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The ‘Gentleman Traveller’ as ‘Comic Travellographer’ in Guy Delisle’s *Pyongyang* and *Jerusalem*

The genre of travel writing – so protean that American critic Paul Fussell lamented the death of travel in the 20th century, even while attempting to define the genre for the first time in *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (1980) – becomes even more nebulous in the graphic narrative form in the 21st century. My paper seeks to extend Paul Fussell’s prototype of the ‘Gentleman Traveller’, originally in the British context of the inter-war years, in graphic travel narratives of the 21st century through the work of Canadian graphic novelist and animator Guy Delisle’s *Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea* (2003) and *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* (2015). Although the subgenre of international graphic literature includes classics like Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* (2000) and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1980), graphic travelogues in the tradition of Robert Byron’s *The Road to Oxiana* (1937) that merges political commentary with observations on quotidian life – narratives which are also documents of liminal spaces, many of which becoming increasingly inaccessible due to conflict and pandemic travel restrictions – have received scant critical attention.

My study is on the intersections of the discourses of memory, history, and the craft of ‘literariness’ in these graphic travelogues. Through this lens, I seek to examine mutations of a form that resists classification, and its generic delineation poses a formidable challenge to literary criticism since it is a form that glides in and out of diverse generic boundaries. Paul Fussell, while attempting to define the genre for the first time, remarked, “criticism has never quite known what to call books like these” (202). My work seeks to investigate the graphic travelogue from this position of uncertainty. Additionally, the paper also examines the politics of memory and nostalgia in the trope of the erudite ‘gentleman traveller’ that defines the author – persona of ‘conventional’ travelogues in the context of the ‘comic travellographer’ and its subject position in relation to home, fellow travellers, readers, and the text.

References:

Fussell, Paul. *Abroad: British Literary Travelling between the Wars*. Oxford University Press, 1980.