

Tourist Literature

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Whenever tourism as a distinct phenomenon serves as a subject or as a tool of literary imagination, this produces a particular kind of texts that may be coined as ‘tourist literature’. Within the more comprehensive category of ‘travel literature’ these texts constitute a subgenre determined by their explicit relation to tourist practices.

This concerns poets and writers who act themselves as tourists while preparing their work and who use these experiences as sources of a literary imagination that transcends this particular circumstance. Within this practice, tourism to locations associated with literary memories (from the graves and homes of poets to the landscapes described in their works) has a particular appeal, as the phenomenon of the literary pilgrimage performed by many authors since Antiquity exemplifies.

Inspired and sustained by habits like these some locations even may develop into literary landscapes or cityscapes. Their cultural and commercial exploration largely depends on the indications provided in particular literary texts that frame such locations in the collective mind and that as a result may as well be coined as ‘tourist literature’. This is a bidirectional phenomenon that reflects both on the locations and on the texts. In a purposefully designed constellation like the early 19th-century idea of “Burns country”, the locations described in the Scottish bard’s poetry have acquired literary overtones, yet conversely also his poetry itself has gained strong associations with the tourist practices it has engendered since its publication.

Such a double perspective also characterizes the representation of tourism in literary texts, which is often ambiguous or ironic. While Henry James’ oeuvre provides ample descriptions of tourist practices as they were burgeoning at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the 20th century, like in *The American* (1877), it also comprises some of the most memorable critiques of the fashionable phenomenon, notably in his short story “The Birthplace” (1903). Such entanglements of description and even celebration on the one hand and critical assessment on the other confirms that ‘tourist literature’ tends to complicate the practices in which it is rooted.

References

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- [2] Dekker, George (2005). *The fictions of romantic tourism. Radcliffe, Scott, and Mary Shelley*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Further Readings

Edwards, Philip (2005). *Pilgrimage and literary tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.