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The End of Travel Writing?

Travel Writing as a distinct genre emerged in the early 20th Century and reached a zenith near its end with best-selling authors such as Paul Theroux and Bill Bryson, and popular guidebook franchises Rick Steves, Lonely Planet, etc. We are now witnessing, if not the end of travel writing, at least its evolution into something else. This paper comments upon issues relating to this change, including the decentering of authority, the demise of print journalism and the book culture, and the rise of user-generated media with its expectation of constant interactivity. Virtual tourism and online simulacra are discussed as contributing factors. Why buy a book about last year's Bangkok when you can read about last week's Bangkok, and chat with the traveler, on virtualtourist.com? Why be a tourist in Dublin when your avatar can be a regular at The Blarney Stone and become friends with the avatars of real Dubliners in the online world Second Life?

This proposal is broader than the previous one, looking at the entire genre and industry known as "travel writing" rather than dwelling particularly on the interweb spaces of "virtual tourism" and beyond. I am the current president of the Society for American Travel Writing, and this proposal is in concert with an article I am writing for a scholarly journal. It more reflects my current scholarship and concerns.