

essay from 2007.) Still, Balakier's analysis admirably contemporizes Traherne's work with an audacity that, with a few notable exceptions, remains too rare among critics. Having been so long marginalized as a mystic or metaphysical poet, Traherne's intellectual achievements are easy to overlook. Balakier has given them due notice, by grounding the concept of Felicity in experiential principles whose relevance endures in cognitive science today. He is in this sense, like his subject, "radically optimistic."

Ann Talbot. *The Great Ocean of Knowledge. The Influence of Travel Literature on the Work of John Locke*. Leiden / Boston: Brill's Studies in Intellectual History vol. 184, 2010. 337 pp. 4 illus. \$ 147. Review by MARÍA G. NAVARRO, UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

The researcher Ann Talbot presents in this book one of the more complex and in-depth studies ever written about the influence of travel literature on the work of the British philosopher John Locke (1632-1704).

At the end of the eighteenth century, the study of travel literature was an alternative to academic studies. The philosopher John Locke recommended with enthusiasm these books as a way to comprehend human understanding. Several members of the Royal Society like John Harris (1666-1719) affirmed that the learning that could be obtained through these books was different from the one that provided the educative system of that time. Travel literature could make one see the source of the ignorance of the ancients; it stressed the curiosities and extraordinary facts and led to a revision of beliefs and scientific theories of the ancient world. Besides, the account of a broad diversity of subjects contributed to the creation of matters of fact, and this was important in order to put rational limits to the descriptions of the world that were commonly accepted.

The book *The Great Ocean of Knowledge. The Influence of Travel Literature on the Work of John Locke* is an exhaustive and rigorous study of Locke's thought. It shows a deep knowledge of postmodern critiques to the modern notion of Enlightenment and applies these historiographical critiques to a documented analysis of Locke's library

and what could mean, for him, the travel literature he read. These are some of the most important contributions of a book that is a historiographical research work on travel literature and its intellectual effects; it sets a specific model in order to analyse the genesis of Locke's thought and, besides, offers a critical and contemporary study of the significance of European Enlightenment. These aspects, that are to be associated to the character of the research carried out by Talbot and also to her intellectual disposal, have to do with the two questions the book answers to: what kind of works were in Locke's library? how is the impact of travel books on the philosopher's thought to be evaluated?

In a library of more than 3600 books, 269 works could be classified today as philosophy and 275 as travel or geography. This significant proportion is forwarded as an evidence of Locke's interest for this kind of literature. But, what did he thought about this material? What did it mean to him?

First, Talbot raises these questions and analyses them as an historian. Afterwards she does it as a critique of the historiographical conceptions of modernity about the origins of Enlightenment. And finally, she analyses them as an expert in the political and moral thought of Locke.

The result is a reference work about the thought of Locke, but also about the history of the ideas of Enlightenment and about research models of historiography to deal with all this, and to present it. That is why, in my opinion, this book is an innovative work in all the three above mentioned fields.

Two important factors influenced Locke: the absolutist society he lived in, a society where the learning model was based on the study of the classics and of the Bible, and his knowledge of the research techniques he learned of two authors influenced by Bacon, Robert Boyle and Thomas Sydenhan. Locke used what he had learned from them in a unique way to examine contemporary questions on politics, human behaviour, beliefs and religion.

The 275 works of travel literature in Locke's library are classified by Talbot into four categories: books related to projects of the fellows of the Royal Society, clearly linked to Baconian tradition; works influence by the Neo-Thomist School of Salamanca, in Spain; books that linked Confucianism to atheism and materialism, and finally,

travel books that had an utopian character. The author analyses the influence of each of these works of travel literature on the theory of knowledge of Locke, and also on his political and moral philosophy.

Locke's library was comparable to those of other fellows of the Royal Society, but the impact of this literature on his work was unique and non-comparable to any other case. It seems that Locke selected his books patiently, in the same way a doctor looks for indexes, signales, evidence, exceptional and challenging cases for himself and his theories. His bibliographic quest, similar to the one of a collector, was filled with true scientific and philosophical passion, as he saw each travel book as an opportunity to evaluate and check what he had proposed in his own work.

The problem of what laws do govern human behaviour, the variations between one society and another, questions that have to do with the problem of the universality of moral or the origin of human knowledge, can no longer be understood without the image of this library rich in travel literature, where Locke spent most of his life reading and writing, chewing, ruminating all these stories of extraordinary places and people.

The question of human nature transforms itself into a fascinating philosophical investigation thanks to Talbot's book, and it is so for two reasons: it helps us to approach the figure of John Locke and the philosophical and political meaning of Enlightenment, and it does so without breaking its relationship with the experience of the discovery of other human beings and unknown places, which was a radical experience both for Europeans and for its "others" that was made possible by Enlightenment by means of travel literature.

The book is structured in fourteen chapters and a conclusion to which two appendices are added. In them, the author offers a list of the travel books cited by Locke, and a complete bibliography of the manuscript sources. In my opinion, the work of Talbot offers an interpretation of the thought of Locke made from the point of view of social anthropology.