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# Where I Tread

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WHERE I TREAD

by

Sarah Watts

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(Ecology and Environmental Sciences; Spanish)

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University of Maine

May 2013

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## **Abstract**

I studied abroad for two semesters during the 2011-2012 academic year; I spent the first semester in Bilbao, Spain and the second in Cork, Ireland. Over the course of this experience, I got to know my host cities, traveled widely, and wrote a lengthy blog about my experience. The blog covers not only my experiences but also observations and historical accounts: I connected what I did with the greater context of the places I was in. Study abroad proved to be transformative, something the blog shows.

I have chosen to use the blog as the basis of my thesis because it tracks a coming-of-age story I believe many people share; I illustrate this with a selection of blog posts as well as an essay. I discuss the questions many people ask of themselves and of their cultures while traveling: in so doing, I have shown, in part, why travel is so important.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **I. Introduction**

On August 31, 2011, I arrived in Madrid, Spain. Three days later I was in Bilbao, and stayed there until December 31, 2011, when I left Spain to go to Cork, Ireland. I stayed in Cork until May 30, 2011. While in each of these places, I studied in a university and traveled in the country and abroad.

This information can say a lot about my experience, but it doesn't tell anything about how it made me feel, what interested me, or how I changed. That is what my blog was for: it tracked my experiences (or, at least, what I was comfortable telling my grandmother about) and shared them with others. In the beginning, I wanted to relate my experiences with enough detail to make them interesting, to engage my readers; in the end, I wanted to relay history in the most genuine way possible, to make it fun and worth remembering, and to blend it with my own experiences and impressions. I wanted to take the best photographs possible, to transport people, to inspire them, maybe even to make them jealous. In many ways, my blog was my proving ground: I showed the people who had set convictions about who I was that I could be smart, funny, and empathetic; I showed that I could talk about profound themes with respect, if not complete fairness; I showed that I could entertain people with my words, that writing that way was something I could do well; and if nothing else, the blog showed my tenacity, my drive to finish what I started. The blog enabled me to grow as a person and to show other people that such growth was happening. I was tired of not being taken seriously by nearly all of the people around me; the blog changed that. I demonstrated to people my humor and goofiness, but at the same time that I was a force to be reckoned with.

Study abroad for me was about freedom and discovery, stretching my limits and gaining in confidence. I began my journey scared out of my wits, wondering what I would be like at the end of those nine months; I emerged, the same person I was when I left, but able to see the world in terms of possibilities instead of boundaries. I had expected this, but it still surprised me that I could be this open and this free to do what I wanted, that I could have the courage to walk into the unknown and enjoy the uncertainty; I am told now that I am much more carefree and able. My experience proved to be transformative, as many early-adulthood voyages tend to be: the difference between myself and my peers is negligible in this regard; the only difference may be how well documented my experience was.

This thesis follows through a progression of blog posts, which show my instinctual, raw experiences as well as my growth as a person and as a writer. Over the course of the essay, I use hindsight to address issues and themes common in other travelers' accounts; first, I discuss the effects of religion and pilgrimage on travelers – in essence, I converse about the effects that profound experiences have on people, the way in which religion motivates and informs those deep experiences. I use the accounts of a variety of writers to act as a counterpoint to my blog and my own adventures. Second, I move from what motivates people and the reactions they have to a common stereotype, a distinction many travelers make, that line between what constitutes tourists and travelers; I show what the stereotype truly entails, what we think and why we think it. More than that, though, I show that through the explication of a stereotype other themes can be accessed and discussed in a new and useful manner.

The blog posts that follow are selected to represent my experience and my metamorphosis; the essay explicates certain parts of that experience and puts it in context with what others have written. Neither the posts nor the essay gives a complete picture of my affairs in Bilbao and Cork, but they come as close as it is possible to be: I hope to invite you to different perspectives not only about why people travel but also about what travel is meant to do.



## II. Blog Posts

The blog posts featured on this thesis can be referenced on the website [www.sarahgoestobilbork.wordpress.com](http://www.sarahgoestobilbork.wordpress.com). The posts listed here are in chronological order; they will be listed in reverse chronological order online, the most recent post shown first. I have provided two lists, one of posts that I believe are essential to a full reading of this thesis (“Required”), and those that show more dimension of the blog itself (“Recommended”). In addition, the online version of this thesis features hyperlinks – when I reference one of my experiences, there will be a footnote to direct you to the post in question. If you like what you are reading, feel free to branch out. Enjoy!

### *Required:*

I’m in the Blogosphere!	Aug. 24, The Beginning
Getting a Little Chubby, There?	Sept. 20, Bilbao
Pilgrims that Cheat	Nov. 8, Santiago de Compostela
As the Romans Do	Jan. 12, Rome
‘Sploring	March 11, Cork
Like a Red, Red Rose	May 21, Edinburgh
In My Shoes	Nov. 26, The Conclusion

### *Recommended:*

The Coast, the Sea, the Sky	Oct. 9, San Juan de Gaztelugatxe
Going Slowly But Efficiently Crazy	Dec. 1, Bilbao

The War on Pants – Christmas Edition	Dec. 27, Bilbao
The Streets are Made of Water, I Ain't Kiddin'!	Dec. 29, Venice
Don't Bring a Slingshot to the Prado...Abroad (A Guide)	Dec. 13
Unpacking, Recovery, Suspense	Jan. 16, Cork
A Strong Sense of Self-Preservation	Feb. 14, Blarney
The Daily Grind	Feb. 20, Daily life
The Shower in the Kitchen and the Ship in the Backyard	May 24, Oslo
The Year 1916 and Falafel	Oct. 21, Dublin
Good Fences	Nov. 26, Belfast

### **III. Prelude to the Essay**

During my time abroad and after I returned home, certain ideas and certain experiences continued to be in my mind, coloring my thoughts about a number of subjects. I was – and continue to be – consumed with questions about what constitutes home, nationality, and how history can be concentrated in certain locations. In addition, I wonder on an almost daily basis about the importance of talismans and how luck and chance encounters can define a journey. I think about the roles of humor, music, and food on how we perceive cultures, how these can be used to gauge our reactions to different societies. More and more, I think about the otherness inherent in the study abroad experience, about being an impermanent citizen of a country I would not belong to for more than five months: was I more of a voyeur into others' lives or a part of their culture? Was I still completely American or was I at least a little Spanish and Irish? Did I belong or was the freedom I enjoyed too much to let me put down roots? In some respects, these questions gauged how successful my experience was, because the feeling of belonging is a fundamental part of the human existence: if we do not belong, we are directionless. Over time, I learned how to grapple with these overarching themes in my life; I learned how to stop comparing Maine to Bilbao or Cork and to accept “otherness.”

The questions I have asked have been pondered by many others before me, but I do not think that all of them have thought about them to a great degree. I have decided to take two of my larger questions and explicate them in the two sections of the essay, as a way of looking back on the blog and making sense of the subtext of my experience. The first part of the essay describes how different people react to being in religious places and

what they typically learn about themselves while on pilgrimage. The second part details the stereotypical difference between travelers and tourists and what being a tourist or traveler means in a broader sense. In both sections of the essay, as with the blog, emotional responses play an important role; however, these responses will now be analyzed in order to come to larger conclusions about what it means to travel and to have life-altering experiences.

In reading this essay, I hope that you will be challenged to think in different ways and to connect to your own experience: it is my aim to be academic but also relatable. In order to do this, I have inserted my own experiences throughout the essay, the backstory that explains my personal attachment to these subjects, as well as links back to the blog, which started this journey; in so doing, I have inserted my own point of view – my bias – into the essay, which has shaped my thinking and therefore this essay. My experiences will serve as a counterpoint to academic thinking and ground the essay in real life experience.

## IV. Responses to Religion

### Introduction

The reactions people have to being in religious places are varied; some people can experience an intense religious connection, while others do not. This part of the essay will explore some of these people's reactions in different time periods in two locations: the Vatican in Rome and in Santiago de Compostela, Spain of people who have gone on pilgrimages. Pilgrimages offer travelers the opportunity to discuss the themes that arise from people's responses, as the long journey to a pilgrimage site allows travelers to fully digest their reasons for going to that particular place or to develop other insights about themselves: when they finally reach their destination, their reactions can be heightened.

Travel accounts of pilgrimage have a long history, going back to Egeria's journey to the holy land in the fifth century A.D., which happens to also be one of the first known travel accounts in history (Blanton 6). Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* continue this tradition of accounts of pilgrimage; it blends truth and myth with fiction, changing the nature of religious travel and the idea of who should embark upon it. Chaucer shows that piety is not a prerequisite for pilgrims – as is shown by the Wife of Bath. The tradition of pilgrimage has continued in every religion to this day, perpetuating a practice at least 2,000 years old (Swatos 33) – though there is evidence that people have gone on pilgrimages ever since they have traveled, such as Stonehenge, a latter-day Mecca.

Today, more and more people are able to go on pilgrimage – in terms of money and time – however, contemporary pilgrims undergo significantly less deprivation in

comparison with their historical counterparts (Swatos 37). As a result, today's religious travel is about religion only part of the time: spiritualism has become an important part of many cultures, including that of the United States. Spiritualism has come so far as to be considered part of our "global value system" (Herntrei 201) rather than as a trend, characterized by the discovery and betterment of self through introspection (Herntrei 209). Pilgrimage allows not only for religious motives, but also for spiritual ones as well, meaning that many different kinds of people go on pilgrimage.

Both of the two kinds of pilgrims have the aim of changing themselves, but the outcome is generally different, depending on whether they travel for religious or spiritual reasons. Pilgrims are defined as people that go on journeys in order to feel a connection to their religion, as a sign of their devotion, or as a sign of their dedication to their religion ("Pilgrim"). Spirituality has different connotations – the word 'spiritual,' for example, does not always have religious connotations, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word means: "Of or relating to, affecting or concerning, the spirit or high moral qualities" ("Spiritual"). Spirituality is also associated with liberation from material possessions, harmony, and learning to belong. For the purposes of this part of the essay, spiritual pilgrims are secular travelers, and pilgrims are religious. The difference, as we will see, is that devout and secular pilgrims have different motivations and draw different insights from their experiences: the presence or absence of religion can drive the responses people have, as well as define their differences.

## Genuine Pilgrimage

*I enter the piazza of San Pietro, surrounded and jostled by the crowds milling around. I am unimpressed with the scope of the piazza, only wishing that I could see the statues on the colonnade better. The cathedral itself is imposing, tall, ungiving. I resign myself to the idea of going inside.<sup>1</sup>*

Rome has long been a popular pilgrimage site; it is the center of many iconic biblical stories, most notably that of Saint Peter, though there are also other saints, such as Francis of Assisi, who went to Rome, strengthening the religious pull of the place, drawing pilgrims there. The experiences of influential religious figures draw others: Peter, who was fleeing the city, saw a vision of Jesus and was compelled to return, to certain martyrdom, and St. Francis was inspired to take the next step into his preferred life of poverty, by exchanging clothes with beggars and breaking bread with them in the gutter (Franke 33-34). It is not possible for the usual pilgrim to have such profound and direct experiences like these – for personal or divine reasons – but in some circumstances, the history itself is enough to inspire fervor. When history itself is not enough, architecture steps in: “One hundred and forty sculpted saints march around the top of Bernini’s graceful colonnade rimming the sixteenth-century piazza...If the scope of St. Peter’s is meant to humble mere mortals, it succeeds” (Franke 32). The architecture of the Vatican is designed to inspire divine feeling in its viewers, a feeling that a single person’s role in the world is cowed by the role of the Church and of God.

Accounts of the power of the architecture of the Vatican have long been recorded; one of the oldest and most celebratory accounts comes from Florence Nightingale, in a letter she wrote while in the Holy City: she got up at first light and hurried to St. Peter:

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<sup>1</sup> [As the Romans Do](#)

The dome was much smaller than I expected. But that enormous atrio. I stopped under it, for my mind was out of breath, to recover its strength before I went in. No event in my life, except my death can ever be greater than that first entrance into St. Peter's, the concentrated spirit of Christianity of so many years, the great image of our Faith... You know I have no art, and it was not an artistic effect it made on me – it was the effect of the presence of God. (Cahill 185)

Here Nightingale expresses a few different effects of being in a holy space in a holy frame of mind: mental overload, a sense of being overwhelmed, and the feeling of being in audience with God. This is the sensation most, if not all, pilgrims seek to achieve: if not a miracle, then it is the profound feeling that something – someone – has control, a deeper work that will never be understood. It is that exact sensation I did not get while in Rome: the enormity of the architecture coupled with what it represented did not uplift me but rather overcame me. Florence Nightingale had the opposite reaction to the same edifice and the same representation of the Holy See; she experienced an interaction with the divine and became euphoric.

In order to have such a religious connection, pilgrims can go through a number of different steps and do a variety of activities deemed “customary” to get themselves in the correct frame of mind. In the Vatican, such activities abound: on the Aventine Hill is a gateway with a keyhole through which the distant dome of St. Peter can be seen (Sheen 104), in the basilica itself is a statue of St. Peter, whose right foot the pious kiss (Sheen 116-117), finally, there is the cap to the religious experience: seeing the Pope.

In many accounts of people who have gone to Rome, they describe at length when and where they saw the Pope, what he said and what ceremonies he performed, regardless of their religious fervor. However, when it is the description of a pilgrim in search of a



revelation or a reinforcement of his or her belief, the description is ecstatic, rather than mechanical:

No royal sovereign has ever achieved such an effect...one sees not one Pope but the last Pope in an unbroken chain of Popes stretching back into the mists of Time, beyond the Renaissance into the Middle Ages, and still back into the Dark Ages, to the Catacombs, to Imperial Rome itself – to St. Peter. (Sheen 119-120)

The Pope serves not only as the head of the Papacy – the role also makes him the physical manifestation of the history of the Church, the representation of a long line of leaders of Catholicism. This heritage can inspire awe even in nonbelievers; this long, uncut thread of leaders into the distant past lends the Church much of its power, the weight of hundreds of years of tradition. What the Pope really serves to do is to marry history with what grand architecture imparts: the notion that the history in the books is still very much alive, in structure and in the human being assigned to be the caretaker of the Catholic congregation of the world.

*The guts of the cathedral are awful; I feel swaddled, bound, smothered, gagged, by the space. There is no place for my eye to rest because of all of the ornamentation; it is clearly a place where many people have spent a lot of money. My breath comes faster, I can feel the blood draining from my face. For once I am the first person out of the cathedral.*

There are other popular Catholic religious sites – that is, sites other than the trio of Rome, Santiago de Comostela and Jerusalem – that still get a lot of traffic, such as Fatima, Portugal; the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico; and Lourdes, France. There are fewer travel accounts of people who go to these places, but there are still some, such as James Martin, who writes of his experience in Lourdes in his book *My Life with the Saints*; he goes to see the healing fountain and shrine of Bernadette Souborious, a girl

who saw the Virgin Mary on several occasions in a filthy grotto of Lourdes in 1858 (Martin 129-136).

Martin has two main reasons for visiting Bernadette's shrine: the combination of a documentary, *The Song of Bernadette*, and the offer of the Knights of Malta who offer Martin, a Jesuit priest, the position of chaplain for their upcoming trip to Lourdes (138). The idea that had been in the back of his mind come to fruition; Martin accepts the offer.

Over the course of his short stay in Lourdes, Martin takes part in many of the ceremonies and activities related to the saint: rosary processions, visits to the baths, masses, and so on. During his account (a series of journal entries), he describes how he was moved at several points: on his first visit to the spring, he writes, "I am filled with wonder at being here" (140); in his first evening rosary procession, he professes to be "overcome by the sight of this procession of faith: *malades* and the able-bodied, of all ages, from across the globe. It seems a vision of what the world could be" (141). For Martin, the pilgrimage gives him the opportunity to see his religion in a different light: the things he would have overlooked in his everyday life are intensified by his observations and participation in the rites. It is not an accident that his most intense experiences occur when he first takes part in the ceremonies – the newness of the procedure as well as the quantity of people around him heighten his senses, mix with his faith, and produce a strong reaction.

What is refreshing (though decidedly sermon-like) about Martin's account is that moments of humor – of realism – are interspersed with his moments of religious clarity; this is not to say that humor is completely separated from pilgrims' accounts, but that it is rare and does not generally have to do with religion itself. The most extreme comic

moment is Martin's first, sleepless night in Lourdes: "I finally climb into bed, after almost thirty-six hours awake. I'm sharing a room with Brian, who I discover is a champion snorer...Maybe this is part of a spiritual discipline that God is asking me to accept. I say a rosary" (141). Later – after giving up all hope of sleep – Martin wanders the streets, looking for another hotel room. Unfortunately for him, he ends up walking into a plate glass window, convincing a hotel clerk that he is drunk. The next day, as Martin walks past the hotel in question the clerk "smiles slyly at me and waggles his finger at me as if to say, 'I know all about your revelry last night, Father'" (143). The entire account smacks of the ridiculous, but with a quality that makes it eminently possible: the humor grounds Martin's religious experiences so that they can be more readily accepted as reality by the reader.

The humor Martin uses becomes instrumental as the account comes to a close: on his final day in Lourdes, he is struck by the thought that if saints such as Bernadette Suboribus receive visions and messages from God in the ugliest backwater of the town, today's visions could well be experienced in bathrooms. Only a few minutes later, an elderly man asks to speak to him privately. The man relates an experience he had had in the healing baths of the grotto earlier that day: a voice had spoken to him in the men's bathroom, absolving him of his sins. Martin reassures the man: "He is surprised when I say that I was just thinking that a bathroom would not be such a bad place for a religious experience. And though it's unexpected, it makes sense: a grace received in a clear and distinct way while on pilgrimage" (150). While Martin does not use the word "miracle," the reader is left under no doubt as to what the old man spoke of. It is the unforeseen

which allows such experiences to happen – much as how the right humor can lighten a terrible situation without cheapening it.

We can draw from the idea of devout pilgrimage the balance between planned enlightenment and surprises (divine or otherwise) that crop up along the way, reshaping faith. The difference between planned enlightenment and the element of surprise is that some people go on pilgrimage expecting religious experiences and that some go on pilgrimage with no real expectations of deep personal change or illumination, even though it usually happens – though most pilgrims that travel for religious reasons experience a mixture of the two, as Martin does. This is in contrast to the people that go to religious places without the expectation of enlightenment – such as my experience in Rome, for example.

The novelty of new experiences and different settings allow people to be open to this reshaping of their character, to the realizations that manifest themselves. What may not be obvious at home is stunningly clear while abroad, when one is surrounded by likeminded people, in a setting home to religious heritage. In other words, the devout are drawn to places where others have had profound experiences; pilgrims seek a taste of those experiences for themselves.

#### Botched or Well-Intentioned Pilgrimage

*Outside, it is almost noon. A crowd has gathered at one end of the piazza; we decide to wait and see what is going to happen. After noon had struck, the Pope comes onto a small balcony, waits for the cheers to die down, and speaks. His voice wavers, he sings off-key, and even at such a distance he appears to me to be bone-weary. I feel sorry for him, even though my body has rejected his Church. At long last, he withdraws and we turn away and forget, lost in our plans.*

Not every pilgrimage is successful. For some, that can mean a lack of religious enlightenment; for others, such as James Boswell, it can mean that good intentions often go awry. Boswell is a well known traveler who lived and traveled in the eighteenth century; one of his most known works is the journal he kept while on his Grand Tour of Europe, from 1763 to 1766. Boswell spent several months in Rome in 1765 during his Tour, during which he was expected to take in as much culture as possible before returning home to his responsibilities. During his trip, Boswell struggled with what he needed to do to build his character and decide what he truly wanted, including a period of time in Rome where he struggled with religion.

Boswell's first mention of his visits to the Vatican are cursory and his observations analytical; he comments on the art and the ceremonies the Pope conducts, telling nothing of any personal reaction to the rites:

[The Pope] made the round of the church and gave his blessing to the whole congregation, who knelt before his Holiness. Then he took his place on a sort of throne, where, after he had performed certain sacred rites of which I understood nothing, people kissed his slipper. After this there was a procession of Roman girls who had received dowries from a public foundation, some to be married and some to become nuns. They marched in separate groups, the nuns coming last and wearing crowns. Only a few of them were pretty, and most of the pretty ones were nuns. It was a curious enough function (Boswell 60).

Boswell's strongest reaction was not to seeing the Pope or witnessing the ceremony, but to the attractiveness of the girls presented before the crowd – though it is also pertinent to mention that Boswell had a habit of contracting venereal disease and was known for his baser appetites. To say the least, Boswell was not known for being a fervent Christian.

However, Boswell changed his mind between the 25<sup>th</sup> of March (the day of the above episode) and the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, when Boswell expresses how moved he had been during a Mass officiated by the Pope: “Universal silence; perfect devotion. Was quite in frame; thought it *one* way of adoring the Father of the universe, and was certain no death for ever” (65). It is uncertain if this change of heart was occurring from within Boswell or if it was prompted by the piety of the crowd, though it does show that he wanted to make life changes, as is also shown in his journal entry a few days later: “swear no women for a week” (65). At the very least, Boswell shows that he at least makes the effort, even mentioning a trip to St. Peter to pray fervently to “drive away melancholy” and to “behave calm and decent, and at last die a worthy old laird” (66). This “melancholy” could be his wanderlust or his need for sex, but whatever it symbolizes, it shows that Boswell would like to obey his father and his culture, be satisfied with the life he has been given – though the way in which he hopes to reinvent himself clashes with his character. It does not appear that he has any prevailing anti-Catholic views (though it is worthwhile to mention that he grew up in Presbyterian Scotland), but rather that he hopes to encourage some sort of religion inside himself that just will not grow.

Boswell’s ruminations about religion largely disappear until he mentions observations he wrote about faith, saying that he was “perfectly impartial” in his analysis and that it could make “a very good essay” (68). It is also his last note about religion, though his search to better himself continues. In a letter he writes to Rousseau a month later, he tells the philosopher that he had not been behaving as well as he had intended, but that he was trying again and that “Patience is necessary” (81). It is quite apparent that Boswell had attempted reformation through religion and that it had not gone as well as he

had hoped, that his intentions and will to behave properly were not enough for the proclivities of his character.

*I spend the majority of time on the way to Santiago looking out the train car's window. I am supposed to be studying for my upcoming exam, but find myself hypnotized by the passing scenery. Every now and then I finger the pages of notes in front of me, or touch the Japanese coin resting on the table.<sup>2</sup>*

There are other pilgrims who have less-than-satisfactory experiences, even with true religious feeling; one such pilgrim is Walter Starkie, who wrote about the Camino and Santiago de Compostela. Starkie hiked the Camino in 1953 and gives every impression of being a righteous, devout man along the way. When he finally reaches and goes inside the cathedral, Starkie is struck by the Gate of Glory, which he spends several pages expounding upon:

Often, on my pilgrimage, I had thought of this moment. As I gazed at the central tympanum where Christ sits enthroned and surrounded by angels, saints, and the rest of the glorified company, the words of the Apocalypse came to my mind: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Starkie 309)

Starkie is uplifted and inspired by the cathedral and its art, making connections not only to himself but to history and religion, as many pious pilgrims do. However, when he reaches the crypt of the church – where (supposedly) lie the remains of Saint James – he is less than impressed: "When we descended the narrow steps to the crypt beneath the high altar, I felt a sense of disillusion as I recalled the description given by Aymery Picaud of the fairylike subterranean church, ablaze with lights and flashing jewels and fragrant with oriental perfumes" (314). Starkie spends barely any time after

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<sup>2</sup> [Pilgrims that Cheat](#)

this in description of the crypt or what he feels while there. Instead – in stark contrast to the Gate of Glory – Starkie is put out that what he had read does not match reality, rather than getting his own impressions of that part of the cathedral and making religious connections, as he did before. For someone who spent such time and effort in getting to Santiago to see this very part of this very cathedral, it must have been brutal for Starkie to realize that the dream he had been walking towards was to him just that, a vision.

Even though Starkie's experience was suboptimal, it does not mean that he does not walk away with new knowledge or insight. He expresses admiration for those pilgrims who came before him, what trials they must have endured to get to Santiago, and what they must have felt upon arrival, how the cathedral was a busy, important religious space (317-318). But Starkie saves what is most important for the final paragraph of his book, when he writes of a monk who became entranced by the sound of a bird singing – “When the bird ceased, he heard the monastery bell calling him to prayer, but all the world had changed and none of the monks recognized him, for the bird's entrancing song had lasted a hundred years” (324). In Starkie's mind, going to Santiago was a way of being brought back in time, of losing the “real” world, of immersing himself in religion and history, being a part of something larger that the outside world can not understand. Even though Starkie did not have a completely satisfactory experience, there is no doubt that he walked away from it with the memory of a fully experienced, intense pilgrimage. Where Boswell blundered and was rendered incapable of religious feeling due to his character, Starkie was on the whole completed by his experience, though disappointed that what he had expected was not real.



## Non-Religious or Ambivalent Pilgrimage

*My first view of the cathedral is through the hostel's window, lit up against the night sky. I feel a thrill. Later, we walk through the streets until we reach the Obradorio, the square in front of the church, which is mostly deserted. We spend several long moments just staring at it, thinking about the next day, when we will be allowed to enter.*

Many of the accounts I have detailed here have been historical; not many contemporary accounts have been analyzed. This is not a coincidence; many of the pilgrimages that occur today have little religious grounding and are, at least in part, due to a need to simply escape, to *go somewhere*: pilgrimages in name only. The old adage that the journey is more important than the destination is doubly true in this sense, as the majority of the accounts of pilgrimage in modern times express, in one way or another, this sentiment. It is good to note that while these accounts make up the majority, they are not the only ones: there are still a number of modern-day religious accounts, or at the very least, religious reasons for pilgrimage, such as my motivation for going to Santiago.

Lee Hoinacki's pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is emblematic of nonreligious pilgrimage. He does not set out on the Camino for religious reasons but is instead fueled by curiosity: "What drew [pilgrims] to a tomb that was, in the beginning, nothing more substantial than a hermit's solitary retreat in the countryside? I concluded that there was but one way to find out: To walk to Compostela myself" (Hoinacki xi). Hoinacki's mission is not to find religion, or even find himself: it is completely fueled by curiosity, to see what could draw so many people across such distances to the shrine.

At the end of his pilgrimage, Hoinacki is still mulling over what compels so many to travel to Santiago, thinking about how now he, too, is part of the culture of the Camino, that though he follows the path of many, everyone seeks something different: “I know...that each of us is very different; each seeks his or her own grace, an intimate, incommunicable secret in each soul” (270). If pilgrims today do not seek religion, they seek answers for questions they keep to themselves – a concept very enlightening about Hoinacki himself: he shows us that even though his pilgrimage to Santiago first starts as something to pass the time, it grows to encompass larger and more personal issues; it also shows that he thinks that grace is something that every pilgrim searches for through some version of introspection.

Hoinaki arrives at Santiago before the city has woken up, and in the perfect, unexpected silence, is confounded and amazed by what he feels with his first view of the cathedral from the Obradoiro; these feelings continue as he finds a place to sit down and think: “In some sense, I’ve joined those who came before me...If they had not sanctified the path with their faith, their courage, their very lives...If they had not accompanied me, I would never have been able to bear the pain and exhaustion, as I learned on the very first day” (272). What is so sacred and unimpeachable to him is that he is now part of a larger, grander picture, which has and will continue to impact people’s lives, a living history, a personal connection to the past.

Hoinacki’s impressions are not alone in a vacuum: another pilgrim, Cees Nootboom, a Dutchman who traveled the Camino by car, felt much the same – “It is impossible to believe and yet I believe it: there are some places in the world where one is mysteriously magnified on arrival or departure by the emotions by all those who have

arrived and departed before” (Nootboom 3). People associate very real power with well-traveled, historic places, with the emotions other people felt in the years past, that connection people feel by walking the same road and touching the same stones as innumerable others have before them. For example, at Santiago de Compostela, there is a handprint on one of the columns: it was formed through centuries of pilgrims placing their right hand on the same spot, slowly wearing down the stone. Today pilgrims continue the tradition, reverently continuing the erosion of the stone. The handprint, as well as the Camino in general, provides a connection between the people that went before as well as the people to come, forming a heritage between faceless people that will never be able to know each other.

Nootboom, too, has strong reactions to seeing the cathedral for the first time, sitting on a hill overlooking the city, thinking of those who had come before, struck by the sheer magnitude of their history. As he prepares himself to leave for the city, he thinks, “Here I am at last, now I can arrive in Santiago” (333) – it is as though Nootboom needed to have this moment with the history of Santiago before entering into the heart of it.

After that point, Nootboom’s reactions are focused mainly on the architecture and his own memories, with the exception of one experience, visiting “la oficina de peregrinación” (the office of pilgrimage) in Santiago – in this office the records of the number and nationality of pilgrims are kept, as well as where certificates of pilgrimage are given out. Nootboom speaks with the priest in charge of keeping the ledger of pilgrims; during this conversation, the priest flips through the pages until he “spotted a Dutchman, a chemistry teacher, ‘not a believer,’ motive: ‘thinking.’ He had appreciated

that, he said, people came up with the oddest motives, but ‘thinking’ was seldom among them” (340). This experience of Nootboom’s sticks out in the overall landscape of the book, suggests that this – thinking – is the real reason to go on pilgrimage. Whether religion is the overt reason for going on such a journey or not, what all of the authors have in common is that they think deeply about their voyage; there is something about walking for a long time that fosters and rears new ideas and new ways of thinking, perspectives that can change the hiker’s viewpoint on life. For those that do not walk the entire pilgrimage, such as myself, this process happens much more slowly and in snatches, in between the bursts of activity of everyday life. It is harder to get the same kind of clarity, but for the pilgrims who spend enough time thinking about their lives in context with where they wish to go, personal revelations are still possible, with enough introspection.

*The next day, we make our way to the cathedral, following the crowd back to the plaza and up the steps. Many people are milling about inside; it is easy to tell which people walked the Camino, as they smell the worst and still wear their hiking boots. We slowly walk around the church; I wait until I am directly in front of the altar before looking at it. I am taken aback by the gaudiness of it, but am comforted by its age and its tarnish.*

For some secular pilgrims, the reasons for leaving are mainly based on the need for self discovery, such as Babette Gallard, an equestrian who traveled both the Camino and the Via Francigena (which runs from Canterbury to Rome) with her husband. On the eve of their trip to Saniago, their motivations were threefold: first, to emulate Alan Marshall, an author of books on equestrian travel (Gallard 2006 15); second, to stave off boredom (15); and third, to see how such a journey could change them (16-17). Their travels become fraught with unforeseen perils but also with personal change and a sense

of achievement. When they finally reach Santiago, they find a place to board the horses and then “we do what every pilgrim has to do, stand in front of that massive cathedral, stare like goldfish and say ‘we’ve done it’” (231). However, this culmination of their trip is not what they are doing it for: “We don’t know what to say because the whole experience has been about getting here, the journey” (233). For the two of them, seeing the cathedral is not really the point: being there at the Obradoiro is symbolic of their overall achievement, a test of teamwork that they are able to pass and which they can relish in this moment.

The couple undertakes their second pilgrimage to Rome for different reasons: after completing the Camino, Gallard and her husband were hooked on the pilgrimage experience, euphoric because they had succeeded in their mission (Gallard 2007 8). Another key difference is in their arrival: Gallard spends barely any time describing her and her husband’s reactions to the conclusion of their adventure (three pages): arriving in Rome is not a joyous event, but one colored by resignation, described as “anticlimactic” (178). However, this in no way means that the experience was worthless – again, the process was the most important element, rather than the arrival: “we cut across countries and cultures without any buffers between us and the communities we encountered on the way. This has been a sometimes tough, sometimes humbling experience, during which we learnt more about ourselves and the human race than we could ever have anticipated” (181-182). Rather than have the conclusion of their journey be the point of the whole venture, it was merely the end. Many religious pilgrimage experiences put the destination on a pedestal, and the arrival at that destination the culmination of everything the pilgrim has worked for, as was seen with Walter Starkie’s account; for Gallard, the culmination

of the voyage happens *during* the pilgrimage. However, this does mean that Gallard and those like her are less likely to get the same satisfaction at completing a pilgrimage – as she shows very well in Rome, when she expresses her resignation – finishing is not about seeing or feeling something amazing, about thinking about religion, or even about pondering life.

*We walk up the stairs behind the altar, looking over St. James' shoulder before descending again, this time into the crypt of the saint, who is entombed in a silver-covered box several feet behind a grate. This is what I came to see, and I break out in goosebumps.*

## Conclusion

Everyone that undertakes pilgrimage today is informed by religious and spiritual motives; we can argue that religious reasons for travel can be characterized as another type of spiritual travel, as the aim is very similar in both: “Today’s pilgrimage is part of a larger cultural focus on the accumulation of experiences combined with ‘spiritual growth’” (Swatos 37). Experiences had while on pilgrimage amplify the changes that occur internally, giving the journey its significance: without the experience of being on the pilgrimage, the journey cannot have the same spiritual or religious experience.

Starkie contends that pilgrimages themselves are a “primitive instinct” (323) that have expressed themselves throughout history, and which are even more important now than they were before, as they slow down the pace of a sped-up world. Starkie finds the immaculately planned, easy trips that many take to be unpalatable – this from in a book written in 1957, to say nothing of how the trends of 50 years ago have given fruit to

today's travel packages – and that pilgrimages, where the experiences are intense and nothing is taken for granted, escape from this norm and are able to access that deep instinct (Starkie 323-324). It gives the traveler purpose, as Hoinacki finds at the prospect of finishing his journey: “Today I will go no further...I will not climb any more mountains...The pain is past, the thrills are over, the magic is finished” (273). At the end of his pilgrimage, Hoinacki is confronted with not only a lack of purpose, but also with reality, that he must now return to his everyday life, in which he does not face difficulties or grow as a person. However, this may be a pitfall of being a spiritually-driven pilgrim: the absence of religion deprives the traveler of the satisfaction of accessing the “bigger picture,” the religious tones of the place to which they have peregrinated, something I saw and experienced for myself in Santiago.

It takes a certain kind of person to be a pilgrim – just as it takes a particular type of character to be a tourist – as Collins-Kreiner and Kliot explain: “The pilgrim and the ‘pilgrim-tourist’ peregrinate toward their socio-cultural centre, while the traveler and the ‘traveler-tourist’ move in the opposite direction” (65). Essentially, this means that Catholics feel compelled to go to Rome or Lourdes because they are looking for a religious home, and that honeymooners go to Bali or Hawaii to escape their homes, in whatever respect that might be. In this sense, all of the authors in this section of the essay can be characterized: those that go home (the devout) and those that escape (those looking for adventure).

Pilgrims can also be characterized as people looking for philosophical enlightenment, which is a premeditated act of will, and those looking for religious enlightenment, an act of surrender (Budd 124). Here, too, the authors can be grouped.

However, some authors, such as Babette Gallard and Cees Nooteboom, reached an enlightenment that was not so definite an enlightenment as a “premeditated act of will” might have us believe – or, for that matter, some may not have reached enlightenment at all. For others, such as James Martin and Florence Nightingale, their enlightenment is very clear: by immersing themselves in the religious structures, they reach the religious plane they seek. Of course, for some it is doubtful whether enlightenment ever truly occurred at all – for example, it is obvious that James Boswell wanted to change, but whether that change occurred during his pilgrimage to Rome is dubious, if not outright laughable.

Of course, not all pilgrimage sites are religious – such American locations include Graceland, Gettysburg, Mt. Rushmore, and the Alamo (Campo 40) – but it does not mean that the feelings there are not genuine and intense. Daniel Budd, for example, traveled to Jung’s home in Küsnacht in Switzerland and felt what many pilgrims feel for religious sites – that it is sacred – made so because Budd had built it up in his mind to be so (120). Budd sees Jung’s home in a way that many other people probably never do: he romanticizes his journey and makes Küsnacht into a religious place. In his essay, he argues that insight that is gained abroad is not conceived there, that all intuition was sleeping inside the mind until it traveled to another location: “An insight is never recognized in its own country but will often be hailed as inspiration if it carries a foreign address” (123). Perhaps the overused idea that everyone becomes who they were meant to be, regardless of specific circumstances, is true: that all of the travelers detailed here were not changing their life, taking themselves off of a prescribed track and laying a new one, but were actually journeying in the direction they were always going to go. Martin



was meant to have a new, more firm faith in miracles; Gallard was meant to find a life as a wanderer and author; Boswell was meant to be in a near-permanent struggle with his base desires and his need to better himself. I was meant to be repulsed by Rome and to be enlivened by Santiago de Compostela.

In the end, each wanderer came into contact with a place that he or she had been thinking about over the course of the entire trip. Whether the reaction was that of being moved, of joy, resignation, or distaste, each person came into contact with something that had once been abstract and was then made real: “There is something about seeing a sacred place, that, in a way, demystifies it. It also makes it, and all it represents, more real” (Budd 121). By arriving at and then interacting with their destination, each author validated his or her entire experience, validated whatever had led up to his or her decision to go on pilgrimage, to venture into the unsafe or unknown.

*I take the coin out of my pocket, warm it in my hands. I spend several minutes thinking, kneeling on the crimson velvet-covered hassock, trying to block out the people chattering away behind me, taking flash photography. Finally, gathering my resolve, I throw the coin through the bars of the grate; it strikes the stone floor three times before rolling under the saint's casket. For once, the chatter and the photography stops. I stay a moment longer and then stand to leave. I am uplifted with the feeling that I have completed something I was meant to do.*

## V. Traveling vs. Tourism

### Introduction

One of the main things that people take with them when they go away from home is their identity – their nationality, their personality – but there is also the identity they use only while abroad. This “alter-ego” is that of a tourist or that of a traveler, the middle-aged man in a Hawaiian shirt and camera or the young woman in a pair of hiking boots and backpack – and whether that young woman represents me remains to be seen.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a “tourist” is someone who goes on a tour (hence the etymology of the word) or someone who travels for pleasure, culture, or to view places of significance. This indicates planned transience, travel in places that are interesting or relaxing and which pose no immediate social or physical harm (“Tourist”). Under this definition, places such as Disneyland, Mount Rushmore, and Gettysburg could draw tourists, whereas places such as the Appalachian Trail, the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., and the site of the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre (now a parking lot) would be of diminished popularity for tourists. It is also important to remember that with tourism usually comes the tourist industry, which expressly supports tourists: lodging, restaurants, and locations and events for visiting groups of people.

The definition of a “traveler” is more vague, a transient who goes from location to location, a person on a journey, a wayfarer – a description that could fit people who never leave their homes. The concept of a traveler becomes more clear when the word is broken down – what does it mean to *travel*? The Oxford English Dictionary states that “travel”

not only implies going from point A to point B, but also means “torment, distress; to suffer affliction; to labour, toil; to suffer the pains of parturition.” The root of the word extends from the verb “to travail” – which begs the question, if this is what travel is meant to entail, why do people do it? What is travel, really? What is it for? Further definitions of “travel” indicate that travel does not entail getting to a destination, but rather that it is based on the experience of getting there, the process that eventually leads to a conclusion (“Travel”). The dictionary does not specify whether the conclusion of a traveler’s journey is more mental than physical, but I believe that we can safely say that this is the case. Where tourism is defined more by psychological and bodily comfort, travel is more about thinking and risk.

I will discuss themes both tourists and travelers face when they go abroad, then expand on the definition of what it means to be a tourist or a traveler, explaining why they are different. This distinction is important to know because it enables us to understand why people behave the way they do while abroad; this is not to say that everyone is a pure tourist or a pure traveler, but it is useful to know the extremes of the spectrum before introducing nuance. Finally, I hope to answer two central questions – what inspires us to take these journeys into the unknown? Why does it affect us so much?

#### Tourism: Its Benefits and its Detriments

*In nearly all of the major cities, I take a tour. Paris, Rome, Dublin, Edinburgh: I enjoy them and yet always feel sheepish, shuffling along with the rest of the crowd. I compulsively take notes and photographs, my eyes the size of dinner plates. I keep track of my bag at all times.*

Tourism as we know it has existed since the 1950s, when transportation was faster and cheaper than ever before; people responded by going to repositories of culture, enraptured with the foreignness of what they were experiencing. In reality, it succeeded in bridging gaps between cultures but also by introducing aspects of Western culture that make everything seem the same (Blanton 23). This “sameness” came from the generalization that where there are tourists, there are specific expectations: it is why a tourist can locate a McDonald’s in virtually every corner of the world. However, the purpose of tourism is not simply the idea of eating a cheap hamburger on every continent.

Tourism can be a form of escape from the everyday – all anyone needs to reference are the advertisements for cruise ships or island getaways. However, there are more reasons for people to leave their “real” lives, as tourism can, in other words: “represent a symbolic quest for the kinds of authentic experiences that elude modern society” (Stronza 277). Unfortunately, what tourism can show in this instance is a large demographic of people who are unsatisfied with their culture, as they cannot access experiences that are “authentic” enough for them – experiences that make them feel alive and make them feel as though they are seeing, if not a part of, something real. In other words, “tourism...provide[s] tourists with authenticated experiences and accounts of the ‘world out there’” (Hummon 180). This again displays dissatisfaction with the status quo at home, that the “world in here” is not nearly as great as the world outside, that tourists require a change from what they know at home, something they have in common with travelers (Nash 462). Tourism provides access to these experiences and opportunities while safely packaging them in tours and in hotels with luxury spas.

Tourism can also denote an important life event: for example, it can mark transitions such as weddings, periods of renewal, or retirement. These periods after change serve a ritualistic function; by acting as the opposite to “real life,” tourism validates the transition that happened in the tourist’s life (Hummon 181). These kinds of tourists sometimes have aspects of travelers, such as the artists that travel to paint new landscapes or retirees that spend more time with the people of the area rather than behind cameras: these people may still engage in touristic opportunities, but they also look beyond the tours and performances.

Tourism can be beneficial not only for the tourist, but also for the cultures that tourists patronize: not only do the host cultures gain income from selling goods and services, but there the hosts can also place greater cultural value on “traditional” practices. For example, once it became clear that tourists wanted to see tribal dances in Bali, new dances were created (Iyer 2001, 144). Ostensibly, the new dances were for the tourists, but the outcome also forged greater pride in the heritage of Bali.

*I love seeing flamenco in Seville, but am uncomfortable in the knowledge that the entire audience is made up of tourists. Are we, the foreign spectators, the only ones keeping the art alive? I decide that if this is the case, it is better to have this art than to lose it – and how wonderful it must be to have an audience for every performance that sees the music and the dance with new eyes, in awe.<sup>3</sup>*

For many people, tourism has a significantly bad reputation: tourists who fit the stereotype tend to be crass (“everything’s better at home”) and cannot understand that speaking louder does not mean that anyone will understand them. For every culture, there is a slightly different stereotype:

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<sup>3</sup> [Journey Into the Land of Tired But Happy Feet \(Seville Edition\)](#)

There are bespectacled Japanese who fret because the Roman sightseeing buses are seldom on time, and sturdy hiking Germans who scorn buses, and French visitors who flatten themselves against medieval walls trying to photograph the narrow street without being run over, and excited Americans who on hot days do not deign to alight from air-conditioned transport to see the stones. (Hamblin 11)

What reaction is unable to take place in each of these kinds of tourists? When all a tourist can see is a timetable, personal comfort, or the purely visual, do they recognize that they no longer are able to interact and identify with a place? West paraphrases MacCannell (1999) by saying “increasingly, the idea of a “tourist” has come to mean someone who is content with an inauthentic experience” (West 600). There is a duality in the tourism industry: either the amplification of authenticity and traditional culture or a disintegration of the culture to fit the stereotype of the tourists – to give the visitors what they want.

An example of this inauthenticity is the tribal dances that are done for tourists in parts of Kenya: what the tourists see is a version of the ritual engineered to fit a stage and to make foreigners comfortable in a situation they know, that of being in an audience. However, the “real version” of these dances is highly interactive and serves greater ritual purposes than for entertainment only (Kaspin 55). The meaning of the dances fades and only the spectacle remains, with the tourists none the wiser. The changed rituals of local cultures are described by Pico Iyer as a “whole new realm of exotica” that arises “out of the way that one culture colors and appropriates the products of another” (Iyer 2001, 148-149). The tourists expected a certain ritual to be preformed, so the Kenyans gave it to them, letting the visitors see a different version than the reality, just as tourists to the South Pacific expect piercings and grass skirts where there may be none in local culture, just as how flamenco is advertised in parts of Spain not known for flamenco – what the tourists want to see is provided.

Tourists' willingness to see their own versions of various cultures allows them to put on blinders against what can sometimes be a gristly reality: tourists who flock to Greece see resplendent sun-soaked stone temples and may never see the political unrest simmering underneath the veneer of the tourist destinations. For example, at the same time that Kaspin saw the Kenyan ritual dance, the Kenyan president had been kidnapped and presumed dead, something which never reached the ears of the tourists until they returned home: "Not only did the tour services direct us toward a commoditized traditional culture, but with equal facility, they had steered us away from the problematic aspects of contemporary African life" (55). Tourism, for all of its benefits, can be deceptive, allowing tourists to believe themselves in an Eden when in actuality, the apple may have already fallen from the tree.

*Pauline and I loved Glen Coe and the town of Kinlochleven, despite the somewhat brown dreariness of the April season. The mountains rose jaggedly toward the sky, counteracted by the clear lake beneath. We climb a path most of the way up one of those mountains, keeping to the rocky path, sometimes slipping and grabbing onto trees. On our way up, we stop to look long at a waterfall, falling tall from the rocky crag above to the pool below. We close our eyes and listen to the sound of the water.*<sup>4</sup>

Because of mainstream tourism's bad reputation, many people have instead turned to other kinds of tourism and other varieties of travel. One of the newest forms is ecotourism, which focuses on responsible tourism, usually to places with abundant and beautiful nature or with "genuine" aboriginal cultures. This brand of tourism is meant to be educational, focusing on increasing "environmental awareness" and "cultural sensitivity" (Stronza 278). Of course, ecotourism can still be vulnerable to the pitfalls of conventional tourism – such as the idealization of natives or the degeneration of local

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<sup>4</sup> [Communing With the Mountains for Some Solace](#)

wildlife or heritage sites – but for many tourists, it is the lesser of the two evils (West 599-600). That escape from mainstream tourism was one of the things that Pauline and I loved most about Kinlochleven, because we were able to escape the stereotype of traditional tourism.

From here, people diverge from what is strictly classified as “tourism”: for example, there are people who travel to various places in order to perform scientific experiments or to observe for anthropological or ecological reasons. These people do not identify themselves as tourists; for that matter, they pride themselves on being different: “When scientific tourists represent their travels as scientific in nature, they are using the language of science to negate the tourism aspect of their travels” (West 611). This is not to say that these visitors are not actually tourists, but the purpose of their mission is meant to distance themselves from what they see as distasteful. Study abroad students use the same guise to shed the idea of tourism – the act of setting out to learn in a different setting is meant to distance the student from the tourist, when at times there is very little learning going on and very much touring. I was able to see my classmates fall into either category – or the great space in between – but was uncertain of where I fell. This was of tantamount importance to me, as I found tourism repugnant.

Those farthest from the generalization of tourism are the (self-defined) travelers, the people who leave their assumptions and comforts at home in favor of openness to the new and unfamiliar (Iyer, Theroux 143). “True travel” is meant to be everything that tourism cannot allow: travelers are meant to see cultures as they are, to try to understand and integrate themselves into the fabric of life, to meet people on their own terms. In other words, “Travel is the best way we have of rescuing the humanity of places, and



saving them from abstraction and ideology” (Iyer, Theroux 144). What people are meant to do is to look into the eyes of another person, someone who may not speak their language, and to converse with them on an organic, real level, so that the conversation does not happen between a visitor and a native, but between two people.

## Culture Shock and Clash

*I'm on the bus back from Pamplona late in the evening, reading and looking out the window. After asking the man in front of me to turn his music down, we strike up a conversation. Turns out, he's from Nigeria and lives in Spain for business. I don't know if it's a Nigerian custom, but he keeps on saying "You understand?" whenever he makes a point. My teeth are grinding together by the time we get back to Bilbao.<sup>5</sup>*

Today's travel is much faster than it has ever been: now we can catch a plane and be on the other side of the world in ten hours, be transplanted into a different society and culture, sometimes seemingly out of the blue. This sometimes makes it hard for travelers or tourists to differentiate between cultures and sometimes makes it harder to adapt (Iyer 2000, 26-27). That temporary failure to adapt is often called "culture shock," "a state of distress or disorientation brought about by sudden immersion or subjection to an unfamiliar culture" ("Culture"). In more practical terms, culture shock goes through a series of three phases: the "honeymoon period," where everything about the different culture is new and fabulous; a low period, marked by fear, anger, or depression; and finally, there is a leveling out of emotions in which the traveler or tourist feels a balance between the honeymoon phase and the depressive phase, which lasts until he or she goes home again.

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<sup>5</sup> [The Day I Didn't Get Mauled By Bulls](#)

The adjustment phase of culture shock is underscored by fragility and awareness of possible failure on the part of the visitor: “the quality that underwrites all of this is vulnerability, the exposedness we feel whenever we’re in a place we don’t understand, but compounded many times over when we’ve just descended thirty thousand feet” (Iyer 2000, 67). Iyer is not writing about culture shock at this juncture, but this is the exact feeling culture shock inspires in many people; it explains why people react in anger or in sadness once they hit the second phase, when they realize that they are essentially placeless. The possibilities drug the tourist or the traveler into euphoria, the hangover sets in, and then he or she sails on an even keel from there – hypothetically, at least.

Sometimes culture shock can inspire adverse reactions in visitors – generally those that experience the worst backlash from their host culture are tourists, due to their unwillingness to see outside of their tours or plans, though travelers are not immune. One response of a group is to huddle closer together, circling the wagons against the unfamiliar: a “direct consequence of tourist-host contact is the anxiety inherent in strangerhood. People respond to stranger anxiety in a variety of ways. One response on the tourist side is to clump together against the host ‘enemy’” (Nash 467). These are the tourists who walk as one unit, not interacting with the locals, snapping photos without making eye contact.

Another common reaction is to try to “reform” or “improve” the natives of the area, especially in developing countries. Such reformation would include subject matter such as hygiene or education about what constitutes “civilized” behavior. Needless to say, this behavior makes relations between hosts and visitors more forced, impeding the understanding process crucial to identifying with the people of the area (West 605).

Lastly, there are always clashes of culture between people who come from different places, misunderstandings that can be infuriating, confusing, or intimidating – for example, many travelers and tourists are made uncomfortable by the European custom to greet friends with kissing or by the confusing accents of the people of different regions. In some cases, cultures expect haggling in the marketplace or expect reciprocity of gifts; people of the host culture can become angered when social dictates are not followed, as West observes (607). Whatever the reaction, if the tourist or traveler is lucky, these experiences will be a speedbump rather than a lasting impediment to a meaningful experience of the culture; in the end, if the visitor is lucky, he or she will realize that “speaking across a language [or culture] gap means speaking less to win than to communicate” (Iyer 2000, 291), and be able to take home humorous stories of his or her mishaps.

*It's one of my first days in Bilbao, and a group of us are going shopping for essentials; Dennyse's host sister Ana is showing us around Areeta and we follow her like ducklings. In one store (where we are pondering which shampoos to get), Ana's boyfriend comes in and introduces himself to us. He turns to me and leans in to kiss my cheek, only I get the side wrong. Under the scandalized gaze of all present, I come very close to kissing him on the mouth. My cheeks turn red and stay that way.<sup>6</sup>*

The extent to which each visitor has to cope with culture shock has now, overall, been diminished: that everyone who is anyone can recognize Will Smith and Beyoncé speaks to the reality, that the world has been globalized. Not only can everyone watch today's most famous movies and singers, but they can also eat foods from the same fast food chains and wear the same styles of clothing. It can be a great comfort for tourists and travelers to find all of the accoutrements of home in strange places – though what

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<sup>6</sup> [My Sweet Bed](#)

separates the two kinds of visitors usually depends upon whether or not they frequently choose to patronize these “homey” or familiar establishments. However, this is not the defining feature of a traveler or a tourist: what is defining is the visitor’s openness to new experiences, and in this case, new foods.

Tourism is intertwined with globalization, as the influx of people with different ideas and cultural experiences often cause change to the places they visit (Macleod 445-446); now even the most historical cities own contemporary fast food restaurants. After all, the international language is not Esperanto or even English, but something more fundamental: French fries. From the moment people disembark from their climate-controlled airplanes, through the climate-controlled, anonymous airports, they are conditioned to want to eat French fries in any of the national landmarks featured on the posters that line the gangway or the guidebooks they read while waiting for a taxi.

Aside from an insatiable desire for fries, there are other “downsides” to globalism: while any tourist can walk through the Chinatown of any major city in the United States or in other parts of the world, no one is allowed behind the curtain, no traveler is invited inside the home of a Chinese family. The visitors are allowed to walk the streets, smell the food cooking, buy the strange fruits, and receive a measure of the experience of what it must be like to “be Chinese,” but there is still a barrier between the visitor and the hearth of a stranger (Iyer 2000, 155). It is the fundamental need for a home that muddies the global waters, creating unhappy wanderers, people with no cultural berth: “Globalism made the world the playground of those with no one to play with” (Iyer 2000, 244). It is possible to know the cobbles of every street of a city but still be unable to know its people: globalism gives us the opportunity to recognize places for

their similarities and yet know nothing more than the name of the fruit vendor or the friendliness of the yappy dog at the coffee shop. Is globalism worth reducing culture shock when it makes everything the same and yet fundamentally unknowable? It comes down to being a matter of personal choice, but usually that choice is in favor of the authenticity of a region or culture.

### The Unexpected

*After my arrival in Limerick, I set out walking to get to my accommodations. I ask directions repeatedly and finally make my way to Ennis Road. I suddenly realize that the place I am looking for is pretty far down the street after being told twice that “Ennis Road is a big place.” I later learn that Ennis Road is several kilometers long and later joins with the N18 highway. Thanks a lot, Ireland.<sup>7</sup>*

A large part of traveling is that schedules and plans go awry; in the words of Lily Tomlin, “Things are going to get a lot worse before they get better” (Leo 26). This is not to say that all tweaks to the planned procedure are terrible; however, they tend to come across as catastrophe in the spirit of the moment. In many ways, travel, with its complicated machinations of connections, is too complex to run smoothly at all times, in a way that tourism (with its infrastructure) is not so vulnerable to:

Foreign travel simply does not always go smoothly. It *can't*. There are too many moving parts...If you can make peace with the concept of travel as comedy-writing-to-happen, then almost nothing can rob you of the deeper thrill of it. (Leo xvi)

What is a flawed matrix is also funny, in the same way that watching someone slip on a banana peel is funny: it is easy to see the slip coming, with the complications implicit in falling, but at the same time, the spectacle maintains its ludicrousness. Some situations

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<sup>7</sup> [Competitive Jaywalking](#)

mutate into something so bad that it can become sublime (Quammen 2001, 239); this is what memories are made of, not to mention good stories.

How visitors are willing to handle the advent of the unexpected is very telling of whether they are travelers or tourists: tourists are not very permissive (“according to the pamphlet...”) where travelers are more likely to laugh in the face of hardship: “I didn’t know where we were or what would happen next, yet I relished the anticipation of the unexpected. I like travel that resembles a chaotic Christmas, with mysterious gifts awaiting unveiling. Impending surprise turned my surroundings exotic” (Lee, Theroux 160). Travelers who are receptive to calamity and new direction can also be receptive to new ideas, to see the layers and the history of places not immediately obvious to the passerby (de Botton 242). Mishaps can often lead travelers down new roads, into the nooks and crannies of the areas they visit, so they can see the understory beneath the touristic veneer. I experienced this in Limerick: the process of being lost allowed me to see how people live there. I met a lot of people, but I also saw the university, the dodgy part of town, and the suburbs. My experience over the next couple of days while going through the town was greatly influenced by that first day and allowed me to get a fuller picture of the kinds of people that live in Limerick and what their lives are like: it made the adventure of the first day worthwhile. In the words of Henry David Thoreau, “He who rides and keeps the beaten track studies the fences chiefly” (78).

### Rerouting Expectations

*As I come to know more and more parts of Cork, I am shocked at the number of pubs and bars. But I still haven’t seen the one stereotype I came expecting – until I am showing the*

*twins, Nick and Dan, around the city. We are walking up the hill to the Shandon Belltower when we see an older, salt-and-pepper haired gentleman in a tweed suit stumble out of the pub and sway up the hill, presumably to his bed. I look at the twins and grin.*<sup>8</sup>

Often what is so unexpected about a place is how we perceive it; a visitor who has built up an idea or a reputation of a place in his or her mind often finds that expectation shattered. For some, the anticipation before travelling is better than traveling itself, as the myths the traveler or tourist has constructed about that place can still be in effect, without having to deal with the reality (de Botton 14). For others, such as Charles Baudelaire, it is the possibility inherent in travel: “When shall we set sail for happiness?” (de Botton 34). In truth, happiness is what most people are looking for, in one way or another, no matter what the more explicit reason may be; they are not looking for just a getaway or only for insight into the human condition, but are also looking for personal satisfaction.

Frequently the expectation – of travelers and tourists alike – is to find purity of some kind: an unadulterated culture, location, or experience (Blanton 47). For example, in the case of Africa “one finds a remarkable consistency in the imagery of primitivism, an African cultural identity embodied in reproducible images that many tourists already know from television” (Kaspin 55). In the instance of Africa, expectations are based on television and the media in general, of the generalizations made to fit an entire continent. The ideas visitors bring with them – ideas that they pack just as they would an extra pair of underwear in preparation for their journey – are sometimes shattered when the rainforest shows signs of logging or when the natives are not as primitive and noble as they had hoped. The search for the authentic or the untouched can be a futile one, as it slams headfirst into reality (West 598).

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<sup>8</sup> [Sploring](#)

The search for purity is a type of superimposition of the desires of travelers or tourists on a place, their own search for happiness that defines their travels and sheds light on themselves (de Botton 9). Sarah Vowell, for example, writes about her college trip to Italy, after spending years building up the ideology of *The Godfather* in her mind; she goes to Sicily, the home of the Corleone family, only to learn that she does not belong: she is not Sicilian (or even Italian) and no longer believes in God. She discovers that where being “in the family” is of paramount importance, she does not have a place to belong: she is glared at in restaurants and on the street. Where there were supposed to be moralistic mobsters who always brought the cannoli home, she found that the culture of the movie to which her heart belonged was not open to her (Vowell 2003, 91-99). What a place symbolizes often draws certain people with certain needs that they wish to have met on their trip, certain freedoms which they want to access; sometimes these superimpositions are beneficial lessons and sometimes they are a disappointment.

Yet another reason why expectations fall flat is because tourists and travelers assume that they will be able to leave their baggage at the door when that is not the case: “A momentous but until then overlooked fact was making itself more apparent: I had inadvertently brought myself with me to the island” (de Botton 19). Travel is meant to be a form of escape – that is part of what people expect – but it sometimes becomes impossible to avoid the same nagging thoughts we face every day, wondering whether everything at home is as it should be. Worries do not have to ruin a trip, but they are an example of what people expect *not* to find, rather than what they *do* anticipate.

The media and visitors are not the only ones complicit in the expectations that surround locations around the world: the people of the places themselves can perpetuate



the mythology of the place, starting at the airport, the country's "business card and handshake" (Iyer 2000, 46), down to the souvenirs each region of each country sells (Iyer 2000, 48). For example, Paris' airports sell the romanticism of the Eiffel Tower and the souvenir shops sell kitschy music boxes that play "La Vie En Rose;" Edinburgh is steeped in tradition, cloaked in tartan scarves, and choked with bagpipers. All of the promotional material for these places reflect these specific icons and these specific themes: Paris is for romance and Scotland is for heritage. This sets up tourists and travelers to believe the hype; often the difference between the two is in the degrees of willingness to believe in the glossy advertisement (tourists) versus the dirt-on-the-street reality (travelers).

This disconnect between the advertised vision of a place and the truth is another danger of living in a global community (Iyer 2000, 65): a tourist who enthusiastically listens to "Molly Malone" before going to Dublin is more likely to buy into the romantic ideology of the song when in reality Ms. Malone was working the street in entirely another capacity. It is impossible to know a place or make assumptions about it through its published media: movies and music can only prepare a visitor for the superficial, prepackaged version of the culture and society – though it is important to note that in my case, those stereotypes sometimes were fulfilled, such as the stereotypical drunk Irish man.

*'Gladiators' swarm the plaza that surrounds the Coliseum, decked out in the uniforms of Roman soldiers. They heckle the tourists, who sometimes walk faster to get away, some of whom bask in the attention and take the opportunity to get some fun photos for home. Anne and I decide that it's best to avoid them already – they're just vultures in an elaborate costume.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [As the Romans Do](#)

At times, the myths and expectations generated around a place are created not only by the visitors, but by the hosts, as well. An example of this is Zelve, a place in Cappadocia, Turkey, the site of a series of caves which were home to people from the thirteenth century until 1952, when the caves were deemed too unstable to live in (Tucker 79-81). Now the caves are home to tourists and travelers interested in the caves' long history; tours of the caves stress the early period of inhabitation by Christians and gloss over the relatively longer period of inhabitation by Muslims: "the previous 700 years of habitation seem forgotten; the museum has to some degree has lost its memory" (Tucker 80). The museum, which virtually ignored the Muslim presence, did not utilize the still-living ex-residents of the caves, some of whom worked in the museum itself.

Tucker was able to get a tour from one of these ex-occupants after she took the official tour; she was surprised to find that the licensed tourguide had gotten a couple of his facts wrong (83-84) and that in general, the second tour took on a more personal feel, making it easier to relate to:

The differences between the two narratives mark the contrast between a personal memory, which is steeped in nostalgia strongly connected to the actual locale, and an official memory, which is constructed within the much wider notional context of "global heritage." (Tucker 85)

What happened is that the visitors to the site were expecting what the "official memory" was selling, a distant but illustrious past, cultural heritage that fit their ideas about what Zelve should be like (Tucker 85); the curators of the museum saw what the visitors wanted and gave it to them – essentially making both groups complicit in the misinformation and bias of the authorized tour.

However, when the tourists and travelers were presented with the option to choose, they found the informal, personal tour to be much more appealing:

...for the tourists themselves it is the more contemporary cave dwellers of Cappadocia who form the extraordinary 'other' whom they seek to experience...the churches and the more distant Christian history of which they were a part, were experienced as a "dry" and "dead" past. (87)

When the visitors saw a history that was still relevant, they made a more meaningful connection to Zelve and to the people who lived there; the museum was able to fulfill some of the needs that the travelers and tourists were attempting to fulfill. The experience of people at Zelve suggests that oral history is more accessible to people today than professionalized, glossy history.

Another instance very similar to that of Zelve is Rome, which draws tourists and travelers from all over the world to see its ancient ruins. However, it is harder for visitors to visualize what life was like in ancient Rome, as it was a very different culture; someone from a small town in Ohio is not culturally conditioned to know what it was like to watch or even take part in the fights that took place in the Coliseum: that contemporary person does not have the kind of access necessary to understand the scope and use of the space as an ancient Roman would, just as the visitors to Zelve have a hard time conceptualizing what the lives of the early Christians were like. In Rome's case, costumed "gladiators" are provided for tourists to use as a reference point; however, these gladiators are not like the ancient fighters and never could be. On the other hand, the more recent history of Italy is not shown to visitors: travelers and tourists are not encouraged to see the economic or political unrest, even though the same themes that drive that unrest drive people of many different cultures today. The more modern,

“messy” or even “backward” history is set aside for the more grand version of history that many people can buy into.

### Historical Attachment

*Picasso’s Guernika is famous, and for good reason: it is big and splashy, argumentative. The actual place is more humble, as is its symbolic oak tree, at the moment hardly more than a sapling. I have a hard time believing that the iconic history we’ve just heard about can be reflected in something so fragile: maybe it’s a metaphor. This tree is the pride of this country, of resistance and patience; I smile for photos.*<sup>10</sup>

The western world is experiencing a history craze: genealogies are very popular, as are history shows and dramas, historical fiction, and reenactments. All of these feed a hunger for the past, for roots (Lerner 124); however, these do not give everyone satisfaction: they often lack the perspective or the deeper meaning people need (Lerner 200). There is simply no substitute for personal contact with history and especially historical places: without the context of a site to surround what happened there, people may not be able to understand what they are trying to conceptualize: it is one thing to read about or to see a decisive battle fought on television; it is another thing to stand on Normandy’s beaches or at Waterloo and be able to understand the scope of the battle.

History provides many services for cultures and for people, but in general its use is in forming national or personal “selves” and to provide explanations as to why the world is as it is (Lerner 116-117). History also feeds into the basic human desire to live forever – figures such as Alexander the Great and Aristotle are able to, in some sense, live forever because they are remembered and studied (Lerner 116). It is for this reason

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<sup>10</sup> [Stormclouds Over the Castle](#) and [For the Trees Have No Tongues](#)

that people feel a connection to ancient buildings and pathways, worn over the course of hundreds of years; the idea of not only making a physical impression on a place, but also continuing the history of the people who walked the same steps before, is a powerful one:

What had moved him most, he said, was just the way the stone on the monastery steps had worn down, by centuries of monastic feet, all anonymous, but all walking on the same path to the chapel, to sing the same hymns every morning. (Iyer 2000, 16)

It is crucial for us as human beings to be remembered, and if not remembered, to have made an impact upon places we have been; it is this impact that makes such an impression on the man Iyer was speaking to. History provides that escape from death we fear, especially when it is romanticized (Hummon 194); it is a seducer of travelers, tourists, and fans of the History Channel alike.

That said, there is a danger that historical locations – with dead history but living people – can become nothing more than tourist sites or curiosities to be visited by open-top tourist buses (Lerner 25). Lerner found this to be the case with Berlin, that all of the memorials in the city are admirable but also obscene: “They have made monuments out of concentration camps and tourist sites out of *Sammellager*” (Lerner 26); after all, what is more obscene than happy people posing for photos outside of the gate to Auschwitz or next to the oak at Guernika? I am complicit in this kind of obscenity by putting on rose-colored glasses in front of some of these profound cultural monuments: in these instances, I was not as aware as I would have liked to be. I was, as much as I hated the prospect, a tourist the moment the shutter clicked.

*There is an almost desperate urgency in the man conducting our Black Taxi Tour, an urgency that is conveyed in his rendering of the history. He is not emotional, but there is an undercurrent, a deep desire for us girls to understand what was had gone on, what is*

*still going on, the history that we are witnessing, as real as the giant wall in front of us. He is asking us in this moment not to forget what happened, to take that history with us.*<sup>11</sup>

What is potentially more dangerous than the trivialization and commoditization of history is selective memory and collective forgetting. Instances of selective memory and collective forgetting would include U.S. detention camps of Japanese-Americans during World War II and the consequences of the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: instead, most people remember the concentration camps of the Germans and that the atom bombs shortened the war. The victors in whatever grisly circumstances are free to rationalize and to reassure the public that good has been done on their behalf; however, there are costs:

Such collective forgetting of the dark side of events is hurtful to the individual as well as to the entire society, because one cannot heal nor can one make better decisions in the future, if one evades responsibility for the consequences of past actions. (Lerner 52)

It is for this reason that every country with the resources has or is still developing atomic weapons, even after the world lived in fear of being caught in nuclear crossfire for half a century: without hindsight, there can be no forethought.

Belfast is another good example of selective memory, though there is also a duality present among the people of the city concerning how they wish to be represented. On the one hand, one group idealizes the Victorian industrial period – especially now that the Titanic museum has been opened, in commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the shipwreck – and on the other, the second group focuses on the Troubles, which remain a present part of the history, a violent past that is represented by the Peace Line and continued (though loosening) segregation. For the tourists and travelers of the city, there

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<sup>11</sup> [Good Fences](#)

are these two different lenses to view it through, but neither can give the full picture of what “defines” the city. What one group deemphasizes, the other accentuates, each selecting a different vision of Belfast’s history.

Selective memory has not only been a function of traumatic world events; it has also been largely forgotten that the first major group to use nonviolent protest was not the civil rights movement, but women’s suffrage, as well as other women’s rights milestones, such as the integration of women in the workforce during World War II: interviews of women who worked in a fabrication plant in Ontario, Canada showed that it was more than simple patriotism moved them to join men in welding and riveting. They worked for the empowerment of having a wage, being able to do “men’s work” well, or to contribute to the safe return of loved ones (Wakewich et al. 66). However, history now remembers the working women of the war more as nationalistic sacrificers, rather than the multi-faceted reality.

In visiting historical places, both travelers and tourists seek to gain deeper insight into the complexity of history (that is why historical tours are so popular); whether or not that learning actually happens may be what separates the two: “A meaningful connection to the past demands, above all, active engagement...imagination and empathy...curiosity and respect. When we do this, the rewards are considerable” (Lerner 201). Is the tourist, for whom one of the main priorities is to relax, willing to undertake such rigorous reflection and thought? It is doubtful that that would be the case, improbable that anyone set on unwinding for a few days would come close to conclusions that define the human experience: “human actions have consequences and that certain choices, once made, cannot be undone” (Lerner 205). It is more likely that a traveler, who would have the

desire to understand the places he or she travelled to, would want to understand the ramifications of the events of a certain location, consequences not detailed by tour guides or pamphlets but which require footwork, thought, and interaction with other people.

*I can't say that I had gotten it before now, the magnitude of what had been done in Oslo. I don't need Alette to tell me what an impact that day in July had had on the people of Norway. I stare at the wall that surrounds the now-demolished section of the building, look through the portholes cut into the plywood, and understand that what had been killed, what had been destroyed, was more than people and buildings. The patina of innocence had been cracked; everyone could see it.<sup>12</sup>*

### Nature, Aesthetics, and Observation

Many tourists and travelers peregrinate into nature on a yearly basis, in search of tranquility or an escape from their hectic lives; they do this through ecotourism, which is generally associated with more “exotic” habitats, such as rainforests or deserts, or through other explorations of nature which are closer to home, which would include scenic drives, camping, and hiking. However, nature sometimes has unintended, beneficial consequences: it can become easier to accept the unforeseen, those events driven by larger and more powerful machinations than we can control; once faced with the scale of nature, the seemingly fickle finger of fate is easier to understand (de Botton 176). The scope of nature inspires people to question what is important, to re-evaluate their priorities, but more than that, being in nature allows for true observation of a place: since the point is to be “in nature” and to enjoy the panorama, a visitor to a beach, campsite, or woodland trail may be able to observe and experience it more closely than if he or she were to visit a national monument or other tourist attraction. For many, such as

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<sup>12</sup> [The Shower in the Kitchen and the Ship in the Backyard](#)



Henry David Thoreau, nature is not the “alternative” or the “getaway” in his life; it is his “real life,” where he feels more alive:

Talk of mysteries! – Think of our life in nature, – daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the common sense! *Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?* (Thoreau 64)

What people seek in nature – and what Thoreau clearly achieves – is an interaction with nature that leads to fulfillment and an ecstatic joy to be alive, borne out of being observant of his surroundings.

*St. Stephen’s Green of Dublin is enchanting each time I see it. In April, blue-tinged clouds hang low in the air, contrasting with the new green leaves of the trees. One of my favorite photographs also includes a bright red balloon caught in the braches of a tree still waiting for its leaves. In May, I walk along a wide, tree-lined path, looking up in awe at the canopy of leaves that stretches high above me, like emerald stained glass, letting thin shafts of light through to the ground below.*<sup>13</sup>

The high level of observance people have in nature becomes more rare when visitors are removed from that natural setting, as is shown by people’s use of photography. Photography taps into the impulse to capture and keep beauty for later – which could include the beauty of an experience, for people who insist on taking group photos everywhere they go. Alain de Botton makes the case that having cameras does not actually make it easier to access beauty, even though cameras can make beautiful vistas permanent: “Technology may make it easier to reach beauty, but it does not simplify the process of possessing or appreciating it” (219). The implications of this statement is that all of the tourists that take photographs on a compulsive scale are not necessarily appreciating the beauty in front of them, merely registering that something is beautiful

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<sup>13</sup> [The Year 1916 and Felafel](#) and [A Train, a Museum, a Sunny Day](#)

and taking the shot, without looking more closely or trying to remember it for themselves. Without the process of deliberate memory, of memorizing a scene, no deeper understanding of why the beauty of a place is so impactful can take place. Taking a photo can be a two second conversion between noticing and snapping the shutter; if it takes more than two seconds to appreciate a work of art, it must take more than that to enjoy the way the sun hits the leaves of tall branches of trees in a park or the way daffodils blanket the ground and bob in the wind.

The difference between travelers and tourists in this instance is the willingness to stand and stare at an object of beauty before taking a photograph; tourists take back photos more as proof that they were there and travelers take back photos in order to remember the fuller beauty of what they saw, or the back-story behind the action of the photograph. Treating beautiful scenes like artworks may be an out-of-the-box idea, but one that can escape the odiousness of the “touristic” stereotype. Where travelers are more deliberate, tourists stay on the face – though there are shades of grey. There can be tourists that consider carefully what photographs to take and still fall within that category; there can also be travelers that are decidedly camera happy but which, again, fall within their moniker.

*I can vividly remember walking in Montmartre in Paris, tired from walking all day. As I reach the square, I can feel a sense of familiarity. While we walk around the square, I try to place the feeling; it is not until I look back that I realize that the canopied café is the same one featured in a Van Gogh painting. The others walk ahead of me, but I stay a moment, taking in all the detail I can. Months later, I look at the painting of the café and compare notes with the mental image I have taken.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> [La Vie En Rose](#)

## Internal Change

Travel can make the tourist or traveler change, but only if that is what he or she is looking for; generally tourists do not undergo radical personal changes unless something monumental happens. The change that tourists might undergo usually is a change of perspective, an awakening to the actual circumstances of the world they are visiting, a realization that, for example, Africa's borders do not mark countries whose people chose to be together, but by Europeans who found it convenient to place that line on the map (Kaspin 56). However, this kind of change does not indicate any deep change of the visitor, but of his or her outlook. A change in the fundamental characteristics of a person's character happens to travelers, who actively seek change by displacing themselves from their usual lives.

How and why people change is often inherent in the process of traveling itself: "Journeys are the midwives of thought. Few places are more conducive to internal conversations than moving planes, ships or trains" (de Botton 54). Travelers see their physical selves in transition, which leads them to think about their lives and choices, to reevaluate their priorities. There is something about the groundlessness and even homelessness of travel that changes how travelers put things into perspective and which allows them to make permanent changes. At the end of the trip, a traveler might look back and find that more of his or her memories were based on internal experiences, rather than external ones: "All of us feel this from the cradle, and know, in some sense, that all of the significant movement we ever take is internal" (Iyer 2001, 149-150). The reality of being displaced from home provokes thought and personal inquiry in travelers; often this

inquiry does not provide answers, merely better and better questions (Iyer 2001, 146).

The more someone travels, the fewer answers there are, the more black and white fades into grey – and in a world where many people are unwilling to budge in their opinions, more questions paired with more insight can never be a bad thing.

The redefinition process that travelers go through is engineered to shock them into change, whether it is through cultural shock, physical challenges, or other extremes. It is what used to be taken for granted is that which must now be thought about that brings this transformation travelers seek. But more than this, travelers travel to fall in love once again, to immerse themselves in new cultures and ideas, to lose or gain themselves, to learn (Iyer 2001, 142). This is the greatest distinction between travelers and tourists: travelers go away from home to change themselves and tourists travel to relax – though it is good to note that each kind of stereotype may still indulge in aspects of the other; that is to say that travelers can relax and that tourists are allowed to reinvent themselves. The need for change is also the reason why many travelers insist that physical or mental pain must be part of the travelling process: however, even though pain often does feature in intense experiences, profound, powerful experiences are dependant only on the traveler's need for reinvention and change.

One benefit of intense reinvention is that if it occurs abroad, the traveler can then return home and be expected to be different: if enough time has passed, the people at the traveler's home will expect that the traveler will be different in some respect. This counts not only for people who go on long treks on the Appalachian Trail or who go hitchhiking through South America; this applies to people who go into the Peace Corps and who study abroad. It is expected that travel will change the person on the journey, a concept

that even self-proclaimed tourists accept for people who have been overseas for a long period. Another way to frame this idea of updated expectations is to define the relationships that people have with each other as “social contracts”: different people in different relationships expect different things of each other. There is the “fun friend” and the “odious coworker”: each person who has been designated as each type is hereafter expected to be either fun or odious, and actions outside of that norm are generally unwelcome. These stereotypes are completely normal; when they are broken by the passage of a long period of time and space, the person who left is then given leeway to be different: the contract is broken and there is room for a new contract to be made.

In the end, the old adage about the journey being more important than the arrival is true: the journey is colored by the process of introspection and the arrival is more of a symbol that the traveler was able to complete his or her challenge. As corny as it is, there are still real life examples: Russell Banks is a writer and mountain climber who nearly reached the summit of Aconcagua, the highest point in the Andes. At the last moment, he turns around to help a friend who has severe altitude sickness. During their descent of the mountain, he meets a woman climbing Aconcagua alone; they share a short, intense conversation: “She smiled. ‘That doesn’t matter. Beyond that mountains there are more mountains. And the journey is always more important than the arrival’” (Banks 2001, 28). Banks comes to think of her as something of an oracle, a surreal vision, but also as a wise one. There is no way any one man can conquer or discover every peak of every mountain in the world; there will always be another. So too it is with traveling: there is an infinite amount of land to cover, but that is not what matters. What matters is what happens *inside* of the traveler while their life is in motion.

*I ventured out into the streets alone. I can do this, I thought. There's no one stopping me but myself, so I'm stepping out of my own way and doing this thing. It doesn't matter whether anyone notices my courage; I will find it from somewhere inside of myself and show it to the light of day.*

## Writing About Travel

It takes a certain kind of person to write about travel; primarily, he or she needs to think of his or herself as an author and have the confidence that what he or she will write will be worth the time spent, be worth the occasional writer's block and late nights. In addition, the prospective author needs something impactful to write about; generally, these people are travelers, as they have undertaken journeys that have changed them in some respect, a transformation that can reach an audience that will not be bored at the prospect of reading what they have to say. Tourists (again, in general) travel for relaxation – and what could be more boring than an account of a person who vegetated on a beach for a week or took a prescribed tour?

Despite that the term “travel writing” seems transparent, that does not mean that that is the case; there is heated debate by many people who travel writing needs to have certain characteristics in order to deserve the name. Primarily, there is the difference between journal accounts of travel and narratives (Blanton 11); now in the age of blogging, there is even the possibility for a blend of the two writing styles, as blogs can take on the flavor of journals or narratives or both: journal entries are concise and in the moment, while narratives follow the thread of a story, using in-depth descriptions. Some travel blogs offer only what happened and where it happened, but others tell stories and

offer insights; still others integrate components of each style. My blog was one that integrated both journalistic style and narrative, though I relied more on narrative to convey history.

There are also scientific or sentimental accounts: “scientists” offer only the facts where “sentimentalists” write about the changes that they experience, their discoveries, their reactions (Blanton 13). No matter the mode through which the traveler-cum-writer expresses him or herself, it is ultimately a dialogue between the traveler and the world as he or she experiences it: “The author is wholly centered within the narrative, and, as in both travel writing and anthropology, these narratives say more about the author than they do about the people described” (Blanton 109). The travelers write about their experiences, but in the process of talking about their reactions, the story becomes less about *where* the author was but rather *how* he or she got there.

Great travel books often read like love stories (Iyer 2001, 146-147) or even like confessionals (Theroux xx), angles that authors use to explain the change they experienced, a way to show people who have never set foot outside their hometown what the journey felt like. Travel writing must describe the self of the traveler in order to describe the other place (Blanton 4-5): the emotions of the writer color the experience the readers have. It is for this reason that sentimental narratives have the corner on the market: personal and emotional narratives are easier for readers to access and understand.

However, with travel books centered almost wholly on the interpretive experience of the traveler, there is a greater tendency for some authors to write about things that did not actually happen or people who they did not actually meet; the most notable example is Bruce Chatwin: “Chatwin is fascinated with different versions of stories, some of

which may or may not have the merit of being true” (Blanton 99). With no one going behind the author taking notes on the trip, there is no one to say what is or is not true when the account is published; if the focus is on Chatwin, there is no one to say that what he wrote about Patagonia is 100 percent true or false. Theroux, a friend of the late Chatwin, holds that today’s travel writing must not be factual, tasteful, or even reader friendly (Theroux xix): that the account of the trip must reflect the effort it took to get from one point to another, the difficulty the traveler had in understanding what was going on. Theroux’s idea of proper travel does not involve first class tickets and wine tastings, but effort and “getting by.”

Does travel have to be fraudulent or extremely uncomfortable? Do travel narratives have to reflect these things? No. However, of all of the travel narratives on the market, the narratives that push the restrictions of reality or the limits of the author are the ones to gain the most popularity. These accounts reflect how the traveler was pushed to his or her outer limits in search of enlightenment and happiness, using the machinations of fiction to help the reader understand the process.

Ultimately, through whatever style the author uses, he or she becomes an anthropologist and teacher, if not psychologist, in his or her description of the places he or she has seen and experienced. In other words:

Above all, we seek to tell a story and to tell it well – to hold the audience’s attention and to seduce it, by one means or another, into suspending disbelief and inattention. We seek to focus concentrated attention upon ourselves and to hold it long enough for the student’s minds to be directed into unexpected and to perceive new patterns...When we succeed in our performance role as teachers, we extend the learner’s thoughts and feelings, so that he or she can move into past worlds and share the thoughts and values of another time and place. (Lerner 127)



In this passage, Lerner writes about the process of teaching, how to engage students in the learning of history: but there are many parallels between how to teach and how to write an at least semi-factual narrative. The goal of any writer of narratives is to transport the reader, to move their minds into another frame and to hold it there long enough to make a lasting impression.

*I sit back from my computer, scroll over what I've just written. Have I said anything that makes a difference? Maybe. Is it true? As far as I can tell. Am I satisfied? After a moment, I decide that I am and click 'Post.'*

## Conclusion

This entire essay traffics in stereotypes. It is impossible to avoid stereotypes: we as human beings deal with them every day, forming our own and being the subject of others; it is doubly hard to avoid stereotypes when traveling. What constitutes each “type,” whether it be tourist or traveler, is still very general. Someone that fits the description of a traveler may think of him or herself as a tourist, and vice versa. Self-perception is vital to how someone is classified – because, after all, travelers are classified more by what they what they think about than what they actually do.

How could a 21-year-old study abroad student be classified, someone who traveled to many of the hotspots of Europe, someone who stayed mainly on the beaten path? So far this description is very generic: this person could be expected to consume a large quantity of alcohol, spend recklessly, take large numbers of photos, commit a number of cultural faux pas, and maybe learn a little over the course of their stay. Again,

this is trafficking in stereotypes, but if the scope is narrowed to, say, me, what does that say? Do stereotypes even work on the personal level?

On the face, I looked very much like a tourist, even in my host cities. In Spain I did not fit in and in Ireland I spent about half of the time utterly lost, so even if I did not look exactly like a typical tourist, I did not look like I completely belonged, either. Outside of Bilbao and Cork, my travels were completely on the beaten path, in touristic hotspots or (very occasionally) on tour buses. I walked around looking even more lost, taking photos at odd moments, scribbling in a notebook, or standing and staring at some cultural monument. If I looked like a tourist and acted like a tourist, was I a tourist?

On the other hand, I never thought of myself as a tourist. I never had truly terrible culture shock or unrealistic expectations. When the unexpected came up, I rolled with the punches until normality asserted itself once again. I tried to understand the history of the places I went to, and in a wider sense, I tried to understand the places themselves, not for the hype, but for what they were (though it is worthwhile to mention that I did not always succeed). I stared openmouthed in nearly every cathedral and basked in the sunlight; I tried to make every photograph count. Travel changed me, made me more confident, just as I knew it would; I wrote about my experiences to reach out to other people and also to reassure myself that the whole adventure was not just mist, a dream I would wake up from in the morning.

There's not much room in stereotypes for hybrids, and yet I feel that is what I was while abroad. My passion for learning was coupled with a desire to see things I had only ever seen on television or textbooks, converting me into a travelist, a shade of grey in between how people perceived me and how I saw myself. Most travelers and tourists

must feel the same thing, that they belong in neither category – because it is human nature to compare lifestyles and cultures, as well as to assess the human condition.

However, stereotypes exist for a reason: they allow us to slide ourselves and others into easily definable categories. While many people may in fact be travelists, they are unlikely to view themselves or be seen that way, as making fussy distinctions like this are not applicable to the everyday work of traveling or touring. That said, it is very interesting that many people view being a tourist as derogatory – people including myself: we can argue that this essay is an effort to prove that I am a traveler, and, for that matter, a pilgrim, as well. There is a contempt for tourists that is strange, but that also makes sense, given the literature we have access to (and which provides cultural context, whether we want it to or not) and the marketing we see. Travel implies adventure and exploration and tourism implies close-mindedness and cluelessness, when that may not be so: the bias against tourists itself implies close-mindedness and cluelessness, so travelers can be at the mercy of their own egos. Whatever the implications, both kinds of voyages give benefits: tourists are able to relax and travelers get an understanding of other cultures and peoples.

In the end, what travelers, tourists, and travelists have in common is the desire to venture into the unknown, in search of happiness, peace, or completion. It is a fundamental need to travel, even if it is over short distances: going somewhere not for classes, work, family, or money gives people freedom, a way of thinking outside of the box, of viewing life differently. When we come back from these voyages, we see ourselves in a new light and can start our “real lives” again with fresh faces. Knowing that no one is as “stuck” in their lives as they might think is a very powerful

understanding of our world as we know it: even if the traveler or tourist comes back from their journey no happier than they were before, there is at least the satisfaction of a mission completed, a successful foray into the unknown come full circle.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Traveling is an excellent way for people to examine their lives, to look for better versions of themselves or for something so simple as happiness. This essay has explored religion and pilgrimage – the search for self – and of what defines a traveler or a tourist, which on another level is purely the search for happiness. Essentially, travel, of whatever stripe, is not really just travel: it is something more, sometimes on the surface, sometimes a transaction that happens on a deeper level. Not every travel experience is profound, but the reason for traveling is: the act of a person leaving home not for work or for academic purposes reflects a need for something different, a need for reinvention, for happiness. We travel to experience new emotions and to explore the unknown.

One common thread through many of the authors I have explored has been that traveling isn't just the logistics of moving from one place to another, that the state of motion and the feeling of being out of place shake loose revelations about life, the universe, and everything. There is a real freedom in being away from home: even if the same worries plague us, we are somehow still able to think outside of the box and to change our outlook. Is it any accident that many of the influential people of our society and of history in general traveled widely? I do not think so: travel broadens the mind and allows people to fit in outside of their home cultures, to find a place for themselves in another social order.

There is no denying that my study abroad experience left a great impact upon me and my character. What it also means is that there is much for me to digest, even now when I have been back in the United States for nearly a year. This thesis is part of my

process, of taking one very great achievement (the blog) and converting it into a larger subtext, my effort in understanding how my culture informed my thoughts and emotions when I traveled: the authors I have cited are the representatives of my society, of ours. They have shown me that my thoughts were the same as others before me, that I was not alone in thinking some of the things I did – or for that matter, that the judgments I have made of people were not alone in a vacuum. They gave me a new lens – a new perspective – and have allowed certain aspects of my experience to come full circle.

In other words, what I went through was a coming of age experience, an intense series of events that changed who I am and how I perceive the world that I will never have to the same extent again. I believe that there are many different kinds of coming of age experiences, different elements that are sometimes combined, depending on the person and the circumstances. These types of growing-up experiences generally center around six different themes: academic achievements (large projects, theses, capstones, or simply going to college), personal feats (which under my definition are mainly physical, such as climbing mountains or long-distance running), relationships and sexuality (romantic relationships are often more volatile when people are coming of age, as there is more at stake), drugs (which means that the struggle to get clean or to resist detoxification is also in play), writing (such as journals or blogs), and finally, study abroad. For me, my coming of age experience melded study abroad, writing, and most recently, academic achievements. I am now on a track that will inform the direction for the rest of my life due to the congress of these different elements; travel was the key to accessing this profound personal change.

This thesis marks a milestone in my life: one year I walked in the footsteps of history and within different worlds; with the next, I retraced that path in an attempt to excavate those ideas I found along the way. I feel that I now know much not only about history and about myself, but of people in general, of what makes art, the importance of friends, and the role of a good pair of shoes. I never knew where I was going to go next, but that if I was armed with the right ideas and the right outlook, I could discover new territory.

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## **VII. Author's Biography**

Sarah Watts is from Bowdoin, Maine. Thus far, Sarah has traveled through Europe, become fluent in Spanish, and attended the University of Maine, where she double majored in Ecology and Environmental Sciences and Spanish. After she graduates from the University of Maine, she plans to enter into the Peace Corps, after which she will get a Master's Degree in the field of her choosing. Over the course of her lifetime, she hopes to combine her interest in environmental science and travel with nonfiction writing.