

## Wendy Roy. *Maps of Difference: Canada, Women, and Travel.*

Roberta Buchanan

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## REVIEWS

Wendy Roy. *Maps of Difference: Canada, Women, and Travel*. Montreal and Kingston, 2005, ISBN 0773528660

ROY FOCUSES ON THREE women travellers: two Canadian (Mina Hubbard and Margaret Laurence), and one British (Anna Jameson), from the 1830s to the mid-twentieth century. Each could claim a “first” in their field. Jameson claimed in her *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* that she traveled “beyond the bounds of civilised humanity, or indeed any humanity” (17), and was the first European female to shoot the rapids at Sault Ste Marie (reclining comfortably in a canoe while native men steered and paddled). Mina Hubbard went to Labrador in 1905 to complete her husband’s project of exploring and mapping the Naskaupi and George Rivers. Leonidas Hubbard died in the attempt two years before. “I was the first in the field, and the honour of exploring the Nascaupsee and George Rivers was to fall to me” (112). Laurence more conventionally accompanied her engineer husband to the British Somaliland Protectorate, where she made the first systematic translations into English of Somali oral literature.

Roy is interested in the three women’s encounters with, and responses to, “difference:” mapping in “its metaphoric sense, as a minute record of cultural, gender, race, and class difference” (3). She is also concerned with mapping as a literal endeavour, particularly the imperialist politics of renaming, with the elision of aboriginal names often replaced by those of male politicians (for example, Churchill Falls). Hubbard’s map of Labrador is particularly interesting: she named some geographical features after male patrons and supporters; but many others after female relatives, thus inscribing her own “matrilineage” on the land (146).

Roy’s method is to examine “pre-texts,” “counter-narratives,” “comparison texts,” and the visual perspective provided by sketches, photographs, and maps. This leads to a richly-textured and multi-faceted exploration of each writer. “Pre-texts” are narratives written by literary predecessors. Alexander Henry’s *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories* influenced Jameson in her choice of itinerary and, initially, her opinions. She followed him in being “adopted” by a First Nations family, using this as a way of obtaining inside knowledge about

the language and culture of the Anishinaabe. Laurence reacted against the imperialist Sir Richard Burton's *First Footsteps in East Africa*. Roy points out that it should not be assumed that the travel writer's account is "objective." Thus, it is important to look for "counter-narratives" by locals or natives which might provide an alternative view. These are provided by the diary of George Elson, Mina Hubbard's chief guide, and in Innu oral accounts of Hubbard in Labrador. Jane Schoolcraft, a part-Anishinaabe woman who accompanied Jameson, wrote a letter about their travels. Roy also draws parallels between her own subjects and contemporaries, and especially women who traveled through similar areas at the same time, or had similar experiences in other countries. Catherine Parr Traill, Agnes Deans Cameron, and P.K. Page provide useful "comparison texts" for an analysis of the writers' attitudes to native peoples and women's roles.

Roy views the three women travel writers from a political and feminist perspective, as "reporters on and critics of colonialism" (9). Jameson, who suggested there were similarities in the lot of Amerindians and in that of European women, gives the most thoughtful analysis of women and gender relations. Among Indian women, there was an "equal division of labour; there is no class of women privileged to sit still while others work" (63). Compared to servant-maid or factory worker, "the condition of the squaw is gracious ... dignified ... by equality with all around her" (63). The repressive laws in England meant that a woman's children could be taken from her and a husband was entitled to his wife's earnings. As a wife seeking a legal separation from her husband, Jameson's own position was precarious.

At a time when the liberties of women in Europe and in settler societies were restricted significantly, Mina Hubbard used various strategies to maintain her respectability while at the same time transgressing social limitations. Hubbard was careful to maintain her feminine image while usurping a masculine role as explorer in the public sphere. She led her own expedition unchaperoned, and accompanied by four Native or Metis men; a situation which made her vulnerable to unpleasant gossip and speculation.

Jameson had the courage to critique the oppression of women in her own society, using Amerindian women as a benchmark to measure it by. Laurence accepted the pain and exploitation of Somalian women on the grounds that an "anti-imperialist" should not meddle in another culture. She conformed to Somalian and Islamic notions of propriety by ceasing to wear slacks and covering her hair in the approved fashion for married women. She records the oppression of Somali women: genital mutilation and infibulation, forced marriage, child prostitution. Laurence herself witnessed the latter when a teashop-cum-brothel was situated near her husband's construction camp; one of the prostitutes was an eight-year-old girl. Her husband condoned the prostitutes as providing a service to his workmen, and Laurence refused to "meddle." When some women asked her for medication to relieve their menstrual pain, Laurence refused, even though she could have given them aspirin.

Her stated reason was that “the lunatic audacity of shoving a mild pill at their total situation was more than I could stomach” (198). “Her desire to be sensitive to cultural difference outweighed her urge to make a feminist intervention” (198). It is hard to see how giving a woman aspirin for menstrual pain could be construed as “meddling.” Laurence used the girl prostitute as material for one of her stories. In her novel set in Africa, *This Side Jordan*, a European man, Johnny, “sexually brutalizes an inexperienced prostitute,” and then brutally rapes an African virgin who has been bought for him as a bribe (202). “The woman suffers pain so that Johnnie can have a moment of redemption” and recognize Africans as fellow-humans (204). Not every reader would agree with Roy that Laurence is not only “an anti-imperialist writer but also a ground-breaking feminist” (206).

Roy’s views on Laurence may not be shared by all, and the Laurence chapter raises some disturbing issues. Her controversial work indicates some of the inadequacies of her travel writers’ efforts to “map” their own and other cultures, but also the necessity of attempting to do so.

Roberta Buchanan  
Memorial University

Ron Pumphrey. *Human Beans*. St. John’s, 2007, ISBN 1-897317-09-9

RON PUMPHREY IS a well-known figure in eastern Canada and especially in his home-province of Newfoundland and Labrador, mainly because of his 1970s-1980s open line radio programmes where he greeted listeners with his exuberant “Hello my Lovelies.” That audience already knew that he had “the gift of the gab.” With this, the first installment of his autobiography, we discover that, not only can he tell a good story, he is one of that rare breed who can also translate that gift to paper, with words and images that jump off the page and engage the reader.

While his previous books were mainly biographies that celebrated the lives of others, this work recreates the lives of the author, his immediate family, and the communities around them, told, for the most part, from the point of view of the growing boy. As with his speaking style, his writing style is flamboyant in this imaginative retelling of his first eight years. Some names have been changed to protect the innocent, but those familiar with Harbour Grace and Bell Island in the mid-twentieth century will know and remember most of those mentioned. Others will get a good sense of the local citizenry. The book is full of the joys of childhood, with a generous dose of the fears, misgivings, and disappointments. Pumphrey writes about it all with enthusiasm and great sense of discovery.

More than the antics of a young boy growing up in a rapidly-changing world, this is an anthropological study of the era as seen through the fresh eyes of an inquisitive child. There is honesty and true wonder in his unfolding comprehension of the ways of the Depression-era world. This book is rich in folklore, sociology, natu-