Minor Field Examination in History of Theory of Travel

Choose one question from each of the three sections. (You should write three answers in all.) Be sure to discuss specific scholars and scholarly works where appropriate and to include extensive discussion of the relevant historiography in your answer.

I. Choose one of the following two questions:

A. Many American and British archaeologists were travelers, going to “exotic” places in which to conduct their fieldwork. Early archaeologists – such as Stephens, Squier and Bingham – wrote travelogues about their adventures. It is a tradition continued by Agatha Christie. Please write an essay in which you provide a description and critical analysis of the relevant literature on this topic of archaeologists as travelers and travel writers.

B. The recent travel writing by anthropologists and other humanists (including novelists) – basically since the 1980s – is different from that of their predecessors in their explicit concern with intercultural encounters and relations of power, among other topics. Please write a historical essay in which you consider what many would label as the “postmodern” aspect of recent travel literature, placing special emphasis on the context in which scholars wrote, their focus, the theories of travel and development of the anthropology of tourism as a field of scholarship. What are the themes you see? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the literature?

II. Choose one of the following two questions:

A. The radically new encounter of Europeans and Amerindians beginning with Columbus’ first voyage raises many questions about the possibilities of human understanding across cultures. Do you accept T. Todorov’s thesis that Europeans were skilled at understanding Amerindians in Central and South America and the Caribbean? How did their European background influence their understanding of the peoples they met, according to Pagden and others? What do you think of J. H. Elliott’s thesis that a growth in Europeans’ comprehension of the New World took place over several centuries? Please discuss these and any other relevant scholarship.

B. Richard White has argued that a “middle ground” formed in North America in which French and Indian cultures merged across a large area from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi Valley. By extension could one argue that, more generally, a merger of European and North American Indian cultures took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? What were the limits on such a merging of cultures? White believes that this culture unraveled in the late eighteenth century, a process greatly accelerated by the American Revolution. Do you agree that this was the end of the era, or would your periodization look different?

III. Choose one of the following two questions:

A. How did changing notions of geography articulate European perceptions of the non-European world? Consider two aspects of this question. First: Beginning with Columbus Europeans filled out their knowledge of large areas of their maps of the world, first in the Americas and then in the Pacific; how did this filling out of the globe challenge older conceptions of issues like the authority of the classical world and the identity of “natural man”? Second: How did European concepts for mapping the world
change over time – how did concepts like “north” versus “south” in the world, or “eastern” versus “western” Europe, come into being and change over time? You may choose from a wide variety of areas to discuss this, but be sure to include at least two (for example, the Americas, the Pacific, eastern Europe) in your discussion.

B. If you were teaching a graduate seminar on the history of travel, which theorists would be required reading lists? Which debates would be most helpful for students to learn about? How would the theories relate to the secondary literature on the actual history (as opposed to the theory) of travel? How do you think that theoretical discussions have evolved in recent decades, and how would you propose to give your students an overview of the changes that have taken place? Be sure to discuss at least two large theoretical topics (for example, Orientalism, translation, or writing – feel free to use these, or choose others if you’d prefer). Be sure that your answer makes specific reference to discussions from the recent theoretical and historical literature.