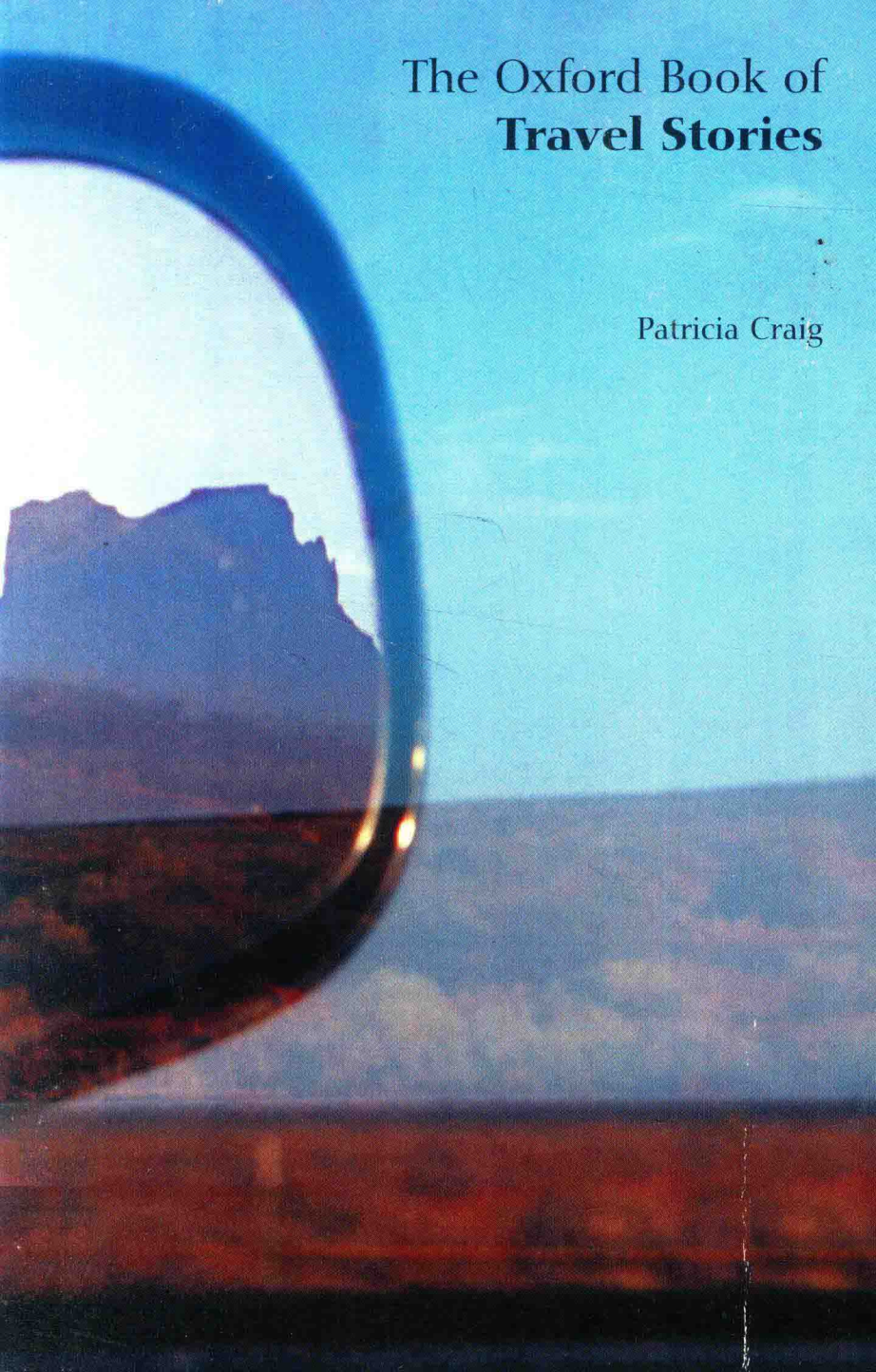

The Oxford Book of **Travel Stories**

Patricia Craig

The Oxford Book of Travel Stories

Edited by
Patricia Craig

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi
São Paulo Shanghai Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto

with an associated company in Berlin

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

First published by Oxford University Press 1996
First issued as an Oxford University Press paperback 1997
Reissued 2002

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

The Oxford book of travel stories / edited by Patricia Craig.
p. cm.
1. Travel—Fiction. 2. Travelers—Fiction. 3. Short stories,
English. 4. Short stories, American. 5. Voyages and travels—
Fiction. I. Craig, Patricia.
PR1309.T73096 1997 823'.0108355—dc21 96-51543

ISBN 0-19-284088-6

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd., St Ives plc, Bungay

The Oxford Book of Travel Stories

Patricia Craig was born and educated in Belfast before moving to London where she now lives. She is a freelance critic and reviewer and has edited several anthologies including Oxford Books of *English Detective Stories*, *Detective Stories* and *Modern Women's Stories*.

Introduction

> Keep moving! Steam, or Gas, or Stage,
> Hold, cabin, steerage, hencoop's cage—
> Tour, Journey, Voyage, Lounge, Ride, Walk,
> Skim, Sketch, Excursion, Travel-talk—
> For move you must! 'Tis now the rage,
> The law and fashion of the Age.

So wrote Coleridge in 1824, before tourism as an industry had come into its own, but with the idea of travel-as-exploration largely a thing of the past. Many literary and social commentators have identified the various phases of travel, and travel writing, from the Middle Ages on: first the journey-as-pilgrimage, then the 'Grand Tour' undertaken in a spirit of aloofness by the fashionable young gentleman of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—and, in contrast to this, the journey of exploration, breaking new ground, and with danger and outlandishness very much on the agenda. The traveller-as-student, the Casaubon figure, comes equipped with the utmost determination to fathom foreign ways, while the 'romantic traveller' is merely susceptible to the allure of abroad. Those in search of change, in one sense, are sometimes prone to resent it, in another—if it entails any diminution of the picturesque, or increase in standardization ('We can buy Harvey Sauce, and cayenne pepper, and Morison's Pills, in every city in the world', writes Thackeray in 1850, in sardonic vein). You get Henry James, for example, lamenting the sense of pioneering and discovery available to earlier travellers and settlers in Italy, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Paul Fussell, in his invigorating study of British literary travel between the wars (*Abroad*, 1980), traces the beginnings of modern tourism to Thomas Cook and the mid-nineteenth century—roughly the period at which the short story was beginning to evolve into a distinct literary form (though it would take another fifty years or so before it became fully fledged). It was inevitable that the two should converge. Travel, with its association with marvels, strangeness, adventure, and so forth, has always proved an irresistible literary subject—indeed, half the point of going into foreign territory was to

write an account of the whole undertaking. As it became more widely available, however, the focus of interest shifted from pioneering or anthropological travel to the more ordinary business of tourism—holiday-making. One early story, or novella, Thackeray's 'The Kicklebury's on the Rhine' of 1850 (unfortunately too long and rambling for inclusion here), takes up Coleridge's tone in the lines quoted above, and pokes amiable fun at the fuss and bustle, not to mention the social manœuvring, of getting from one place to another, and taking in a fair amount of sightseeing along the way: 'her mamma calls her away to look at the ruins of Wigginstein. Everybody looks at Wigginstein. You are told in Murray to look at Wigginstein.'

Elizabeth Bowen and others have pointed out that the short story proper is really a child of the twentieth century—that before this period it wasn't sharply differentiated from the novel, in form or content: merely condensed or cut short. For this reason—since I wanted to include some examples of Victorian travelling—I have judged it legitimate to cut the first two stories in this collection even shorter. Charles Dickens's 'The Holly-Tree' was issued in three parts, and only the first part is relevant to the travel theme: this wonderfully atmospheric account of a journey by stage coach from London to Yorkshire in the snow marks a point, in the mid-century, at which the possibilities inherent in a genre of short travel fiction began to be understood. It can't be omitted, so I have simply detached Part I from the continuations. And the Dickens–Wilkie Collins piece, 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices', which unfolds as a series of diverting episodes, also lends itself to cutting, in a way a more compact narrative does not. The longish Trollope story in this collection, for example, needs to appear in its entirety. Not only is 'A Ride Across Palestine' the most intriguing and vivid piece in the whole two-volume *Tales of Many Countries* (1861 and 1863), but it is also the most suitable for my purposes. It moves from Jerusalem to Jericho and back again, then on to Jaffa and a steamer bound for Alexandria. 'The Dead Sea was on our right, still glittering in the distance, and behind us lay the plains of Jericho and the wretched collection of huts which still bears the name of the ancient city. Beyond that, but still seemingly within easy distance of us, were the mountains of the wilderness. . . . We wandered out at night, and drank coffee with a family of Arabs in the desert, sitting in a ring round their coffee-kettle.'

Trollope's *Tales of Many Countries* brings us to the first problem confronting an anthologist of travel stories: how is the crucial piece of

writing to be defined? These *Tales*, in common with a lot of other Victorian fiction set abroad—including some by authors such as Mrs Gaskell and Mrs Oliphant—tend to get the protagonist into the foreign setting and then merely recount an episode in the life of some distinctive person encountered there: nothing to do with travel in any sense. A travel story is not, strictly speaking, a holiday story, or an expatriate story, or a story about the inhabitants of a foreign country (although these elements may come into it). It should, ideally, accord some prominence to the actual means of locomotion, whether this is by air, water, or land. It should be a work of fiction, and self-contained. However . . . it is possible to lay down certain rules and then find yourself bending or even breaking them in order to get in something which adds a new dimension, illumines the whole collection, or puts its finger on the mood of a particular era. For example—though neither exactly comes under the heading of fiction—I've included the F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald—what to call it? mood-piece?—about exotic hotel life in the 1920s, all palms and gilded filigree and Japanese lanterns and trips by limousine, 'Show Mr and Mrs F. to Number—'; and Jack Kerouac's 'Big Trip to Europe' of 1960, which encapsulates, if anything does, late 1950s fecklessness and the whole soft-drug-related style of indolence abroad: 'just then an old robed Bodhisattva, an old robed bearded realizer of the greatness of wisdom came walking by with a staff and a shapeless skin bag and a cotton pack and a basket on his back, with a white cloth around his hoary brown brow.—I saw him coming from miles away down the beach—the shrouded Arab by the sea.—We didn't even nod to each other—it was too much, we'd known each other too long ago—'. Both of these go in for evocation to the fullest extent.

There is a question about the exact moment at which transfigured autobiography turns into fiction. Perhaps it is possible to have it both ways: Diane Johnson, in the preface to her collection of travel stories, *Natural Opium* (1992), mentions the French neologism, translated as 'auto-fiction'—'by which the teller of true stories avails herself of some of the rights of the novelist to tidy and pace the account'. It's not a new practice, indeed; Elizabeth von Arnim was doing it in 1904, with her comic misadventures in Rügen: 'I wondered what those at home would say if they knew that on the very first day of my driving-tour I had managed to lose the carriage and had had to bear the banter of publicans.' Jump to 1980 and you get Elizabeth Hardwick looking back to 'the travels of youth, the cheapness of things, and one's intrepid

poverty'. David Malouf recalls a train journey from Brisbane to Sydney in 1944, with the young protagonist already possessed of the traveller's instinct for newness, and avid for proof 'that the world was as varied as I wanted it to be'. In 'Siegfried on the Rhine' (first published in 1981 in *Scenes of Childhood and other stories*), Sylvia Townsend Warner singles out a moment from what she calls 'a dawdle through Germany' in 1908; this fragment of reminiscence comes imbued with the shimmer of fiction.

I mention these examples to show how easily the line of demarcation is blurred between fact and fiction; however, what is beyond dispute is that the travel *story* is not the same as travel *writing*. (I was surprised to pick up an anthology of 'travel stories' recently in a remainder bookshop, and to find that it consisted solely of excerpts from works of non-fiction.) Perhaps it's because there exists some confusion, in the popular mind, between these separate genres—and also, possibly, because the experiences of real-life travellers, from Lady Mary Wortley Montague to Redmond O'Hanlon, have proved so riveting to so many readers—that collections of travel stories proper seem remarkably thin on the ground. In the course of reading for this anthology I have come across no more than two, and one of those was Australian. The other—Alan Ross's *Abroad* of 1957—contains fourteen stories, all of a high quality (odd to note, though, that only half of one—the F. Scott–Zelda Fitzgerald one—has a woman author). Ross, in his foreword, makes some sensible points about the travel story and what it should encompass; it should, he says, 'be written around a journey of some kind, its point being emphasised, if not actually created by, the physical act of travelling . . . I wanted to illustrate the concept of being or going "abroad" in as diverse a manner as possible . . .'. In his opening line he mentions 'the exhilarations and consequences of a change of place', which is another way of specifying the 'natural opium' of Diane Johnson's title. The freedom and excitements of travel can go to one's head. Indeed, Brigid Brophy, in one of her essays, refers to a condition she describes as 'travellers' trauma, which is no doubt more acute in armies but may overtake even tourists'; in fact—she goes on—'it is too little appreciated how many people are slightly mad while they are abroad'.

Why do we do it? Diane Johnson offers a suggestion or two: travel is 'broadening or restorative', it provides a means of escape 'from our quotidian lives', it is simply imposed on us by some 'inner compulsion' which is not to be resisted.

> This is the fret that makes us cat-like stretch
> And then contract the fingers, gives the itch
> To open the french windows into the rain,
> Walk out and never be seen at home again . . .

So Louis MacNeice, in one of the 'Letters from Iceland' which he published jointly with W. H. Auden in 1937. Most departures, though, are not as reckless or feckless as all that. It is easy to identify a few mundane starting-points—business, family obligation, the enticement of the package tour. One or two of the stories in this collection do, it's true, contain a whiff of the supernatural or surreal—Beryl Bainbridge's playful 'The Man Who Blew Away' which might, I suppose, be said to constitute the final expression of taking off; Rachel Ingalls's 'Somewhere Else', which moves on from its uneccentric start to end by embodying a perpetual state of transit (as in Paul Muldoon's poem 'Immram', with its onward drift disorientating the senses: 'It seemed that I would forever be driving west'); Jane Gardam's 'Chinese Funeral' which (I take it) points forward to Tienanmen Square. There is an obvious sense in which travel has to do with continuation, but indeed its metaphorical possibilities are endless (we can't do anything *but* 'fare forward', as T. S. Eliot has it). Travel as *rite de passage* is a feature of the David Malouf story, and others in this collection.

The dauntless woman explorer of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, endowed with endless *sang froid* and apt to extol the blessings of a good thick skirt in the face of elephant traps and other hazards: this is a figure of considerable prominence in the history of travel—yet it is rare for an equivalent character to turn up in the pages of fiction (at any rate, short fiction). She was, indeed, a gift to the parodist, as Serena Livingstone-Stanley's* *Through Darkest Pondelayo* shows: 'Well even the most respectable Englishwoman cannot go on screaming for an hour on end, even when being carried upsidedown by a naked savage through the heart of a tropical forest as I can prove by experience.' You will not find many tropical forests in this collection—in fact, one of my objectives is to illustrate how a sense of danger or alienation is not necessarily tied up with putting a considerable distance between yourself and home. The journey by car, or even on foot (as in the Elizabeth Bowen story) can produce perceptions as acute, or disturbing, as those available to the most sedulous voyager.

* The pseudonym of Beckett W. Lindsay.

However, the majority of travellers are exposed to nothing more than routine annoyances: agitating hold-ups at airports without adequate lavatories (Penelope Lively), or aching legs on a trudge through the English Midlands (Elizabeth Bowen). On top of this, there are moments of exasperation or ennui: 'How dull travel really is!' (John Cheever). Henry James's hero, in the story 'Travelling Companions' (too long, again, to fit in this collection), is suddenly overtaken by 'a poignant conviction of the ludicrous folly of the idle spirit of travel' (he gets over it). George Crabbe's sardonic enquiry (in 'The Adventures of Richard'), 'Do tell me something of the miseries felt / In climes where travellers freeze, and where they melt', points up the most basic discomfort of all—one experienced to the full by the wife in Anita Desai's story, 'Scholar and Gypsy', who is completely knocked up by the heat of Bombay: 'If she stepped out of the air-conditioned hotel room, she drooped, her head hung, her eyes glazed, she felt faint.' Flagging spirits are perhaps a natural part of any trip—after the headiness of setting off—but recovery is a built-in factor too.

In most of these stories, the contretemps that occur are presented as comic—even if the comedy comes with an unsettling undertone. (This is true, I think, even of something as powerful as Flannery O'Connor's 'A Good Man is Hard to Find', which treats of a family excursion by car and its horrendous outcome.) One or two singular predicaments are devised for travellers—V. S. Pritchett's newspaper editor pursued all over the Continent by a stumpy-looking foreigner with an *idée fixe* ('The Lady from Guatemala'); septuagenarian Lady Cameron in Greece, in J. I. M. Stewart's story, 'The Bridge at Arta', getting lumbered with the ultimate in bores who is also, as it happens, her one-time husband; bemused late-night diners in Diane Johnson's 'Cuckoo Clock' who find themselves expected to toboggan down a slope in the dark. Out-and-out comedy is a feature of (for example) 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices', with its holiday-makers who can hardly be bothered to undergo the smallest exertion; or Evelyn Waugh's 'Cruise', which has a lot of fun at the expense of the empty-headed and incorrigible. Occasionally, however, the tone turns more sombre—with Edith Wharton, for example, whose story, 'A Journey', puts a young woman on a train with her dying husband, and fully conveys the horror of the thought that overwhelms her: is she going to be ejected, with the corpse, at some unknown station? Rebecca West, too—in 'Deliverance'—has a woman on a train brought face-to-face with death, and not greatly bothered by the prospect: 'There

was nothing at the end of her journey except several sorts of pain, so if the journey had no end there was no reason for grief.' In this case, though—as the title indicates—the outcome encompasses a change of mood.

'Deliverance' is a spy story. When I first started planning this anthology I thought it might be a good idea to include examples of various distinct genres, just to get the widest possible perspective on the theme. However, I found that certain things simply would not fit the 'travel' specification—starting with Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Celestial Railroad', which parodies Bunyan, and recounts a dream; and coming up to the present—via Kay Boyle and her story of refugees streaming along a road in France ('This They Took with Them')—with Sylvia Townsend Warner's fantasy (for example, 'The Search for an Ancestress') and T. Coraghessan Boyle's anarchy ('We are Norsemen'). One or two stories which at first seemed suitable have ultimately been omitted, with great reluctance: Saul Bellow's 'The Gonzaga Manuscripts', for instance; Sean O'Faolain's 'Something, Everything, Anything, Nothing'; and J. F. Powers's 'Tinkers', all of which (it seems to me) place insufficient emphasis on the travel aspect of the narrative. Others which I liked proved too long (Eudora Welty, Alice Munro), or endlessly available elsewhere, or both (E. M. Forster, Katherine Mansfield, Conrad, Hemingway, Somerset Maugham). Why Rebecca West, then? Well, this story, I believe, helps to extend the scope of the anthology without distorting its purpose. One distinctive feature of travel literature is the sense of constantly changing landscapes—scenes flashing past outside the train window—and here we read:

> Now the train was running toward the mountains, and was passing through a valley in the foothills. There were cliffs, steel-grey where the sun caught them . . . a line of poplars . . . a broad and shallow river . . . an old man in a dark blue shirt and light blue trousers was leading a red cart . . .

Such details gain in vividness from the dramas to which they form a backdrop. Difficulties are resolved, possibilities open out, and lives are altered on trains. People take off for unknown destinations: 'He was going somewhere, he knew that. And if it was the wrong direction, sooner or later he'd find it out.' Thus Myers, in Raymond Carver's story, 'The Compartment'. The outcome of a trip is sometimes happily left to the imagination: 'it further occurred to me that travelling all

over California on the Greyhound I could meet anyone at all', thinks Alice Adams's narrator.

Transitoriness is another motif: people going, and then gone—like the trippers on the Scottish excursion steamer in William Sansom's wonderfully idiosyncratic story. What else? Benedict Kiely for high spirits, William Trevor for astringency. William Plomer, Dan Jacobson, Paul Theroux: all of these bring their own singularity to bear on the travel theme, and thereby enlarge it. The travel story, indeed, is more than an account of a journey; one of my aims has been to show how readily it accommodates itself to any number of modes or purposes. John Cheever's remarkable 'Brimmer', for example: ostensibly about compulsive copulation on a crossing between New York and Naples, this may be read on more than one level. And Ring Lardner's 'Travelogue': set on a train, mildly satirical in tone, concerning bragging about travel—you could call this in many ways the last word on the subject.

You could, but in fact I don't. I believe that the only way to compile a travel anthology—or any anthology—is to follow one's nose, and mine has led me to break the chronological sequence, and indeed contradict the declaration of content, by ending with a poem, not a story: Elizabeth Bishop's 'Questions of Travel', which seems to me to provide a kind of intensifying gloss on everything that goes before. I have therefore appended it as an epilogue. As for the stories themselves, all thirty-two of them: I would hope that each illustrates, in its own way, how travel has to do with stimulus, enrichment, a sense of achievement that is everlasting. 'We shall certainly cease to be here', observes the protagonist of a Henry James story, referring to Venice, 'but we shall never cease to have been here.' There's urbanity of outlook for you.

As ever, I am indebted to Jeffrey Morgan and Gerry Keenan for the greatest help and encouragement while I've been compiling this anthology. Thanks are also due to Nora T. Craig, Alan Ross, Val Warner, Brice Dickson, Judith Luna, and Araminta Whitley.

P. C.

London 1995

The Oxford Book of Travel Stories

Contents

CHARLES DICKENS

The Holly-Tree

I have kept one secret in the course of my life. I am a bashful man. Nobody would suppose it, nobody ever does suppose it, nobody ever did suppose it, but I am naturally a bashful man. This is the secret which I have never breathed until now.

I might greatly move the reader by some account of the innumerable places I have not been to, the innumerable people I have not called upon or received, the innumerable social evasions I have been guilty of, solely because I am by original constitution and character a bashful man. But I will leave the reader unmoved, and proceed with the object before me.

That object is to give a plain account of my travels and discoveries in the Holly-Tree Inn; in which place of good entertainment for man and beast I was once snowed up.

It happened in the memorable year when I parted for ever from Angela Leath, whom I was shortly to have married, on making the discovery that she preferred my bosom friend. From our school-days I had freely admitted Edwin, in my own mind, to be far superior to myself; and, though I was grievously wounded at heart, I felt the preference to be natural, and tried to forgive them both. It was under these circumstances that I resolved to go to America—on my way to the Devil.

Communicating my discovery neither to Angela nor to Edwin, but resolving to write each of them an affecting letter conveying my blessing and forgiveness, which the steam-tender for shore should carry to the post when I myself should be bound for the New World, far beyond recall,—I say, locking up my grief in my own breast, and consoling myself as I could with the prospect of being generous, I quietly left all I held dear, and started on the desolate journey I have mentioned.

The dead winter-time was in full dreariness when I left my chambers for ever, at five o'clock in the morning. I had shaved by candle-light,