

Call for papers for a workshop at the 8th Conference of the European Society of Comparative Literature (former Network of Comparative Literature Studies), Lille, 26-30 August 2019

Title: Travel Writing, Cultural Exchange and Identity Construction

Organisers: Leena Eilittä (Helsinki), Sandra Vlasta (Mainz)

Projected duration: two sessions of two hours

Travel writing is a genre through which knowledge has been transmitted – both explicitly, as for instance in travelogues about expeditions, and less obviously in supposedly individual travel writing in which the subjectivity of the traveler is often more important. Both forms of travelogues, which are often mixed in the actual travelogues, contribute to the processes of cultural transfer. At the same time, travel writing does not tell only about other places and ‘the other’ but about personal identity, both in an individual (the traveller) as well as in a collective way (with reference to the readers and the community they belong to). The ‘I’ of the travel narrative that Alfred Opatz has described as a persona developed for communicative purposes, mediates the traveller’s experiences through the travel narrative, thereby transforming the actual journey into a public communication capable of describing, creating and performing different identities and enabling the reader’s identification with the mediating persona in this process.

Travel writing describes, negotiates and feeds identity constructions on various levels – individual identities, cultural identities, national identities, social identities etc. Cultural transfer plays a crucial role in these processes as the intercultural context of travel writing predestines it for the negotiation of what is supposedly one’s own identity. These texts, our argument goes, have thus had a substantial relation with society particularly in historically crucial periods when questions of identity were an issue: for instance, in any time of conflicts and expeditions, starting from antiquity and continuing up to our age, or in the process of the formation of the nation states particularly in the 19th century, or in the aftermath of the breakdown of communism in Europe in the 20th Century.

The proposed workshop, which will include altogether eight papers, investigates how these processes of identity construction take place in travel writing. The aim is to identify such strategies from any period and linguistic and cultural contexts and thus to look at travel writing as a genre. The focus will be on travelogues on journeys that have actually been undertaken but also analyses of other forms of travel writing (i.e. fictional travelogues) are welcome.

Please send your **abstracts (300 words) and a short biography by February 1, 2019** to Dr. Sandra Vlasta (savlasta@uni-mainz.de), University of Mainz, and Dr. Leena Eilittä (leilitta@hotmail.com), University of Helsinki.