

Book

Travelogue for the adventurous imagination

The Dictionary of Imaginary Places
Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi
Lester and Orpen Denny

review by Elaine Ostry

It's a pity that almost all corners of this world have been photographed by the *National Geographic*, and that in the heart of the jungles of Ecuador there are natives wearing jeans and T-shirts.

But take heart, would-be explorers, for the world of the imagination can never be completely discovered. Or completely chronicled, although *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* does a marvellous job trying to do so.

What Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi have done is taken descriptions of imaginary places in literature, and turned them into travelogues. As Manguel states in the introduction, "we based the design of

the book on a nineteenth-century gazetteer — the relic of a time when travelling in the real world was still exciting and adventurous."

This book is intended to stimulate the imagination, and succeeds. It could hardly fail to do so, because it contains such a variety of material from around the world and throughout time.

The only limitation on the selection of works was that the places had to be ones which a traveller could expect to find. This excluded descriptions of heavens, hells and places of the future.

The *Dictionary* spans the ages of recorded imagination: from Plato to Voltaire to Kingsley to Tolkien. All of the traditional fantasy writers are included, such as C. S. Lewis and Ursula K. LeGuin.

But more valuable are the less familiar names such as Tove Jansson and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Particularly welcome are selections from the writers from foreign countries who are less well-known here: Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges, Charles Fourier, Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

The variety of selections invites the reader to compare the similarities among the stories and styles of authors of different times and places.

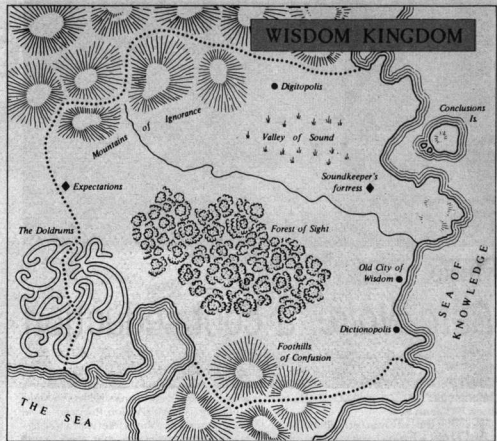
The styles range from the ridiculous to the existential. Much of the humour is dark. On the "Isle of Boredom", for instance, travellers are warned of the animals who will rip out their entrails and then heal them, only to repeat the attack again. "Those who have visited the Isle of Boredom are not known to have ever visited it a second time."

Such advice to travellers gives the book an air of truth. A kind of bizarre Fodor's Guide. Travellers are advised that a visit to Cook's Island is an almost certain cure for whooping cough.

Many of the descriptions tell little stories of the place, such as the village of "Eggs Up"



The Tower of the Two Dragons in Lamian.



Wisdom Kingdom: don't jump to Conclusions

from Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories*. The reader learns that the village tried to build a skyscraper to the moon, only to discover that it moved. Ever since, the inhabitants have been "wondering why the moon moves" and how "to stop it doing so."

Also interesting is the biting social commentary in many of the selections, such as the descriptions of "Popelig's Island" and "Popimania" from Rabelais's work. One funny piece is on the "Island of Poetry," which satirizes poets, who conceive their babies in their head and give birth through their fingers.

And how's this for existential? Paul is "a vast place inhabited by a spider the size of a man. Visitors who are brought here spend the rest of their lives watching it in terror." That's from the imagination of Dostoyevsky,

if you couldn't guess.

The *Dictionary* is liberally sprinkled with maps and illustrations, drawn by James Cook and Graham Greenfield respectively. These touches add to the presentation of the *Dictionary* as a travelogue.

You can't get bored reading this book. It's perfect for those long car trips. How can you resist names like "Zlay", "Agreazigulis", "Sas Doopt Swangeant"?

How about visiting "Yspaddaden Penkaur", described in the anonymous 14th-15th century work *The Mabinogion*? It is "a castle somewhere in Wales.... For unexplained reasons, the closer a traveller comes to it, the farther away the castle appears to be...."

The Dictionary of Imaginary Places is for the lovers of mystery, magic and adventure.

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- have a minimum GPA of 7.5 or be in the top 10% of the class

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The Selection Committee will base its decision on academic standing *and* community leadership qualities as demonstrated by participation in university or community organizations, sports activities or cultural activities, etc.

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Further information may be obtained from the SORSE office. A letter of application and resume should be submitted to:

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