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Thompson, Christopher W. *French Romantic Travel Writing: Chateaubriand to Nerval*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Pp. xi + 453. ISBN: 978-0-19-923354-0

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At a time when many literary and cultural scholars make critical turns to the transnational or the transatlantic, seeking to push beyond political and geographical borders, Christopher W. Thompson's splendid examination of French Romantic travel writing recalls the value, especially in the nineteenth century, of the *national* framing of an inquiry. This exhaustive study argues convincingly that French authors in particular brought originality to the genre. During the first half of the century, Thompson underlines, cultural innovations pushed French travel writing to a popularity unequaled in other European national contexts. Instead of focusing on a single author's works or more broadly exploring other topics, such as visions of the Other, he looks collectively at the Romantics with impressive breadth and detail as he lays out the contours of an often dismissed genre that rose to new heights in a post-Napoleonic France.

The book moves through the century while centering on the published travel accounts (rather than unpublished notes or memoirs) of major authors who, he posits, fundamentally shaped the genre. The introduction grounds readers in the European context and in the long historical traditions (and criticisms) of travel writing, and provides an excellent background to French travel writing prior to the nineteenth century. The next ten chapters delve more or less chronologically into the masterworks (and the not so masterful works) produced by French writers including Chateaubriand, Staël, Stendhal, Nodier, Custine, Nerval, Dumas, and Hugo. Through fine analyses of these authors and others, Thompson details the complex factors that impacted travel and the production of French travelogues: increased access to transportation and mobility within France and beyond, a changing national press and readership, political factors within the nation and without, and attitudes toward the genre. He also devotes chapter nine to a close-up exploration of travelogues and travel autobiographies written by women through the works of Madame de Staël, Flora Tristan, and George Sand. Finally, he expertly closes the study by venturing into travel writing as it moved into the twentieth century.

Thompson's remarkable work is a must read for experienced scholars and for those who seek a solid introduction to the field. His consideration of the impact of Romanticism on, for example, the trope of "the journey," the importance of meandering, and of the roles of the author will be of particular interest for literary specialists. Cultural and book historians will also delight in his insightful analyses of factors influencing the production and consumption of travel narratives, including the cordoned-off focus on women and travel writing. Of important note, finally, is an acknowledgement of Thompson's extraordinary research, which provides insights at once wide in scope and minute in detail. Indeed, all nineteenth-century scholars (and not just those specializing in France) may glean much from this masterwork.

While some might criticize the book's seeming critical nostalgia and conservative corpus (only published travel writing), they will also recognize that Thompson articulates a persuasive argument for the contours of his study. Even those most committed to extending research beyond geopolitical boundaries will find compelling evidence for revisiting the place of the national in this particular field of scholarship. Furthermore, the book also brings the importance of travel and travel writing into sharper focus because of its all-encompassing understanding of the genre in Europe and in France, a perspective that is often lost in previous author- or country-specific works. No matter the

critical take, *French Romantic Travel Writing* will no doubt enrich many inquests into travel writing and into nineteenth-century culture, providing a thorough basis for the history and evolution of the genre and the importance of travel as the Romantics and their travel writing took French readers much further than ever before.