

## **Abstract**

This thesis emphasises the travel and life of Elizabethan and early Jacobean traveller Thomas Coryat. Using historical enquiry and textual analysis, Coryat's life and journeys depict how the circumstances in early modern England afforded a common man to dream the dream of globetrotting. The study commences with a loosely biographical discussion of the ancient travellers who may have been motivational for Coryat. The bulk of this thesis employs two travel journals *The Crudities* and *Letters from India* written by Thomas Coryat as the prime raw material for the analysis which is the second chapter. The historical context of these accounts sketches the cultural and intellectual history that existed among the literary coterie that graced the meetings at the Mermaid Tavern. Alongside the thesis raises the debate on Orientalism for which I follow Coryat's journeys as they are described in his work. In adopting a narrative approach my purpose has been to recreate as closely as possible the sense that Coryat himself strives to create while experiencing things as he went. Thus, Coryat's work rendered Eastward travel accessible, desirable and credible for later generations paving the way for the *Grand tour*. In conclusion this thesis argues that Coryat travelled for personal ambitions, a lust for learning in order to promote himself to permanent membership among the courtly circles.

The opening chapter is a brief introduction and a preview of the ensuing chapters. The introduction begins with the victory over the Spanish Armada and how the incident triggered a new wave of exploration not just for commercial purposes but also for educational purposes. The drastic change in the interaction of England with other countries and the opening up of the protestant English boundary to both insiders and outsiders gathered momentum that resulted in the travel of common people for the sake of study and pleasure besides the core commercial purpose.

The next chapter deals with the ancient travellers, whose works may have prompted Coryat to see the unknown world, also explaining the probable reasons Coryat chose to travel against the trend, to the east and not the west. In the ancient world pilgrims, soldiers, ambassadors and merchants undertook arduous journeys with no guarantee of

return. In spite of the dangers and hazards connected with travel people moved. On their return they wrote accounts of their experience and the unknown world for themselves. Coryat may have surely set his hands on a variety of travel accounts that may have fed him with the necessary information that must have mentally prepared him for the unknown. Coryat, who is also in the habit of backing up his experiences with historical facts, regularly quotes and refers to the predecessors who have moulded Coryat into the traveller he was.

Next in focus is Thomas Coryat's life, journeys and acquaintances. Coryat's first journey abroad was around continental Europe. This tour spanning over five months was and on his return he privately published a voluminous account of his experiences, the *Crudities* which he dedicated to Prince Henry. This book is appended with panegyric verses by Coryat's friends and acquaintances to increase the value and in turn the sales so that Coryat could benefit financially. These friends and acquaintances who wrote the panegyric verses were persons that were well placed in the English society. Coryat's self-promotional printing efforts to earn fame were a success and this soon promoted the second trip to the East Indies. Instead of taking the sea route Coryat opted for the arduous land route. This allowed Coryat to relive the experience first-hand the history and culture he had studied, further to enjoy the art and architecture of ancient monuments. Coryat's writings reveal his openness to new things, and his unbiased attitude towards them. It is however really sad that Coryat never made it back to England. Had Coryat survived to publish his second book about his eastward travel, no doubt it would have been a masterpiece and an indispensable piece of information about the East.

Then the study moves to the witty London circle or the so called Fraternity of Sireniacal Gentlemen. Coryat in one of his letters from India mentions this Tavern, and sends his greetings to all members that gathered there on the first Friday of every month. This tavern at times is also referred to as the Friday Club and at times as the Mermaid Tavern. This tavern has its roots in the School of Night that which came under scrutiny for its suspicious enterprise. Walter Raleigh who initiated the School of Atheism which later came to be called the School of Night was a group instituted to study science,

philosophy, and religion besides discussing all the new scholarship around scientific knowledge. This gathering was and its existence was shrouded in mystery, as the mere discussion of religion was considered a crime and hence not many references have been made to it in any kind of book or literature. The fact that not much has been ever written about this tavern, and the fact that Coryat makes special mention of it in his letter from India denotes that it enjoyed a certain status from which Coryat was hoping to borrow. Through a range of people and a few surviving materials related to the Mermaid Tavern we shall try and penetrate the intellectual and cultural activity that attracted the members to gather there to discuss and debate on several issues that were popular at the time. This intellectual gathering and its members who gathered here are symbolic of the informal literary scenario where all met regardless of their social standing or status for the pure love of learning. These members no doubt played a substantial role in Coryat's peregrination to the East for intellectual purposes and not for any sort of colonization process.

The thesis then shifts to the concepts of Orient and Orientalism and the transition of the word the East into Orient. Edward Said's iconic book *Orientalism* gave rise to various debates in which travellers accounts too were sieved to be found guilty of a superiority complex. At times the Orientalism debate and the Colonialism debate seem to overlap and it is this very overlap in which travel accounts get caught. In the ground breaking work of Edward Said, it is state that Orientalism existed right from the times of Homer, Dante and Flaubert. Here it is important to note that a single concept like Orientalism cannot be applied over such a long period of time. The flexible time frame shall lead to misinterpretation of the concerned text and mislead the reader from interpreting the true essence. Along with Coryat a look into other accounts of travellers, ambassadors and chaplains shall show that their complex narratives fitted into the oriental framework may in reality be a misfit. As an extension the colonial framework is also discussed with regard to the travel account.

The focal point of the next chapter is the interconnection between the post Oxbridge educational tour, *The Grand Tour* which flourished as a rite of passage among the aristocratic youth and Elizabethan and Jacobean travellers. The seeds for this tour were

sowed by none other than the predecessor Oxbridge graduates who travelled not only around continental Europe but also further east giving rise to this trend of field work study tours under the support of guides. The travel accounts of Coryat and other travellers created the base upon which these elites experienced and consumed the art, architecture and culture of continental Europe and beyond. Motivation in the form of direct exposure to classical antiquity and destinations with renaissance culture, art and architecture, drove these youth to undertake this educational rite of passage. The *Crudities* no doubt played a major role in instructing the youth about the itinerary and requirements for a pleasurable and interesting tour. One point he however stresses in his works is the advantage of learning various languages to directly communicate with the locals and not to rely on interpreters or interpretations of other travellers. Besides this, Coryat does not directly write a kind of instruction manual but within his writings subtly hints at the best approach.

In the closing chapter this thesis concludes that Coryat the traveller, travelled for personal ambitions, and a lust for learning. Coryat especially through his travels causes a paradigm shift wherein he makes it possible for the common man to travel and travel in the capacity of a tourist. Coryat was well versed in several languages but at no point of his travels does he use it for commercial purposes. His flair for languages stood him in good stead on several occasions. One such time was when he got a direct audience with the Mogul emperor in whose favour he made an oration and also requested that a letter of recommendation to the land of Tamburlaine who happened to be the Mogul emperors ancestor and the main character of Christopher Marlowe's work of the same name. The oration won Coryat a bag of hundred silver coins, but the letter of recommendation was denied as the Emperor had not maintained any relations with the successors of Tamburlaine and hence had no such direct contact. Coryat was eventually hoping to promote himself in order to acquire a permanent membership in among the courtly circles in London. With this in mind he traversed the paths from antiquity reliving the past in the present, and at the same time gathering new and relevant cultural, architectural and anthropological information of the age for the good of his country and his countrymen.