

INTRODUCTION

SHAPING STRANGERS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH TRAVEL WRITING

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For so it is that aliens and strangers eat the bread from the fatherless children, and take the living from all the artificers, and the intercourse from all merchants, whereby poverty is so much increased, that every man bewaileth the misery of other, for craftsmen be brought to beggary, and merchants to neediness.

(Munday et al. [c. 1590] 1990: 1.1.111–116)

What did early modern English people think about “strangers”? This speech from the play *Sir Thomas More*, written by Anthony Munday and others and first performed in the early 1590s, gives an emphatic answer to this question. Strangers were “aliens” who “braved and abused ... freeborn Englishmen” (1.1.111, 74, 72). By their presence in London they stole both food and women from their rightful English owners, committing “vild enormities” and “insolencies” against the native people (1.1.81, 90). The extract above comes from a playbill designed by the broker John Lincoln, who calls on the “worshipful lords and masters of the city” to bring these injustices to an end (1.1.106-7). The text of the bill is taken verbatim from Holinshed’s 1587 *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, which related the events dramatized in the play, the “Ill May Day” protests of 1517. In *Sir Thomas More*, Lincoln and his fellow “revolters” (1.1.132) complain that the strangers not only steal from Londoners, but also damage English markets and merchants with their voracious appetites and dangerous foreign products, which “have infected us” so that “our infection will make the city shake” (2.3.16–17). Strangers—and “stranger” is the most commonly used term for the incomers, though they are also (much less frequently) referred

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to as “French” or “Lombards”—are portrayed as difficult, dangerous, unruly, and even infectious. Directly in their effect on English markets, and indirectly through their provocation of the citizens to riot, the strangers present a threat to order, presenting risks of economic failure and social revolt. As Joan Fitzpatrick (2001/2002: 129) notes in her discussion of these scenes, the Londoners’ tendency to categorize the foreigners as “strangers” rather than to refer to them by national or regional identity suggests that “it is less important where the foreigners come from than that they are foreign; the focus is on their alterity, their strangeness, primarily their un-Englishness.” Fitzpatrick points out that the term “strangers” might evoke for an English audience not only the French, but other “strangers” closer to home, “namely the Scots, the Welsh and particularly the Irish” (2001–2002: 129). Strangers might also come into London and England from further afield than Continental Europe. Throughout the period, and particularly from the 1550s on, England saw a large influx of immigrants and Londoners in particular might expect to encounter “strangers” at home as a matter of course (Hoenselaars 1992: 26–27; Selwood 2005, 2010; Yungblut 1996).

The term “stranger,” then, might refer to any number of regional or national identities, according to context. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “stranger” shares a semantic field with the word “foreigner” and could be defined as anyone who comes from outside of the defining group, “one who belongs to another country” or “an unknown person.” “Strangerness” like vagabondry or scatteredness could also refer to low socioeconomic status or lack of esteem, or to dispersion and nomadic lifestyle.

As John Michael Archer has written, strangers and foreigners were not citizens of London, and the two terms could be used interchangeably in the sixteenth century, “but for the most part strangers or ‘aliens’ were born outside the British Isles, and foreigners despite the modern connotations of the name, were native-born English, who had newly come to the city [i.e. London] as adults, rather than as young and assimilable apprentices” (2005: 7–9). Indeed, as the articles in this special issue ably demonstrate, strangers in the early modern world could be identified not only by geographical difference, but by almost any type of alterity: religious, ethnic, bodily, spiritual, or linguistic.

In a play like *Sir Thomas More*, which takes London as its location and subject, strangers are those who come into the native community from outside, and can thus be easily identified. As the boundaries of English explo-

ration expanded in the sixteenth century and beyond, however, unknown persons were increasingly encountered by the English abroad as well as at home. Strangers were not only foreigners who entered a particular community, but also those encountered by a traveler when he crossed the threshold of a community foreign to himself. Indeed, in travel literature, the writer is the stranger, identified by the Oxford English Dictionary as “one who resides in or comes in to a country to which he is a foreigner.” Thus, in the writings considered by the articles in this issue, the identification of strangers is complicated further by the fact that the traveler-writers are themselves strangers to those whom they encounter and describe as strangers. The category of “stranger” is an unstable concept, which shifts according to the position of writer, subject, and reader, who may or may not share the author’s own position.

An equation, then, can be drawn between the traveler and the stranger: both cross boundaries between lands and between what is known and unknown; both are transgressors. John Gillies (1994: 3) notes this parallel and suggests that there is a link between travelers and strangers as moral, as well as geographical, transgressors: “both voyagers and others tend to be creatures of *hubris* in the original Greek sense of ‘overflowing’ their bounds” and “the exotic geographies that define them will tend to function as a paradigm of their transgressiveness.” Strangers and travelers who “overflow” their bounds in one way may also do so in another. In other words, strangers, having crossed geographical borders, may violate moral codes. In relation to the drama of the period, A. J. Hoenselaars has discussed the potential for an “equation of foreignness with evil, with ‘virtue as a native and vice as a foreign concept’” (1992: 43). This is the opposition between native and strange, good and bad, which is at work in the events—and the xenophobia—dramatized in *Sir Thomas More*. Although there may be a moral taint associated with strangeness in the imaginative literature of the era, it is nonetheless true that the early modern period inherited a common conception that all people were, in fact, strangers: within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, all humanity were “exiles from the earthly paradise” (Akehurst and Van D’Elden 1997: vii). Discussing strangers in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, Niayesh points out that within this tradition, “the idea of being ‘strangers and sojourners’ on earth (*Gen. 23: 4*) is clearly associated with wandering as divine retribution for the original sin of murder committed by Cain against his brother Abel” (2004: 405). Elsewhere, the casting of Adam and Eve out

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of Eden and the destruction of the Tower of Babel are often cited alongside the Cain and Abel story as examples of mankind's wandering strangeness. To be a wanderer, a traveler, and a stranger was also part of the universal condition of humans as fallen, sinful, mortal beings.

The multiplicity of meanings carried by the term "stranger" makes it a fascinating prism through which to examine attitudes to otherness in early modern English travel writing. Strangers occur in all genres of literature and all aspects of history, but travel writing provides a particularly rich source of material for the examination of strangers and strangeness, as its subject is the encounter between different cultures, each of which is foreign (though sometimes also familiar) to the other. Strangeness and dislocation is the universal subject of travel writing. However—as studies of early modern travel have established—such writing reflects on the identity of the traveler, or his nation, as much as it does on those of the other, building on a long classical and medieval tradition of writing about foreign cultures, peoples, climates, flora and fauna (Helgerson 1992; Rubiés 2000b, 2002).

In recent decades, the ways in which early modern people wrote their lives, fashioned their selfhood, and marked their identities has come to the fore of early modern studies, and travel writing has simultaneously become an ever more important subject for scholars of early modern history and culture.¹ Travel provided an opportunity to define the self against the other in a variety of ways and, as Englishmen began to voyage farther and more frequently beyond English borders, they increasingly defined themselves through contact with the wider world. Similarly to the way Natalie Zemon Davis (2007: 12–13) has characterized Leo Africanus as an early modern individual with a "double vision, sustaining two cultural worlds, sometimes imagining two audiences, and using techniques taken from the Arabic and Islamic repertoire," the travelers examined in this issue can be seen as cultural intermediaries. They disseminated and mediated information about foreign lands and their inhabitants, interacted with "strangers," and came to realize how they themselves had changed through these contacts. Early modern English people, it has been argued, became especially interested in foreigners and foreignness, whether as a means of drawing moral conclusions about their own lives or in order to compare other worlds, habits, and languages to their own (Ostovich et al. 1998: 11). The question of what they thought about strangers and strangeness is the central focus of this issue of *Journeys*. The articles presented here offer reflections on the

“shaping of strangers” by exploring how English travel writing educated, communicated, and disseminated ideas about strangers and made its readers think about strangers in novel ways. They consider how various strangers were presented and represented in English travel writing, whether their “strangeness” be one of physical, religious, geographical, or national difference, and, simultaneously, the slippage between different kinds of strangeness. Our goal is to explore how strangers were both made familiar and foreign, and how their representation simultaneously rested on a long tradition of writing about other cultures and the traveler’s experiences and purposes of self-fashioning.

The issue opens with Matthew Dimmock’s article, which identifies a failure in the English “language of difference” in the late sixteenth century. Discussing two tracts about religious conversion—John Foxe’s *A sermon preached at the christening of a certaine Iew* (1578) and Meredith Hanmer’s *The Baptizing of a Turke* (1586)—in the context of travel and trade in the sixteenth century, Dimmock suggests an alternative critical vocabulary for the study of strangers and “otherness” in early modern England and calls for more attention to an earlier lexicon about heresy. The second article by Eva Johanna Holmberg explores representations of Jewish trades and professions in English travelers’ accounts by looking at the ways in which trades were made to shape and construct ideas about the famous “scattered nation,” defined by one contemporary writer as “strangers where they dwell and travelers where they reside.” Observations of foreign customs and practices, whether religious or profane, were expected from learned travelers, as they revealed a lot about foreign nations. Jews, the quintessential strangers, interested early modern Britons not just because of their business networks and notoriety, but also because of their long absence from England, from where they had been expelled in 1290. The professions of Jews were made to tell stories about the reliability, supposed greediness, and superior business instincts of Jews, or the harms and benefits of their presence for trade in foreign countries.

Chloe Porter’s contribution on the Mediterranean travel writings of Anthony Munday and Thomas Dallam reconsiders the question of the gaze—and the object of the gaze—in early modern cultural encounter. These two late sixteenth century travelers, different in many ways, are connected by visual activities; both are concerned with the physicality of their visual experiences as participants in the rituals and ceremonies of strangers. Ques-

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tions of religious and national allegiance are brought to the fore in this article, as their active involvement in such rituals challenges the travelers' own identities. Despite the authors' claims to spectating from a safe distance, close physical contact with strangers proves to be a disruptive and potentially threatening experience. Religious and national identities are also the subject of the article by Amrita Sen and Jyotsna Singh. The authors consider early modern ethnography via Henry Lord's *A Display of Two Foreign Sects in the East Indies* (1630), reading Lord's efforts to classify Indian religious and caste identities (and especially the Banians, who were active in trade and to become a crucial part of the East India Company community) in the context of England's trade prospects in India. Lord seeks to make sense of the indigenous Indian caste system via the Banians' "Shaster," which he takes to be their sacred text, understanding the Banian religion as a misrepresentation of Christianity. Lord's attempt to explain the religious and caste identities he encountered reflects not only his lack of understanding, but also how his "discovery" of the Banians ultimately became the "rediscovery" of an ancient people who could serve the East India Company's interests. The representation of strangers can once again be seen to reflect the underlying concerns of the European traveler.

The issue closes with Anna Winterbottom's article about Samuel Baron's *Description of the Kingdom of Tonqueen* (1686) as a form of "auto-ethnography" where Baron fashioned his life and identity in the maritime mercantile world of Southeast and East Asia. Trying to attract patrons and supporters, Baron shaped and manipulated his identity in surprising ways. The offspring of a Vietnamese mother and Dutch father, he was able to portray himself both as a stranger and a native, Englishman and Asian, by using the tropes of the European travel narrative to his advantage. The overlapping of different identities in Winterbottom's piece is an appropriate reminder of the complexities that surround various categories of strangers in the early modern period. The wide webs of meanings around "strangers" explored in this issue show how important it was for early modern English writers to make sense of strangers, and how by looking at strangers we gain a novel perspective on negotiations and interactions with the strange and the familiar, the known and unknown, the old worlds and the new, all ubiquitous in the literature and culture of travel of the early modern period.

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Note

1. The literature on travel and travel writing in the early modern period is vast, but a selective list includes Fuller 1995, 2008; Hadfield 2007; Jowitt 2003; Kamps and Singh 2001; Rubiés, 2000a; Sell 2006; Sherman 2002; Singh 1996.

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