

EAST LOOKS WEST:

East European Travel Writing on Identities and Divisions 1600-2000

School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College (London)

General Informations:

As part of the 3-year research project *East looks West: East European Travel Writing on Identities and Divisions, 1600-2000*, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, the project coordinators invite contributions to a workshop to be held at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, Univ. College London. We intend the workshop to lay the basis for ongoing collaboration among the participants, leading to a conference (planned for 2004) and a volume of studies. (For a full description of the research project: <http://www.ssees.ac.uk/eastwest.htm>).

Date: Workshop: provisionally scheduled for 1-2 February 2003, conference: 2004.

Place: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, Univ. College London.

There are a limited number of spaces for participants. Those interested in applying should send a CV with a covering letter stating the nature of their interest and involvement in the outlined topics.

Deadline for applying: November 30, 2002.

For further information please contact Wendy Bracewell at w.bracewell@ssees.ac.uk or Alex Drace-Francis at adracefr@hotmail.com.

Following the award of a three-year research grant of £174,000 by the *Arts and Humanities Research Board*, a team of researchers based at SSEES has been set up to research, develop resources and publish work on East European Travel Writing since 1600. The project will involve a workshop and an international conference, bringing together researchers in this field to produce, among other publications, a volume of studies, an anthology of translations, and bibliographic tools. The team coordinating the research consists of **Wendy Bracewell** (CSEES), **David Chirico** (CSCE), **Alex Drace-Francis** (CSEES) and **Karin Friedrich** (CSCE).

Call for Workshop Participants

Travel Writing and Identity

The project addresses the general need to re-examine what we mean by national and regional identity in post cold-war Europe through an assessment of East European travel texts. This subject is a clear research imperative at a time when both Eastern and Western European identities are increasingly in flux, and attempts to understand the concept of Europe and its proposed political enlargement constitute a major intellectual and political concern.

Research in the humanities has of course been directed at these problems. Western representations of Europe's colonial others, and of others within Europe, have been the subject of extensive analysis. Scholars have shown how the West has constructed an imaginative geography dividing and defining Europe – beginning in the 15th century, with increasing intensity (and ever more serious consequences) up to the present. Studies of the ways West looks East have focused on the literary sites in which such images were constructed (travel writing, popular fiction and academic study); on the techniques and strategies used; on the ideological and political investments at stake; on the consequences for self-image and for the ›other‹ of such alteritist discourses. Such researches have made a strong and innovative contribution to such diverse subjects as the history of the idea of Europe; the symbolic geography of mentalities, and the role of discourse and representation in shaping them; sites of memory and social history of place; self-image and image of the other in European society; the force, extent and limits of West European colonialist and Orientalist discourse.

However, the Orientalist critique implies that the Western construction of its others is largely a by-product of Western processes of self-definition, and tells us little about Eastern European concepts of self or understandings of Europe. The present project seeks to contribute to this debate, but also to enlarge both the documentary base and the terms of the argument. Our focus is on East European images of civilizational boundaries within Europe; the representation of self and (particularly Western, but also Eastern and internal) others; the use of, and negotiation with, Western models and images; the politics of these East European discourses. Recent movements within the humanities have questioned simplistic mappings of representation onto power, challenging colonialist and post-colonialist assumptions about the unidirectional nature of power. However, interpretations of travel and of travel writing within Europe have depended on a range of West European texts, largely in English, French and German. The one exception, studies of Russian travellers' confrontations with ›Europe‹, has been treated as a special case. (This project uses the existing literature on Russian encounters with the West for comparative purposes and to question Russian exceptionalism.)

By addressing a different, much wider range of texts, the project obliges a more nuanced understanding of the development of ideas of Europe's limits and divisions – and their consequences. The result will be a contribution to a more general revision of the colonialist/orientalist approach (de-homogenizing the ›colonial‹ subject; a more holistic approach to definitions of the West and its others, and the politics of these definitions) and to a debate on the utility of the post-colonial approach within Europe (to what extent is the discourse of post-

colonialism, based on models of colonial socio-political relations, valid for the specific circumstances of West and East in Europe?).

Approaches and aims

The following three clusters of issues frame our research:

- The sociology of travel and travel writing: What kinds of East Europeans travelled in the modern period? Where did they travel? To 'The West'? Elsewhere? Who wrote about their travels? How were such writings disseminated and read? What influence did they have?
- Genre and reception in travel writing: What formal and/or discursive elements constitute/determine the genre of travel writing? First-person narratives, markers of non-fictionality etc? How have these changed over time/between national literatures? What other textual genres have served as models for/have been modelled on travel writing?
- Discourses and representations of identity. To what extent have East European travel writers negotiated with Western imaginings and rhetorical strategies? Is Eastern European travel writing different? What do these writings tell us about conceptions of identity in Eastern Europe, particularly on the following levels: a) conceptualization of Europe, east and west; b) particular national or regional identities; c) social identities? Can we draw general conclusions about observers' perceptions of unity and difference in Europe, over space and time?

In terms of scholarly aims, the project sets out to:

- carry out interdisciplinary and comparative study of European identities and East-West divisions across national and linguistic boundaries;
- insert East European perspectives on these identities and divisions into the wider debates of colonialism/post-colonialism;
- contribute to a more complex understanding of these issues among specialists in East and West European history; and among the general public.

The project will be of interest to scholars, teachers and the wider public seeking new perspectives or sources (particularly from beyond their own area and language expertise) in the fields of: travel and travel writing; East European literatures in translation; European imaginative geographies; mentalities and stereotypes; regional and urban history of Western Europe; colonial and post-colonial theory.

The workshop aims to enable scholars to share and compare data and research results currently scattered through a disarray of publications in over a dozen different countries and languages; to consider the utility of East European travel writing as a source of new questions and new approaches to problems of textuality and identity; and to pinpoint issues for further study. We intend the workshop to lay the basis for on-going collaboration among the participants, leading to a conference (planned for 2004) and a volume of studies. (For a full description of the research project, see <http://www.ssees.ac.uk/eastwest.htm>.)