



Guest Lecture

Prof. Dr. Natalya Din-Kariuki (University of Warwick)

Colonial Politics, Colonial Poetics? Reading Early Modern Travel Writing, Then and Now

Thursday, 5 March 2026, 10AM-12PM

Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Etterbeek Campus, Promotiezaal D.2.01

This lecture reflects on some of the key conceptual and methodological challenges raised by the study of travel writing, a capacious body of material comprising diaries, journals, letters, logbooks, and reports. Its central argument is that while the entanglements of travel and colonialism are well known, insufficient attention has been paid to the role played by the rhetoric of travel writing in articulating and reinforcing colonial discourse, and thus the practice of colonialism itself. Focusing on early modern



English travel writers including the proto-tourist Thomas Coryate, the diplomat and poetic theorist William Scott, the chaplain Edward Terry, and the merchant Peter Mundy, this lecture sets out a model for reading travel writing which attends equally to questions of politics and poetics. It places particular attention to the relationship between the language and ideas of the rhetorical tradition — which encouraged orators to speak for ‘profit’, to gain ‘credit’, and to ‘prove’ themselves to their listeners – and the economics of early modern travel and trade, which were preoccupied with profit, credit, and improvement, too. Moreover, it reflects on the implications of this research for meritocracy studies by considering the fraught relationship between ideas of meritocracy and the practice of travel, and what this means for our reading of early modern travel writing now, including in the context of editing.

Register here: <https://events.vub.be/guest-lecture-by-prof-dr-natalya-din-kariuki>

The guest lecture will be followed by a workshop on Travel Writing, jointly organised by CLIC researchers focusing on this genre. Apart from this engagement, Prof. Din-Kariuki will also participate in the Meritocracy and Literature (MERLIT) project’s Theory and Methodology Workshop on 4 March. Please find more information about Prof. Din-Kariuki and about both workshops below.

Natalya Din-Kariuki is an Associate Professor in the Department of English & Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. Her research examines the literary and intellectual history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a particular focus on travel writing, transnational and transcultural encounters, modes of cosmopolitanism, and rhetoric and poetics. She is currently completing a book on seventeenth-century English travel writing, material from which has been published in *Textual Practice*, the *Review of English Studies*, and elsewhere. With Subha Mukherji and Rowan Williams, she edited *Crossings: Migrant Knowledges, Migrant Forms* (2025). Finally, with Guido van Meersbergen, she is editing a volume of decolonial approaches to the history of travel.



Workshop: Travel Studies: Theories, Methods, Materials

Thursday, 5 March 2026, 2PM-5PM

Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Etterbeek Campus, Room TBA

This workshop focuses on significant theoretical and methodological developments in the interdisciplinary field of travel studies and reflects the directions that it might take next. We will consider the legacies of the New Historicist and postcolonial approaches which shaped the study of travel in the 1980s and 1990s before turning to the insights and provocations offered by more recent scholarship rooted in feminist, queer, Black, migration, and decolonial studies.

Texts to be discussed:

1. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Beijing to the Bosphorus: notes on the travel account", *India International Centre Quarterly* 30 (2003-2004), 89-107.
2. April Shemak, "Refugee and Asylum Seeker Narratives as Postcolonial Travel Writing" in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing* ed. Robert Clarke (Cambridge, 2018), 188-201.
3. Natalya Din-Kariuki and Guido van Meersbergen, "Travel Studies and the Decolonial Turn", *Studies in Travel Writing* 27.2 (2024), 77-93.

Participants should read the aforementioned texts, which will be circulated before the workshop. Participants are also expected to briefly introduce their own projects in the field of travel writing or their motivation in participating in the workshop.

Please register by writing an email to florian.deroo@vub.be.



MERLIT Theory & Methodology Workshop with Guest Professor Prof. Dr. Natalya Din-Kariuki

Wednesday, 4 March, 10AM-3PM

Learning and Innovation Centre (LIC), Melbourne meeting room 4.05 (4th Floor)

The recurring Theory & Methodology workshops organized in the context of the ERC-funded project “Meritocracy and Literature” (merlit.vub.be) are aimed at better understanding the role of literature in shaping and responding to narratives on achievement and merit. The workshops provide opportunities for in-depth discussions on foundational and current research with the MERLIT team as well as offering a glimpse into the group’s diverse projects. The T&M Workshops welcome any interested guests on condition that they register, come prepared and participate actively.

Texts to be discussed at the upcoming T&M workshop:

- Din-Kariuki, Natalya and van Meersbergen Guido. 'Travel Studies and the Decolonial Turn', *Studies in Travel Writing* 27.2 (2024), 77-93.
- Saïd, Edward W. “The Scope of Orientalism.” *Orientalism*. Penguin Books, 2003. pp. 31–92. Reading the “Introduction” is also recommended but not mandatory.

The workshop will also include brief updates on MERLIT’s WP1: “The Politics of Change in Restoration Drama”, WP4: “Postmigrant Novels of Formation (Bildungsroman)” and MERLIT's *Talent for Research* MA project “Persia Illustrated: Paracolonial Space and the Geopolitical Aesthetic in the Illustrated London News, 1856–1873”.

Please register by writing an email to merlit@vub.be.



Campus Map:

