

Online Reviews

Morgan, George Cadogan and Richard Price Morgan. *Travels in Revolutionary France and A Journey Across America*. Eds. Mary-Ann Constantine, and Paul Frame. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013. Pp. 237. ISBN: 978-0-7083-2558-2

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In July 1789 George Cadogan Morgan, a young, opinionated minister, nephew and former pupil of the famous dissenter Richard Price, set off for a trip to France with a party of three acquaintances. It was an educational trip, a version of the Grand Tour tailored to the travelers' progressive frame of mind: they were to learn by observing the customs, agricultural practices, and (misguided, surely) political systems on the Continent. It just so happened that they arrived in Paris on July 9th and stayed for a week—and what a week it was! Morgan wrote to his wife detailed letters on the events, trying to paint as vivid a picture as his talents allowed him. Through the letters published in this volume readers join in what must have been Mrs. Morgan's excitement at learning first-hand reports of the revolutionary rush, of the boisterous energy that animated the multitudes milling through the Palais Royal, or of the grand spectacle of the Estates General gathering at Versailles. Morgan's political beliefs made him side with the nascent revolution so all his accounts radiate a sense of satisfaction and approval of what he saw in the streets of Paris. He and his fellow travelers certainly had reason to be frightened now and then—what with the “rage of the populace” (50) making itself felt under their very windows—but the thrill of witnessing events that all understood to be epoch-changing made it all worthwhile.

After only four days' delay, the four travelers pursued their tour as scheduled and admired—as scheduled—the landscape and the “sublimity” of the Mont Blanc (75); if there was an unexpected alteration in the routine of sightseeing and observing, it was their pleasure at fielding questions on the happenings in Paris: “In every village we were stop'd by the crowd agitated by inquiries about news from Paris” (55). The originality of this narrative comes from the sense of candid joy of finding oneself in the middle of a revolutionary movement that changed the world without, however, changing the observer's own life. Thus, the eagerness to describe the journey as it unfolds generates a stream of involuntary humor: grave comments on the attack on the Bastille or ecstatic descriptions of natural wonders are followed by scrupulous reports on mundane nuisances such as the ubiquitous bedbugs that tormented even the most uncomplaining tourist. Still, the addition of a letter written in 1792 to the Jacobin Club in Paris illuminates the impact that the Revolution had on radical-minded individuals in Great Britain, long after the more trivial memories subsided.

The second part of the book has an entirely different tone: it is also the account of a new beginning, but on the modest scale of one family going through a private revolution of sorts while crossing the ocean to the New World. At George Cadogan Morgan's death in 1798 his family entered a life of travels and “genteel poverty” (125) which eventually took Anne Morgan and her sons to America in 1808. Only half of the eight brothers remained in America; Richard was one of the four who stayed. “The Autobiography of Richard Price Morgan, Senior,” contained in this second part of the book, is an American narrative of triumph over hardship, a tale of struggle, determination, and ingenuity. Only seventeen years of age when he arrived, Richard completed his education in America, married and had children, traveled throughout the country, tried his hand at farming before investing in the railroad, and finally attempted to become a civil engineer. Success did not come easily: it was only

in 1848 that he achieved his dream of being appointed chief engineer of a railroad line under construction along the Illinois River; it was only at the celebration of his eightieth birthday, with his children and their families around him, that he felt entirely at peace. His journal ends on a melancholy note, as he reflects on “opportunities lost” while not forgetting “long intervals of comparative happiness” (195). His son, Richard Price Morgan, Junior, concludes the narrative with an epilogue destined to attenuate his father’s doubts and show that the youngster who landed in America in 1808 had, in fact, a success story to tell, his own and America’s success: “He was a bold and fearless advocate for the development of this country by the means of great railway enterprises and throughout his life a large share of his vitality was expended *pro bono publico*” (197).

A final note on the outstanding critical apparatus: these two texts come with exceptionally rich analytical introductions and meticulous notes that place them in their historical and philosophical context. Readers will profit equally from the historical narratives presented here and from Constantine’s and Frame’s illuminating and erudite commentary.

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