



PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF ABDELHAMID IBN BADIS – MOSTAGANEM

FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English for the Requirement for the Degree of
Master in “Literature and Interdisciplinary Approaches”

Tracing the Print Culture of Female Travel
Writers and the Influence of Gender and Race on
their Perception and Publication

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Academic Year: 2019-2020

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the dearest people to my heart, to my loving parents, who have been a source of inspiration, whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears. Thank you for your inestimable love, consciousness, support, sacrifices and all the values you have been able to inculcate.

To my dear sister for her tenderness, her complicity and her presence all the time.

To all my friends with whom I shared great moments at the University of Mostaganem

For all the love given by my family.

To all those who would be interested in reading my dissertation.

Thank you for being here for me !

Acknowledgements

First of all, I thank Allah for giving me the strength to accomplish my project within the limited time.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my beloved teacher and supervisor Prof BENNEGHROUZI Fatima Zohra. A great deal of thanks is owed to her for her unwavering support, encouragements and patience. For her thoughtful supervision and constructive guidance proved invaluable throughout this dissertation.

I am also indebted to all my teachers including my supervisor, for their interesting lectures, documents and advice during the academic year 2019 /2020.

I would like to thank and acknowledge the board of examiners: Mrs BEKKADOURI and Mrs GHERMAOUI for reading and evaluating my dissertation.

Finally, I would like to express my special thanks to all the teachers and members of our department.

List of Figures

Figure 1	15
Figure 2	16

Abstract:

This dissertation traces the print culture of female writers since the turn of the twenty-first century and the influence of gender and race on their perception and publication. In a society that is bound by social sanction, gender identity is performative and thus self-perpetuated by those who adhere to their prescribed roles for fear of marginalization. This study aims to investigate the extent to which the ideologically gendered genre of travel writing continues to inflect current publishing practice. A case study of two successful female travelogues is carried out to investigate whether British publishing houses are attempting to amend existing practice in light of the genre's entrenched inequalities. The rise of digital platforms and the travel blogosphere since the turn of the century have assisted in the diversification of travel writing. Yet the fact that minority voices both online and in print rarely receive the exposure required to infiltrate mainstream awareness evidences that it falls to both readers and the wider publishing industry to break the systemic diversity issues which are endemic in the travel writing genre.

Key words: gender, genre, race, travel writing, digital platforms, publishing houses.

Contents

Dedication	I
Acknowledgements	II
Abstract	V
General Introduction	1

Chapter One: Literature Review

Introduction	3
1-Female Travel Writing: Definition and types	3
2-Theorising a Gendered Genre	5
3- Current publishing practice in female travel writing as illustrated in the UK industry.....	7
Conclusion	10

Chapter Two: practical issues: *Eat, Pray, Love and Wild*

Introduction	12
1-Authorship and literary agency	12
2- A Textual Analysis	13
3- Paratext and Production	14
4- Readership and critical reception	16
5-Distribution, sales strategy, and marketing	18
Conclusion	19

Chapter Three: The Online Travel Movement: Paving the Way for Diversity?

Introduction	21
1- The UK Publishing Industry: A Lack of Diversity	21
2- Current Publishing Practice: Black Travel Writing.....	21
3-The Online Travel Movement	22

4- #BlackTravelMovement: A Case Study	23
Conclusion.....	24
General Conclusion	26
Bibliography	30

General Introduction

In his 1869 chronicle *The Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain states that “travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow mindedness” (1869, 244). Contrastingly, Anna Alacovska refers to travel writing as a “profoundly unequal and exclusive genre” (2015, 133).

Historically regarded as a male pursuit, modern travel writing has remained steadfast in its androcentrism. Indeed, the lack of commercially successful output from female travel writers is conspicuous in an industry that increasingly attempts to foreground diversity: of the bestselling 50 travel narratives published since the turn of the millennium, 6 were written by women (August 2017). As such, this research project aims to trace the print culture of female travel writers in the modern publishing industry, assessing the influence of gender and race on their perception and publication.

To fully assess the current state-of-play facing female travel writers, an analysis of the relationship between gender and genre is required; travel writing’s status as an ideologically gendered genre has undoubtedly influenced a publishing industry that, while ostensibly attempting to address the increasingly conspicuous industry-wide lack of diversity, is currently doing little to amend existing practice with these inequalities in mind.

In order to ascertain whether this is simply a case of publishers publishing travelogues to a market that overwhelmingly mirrors their authors – middle class white males – a research was conducted, which clearly identifies a demographically varied readership with an interest in travel writing. Clear, then, is that the society is a gendered one that is self-perpetuated by a culture that marginalises those who choose not to ascribe to their assigned gender roles.

Such is evident in the publication and subsequent reception of both Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love*, and Cheryl Strayed’s *Wild*, two female-authored travelogues which constitute the case study behind Chapter 2. Despite both books featuring on the *New York Times Bestseller List* and providing the basis for successful film adaptations, the works have since become synonymous with an observed decline in the “great travel writing tradition” (Kelly 2015). Nevertheless, the conscious efforts of Cheryl Strayed and her publisher to market the book to a gender-neutral readership reflects both an attempt to portray an account written by a female as universally relevant, and the transgressive potential implicit in the genre of female travel writing.

This project’s final objective is to assess the extent to which the rise of digital platforms and online travel blogs have helped address issues of misogyny and racial insensitivity in travel writing. The fact that anyone with an internet connection can now publish content online has undoubtedly proved pivotal in giving a voice to demographics excluded by the traditional publishing industry; the burgeoning of Black, Asian, and minority-ethnic (BAME) travel movements online of *#BlackTravel: The Anthology*, a collection of writing from members of the US-based *Black Travel Movement*. The high demand for the title, reflected in its initial print run selling out in just 10 days, reflects the fact that the market for travel writing is in fact much more diverse than recognised by the commercial publishing industry.

Chapter One
Literature Review

Introduction:

As Mark Ellingham outlines, the mixture of travel and autobiography is the starting point for the genre of travel writing (2004,25). Indeed, this formula is one that has historically proven successful for renowned travel writers such as Bill Bryson and Paul Theroux. Yet travel writing as a concept is now almost synonymous with the white, male, middle-class authors whose texts collectively make up the genre. Despite women having historically been attached to the domestic sphere, it was not the case that women did not travel and write.

Although it is true that “women were thin on the ground in the two modern golden ages of travel literature: the 1930s and 1970s” (Wheeler 2017), there is indeed an abundance of historical studies of “wayward women”; individuals including Freya Stark, Gertrude Bell and Isabella Bird who rebelled against convention in undertaking their adventures. Nevertheless, their accounts have been overshadowed by those of their male competitors and have largely been lost to history. Why is it, then, that of all the genres, travel writing has remained steadfast in its androcentrism? In analysing the relationship between gender and genre, this chapter will explore the manner in which travel writing as a genre simultaneously reflects, constitutes, and perpetuates gender inequalities.

1-Female travel writing: Definition and types:

Travel writing in general describes a text in which the overarching plot centering on the movement of at least one protagonist across a foreign or unfamiliar land. It is also described as “a form of creative nonfiction in which the narrator’s encounters with foreign places serve as the dominant subject” (Nordquist 2019).

Despite travel writing being a well established genre, women’s travel writing, as Patricia M.E. Lorcin argues, has long been considered “the genre of novelists-manqués and second-second rate writers” (2017). An increased onus on diversity within the publishing industry in recent years had led to observations that the resultant “reissues, new critical editions, and of course anthologies” of work written by women have led to an “increased awareness of women travel writers” (Pettinger, xi).

Jessa Crispin’s argument, that travel writing need to be “infiltrated and broken apart, its masculine tropes challenged” (2015) reflects a prevailing belief that there remains an overwhelming cultural bias against women perpetuated by the practice of the modern publishing industry. As such, the argument forming the basis of Judith Butler’s 1988 *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* has provided the foundation for the study of the relationship between gender and genre central to this research project. Butler’s assertion that gender identity is a “performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (1988, 519) self-perpetuated by a culture that so readily marginalises those who “fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism” (1988, 528) is evidenced by the current publishing practice surrounding female travel writing.

Sara Mills’ 1993 book *Discourses on Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism* builds on Butler’s ideas of performativity, and is innovative in its application of genre theorists to travel writing as a genre. Mills’ argues that, even when women’s writing consists of similar elements to that of their male contemporaries, it is judged and categorised

differently, the “discursive pressures” on both production and reception have to be negotiated accordingly, and thus result in differences in female authored texts which are rooted in gender (1993, 6). One such difference, which manifests itself in the gendered dichotomy of male writing being associated with the public and professional, and female with the private and personal, has led to the ascription of the genre of “faux travel writing” (Crispin 2015), which has become synonymous with the works of female travel writers.

Anna Alacovska similarly builds on the theories of Judith Butler, focussing specifically on the genre’s “androcentrism” to evidence the “performativity” of both gender and genre as concepts (2015, 132). Echoing Sara Mills’ description of the “discursive pressures” faced by women travel writers, Alacovska attributes a genre-wide anxiety to the implicit barriers constructed by a “culturally granted masculine authority” (2015, 133). Her interviews of female travel writers support her article’s argument that travel writing does not merely reflect gender inequalities, but constitutes them (2015, 140). Butler, Mills, and Alacovska all concur in their dismissal of biological determinism; however, this, unfortunately, is something that still plagues female travel writing as genre. Such is evident in Jessa Crispin’s ascription of the genre of “faux travel writing” to female travelogues – in particular Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love* and Cheryl Strayed’s *Wild* – texts which have faced criticism for their narrative “interiorisation”. However, Crispin’s assertion that gender is often used as a marketing hook is an insightful one; its dual potential of both distinguishing work “away from the towering male influence” whilst risking the sequestering of female authors is pertinent to the conversation surrounding female travel writing as a genre. Indeed, the attempt to give voice to female authors in the form of anthology often leads to concerns that gender essentialism is merely being perpetuated through tokenistic gesture.

Lee and Gretzel’s statement that, “as a powerful word-of-mouth tool, blogs have important implications for tourism development and marketing” (2014, 38) is extendable to the publishing industry. Indeed, Carrie Speaking argues that the online provision of a platform to a wider demographic including women has led to a visibly increased authorial diversity when compared to traditional publishing, which has “remained for a long time the province of men” (2017). However, Anna Alacovska’s observation that the genre of travel writing is not merely ideologically gendered, but also “racialized and ethnicized” (2015, 134) holds true on the online blogosphere. Evidenced by the mainstream media’s conspicuous whitewashing of the travel industry, both in their representation in books, films, and television, and the overwhelmingly white proliferation of “best travel blogs” lists (Dhillon 2015), Navdeep Singh Dhillon notes how female travel writers of colour are faced with further “discursive pressures” online.

Oneika Raymond, a prolific travel blogger of colour, attests to this, stating that, in a digital context, the possibility of “losing out on lucrative partnerships, collaborations, and sponsorship deals” (Raymond 2014) often acts as a “deliberate silencer” (Dhillon 2015), muting criticisms of the systemic lack of representation of travellers of colour in the mainstream media. Consensus, then, is that, despite the ostensible diversification of the genre facilitated by the ease of publishing online, there are still endemic issues of sexism and racial insensitivity perpetuated both by a lazy publishing model that “shoehorns” works into a mould designed to appeal to consistently lucrative markets, and authors faced with self-perpetuating “discursive pressures” (Mills 1993, 6).

2- Theorising a gendered genre:

While a great deal of research has been conducted surrounding the relationship between genres and readers, the relationship between genres and producers has remained a relatively unexplored area of study – something which seems surprising when, as Ana Alacovska highlights, genre “affects producers as much as recipients” (2015, 130). Defined by the OED as a “style or category of art, music, or literature” literary genre studies is structuralist by definition. Inherently temporal and mutable, consensus is that classifications are empirical in nature, as Ralph Cohen outlines:

“[genres] are historical assumptions constructed by authors, audiences, and critics in order to serve communicative and aesthetic purposes [. . .] The purposes they serve are social and aesthetic. Groupings arise at particular historical moments, and as they include more and more members, they are subject to repeated redefinitions or abandonment” (1986, 210)

As such, genre theorists are increasingly adopting critical perspectives, including how genres “maintain or reinforce genre relationships and how they shape world views” (Devitt 2000, 707). Despite fluidity being ostensibly in-built within the genre’s conceptual mutability as Derrida outlines, texts participate in, rather than belong to, certain genres (1980, 63) travel writing is unique in stagnant androcentrism.

Synonymous with the stereotypically masculine qualities of action, adventure, and machismo, these historically gendered associations have affected the style of female travel writing content throughout history. Despite the overwhelmingly male authorship of historic travel texts, it is not the case that women did not travel nor write.

Indeed, Jennifer Steadman notes that the recovering of the accounts of historic female travel writers provides a unique insight into the complex social systems and structures influencing female mobility and thus cultural ideas about “roles” for women (2007, 7). Noting how “layers of complexity” are added by women writers’ representations of genre within their works, Steadman’s argument that “women travel authors negotiate gender expectations constantly in their texts” (2007, 9) can be extended to race. A further layer of complexity is added: whereas white women are often “discussed only in terms of their race privilege” (Steadman 2007, 10), race operates very differently in the texts of black women travel writers, whose works were published to a far lesser extent.

Despite the literary canon focusing on slave narratives as the “dominant genre of antebellum writing”, the largely unexplored area of travel writing by “free” black writers allows unique exploration into the relationship between mobility, race, and diaspora (Fish 2004, 15). As such, traveling black women “directly challenge nineteenth-century and even present-day definitions of black experience” (Steadman 2007, 10), as will be further explored in the next title. Nevertheless, these women were exceptional individuals, rebelling against convention in venturing to far-flung places.

However, while it must be noted that the lives of all these women were “restricted” (Mills 1993, 27), the role of the white, middle class women, who constitute female travel writing’s dominant authorship demographic, in upholding colonial rule should thus not go unspoken; as Kristi Siegel asserts: “It would be pleasant to think that western women, often dominated

themselves, would bond in sisterhood with women of other cultures, but that was not always the case” (2004, 3).

Yet the transgressive potential in their adventures outside the domestic sphere were often undermined by their being dismissed as eccentric by a patriarchy concerned by the risk of their unconventionality affecting their female readership; it was thus often ensured that their experiences could not be generalised to refer to other women.

Women thus had to strike a fine balance between writing material that was exciting enough to attract an audience, whilst sufficiently adhering to “feminine” conventions to retain said audience. Isabella Bird, for example, was forced to exclude certain content from *The Golden Chersonese* because her publisher considered it to be unfeminine. What is evident is that similar pressures are still experienced by contemporary female authors: Ana Alacovska’s interviews with female travel writers confirmed that the “slippage between moral, propriety, safety and success” in the genre remains a source of severe angst. Such concerns further reflect the “rhetoric of peril” prevalent throughout historic female travel writing which acts to socially and culturally construct women’s travelling bodies as “innately weak” (2015). Such pressures thus undoubtedly have implications not only for the publishing practice around these texts, but the writing process itself. Female travel writers often succumb to this anxiety for fear of remaining unpublished, thus “reinforcing the gender stereotypes” and perpetuating the issue.

Clear, then, is that genres are built upon premises about gender, and both concepts are performative in nature. The relationship between the two is evident to the extent of their shared word stems: the connection of “genre” to “gender” suggests that the terms are both based on the division of classifications. As Cohen outlines, two genders are “necessary to define one and sexual genders not merely classification but a hierarchy or dominance of one gender over another” (1986, 204). As such, travel is “both a gendered and gendering genre” (Alacovska 2015, 133). This self-perpetuation is fuelled by the biographical nature of travel writing: as Alacovska highlights, because biographical work is “genre-bound”, writers “draw on genre resources in constructing their professional identities” (2015, 134).

Ideologically laden, gender, like genre, is essentially an arbitrary social construct instituted through repetition. However, in being compelled by social sanction and taboo, gender identity is “made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control” (Butler 1988, 528).

Judith Butler, Ana Alacovska, and Sara Mills all concur in that, even when women’s writing seems to consist of similar content to that of their male counterparts, the discursive pressures (Mills 1993, 5) on both production and reception vastly differ. This is further reflected in the demographics of 17 critics concerning themselves with female travel writing as a genre: overwhelmingly female, commentators on female travel writing view it as a necessity to situate their arguments, at least implicitly, within a feminist framework (Mills 1993, 4). It is therefore undeniable that the concept of genre is central to understanding the sexism inherent in travel writing. The textual distinction between men and women’s writing is thus not a simple one; the gendered and gendering ideology of travel writing becomes further complicated when considered from within a publishing framework.

3-Current publishing practice in female travel writing as illustrated in the UK industry:

What has emerged in research is a prevailing thread observing that the nature of travel writing as a genre has vastly changed in the past 20 years, with many arguing that the ease of travel has somehow “lessened the vitality of travel writing” (Wood 2010); these “traditional” travel narratives are perceived to have been replaced by a “growing trend towards personal writing” (Kelly 2015). What is problematic, however, is the disparity between the publishing industry’s treatment of “confessional” or “personal” writing by male and female authors respectively: reactionary organisations such as VIDA and campaigns such as #ReadWomen highlight a prevailing and systemic sexism within not only the genre of travel writing, but across the wider publishing industry.

As Hailey Hirst observes: “men seem to dominate travel literature, or at least the popular culture of it” (2015). Such is evident merely from sales figures obtained from Nielsen BookScan; of the bestselling 50 travel narratives published since the turn of the millennium, just 6 were written by women. That 80% of these bestselling titles were published in the last 3 years indicates that there is a healthy UK market for travel writing (Nielsen 2019); indeed the current bestselling title, Bill Bryson’s *Road to Little Dribbling: More Notes From a Small Island* (Black Swan, 2016) has sold over 100,000 copies to date. However, the globalisation of recent decades and the increased ease of mobility inherent in this has led to a “great spate of think pieces mourning the death of the great travel writing tradition” (Kelly 2015). With some claiming that ease of movement has “somehow lessened the vitality of travel writing” (Wood 2010), there has been an observed change to published content. With an increased emphasis on the “interior journey”, modern travel writing is perceived as being more “aspirational” in nature (Crispin 2015).

In tandem to the criticisms of female confessional writing outlined by Emily Gould, this perceived decline in quality becomes problematic when it is associated with a near exclusively female authorship. The dichotomy between male and female authorship within the travel writing genre is especially pronounced, with the public and professional “journalistic story-telling” being aligned with the former and the private and personal “self-exploratory travel-journal” with the latter (Speaking 2017). Indeed, women’s travel writing has been “long considered the genre of novelists manqués and second-rate writers” (Lorcin 2017).

Yet, like travel writing as a genre, “women’ as a gender cannot be easily compartmentalised; “women’s travel writing is, therefore, a complex, varied, and fluid area.” (Saunders 2014). It is furthermore important to note the consequences of socially constructed gender roles for both sexes. As Carrie Speaking observes, just as it is not fair to disparage female writers for writing what they “felt they needed to write”, it is similarly unjust that we do not read more pieces written by men giving detailed descriptions of how a particular experience “[triggers] in them feelings about which they won’t write, because society does not expect their male self to write about them” (2017). Despite Speaking’s further assertion that “published travel writing should not convey the idea that there is a proper way of traveling” (2017), the opposite is reflected in the masculine domination of the travel writing bestseller list and the resultant implications for editorial practice.

Despite the results of the research for this thesis indicating that readers value content more highly than the gender of the author, the systemic sexism evidenced within both the genre and

wider publishing industry undoubtedly has consequences. Furthermore it is arguable that the identity of an author, to an extent, upstages their work: when the genre is currently near synonymous with authors such as Bill Bryson and Paul Theroux, their latest releases are arguably bought because of who they are written by. The name on the cover thus carries a brand power that perhaps constitutes a stronger motivation for purchase than the book's content or subject matter. As outlined by Carrie Speaking: "traditional editors and publishers might argue (and perhaps very rightly) that the way they pick pieces is solely based on quality, not gender. But we live in a gendered world." (2017). The interviews with female travel writers that formed the basis of Anna Alacovska's research conveyed an authorial anxiety rooted in feeling "continually ousted" by "masculinist editors" who feared that "serious" assignments on "physically" and "mentally" more demanding destinations or adventures would be damaged in an aesthetic and economic sense if entrusted to women" (2015, 138). Interestingly, three of the authors interviewed further confided that they utilized masculinised pseudonyms to increase their chances of being commissioned.

Yet, perhaps as a reaction to the entrenched masculinity of the travel writing genre, the past three decades have seen a recovery project of women's writing. Interesting to note is that most of the activity surrounding female travel writing has been to reprint the works of historic female travel writers, as opposed to championing new writing. However, this may largely be rooted in the fact that the majority of this work has been carried out by the feminist press Virago, whose avowed aim has always been to rescue women's texts. I.B. Tauris have made a similar endeavour in their list re-editing the works of Freya Stark. Both publishers were approached for interview and, whilst the editor for I.B. Tauris's travel list was unable to assist, Virago's Senior Commissioning Editor, Lennie Goodings, provided an invaluable insight into female travel writing from a publisher's perspective. Recognising that travel writing remains an under-published area for women, Goodings confirmed that Virago have discussed reissuing their Virago Travellers series; a highly successful list launched in 1986 which reprinted the extraordinary works of travellers including Gertrude Bell, Lucie Duff, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

When asked whether commissioning new content from authors of successful online travel blogs would be something Virago would view as commercially feasible, Goodings stated that, whilst having a unifying thread for a series might prove too much of an imposition for modern writers, individual books by women travel writers who have cut their teeth online would be very interesting. Gooding's opinions are confirmed by data from Nielsen BookScan: the bestselling works of female travel writing are one off titles with the current bestselling title – Diana Athill's *A Florence Diary* (Granta Books, 2016) – having sold over 11,000 copies to date. Whilst there have been women's travel anthologies published in recent years in the UK market, they have not met commercial success. Dea Birkett and Sara Wheeler's *Amazonian: The Penguin Book of Women's New Travel Writing* (1998), in which every contribution is an original piece of travel writing, has sold just 434 copies to date. However, sales figures aside, there are pitfalls to the gendered compilation of pieces of travel writing. Yet, as we see in the next chapter, such an observation is not reserved for compendia even one off titles such as Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* and Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* fall foul to the androcentrism both the travel writing genre and wider publishing industry.

The UK publishing industry has what was many argue is "an overwhelming cultural bias against women" (Flood 2015), with female authors having been historically excluded from the established canon. Indeed, Joanne Rowling was famously encouraged to use her initials to

obscure her gender when publishing *Harry Potter* because her publishers were concerned that young boys “wouldn’t read the series if they knew it was written by a woman” (Cueto, 2014).

The de-feminisation of author names is emblematic of a wider issue in that women are generally thought of as the particular instead of speaking for the universal in the same way their male counterparts are. This is all in spite of the fact that more women buy books than men, and books by female authors are published in “roughly the same numbers” (Walsh 2014). Although now 20 years old, Francine Prose’s essay *Scents of a Woman’s Ink* is still pertinent to the modern publishing industry: whilst it is not at all clear “what it means to “write like a man” or “like a woman” [...] it’s assumed that women writers will not write anything important – anything truly serious or necessary, revelatory, or wise” (1998).

Although the issue of course can’t be broken down into a “story of fair-minded women versus bigoted men” (Shamsie 2015), there is a gendered dichotomy at play in the publishing industry. Emily Gould, remarking on the “true confessions” in new women’s literature – a pronounced element of women’s travel writing – notes how “if a woman writes about herself, she’s a narcissist [whereas] if a man does the same, he’s describing the human condition” (Gould 2010). The confessional writing label thus becomes a put-down of sorts when applied to female-authored works; this is enacted in the “faux travel writing” genre Jessa Crispin aligns exclusively with female authors. The problem is not therefore, as Joanna Walsh outlines, whether women are published, but “how” (2014).

This disparity undoubtedly affects editorial practice: the fact that almost all publishers now only accept submissions through agents leads to them having a gatekeeper role for any author attempting to publish their work in the traditional market. Such a recognised and inbuilt female audience leads to a lazy publishing model which many have associated with the consolidation of the publishing industry over the second half of the 20th century: the industry’s corporatisation has “led to scarcity – fewer independent publishers and editors with individual taste [...] Scarcity leads to conservative behavior” (Flood 2015). Such conservatism manifests itself in a uniformity of publishing style aligned to a method ensuring commercial success: there are many accounts of female authors “grousing” when their books are given flowery, pastel covers, while even their publishers’ press releases “describe their work as “delicate” when it is forthright, “delightful” when it is satirical” (Walsh 2014). As such, publishers work with the mostly correct assumption that work by women is still being read with preconceptions. Therefore, by extension, there are fewer publishers willing to challenge the status quo of so-called gendered genres.

The relegation of female-authored books to genre-fiction such as mystery, romance or, more poignantly, chick-lit, has led to the observation that such genres have an “autonomous existence, a trajectory with almost no relation to the more cerebral bookreview- pages and the literary prizes” (Prose 1998). The exclusion of texts by female authors from high-brow recognition has not gone without protest. In 2014, the #ReadWomen campaign was launched to champion women writers, persuading readers to “look beyond the pastel covers” (Holmes 2014). Furthermore, the fact that, in the last 15 years, just two of the Man Booker-winning novels have had female protagonists (Shamsie 2015) – there are, as of yet, no female protagonists among the 15 Pulitzer-winning books – proved part of the motivation behind the establishment of *Vida: Women in Literary Arts*, an organisation which undertakes a yearly count of the paucity of female reviewers and female books reviewed to both offer up concrete data and an assurance to women authors (and wayward editors) “that the sloped playing field is not going unnoticed” (Vida 2012). Recognising that the lack of publishing diversity is not

solely rooted in gender, *Vida* also conduct an “annual women of colour” count (Shamsie 2015). While reviews themselves may not seem significant, their influence on readership is profound: book-buyers often make their purchasing decisions based on what is reviewed favourably in (online) magazines and newspapers. These reviews propel bestseller lists and thus, by extension, important publishing decisions and the careers of individual authors. Therefore, as Sally Smith outlines, “when women aren’t represented as evenly, or are treated primarily as niche and genre authors, that’s going to create a serious disadvantage for women in publishing” (2013). This disparity is particularly prominent in the genre of travel writing.

Conclusion

As such, despite the reactive work of feminist publishing houses like *Virago*, and the launch of organisations and campaigns such as *Vida* and #ReadWomen, there is still a long way to go to tackle androcentricity of the travel writing genre. White, male travel writers still dominate the bestseller lists and, while there is an observed consensus that the only distinction should be between good and bad writing, it is difficult to foresee change until the prevailing cultural attitude ceases to think of females as the particular, which in itself constitutes a means of marginalisation.

Chapter Two

Practical issues: *Eat, Pray,*
Love and Wild

Introduction

The genre-wide issues of stereotyping and marginalisation have been no more apparent than in the publication and subsequent critical receptions of Elizabeth Gilbert's 2006 memoir *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything*, and Cheryl Strayed's *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (2012). Whereas there seems to be a critical consensus that the masculine tropes embedded in the genre need to be challenged, these texts have faced criticism for 'interiorising' the narrative to an extent where their texts have been reclassified as "faux travel writing" (Crispin 2015); a genre that has become largely synonymous with both these texts and wider female travel writing. Considered regressive in their ostensible obedience to the entrenched dichotomy of the reader looking to male narrative to learn about doing and female narratives to learn about feeling, this chapter will explore the extent to which the publication of *Eat, Pray, Love* and *Wild* both reflect and challenge the insidious gender inequality evident within the travel writing genre.

1- Authorship and literary agency:

Pre-publication, Elizabeth Gilbert was a respected author in her own right and presented her editor at Viking, Paul Slovak, with what he calls "one of the most incredible proposals we'd ever seen in publishing" (Almond 2013). Indeed, the publisher financed her idea for a post-divorce travel narrative to Italy, India and Indonesia with a \$200,000 advance; this is somewhat remarkable in itself since it is relatively rare for women to be commissioned to travel. Despite having previously written three critically acclaimed books – her first book *Pilgrim* was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award – Gilbert herself notes the effect of writing a female travelogue on her professional reputation: dismissed as chick-lit, she remarks that 'what little respect I clawed my way to, I totally erased' (Almond 2013). Interesting is the manner in which the dichotomising gender rhetoric surrounding the book is evident from its very inception. Describing the motivation behind the writing of *Eat Pray Love*, Steve Almond describes the memoir as a "coming-out" story, remarking that "after a decade spent writing for and about men, Gilbert turned her focus inward, toward the pain and yearning she felt as a woman" (2013). This remark seems to neglect the fact that Gilbert is an established New York journalist who spent the prior years "traveling the world on assignment" (Egan, 2006).

Roxanne Roberts' observation of Gilbert's "convenient" glossing over (2016) of the fact her path to empowerment was subsidised by her publisher is reflective of the criticisms of unaddressed privilege proliferating the criticism of the text, its author, and its readership. Jan Moir argues that the publisher's cheque acts to devalue Gilbert's travel, reducing her experience to "an assignment with its own built-in safety barrier" (2010). In making the following distinction: "Elizabeth Gilbert did not really take a year out to find herself following divorce and depression. She took a year out to write a book about finding herself" (2010), Moir's statement epitomizes criticism surrounding *Eat, Pray, Love* in arguing that the editorial process and financing behind the memoir fundamentally affects the value of the text as a piece of travel writing.

Like *Eat, Pray, Love*, Cheryl Strayed's 2012 *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Cost Trail* reached number one on the New York Times Bestseller list and was the basis for a successful film adaptation. However the financing behind Strayed's travelogue vastly differs to that of *Eat, Pray, Love*. Strayed's trip had already been undertaken and the memoir written when *Wild* was sold to her publisher (Knopf) in 2009 for a \$400,000 advance. With student

loans and a vast credit card debt, it wasn't until January 2013 that Strayed began earning royalties for the book's global success (Loudenback 2017). Like Gilbert, Strayed had previously been published; her first novel *Torch* also themed around the death of a mother - was published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt to favourable reviews in 2006 and reissued after the success of *Wild*.

Despite having hiked the Pacific Coast Trail in 1995, the first draft of the memoir was not finished until February 2010. Having undertaken the trail during a period of emotional strife, 26-year-old Strayed had just lost her mother to cancer, had her marriage break down, and had begun using heroin, Strayed recognised that she needed to "compost" that experience until she "better understood what she wanted to say about it" (Kirch 2012). Remarking on this gap, she states how *Wild*, like any memoir is "based primarily on memory crafted with the intention of creating piece of literature" (Strayed, n.d.).

This dedication to honest writing is something Cheryl Strayed further promotes in her role as popular advice columnist *Dear Sugar*, published in *The Rumpus*, a literary magazine which promotes "fantastic writing that's brave, passionate, and true" (The Rumpus, 2016). Thus, Strayed's literary background, in combination with her assertions throughout *Wild*'s editorial and marketing process that her femaleness as an author should not provide justification for the book being promoted to a solely female audience, has led to Strayed being regarded as a sort of "literary every-person" (Diamond 2014). Her belief in and endorsement of the fact that stories written by women can be as relevant to men as men's stories are to women is thus evident throughout the marketing strategy surrounding the book, and the subsequent film adaptation.

2- A textual analysis:

As explored in previous chapter, Ana Alacovska asserts that genres are built on premises about gender (2015, 130); both genre and gender are performative and act to perpetuate each other. With the genre of travel writing being historically dominated by white, middle class males, evident is that female travel writers feel the need to justify their "unfeminine choice of genre, and thus their "professionally sound yet socially "unnatural" behaviour, such as disavowing children, marriage or settlement" (Alacovska 2015, 136). Indeed, the disavowal of life events often expected of females of a certain age form the premises of both *Eat, Pray, Love* and *Wild*. In her thirties, settled in a large house with a husband who wants to start a family, Gilbert's memoir begins on the bathroom floor in crisis. Following a bitter divorce and a rebound relationship, *Eat, Pray, Love* is an account of the author's search for self.

Her introduction acts to explain the reasoning behind the book's structure: "being as this whole book is about my efforts to find balance, I have decided to structure it like a *japa mala*, dividing my story into 108 tales, or beads" (Gilbert 2007, 1). In referencing Hindu prayer beads, the spiritual intention behind her trip is introduced from the very beginning: 108 is a three-digit multiple of three, the number of "supreme balance", and marks the text's division into three sections marking Gilbert's travels round Italy (pleasure), India (devotion), and Indonesia (balance). However, the travelogue elements of the text are undeniably undermined by the author's interior musings: very little is included of the Gilbert's surroundings. Indeed, one review enthusiastically states: "[the book] hits the trifecta of chick-lit porn: pasta, spiritual awakening and marriage to a sexy Brazilian she met in Bali" (Roberts 2016). Crispin's disparaging label of "faux travel writing" is thus perhaps not unfair when applied to *Eat, Pray, Love* the book's opening line of "I wish Giovanni would kiss me" (Gilbert 2007, 7)

goes some way to justifying the cover design and marketing behind the book being more targeted to readers of romance and “chick-lit”.

Despite *Wild* being twinned with *Eat, Pray, Love* in having become synonymous with criticisms of the popular female travel narrative having “overcorrected itself to the point where the consequences are detrimental to the wider genre” (Crispin 2015), there is a radicalism to Strayed’s memoir that distinguishes it from the “faux travel writing” label attached to Gilbert’s text. *Wild* is an account of Cheryl Strayed’s 1,000 mile hike along the Pacific Coast Trail whilst processing the enduring grief of her mother’s premature death; it’s dual narrative structure has led to *Wild* being reviewed as “a classic of wilderness writing and modern feminism” (Scott 2014).

Indeed, whereas *Eat, Pray, Love* does fall prey to stereotypes of unaddressed privilege within travel writing, Strayed uses her writing to tackle taboo. As Sara Wheeler observes, sex becomes a sort of leitmotif within the narrative – Strayed’s transgressive tackling of ‘one of the last taboos in women’s travel writing’ is viewed as laudable; indeed, *Wild*’s honest and unapologetic discussion of the unspoken hardships of adulthood leads to it resonating with readers in a manner that many books about “finding oneself” fail to achieve (Rehak 2012).

Furthermore, if we take Ellingham et al.’s definition of travel writing as “the art of bringing together travel and autobiography” (Ellingham, Hopkins, Sinclair and Jarvis 2004, 25), then Strayed’s observations of her journey, accompanied by multiple blisters and her bulky backpack, *Monster*, establish her memoir firmly within the genre. Each chapter begins with an account her surroundings: “the next morning the sky was clear blue, the sun shimmering on Olallie Lake, views of Mount Jefferson framed perfectly to the south and Olallie Butte to the north” (Strayed 2012, 300). As such, Crispin’s claim that “one rarely gets any description of the world around her, [the narrative] contains next to nothing of the Pacific Crest Trails natural history or ecology” (2015) is perhaps an overstatement.

3- Paratext and production:

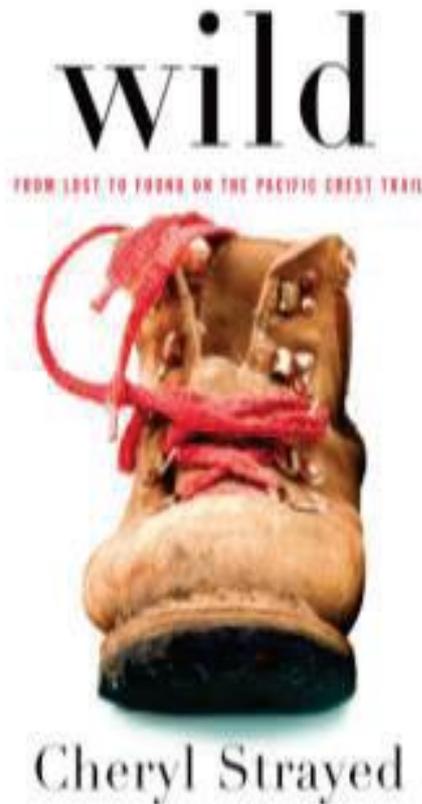
The cover of a book is undeniably crucial to its publicity and marketing strategy; indeed the cover and its appendages are important factors in how the book is interpreted by the reader. The cover presents to the public many items of information, some of which are authorial, and some of which are the “publisher’s responsibility” (Genette 1997). In his theorising of book design and paratext, Genette remarks on the aim for the aesthetics of the book to be inseparable from literary intention, something he observes is not without issue, but is clearly an innovative tool. What is clear in the case of *Eat, Pray, Love* is that the book’s covers have been cleverly engineered by the publisher to appeal to a more lucrative market:



(Figure 1)

Whereas the initial cover (Figure 1) is relatively minimalist in design – “Eat” is spelled out in pasta, “Pray” in prayer beads, and “Love” in flower petals, against a white background – what is immediately apparent through the pink font and cover copy (“One Woman’s Search for Everything”) is that the memoir is being pitched at a female readership. Reflecting on having her attention drawn towards the artful cover design while browsing in Barnes and Noble, Lesley Garner recalls how, once she had started reading, “Elizabeth Gilbert became my friend and companion” (2010). The inclusion of a review from the *Sunday Times* stating: “Eat, Pray, Love has been passed from woman to woman like the secret of life” reiterates a conspicuous tendency of the marketing surrounding the book to misguidedly assume that the book has a blanketing appeal to all women by reason of an imagined universal femininity.

Whereas the pink text and gendered cover copy of Gilbert’s *Eat Pray, Love* is very clearly marketed to a female audience, the original cover of *Wild* (Figure 2) has a deliberately more gender neutral design. A minimalist design with a picture of a battered walking boot, the red and black colour scheme reflects the intended universality of the book’s audience and the cover copy of “From lost to found on the Pacific Crest Trail” contains no gendered language or pronouns. Indeed, the later edition includes the following quote from Nick Hornby, screenwriter of the film adaptation: “*Wild* is angry, brave, self-knowing, redemptive, raw, compelling, and brilliantly written, and I think it’s destined to be loved by a lot of people, men and women, for a very long time.” Evidencing Genette’s assertion that the publisher is the mediator between public and private and author and reader (1997), the intention to promote the book as universally relatable through its cover design is blatant.



(Figure 2)

4- Readership and critical reception:

As Kathryn Schulz remarks, in a culture with “profoundly ambivalent feelings about independent women, it is not always clear what kind of adventures we will be lauded for undertaking, nor what kind of tales we will be lauded for telling” (2014). Despite its bestseller status and devoted readership, *Eat, Pray, Love*’s content was not reviewed without criticism.

Italian critics in particular have argued that the travelogue often reinforces “tired, cultural stereotypes” (Moir 2010); indeed, the manner in which the narrator converses “almost exclusively with westerners, more interested in relaying the details of her recent breakup than noticing anything about her host country” (Crispin 2015), has led to Jessa Crispin referring to Elizabeth Gilbert as “a obnoxious white lady in brown places.” This sentiment is both echoed and extended to the book’s readership by Roxanne Roberts who asserts that “if the book served as a life raft (and who could object to that?), it also fed the most pernicious feelings of melodrama and entitlement” (2016). It is observations such as these which lead to the text having become synonymous with Jessa Crispin’s label of “faux travel writing” and the observed wider decline in the quality of the travelogue genre.

However, the binarising rhetoric surrounding the text’s reception is problematic. One reviewer describes *Eat, Pray, Love* as a “coming out story”; stating how, “after a decade spent writing for and about men, Gilbert turned her focus inward, toward the pain and yearning she felt as a woman” (Almond 2013). Such an allegiance to grossly simplified, socially

constructed gender roles is reflective of the manner in which publishing practice can simultaneously reflect, constitute and perpetuate gender inequalities especially in a critical environment where women's cultural productions are often "deemed less worthy of study" (Smith 2008, 15) than men's. Proudly identifying as a feminist, Gilbert is aware of the false homogenisation of her assumed audience. Remarking on an interview comment that her latest book *The Signature of All Things* will attract a "different kind of reader" (Almond 2013), Gilbert rebukes the implicit slight in this praise, realising the implied assertion that this better grade of reader is male.

Furthermore, although the reviews and marketing around the book assume female readership for obvious reasons, there is a conspicuous tendency for a misplaced assumption that the book has a blanketing appeal to all women by nature of an imagined universal femininity. With statements like: "the words eat, pray and love might in themselves be an invocation of the lost or prohibited pleasures of femininity: 'hedonism, devotion, sensuality'" (Cusk 2010), it is perhaps not surprising that Gilbert's book has become synonymous with the female travel narrative being viewed as detrimental to the wider genre.

Whereas Jessa Crispin refers to *Wild* as an exemplar text from a "niche of faux travel writing by women" (2015) inspired by Elizabeth Gilbert, the memoir was largely met by a more favourable critical response. The book's dual narrative structure has been overwhelmingly praised, with Sara Wheeler lauding the balance of the book's two threads: "the story of her past, and in particular her mother's harrowing death, unspools [...] alongside the blisters and the bulky backpack she calls Monster" (2013). The circumstances in which Strayed undertook her journey means that, unlike *Eat, Pray, Love, Wild* was not met with the same criticisms of unaddressed privilege. In fact, many have argued that, in its honest portrayal of the 'unspoken truth of adulthood' that many things in life don't turn out as expected, "*Wild* feels real in ways that many books about "finding oneself" [...] do not" (Rehak 2012). The universality of this truth only expands her potential readership.

Conscious of the way in which women are often marginalised, the entire publishing process behind *Wild* is conscious to dispel the myth that stories written by women cannot be relevant to male readers. Strayed herself states "throughout time what we've seen is that male writers have this central space where their stories are about all of us, and women's stories are about women" (Strayed 2014). With this in mind, whilst acknowledging that a number of the book's themes would resonate particularly powerfully with women, Strayed repeated to all involved in the process that *Wild* is a book "for people". Indeed, whereas some claim that Strayed and Gilbert's works evidence a similar formula for success – both are memoirs written by women embarking on trips as a means of overcoming personal struggles – the difference lies in the manner in which theme of self-empowerment which proves so popular with readers is not gender-specific in *Wild*. The effectiveness of this is evidenced Strayed's claim that half of her fan mail is penned by men (Lui 2015).

However, the novelty of Strayed's journey has not been without critical backlash. As Melanie Rehak observes, "for a long time, most nature writers were wealthy white property owners, and walking alone outdoors was not an option for women" (2012). Indeed, Strayed's decision to undertake the PCT as a solo hiker highlights a double standard within the genre: "a woman's decision to detach herself from conventional society always requires justification [...] we can't count to ten before someone asks if we miss our family, or accuses us of abandoning our domestic obligations." (Schulz 2014). Travelling as a solo female has also led to further backlash from the wider hiking community; a website entitled "Don't Hike Like

Wild” was established to warn prospective travellers from embarking on the hike unprepared. Issues of practicality aside, the site has become a forum for derogatory comments about Strayed herself. Referred to as “pathetic and pitiful” in having “allowed her life to deteriorate to the point of desperation” (2017), it is difficult to regard this as anything but another example of the female emotional experience being relegated to a substandard genre.

5- Distribution, sales strategy, and marketing:

Elizabeth Gilbert herself claims that she “never fully understood why *Eat, Pray, Love* was such a success” (Roberts 2016). Yet, since its release in 2006, the memoir has sold over 10 million copies and been translated into over 30 languages. The film rights were sold early on and the book has been merchandised to the extent that there is a perfume, jewellery line, and package holidays all based on Gilbert’s route (Whitworth 2010). As Rachel Cusk observes, “selling the pleasure concept to over-committed women is big business” (2010).

Indeed, as previously evidenced, *Eat, Pray, Love*, a narrative focussing on the trials and tribulations of its protagonist (Smith 2008, 2) undeniably meets the definition of chick-lit and where this becomes most clear is in the sales and marketing strategy behind the book. Chick-lit, like most genres, is historically situated, and its commercial viability means that the demographic has only expanded. Writing in 2008, two years after *Eat, Pray, Love*’s release, Caroline Smith observes how “30-45-year-old women are currently the core readers of the fiction market. They are the strongest buyers and readers” (2008, 7). Although *Eat, Pray, Love* is non-fiction, the analogous relationship between writer, protagonist, and reader still applies, and can be capitalised upon as a means of selling the book: it is part of a genre that is written by, about, and for young women, and thus has a captive and lucrative audience. It is therefore acknowledged that the tone of Gilbert’s writing is at the heart of her book’s status as a runaway bestseller: “Gilbert is instantly likeable as a narrator: she’s warm, funny, and, as she says, can make friends with anyone, anywhere. That included her readers who have become cult-like devotees” (Whitworth 2010). Gilbert thus shares her deepest embarrassments and private thoughts with her reader; in what Rachel Cusk refers to as “best friend” language (2010), Gilbert’s writing promulgates a cult of comic female personality. Despite this not being a novel approach to female literary expression; critics make comparisons to *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and even the works of Jane Austen, it is a proven means of selling books.

Perhaps more than any other genre, chick-lit has a nuanced relationship with consumer culture: its titles often “directly reference consumer culture like women’s magazines, [...] consumer products, movies and television” (Smith 2008, 8). The symbiotic nature of this relationship means that consumer culture media themselves often publicise popular women’s titles. A significant factor contributing to the marketing success of both texts is the “Oprah Effect”. The talk show host’s effect on the US nation’s reading habits cannot be understated: a book mentioned on her show which has about 23 million viewers each week (Whitworth 2010) becomes an overnight bestseller. *Eat, Pray, Love* was the focus of two entire episodes of the show, which played a vital role in proliferating word-of-mouth recommendation. The conversation started on the talk show was arguably a significant factor in Alexandra Pringle’s decision to publish *Eat, Pray Love* with Bloomsbury UK in 2007; the spiritual elements of the travelogue were initially perceived as not having the same commercial viability to a more cynical UK market.

However, since its 2012 release, *Wild* reached number 1 on the *New York Times Bestseller List* and has been translated into 32 languages. Similarly to Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* it is recognised that Gilbert's tone of writing is a large contributor to *Wild*'s bestseller status.

In contrast, it is not necessarily Strayed's likeability that is important, but rather her "real-ness". As Eliza Berman outlines, Strayed is "complicated and fallible, sexual and empowered, unrepentant for the past and uncertain of the future" (Berman 2014) and it is her refusal to conceal her shortcomings and transgressions that generates a kinship with her readers. The fact that *Wild* is the story of a woman who sustains herself outside of society without the help of a man arguably constitutes the memoir's unique selling point. As Katherine Schulz observes:

Outside of slave narratives and horror fiction, adult American literature contains very few accounts of women alone in the woods [...] and it is a story that ends happily in the near total-absence of that conventional prerequisite for happy endings, romantic love (2014)

Indeed, the solo nature of Strayed's trek is where the radicalism that sets *Wild* apart becomes most evident. In combination with the gender-neutral approach consciously pursued by both author and publisher throughout the publishing process, *Wild* is marketable to a more diverse readership than that of *Eat, Pray, Love*. Yet despite this, the "Oprah effect" that proved so influential to the sales of *Eat, Pray, Love* also had a significant impact on the sales of Strayed's memoir. Having been on a two year hiatus, *Wild* was picked as the text to revive Oprah's book club; it then held the number one spot on the *Times' Bestseller List* for seven weeks.

Conclusion:

The manner in which *Eat, Pray, Love* participates in multiple genres the memoir is undeniably a travelogue whilst simultaneously mirroring the criteria for "chick-lit" – has led to the text becoming both the seminal work in a "faux travel writing" movement aligned exclusively with female authors, and synonymous with a wider decline in travel narrative quality. Questions of content quality aside, the gender binarising rhetoric of the memoir's criticism highlights an insidious sexism in the publishing of female travel writers.

Strayed's memoir challenges the masculine tropes inherent in travel writing in a way that cannot be said of Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*. Whereas Jessa Crispin claims that "we still look to men to tell us about what they *do* and to women to tell us about how they *feel*" (2015) it is fair to assert that *Wild*'s dual narrative structure achieves both of these elements. As "Sally", a blogger who took issue with the relentless "Cheryl-bashing" overheard during her own Pacific Coast Trail hike, asserts: "Strayed's is one of the first stories to relate to a wide audience, and I'm 99% sure that's the real issue thinking culture isn't, and doesn't want to be, relatable to a wide audience" (2015). Both Cheryl Strayed and her publisher's efforts to counter this in portraying an account written by a woman as being not a particular, but the universal, reflects and embodies the transgressive potential implicit in female travel writing.

Chapter Three

The Online Travel Movement: Paving the Way for Diversity?

Introduction:

It is evident that the underrepresentation of women writers within the travel writing genre is emblematic of the underrepresentation of women writers in the wider history of the western publishing industry. However, the previous chapter; case studies of two commercially successful female travelogues, hints at another endemic problem of representation: the genre of travel writing is not only ideologically gendered, but it is also “racialized” and “ethnicized” (Alacovska 2014, 134). With an overwhelmingly white publishing industry it appears that an increasingly diverse travel blogosphere is giving voice to demographics excluded by the mainstream. Indeed, the US-based *Black Travel Movement* is gaining increasing media traction, and the first edition of *#BlackTravel: The Anthology*, a collection of writing from “travel groups and bloggers in the travelsphere” was published to high demand, selling out its initial print run within 10 days of its publication. This chapter thus aims to assess three things: whether the rise of travel blogging has helped diversify the travel writing industry; to what extent movements and platforms such as *The Black Travel Movement* have pioneered change across the travel writing landscape; and how this has been responded to by commercial publishing houses.

1- The UK Publishing Industry - A Lack of Diversity:

In a globalised milieu, travel is “an inherent part of life for many multicultural individuals” (Limongi 2016), yet, at present, neither the travel nor publishing industries are reflective of this. The UK bestseller charts are indicative of a lack of Black, Asian, and minority-ethnic (BAME) representation: of the top 100 titles of 2016, just one was authored by a British writer from an ethnic minority background, with six in the top 500. An equivalent US chart shows 30 US BAME authors in the top 500 bestsellers (Shaffi 2016). Indeed the 2015 *Writing the Future* report, commissioned by *Spread the Word*, a London-based writer development industry, found that Black and Asian authors often find themselves “shoehorned” by the publishing industry into writing literary fiction that conforms to a stereotypical view of their communities, addressing topics such as “racism, colonialism or postcolonialism, as if these were the primary concerns of all BAME people” (Cain 2016). Their conspicuous absence from popular commercial genres attests to Alison Flood’s observation that a failure to comply risks accusations of inauthenticity should their characters or settings “not conform to white expectations” (2016). This, in combination with the underrepresentation of BAME authors by literary agents – 53% of BAME authors are agentless, compared to 37% of white writers (Flood 2015) – acts to limit opportunities for any style of writing that does not conform to the industry’s prescribed and essentialist mould.

2- Current Publishing Practice: Black Travel Writing

It is thus apparent that a real indicator of diversification will be in the transition from BAME authors publishing not just in literary fiction, but also in the big commercial genres (Flood 2016). Nneka Okona asserts how “before the Elizabeth Gilberts and Cheryl Strayed of bestselling contemporary travel writing, there were Black women writers trailblazing in this ever-shifting genre” (2016). However, the historic restrictions on freedom of movement which have always inflected the travel writing genre have led to many contemporary BAME travel writers noting a prevailing feeling that travellers of colour must still “justify their movements across the planet” (Peters 2016).

Indeed, a great deal of published travel writing from BAME writers are diasporic narratives characterized by (forced) migration. There is currently just one travelogue by a woman of colour in the UK's top 100 bestselling travel writing titles. Quashing the stereotype that travel for travel's sake remains a white, western pursuit, Monisha Rajesh's *Around India in 80 Trains* (Nicholas Brealey publishing, 2016) explores the author's Indian heritage, giving an account of the diversity of the world's second most populous country through its labyrinthine railway system.

The US publishing industry's treatment of travel writing authored by writers of colour provides an interesting point of comparison. The segregation-enforcing Jim Crow laws remaining unabolished until the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has had a permeating legacy on published travel writing by people of colour. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book*, published between 1936 and 1964, proved a historically pertinent text in providing black travellers with a list of places where it was safe to stay and to stop (Chideya 2014). Similarly, the first travelogue published by and for African American women – *Go Girl: The Black Woman's Book of Travel and Adventure* (1999) a collection of 52 stories from prolific authors including Maya Angelou and Alice Walker, was rooted in a discussion of “issues of particular concern to black women; dealing with racism, overcoming fears, claiming entitlement etc.” (Lee 2003). When interviewed, Elaine Lee, the book's editor, remarked how, despite promotional signing events proving vastly popular, the book didn't receive as much press as expected: “I only sold 5,000 books but I had expected to sell the 7,000 published” (Lee 2015).

Despite the book having been published almost 20 years ago, the lack of media attention received is argued by Lee as being representative of the mainstream media's prevailing attitude to African American travel. Furthermore, similar accusations of scaled-back marketing for BAME titles have been made of the UK market: Irenosen Okoji notes cases of publishing houses adopting conservative promotional strategies for titles that are viewed as commercial risks (2014). As such, considering the endemic nature of the diversity issues plaguing the publishing industry, it is perhaps not surprising that the biggest challenges to the racialised androcentrism of the travel writing genre are coming from online.

3- The Online Travel Movement:

Recent years have seen travel writing and travel blogging become “increasingly overlapped” (Robinson 2017) in the publishing landscape. Perhaps the most significant difference between the two lies in the fact that a travel blogger is required to not only write, but act as an editor, sales person, marketer, and website designer –all of which are aspects that would usually be managed in-house in a traditional publishing environment. The onus is therefore not so much on finding a means of publication, but on finding a readership.

However, the lack of gatekeeping intrinsic to the instantaneous generation of online content has caused some to view online travel writing with disparagement. Referring to blogs as “illiterate” and “hasty”, Paul Theroux argues that a blog “doesn't have any literary merit at all” (Theroux 2011). Yet, despite concerns rooted in quality of content, blogs with considerable followings have proved “a fresh source of content and talent for publishers” (Azariah 2016). The fact that bloggers often “communicate a cultural identity as part of their social identity” (Lee and Gretzel 2014, 44) plays a significant role in fostering the participatory culture of the online blogging community.

However, in spite of the diversity ostensibly inherent in authors being granted direct access to the public, the media's representation of both travel blogging and the wider travel industry has led to the claim that, even online, the genre remains commercially a white domain. Oneika Raymond, author of the prolific blog *Oneika the Traveller*, notes how, in her formative years, the images offered by the books, magazines, TV and film she consumed painted the "quintessential globetrotter" as white, blond and sinewy; such a prevailing lack of diversity in representation meant that "black people, for whatever reason, were not part of this narrative" (2014). This, in combination with the overwhelmingly white proliferation of "best travel blogs lists and panels and conferences" contributes to the misplaced notion that people of colour "don't travel, or write, or draw in high traffic on their travel blogs" (Dhillon 2015).

Statistics confirm that this is not the case: according to MMGY analysts, black travel has rebounded since the 2008 recession, with "seventeen percent of African-Americans take one or more international trips a year" (Chideya 2014). Navdeep Singh Dhillon, author of travel blog *Ishq in a Backpack*, even suggests that the financial implications of sabotaging potentially lucrative partnerships and sponsorship deals manifests in a "deliberate silencing" of blogger's criticisms of mainstream media's whitewashing of the travel industry. He argues: "nothing kills the sexiness of a fun travel blog like using highly charged terms like Racism, White Privilege, or White Supremacy" (Dhillon 2015).

As a response to this exclusion, organisations such as the *International Association of Black Travel Writers (IABTW)* have been established as a means of unifying travel writers of colour. Yet, using race as a means of unification has proved problematic to some; wary of making tokenistic or essentialist claims, Lola Akinmade ponders an issue many BAME travel writers 'struggle with': 'If I don't focus solely on the black experience or write mostly about Africa as an African travel writer, am I selling out?' (2016). As such, despite the ostensible freedom offered by an unmonitored blogosphere, there are discernible parallels between the online travel movement and the publishing industry's treatment of travel writers: when writers of colour do share their voices, they are often 'boxed up' or marginalised to fit a certain demographic (Akinmade 2016). The problem, therefore, is not a lack of travel writing content being produced by BAME authors, but more a lack of opportunity.

4- #BlackTravelMovement: A Case Study:

The US-based Black Travel Movement has been gaining increased media traction in recent years. Comprised of 'for us by us' groups including *Nomadness Travel Tribe*, *Travel Noire*, and *Tastemakers*, these companies 'go further than just featuring brown skin on marketing materials'; travelling to 'lesser known "brown" destinations, they offer 'itineraries designed to foster integration and appreciation' (Raymond 2016). Recognising the untapped potential of this movement, the editors of *Griots Republic* – the premier magazine for young, American travellers of colour – released *#BlackTravel: The Anthology*, an inclusive coffee table book compiling travel photos and essays celebrating the people and groups that have created the *Black Travel Movement*. With 24 writers covering 78 countries, the contributions cover topics ranging from "politics and social justice to sex and adventure". Released on 15th March 2017 to coincide with *Black History Month*, *#BlackTravel: The Anthology* was initially intended as a limited edition with plans for a short run production; the fact that the first print runs sold out in just 10 days only evidences the commercial viability of the project.

Davita McKelvey, Editor in Chief of *Griots Republic* provided invaluable insight into the process behind publishing *Black Travel: The Anthology*. When asked for her opinions on the current state-of-play facing female travel writers within the publishing industry, McKelvey responded that the “ease of self-publishing through platforms like Amazon or Blurb” is helping “level the playing field” for travellers of colour who have not always had the privilege and ability to travel freely. Yet, echoing the financial implications facing writers of colour online, traditional publishing still holds the “proverbial purse strings”. Despite the ever-increasing numbers of BAME travellers, McKelvey asserts that there is absolutely a gap in the current travel publishing market for female BAME authors; current publications by female authors - McKelvey references *Eat, Pray, Love* – “always [deal] with broken women who are hitting the road to fix something”. The fact that none of these authors are people of colour means that this “repetitive and vanilla voice” is a consistent source of frustration for BAME readers searching for a resonating voice.

When asked about the publishing process behind the anthology, McKelvey stated that it only took the editorial team 25 minutes to dispose of the idea of trying to work with a traditional publisher; the collaboration was deemed unnecessary when the team had the skill set, funding, and had already built the brand and customer base through *Griots Republic*’s circulation. The unprecedented demand for the first print run, especially considering the fact that no press copies were sent out and the title was not even initially listed on Amazon, only confirms this.

As McKelvey observes, the speed of response indicates two things: the brand had been successfully built to speak to an identified niche, and catering to the wider publishing industry was not essential in accomplishing their intentions. With this in mind, the successful marketing campaign behind the anthology, including a book tour and appearances at popular festivals, has catalysed a stream of enquiries hinting at future projects; the editorial team are receiving communication from “major museums” and “niche bookstores” requesting to stock the book. McKelvey thus recognises that working with a traditional publisher cannot be fully dismissed when contemplating the project’s future scalability. Most significantly, the anthology’s success – though almost exclusively US-based at present – suggests that *The Black Travel Movement* does have the potential to rejuvenate an androcentric and racialised genre. *Griots Republic* attests to this potential in reporting the near-constant demand from black travel writers to publish their work; through crowdfunding platforms such as *Kickstarter*, the magazine have donated to now-published projects and have plans to produce further travel memoirs by “black bloggers, YouTube personalities, and chefs throughout the diaspora”. As McKelvey states: “at some point, big corporations will notice and want in on the market”.

Conclusion

It therefore seems fair to assert that the increasingly diverse travel blogosphere *is* giving voice to demographics excluded by both the wider publishing and travel industries. However, BAME voices both online and in print rarely receive the exposure and championing required to break into mainstream awareness. Dreda Say Mitchell, remarking that it is British society that problematises skin colour, counters with “it’s an important part of who I am. But it’s not

the only thing” (2015). Despite the online travel writing community proving effective in resonating with underrepresented audiences in a way is not achieved by the commercial print publishing industry, communities united through race or gender face the shared problem of tokenism and essentialism; BAME writers often face “shoehorning” to fit an intended demographic. Furthermore, although US-based, the work of *Griots Republic* in publishing *BlackTravel: The Anthology* ascertains that there is both a multitude of content produced by travel writers of colour and an eager market. As such, it falls to the wider publishing industry to shatter racially insensitive stereotypes in breaking the cyclical and systemic diversity issues within commercial genres.

General Conclusion

The performativity of gender identity within a society that is bound by social sanction has an undeniable impact on the perception and publication of female travel writers. Despite the genre's natural fluidity and the industry's current initiative to foreground diversity, commercially successful travel writing has remained entrenched in its white androcentrism. An analysis of the relationship between gender and genre has revealed that a prevailing societal marginalisation of those who fail to perform their prescribed gender roles places unique "discursive pressures" (Mills 2015, 133) on female travel writers, who often conform to these demands for fear of remaining unpublished. Such pressures, embodying the societal regulations and controls enforced by these gendered constructs, are further facilitated by a risk-averse publishing model that "shoehorns" works into consistently lucrative moulds.

Evident is that travel writing content has changed with the ease of travel facilitated by a globalised twenty-first century milieu. Whereas the traditional narratives aimed at an assumed sedentary readership are now largely equated with a "dead" genre and a bygone era, the growing trend towards the "personalization" (Kelly 2015) of travel writing has become synonymous with questions of an ostensible quality slippage. The disparity between the publishing industry's treatment of "personal" or "confessional" writing by male and female authors respectively is undoubtedly problematic; the gendered dichotomy of female interiorisation reflecting narcissism, and male interiorisation conveying profundity, is inherently problematic in its assumption that there is a fixed definition to what it means to write "like a woman" or "like a man". The fact that these arbitrary and socially constructed assumptions provide the root cause of the androcentrism pervading both the travel writing genre and the wider publishing industry evidences that the genre will only truly diversify with a significant overhaul of prevailing cultural attitudes.

Sara Mills' recognition of the balancing act performed by historic female travel writers in writing material that was exciting enough to attract an audience, while sufficiently adhering to "feminine" conventions to retain said audience remains ever-pertinent to the modern-day publishing industry. What is evident is that the corporatisation of the industry in recent decades has led to increasingly conservative publishing. The mass of pastel coloured covers, combined with the rhetoric used even at the level of cover copy – the cover of Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* is awash with feminised language – enacts the industry both perpetuating and capitalising upon the fact that work by women is still being read with preconceptions.

The market for travel writing is therefore clearly more diverse than currently recognised. Whereas recent years have seen a "recovery project" of reprinted female travel writing largely spearheaded by the feminist press, Virago, the publishing of reactive one-off anthologies aiming to foreground original pieces – such as *Amazonian: The Penguin Book of Women's New Travel Writing* – are not without issue. Low sales figures aside, the compilation of works on the grounds of gender leads to problems of essentialism. Such texts risk being valued not for their literary merit, but for the "extraordinariness" (Jennings 2004, 113) of their author's gender, and thus do little to challenge the industry-wide presumption that female authors represent the particular, as opposed to speaking for the universal. However, that such issues of pigeonholing and essentialism are not exclusive to compendia highlight the fact that this issue is deeper-rooted.

Critical reaction to both Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* and Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* reflect the manner in which, within a culture with discernibly ambivalent feelings about independent woman, it is decidedly unclear what kind of journeys women will be lauded for embarking on, and what kind of tales will meet favourable response. Indeed, despite their vast stylistic differences, both texts have become synonymous with the exclusively female genre of "faux travel writing" (Crispin 2011) and thus held up as being symptomatic of perceived genre wide quality decline. Therefore arguable is that the treatment of Strayed's text in particular is emblematic of the homogenising effect of a conservative publishing industry. Despite the transgressive nature of *Wild* resulting in a more favourable critical response than that met by Gilbert's travelogue, the two texts are still overwhelmingly discussed in tandem. Such comparisons are in spite of Strayed's conscious effort to avoid the feminised marketing campaign behind *Eat, Pray, Love* in her attempts to dispel the myth that female-authored stories cannot be relevant to men; both case studies thus provide instances of the female emotional experience being relegated to a substandard genre.

As such, while it is promising that the exclusion of texts by women from high-brow recognition is not going unnoticed, it is clear that there is still some way to go. Despite the tireless work of campaigns such as #ReadWomen and organizations such as *Vida: Women in Literary Arts* in drawing attention to the paucity of female authored works lauded in review pages and on literary prize shortlists, the fact that women remain underrepresented within the wider publishing industry itself creates a serious disadvantage at grass root level. Whereas traditional editors assert that books are championed because of the quality of their content as opposed to the gender of the author, their decisions are being made within a gendered environment. Indeed, Ana Alacovska's research conveyed an authorial anxiety felt by female travel writers in feeling "ousted" by "masculinist editors" within a patriarchal industry (2015, 138). Whereas women dominate the "open plan" spaces occupied by assistants and lower level managers, the offices allocated to senior management, with "decision making power" (Kean 2017), are predominantly occupied by men. The industry has made moves to address its lack of diversity, with Penguin Random House removing its degree-requirement as an employment stipulation, and Hachette offering two year long internships for BAME aspiring publishers as a means of attempting to diversify the industry's workforce. Yet it seems that such changes have yet to filter through to editorial practice: apparent is that both the problem and the solution is clear; it is now action that is needed.

The rise of the travel blogosphere since the turn of the century has undoubtedly helped address issues of misogyny and racial insensitivity endemic to the genre. The provision of an online platform enabling anyone with an internet connection to publish content has enabled the fostering of a participatory culture giving voice to demographics excluded by the mainstream publishing industry. Despite concerns rooted in the lack of gatekeeping regarding content-quality, blogs with established followings have provided a ready talent pool for publishers. Yet, the transgressive potential intrinsic to online platforms is undermined by the mainstream media's perpetual failure to represent travellers of colour. The resultant difficulty for bloggers who do not fit the industry's stereotype in attaining sponsorship deals and lucrative collaborations has undeniably led to a "deliberate silencing" (Dhillon 2015) of criticisms of the media's treatment of non-white travellers. There are, as such, disappointing parallels to the issues facing BAME authors within the publishing industry; it is not a lack of content, but more a lack of opportunity. Although outside the scope of this project's limits, the impact of online travel magazines on the diversification travel writing would prove an interesting route for further study. The success of *Griots Republic*, an online magazine whose

urban black travel brand identified the market and thus provided the foundations for *#BlackTravel: The Anthology*, reflects the potential of online platforms to recognise gaps in the market that are currently not addressed by a risk-averse mainstream publishing industry.

Travel writing, at present, is thus anything but fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrowmindedness. Symptomatic of the diversity issues proliferating the wider modern publishing industry, a true indicator of diversification will be in the transition from both femaleauthored texts being regarded with the same esteem as those of their male counterparts in populating the review page of literary publications, and the further transition in BAME authors publishing not just literary fiction, but also within the commercial genres. While there is, at present, an industry-wide conversation recognising said issues, these words need to manifest into action. It is only through the constant challenging of the industry's endemic misogyny and racial insensitivity that the genre of travel writing will cease to be ideologically gendered, with the sole distinction being between good and bad writing.

Plot Summary

Many travel stories have been written by men over time when the rare travel writers appears, seemingly an unexpected exception, at least that is how it is. Actually it changes. For many centuries, women have travelled and written about their encounters and experiences. Regardless of whether for delight, journey, or duty, their stories are a great motivation and inspiration for current modern women who adventure outside of what might be expected. Women travel writing is about how women can adapt with being women in a strange land.

A range resources were consulted in order to explore the print culture of female travel writers, and the influence of gender and race on their perception and publication. To identify what exactly constitutes “travel writing”, and assess to what extent the genre is ideologically gendered, it was necessary to attain an overview of the pre-existing literature surrounding the topic. The consultation of handbooks were useful in providing an industry-centric insight into current publishing practice and current perceptions of the genre. Research was also conducted into genre theory; the works of feminist theorists including Judith Butler, Sara Mills, and Ana Alacovska, all of whom have analysed the relationship between genre and gender, proved invaluable to formulating an impression of the genre’s androcentrism.

To further explore current publishing practice, an analysis of data from Nielsen Bookscan was conducted to assess the number of texts currently being published by female travel writers in the UK market. A case study was also conducted, comparing the publishing of Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman’s Search for Everything Across Italy and Indonesia*, and Cheryl Strayed’s *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, texts which are both two of most prolific travelogues written by women in recent years, and have become synonymous with a genre of so-called “faux travel writing” that has been exclusively aligned with female authorship. The marketing of these texts, including subsequent film adaptations, evidenced a lazy publishing practice of “shoehorning” the works of women writers into fitting a pre-proven lucrative market.

For the final research aim of assessing the extent to which the rise of the travel blogosphere since the turn of the millennium has helped address issues of misogyny and racial insensitivity in travel writing, it was first necessary to ascertain the types of digital platform being utilised to publish content.

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