

## Travel

**Josh Shoemake**

**TANGIER**

A literary guide for travellers

288pp. I. B. Tauris. £16.99.

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**T**angier: A literary guide for travellers follows in the wake of Michelle Green's *The Dream at the End of the World* (1991) and Ian Finlayson's *Tangier: City of the dream* (1993); it draws heavily on both, but is also an excellent book in its own right and more lively than its predecessors. Josh Shoemake's first chapter is devoted to the port of Tangier and the arrival there of assorted literary figures, including Samuel Pepys, Hans Christian Andersen, Truman Capote and Jack Kerouac.

He begins with Andersen, who did not enjoy his disembarkation: "One seized a port-manteau, another a carpet-bag, a third carried off our umbrellas; it was like a regular work of plunder; they would listen neither to reasonable expostulations nor to angry shouts". Thereafter, Shoemake continues to eschew chronology, as he proceeds from port to *plage* to Kasbah, then to Medin and Petit Socco, and on to various cafés, bars and hotels, logging the various celebrities who might have assembled there over the decades. Time is compressed to whimsical effect, somewhat reminiscent of Max Beerbohm's stage direction in *Savonarola Brown*: "Enter Lucrezia Borgia, St Francis and Leonardo da Vinci". Thus, in Shoemake's account of Dean's Bar on the Rue de la Liberté, one encounters Truman Capote, Ava Gardner, Ian Fleming, William Burroughs and Robin Maugham and then, sitting a few tables away from one another in the Gran Café de Paris, there are Paul Bowles, Tennessee Williams, Mohamed Choukkri, Jean Genet and Joe Orton – in short Tangier's "usual suspects".

Bowles is clearly Josh Shoemake's hero – the dominant figure in literary Tangier – and the city's Arabs are almost invisible except as informants, collaborators or proxy authors. The pervading impression one gets from this seedy version of Fitzrovia on the Mediterranean is of louche despair, something of which is captured in Bowles's remark that "Tangier doesn't make a man disintegrate but it does attract people who are going to disintegrate anyway".

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## THIS WEEK

What we see in ancient Rome has always been coloured by what we want to see. Seventy years ago, while fascists stalked Europe, the Roman Republic was an oligarchy behind a democratic mask. Today, says Mary Beard, the fashion is to seek the democratic aspects again. Some very slim shards of evidence are used to justify both positions and this week our Classics editor offers two helpful warnings to readers who might become confused. The first is to watch the space set aside for small print at the bottom of the page: "the more space the footnotes occupy, the less likely they are to prove what they are supposed to". The second is to watch for conveniently modern jargon translated from unfamiliar Latin words: "the more cod Latin that is sprinkled over any discussion of Roman history, the less well founded the argument is likely to be".

In few discussions of the ancient world has there been greater imagination, wishful thinking and fraud than on Roman Britain. The British shift from tiny part of great empire to massive imperialists in our own right has long encouraged the creators of patriotic narrative. Emily Gowers reviews Charlotte Higgins's much praised book *Under Another Sky*, in which the author's journey around the remains of mosaics, camps and towns becomes "a brilliantly constructed and often exhilaratingly poetic treatment of wider themes". Marina Warner considers Edith Hall's "superb and richly detailed study" of how Goethe and Stalin, among others, obscured our understanding of Iphigenia's time beside the Black Sea.



One of the most extraordinary classical translations of recent times is A. E. Stallings's version in verse of *De rerum natura* by Lucretius (above). Sarah Knight quotes from Stallings in her review of an earlier translation by Lucy Hutchinson, another great woman translator of this materialist masterpiece. In the seventeenth century the potential offence against Christian piety was as much an obstacle to her art as the problems of the poet's philosophical Latin.

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