

Bill Bell, “Authors in an Industrial Economy: The Case of John Murray’s Travel Writers.” *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780-1840* 21 (2013): 9-29.

The title of Bill Bell’s article does not immediately suggest rich pickings for the literature and science scholar, yet as so many of Murray’s travel writers were scientists and explorers this is as much an article about the writing of scientific exploration as it is travel narratives. Indeed, Bell offers a very rich account of the processes that led to the publication and dissemination of science within the confines of a specific genre (the travel narrative) that had particular practices which mediated its content. Having said that, Bell’s focus remains stoutly on the industrial processes themselves so that much of the meaning of these processes for scholars wishing to consider scientific writing remains implicit. Nevertheless, the article has such fresh insight and detail to offer that uncovering those meanings is a hugely worthwhile project. It is worth noting, too, that interested readers can do this work for free: *Romantic Textualities* is a high quality open access journal which can be found online at <http://www.romtext.org.uk>.

Bell begins by noting that the House of Murray was among the most influential publishing venues of the nineteenth century and boasted a considerable number of Britain’s eminent scientific travel writers as its authors. These included Charles Darwin, John Franklin, Austen Henry Layard, Maria Graham, Joseph Hooker and Isabella Bird. As Bell shows, these and other writers, far from being individual authors sharing their scientific insights with a glad receiving public, were in fact entirely enmeshed in numerous editorial, printing and advertising activities that influenced the final published product. As Bell succinctly writes, the work of these scientist-explorers was subject to “a regime of regulatory practices” (9) that calls into question any abiding sense of the authenticity of the individual authorial voice or text.

Bell finds three processes of the publishing industry most disruptive to the myth of the single author: the role of the literary advisor, printing interventions and technologies, and advertising decisions. The literary advisor, or publisher’s reader, was employed by Murray to give expert testimony on a submitted manuscript – verifying the accuracy of its claims and providing an opinion on its qualities as a saleable commodity. At times, Murray used his own scientist authors for such tasks: Maria Graham, for example, was one of the “literary friends” that Murray relied upon for advice on exploration and naturalist narratives. Indeed, one of the most prominent ways in which a narrative’s scientific knowledge might undergo some kind of alteration was on the advice of the expert advisor who often countered the scientific authority of the narrative with their own authority in the same field. Although Bell does not make this point, there is something of peer review about the actions of the literary advisor who comments both on veracity and style from a standpoint of expertise.

Such interventions were commonly accepted by writers keen to see their work into print. There were, however, exceptions. Bell gives the example of the geographer and zoologist Sir John Richardson, who had submitted to Murray the manuscript of his narrative recollections of his voyage in search of Franklin. This narrative included some new geographical knowledge as well as a section that would now be called anthropology, detailing encounters with peoples as yet unknown in Britain. Murray’s desired changes to the manuscript – given on the advice of a literary advisor – were so

extensive, and so reduced the scientific sections, that Richardson demanded the return of all his papers and published his work with Longman the following year.

Joseph Hooker was also unimpressed with Murray's meddling with the manuscript of his *Himalayan Journals* (1854), although not so much that he left for another publisher. Hooker's complaint concerned the printing procedures for his illustrations, which so altered the images he had submitted (which he had drawn himself in order to maintain their accuracy) as to make them entirely without foundation in fact. As Bell argues, Hooker was caught in the complex relationship between the received modes for print illustration (the picturesque or sublime) and the emerging realist mode more in tune with an "age of science" (18). Perhaps most interesting in this example is that Hooker feared that the public would find his own faithful illustrations "tame" (19) and would become indifferent to scientific accuracy. Murray aimed, therefore, for a "combination of accuracy and aesthetic appeal" (19) in the illustrations to works of travel and exploration. A decision like this seems important in the context of literature and science scholarship: it reveals the interplay, at every level, of literary or artistic concerns with scientific methodologies.

Bell brings his arguments to a conclusion by focussing, briefly, on advertising. In marketing works of scientific travel to the public, the scientific credibility of any promoter was vital. Murray was at pains to secure ideal scientific supporters for his volumes; often eschewing existing, and fulsome, public praise in favour of advertising a more sober scientific endorsement of a particular work's veracity and usefulness. At the same time, Murray was quite ready to make certain of a favourable review of his books in his own periodical, the influential *Critical Quarterly*.

Overall, Bell claims that his meticulous research reveals the myth of single authorship at the same time as authors, in their prefatory remarks and elsewhere, continued to claim sole responsibility for the work produced for public audiences. Such "disavowal of the very trade mechanisms that governed their presentation to the public," Bell argues, was an attempt to evade the truth of the multiple industrial interventions in each and every text. Although not turning to the question of scientific authority and accuracy in his concluding remarks, Bell's article has exciting repercussions for literature and science research. There is surely much more to be learned, as a scholar like Jonathan Topham has shown us before, of the narrative interventions, of the interplay of aesthetics and accuracy, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century science publishing.

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