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Travelling Companions: Cook’s Second Voyage in the Writing of Georg and Johann Reinhold Forster

On his second voyage, James Cook was accompanied by the scientist Johann Reinhold Forster and the latter’s son Georg. In their writings about the circumnavigation a particularly complex relationship between father and son, and between the Forsters and Captain Cook emerges. The essay will explore the collaborative strategies developed by Georg and Johann Reinhold Forster, in which a kind of ‘transference’ between Georg and Johann Reinhold can be observed, and how this is reflected in their respective writing strategies.

In an article published in *Imago* in 1912, the Austrian psychoanalyst and writer Alfred Freiherr von Winterstein suggested that travelling is motivated by the dream of the boy to escape the authority of the father; travelling therefore is an attempt to flee the oedipal triangle by seeking the foreign, the (sexualised) exotic.¹ But what happens if the father cannot be left at home, if the invitation to travel is dependent on the authority of the father, albeit in the case at hand his scientific authority and expertise?

The second voyage of Cook in the years 1772 to 1775 saw the young Georg Forster as the assistant of his father Johann Reinhold Forster travelling to the southernmost parts of the globe, on their way encountering Pacific islands that, in the European imaginary, promised unlimited erotic satisfaction, only to probe further and further into the unknown waters of the Antarctic Ocean. The aim of the voyage was to prove the existence, or better put to rest once and for all the idea, which had persisted throughout the previous centuries and which was still advocated by some, that there was a large inhabitable continent in the South.

Much has been said about the close collaboration between Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Georg. While the father, on their return to England, was prevented from publishing a ‘philosophical account’ of the voyage, Georg found himself in the fortunate position of not being bound by any contract with the British Admiralty. Georg recounts in the Preface to *A Voyage Round the World* (published 1777) as well as in the German edition *Reise um*

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die Welt (published 1778-1780), that originally one single narrative written by his father and based on Cook’s and Johann Reinhold’s journal had been planned, or as Robert Kahn notes, this is what Johann Reinhold Forster thought the agreement with the Admiralty and Lord Sandwich entailed.² Johann Reinhold had submitted various drafts to the Admiralty and had, according to Georg, been promised a number of copper plates produced from the drawings of the voyage’s artist, William Hodges. However, the permission to publish anything other than his scientific notes, that is a comprehensive travel account, as well as the use of the copper plates were eventually withdrawn.

Georg remarks that since his father was not permitted to compose a ‘narrative’ he thought it ‘incumbent’³ upon himself (‘Schuldigkeit’ in the German version⁴) to write the account of the voyage in his father’s place. He also argues that his account would supplement Cook’s since Cook himself would not be able to finish the editing of his official account as he was already at sea on his third and final voyage (1776-1778). Georg’s account was to provide a different perspective and promised to avoid omissions that had occurred in the official account of the first voyage of Cook due to national sensibilities and censorial interferences. In Georg’s critique of the account of Cook’s first voyage, which had not been written by Cook himself but by John Hawkesworth who had, in fact, not accompanied the expedition, Georg discusses the imperative of providing an eyewitness account, not a simple compilation of facts based on logbook or diary entries, nor a ‘marvellous history’.⁵ While both Georg Forster’s and Cook’s comprehensive accounts⁶ of the second voyage appeared just two years after their return, Johann Reinhold only published his scientific notes entitled Observations Made during a Voyage round the World on Physical Geography, Natural History and Ethic Philosophy (1778).⁷ While there are other accounts of the voyage, for example that of Anders Sparrman, the botanist and student of Carl Linné who was recruited by Johann Reinhold Forster in the Cape Colony to join the expedi-

⁵ Forster, Voyage, I, 11.