

Keighren, Innes M., Charles W.J. Withers, Bill Bell. *Travels into Print: Exploration, Writing, and publishing with John Murray, 1773-1859*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. 392 pp. \$45.

In recent years authorship studies as a field has been moving towards a more integrated notion of authorship, inspired by the continued bloom of related fields like book history and publishing history. Authors are no longer artificially kept separate from the broader publishing landscape but are allowed to take their place within it. This approach acknowledges the fundamentally collaborative nature of print publication, and invites scholarly consideration of crucial behind-the-scenes operators like publishers, their in-house readers, and editors.

In *Travels into Print*, Keighren, Withers and Bell contribute to this approach by exploring the implications of author-publisher dynamics for late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British travel writing. The corpus of texts under consideration consists of the 239 books of travel published by the house of Murray between 1773 and 1859. Taken together, these travel texts allow Keighren, Withers and Bell to show how field notes and journals became literary properties that existed in differentiated editions aimed at distinct market segments. Central to this study are considerations of authorship and particularly authority, as the market value of travel writing lay in the credibility of the truth claims made by the traveller-author.

Initially, Keighren, Withers and Bell identify three strategies that Murray's authors used to establish reader trust: scholarly citation, authenticity and self-representation, and instrumentation. The first of these strategies positioned the text and its author in a scientific tradition through the acceptance or rejection of existing sources, which was intended to show both erudition and discrimination (75). The second strategy refers to travellers' use of local guides and informants which could be presented as either reliable or deceptive, but whose purpose in the text was a rhetoric device that allowed authors to self-present as a successful "arbiter of truth" (88-89). Instrumentation, finally, sought to demonstrate credibility through scientific professionalization, supplementing a traveller's "individual testimony with instrumentally derived data" (96). These strategies frequently overlapped in what Keighren, Withers and Bell have called individual authors' "ad hoc regime of credibility [which] reflected particular judgements as to how best their veracity and that of their observations and judgements might be reckoned truthful" (75).

These observations are astute and valuable, but what makes *Travels into Print* particularly interesting is its insistence that we acknowledge that the creation of a credible authorial persona was (and is) "profoundly collaborative, although it was not necessarily always mutual" (216). Because travel writing was subject to competing interests—scientific best practice versus saleability, generic conventions versus authenticity—

Schelstraete, Jasper. "Keighren, Innes M., Charles W.J. Withers, Bill Bell. *Travels into Print: Exploration, Writing, and publishing with John Murray, 1773-1859*" *Authorship* 5.1 (2016).

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21825/aj.v5i1.2326>

Copyright Jasper Schelstraete. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Keighren, Withers and Bell urge us to be aware of the mediations and manipulations involved in the business of publishing it. In their conclusion, they call on students of travel writing to “no longer regard the printed issue of explorers’ narratives and travellers’ tales as the definitive version of the events they purport to describe without [...] being alive to the possibility, and to the responsibility of showing, that an earlier version is extant, either in whole or in fragmentary traces” (226).

By drawing attention to manuscript versions of travel writing, and to the slippage between manuscript and published versions of the same text, *Travels into Print* shows how publishers like Murray engaged in “author shaping” (32). This term denotes the process by which a diverse group of actors—the behind-the-scenes operators mentioned above—transformed a traveller’s original text into a commodity that conformed to reader expectations about travel writing, and which, in doing so, transformed the traveller’s textual account of herself into a recognizable authorial performance. This was a double process which at once smoothed often fragmented narratives of privation and chance into highly constructed plots, and disavowed this mediation. Keighren, Withers and Bell argue convincingly that Murray secured “authoritativeness” to the travel accounts which appeared under his imprint, “authorizing” (27) travellers by constructing “highly professional performances of amateur authorship present the work as an unmediated exchange between the writer and the reader, untrammelled by the complex, industrializing, and sometimes contradictory forces that gave shape to the final printed work as a commodity” (193). This author-shaping happened in diverse ways: from publishers framing authors paratextually by including maps and frontispiece portraits, over general compositional interventions from compositors and printers to the almost wholesale rearrangement of a traveller’s notes by editors.

Like his authors, Murray was invested in gaining readers’ trust, convincing them that the author was the kind of person who could be relied on to write the truth about their experiences in the world. Paradoxically, then, Murray attempted to enhance the credibility and authority of travellers (whom *Travels in Print* describes at one point, rather wonderfully, as “geographically privileged persons) by inscribing an authorial performance onto them. As *Travels into Print* points out, “in many respects, the social and political milieu’s of Murray’s authors and the firm itself are one and the same. Because after about 1813 the firm was at the centre of London’s official and colonial networks, the publisher and its authors engaged in strategies of mutual legitimation” (154). Eventually, the imprimatur of the house of Murray accrued an almost self-sustaining reputation of credibility, which allowed it to vouch for the authenticity of narratives even when the traveller-author’s authority was question (Herman Melville’s earliest works *Typee* (1846) and *Oomo* (1847) are conspicuous benefactors of Murray’s reputation).

Though *Travels in Print* is concerned with a specific genre of writing which appeared from one publishing house at a well-defined moment in time, the intervention it makes is an important one to remember for all students of authorship. We must identify how a text

constructs its credibility, how it establishes its authority, in a way that acknowledges the processes of publishing which imbue authorship with a fundamentally collaborative dimension, even if (or especially if) those processes are invested in their own erasure from the text.

Dr Jasper Schelstraete
Ghent University