



# Travel Writing and the Natural World, 1768-1840

*Paul Smethurst*

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While there is increasing anxiety about the natural world and many are calling for action on the environment, academic discourse on the subject has been dominated by romantic ideas of wilderness, new primitivisms, and philosophical approaches to the concept of nature. This book explores the heyday of travel writing about the natural world between 1768 and 1840. The starting point is the parallel occurrence of Cook's Pacific voyages, natural history, scenic tourism and romantic travel. The lasting effect of these practices has been to turn nature into a detached and abstract space and travel writing had a central role in this process.

Unifying a wide field of enquiry is the argument that travel writing, whether presenting scientific information or aesthetic responses to landscape, shares a common interest in finding order and structure in nature. Even where political imperatives are not explicit, a tendency towards imperial order is found; empire is writ large and small. As little resistance to the idea of order is found, we can conclude that, through nature, travel writing in the eighteenth century was generally supportive of empire, trade and the landowning class.

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