

TRAVEL WRITING REVISITED: *READING THE RIVER*

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Abstract. *Some theoretical considerations of travel writing as a genre presented in this article were inspired by Myrna Kostash's Reading the River: A Traveller's Companion to the North Saskatchewan River (2005). Besides a review of generic considerations, this text aims to highlight the postcolonial context and its relevance for travel writing, as well as the concepts of contact-zone and intertextuality, with a final touch on female travel writing, which all figure in Kostash's travelogue.*

Key words: *travel writing, generic considerations, postcolonialism, contact zone, intertextuality, female travel writing, Myrna Kostash*

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the critical response to travel writing shows rather diverse attitudes towards travel writing as a genre and towards its literary value. Initially, travel writing was merely an additional aspect of an author's biography or a document about a certain culture (Gvozden 2014, 1). Thanks to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979), travel writing got its own distinct field of studies in the 1980s (Thompson 2016, 22). Since then, there have been attempts to show that travel writing possesses a valuable literary aspect, as much as it does a cultural and a national one. According to Vladimir Gvozden, when approaching travel writing as a genre, it is important to see how the national and the cultural identity are transformed in literature. This shows that travel writing, as a literary genre, is intrinsically connected to the culture in which it is written, and also, to the attitudes of the author. Travel writing serves the purpose of reading about other cultures, of learning about them, and, hopefully, of understanding cultural differences, which can help the readers with intercultural exchanges. Related theoretical considerations in this article are inspired by Myrna Kostash's *Reading the River: A Traveller's Companion to the North Saskatchewan River* (2005).

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Myrna Kostash is a third generation Ukrainian-Canadian known as an author who put Edmonton on the literary map of Canada (Ferchoff 2014). Apart from being a writer, she is also a journalist whose work includes books, articles, playscripts, and radio documentaries (Ferchoff 2014). Kostash is an acclaimed writer of literary and creative nonfiction, who travels in order to pursue her literary interests and passions. She has traveled from Vancouver, BC, to Ukrainian weddings in Two Hills, Alberta, “from the site of the mass grave of Cree warriors in Battleford, Saskatchewan, to a fishers’ meeting in Digby, Nova Scotia; from the British Library in London, UK, to the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul”. Her nonfiction is not divorced from social issues, as she is continually inspired in her work by her childhood in the Ukrainian-Canadian community of Edmonton, her “rites of passage through the Sixties in the US, Canada and Europe”, her rediscovery of her western Canadian roots in the 1980s, her return to her spiritual sources in Byzantium and the Eastern Christian (Orthodox) Church, and, most recently, by her “re-education in the history of Indigenous and Settler relations in western Canada” (myrnakostash.com).

Myrna Kostash’s *Reading the River* is an interesting example of travel writing. Namely, it does not offer only the author’s insights and attitudes, but it also makes use of other people’s travel writings or literary works which deal with the same topic. Kostash relies on a wide variety of “stories and tales and anecdotes and reports [...] from First Nations legends (“orature”) to twenty-first century poetry” (Kostash 2005, 2). The intertextuality of this book is exemplified by the usage of both the oral tradition and the written text. It is also an example of intertextual writing in the contact zone, as the North Saskatchewan River is taken as both a metaphorical and literal zone of contact between the two cultures. Kostash’s focus in the book is the North Saskatchewan River, the contact and the stories that the people who have met along the river have made. In view of the fact that it is written in the twenty-first century, it belongs to the tradition of postcolonial books, which look back on the colonial times and also investigate the aftermath of the colonial rule. Thus, the article first offers a history of travel writing, and then connects it to the framework of postcolonial studies, and the concepts of intertextuality and contact zone. Female travel writing is also touched upon, in connection to Myrna Kostash’s own writing.

2. TRAVEL WRITING: GENERIC CONSIDERATIONS

Western imperial dominance from the eighteenth to the twentieth century has caused an interest in the field of theory on the intersections which may exist “between travel writing, knowledge and power” (Thompson 2016, 22). Peter Duncan Hulme in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* explains that travel writing appeared as “one of the early modern period’s most popular and flexible genres”, which inspired, educated, and entertained readers, and also inspired national pride within them (Hulme 2002, 20). Even though the genre never settled “into a single paradigm,” most of the “geographical locations, rhetorical forms, and political issues” which are now associated with travel writing have appeared at least once by the end of the seventeenth century (Hulme 2002, 20). Within the field of the travel writing genre, there is a difficulty in defining where travel writing ends, and where the other genres begin, such as autobiography, ethnography, nature writing, and fiction (Thompson 2011, 12). Travel writing can be placed within the field of creative nonfiction because the authors of this genre tend to portray the events in a way which makes them believable, and to paint a picture of them actually being there (without necessarily being

physically present) (Gvozden 2014, 1). This makes it rather difficult to determine what can be considered travel writing. The difficulty lies in the fact that the history of the travel writing genre has been associated with other nonfiction genres — autobiography, testimony, investigative journalism, ethnography, memoir; additionally, we should also consider its “fraught relationship with fiction” (Hulme 2002, 223). Its association with the novel makes it difficult to draw a line between the field of truth and the field of fiction, since the “relationship between travel writing and the novel took its modern disposition in the early eighteenth century” (Hulme 2002, 223). Therefore, to obtain the necessary critical distance needed for the understanding of travel writing, intertextuality should be taken into account, as travel writing is often explicitly intertextual, and includes other points of view and other texts as well (Hulme 2002, 223). An explanation of travel writing and its connection to intertextuality can be found further on in this article.

Despite the fact that the majority of travel writing authors come from Europe, it is important to note that travel writing is not a uniquely European creation. However, its incredible development during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was crucial in the formation of a specifically “Western discourse on human societies”, a discourse organized around a vision of natural and historical diversity, which was also inextricably tied to universalist assumptions and aspirations (Rubiés and Bacon 2000, 5). The importance of the genre of travel writing in this period can be found in the immense quantity of original material which was written, “in the variety of forms and purposes which it inspired, and in the intellectual importance of the debates that it informed” (Rubiés and Bacon 2000, 5), providing the necessary foundations for an empirical scientific discourse.

The category of ‘travel literature’ is more general than that of ‘literature of discovery and expansion’ and can be defined as that varied body of writing which, whether its principal purpose is practical or fictional, takes travel as an essential condition for its production. Travel is therefore not necessarily a theme, nor even a structuring element, within the body of literature generated by travel (Rubiés and Bacon 2000, 5).

With this in mind, the historical narratives of the overseas conquests written in the sixteenth century by the Portuguese or the Spanish used the materials collected by European travelers but did not particularly dwell on a description of their own observations; rather, the writer relied on the materials and authority of first-hand travelers. Therefore, travel writing should best be described as the “genre of genres,” as the variety of kinds of literature defined by a variety of purposes and conventions which share travel as the essential condition of production. Literary genre by default refers to a set of assumptions and invisible rules which shape how a linguistic representation is formally organized in order to meet the demands of a social context of communication (Rubiés and Bacon 2000, 5).

There has always been an intricate connection between writing and travel; a thousand years before Homer’s *The Odyssey*, one of the earliest extant texts was composed in Egypt during the Twelfth Dynasty, telling a story of a shipwrecked sailor alone on a marvelous island. Besides that, the early biblical and classical traditions also have a lot of examples of travel writing, which varied from literal to symbolic: “Exodus, the punishment of Cain, the Argonauts, the Aeneid”. One of the most notable epic journeys, *The Odyssey*, gave its name to the word which is used to this day to describe an epic journey, danger of travel, and the joy of homecoming. However, societal attitudes to travel, both literal and literary, have been ambivalent, as travel broadens the mind and helps acquire knowledge of distant places and people, but it also changes the travelers, who, in some cases, may not return at all.

Travel has also been intrinsically connected to Christianity, as pilgrimages were necessary for Christian salvation, but were also carefully controlled. Within the Christian tradition, life itself has been symbolized as a journey, and the importance of the pilgrimage to Christianity is present in medieval travel writing, which is particularly well exemplified in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In a way, pilgrims can be considered as ancestors of modern tourists, because: "a catering industry grew up to look after them, they followed set routes, and the sites they visited were packaged for them" (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2002, 2).

Writing became an integral part of traveling during the sixteenth century, as it was necessary to document the activity; sponsors, political or commercial, wanted reports and maps, which were mostly kept secret, but the public interest aroused by stories of faraway places was an important way of attracting investment and, eventually, with the start of colonies – settlers. Publication of travel accounts became a semi-official business in which the beginnings of imperial histories were noted, due to the rivalry between European nation-states. Even the fictional accounts of travel writing initiated interest. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) made a great impact on English writers in the early sixteenth century, portraying a fictional traveler, Raphael Hythloday, who (fictionally) journeyed with Amerigo Vespucci to the New World. *Utopia* and some later fictional texts (Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, 1899), became a foundation upon which subsequent travel writing was created, influencing the form of both expectations and reports (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2002, 3).

Modern travel writing is extremely varied, and it may be inappropriate to place it within a category of a single genre. Most of the early modern travel writing began with a tribute to the patron and address to the reader, and also with a sort of justification for both travel and travel writing, including lists of classical precedents and cited biblical passages. As far as the form of this travel writing is considered, the depiction of early modern travels could be in the form of letters, essays, sketches, plays, and poem. The end of the sixteenth century brought along the most characteristic form which was the "report" or "relation", in which a chronological narrative of movements and events was combined with geographic and ethnographic observations. An inevitable addition to travel narratives were maps; however, since they were rather expensive and could be also handled as state or trade secrets, they were not that common (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2002, 30).

Throughout the period of 1450 — 1750, travel writing "was enormously diverse in content, style, and genre to cover many types of journey to a constantly expanding range of places," and it adopted a more consistent form and style, as well as an approach which was more empirical and scientific as it was inspired by the Royal Society and the Enlightenment (Thompson ed. 2016: 284). However, even though its form and style were narrowed, new sub-genres emerged, such as "letter writing; shipwreck, piracy and captivity narratives; chronographic descriptions of places; and fictional narratives" (Thompson ed. 2016: 284). Travel writing of the period was focused on "reporting information about the external world" and did not actually incorporate personal thoughts and feelings of travelers (Thompson ed. 2016: 284).

Writing by Europeans in this period frequently displays condescending attitudes to indigenous populations and a competitive and nationalistic approach to those who could not be conquered. Yet the best travel writers reveal a complex and careful engagement with the 'other' they encountered, describing the cultural practices, customs, and habits of unfamiliar peoples in an evenhanded way. They also achieve an effective synthesis of narrative and description, combining an account of the events of the journey with perceptive depictions of peoples, places, and things (Thompson ed. 2016, 284).

This excerpt brings us to travel writing in the colonial time. Thomas Harriot, a scientist, and John White, an artist, went to America in 1585 as part of Walter Raleigh's attempt to make a settlement in Virginia, and the result of their travel was Elizabethan England's most sophisticated and influential travel book, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. Thomas Harriot was thus praised (even though he served a colonial project) for his description and understanding of the Virginian natives in their own terms (Thompson ed. 2016, 284). He provided Algonkian names for many commodities, since he was helped by two Roanoke Indians who had visited England after an earlier voyage in 1584, and who were interpreters during Harriot's visit. By the eighteenth century, travel narrative got extended and included an eyewitness account, usually in the form of a journal or a diary, by someone who had actually made the journey (Thompson ed. 2016, 275). Throughout the period, however, there remained a great diversity as to what was accepted as travel writing. The generic template of the first-hand, eyewitness journal emerged as an attempt to direct both what travelers should write about and how they should relay their information back to the domestic audience. In a way, travel writing can thus be considered as life writing because it tends "to concern the self when away, abroad, elsewhere, focusing on encounters more than relationships" (Thompson 2016, 55—56):

This spatial dislocation has a temporal counterpart. While autobiographies and biographies are often presented figuratively in terms of travel ('life is a journey', as the cliché has it), travel writing rarely presents a cradle-to-grave (or rather, cradle-to-the present) account, at least not in a linear fashion. Rather, it usually focuses on a portion of life. Travel writing can thus sometimes seem like an excursion out of the life, or an episode in a life that is distinct yet resonant in terms of the life-story as a whole, or a clearing in the life from which the arc as a whole can be surveyed (Thompson 2016, 56).

As it contains the narratives which also include the report on encounters, where "the 'self' meets 'the other'," travel writing is important in the context of postcolonial criticism, a criticism deconstructing orientalist and essentialist discourses built in travel diaries and travel fictions (Kechida 2019, 14). This criticism focused on the orientalist texts which produced the image of "the Self" and "the Other" (Kechida 2019, 14). Edward Said explained in *Orientalism* that the "Other" is that which possesses a "contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" from the western standards (Said 1979, 2). Such approach to travel texts targets the dismantling of the statements (initially discriminatory) made about the "Other" (Kechida 2019, 14). In this scope of study, travel narratives are seen as generating a discourse in which writer and reader know about themselves by defining the identity of the self and comparing it to the equally built "Other" (Kechida 2019, 14). This has a very prominent place in *Reading the River*. Therefore, finding the place of travel writing within the postcolonial framework emerges as a significant issue.

3. TRAVEL WRITING WITHIN THE POSTCOLONIAL FRAMEWORK

When it comes to the term "postcolonial", there have been numerous attempts to come to the core of its meaning. According to *Postcolonial Studies – Key Concepts* (2007), the term "deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies" (Aschcroft et al. 2007, 168). The term was originally used by the historians after the Second World War to describe a "post-colonial state," in order to talk of a country after it gained a semblance of

independence in the “post-independence period” (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 168). As far as the aim of postcolonial studies is considered, it is “to comprehend, and to contest, the pernicious consequences of the vast European empires of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (Thompson ed. 2016, 3). Due to the imperial project of the European countries which brought about the promotion of global capitalism, cross-cultural contact became an important aspect for investigation, as it included the relocation of individuals and peoples, and established the inequalities which exist between the regions of the world, “the developed ‘West’ and the less developed ‘Rest’”, when wealth, health, and technological advancement” are considered (Thompson ed. 2016, 3). At the time when the West rose to global dominance, around 1760s, travel writing followed and described the spread of Western modernity and its dominance, as both these processes were essentially linked (Thompson ed. 2016, 288). The progress of Western civilization could also be seen in technological invention, agricultural reform, industrialization, and urbanization, as all these processes had significant impact on the history of travel, and they served the worldwide “advancement of financial, mercantile and industrial capitalism” (Thompson ed. 2016, 288). What matters for postcolonial theory, dating from at least the fifteenth century, is the continuous development of imperial rhetoric and of imperial representation of the rest of the globe in literature (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 114). Most of the rhetoric itself is focused on the desire for, and belief in the “European cultural dominance,” and its “right” to exploit the world’s resources (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 114). This can be clearly seen in travel writing.

If we consider travel as an opportunity for people to experience an encounter between self and what is considered the “Other”, then all travel writing could be considered, at some level, as a record or a product of this encounter, and also of the similarities and differences that it entailed. However, there are different ways in which that encounter is dealt with in travel writing. Sometimes it is mentioned in passing, sometimes it is described directly in the writing, and sometimes “the encounter itself will only be implicit in the writing, as it offers an account not of the actual travelling but of just the new perspectives or the new information acquired through travel” which adds a two-fold aspect to travel writing. In the most obvious case, it is a report on the wider world, an account of unfamiliar people or places; at the same time, it is also revelatory to a greater or lesser degree of the traveler and the author of the report, and of his or her values, preoccupations, and assumptions. It also reveals something of the culture from which that writer emerged, and/or the culture for which their text is intended (Thompson 2016, 10). However, the intentions of travel writing and its authors have been dubious at times, particularly with the rise of its importance within the realm of postcolonial studies (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2011, 1). Some critics have pointed out that travel narratives could be aligned with textual practices associated with colonial expansion, such as mapping, botany, ethnography, or journalism, in which case travel writing can be seen as propagating “discourses of difference” which were used to justify colonial projects (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2011, 1). David Spurr (1993), a literary critic, says that travel narratives perpetuate “the rhetoric of empire” by “offering information to colonial administrators” about what is happening in potential colonies, “while also depicting the colony for a general readership” (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2011, 1). Within this context, travel writing provided Europeans with enough information about areas outside of Europe, as if they were under their control, as an extension of land through ownership (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2011, 1). According to such critics, the genre of travel writing can be considered as the cultural by-product of imperialism, “often written by those actively involved in the expansion or maintenance of empire”, such as explorers, soldiers, administrators, missionaries, journalists,

and those dependent upon the support of the institutions of imperialism (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2011, 1). Therefore, in postcolonial travel writing there is a notion of suspicion as to whether the authors are merely perpetuating the ideas of their home countries while traveling, and whether or not they are portraying the authentic situation of the countries they visit. Thus, a huge power is vested in traveling and its narrative, especially as the cultural role of travel literature became more specific in an attempt to historically reconstruct the texts in their contexts of production and readership (Rubiés and Bacon 2000, 10). It is necessary to consider the conditions of appearance and development of the genre in different cultural traditions, and to relate it to a set of historical experiences (Rubiés and Bacon 2000, 10).

Mary Louise Pratt in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (1992) thus argues that European colonial travel writing tells us more about the European society than it does about the places the travel writers are visiting (Edwards and Graulund eds. 2011, 36). European colonial texts were used to portray the “barbarity of new exotic cultures”, in order to differentiate them from the civilized European culture, to portray the irrationality of this “Other” in contrast to the European rationality (Edwards and Graulund eds. 2011, 36). In other words, colonial travel narratives are not only narratives about other cultures, but narratives that help Europe manufacture a sense of self. Pratt calls this process “transculturation”, which is the “reciprocal, but unequal exchange between Europe and its colonies” (Edwards and Graulund eds. 2011, 36). Numerous other postcolonial critics have followed Pratt’s lead and argued that more recent travel narratives written in English “re-inscribe a mutually supportive relationship between Western global power and representations of the non-Western world” (Edwards and Graulund eds. 2011, 36):

In the last decades of the twentieth century, processes of decolonization opened the meaning-making powers of empire to scrutiny, as part of a largescale effort to decolonize knowledge, history, and human relations. [...] Travel books, I argue, gave European reading public a sense of ownership, entitlement, and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized. Travel books were very popular. They created a sense of curiosity, excitement, adventure, and even moral fervor about European expansionism. They were, I argue, one of the key instruments that made people ‘at home’ in Europe feel part of a planetary project; a key instrument, in other words, in creating the ‘domestic subject’ of empire (Pratt 2008, 3).

It could be said that the colonial travel writing pointed out the differences, whereas the new, postcolonial travel writing has a new agenda. Postcolonial study is interested in the hidden rules which generate binary or classificatory systems such as “Self /Other, Civilized/ Barbarian”, which allows for the recent studies of travel writing to be considered through a postcolonial lens (Kechida 2019, 14). Within contemporary postcolonial travel writing, the main point is not the itinerary of the traveling subject, but narratives which focalize their material through the prism of postcolonialism and are as much concerned with mapping the traveler’s own subject positions and sites of enunciation (Edwards and Graulund eds. 2011, 117). The late twentieth century saw a rise in the reputation of travel writing, with a new generation of trendy travel writers (Kechida 2019, 18). The prestigious British literary journal *Granta* created a watershed through its travel-themed special issues in the 1980s and 1990s, allowing its literary reviews to recognize travel writing as a genre bearing significant importance in reflecting modern needs for mobility, movement and cross-cultural curiosity (Kechida 2019, 18). Besides the fact that tourism is now one of the largest industries in the world, it should be noted that the global population no longer moves

only through choice, or for recreation, but through necessity, as they are displaced by economic hardship, environmental disaster, or war. Thanks to this, postcolonial travel writing has an enormous importance in offering insight into the cultural encounters (Kechida 2019, 18). This brings up another concept relevant for postcolonial studies – the contact zone, which is the focus of Kostash's *Reading the River*.

4. TRAVEL WRITING IN THE CONTACT ZONE

Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” which is usually followed by “highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (Pratt 2008, 7). This term is extremely useful and flexible for the many complex engagements which characterize the postcolonial space and its encounters (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 48):

[...] the term 'contact zone' [...] the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. 'Contact zone' in my discussion is often synonymous with 'colonial frontier.' [...] A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power (Pratt 2008, 8).

Another phenomenon connected to the notion of contact zone is the already mentioned transculturation. Transculturation refers to “the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds in colonies and metropolis” (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 213). During the aggressive diasporic movement of European settlers during the colonial period, the points they reached became known as frontiers, whereas the settled area adjacent to this was known as “borderland” (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 25). In contemporary transcultural studies, such borderland spaces can be spaces of energy, where they release the potential for change and revision, because these liminal spaces act to problematize and dismantle the binary systems which bring them into being (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 25). Just as postcolonial identity emerges in the ambivalent spaces of the colonial encounter, the dynamic of change does not take place in one direction, but it is “transcultural, with a significant circulation of the effects back and forth between the two” (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 21). Even though the subjugated people cannot control what the dominant culture tries to impose on them, they still do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own culture, how they use it, and what they make it mean (Pratt 2008, 7). Every single colonial encounter or a “contact zone” is different, and every single postcolonial occasion has to be precisely located and analyzed (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 171). Postcolonial studies are enriched by the fact that there are various kinds of postcolonial experiences, which enable the specific analysis of the various effects of colonial discourse (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 171). Even though the earliest life stories and personal accounts of such societies and their people were produced under the control of the western interlocutors (e.g. missionaries), recent accounts have stressed that even under these conditions, the texts can reveal the hidden subjects, uncover the controlling inscriptive practices of the interlocutor, and reveal the hidden voice

of the indigenous subject (Ashcroft et al. 2007, 211—212). In particular, Myrna Kostash's book is different as it does not offer merely the aspect of the European people but includes the point of view of the First Nations people as well.

5. TRAVEL WRITING AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Within the discourse of travel writing, there is a high degree of intertextuality (Thompson 2016, 67). Julia Kristeva introduced the term after she was influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogism" and Roland Barthes' "text theory" (Kristeva 2002, 8). She sees intertextuality as a way of introducing history to structuralism, based on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and carnival, which open a new perspective beyond structuralism. She also draws on Roland Barthes' text theory, in which he was thinking about the ideological implications of the semiotic system and the plurality of the sign itself. Thus, she replaced Bakhtin's idea of several voices inside an utterance "with the notion of several texts within a text" (Kristeva 2002, 8).

This idea of "several texts within a text" is what can be found in Myrna Kostash's book, as it contains numerous texts from numerous authors and sources. Kristeva connected the concept of intertextuality with other concepts she was working on, namely "strangeness/hospitality, migrant personalities, and grafts; that of the semiotic/the symbolic, and their trans-verbal meaning; then abjection, borderline personalities, and the blurring of object and subject acting out" (Kristeva 2002, 9). What could be shared by all these concepts is "frontier" or "threshold", and, according to Kristeva, intertextuality is a crossed threshold found between languages and cultures (Kristeva 2002, 9). Peter Wagner, in his *Swift's Great Palimpsest: Intertextuality and Travel Literature in Gulliver's Travels* brings the concept of intertextuality even closer to travel writing, by considering it as "the relations that arise out of the presence of one text or even several texts in another text" (Wagner 1992, 129). He borrows this understanding of the term "intertextuality" from Gérard Genette's book *Palimpsests*, where Genette defines intertextuality as "a relationship of co-presence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another" (Genette 1997, 1—2). There is an explicit and literal form portrayed in the traditional practice of *quoting* (with quotation marks, without specific references) (Genette 1997, 1). In a less explicit and canonical form, it is the practice of *plagiarism*, an undeclared but still literal borrowing. Finally, in less explicit and less literal guise, it is the practice of *allusion*: an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text (Genette 1997, 1). This is exactly what Myrna Kostash does, and it is most evident in her book *Reading the River*.

6. MYRNA KOSTASH AND FEMALE TRAVEL WRITING

Textual identities are constructed in travel writing through motion, encounters and exchanges, as the traveler, or the author in this case, has multiple discourses embedded in his or her perspective, such as race, nationality, and class (Thompson 2016, 81). Gender, however, is a key frame of reference, and a discourse which has generated much critical, historical, and theoretical enquiry (Thompson 2016, 81). However, despite the fact that there have been numerous female travel writers, particularly in the nineteenth century, social sciences and academic discourse in general have failed to draw public attention to

their texts. Feminist literary criticism has tried to redeem this by stimulating the recent burgeoning of interest in travel writing, as researchers tried to identify and analyze women's contributions to a genre which was traditionally viewed as a masculine genre (Thompson 2016, 81). In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an emergent women's movement and an increasing number of women who ventured beyond the European continent as tourists and, sometimes, as explorers (Hulme 2002, 293). What was interesting to note in this early female travel writing was that even though women faced a restrictive gender hierarchy and gendered exclusion in their home societies, their writing was not particularly more sympathetic towards the non-European other, as it rather demonstrated equally divergent and ambivalent attitudes as that of men (Hulme 2002, 293). This, in fact, proves the power of social discourses, stereotyping included.

In recent critical theory, gender is understood as just one factor among many variables in order to better understand the relations they construct (Thompson ed. 2016, 81). Attention has also been paid to the ways in which male travel writers conform to, consolidate or question the prevailing norms of masculinity, which proves that gender not only affects female, but also male travel writing (Thompson ed. 2016, 81). Pratt considers that, at least when it comes to women's access to travel writing, it seems even more restricted than their access to travel itself (Pratt 2008, 168). Most travel texts were discovered or revisited in an attempt to bring back into print and public discourse the European and American women writers of the last three or four centuries, many of whom wrote autobiographically, whether at home, abroad, or on the frontiers of expanding nations like Canada or the United States (Hulme and Youngs eds. 2002, 264). However, it is interesting that the majority of the texts which are being analyzed nowadays are mostly those produced by the female writers from the Victorian period, and, unfortunately, few consider writers of earlier periods or even those who are writing at present (Mills 2005, 33). Myrna Kostash is only one of the prominent names in the field of female travel writing in Canada in the twentieth and twenty-first century with books whose titles reflect the complexity of the genre, as well as gender: *Bloodlines: A Journey into Eastern Europe* (1993), *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir* (1998), *Prodigal Daughter: A Journey to Byzantium* (2011).

7. CONCLUSION

Myrna Kostash is noted as a writer of creative non-fiction, which could be an umbrella term for all types of travel writing the way she defines it: "it involves the application of literary techniques (what Andreas Schroeder calls our 'tool-box') to documentary materials" (Yumpu 2021). However simple this definition is, it allows for numerous classifications of the works pertaining to travel writing: from the most general types (literary, commercial, critical), to the straight-forward "travel guide", the "historico-geographical" tour type of book, and the "personal discovery" type of account, then to more specific histories, personal narratives, accounts of exploration, and tales of epic quests, and finally to very concrete destination articles, special-interest articles, holiday and special events, round-ups, personal essays, op-eds, how-to, itineraries, longform posts, travelogues, travel memoirs, and guidebooks. The list of types is not exhausted. Besides the historical review of theoretical issues, theoretical aspects highlighted in this article are mainly those found in *Reading the River*: the post-colonial context, the concept of the contact-zone, intertextuality, and female travel writing. They only underline the fact that travel writing may be as exciting as traveling itself.

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VRAĆANJE PUTOPISU: ČITAJUĆI REKU

Neka teorijska razmatranja o putopisu kao žanru predstavljena u ovom radu su inspirisana knjigom Čitajući reku: Saputnik za upoznavanje s rekam Severni Saskačevan (2005) Mirne Kostaš. Pored pregleda uopštenih razmatranja, ovaj tekst ima za cilj da istakne postkolonijalni kontekst i njegovu važnost za putopis, kao i koncepte poput zone kontakta i intertekstualnosti, sa završnim osvrtom na ženski putopis, a sve prethodno spomenuto je prisutno u putopisima Mirne Kostaš.

Ključne reči: *intertekstualnost, Mirna Kostaš, postkolonijalizam, putopis, uopštena razmatranja, zona kontakta, ženski putopis*