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## **Negotiating Gender, Representing Landscape: Teaching Lady Anne Lindsay Barnard's Letters, Journals and Watercolours from the Cape Colony (1797–1801)**

Lenka Filipova  
*Freie Universität Berlin*, [filipovalen@gmail.com](mailto:filipovalen@gmail.com)

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## Negotiating Gender, Representing Landscape: Teaching Lady Anne Lindsay Barnard's Letters, Journals and Watercolours from the Cape Colony (1797–1801)

### Abstract

The article focuses on Lady Anne Lindsay Barnard's letters, journals and watercolours that she produced during her stay at the Cape Colony (1797–1801). Combining a series of tasks focused on close reading of Barnard's work and a critical discussion of the historical context, the article provides a teaching strategy to examine her work with respect to the gendered discourse of the eighteenth century, and her approach to the Cape landscape and its inhabitants which both employs and, significantly, subverts contemporaneous conventions. More specifically, the tasks draw attention to Barnard's use of 'the modesty topos' and the way she uses rhetorical self-deprecation in her writing to prevent violating the gender norms of her time. Furthermore, they facilitate a discussion of her subject position, particularly with respect to the period's media landscape and manuscript culture, as well as some of the contemporaneous artistic conventions. While Barnard's views and approaches to the Cape and its inhabitants are shown to occasionally echo officialdom, she needs to be read as a rather sophisticated observer who sometimes subtly breaks these conventions.

### Keywords

Lady Anne Barnard, travel writing, gender, modesty topos, landscape representation, watercolours, portraits

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### Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank the reviewers as well as the editor for their very helpful and insightful comments and suggestions.

Since the publication of editions of Lady Anne Lindsay Barnard's diaries, journals, and other papers in the 1990s, interest in her work has been considerable, and the opportunity to include her work in teaching contexts has expanded. Barnard's work adds further insight about the experiences of British women traveling to and living in Africa, as well as British women's role in empire and colonialism. Despite contemporaneous gender restrictions, Barnard creates a position for herself from which to record life at the Cape as an independent observer and engages thoughtfully with a variety of issues and concerns in her work as a sophisticated writer. While her writing and watercolours adopt the contemporaneous artistic conventions, and her views unsurprisingly echo those of her class, her race, and her nation, she also occasionally subtly questions and undermines these conventions. Her work therefore provides an instructive insight into a period in which British rule at the Cape was not yet consolidated. Barnard's writing and watercolours can be characterised by the political and economic aims which undergirded the early colonial enterprise on the one hand, and her interest in cultural differences at the Cape on the other. Her work needs to be contextualised historically and with respect to the relations of early colonialism. Yet it also needs to be linked to the period's manuscript culture, as it is the genre of travel writing and her creative work more broadly which enable her to create a liminal role for herself of an independent observer.

This expanded and nuanced understanding of Barnard's writerly authority and purpose can be engaged in the classroom in several ways: first, by considering the historical context of Barnard's work; second, by examining her use of what is sometimes termed 'the modesty topos;' and third, by paying attention to her employment and occasional subtle subversion of one of the conventional modes of representation—namely the picturesque—in both her textual and visual representations. The research and reading tasks proposed in this paper can help to facilitate a nuanced approach to eighteenth-century writing, assisting students in engaging with the often-elusive historical context of eighteenth-century travel writing and its various media, as well as to critically examine the ways we adapt and interpret those contexts when we read for meaning in our own moment. The approaches to Barnard's work outlined here can be used individually or together as one-week or a two-week module.

This article springs from the classroom discussions with undergraduate students in a literary studies course on eighteenth-century travel writing at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. The course focused on a variety of examples of mainly British travel writing by mainly women travellers. The aim of the seminar was to discuss issues of global travel, transculturation, colonial expansion, representation of the natural world and landscape, as well as place representation more broadly, in

eighteenth-century travel accounts, and how they contributed to contemporary ideas of the global and the local. The work of Lady Anne Barnard, a relatively lesser known woman travel writer, is particularly suitable for studying these issues as it provides insights about the experiences of British women travelling to and living in Africa, as well as contemporaneous approaches to landscape of a 'contact zone' in travel writing. Other authors whose work was discussed in the course include Lady Elizabeth Craven (1750-1828), Janet Shaw (1731-1801), Anna Maria Falconbridge (1769-1835), and Maria Graham (1785-1842).

We primarily worked with two volumes of Barnard's letters and journals: *The Cape Journals of Lady Anne Barnard 1797 – 1798*, edited by A. M. Lewin Robinson and published in 1994, and *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas, from the Cape and Elsewhere, 1793-1803* edited by A. M. Lewin Robinson and published in 1973. In particular, we focused on Barnard's letter to Henry Dundas from 10 July 1797 (Barnard, *Letters* 35-64), and the third volume of her journals entitled "Tour into the Interior of Africa" (Barnard, *Journals* 291-425). Margaret Lenta and Basil Le Cordeur's edition of two volumes of *The Cape Diaries of Lady Anne Barnard 1799-1800* published in 1999 supplements the earlier edition by A. M. Lewin Robinson, and often provides alternative and more complicated accounts and views to those provided in Robinson's edition. Margaret Lenta's 2006 edition of Barnard's journals entitled *Paradise, the Castle and the Vineyard: Lady Anne Barnard's Cape Diaries* includes supplementary materials and images in grayscale which are helpful for teaching. The only publication that reproduces Barnard's art in colour is Nicolas Barker's private press publication from 2009 entitled *Lady Anne Barnard's Watercolours and Sketches: Glimpses of the Cape of Good Hope*. While Barker's collection should be used as the primary source of the reproductions, a small collection of Barnard's watercolours is also provided on Greg Clingham's travel blog [<https://clingham.blogs.bucknell.edu/>] which, albeit a personal and anecdotal source, can serve as a student-friendly site for quick reference and some supporting information.

## Historical background

Before asking students to complete their reading assignments, it is helpful to provide them with some historical context so they can approach some of the aspects of Barnard's writing with respect to its nuances and some of the paradoxes of her time. Lady Anne Barnard (1750-1825) can be briefly introduced as a Scottish travel writer, artist, and socialite, who lived at the Cape Colony from 1797 until 1802 where she produced writings and watercolours. Under the

administration of the Cape Colony by George Macartney, she became a hostess at the Cape, yet she had no official remit. Greg Clingham's article "The Archive of Lady Anne Barnard, 1750-1825" provides helpful introductory information about her life, as well as the abundance and complexities of her work. While her views in her letters and journals echo officialdom, her writing and paintings often subtly undermine them and run counter to colonial orthodoxy. As the discussion of Barnard's work came after we had discussed some excerpts from the work of Maria Graham, students already knew that travel writing by women from the period emerged from patriarchal constraints around gender, class and mobility, and as a consequence, was for a long time sidelined in scholarship in comparison to the attention given to travelogues written by men. This was related to the longstanding male mobilities of 'exploration' and 'discovery.'

Students can be asked to first read some short extracts from historical accounts of the early Cape Colony, mainly so that they gain an understanding of the trajectory of British colonialism as well as the importance of travel writing for the period. It does not seem uncommon for students, especially those who have some knowledge of postcolonial studies, to think about the eighteenth century in terms of the binary logic of Saidian Orientalism as described in Edward Said's influential work *Orientalism* (1978). Said's work examines a pervasive Western tradition, both artistic and academic, which constructed and continues to construct prejudiced and contemptuous portrayal of the East, i.e. the 'Orient.' *Orientalism* became one of the foundational texts of postcolonial studies by examining Orientalism as a discourse of power relations and a Western style of dominating the other. Saidian Orientalism is a supreme example of the construction of the colonial other, and its practice became pertinent particularly to the operation of imperial power and high colonialism in the nineteenth century (though the discourse of Orientalism persists into the present). Yet, in the eighteenth century, Enlightenment-inspired and transcultural orientalisms existed long before the arrival of Saidian Orientalism, as pointed out by Srinivas Aravamudan in the introduction to his 2012 study *Enlightenment Orientalism* (1-10). Aravamudan shows that the period can be characterised not just by the domination of the other and emerging imperial relations, but also by intellectual tension and a complex questioning of these relations, as well as attempts at mutual understanding across cultural differences which go beyond the binary logic of imperialism.

To help students to understand Barnard's historical position within the discourse of colonialism, one research task that could be assigned is to put together the timeline of the British occupation of the Cape from the late eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century. Owing to her friendship with George Macartney, Barnard became a hostess of the British administration during a key period for the

British at the Cape. At the time of her stay, the aim of the British was to evaluate the potential economic benefits that Britain might accrue from the South African project, and to help with the Cape's transition from the administration of the Dutch East India Company to British rule.

In light of this historical context, students can discuss the pragmatic purpose of Barnard's writing. Their task was to outline the various types of information that Barnard provides in her account of her tour into the interior based on their reading of the third volume of her *Journals*. Almost without exception, all students highlighted the following statement made by the author: "What I have endeavoured and shall endeavour to do is to give the topographical account of all I see cultivated for you ... Africa is your Masters Villa (George the 3<sup>rd</sup>)" (320). They opined that the lines indicated Barnard's intention to provide a detailed study of the land and implied her participation in the colonial project in southern Africa. Given the wealth of information Barnard provides in her journals, students were also of the opinion that her writing was a valuable source of information for her readers, pointing out how her journal writing often explicitly or implicitly assesses the economic potential of the Cape for the British colonial project. However, while this pragmatic concern was impossible to miss, students also observed that Barnard's writing can be characterised by her often self-critical attitude towards the British administration, her curiosity to explore and learn about the life of the native population, her interest in the local plants and animals, as well as her admiration of the landscape. At the same time, they wondered about the style of her writing, particularly her frequently apologetic tone. These observations created the perfect ground for a discussion of the gendered nature of Barnard's writing.

### **Female authority and the modesty topos**

The next set of tasks can help to facilitate a discussion of the strategies Barnard adopts to gain writerly authority, as well as her ambivalent relation to gender stereotypes. Students can be asked to read the "Preface" (Barnard, *Journals* 18-23) to Barnard's letters and comment on the tone of her writing, as well as the specific information that she provides. Barnard tends to be apologetic when she notes, for example, that if her journals can "be of utility to any being in existence under the canopy which shadows us all, I do not think we ought to regret having written it" (18). She also suggests that her readers should forgive her any potential "Nonsense" in her writing, given that "it is in Manuscript," and reminds them that "there is no absolute law why every page must be sensible or witty" (*Journals* 18). She explains that the motive for writing her journals "is without harm, and the word Manuscript on its back stands an Apology for all its imperfections"

(*Journals* 18). The preface clearly shows that while Barnard is aware of her precarious position in the world of travel reports constructed by male writers and makes these disclaimers in order to avoid violating the norms of femininity, she nevertheless proceeds after articulating them.

The discussion can continue by asking if Barnard's claims of non-competence and apologetic tone reflect the broader quality of her writing. It's important to consider this question so that Barnard's apologetic tone is not taken at its face value and so that students take seriously the question of her authority as a writing woman. While Barnard's journal entries provide their readers with a plethora of information about life in the Cape, her claims as to her non-competence, and her feigning of inadequate ability, need to be understood as stylistic devices which she employs in order to gain a writerly authority. The discussion can be extended by introducing the concept of the 'modesty topos,' a term that has come to serve as shorthand for disclaimers and self-deprecating style used by women to claim lack of authority and knowledge to do justice to their subject.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to gender negotiations in Barnard's writing, students' attention can be drawn to the fact that even though Barnard's journals were not published until the early twentieth century, the preface also suggests that she anticipates a readership: "if one beneficial hint can be obtained from a very imperfect Journal, to be of utility to any being in existence under the canopy which shadows us all, I do not think we ought to regret having written it" (Barnard, *Journals* 18). She provides her readers with a disclaimer while referring to the 'imperfection' of her writing, yet at the same time, she expects her work to be read. This is evident from both her references to her readers, and also from the inclusion of a preface. The preface therefore needs to be contextualised in terms of the manuscript culture of the period.

Recent travel writing scholarship has shown that manuscripts and other non-print forms of expression played a significant part in the period's literary and intellectual culture more broadly. One of the theoretical texts I asked my students to read alongside extracts from Barnard's work was Zoë Kinsley's introduction to her work *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812*, in which she argues that the idea of 'amateur' literary efforts of authors who produced manuscript writings in the period is outdated and needs to be rethought. Relatedly, Betty A. Schellenberg's study *Literary Coterie and the Making of the Modern Print Culture 1740-1790* examines the significance of the pervasiveness of social networks and the aesthetic work performed by the dissemination of unpublished literary works. This is particularly relevant for the writing of women as it has historically been considered domestic and therefore marginal in comparison to the

explicitly public writing by their male contemporaries. Kinsley's and Shellenberg's works are helpful sources to foreground the idea that women writers from the period may be understood as having a solid writerly authority *through*, not despite, their use of manuscript genres, such as letters and journals—that is, through their use of ostensibly private modes. This approach not only calls into question the generic distinction between the published and the unpublished; it also suggests that women who participated in manuscript cultures by writing journals, for example, expected to be read, often as members of coteries, and were therefore part of *literary culture*—not an alternative literary culture. This insight can be utilised in discussions of other women travel writers from the period. It generally makes it possible to consider their writing as free of the constraining idea that these women were necessarily struggling to free themselves from the norms of femininity, even though they might actually be addressing such constraints in their works.

Having discussed the preface in detail, students opined that while Barnard's position within the South African colonial discourse was marked by her ambivalent relation to gender stereotypes, she was also clearly an articulate writer. It is therefore important that her writing is not understood as a series of observations made for merely personal purposes, but rather as an account by a woman writer who can be located within the period's culture of coteries. The way she establishes her authority in writing can further be expanded by a discussion to how she tends to align herself with male figures, such as Henry Dundas, then British Minister for Wars and the Colonies, and her husband, Andrew Barnard, in order to create a position of influence for herself (e.g., Barnard, *Journals* 293). Yet at the same time, attention can also be drawn to how she distances herself from the existing accounts of her male contemporaries when she establishes her reliability: "You [Henry Dundas] shall find everything you can wish to know from the honestest pen and pencil I will venture to say in the world (...)—I never exaggerate whether with the one or the other, sometimes I may extenuate but I set down nought in Malice" (*Letters* 46). By emphasising that she will not 'exaggerate' and referring to her 'honestest pen,' Barnard assures Dundas that she will not supply him with an unreliable portrait of the Cape. Having no official role in the colonial enterprise, Barnard managed to create a position for herself from which to record the life in Cape without a primary pragmatic purpose, even though a form of pragmatism is evident in some parts of her writing.

### **Integrating the textual and the visual**

After this sustained discussion of the historical context of Barnard's writing, the purpose of her journals and letters, as well as her use of the modesty topos,



students' attention can be drawn to her representation of the Cape landscape and its inhabitants. While her work was inevitably influenced by contemporaneous fashionable attitudes to the natural world, as well as artistic conventions such as the picturesque, she occasionally breaks these conventions in both her writing and watercolours. As such, their examination presents a unique opportunity to consider how travel writing from the period can often be characterised by tension between colonial orthodoxy on the one hand, and openness to cultural differences and influence on the other. Particularly the picturesque in this period was interrelated with economic concerns. Scholars including Nigel Leask and Jefferson Dillman have shown how the contemporaneous picturesque as well as economic concerns involve commodification of landscape for profit, be it financial or aesthetic.<sup>2</sup>

Students may first be asked to examine specifically selected passages from Barnard's writing in which she expresses discontent over the landscape while seemingly projecting her ideas of beauty and worthiness into the landscape. I asked them to reread the following passage in which she speaks about her journey through the Hottentotskloof Pass, the road between Cape Town and the Karoo through Ceres:

As we ascended it grew worse and worse, and sometimes the path was so perpendicular and the Jutting rocks (over which the waggon was to be pulled) so large in the middle of the road, that we were astonished how it could be accomplished at all, [...] at length we reached the Summit, and the new canaan opened on my view. [...] far as the sight could reach and it was no where bounded, there was hillock on hillock ... Mountain behind Mountain, a slight thread of rivulet here and there like a silver eel winding thro' the valleys, but scarcely perceptible, and the only object on which the eye found any thing to pause was sometimes a few pointed stones on the summit of rising grounds. (Barnard, *Journals* 306)

Students can be encouraged to consider *how* Barnard is looking at the place in this passage. They opined that she seems to be searching for a different type of landscape, one that would not be as rough as the 'hillock on hillock' and 'mountain behind mountain' in this one, and that she indeed seems to be composing the landscape when she speaks about how 'the eye' has nowhere to rest. In other words, she records how the roughness and beauty of the South African landscape defy her attempts to see it as a particularly composed *scenery*. While it is clear that her view is informed by a-priori aesthetic ideals, it is

important to note that she nevertheless does not attempt to subvert the landscape into a pleasing scenery, and simply comments on her discontent.

The discussion can be extended by addressing another tendency in Barnard's writing: her endeavour to assess the agricultural potential of the place and see beauty in cultivation. As an exemplary passage, one can take her letter to Henry Dundas from 10 July 1797: "I love these bold strokes with which the almighty has separated the dry land from the sea in his chaos [...] – it is in the power of activity and taste to make this the finest scene in the world by planting" (Barnard, *Letters* 44). Barnard speaks about what she sees as the deficiencies of the land while at the same time highlighting its potential for cultivation, and emphasises the future of the place which can be seen as contained within notions of utility and domesticity. However, what needs to be questioned and considered is the extent to which these isolated instances of seeing the land as in need of cultivation were the result of artistic convention rather than reflection of her personal attitude.

At this point, it may be helpful to introduce the picturesque convention which was common in both topographical descriptions and visual art. Given the broad variety of available definition of the picturesque, students can be provided with the following concise and sometimes conflicting accounts of the picturesque from different sources and asked to highlight its main aspects: Malcolm Andrews' *The Search for the Picturesque* (29-30), Ann Bermingham's *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (63-73), and Kim Ian Michasiw's "Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque" (76-100). Based on these extracts, the picturesque can be defined as a form of a bridge between the austerity of Neoclassicism and the emerging taste for complexity of surface variation in Romanticism. At the same time, the picturesque as an artistic convention was not only an aesthetic ideal but also a landscape reordered according to the imagination and the rules of neoclassical composition. In terms of the composition itself, the picturesque usually divided an image into three parts: a hazy or misty background, a deep-toned middle ground, and a detailed foreground. All other elements of a picturesque representation (people, plants, animals, etc.) were to be placed in such position so as to create a perfect harmony and to channel the viewer's gaze and attention to the middle ground, as if to a stage.

While Barnard's search for the picturesque is related to her seeing the landscape as an agricultural commodity, it is also interrelated with the aesthetic expectations of her time. The discussion can then pay a heightened attention to some of the ambivalences of her writing, and the way it embraces a pragmatic approach on the one hand, and fascination with, curiosity about and admiration of the uniqueness

of the place and its inhabitants on the other. Both approaches need to be seen as mutually complicit and going beyond any stability one might desire from them.

After this discussion of selected letters and journal entries, students may be asked to examine some of Barnard's visual representations of the Cape. Barker's collection includes a number of images suitable for an examination in class. For example, a sketch titled "View of Cape Town on Entering Table Bay" (Barker 28-29) depicts the sea as calm and tranquil and stands in contrast to how Barnard speaks about the wildness of the ocean in her journals. This particular image includes some aspects of the picturesque, with the farm fence and deep green trees on either side in the foreground serving as a framing device, leading the eye to the middle ground— Cape Town and the deep blue water surface—contrasted with the faded, almost disappearing mountains and pale blue sky in the background. The scene is in harmony in terms of perspective, use of colour, and the peaceful relationship between the human and the non-human. Interestingly, while in her writing, the landscape of the Cape sometimes defies the imposition of a European aesthetic upon it, as demonstrated earlier, Barnard's watercolours tend to portray regularised and softened landscapes that suppress difference.

The picturesque was a widely used artistic convention which inflected the way the land was represented even when its features were unlike those of Britain and Europe. Interestingly, Barnard does not always subscribe to this convention. In another watercolour titled "Hans Craal the Plaace of Jacob van Rhenin" (Barker 74-5), she provides a similar way of framing the landscape: the foreground shows two minuscule figures of a human and a dog, with rocks on either side channelling the viewer's eye towards the middle ground, which depicts a calm sea surface and a tiny, almost disappearing ship, with faded mountains in the background. The depicted scene provides a sense of both variety and harmony in terms of its composition, perspective, and use of colours. Yet this harmony is disrupted by the soft red colour of the protea bush pointedly included in the foreground. The protea plant is native to southern Africa and therefore provides the image with an emphasis on the strange and new. As such, it creates a representational surplus which challenges any potential sense of familiarity and generates a subtle sense of ambivalence. Barnard's representations of the Cape vegetation are generally worth paying attention to, as in several other representations, including, for example, "Portico of the Vineyard" (Barker 64-5) and "The Vineyard" (Barker 60-1), Barnard tends to depict the plant life at the Cape in an exaggerated way, making trees and flowers unrealistically high, thus emphasising their strangeness as well as beauty and power.

While Barnard's landscape art is certainly interesting to examine, she also authored watercolour portraits, which, as Greg Clingham notes, "was rare at that time" ("Archive" 381). Significantly, her portraits included Indigenous and enslaved people. While Barker's collection contains some reproductions of these portraits, Clingham's article on Barnard's archive also includes one pencil drawing entitled "Sleeping Madonna, with child" ("Archive" 382). Students can be asked to look at these images and consider their composition, the expression of the depicted subjects, as well as the delicacy and subtlety of the pencil drawing in particular. Contrary to the exoticisation of Black and Indigenous peoples in the work of some of her contemporaries, such as Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough, Barnard seems to depict her subjects with a certain level of dignity. Students may be encouraged to consider questions such as to what extent Barnard's portraits speak of racial hierarchy, and they can also compare them with her landscape art and think about how aesthetics can be related to broader cultural context. A discussion of the portraits can also be contextualised with a reading of an extract from Srinivas Aravamudan's *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804*, such as the introduction (1-25), which highlights how colonialist representations feature a mixture of historical, geographical and representational apprehensions of the colonised. While Barnard's depictions can be seen as giving her subjects some agency, her representations are still a consequence of the accidents of an early Empire and, as such, their discussion needs to attend to the filiation and affiliation of early imperial relations at the Cape.

Including Lady Anne Barnard's work in a course on eighteenth-century travel writing can expand students' understanding of the period in a few different ways. Travel writing can be examined as a way for women to access the public sphere, and, implicitly, to ask for more freedom. Barnard's opportunity for mobility was comprised by class, wealth, and access to elite circles of power. Yet, she could gain writerly authority using the means of travel writing and creative work. As such, she was able to carve out a distinctive individualism within the constraints of patriarchal social relations. This individualism as well as intellectual independence also enabled her to navigate the complex relations of colonialism in a way that occasionally breaks some generic conventions and goes beyond colonial orthodoxy and emerging imperial relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Thompson's 2017 article "Journeys to Authority: Reassessing Women's Early Travel Writing, 1763–1862" provides some helpful insight into how cultural constraints contributed to shaping women's account of travel from the period, and can be read along Barnard's writing. For further reference, Dorothy Driver's "Literary Appraisal" in Robinson's 1993 edition of the

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journals includes an insightful discussion of the gendered nature of Barnard's writing, as does Driver's essay on the concept of 'self-othering' in Barnard's work. Margaret Lenta's essay "All the Lighter Parts: Lady Anne Barnard's Letters from Cape Town" and Jessica Murray's articles on gendered rhetorical strategies in Barnard's letters and journals can also be used as an additional or recommended reading.

<sup>2</sup> Including a chapter from Jefferson Dillman's *Colonizing Paradise: Landscape and Empire in the British West Indies* as a secondary reading may help students to make sense of the British ambivalence about the environment to demonstrate how British economic and political aims in the region undergirded such narratives. Though Dillman discusses the West Indies, many of the insights are applicable to other colonies. Nigel Leask's *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing 1770-1840* provides a more general insight into the use of picturesque in travel writing in particular. Paul Smethurst's essay "Nature Writing" in *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* may also be a helpful reference as it provides an overview of some of the contemporaneous approaches to the natural world, as well as representational conventions.

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