



Political Tourism and Its Texts: Cultural Spaces

By Maureen Moynagh

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The most conspicuous feature of Maureen Moynagh's book on political tourism is its style; conspicuous because she confesses it early, insistently. Page one, paragraph two: "This study speaks to the efforts of contemporary postcolonial and cultural studies theorists to devise a 'new' cosmopolitanism, even as I remain skeptical of the claims to novelty that mark much of this scholarship."

Why these theorists, rather than real historical experience, are worth studying is taken for granted. Unasked, also, is the question of why an inflated claim to novelty on their part should be

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the object of sustained scepticism. The book "speaks to the efforts" and out of the mouth of this abstraction come volleys of quotations, jargon, analysis and then back to authoritative quotations from unimpeachably distinguished academics such as Paul Gilroy, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, Jacques Derrida, Bruce Robbins and Frederic Jameson. *Political Tourism and Its Texts* is a useful and intelligent book, yet intramural in style and conception, and limited for the general reader accordingly. Read it, if you will, in the beneficial spirit of an Olympian mist.

Unlike Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims*, a hateful history of Western intellectuals wandering in the political wilds of Cuba, China and the Soviet Union, Moynagh's study is about testing propositions, weighing and sifting the interplay of text and context. Hollander is overwrought in describing the dubious ethics and arrant political intelligence of leftist travellers. Moynagh applies a rhetorical analysis to key texts, taken here as signifying nodes against the common language. They include: Nancy Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology*, Agnes Smedley's *Battle Hymn of China*, W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *Journey to a War*, Ernesto Che Guevara's *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*, Margaret Randall's *Sandino's Daughters* and Salman Rushdie's *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey*.

The thrust of *Political Tourism and Its Texts* is a heroic search for links in the chain of language that united these authors, whether they themselves felt these links or not. Their lingua franca was anti-imperialism. Although they never quite settled on the relation of their writerly sensibility to their order of moral obligations (family? country? rights? reason?) each and all were literary cosmopolitans, partisans of empathetic thought – "writer-travellers rather than travel writers".

Interesting authors, each and all. And there is something gratifying about the reversal by fiat of "writer-travellers", something refreshing in placing the writing *before* the travelling, the reflective mind before the action and experience upon which

leftist and liberal intellectuals in Europe and America have been beating one another over the head on the matter of communism for 100 years. Enough. The Cold War is over. Moynagh wishes to interrogate her leftist interlocutors, to be sure about that. Only, the most she wishes to know of each case study is "what each text and its contexts can tell us about the possibilities for commitment across social, economic, political and national divides in different sites of struggle and at different historical moments in the twentieth century". That does not sound so bad – not nearly as menacing as Hollander says. Voyeurism, in fact, never sounded so good.

Although the style of this book is argument by an authoritative mix of innuendo ("this is not to suggest...") and distinctions precise and sharp, there is a more generous way of putting it. Moynagh continually refers to the ironies and conflicts disclosed by her distinctions to a fraternity of like-minded scholars who appear to be urging one another along in the emancipatory enterprise of cultural studies. If their concessions are few to the common reader, so much the worse for us.

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