

## **Resenha**

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## **IMPERIAL EYES: A SECOND LOOK**

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Below is a review of the second edition of *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, by Marie Louise Pratt. The book is divided into three parts, orderly “Science and Sentiment, 1750-1800”, “The Reinvention of América, 1800-50”, and “Imperial stylistics, 1860-2007”. The first part is comprised by four chapters that deal with scientific and sentimental aesthetics and discourse as forms of anti-conquest. The second part is divided into three chapters that cover the influence of Alexander von Humboldt’s, the capitalist vanguards’ and the exploratresses’ writings in the construction of the Latin American Creole identity, whereas the remaining two chapters analyze travel writing from 1860 to 2007, bringing the discussion to contemporary migratory movements and focusing on global issues.

In the Introduction, or Chapter 1, Pratt uses personal narrative as a springboard to an inquiry into travel writing and its impact in empires and their colonies. Pratt also establishes the purpose of her work - to analyze this literature, paying “serious attention to the conventions of representation exhibited by European travel writing, identify[ing] different strands, and suggest[ing] ways of reading and focusing rhetorical

analysis.”(12) Laying out her plan of work by providing brief summaries of the ten chapters of the book, Pratt offers readers useful information about the focus of each chapter.

Chapter 2. “Science, planetary consciousness, interior,” examines the two historical, political and social contexts that gave birth to the new Eurocentered “planetary consciousness”: the publication of Carl Linné’s *Systema Naturae* and the La Condamine Expedition. Here Pratt draws upon diverse sources such as Captain Betagh and Charles-Marie de la Condamine, among others, to chronicle the emergence of a literature that accounts for the scientific and naturalistic approach to European contacts with America. In this chapter Pratt also surveys the several writings that resulted from the aforementioned expedition, pointing out their main characteristics and underscoring the importance of including ideological considerations of anti-conquest, the “Utopian image of a European bourgeois subject simultaneously innocent and imperial, asserting a harmless hegemonic vision that installs no apparatus of domination”(33).

Chapter 3. “Narrating the anti-conquest” discusses “the impact of natural history and global science on travel writing” (38). Pratt argues convincingly that the selected narratives of anti-conquest entailed by naturalists are relevant examples of the discursive impact of natural history and the new planetary consciousness in the European imaginary. Pratt provides a historical account on the Cape of Good Hope and analyzes four books of European travelers in South Africa, emphasizing the differences between European and native populations and their relationships.

Chapter 4. “Anti-conquest II: The mystique of reciprocity” focuses on the movements towards the interior of Africa in correlation to the emergence of abolitionist movements. Pratt exemplifies accounts of travels to the interior of the continent through

the work of Mungo Park, one of the few survivors of the enterprise. Pratt also cleverly points to the ideological distinctions between European metropolis and colonies, emphasizing the sentimental aspect of Park's account. Moreover, she deeply argues that the sentimental discourse is another form of anti-conquest, since the same ideal of passivity and innocence is repeated.

Chapter 5. "Eros and abolition" returns to a point that has been broached in the previous chapter: the abolitionist cause and its relation to sentimental writing, specifically with survival literature. According to Pratt, interracial relations became a strong asset of travel writing in the eighteenth century, but she cleverly points out that those narratives provide only the point of view of the Europeans who returned. Pratt analyzes thoroughly two narratives of interracial affairs between European and natives: the first is Le Vaillant's *Voyages dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique* (1790), where Pratt highlights both the Rousseauian noble savagery and *sensibilité*, and secondly, John Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, where Stedman describes his relationship with the slave Johanna. Pratt draws a parallel between these two pieces of travel literature, emphasizing the discourse of anti-conquest present in this form of concubinage. Still in this chapter, Pratt analyzes women travelers Anna Maria Falconbridge and Sarah Lee, focusing on gender differences in travel accounts.

Chapter 6. "Alexander von Humboldt and the reinvention of América" focuses on the relationship between Humboldt's *Views of Nature* (1808) and *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent* (1814) and the ideological construction of South America, paying close attention to the narrative strategies the German writer adopted to employ the reinvention of America as Nature. This chapter

also accounts for the relationship between Romanticism and the discourses on subaltern nations. Pratt convincingly argues that Romanticism “originated in the contact zones of America, North Africa and the South Seas” (135).

Chapter 7. “Reinventing América II: The capitalist vanguard and the *exploratrices sociales*” provides a historical background on the mercantile and commercial relations in South America in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Pratt characterizes capitalist vanguards as travel writers who consecrated European expansionist designs and she exemplifies the exploratory accounts and “discoveries” these travel writers performed. In these writings, Pratt claims, Creole elites are criticized for not maximizing extractive paradigms of capitalism, thus legitimizing the interventions of the capitalist vanguard, in a kind of anti-conquest discursive practice. Pratt also emphasizes the discursive power of the European civilizing mission. In addition, she analyzes the writings of two female travelers of the period: Flora Tristan and Maria Graham Callcott, who witnessed independence struggles and their consequences, providing a critical view of the ideologies and society of the period.

Chapter 8. “Reinventing América/ Reinventing Europe: Creole self-fashioning” provides a careful analysis of Andrés Bello’s *Repertorio Americano*, a “conduit and a filter for European writings that might be useful to the nationbuilding processes there.” (169) Another important poet she analyzes is José María Heredia, whose poem “The Captive” tells the story of the ones “who did not survive the encounter and did not succeed in engendering a white social order”. (182) Pratt also analyzes two female travel writers: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Juana Manuela Gorriti, whose tales demonstrate that “Europe is infiltrated by America, as well as the reverse” (191), proving the reciprocal character of negotiation of identities in the contact zone.

Chapter 9. “From the Victoria N’Yanza to the Sheraton San Salvador” explains the monarch-of-all-I-survey narratives, where Europe claimed discovery to the mere conversion of local knowledge into European forms of relocations of power. From a European perspective, this “discovery” is a passive experience, thus characterizing another form of anti-conquest. Pratt also identifies three conventional means which create qualitative and quantitative value for the explorer’s achievement in Victorian discovery rhetoric: estheticism, density of meaning and relation of mastery, which she carefully explains and exemplifies. Pratt also demonstrates the view of hyphenated men and female writers of the monarch-of-all-I-survey narratives. In addition, the author provides an analysis of contemporary travel accounts where the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene gets repeated, using Theroux’s and Moravia’s accounts to exemplify the discourse of negation, domination, devaluation and fear that remains in the twentieth century as a powerful ideology. In contrast, Pratt provides an analysis of Richard Wright’s *Black Power*, where Wright declares dissatisfaction with the kind of judgment elicited by Theroux and Moravia.

Chapter 10. “In the neocolony: modernity, mobility, globality” synthesizes the issues previously discussed. Pratt starts by underscoring the importance of the 1928 publication of *Los desterrados*, a short story collection by Horacio Quiroga, a book written from a subaltern perspective where colonial order is constructed out of discontinuity. Pratt then focuses the first decades of the twentieth century as a time for the consolidation of modernity in Latin America and addresses neocolonialism as an economic reality of Latin America, where countries become independent politically but have no control of their economic system. Pratt then shows how modernist writers in South America have appropriated the European discourse and used it in consciously

inauthentic ways, evoking foundational myths of America and erasing them, in order to define themselves in opposition to constructs of otherness imposed by European imperial forces. Pratt then moves on to an interesting analysis of contemporary demographic changes in the globe, by presenting newspaper accounts of attempted migrations to rich countries. Pratt draws a parallel between survival stories of the past and the story of contemporary diasporic subjects, showing the latter as “dramas not of departure and return, but of denial and exclusion.” (240)

In this second edition of *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt has developed a cogent argument about the cultural impacts of travel writing in politics of identity construction in the contact zones and about the multiple perspectives of anti-conquest narratives present in travel literature. By drawing on the accounts of naturalists, sentimentalists, capitalist vanguards, women writers and others, Pratt shows how the postcolonial discourse facilitated the expansion of capitalism in Latin America. The new introductory chapter, allied to the pictures that illustrate the book and the final chapter connecting the travel writing of the nineteenth century to contemporary narratives of migration proved really substantial improvements from the first edition.