School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts

'Travelling Without Moving'
and
'Transformation, Identity and Liminality in Travel Memoir'

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: …   …

Date: ………17 July 2015.……….

Abstract

This thesis comprises a creative work and an exegesis.

The creative work, <u>Travelling Without Moving</u>, is an autobiographically-inspired, fictional, discontinuous travel narrative that explores why and how we navigate our inner and outer journeys, and correlates the suffering of the world that surrounds us with the uncharted elements—confusion, passion, evil—of our inner lives.

The exegesis considers how travel memoirs question our liminal encounters with the 'other' and the affective transformation of our identity.

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Publication Notice

A reworked excerpt from Chapter Two of my exegesis was presented in June 2014 at 'Great Writing: The International Creative Writing Conference' in London and at the 'Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference' in Tampere, Finland. My conference paper, *Travelling without Moving: Navigating the Liminal Space between Memoir and Fiction*, has subsequently been published both in print and online by Taylor & Francis (King, <u>New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing</u>, 27-34).

Contents

UNDER EMBARGO

Introduction

Overview of this Exegesis

Travel literature often has been considered an account of the affective transformation of self via encounters with the 'other' (Fullagar, <u>Encountering Otherness</u>, 173), as have philosophy and psychology. Yet the connection between these disciplines on the matter remains largely unexplored; in particular, the fact that the encounter between self and 'other' is a liminal experience; that is, it occurs across a sensorial threshold. Furthermore, the world resides beyond the mere sum of its sensations—sight, touch, taste, smell and sound—it is also a matter of perception. There has been little post-structural analysis of embodiment and the sensory modalities of experiencing the particularity of the world through the travel encounter (173). More recently, questions about the representation of travel experience have been raised in relation to writing, but few writers have engaged with the ethical and phenomenological dilemma of how we come to know the world through the liminal space of the travel encounter (173). The Swiss-British writer and philosopher Alain de Botton speculates on such a plight:

> If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness, then perhaps few activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest—in all its ardour and paradoxes—than our travels. They express, however inarticulately, an understanding of what life might be about, outside the constraints of work and the struggle for survival. Yet rarely are they considered to present philosophical problems—that is, issues requiring thought beyond the practical. We are inundated with advice on *where* to travel to; we hear little of *why* and *how* we should go—though the art of travel seems naturally to sustain a number of questions neither so simple nor so trivial and whose study might in modest ways contribute to an understanding of what the Greek philosophers beautifully termed *eudaimonia* or human flourishing (<u>The Art of Travel</u>, 9).

My research links perception with the philosophy and psychology behind why, and how, we travel. It asks: *how do travel memoirs question our liminal encounters with the 'other' and the affective transformation of our identity?*

The issue of whether or not travel renders an affective transformation in us—that is, a prelinguistic corporeal change—remains a point of contention. The nineteenth century American essayist, lecturer and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson felt that he remained the same person, whether here or there.

Travelling is a fool's paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. At home I dream that at Naples, at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea, and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from. I seek the Vatican, and the palaces. I affect to be intoxicated with sights and suggestions, but I am not intoxicated. My giant goes with me wherever I go […] Though we travel the world to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us, or we find it not (Self-Reliance, 71).

De Botton had a similar experience to Emerson:

I was to discover an unexpected continuity between the melancholic self I had been at home and the person I was to be on the [Caribbean] island, a continuity quite at odds with the radical discontinuity in the landscape and climate, where the very air seemed to be made of a different and sweeter substance (The Art of Travel, 22).

By contrast, the nineteenth century American author, philosopher and poet Henry David Thoreau extolled the virtue of travel as a means to 'be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought [and to] explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean, of one's being alone' (Walden, 300-301). He believed that travel could deeply and permanently transform our way of being, and perceived that we otherwise 'easily and insensibly […] fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves' (302), hardly noticing our surroundings and thoughts, leading institutionalised 'lives of quiet desperation' (6), and living as if 'sound asleep nearly half our time' (310).

The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star (312).

Ironically, Thoreau avoided travelling on ocean, in desert, or through wilderness; in fact, he never left the United States of America (Theroux, The Tao of Travel, 141). Nonetheless, he wandered locally to a great extent, proving that travel was more a matter of psychological, rather than geographical, distance. The contemporary American adventurer and travel writer Mark Jenkins concurs with Thoreau:

Real adventure—self-determined, self-motivated, often risky—forces you to have firsthand encounters with the world. The world the way it is, not the way you imagine it. Your body will collide with the earth and you will bear witness. In this way, you will be compelled to grapple with the

limitless kindness and bottomless cruelty of humankind—and perhaps
realise that you yourself are capable of both. This will change you.
Nothing will ever again be black-and-white (The Ghost Road, 100).

This thesis explores whether travel renders us transformed, as claimed by the likes of Thoreau and Jenkins; leaves us the same, as experienced by Emerson and De Botton; or does both, depending upon the receptivity of the traveller and the circumstance (i.e. time and place) of the travel itself.

My research focuses upon the self-determined, self-motivated type of traveller whom Jenkins describes. That is, those who travel out of their curiosity for the 'other', to find their self or to escape their self; those who travel to remember, or to forget; those who seek the sublime to resensitise their self, or remove their self from the familiar and confront the unknown, to test their boundaries. Less introspective travellers may similarly have a subconscious psychological motivator and inadvertently use travel to 'medicate' against facing their repressed self. For instance, an individual may indulge in the pure hedonism of a Contiki-style or an Ibiza / Bali-bound trip at a certain stage in their life. Encounters with the 'other' are but one way, albeit a potentially confronting and catalytic way, whereby we may see ourselves mirrored (or 'shadowed', according to Jungian approach) in other cultures and identified (or conversely, unidentified) in other landscapes. I hypothesise that travel may provide the sensory stimuli required to break through our conscious 'self', confront our primal psychological trauma, integrate our subconscious 'shadow self' (i.e. our repressed self / secondary personality) and thus expedite our transformation towards individuation: the ultimate inner journey.

There has been surprisingly minimal scholarly debate or creative exploration of this issue. Further significance of my enquiry lies in its consideration of the sensorial component. This research explores *why* and *how* travel may, or may not, be transformative to the self. It interrogates and connects:

- Jung's psychological theory of individuation and the unconscious;
- Campbell's mythological theory of 'the hero's journey';
- Turner's anthropological theory of rites of passage and liminality;
- Propp's folklorist theory of the 'wondertale';
- Levinas' philosophical theory of the relational state of being;
- Deleuze's metaphysical theory of 'becoming', affect and deterritorialisation;
- De Botton's philosophical theory of the art of travel; and

- Proust's literary theory of vertiginous moments.

In Chapter One, I conduct a literature review on travel memoir through the ages and consider the aforementioned theories in the context of primal and universal motivators for travel (the *why*) and the interaction of the self with the 'other' and its affective transformation (the *how*).

In Chapter Two, I explore the concepts of transformation, identity and liminality in the genre of travel memoir, and consider various literary theories of interpreting life narratives. Contemporary travel literature provides many examples of the ways in which writers navigate inner and outer journeys, as well as the liminal space between memoir and fiction. I examine the process of creating an autobiographically-inspired travel narrative poised in this complex, delicate and problematic space. I consider genre boundaries and the separation of fact from fiction; narratology and the portrayal of emotional truth; the rhetorical shift from reportage to lyricism; the paradoxical protecting and exposing of oneself; and writing as a dialogue: revelling in its own loose ends.

In Chapters Three to Five, I apply these complex theories and concepts via textual analysis of three notable travel memoirs. Damon Galgut's Man Booker Prize-shortlisted In a Strange Room: Three Journeys (2010), Robert Dessaix's Arabesques: A Tale of Double Lives (2008) and Gao Xingjian's Nobel Prize-winning Soul Mountain (1990) have been chosen as they consider liminality and transformation of identity. They also challenge readers to question the boundaries of genre and reassess the importance placed on the separation of fact from fiction.

In the Conclusion, I comment on my creative work, developed in parallel to the exegesis, which has been informed by such analysis and furthermore draws upon my own relevant travel experience.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Affective transformation in the context of this work refers to a prelinguistic corporeal change. That is, a dynamic socio-cultural and uniquely individual process that: begins with a disorientating dilemma and involves choice, healing, and experiences of expanding consciousness; initiates a permanent change in identity structures through affective experiences; and renders a sustained shift in the form of one's thinking, doing, believing or sensing (Ross, <u>Transformative Travel</u>, 54). Jung makes a related point:

> Whether a change has taken place as the result of integration, and what
> the nature of that change is, remains a matter of subjective conviction.
> To be sure, it is not a fact that can be scientifically verified (<u>Memories,</u>
> <u>Dreams, Reflections</u>, 317).

Affect is distinguished from emotion here 'by virtue of its intense power to produce a different experience of otherness in relation to oneself' (Fullagar, <u>Encountering Otherness</u>, 173). Emotion can be identified as 'a qualified intensity that is semiotically ordered […] whereas affect is something more, an intensity that escapes the logic of closure […] non-linear and potentially disruptive of western reasoning' (174). Affective processes, and specifically the vicissitudes of attachment to others via inter-subjective experiences, are primary drivers in neural development; the very milieu in which our personal development takes place (Watt, <u>The Dialogue between Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience</u>, 191). All schools of contemporary psychoanalysis are now emphasising the centrality of affect and its regulation to the emergence and maintenance of the self (Schore, <u>Advances in Neuropsychoanalysis</u>, 439).

Desire in the context of this work refers to 'a dynamic but obscure energy within a human subject that insists on satisfactions of a kind the world of objects cannot supply' (Porter, <u>Haunted Journeys</u>, 8). Most forms of travel cater to desire: they seem to promise, or allow us to fantasise, the satisfaction of drives that for one reason or another is denied us at home. As a result, not only is travel typically fuelled by desire, it also embodies powerful transgressive impulses (9).

Liminality in the context of this work refers to German-born, French-raised folklorist Arnold van Gennep's seminal definition: an intermediary phase in all rites of transition; the margin between separation and aggregation. The separation phase comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions.

During the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject is ambiguous; he or she passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the aggregation phase, the passage is consummated (Turner, <u>The Forest of Symbols</u>, 94).

My exegesis considers liminality both in terms of travel, as in the liminality of the experience on the traveller, and in terms of writing, as in the liminality between the genres of travel memoir and fiction.

Myth in the context of this work refers to the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's definition:

> A narrative resurrection of a primeval reality [that] expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilisation; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom (<u>Myth in Primitive Psychology</u>, 19).

Personal identity in the context of this work refers to a sense of self-definition rooted in interactions with others that develops in the course of an individual's life experience, which both relates the individual to, and distinguishes the individual from, their community (Côté and Levine, <u>Identity, Formation, Agency and Culture</u>, 2). Personal identity and its formation is a complex notion, contested by various sociological and psychological theories; simplistically, it is the means whereby individuals find a fit between the prescriptions of their social identity (i.e. sociopoesis) and the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of their ego identity (i.e. autopoesis) (8).

Primal psychological trauma in the context of this work refers to that which may be invoked by the fundamental challenge of travel: whether to cling to our old worldview or to embrace the new worldview following our encounter with the 'other'. There are, of course, alternative ways that we can evoke primal psychological trauma; other ways that we can illuminate and ruminate on the 'self' through encounters with the 'other', from commonplace acts, like being in a relationship with another human being, to the more esoteric, like undergoing analytical therapy.

I have chosen to focus on travel for its sociological conundrum: many of us live for it, save for it, and yet do not truly understand how it operates on us; why we are perhaps turned off it at times, or insatiably compelled for more. Relationships and therapy sessions are peripheral constructs within my creative work as they each can potentially invoke the primal psychological trauma of travel, and vice versa.

Travel in the context of this work refers to a change in environment significant enough to provide an encounter with the 'other'. This is, of course, inherently subjective and a matter of psychological, rather than geographical, distance. The travel can, in fact, be metaphorical; travelling without moving. Such travel can be considered a 'journey' or a 'rite of passage' and is common to many cultures. 'I prefer to regard transition as a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation' (Turner, The Forest of Symbols, 94).

Travel memoir in the context of this work refers to self life writing in the realm of travel. The genre brackets various periods of experience as relevant to the theme rather than an entire life span written retrospectively, as per traditional autobiography. The term 'memoir' is often regarded as more malleable than the term 'autobiography', with the former foregrounding historical shifts and intersecting cultural formations; and so, when a narrative emphasises its mode as memoir, readers should consider the significance of that choice (Smith and Watson, Reading Autobiography, 4). Memoir is characterised by a self-reflexivity about the writing process, written simultaneously from externalised and internalised points of view, with the author / narrator / protagonist taking themselves as both subject and object, or thematising that distinction (4-5).

Contemporary travel memoir increasingly pushes against the boundary of fiction and, as such, hybrids of these two genres have evolved. Life writing and the novel share features that we ascribe to fictional writing: plot, dialogue, setting, characterisation, and so on. But they are distinguished by their relationship to, and their claims about, a referential world (9-10). Novelists are bound only by the reader's expectation of internal consistency in the world of verisimilitude, or suspension of disbelief, created within the novel; they are not bound by rules of evidence that link the world of the narrative with a historical world outside the narrative (12).

Overview of the Creative Work

My own autobiographically-inspired yet fictional travel narrative, <u>Travelling Without Moving</u>, is poised in the same complex, delicate and problematic space as the three notable travel memoirs that I have chosen to analyse. It is written in a discontinuous form, composed of various seemingly-random vignettes that weave and interconnect. It explores the primal psychological trauma of travel and its affective transformation on the self; essentially: why and how we navigate our inner and outer journeys. It has been primarily inspired by real and relevant events from my own life and travels but, in the form of parallel narratives, also considers events from the lives of various others (e.g. ancestors, foreigners encountered during my travels) that aptly mirror or contrast with my own experiences. These others appear anonymously as peripheral (and, at times, composite) characters, merely as and when required to drive the narrative. I have experimented with intrasubjective dialogue and the notion of a composite protagonist. Biographical accounts act as inspiration rather than literal annotation, and aim to achieve the generosity of spirit that Dessaix speaks of. Nonetheless, throughout the work, I have ensured anonymity by fictionalising all names, including my own.

Narrated predominantly from the third person omniscient point of view as 'Sophie' (my self), 'Alice' (my shadow self) or the deliberately ambiguous "she", my creative work ultimately questions what it means to 'sense' the world. The pseudonyms are a subtle reference to the protagonists in Jostein Gaarder's <u>Sophie's World</u> and Lewis Carroll's <u>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass</u>, both being classic philosophical novels that respectively question what it means to 'be' in the world and to 'know' the world.

I use a non-linear narrative structure to juxtapose certain events and character developments, or lack thereof, to show that the journey to the centre of the self is in fact not a linear process but a circumambulation over each of our lifetimes (Jung, <u>Memories, Dreams, Reflections</u>, 222). I consider selfhood as something that we are drawn towards, yet also have a degree of resistance to. As a creative twist to exemplify the inner journey towards individuation, I converge the representations of 'the self' and 'the shadow self' throughout the course of the narrative.

My own life travels have been geographically far and near; psychologically deep and shallow. I experienced an abruptly traumatic time during young adulthood in which I fell into a light depression and desensitisation. I literally lost sense of the world and

of my self. What I needed lay in the realms of affect*;* that is, precognitive experience. As I struggled through (and eventually embraced) Jungian analytical therapy, I found that I had been salvaging a narrow state of consciousness and was yet to confront my primal psychological trauma. Such a realisation allowed me to broach the restricted range and intensity of affect that comes with depression and desensitisation: a potential indicator of unresolved primal psychological trauma.

To complement the therapeutic process, I turned to reading and writing creative non-fiction and, above all, travel. This research is, in a deeply personal way, the illumination, culmination and continuation of that journey. It is an excavation of how others have similarly or differently, deliberately or inadvertently, confronted or dismissed their primal psychological trauma in the realm of travel.

Chapter One—Literature Review: the Research Context

Travel Memoir through the Ages

Travel literature often has been considered an account of the affective transformation of 'self' via encounters with the 'other'. That is, encounters with the 'otherness' within the self (i.e. the repressed or 'shadow' self) as well as with the 'cultural other', which can in turn prompt one another.

> The report of travellers […] furnishes a particularly rich field of inquiry for anyone interested in the way we conceptualise and represent the world, categorise its peoples according to a variety of overlapping schemas, affirm the relationships between them, and perceive our own (apparently central) place within this imaginary global geography (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 3).

Human history has been shaped by experiences of transformation associated with travelling—exile, migration, invasion, discovery, colonisation, conquest, diplomacy, trade, enslavement or escape—from the primal myth of the journey out of Eden to narratives of religious and spiritual pilgrimage (Whitfield, Travel: A Literary History, 1). Travel literature becomes a witness, and indeed an agent; it becomes 'a form of discourse through which one civilisation thinks about another, and about itself' (vii-viii).

A recurrent 'turning inwards', the continual effort to seek truth by looking deep within oneself, can be observed at various critical junctures in human history, and was first reported throughout Palestine, India, China, Greece and Persia in the Axial Age (750-350 BC) as an uprising by prophets and wise men who denounced the established religion when it became excessively ritualistic and privileged, and instead encouraged inner penitence and reform through private study and reflection. But it was not until the eight century BC epic: Homer's The Odyssey that the premise of an inner journey that parallels the traveller's outer journey was documented as such. The reflective travel narrative then emerged with the advent of Christianity. The original motive of the pilgrim, religious piety, was soon supplemented by the new motive of curiosity about the world (Whitfield, Travel: A Literary History, 16). Tales of miraculous adventure demanded 'a new structural device, a new standpoint for travel writing […] the first-person narrator, the traveller himself, becomes an essential presence […] to evoke such experiences was a new kind of challenge' (13).

The memoir of the 17-year-old Italian Marco Polo's journey to China in 1271 is regarded as classic and influential; important in launching the genre of travel writing and presenting the East to the West as a 'dream-vision' (29). Yet Polo remains an eyewitness; while the record is undoubtedly personal, a first-hand account of what he saw and lived through, his own personality does not emerge. After all, the concept of 'personality' is relatively recent, connected with Renaissance social developments (Taylor, Sources of the Self, 293). Polo's narrative was unique and unprecedented as it had no motive of religion or conquest, no political dimension; it was not a dissertation on history or culture; for the first time, the experience itself was foremost (26).

The first-person narrative recount of experience brought about the dilemma that travel writing can inhabit a borderland between fact and fiction. The travel narrative of the Englishman Sir John Mandeville, composed in the 1350s and first published in 1360, was the prominent account of the lands beyond Europe for at least two centuries, admired by the likes of Leonardo da Vinci and Christopher Columbus (30). What begins as a pilgrimage to the Holy Land becomes an exotic traipse through Asia and fabled countries more distant, complete with cannibals, giants, the fountain of youth and the valley of devils (30-31). As such, the genuineness of this 'medieval romance grafted onto a pilgrimage narrative' was scrutinised, back then as it is now.

> Some critics have seen Mandeville as composing a description of the world, a medieval compendium, but with a first-person narrative voice. Others have preferred to see in him the first English novelist, using travel as Malory, Cervantes, Defoe or Fielding would use it much later— as a dimension through which a narrative may develop (32).

Mandeville's contemporary, the wealthy Moroccan scholar Ibn Battuta, overcame this dilemma with his diametrically-opposed narrative approach to travel writing, which led to his account being regarded as fact rather than fiction. Motivated by piety and curiosity, he wandered the length and breadth of the Islamic world ceaselessly for forty years, never covering the same ground twice, undertaking more documented travel than any other human being before him. Battuta's record is, in contrast to Mandeville's: direct, anecdotal, inquisitive and humane; his personality is the thread that holds his long, episodic text together (33-34).

The fifteenth century through to the seventeenth century was a period of European global expansion: the Age of Discovery; the bridge between the Middle Ages and

the Modern era. Those who voyaged beyond Europe at that time were primarily explorers: professional sailors, naturalist scientists, ambassadors, missionaries and merchants. They returned with chronicles of first encounters from places which did not yet exist on maps, in the understanding or the imagination; works of historical-geographical research and mature reflection that transcended the personal narrative. Their writings are of deep interest, but 'as they came from the pens of soldiers and adventurers, men of action, not philosophers or poets […] they rarely reach a level of imagination or insight worthy of their subject' (47). Furthermore, they hold a Eurocentric tone of superiority and the motive of reformation.

Emerging in parallel to the scientific Age of Discovery was the artistic Renaissance era. As such, the travel literature of this period varied between 'factual and fictional, speculative, utopian, satirical, scientific, artistic, improving or sentimental' (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 18). Published in 1516, Sir Thomas More's now-celebrated novel Utopia, an intellectual flight of fancy concerning political philosophy, coined a new word and concept with its imagined explorer who lands on a distant island which is in every way more rational, civilised and humane than European society (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 61). In 1572, the Portuguese poet, soldier and sailor Luis de Camoes published a narrative poem, The Lusiads, which became a national epic as it prophesised the future glories of the Portuguese maritime empire and presented it as a divine and cosmic destiny, further revealing the psychology of the era. The Renaissance culminated in the rise of the autobiography—which is, in simple terms, writing about one's own life—another, more contemporary, example of humankind again turning inwards.

What followed, from the late seventeenth century through to the eighteenth century, was the Age of Enlightenment (or the Age of Reason), which saw the Scientific Revolution, the rationalisation of nature, intellectual freedom, the challenge of authority and the rise of individualism. A paradigm of eighteenth-century travel was the Grand Tour of Europe, with the journey primarily encompassing Italy and France; a cultural pilgrimage, often in the footsteps of classical Latin poets such as Ovid, undertaken to acquire social style, pleasure and intellectual perspective so as to distinguish the traveller as an elite citizen; a 'finishing school' for young aristocrats accompanied by tutors (Whitfield, Travel: A Literary History, 154). The model for accounts of the 'grand tour' was Englishman Joseph Addison's Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, published in 1705, which revered the qualities of learning, judgment

and elegance (Porter, <u>Haunted Journeys</u>, 29). Yet this model was challenged by Englishman James Boswell's 'grand tour' of the 1760s:

> By Addison's standards, [Boswell's] focus is too often on the traveller, rather than on his observations. Boswell is altogether too confessional and anecdotal [...] too 'egotic' (29-30).

But the 'grand tour' was not the exclusive province of the English; the German writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe undertook travels in Italy from 1786-88 and his record of this: <u>Italian Journey</u>, published in 1816, is noted for being fresh, thoughtful, reflective and personal without descending into self-consciousness, counter to the stereotypical 'grand tour' writing. When entering Venice for the first time, he suddenly recalls a toy gondola he possessed as a child, and as he steps into the real gondola that now awaits him, he relives his long-forgotten childhood pleasure in an almost Proustian moment. Throughout his life, Goethe affirmed that Italy had been for him a decisive experience; a personal and professional transformation (Whitfield, <u>Travel: A Literary History</u>, 171-172).

During the Age of Enlightenment, the French philosopher René Descartes speculated in <u>Meditations on First Philosophy</u> that a human being's only certainty was his or her inner life: 'cogito ergo sum' ('I think, therefore I am'). Though Descartes' immortal saying refers explicitly to the cognitive faculty, the inner life also extends to the affective realm, as defined in the next era: late eighteenth century Romanticism, which was a turning inward; a reaction against the Enlightenment idea that the world (and the self) could best be understood rationally, by science.

The Romantic artistic, literary and intellectual movement, which ran until the nineteenth century, revived aspects of medievalism, appreciated intense emotion (affect) as an authentic source of aesthetic experience and coined the notion of the 'sublime'. During this time, the English poet and traveller Lord George Byron popularised rapturous, impassioned word-painting on the beauties of nature, which became an expected feature of travel writing, both fictional and non-fictional (Whitfield, <u>Travel: A Literary History</u>, 185). Thoreau and Emerson led this era's transcendental travel memoirists: a philosophical group who believed in the inherent goodness of both people and nature, and that society and its institutions ultimately corrupt the purity of the individual. The American author Mark Twain aligned with this sentiment in <u>The Innocents Abroad</u>:

> [...] whatever you go to see is spoiled because you must see it with hundreds—or thousands—of other people, and because it is degraded

by the hideous apparatus of tourism—the hoteliers, the mendacious guides and the hordes of hangers-on demanding baksheesh (Whitfield, Travel: A Literary History, 233).

Published in 1869, The Innocents Abroad was considered the first anti-travel, or rather anti-tourist, polemic.

The Romantic era led to the concept of the self evolving to encompass *Homo duplex*: a 'second', different self whom one is trying to discover or release. This notion of a 'second self' inspired the depth psychology of the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud and the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. Their idea of the unconscious is the latest and greatest turning inwards in history; an attempt to be scientific about the self. According to the English historian / journalist Peter Watson, their idea notably converges the two main streams in the Ancient Greek history of ideas—the Aristotelian world of observation, concerned with outer exploration, and the Platonic world of introspection, concerned with inner exploration—by offering an Aristotelian understanding of Platonic concerns (Ideas: a History from Fire to Freud, 1011). It is the inner life, of the self and the soul, that most intrigues contemporary writers of travel memoir, as it is the place of transformation, identity and liminality.

> […] despite the great growth in individuality, the vast corpus of art, the rise of the novel, the many ways that men and women have devised to express themselves, man's study of himself is his biggest intellectual failure in history, his least successful area of inquiry (1010).

The soul can be considered one of the most influential ideas in history; a more influential idea than God itself (1005-1010). After all, it is the idea of the soul that gives meaning to religious doctrines and their claims of an afterlife. Also, the idea of the soul has, in the Western world at least, outlived the idea of God. It may be said that the soul has evolved beyond God, beyond religion, in that even people without faith—perhaps especially people without faith—are concerned with their inner life: 'the self remains as elusive as ever' (1015).

In contrast to the idealism of the Romantic era, the Realism era of the mid-nineteenth to twentieth century was an attempt to represent subject matter truthfully, avoid artistic conventions (such as stylisation, especially with implausible and exotic elements) and focus on everyday subjects. This era of dislocation due to world wars, mountaineering, desert expeditions and polar exploration saw a new primitivism and savagery in travel writing: endurance amidst physical harshness and alien landscapes, complete with dissolved identities and touching on the

psychological void that lurks below the surface (Whitfield, <u>Travel: A Literary History</u>, 251).

> After its long history of experimentation, approaching and circling around but never quite grasping certain central truths, travel writing in the twentieth century finally came to focus on two crucial insights: that foreign travel has something to teach us, and that the writers must undergo some form of personal transformation as they travel, otherwise their experience and their writing will be merely formulaic (243).

At the heart of such extremity is the ultimate journey: to travel into the realm of death, and to return alive, echoing the ancient mythological descents into the underworld; a brief, terrifying experience which has the power to transform forever our perspectives on life (250).

In 1957, the American Paul Bowles published <u>Their Heads are Green and Their Hands are Blue</u>, a collection of perceptive travel essays that coined the phrase 'baptism of solitude' in respect to his Saharan desert experience.

> Each time I go to a place I have not seen before, I hope it will be as different as possible from the places I already know. I assume it is natural for a traveller to seek diversity, and that it is the human element which makes him most aware of difference […] Everything disappears eventually anyway—your coffee, tea, sugar, cigarettes—and you settle down to a life devoid of these superfluities, using a pile of soiled clothing as a pillow for your head at night and your burnous for a blanket. Perhaps the logical question to ask at this point is: Why go? The answer is that once you have been there and undergone the baptism of solitude you cannot help yourself. Once you have been under the spell of the vast, luminous, silent country, no other place is quite strong enough, no other surroundings can provide the supremely satisfying sensations of existing in the midst of something that is absolute (Whitfield, <u>Travel: A Literary History</u>, 279).

He was passionate about landscape and its effect on the traveller; he sought diversity and the experience of 'the absolute'.

In 1977, the English novelist, journalist and travel writer Charles Bruce Chatwin published <u>In Patagonia</u>, which heralded a revolutionary, postmodern approach to travel writing. It sits very close to fiction, consisting of a collage of brief, enigmatic passages, not easily related to one another or to any central theme, with intense

psychological depth, and spoken in a cool, laconic, self-possessed voice that refuses to identify itself or to establish any conventional context. Chatwin's work plays games with the reader, dissolving reality into a series of encounters and impressions (Whitfield, Travel: A Literary History, 275). Chatwin regarded walking— the age-old, nomadic, most fundamental and perhaps most revealing form of travel—in an almost mystical way (Theroux, The Tao of Travel, 131). He claims that some of what he wrote was made up or exaggerated, but believes that inventing things in a travel book is not the same as writing a novel (135-136).

Despite the popular acclaim of such a postmodernist approach, there remains a place for modest, civilised analysis, as exemplified by the English travel writer Colin Thubron.

> [Thubron] has claimed that for him there is no serious relationship between travel writing and fiction, for the hallmark of the former is that curiosity is projected outwards into the world, and of the latter that it is projected inwards into the self. Consequently, what shines out of his travel writing is a respect for that elusive and old-fashioned quality, the truth (Whitfield, Travel: A Literary History, 276).

Thubron is highly regarded for his informative, compassionate objectivity, his search for understanding and his trademark reported conversation. His own personality is kept predominantly in the background.

In 1978, the American novelist, nature writer and Zen Buddhist Peter Matthiessen published his most celebrated work, The Snow Leopard, which is a spiritual account of his trek through Western Nepal in the intellectual and philosophical tradition of Emerson and Thoreau. It epitomises the moral, environmental travel writing that also surfaced in the twentieth century. Matthiessen shares the ideology of existential philosophers such as Heidegger in that he believes that nature offers unobscured signs of being. That is, Matthiessen subverts society's universal search for 'the meaning of life' and instead accepts that nature simply exists; that it *is* meaning, in and of itself. He writes with a sense of wonder of natural things as they are, not for their potential value to be used and exploited by humans.

Nowadays, as we accelerate into the twenty-first century with our materialistic and technological advancement, the new paradigm appears to be the search for identity, or perhaps the redefinition of identity (Whitfield, Travel: A Literary History, 282). Furthermore, the world has become an increasingly complex, pressurised and

dehumanised one, in which the need to escape has become endemic. This prevalent theme marks our 'desire to return to something elemental, noble, primitive or pagan, suggesting a flight from civilisation and its discontents' (282-283). The flood of information about the outside world, brought about by mass travel and instantaneous communication, does not signal the end of travel writing; on the contrary, it makes the need for it more urgent; there is no escaping the world, and no escaping the effort to understand it (286).

Individuation and the Unconscious—the Desire for Light, and for Flight

To date, travel memoir's attempts to *explain* the self, despite the rise in individuality and means of personal expression, have fallen short as attempts that merely *describe* the elusive self. Jung's life-long endeavour to explain the self positions his work as central to this thesis: as a traveller, as a theorist and as a pivotal thread to the creative work (the protagonist undergoes Jungian psychoanalysis). For cultural studies, the Jungian territories largely remain 'unclaimed land and free to explore' (Pint, Doubling Back, 48). The Belgian cultural philosopher Kris Pint perceives that 'the most advantageous aspect of Jung's theory is his approach to the unconscious as an almost inexhaustible reservoir of actors and landscapes, a dramaturgy of affects and sensations' (48).

Jung's conceptualisation of the unconscious reads as a metaphorical quest deep down and far back into the archaeology of the human soul. Jung intensively studied the singularity and duality of the self; the paradox that every individual struggles to reconcile their second, diametrically-opposed personality—their unconscious, repressed, or underdeveloped ('shadow') self—which differs from a medically-diagnosed 'split' or dissociated self as in schizophrenia (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 62). Jung perceived an alchemical journey of the self, from fragmented to consolidated, within every individual's lifetime; a process that Jung called 'individuation'. Jung saw an inherent connection between the suffering of the world that surrounds us and the uncharted elements—confusion, passion, evil—of our inner worlds.

According to the American psychoanalyst Sherry Salman, Jung always insisted that the self was fundamentally unknowable, not just because of epistemological issues, or because the self is both the subject observing and the object of its contemplation, or because it had not yet 'unfolded'. Jung considered the self to be unknowable because *it did not really exist*; he believed it to instead be a mythopoetic 'dream of totality' and a symbolic process of individuation (Salman, Dissociation and the Self in the Magical Pre-Oedipal Field, 73). Similarly, the English psychoanalyst Mark Saban has argued that the ultimate goal of Jungian psychology is the reconciliation and incorporation of the 'other' (Entertaining the Stranger, 94). The individuation process, where the narrow state of consciousness is shattered in the play of self against 'other', enables this goal and culminates in the synthesised concept of the self.

Jung came to perceive the self as ambivalent and its singular motivating psychic force (the 'psyche') as numinous; that is, capable of manifesting either positively or negatively. Jung further speculated that love (Eros) and power was an inversely-related drive in humankind, and that:

> On the one hand man succumbs to the drive; on the other hand, he tries to master it […] Wherever the psyche is set violently oscillating by a numinous experience [such as an encounter with the 'other', potentially via travelling] there is a danger that the thread by which one hangs may be torn. Should that happen, one man tumbles into an absolute affirmation, another into an equally absolute negation (<u>Memories, Dreams, Reflections</u>, 176-177).

The work of both Jung and the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan gives insight to the psychic investment of the traveller, through the notions of unconscious desire, transgression and transference, whereby our earliest fantasies can be reproduced in scenarios of our adult lives.

> […] decisions concerning flight or exile from the 'homeland' along with the embracing or rejection of the countries through which one travels, often derive from identifications dependent less on objective factors than on the projection of early prototypes onto geographic space (Porter, <u>Haunted Journeys</u>, 11).

Perhaps the most cardinal human desire is to search for meaning, in life as in travel. Jung's response, after studying ancient mythology, the psychology of 'primitives' (a now outdated concept) and the global beginnings of spiritualism, was his conceptualisation of archetypes, otherwise known as 'the collective spirit of the unconscious'. In essence, Jung logically deduced a global objectivity to the human psyche (<u>Memories, Dreams, Reflections</u>, 119).

Jung believed that both the Oriental and Occidental cultures had emerged from original psychic experiences of the unconscious and therefore produced comparable insights. He sought to connect with the psyche by understanding the symbolism of archetypes, which involved finding 'the particular images which lie behind emotions' (201). Jung saw a direct correlation between the primordial and fantastical images of alchemy and the psychic content of the unconscious, which gave his hypothesis historical context. Jung concluded that the human psyche is transformed or developed by the relationship of the ego to the contents of the unconscious. As such, he came to see the unconscious as a process, rather than an entity, that undergoes or produces change.

> In individual cases the transformation can be read from dreams and
> fantasies. In collective life it has left its deposit principally in the various
> religious systems and their changing symbols. Through the study of
> these collective transformation processes and through understanding of
> alchemical symbolism I arrived at the central concept of my psychology:
> the process of individuation (235).

Jung saw the individual psyche as an endlessly varied combination of age-old
components; elements which were all already present in the ranks of our ancestors.
He surmised that it is our loss of connection with the past, our uprootedness, which
has given rise to the discontent of civilisation and which unconsciously fuels our
travels (263).

Jung theorised that, until we each confront and integrate the overwhelming fund of
images in our personal unconscious, we are inadvertently ruled by them. He
remarked, 'whenever we give up, leave behind, and forget too much, there is always
the danger that the things we have neglected will return with added force' (306).
Negotiating the images of the unconscious was considered risky and taboo; a path
of error and equivocation. Yet Jung saw their numinosity as 'the matrix of a
mythopoetic imagination which has vanished from our rational age' (213).

> Among the so-called neurotics of our day there are a good many who in
> other ages would not have been neurotic […] If they had lived in a period
> and in a milieu in which man was still linked by myth with the world of the
> ancestors, and thus with nature truly experienced and not merely seen
> from the outside, they would have been spared this division within
> themselves (166).

Jung heralded the virtue of real-world experience beyond the realm of
conceptualisation; of experience both physical and psychological. He saw his own
journey into the depths of the personal and collective unconscious as unpopular,
ambiguous and dangerous yet necessary; it was ultimately 'a voyage of discovery to
the other pole of the world' (214). Jung's bid for real-world experience took him on
journeys to North Africa (Kenya and Uganda), India and North America (New
Mexico). Despite the inherent subjectivity, Jung attempted to cast an outsider's
observation on his own self, and on what it was to be European, during his travels.

Herein lays the ethical dilemma of the travel encounter: there are limitations to
Jung's separation of non-Europeans from Europeans, which is deeply essentialist.
Though Jung writes from a position of admiration, his views convey an intellectual

apartheid, and they must be read alongside this disclaimer. He generalises that the European possesses 'a certain measure of will and directed intention' and journeys 'with steadily increasing velocity, towards nebulous goals' yet 'time and its synonym, progress, have crept up on him and taken something from him' (268). In contrast to the native North Africans, he felt that the Europeans 'lack intensity of life'; that the former live beyond cognition and reflection: they 'live from their affects, are moved and have their being in emotion' (270). Jung further observed that:

> The emotional nature of these unreflective people who are so much closer to life than we [Europeans] are exerts a strong influence upon those historical layers in ourselves which we just have overcome and left behind, or which we think we have overcome (272).

It was in Africa, amongst the Elgonyi tribe, that Jung first physically and psychologically recognised the immemorially known; what he considered to be the 'collective unconscious'.

> On a jagged rock above us a slim, brownish-black figure stood motionless, leaning on a long spear, looking down at the train. Beside him towered a gigantic candelabrum cactus. I was enchanted by this sight—it was a picture of something utterly alien and outside my experience, but on the other hand a most intense *sentiment du déjà vu* (283).

Paradoxically, Jung felt that he had already experienced that foreign yet familiar moment and that he had somehow always known that world, 'separated from me only by distance in time […] as if I knew that dark-skinned man who had been waiting for me for five thousand years' (283).

Jung also experienced the divine peace of native Africa; his 'liberated psychic forces poured blissfully back to the primeval expanses' (293). He saw numinosity in the African natives, in their relationship with darkness and with light.

> In general the people maintained that the Creator had made everything good and beautiful […] but at six o'clock in the evening this optimism was suddenly over, as I soon discovered. From sunset on, it was a different world—the dark world of *ayik*, of evil, danger, fear [...] Without any inner contradiction, the optimism returned at dawn (297).

Jung correlated the Elgonyi's subterranean spirit of fear ('ayik') with the ancient Egyptian god of darkness and chaos ('Set'). He saw a commonality in their mythologies: the conflict between the principle of darkness, the breeder of fear (ayik / Set) and the newly-risen divine sunlight (adhista / Horus). Both the Elgonyi and

Egyptian burial rites attempt to unite these opposites. The two principles, darkness and light, are considered of equal power and significance as they are respectively dominant for twelve hours. Jung believed these mythologies to be conceived when consciousness first released humankind from the darkness of prehistoric times.

Jung unexpectedly found that, during his entire trip in Africa, his dreams drew exclusively upon scenes from his European homeland and his personal problems, regardless of how impressionable the day's events had been. His unconscious seemed to consider the African journey 'not as something real, but rather as a symptomatic or symbolic act' (302). He postulated that—much as military psychologists withdraw soldiers when they start to dream of war scenes—had he actually dreamt of the demanding African environment that he encountered, it would mean that 'he no longer possessed any psychic defences against the impressions from outside' (302). He began to see the intensely personal nature of his journey and felt that 'any attempt to go deeper into it touched every possible sore spot in [his] own psychology' (303).

> In travelling to Africa to find a psychic observation post outside the sphere of the European I unconsciously wanted to find that part of my personality that had become invisible under the influence and the pressure of being European. This part stands in unconscious opposition to myself, and indeed I attempt to suppress it (272).

Jung's traipse from the heart of Africa towards Egypt and 'enlightened' Europe was ultimately an internal quest: 'I had wanted to know how Africa would affect me' (304).

Essentially, he discovered the 'drama of the birth of light' (303); that is, the primordial beginnings of the soul, with its desire for light and its irrepressible urge to rise out of the psychic primal night, 'which is the same today as it has been for countless millions of years […] a darkness altogether different from natural night' (299).

> When the great night comes, everything takes on a note of deep dejection, and every soul is seized by an inexpressible longing for light […] that sadness also reflects the mood of Africa, the experience of its solitudes. It is a maternal mystery, this primordial darkness. That is why the sun's birth in the morning strikes the natives as so overwhelmingly meaningful. The moment in which light comes is God. That moment

brings redemption, release. To say that the sun is God is to blur and forget the archetypal experience of that moment (298).

The modernisation of civilisation has unwittingly devalued the maternal mystery and subdued the drama of the birth of light, with its artificial lighting throughout the night and its 24-7 lifestyle. Yet our ongoing attempts to overcome nature seem thwarted, misdirected, and our greater loss, as the longing for light is inevitable to our human nature: it is our longing for consciousness.

Jung found similar beliefs among the Pueblo Indians, native to the New Mexico region of North America, on the opposite side of the world.

I then realised on what the "dignity", the tranquil composure of the individual Indian, was founded. It springs from his being a son of the sun; his life is cosmologically meaningful, for he helps the father and preserver of all life in his daily rise and descent. If we set against this our [European] self-justifications, the meaning of our own lives as it is formulated by our reason, we cannot help but see our poverty […] Knowledge does not enrich us; it removes us more and more from the mythic world in which we were once at home by right of birth (280-281).

Jung saw first-hand how knowledge is not necessarily power, contrary to the common European ethos, and how the daily sun-worship ritual of the Pueblo Indians is intrinsically tied to their sense of self.

'The Hero's Journey'—a Symptomatic or Symbolic Act

Jung believed that the longing for self-consciousness is a centripetal drive over an individual's lifetime; that the self does not develop linearly, that there instead is a circumambulation. 'Uniform development exists, at most, only at the beginning; later, everything points towards the centre' (222). Similarly, the American mythologist, writer and lecturer Joseph Campbell stated:

> Where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the centre of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 25).

Campbell's ideologies complement and weave with those of Jung in the context of travel; they provide the motivations and manifestations of 'the hero's journey'. That is, a journey that physically traverses the path of error and equivocation while, in parallel, numinously encounters the centre of the self. Campbell traces humankind's search for meaning and transformation through many of the major mythologies and religions of the world.

So, how does one set out on the hero's journey, if the centre of the self can be overtly sought as such? And how do you know when you have arrived at the destination? Jung saw individuation as the ultimate goal in the hero's journey; a place where conflicts and contradictions still abound—you are by no means immune to life's slings and arrows—but where a cohesive objectivity predominates. He eloquently captured the sentiment of individuation as a 'painful process of defoliation':

> The whole phantasmagoria of earthly existence fell away or was stripped from me […] nevertheless, something remained; it was as if I now carried along with me everything I had ever experienced [which] gave me a feeling of extreme poverty, but at the same time of great fullness […] I existed in an objective form […] the temporal embodiment of the primal form, which has existed from the beginning (Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 321-323).

Jung felt consolidated within himself; interwoven into an indescribable whole, which he could yet observe with complete objectivity (327). Moreover, he felt connected to the heritage of humanity; to 'an archetype, rich in secret life, which seeks to add itself to our own individual life in order to make it whole' (333).

Jung saw individuation as a journey beyond the constraints of a purely rational life: 'the more the critical reason dominates, the more impoverished life becomes; but the more of the unconscious, and the more of the myth we are capable of making conscious, the more of life we integrate' (333). And yet, it must be a balance:

> Cut off the intermediary world of mythic imagination, and the mind falls prey to doctrinaite rigidities. On the other hand, too much traffic with these germs of myth is dangerous for weak and suggestible minds, for they are led to mistake vague intimations for substantial knowledge, and to hypostatise mere phantasms (348).

Jung defined myth as the earliest form of science and 'the natural and indispensible intermediate stage between unconscious and conscious cognition' (343). He saw that we have long been in possession of mythologems which express the dynamics of certain subliminal processes, though these processes were only given names in very recent times (342).

Jung perceived the Occidental civilisation as predominantly extraverted; as people who project and objectify meaning, who feel the need to complete the meaning of the world. Conversely, he saw the Oriental civilisation as predominantly introverted; as people who 'feel the meaning in [their] self' (349). While it must be acknowledged that these perceptions of Jung's are massive simplifications of complex, changing and plural cultures, they effectively dichotomise the way in which mankind makes meaning of his self and the world. Jung believed that both perspectives were valid: that meaning is 'both without and within' (349).

Like Jung, Campbell saw that the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; 'they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source' (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 4). He saw dreams as personalised myths, and myths as depersonalised dreams; both myths and dreams as symbolic of the dynamics of the psyche (19).

> Symbolic [archetypal] forms [such as Christ, Buddha and Osiris] have always been—and still are, in fact—the supports of their civilisations, the supports of their moral orders, their cohesion, vitality, and creative powers. With the loss of them there follows uncertainty, and with uncertainty, disequilibrium, since life, as both [the German philosopher Friedrich] Nietzsche and Ibsen knew, requires life-supporting illusions;

and where these have been dispelled, there is nothing secure to hold on

to, no moral law, nothing firm (Campbell, <u>Myths to Live By</u>, 10).

Campbell eloquently speaks of the inevitability and universal commonality of the hero's journey, that 'the world as we know it, as we have seen it, yields but one ending: death, disintegration, dismemberment, and the crucifixion of our heart with the passing forms that we have loved' (<u>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</u>, 25-26).

And yet, he offers the key to affective transformation within each of our lives, believing that mythology reveals the specific dangers and techniques of the dark interior way from tragedy to comedy:

The objective world remains what it was, but, because of a shift of emphasis within the subject, is beheld as though transformed […] Tragedy is the shattering of the forms and of our attachment to the forms; comedy, the wild and careless, the inexhaustible joy of life invincible. Thus the two are the terms of a single mythological theme and experience […] the down-going and the up-coming, which constitute the totality of the revelation that is life (28).

While the passage of the mythological hero is incidentally overground, fundamentally, it is inward: into depths where obscure resistances are overcome and long-lost, where forgotten (repressed) powers are revivified (29).

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*, with the passage of the threshold a form of self-annihilation (30).

[…] the perilous journey was a labour not of attainment but of reattainment, not discovery but rediscovery. The godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time […] The two—the hero and his ultimate god, the seeker and the found—are thus understood as the outside and inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world. The great deed of the supreme hero is to come to the knowledge of this unity (39-40).

Campbell theorises that, for those who have not refused the call to adventure, such a journey evokes an encounter with the benign, protecting power of destiny; a reassurance of the present, future and past (omega and alpha) amidst the threshold passages and life awakenings (71-72).

> Protective and dangerous, motherly and fatherly at the same time, this supernatural principle of guardianship and direction unites in itself all the ambiguities of the unconscious (73).

The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure in a myth, the dreamer in a dream or a traveller in real life, discovers and assimilates their opposite (their own unsuspected self) either by 'swallowing it' or by 'being swallowed' by it, and by progressively breaking resistances, only to discover that they are in fact one-and-the-same embodiment as their opposite (108).

In contrast to bygone eras, when meaning could be found in the collective, today's self-expressive individual has all lines of communication between the conscious and the unconscious zones of the human psyche cut, and we are consequentially split in two (388). Atonement (at-one-ment) consists of abandonment of that self-generated 'double-headed dragon'—the dragon thought to be god (superego) and the dragon thought to be sin (repressed id)—but that requires abandonment of the attachment to ego itself, which is the hero's ultimate challenge (130).

Rites and Liminality—Betwixt, Between and Affective Transformation

Campbell perceived that 'all life is structure', whether in the biosphere or the human cultural sphere, and saw that the function of ritual is to give form to human life, not superficially, but deeply (<u>Myths to Live By</u>, 44). 'Myths are the mental supports of rites; rites, the physical enactment of myths' (45). Campbell saw that the purpose and actual effect of ritual was to 'conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in pattern not only of conscious but also of unconscious life' (<u>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</u>, 10).

> It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back (11).

Similarly, the British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner saw rites of passage as acts of undoing, dissolution and decomposition accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns (<u>The Forest of Symbols</u>, 99).

Influenced by van Gennep, Turner perceived liminality as the margin between separation and aggregation; as an intermediary phase in all rites of transition:

> The separation phase comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions. During the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject is ambiguous—he or she passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the aggregation phase, the passage is consummated (94).

Furthermore, Turner observed that various cultures around the world represented logically antithetical processes, such as death and birth / rebirth, with similar symbolism:

> […] for example, by huts and tunnels that are at once tombs and wombs, by lunar symbolism (for the same moon waxes and wanes), by snake symbolism (for the snake appears to die, but only to shed its old skin and appear in a new one), by bear symbolism (for the bear "dies" in autumn and is "reborn" in spring), by nakedness (which is at once the mark of a newborn infant and a corpse prepared for burial), and by innumerable other symbolic formations and actions (99).

Turner saw that this coincidence of opposite processes in a single representation characterises the peculiar, paradoxical unity of the liminal: that which is neither this

nor that, and yet is both (99). The overwhelming characteristic of those in liminality is that they are:

> […] necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and position in cultural space […] they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony (Driver, <u>Liberating Rites</u>, 158).

Turner understood liminality to be situated within the realm of 'primitive' hypothesis, 'where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence [...] there is a promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the categories of event, experience, and knowledge' (<u>The Forest of Symbols</u>, 106).

The Wondertale—the Ritual and Sociological Function of Myth

The work of the Russian / Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp can be connected to the work of Jung, Campbell and Turner as he likewise maintains a holistic view of folklore origins. He deduced a morphological similarity in worldwide folklore (coined 'the wondertale') and perceived the wondertale to be a reflection of reality. Within the Theory and History of Folklore, Propp compares the study of the wondertale to the Darwinian study of organic formations in nature; he likens the naturalist to the folklorist. Propp explores the complex relationship between the wondertale and real life, and traces the wondertale to the rites of initiation and funeral, where he demonstrates that the former wholly mirrors the latter. Within his corpus of folk tales, Propp identified an interdiction and a transgression that causes a lack; a compelling force that can be recognised within all narratives.

> The narrator of [the 1760s Scottish lawyer, diarist and author James] Boswell's travel journals does leave home under a cloud, only to return there after a lengthy and complex journey, more fully self-possessed, if not chastened and reconciled [… he] boasts of the growth in his knowledge of the world as well as in self-knowledge and self-confidence (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 33).

The 'lack', which can be considered a desire or an insufficiency, and can be either created from without or realised from within, prompts a quest (Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, 35). Propp influenced the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who defined the objective of myth from a structuralist perspective: 'to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction' (The Structural Study of Myth, 229). In the context of travel narratives, the contradiction appears to be whether or not travel is capable of affectively transforming an individual. Campbell's mythological theory of the hero's journey offers a logical model to overcome such a contradiction, and the question becomes whether or not travel catalyses a shift of emphasis within the subject; that is, whether the hero undertakes the threshold passages and life awakenings of individuation, or else refuses the call to adventure.

Losing consciousness of individuality serves as a link that 'connects civility both with the affirmation of the erotic self and the deconsecration of happiness and grief' (Bartra, Wild Men in the Looking Glass, 146).

> At the symbolic level, the forest as the place of man's metamorphosis and search for identity, where he gets lost to better find himself, has been the inspiration for many Celtic and German myths, as well as for existential philosophy, with its paths leading nowhere except to the heart

of the forest—that is, to the essential abyss […] he emerges as a man reborn, gifted with inexhaustible strengths and an unmistakeable identity (146-147).

The Mexican anthropologist Roger Bartra identifies three mythical components of Western identity: the separation between nature and culture, which gives rise to the notion of civility; the delimitation of love as an internal force, narrowly associated with erotic individuation; and the secularisation of feelings of guilt and suffering, and the consequent autonomy of the idea of happiness, with respect to the spaces of the sacred (146).

Bartra perceived that the identity of the 'civilised' human being in fact lives with the shadow of the 'wild' human being, and has always been 'flanked by the image of the Other': they are one and the same (3). Paradoxically, the wild human being is one of the keys to Western civilisation, created:

> […] to answer the questions of civilised man; to reveal to him the meaninglessness of life in the name of the cosmic unity, thereby sensitising him to the tragic and terrible compromise brought on by his individuality and loneliness […] a fixed and tangible phenomenon offering Europeans an extraordinary opportunity to gaze into the mirror of otherness (204).

The American philosopher Alphonso Lingis saw nobility in such atavism; that is, the tendency to revert to ancestral types (<u>The Return To, The Return Of, Peoples of Long Ago and Far Away</u>, 169).

The Relational State of Being—Liminal Encounters with the 'Other'

Lingis and the French-Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas have each conducted several relevant studies into encountering otherness, respectively from a sociopoetic and an autopoetic perspective.

To begin with the autopoetic, Levinas takes a metaphysical approach to encountering otherness and speculates on the relational state of 'being'. Read in the light of Levinas' writings on otherness, the 'Jungian Self', which is characterised as unitary, autonomous and undivided, may be seen as a defence against, or even an erasure of, otherness (Saban, Entertaining the Stranger, 92). However, a revision of this approach from the perspective of the French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida suggests that:

> […] the ambiguities and paradoxes that Jung insisted were intrinsic to his intuitions about the self-concept have the potential to evoke a remarkably subtle vision of Selfhood manifesting within the very tensions generated between Same and Other (92).

Perhaps the most fundamental finding of self psychology is that the emergence of the self requires more than the inborn tendency to organise experience. It also requires the presence of others, who provide certain types of experience that will evoke the emergence and maintenance of the self (Wolf, Treating the Self, 11).

Moving on to define the sociopoetic self, Lingis perceives a historical socio-cultural aspect to the inseparability of the self and the other. He believes that each individual holds the summed potential and infinite possibility of all individuals, across all times and places. He thinks that is why we each can experience that feeling of 'living a life that has already been lived thousands of years ago', what he considers to be 'the highest form of our spirit […] that most comprehensive soul':

> It is not simply that in the individual the abstract form of humanity recurs; it is the possibility that in the individual all the affects, all the intensive forces of *all* individuals recur. It is also the highest form of life […] the most divine form […] equated with nature, with the sun, hub of nature (The Return To, The Return Of, Peoples of Long Ago and Far Away, 171).

Though this grand hypothesis has not been scientifically verified (if it ever could), it perhaps holds merit in as much as it taps into Jung's notion of a collective unconscious and Campbell's notion of a universally common mythology.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault paves the way for a more historically-informed and critical psychoanalysis with his notion of the creation of the sociopoetic self through a dialogic encounter with others (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 8). He perceives that travel writers are engaged in a form of 'cultural cartography' and are 'impelled by an anxiety' to map, centre, explain and assign fixed places and identities (20). In life as in travel, we understand what has happened, or is happening, to us and thus know ourselves via what Foucault calls 'discursive regimes'; that is, 'domains that serve as cultural registers for what counts as experience and who counts as an experiencing subject' (Smith and Watson, Reading Autobiography, 32). And yet, simultaneously, there are human experiences outside discursive frames: 'feelings of the body, feelings of spirituality, powerful sensory memories of events and images […] hunger, thirst, and desire […] the material universe affects us, literally as well as discursively' (32). Nonetheless, we make meaning of these literal, affective events discursively, in language and as narrative (32).

As expressed eloquently and profoundly by Lingis in his collection of essays on journeys through India, Latin America, Thailand, Bali and Antarctica:

> […] what moved one deeply can only be shared through language when
> one has found the right words. Finding the right words takes time […]
> what I wrote was how places and events spoke to me (Abuses, vii-viii).

Lingis provides a contemporary philosophy that resonates with what may be considered 'a Deleuzian metaphor of travel; the lines of flight, or trajectories of desire that affect and move us into the otherness of the world' (Fullagar, Encountering Otherness, 171). Lingis suggests that through travel 'we do not simply encounter a desired otherness, we are also confronted by the limitations of our own constructions of identity and difference' (172).

Becoming, Platonic Dualism and the Paradox of Infinite Identity

Following on from the relational state of being, we can consider the notion of 'becoming'. In this regard, I refer to the concept of 'Platonic Dualism' and the associated paradox of infinite identity. In The Logic of Sense, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze draws on the ancient Greek philosopher Plato to distinguish between two ways of being, and hence postulate on becoming. According to Deleuze, Plato saw subjects (objects and beings) as either limited to a fixed quantity and quality (e.g. of a particular largeness at a particular moment), which always presupposes pauses and rests, or else as in a state of pure becoming without measure, which never rests (1-2). In the case of the latter, he saw that:

> [The subject] moves in both directions at once. It always eludes the present, causing future and past, more and less, too much and not enough to coincide in the simultaneity of a rebellious matter. "'[H]otter' never stops where it is but is always going a point further […] whereas definite quality is something that has stopped going on and is fixed; [the former] can never finally become so [or it] would no longer be becoming, but would be so" (2).

Such reversals and dualisms have consequence in the context of this study: they contest the traveller's identity. Deleuze perceives that personal uncertainty is 'not a doubt foreign to what is happening, but rather an objective structure of the event itself, insofar as it moves in two directions at once, and insofar as it fragments the subject following the double direction' (3).

Tied in with the notion of becoming is the notion of the 'sublime': that which affects awe and inspires stillness; a notion ascribed to the AD 200 Greek author Longinus that came to prominence at the beginning of the eighteenth century (De Botton, The Art of Travel, 165). De Botton sets out for the barren, overwhelming space of the Sinai desert in order to feel diminished, and so becomes inspired to quote the French mathematician-philosopher Blaise Pascal:

> "When I consider […] the small amount of space I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me, I take fright and am amazed to see myself here rather than there: there is no reason for me to be here rather than there, now rather than then. Who put me here?" (159).

De Botton perceives that sublime places suggest a power greater than, and threatening to, that of humans; they embody a feeling of weakness and intoxication:

> Sublime places repeat in grand terms a lesson that ordinary life typically teaches viciously: that the universe is mightier than we are, that we are frail and temporary and have no alternative but to accept limitations on our will; that we must bow to necessities greater than ourselves (169).

Why desire this feeling, and experience it as exhilaration rather than despair? De Botton speculates that, quite simply, what defies our will can not only provoke anger and resentment but, conversely, can arouse respect, humility, inspiration and honour: the outcome seems to depend upon the subject's motive (167-169).

The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard suggests that such an experience of the sublime has the capacity to unsettle perceptual habits and open up new ways of experiencing the world (Fullagar, Desiring Nature, 60). The Australian sociologist Simone Fullagar takes this a step further, believing that awe is 'an intense experience of reverberation felt as a movement of transformation, a becoming other' (60). Fullagar perceives that in such a moment of extremity and dissociation, one envisages a world without itself as centre (69).

> The desire to die [or become other] is, in other words, a desire for transformation, for intensities that connect the self with nature in such a way as to dissolve the familiar borders of identity. The experience of awe is a paradoxical moment; in the desire to become immense, he realises his own smallness and insignificance; captured by the landscape, he is transported elsewhere […] a movement which decentres self conscious rationality (62).

Fullagar perceives that it is a challenge to write through the intensity of affect without sentimentalising the other, as we lack the specific cultural vocabulary (Encountering Otherness, 174). But one alternative, of allowing thinking time and breathing space to contextualise and personalise our travels, as speculated by Lingis ('finding the right words takes time'), is also problematic in that memory can dilute and distort our experiences. After all, as the Swiss-British writer and philosopher Alain de Botton theorises in the next section, we already artistically edit an experience in the moment, let alone when recalling it. Perhaps it is more feasible to consider travel as a performed art, with travellers feeling and extemporising their way through its anticipations, motivations and desires in an iterative way throughout their journey. This would also complement Jung's approach to the unconscious as 'an almost inexhaustible reservoir of actors and landscapes, a dramaturgy of affects and sensations' (Pint, Doubling Back, 48).

The Performed Art of Travel—Anticipation, Motivation, Desire

De Botton has at length considered the 'performed art' of travel; its anticipations, motivations and desires (such as for possession or release). Similarly, the American sociologist Judith Adler has observed the aesthetic dimension of travel as one means of 'worldmaking' and of self-fashioning, and notes that it is 'the variable about which least is known at present':

> Those writers whose private letters, notes and journals are now receiving serious attention from literary historians consciously practiced and perfected an art of travel, *not* simply an art of travel writing. Their texts were concerned with innovating or reaffirming norms of travel performance and with providing evidence that such norms had been honoured in practice (Travel as Performed Art, 1367-1368).

De Botton inconclusively argues both possibilities as to whether travel has the power to affectively transform us or not. His experience has taught him that we can remain the same, whether here or there:

> […] we are sad at home and blame the weather and the ugliness of the buildings, but on the tropical island [in the Caribbean, the epitome of paradise] we learn (after an argument in a raffia bungalow under an azure sky) that the state of the skies and the appearance of our dwellings can never on their own underwrite our joy or condemn us to misery (The Art of Travel, 25).

And yet, he suggests that it is not necessarily at home that we 'best encounter our true selves […] the domestic setting keeps us tethered to the person we are in ordinary life, but who may not be who we essentially are' (59). On the contrary, after several hours of train-dreaming, we may feel that we 'have been returned to ourselves—that is, brought back into contact with emotions and ideas of importance to us' (59). Furthermore, he notes that some may find psychological pleasure in a plane's take-off, for the swiftness of the ascent is an exemplary symbol of transformation: 'the display of power can inspire us to imagine analogous, decisive shifts in our own lives; to imagine that we too might one day surge above much that now looms over us' (41).

De Botton perceives the nineteenth-century French writer Charles Baudelaire as 'unusually alive' to the poetry and power of liminal travelling places, such as airport terminals, harbours, train stations, service stations, bus depots, border crossings, hostels, motels and hotels; places conducive to transience and introspection, where

what we have in common with others looms larger than what separates us (32). Baudelaire honoured reveries of travel as:

> […] a mark of those noble questing souls whom he described as "poets", who could not be satisfied with the horizons of home even as they appreciated the limits of other lands, whose temperaments oscillated between hope and despair, childlike idealism and cynicism (34-35).

Baudelaire had a lifelong ambivalence towards travel, concurring with the sentiments of Emerson and De Botton, and yet he remained sympathetic to the wish to travel and observed its tenacious hold on him, frequently desiring (especially in the crevasse of mood, when lassitude and despair threaten) to simply 'leave for leaving's sake' (33-34).

De Botton notes that it is our artistic imaginations that account for our anticipation of a place; we seldom realise how much we automatically omit and compress in our minds in a process of simplification and selection. We cut away periods of boredom, direct our attention to critical moments and, 'without either lying or embellishing, thus lend to life a vividness and coherence that it may lack in the distracting wooliness of the present' (15).

> Artistic accounts involve severe abbreviations of what reality will force upon us […] A storyteller who provided us with such a profusion of details would rapidly grow maddening. Unfortunately, life itself often subscribes to this mode of storytelling, wearing us with repetitions, misleading emphases and inconsequential plotlines (14-15).

De Botton refers to the eminent Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh to exemplify the difference between 'naïve realism [and] a deeper sort', with the latter requiring distortion, omission and substitution in order to reveal truths and bring them to the fore, 'but it was still the real—"the likeness"—that interested [van Gogh]' (208). On the point of artistic editing, De Botton continues, 'there is a purity both in the remembered and anticipated visions of a place: it is the place itself that is allowed to stand out' (23). He remarks that we seldom realise how much of our travels are in fact spent geographically and temporally elsewhere, with our mind preoccupied with concerns of home, or concerns of the past or future; someplace and sometime other than where we are geographically situated at the present.

In terms of motivation, or focus, for travel and the writing of such, De Botton comments that, in bygone eras of exploration and colonisation, there was a necessity and a curiosity to seek knowledge for life from one's travels (112). These

days, with the world predominantly explored and colonised—extending into deep space and ocean caverns—and instantaneously accessible to us via technology, we are largely offered the preconceived ideas of the empowered, not marginalised, others who went before us about what is significant in a place; their preconceived designations of value (113). Though value systems change over time, and vary both culturally and individually, their power of suggestion lingers and is reinforced by guidebooks: pressuring, intimidating and shaping the expectations and impressions of today's traveller. De Botton vividly experienced this in Madrid, Spain:

> I stood on the corner of the Calle de Carretas and the Puerta del Sol, an undistinguished half-moon-shaped junction, in the middle of which Carlos III (1759-88) sat astride a horse. It was a sunny day and crowds of tourists were stopping to take photographs and listen to guides. And I wondered, with mounting anxiety, what was I to do here, what was I to think? (108).

De Botton later adds: 'I knew the official enthusiasm that my response would have to accord with' (114). On a trip to Provence, France, where the landscape is richly associated with beauty, his quest for that beauty prompted him to implicitly challenge the landscape to 'delight and enliven [him]', amounting to a vast, loose and bewildering agenda (185-186).

Beyond its expectations, travel offers impressions that can be overwhelming to the unfocused traveller / travel writer. As De Botton perceptively testifies, we often underestimate 'the importance of having the right question to ask of the world' (122). Furthermore, he comments that 'a danger of travel is that we see things at the wrong time, before we have had a chance to build up the necessary receptivity' (124). French author André Gide acutely perceived this issue as experienced by contemporary travel writers, in contrast to other artists:

> "A traveller newly arrived in a country in which everything is new to him is arrested by indecision. Since he is interested in everything to the same degree, he is unable to cope and begins by noting nothing down because he cannot note everything down. How fortunate is the sociologist who is interested only in mores, the painter who consents only to capture the look of a country, the naturalist who chooses to concentrate on insects or plants. How fortunate is the specialist" (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 238).

Nowadays, we can focus on whatever it is in an unfamiliar land that strikes our fancy, which invites a form of uninhibited, subjective self-disclosure that is only

partially conscious, 'with *depaysement* [disorientation upon being displaced] stimulating free association of a kind that is not reproducible in other ways' (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 13). As a result, such a traveller / travel writer can readily be stimulated to write about:

> […] lives they want or do not want to live, the lost objects of their desire or the phobias that threaten to disable them. Thus the literature of travel reminds us, among other things, of how dissatisfied most people are much of the time, of how the promise of other lands and other cultures is often that of demands fulfilled or of richer, more sensuous lives. It is often difficult to ignore the possibility that the satisfactions represented in a great deal of travel writing are hallucinated satisfactions like those of dreams (13).

In essence, it is more prevalent, if not subconscious, for today's traveller to become motivated by their repressed dreams and desires; potentially, their repressed identity.

The French literary and cultural theorist Roland Barthes taps into Baudelaire's reflections on the promise of a place and Freud's theory of the uncanny (whereby something familiar yet incongruous creates cognitive dissonance) in an effort to understand the forces in his travels that draw or repel him, or perhaps paradoxically, simultaneously do both, as in the case of the uncanny. Barthes' fascination with an old photo of the Alhambra Moorish palace in Granada, Spain, reanimates in him the notion of home; something represented in that faraway house evokes his desire to inhabit, which is characterised as neither dreamlike nor empirical, but 'fantasmatic'.

> It "has to do with a kind of visionary sense that leads me forward toward a utopian future or draws me backward to somewhere unknown within" (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 187).

Similarly, during a trip to Amsterdam, on a stroll down a nondescript street lined with uniform apartment buildings, De Botton stopped by a red front door and 'felt an intense longing to spend the rest of [his] life there […] I wanted the life that this space implied' (The Art of Travel, 76).

Why be seduced by a place and anchor our emotions to it? Why desire to possess it? The simple and universal explanation is that travel can offer 'the exotic': that which is foreign to us; a sense of novelty and change. We are receptive to this as it overcomes our habituation; that is, it overcomes our hardwired brain function that crucially allows us to streamline information processing by making routine and

familiar subjects become automatic, redundant and no longer stimulating (Lombard, <u>Sensory Intelligence</u>, 35). But beyond this lies the more complex and personal notion that we may each value different, particular foreign elements because they seem to 'accord more faithfully with our identity and commitments than anything our homeland could provide […] what we find exotic abroad may be what we hunger for in vain at home' (<u>The Art of Travel</u>, 78). The French writer Gustave Flaubert concurred, finding affinity in Egypt instead of his homeland, leading him to propose a new way of ascribing nationality: 'not according to the country one was born in or to which one's family belonged, but according to the places to which one was attracted' (98).

Vertiginous Moments—the Vacillation of Places and Times

The antidote to habituation is sensitisation, and the French novelist and literary critic Marcel Proust wrote eloquently on the sensitising, conscious-making possibility of travel:

> A being sets out in quest of his past, makes every effort to rediscover his preceding existence. Thus one sees the hero awakening in the middle of the night and asking himself to what epoch of his life there is attached this [vertiginous] moment in which he recovers consciousness (In Search of Lost Time, 7).

Proust saw that travel, and the writing of it, offers the time and place to contemplate the self. Daily routine and familiar circumstances rarely afford such an opportunity; we tend to dwell in the 'doing', not the 'being'. Proust's view parallels that of Campbell, in terms of the hero's quest being a 'search for lost time'. Furthermore, he writes about the vacillation of places and times, and of the vertiginous effect of travel:

> [The traveller / hero experiences] a dizziness, both interior and exterior, physical and spatial, which […] affects at one and the same time the mind of the hero and the very places where he finds himself […] Strange and familiar, never before seen, and yet similar to some image of the past the mind cannot identify again […] like those who set out on a journey to see a desired city with their own eyes, imagining that one can enjoy in reality the spell of a dream (10).

The American philosopher Alphonso Lingis describes this as the vertigo of non-identity, which he momentarily experiences when faced with the fifteenth-century Inca ruins of Machu Picchu in Peru:

> Porosity is the ability of strange substances to cross the subject's own boundaries and in doing so change the very contours of identity […] such an openness of self occurs through the recognition of the strange […] as the other moves through the self, the I is continually decentred, haunted by the shadow of alterity […] a moment that differentiates as much as it connects (Fullagar, Encountering Otherness, 178-180).

Lingis touches on the Deleuzian concept of 'porosity', which ties in with both the Deleuzian concept of 'becoming' and the Proustian concept of 'vertiginous moments', as the body is considered a threshold: 'a site of surfaces, affects and desires that perceive and connect with other planes of existence, energies and affects' (Fullagar, Encountering Otherness, 174; 179).

Renowned for his central focus on the affective life, Proust observes and depicts a certain co-dependence and symbiosis between person and place, particularly in the context of travel. The Belgian literary critic Georges Poulet writes of 'Proustian beings' as those who:

> […] surround themselves with the places where they find themselves, the way one wraps oneself up in a garment that is at one and the same time a disguise and a characterisation [foil and mirror]. Without places, beings would be only abstractions (Proustian Space, 26).

Proust saw the reciprocity of exchanges between people and places; the 'interdependence, at once topological and anthropological' (29):

> If the place enriches the being who is found there, the being confers on the place where it is found something of its own individuality […] in new places, people we love seem to have some sort of renewal (28).

This Proustian sentiment speaks directly to the Seamus Heaney poem Night Drive, as quoted in vignette XXIII of my creative work.

In Proustian Space, Poulet speculates that the Proustian world, a disconcerting 'metamorphosis of space brought about by the experience of travel' (73), resembles the world of Leibnitz's calculus, a composition of discrete, duplicitous and discontinuous fragments 'that affirms the qualitative and the heterogeneous' (40).

> And the feeling of distance, which, under one form or another, never ceases to manifest itself, confounds itself with the anguished feeling of existence. At the bottom of all desires there is an impotency, inherent in the very nature of beings, [which] forbids their attaining the object of their desires. To desire is to render apparent a distance apart […] like the visible demonstration inscribed on infinite vastness, of the great principle of separation that affects and afflicts men (42-43).

In a metaphysical context, the Proustian world is one of solitude, driven by a profound desire for the ever-unattainable unity.

Similarly, the American cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett saw that at least a part of our psychic existence is characterised by a relativity of space and time, and that this relativity seems to increase, in proportion to the distance from consciousness, to an absolute condition of timelessness and spacelessness, 'as a primordial image with many aspects, perhaps as a diffuse cloud of cognition surrounding an archetype' (Consciousness Explored, 339). It is Dennett's view that the self is 'the centre of narrative gravity' around which all of our memories and life-stories revolve; that our

brains retain only a few salient details and rather seek difference: constantly taking-in and making narratives of the disconnected, new and changed events in our environment (431).

Proust was equally attuned to our self-narratives and the fact that our sensations and emotions are forever entwined; that all sensations pass through the primitive brain, which is in charge of survival and self-preservation (feeding, fight, flight, reproduction), en route to the limbic system: our emotional and memory brain (Lombard, Sensory Intelligence, 26-27). We respond to our environment on a subliminal level; habituation and sensitisation focuses our everyday existence so that we attend to what is important (10). Sensitizing is when we recognise something as novel or potentially dangerous. An individual with a low neurological threshold is too sensitised and over-responds; conversely, a high threshold results in under-response (36). The limbic system derives subjective information in terms of emotional feelings that guide behaviour, and allows the brain to adapt to a rapidly changing environment and organise new information. It is dominant not only for the unconscious reception, expression and communication of emotion, but also for the physiological and cognitive components of emotional processing, the control and modulation of spontaneously-evoked emotional reactions, and—of prime importance to this exegesis—the adaptive capacity for the regulation of affect (Schore, Advances in Neuropsychoanalysis, 445).

The sensitised traveller experiences that double-edged moment of displacement / release; that intriguing yet unsettling question—"where am I?" Poulet comments that we can delight in 'the image of a place in which we cannot determine the origin', but most often the mobility of places reminds us that fixity is illusory, 'takes away our last shelter [and] raises our anchor' (Proustian Space, 12). Conversely, for the lost or returning traveller to discover themselves abruptly in familiar territory where nothing has changed, in a process of localisation, it is similar to recovering lost time:

> In the same way that the mind localises a remembered image in duration, it localises it in space. It is not only a certain period of its childhood that the Proustian being sees rise up from his cup of tea; it is also a room, a church, a town, a solid topographical whole, which no longer wanders, which no longer wavers (16).

For if our life is vagabond, our memory is sedentary, and it is in vain that we dash forward; our memories remain shored to places from which we detach ourselves, and there they continue to pursue their domestic life (27).

Such liminality is explored further in the next chapter, along with the concepts of transformation and identity, in the context of the travel memoir genre. I consider various literary theories of interpreting life narratives and examine the process of creating an autobiographically-inspired travel narrative poised in the liminal space between memoir and fiction.

Chapter Two—Transformation, Identity and Liminality in Travel Memoir

Genre Boundaries and the Separation of Fact from Fiction

Autobiographical writing, whether in the context of contemporary travel literature or otherwise, presents a philosophical paradox: how does one's self write about one's self? The writer is challenged by subjectivity, the fallacy of continuous identity, and authenticity; that which one inherently fails to notice about one's self, that which one's self is yet to become or has been, and that which one's self emphatically denies. This then evokes questions about the writer's consciousness, and the true nature of the self. As raised by Eakin in How Our Lives Become Stories—Making Selves: 'Is there, should we ask, a demonstrable difference between the psychological reality of selfhood and the linguistic articulation of that reality?' (4). Contemporary travel literature takes the postmodernist view of self as a concept rather than an entity and thereby challenges writers to navigate the liminal space between memoir and fiction. Galgut's In a Strange Room (2010), Dessaix's Arabesques (2008), Xingjian's Soul Mountain (1990) and my creative work Travelling Without Moving are all poised in such a space.

Autobiography is often considered one of the slipperiest literary genres; circular in reference. Michael Sprinker views it as fundamentally unstable and hence unclassifiable; 'a shifting, borderless locale where concepts of subject, self, and author collapse into the act of producing a text' (Eakin, How Our Lives Become Stories, 2). Philosopher Anthony Paul Kerby and "narrative psychologists" such as Jerome Bruner believe that self-narration is the defining act of the human subject; an act which is not only 'descriptive of the self' but 'fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject' (21). Philippe Lejeune attempts to define autobiography as 'retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality' (2). Yet however historically "real" the name shared by the text's protagonist, narrator, and author, the "I"-figure so named remains a construct of fiction (3).

The use of first person narration provides no shield against self-estrangement (95); on the contrary, it compounds our sense of being in command of our knowledge of ourselves and our stories, and tends to make our sense of self in any present moment seem more coherent than it possibly could be (ix). It bridges the gap

between who we were once and who we are today, but the genre's conventional assumption of continuous identity is a fiction in itself. Occasionally, autobiographers remind us of this fact by casting their identity narratives in the form of an intrasubjective dialogue, between "you" and "I" (93).

Xingjian is such an autobiographer. His epic novel <u>Soul Mountain</u> is poised between memoir and fiction, as it is based on his five-month walking tour of the forest and mountain regions of Sichuan Province, tracing the course of the Yangtze River from its source to the coast, in response to being cleared of a lung cancer diagnosis. The book's prologue, written by translator Mabel Lee, states that 'these events of 1983 form the autobiographical substance of <u>Soul Mountain</u>, the story of one man's quest for inner peace and freedom' (viii). Xingjian achieves a critical analysis of the self of one man, his own self, by dissecting his authorial self into the singular pronouns: "I", "you", "she" (curiously) and "he" (ix). Such is the composite protagonist; the "I" who—to alleviate his acute loneliness on his solitary journey—creates "you" for companionship, along with an unnamed "she", who allows the author to project himself with immense freedom into the psyche of women (ix). The lengthy journey draws the "you" and "I" too closely together and reduces the analytical distance sought by the author, so he allows "you" to walk away, and the back of "you" walking away becomes "he" (ix).

The notion of a composite protagonist draws on the notion of relational identity. Autobiography criticism has not yet fully addressed the extent to which the self is defined by, and lives in terms of, its relations with others (Eakin, <u>How Our Lives Become Stories</u>, 43). The story of the self is not ancillary to the story of the other, although its primacy may be partly concealed by the fact that it is constructed through the story told *of* and *by* someone else. When identity is conceived as relational, the narratives defy genre boundaries, for they offer not only the autobiography of the self but the biography *and* the autobiography of the other.

Narratology and the Portrayal of Emotional Truth

Dessaix's <u>Arabesques</u> opens with an epigraph by Luis Fernando Verissimo: 'We always write to remember the truth. When we invent, it is only to remember the truth more exactly'. When interviewed, Dessaix adds: 'you want your book to be art, not life; truth, not facts. For life […] we've got the front porch, and for facts we've got Google' (Dessaix and Wood, "The Arabesques of Paradox", 10).

To portray emotional truth is, more often than not, to expose the dangerous and irrational complexity of the real world and of the human condition, at least according to Jungian psychology: that, for every positive personality attribute, we each also have a "shadow" (repressed) side to our nature. This makes the protagonist a villain *as well as* a hero; a contradiction that we, as reader, struggle to reconcile, as we inevitably try to identify ourselves with the protagonist. It is also a contradiction that we—Galgut, Dessaix, Xingjian, and myself—as writers in limbo between memoir and fiction, struggle to reconcile, compelling us towards the composite protagonist device, as a means of simultaneously identifying yet disassociating ourselves from the ever-elusive subject matter: our self.

It is topical to consider a review of one of the greatest contemporary writers of fiction, and winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature, Alice Munro:

> [The] greatest work of fiction [...] is the construction of a shared social life to serve as a comforting bulwark against the dangerous contingency of the world […] So much […] fiction shies away from this complexity, presenting a pared-down vision of reality, stripped to what the author sees as life's essential principles. Munro's stories, by contrast, remind us that the non-essential things—the things that didn't have to happen, that could have been avoided if people were a bit more rational, or a bit more careful, or if the world just made a bit more sense—so often determine the shape of a life. In doing so, they remind us that comfort and security are by their very nature essentially fragile and ephemeral, if not largely illusory (Jollimore, "'Too Much Happiness' by Alice Munro").

Like Munro, Galgut seeks to tease out truths 'on a plane of higher, less constructed, contingencies' (Williams, "The Booker Prize-Shortlisted Tale by Damon Galgut That's Both Truth and Fiction"). He does not seek any lofty universal truth, but instead captures what he refers to as a "writer's truth". That is, the mundane truth of what happens to the young South African protagonist "Damon" (who shares the author's first name) in his various incarnations: viewed as the foreshortened "he" in

the distance; as the "I" who is reading the book alongside us, offering explanations and excuses; and as the "you" in the mirror, offering questions and accusations. According to Galgut, the events of In a Strange Room happened, but his narrative is not predicated on facts; it's predicated on truth, which he considers a function of art and art's inventions. Ben Williams, literary critic of *The Guardian Australia*, calls this "narrative syncretism" and considers that labelling such a narrative "fiction" actually deepens its truth. Williams believes "Damon" to be an unforgettable invention; a character who could not be presented outside the confines of fiction.

The power and insight of such a narrative, predicated on emotional truth, derives from the narrator's observation as an anthropologist, and as his own informant. This dual perspective creates a cognitive dissonance and reflects the somatic deep structure of all identity narrative: a story of embodiment and disembodiment (Eakin, How Our Lives Become Stories, 41-42).

The Rhetorical Shift from Reportage to Lyricism

To reduce travel narration to facts is to strip it of the densities of rhetorical, literary, ethical, political and cultural dimensions.

> 'Poetic' language was deemed important because of its power to renew perception, to release hold of stereotypes and make the world strange again. The emphasis is placed on a perpetual 're-visioning' of the external world, as [Russian literary theorist] Viktor Shklovsky affirmed in a celebrated essay—"[an image] creates a 'vision' of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it" […] By collapsing genre distinctions and by concentrating on the play of language wherever it is deployed, the French theorists of Roland Barthes' generation acknowledged the 'poetic' function of language as a potential of all verbal artefacts under the rubric of 'writing' (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 6).

When travel narrators write to chronicle an event, to explore a certain time period, or to enshrine a community, they are performing several rhetorical acts: justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable future, among others (Smith and Watson, Reading Autobiography, 13).

A narrator's refusal of the first person to portray his relation to his earlier self is a rhetorical shift that mirrors the protagonist's psychological situation; the fissure in the fiction of continuous identity (Eakin, How Our Lives Become Stories, 95). To narrate in the first person is to assume the burden of history, while choosing to write about an earlier self in the second and third persons makes the act of composition halting and protracted (97). Nonetheless, Galgut lyrically flits between first, second and third person narration, which paradoxically implicates him in the events that he describes with a personal, authorial voice while questioning the reliability of his reportage and reinforcing his distance from it with interjections such as 'I can't remember' and 'I forget his name' (Skidelsky, "In a Strange Room by Damon Galgut").

On this rhetorical shift, the prominent Australian author Helen Garner comments:
> "[…] there exists a developed awareness of something honourable to offer in [the novel's] place—I mean the dangerous and exciting breakdown of old boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, and the

ethical and technical problems that are exploding out of the resulting gap" (Lehmann, "Book Review of The Spare Room by Helen Garner").

Garner was inspired to navigate this liminal space with her first novel in 15 years, The Spare Room—in which the protagonist shares the author's first name—after reading the following sentence from Thackeray's Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero in a bookshop: 'In the carriage sat a discontented woman in a green mantle'. Geoffrey Lehmann, literary critic of *The Australian*, observes that it takes an omniscient author of fiction to write such a sentence: reportage only allows for the real-world facts that a woman in a green mantle was sitting in a carriage, while any lyricism with regards to her discontented state of mind is conjecture. Lehmann further perceives that, in contrast to the 'flattened landscape' of Garner's grand non-fiction works, the tension at the centre of The Spare Room is resolved, and what results is a 'three-dimensional world' that appears 'truer than non-fiction'.

In the same year that his genre-crossing Arabesques was published, Dessaix reviewed Garner's In a Spare Room ("Kitchen-Table Candour") and considered it to be a fine work of art, an innovative exploration of literary approaches to non-fiction, and an outstanding example of stylish reportage written with superbly refined ordinariness. Yet Dessaix (and other literary critics alike) considered Garner's work to be contentious in genre, and controversial in its label as a novel, believing a novel to be:

> [...] something more sustained, more imagined, more intricately patterned, more whole than the sort of thing Garner writes, however much she trims and transcribes [her diaries]. A novel is primarily a work of fiction with an architectonic quality to it that transcribed diaries just don't have ("Kitchen-Table Candour").

Dessaix adds that characters require interiority in order to create empathy in the reader, which takes 'the exercise of a different skill—a novelist's, perhaps—one that Helen Garner, in The Spare Room, is not in the business of exploring. Nor should she have felt obliged to. Reporters on the front line generally don't' ("Kitchen-Table Candour").

Dessaix's Arabesques is a book about travel, but it is not a travel book. It maps the life and works of the Nobel Prize-winning twentieth century French author André Gide through the cityscapes of Morocco and Algeria, and in the countryside of northern and southern France. Yet it is not a biography: there is no account of Gide's life in Arabesques—that is not what this particular kind of encounter is about.

According to Alexandra Coghlan, literary critic of *The Monthly*, while the reader may be seduced by such exotic locales, they conceal the real journey: not an exploration of foreign lands, but the unplottable space between author and text ("Pilgrimage: Robert Dessaix's 'Arabesques'"). <u>Arabesques</u> is undoubtedly an architectonic work, patterned intricately both conceptually and structurally much like geometric Islamic art (the book's namesake). It is textured with Dessaix's meditations on the significance of travel and the reasons that we undertake it, issues of faith and religion, old age and love. And yet it is not an autobiography. It is:

> […] simply the sum of things remembered, whether true or false […] an ambiguity Dessaix revels in, the space in which his playfully self-aware narrative takes shape […] <u>Arabesques</u> is a sustained working-out of the Nietzschean view that in travelling the individual exists in a privileged and reciprocal relationship with the past (Coghlan, "Pilgrimage: Robert Dessaix's 'Arabesques'").

Marketed as travel memoir, Dessaix clarifies: 'to call what I write "fiction" would raise expectations I can't fulfil' ("Pushing Against the Dark: Writing about the Hidden Self").

Dessaix readily admits that he paraphrases: events, conversations, timelines, impressions, memories. He uses language in adventurous ways and kaleidoscopes familiar places in inventive ways, as 'on the one hand, the reader will expect uniqueness, while on the other hand, refractions of something more universal' (Dessaix and Wood, "The Arabesques of Paradox", 13). Nonetheless, Dessaix feels an obligation to:

> […] let our readers know what sort of paraphrasing they're letting themselves in for—what sort of contract we're offering them, how far our "stories" are leaning towards invention and how far towards a reliable record. It's only fair. Paradoxically, my "novels" […] are in many respects closer to "reality" than my autobiography or the travel memoirs (9).

<u>Arabesques</u> contains the style of life writing in which the writer appears as interpreter and guide, rather than that which 'absolutely foregrounds the subject and strives for a species of objectivity' (Dessaix and Wood, "The Arabesques of Paradox", 9). It is challenging for such a writer to negotiate the line between being interesting enough to fulfil the aforementioned contract with the reader, while being careful enough to protect the sensitivities of the lives on display.

The Paradoxical Protecting and Exposing of Oneself

As a tale of double lives, <u>Arabesques</u> has an inner tension; it is preoccupied with the 'fault lines of a personality: the moments at which the core elements of education and instinct, desire and duty come into conflict, yielding an unstable duality and a shadowy other self' (Coghlan, "Pilgrimage: Robert Dessaix's 'Arabesques'"). While this overtly refers to the protagonist Dessaix and his antagonist Gide, it covertly applies to the reader. Dessaix attempts to illuminate a fault line in the reader's own sense of self ("Pushing Against the Dark: Writing about the Hidden Self"). Dessaix comments that 'bringing hidden selves to the surface and shedding light on them seems to be part of the literary zeitgeist […] it seems to be the fundamental human drama we want to read about' (Dessaix and Wood, "The Arabesques of Paradox", 14). He elaborates:

> Large numbers of us nowadays float placelessly above the world's nation-states, cocooned in our own private memories, allegiances, and dreams […] And so crave to record our own private lives instead […] And we love the illumination of dark corners of the soul, having quite a few of our own, if we're honest with ourselves […] Almost everyone is interested in unspooling their own lives from time to time and rummaging amongst the loops and curls […] My life is there to give my readers the words to reconfigure their own ("Pushing Against the Dark: Writing about the Hidden Self").

Truth can be confronting; it makes for challenging writing and compelling reading. Dessaix believes that the reader should sense a fundamental generosity of spirit in the writer of such truths; that readers 'warm to the tone that says: there's a core to my subject that I *like* very much. Not love, perhaps, but *like* in some deeply grounded way—understand, appreciate, can see the good in' (Dessaix and Wood, "The Arabesques of Paradox", 11).

It is after all a deliberately edited self, a persona, whom we are exposing to the reader. We hide and protect our true self, all the while writing our way towards it. As Dessaix states eloquently:

> Invited inside my life […] you would not find yourself in an enchanted realm. To coax you inside my realm, and to keep you there, I must trick you with art. I must offer you an intimacy with your own stylised essence, and, through voice and language, give you a sense of a focused presence you can converse with ("Pushing Against the Dark: Writing about the Hidden Self").

Returning to <u>How Our Lives Become Stories—Making Selves</u>, Eakin originally believed that 'an uncompromising commitment to the truth of one's own nature […] will yield at the last […] a final and irreducible selfhood', but nowadays asserts that the self is 'a mysterious reality, mysterious in its nature and origins and not necessarily con-substantial with the fictions we use to express it' (x). Eakin concludes, agnostically:

> Whether the self […] is literally dis-covered, made "visible" in autobiography, or is only invented by it as a signature, a kind of writing, is beyond our knowing, for knowledge of the self is inseparable from the practice of language (x).

Self and self-experience are not given, monolithic, and invariant, but dynamic, changing, and plural; 'to speak of "the story of the self" […] oversimplifies the experiential reality [as] there are many stories of self to tell, and more than one self to tell them' (xi).

Writing as a Dialogue: Revelling in its own Loose Ends

Dessaix states that 'traditional biography, valuable as it is, tends to silence the reader […] and that doesn't suit those of us who prefer writing as dialogue […] revelling in its own loose ends' (Dessaix and Wood, "The Arabesques of Paradox", 10). My creative work is such a dialogue with loose ends. And yet, in <u>Arabesques</u>, Dessaix writes paradoxically about craving a sacred tapestry to weave himself into, as his pilgrimage becomes an act of personal redemption. I can also relate to such a sentiment.

My work, in part inspired by the fiction of Munro, attempts to embrace the irrational and unresolvable, the complexity and dangerous contingency of the world. Meanwhile, in part inspired by Dessaix's travel memoir, it attempts an architectonic quality in its sustained and intricately patterned loose ends. Such is the paradox of navigating the liminal space between memoir and fiction.

Three Journeys, Doubles Lives and a Mountain of Solitude

Damon Galgut's Man Booker Prize-shortlisted <u>In a Strange Room: Three Journeys</u> (2010), Robert Dessaix's <u>Arabesques: A Tale of Double Lives</u> (2008) and Gao Xingjian's Nobel Prize-winning <u>Soul Mountain</u> (1990) have been chosen as the three pivotal travel memoirs for in-depth textual analysis as they consider liminality, both in travel and in genre, along with the transformation of identity. The three chosen works have all achieved both public and critical acclaim on a national or international level, which is the ambitious yet modest aspiration of my creative work.

I consider the 'controls' in this analysis to be the issues of: narratology, chronology, structure / style, theme / motivation and genre classification in relation to the work; and gender, age / era, culture and occupation in relation to the author.

In terms of narratology, these works are similar to my own creative work in their riddle-like wavering between various narrative points of view and their psychological predilection regarding self and other. The chosen works of Galgut and Dessaix follow a conventional chronology for the most part, whereas Xingjian and I use seemingly-random (yet calculated) interwoven vignettes. The chosen works of Galgut, Xingjian and myself are postmodern in the tradition of Chatwin, whereas the chosen work of Dessaix is more conventional in structure and style.

Each traveller / writer / narrator / protagonist has been motivated by a life trauma of sorts, and this is reflected in the work's theme; respectively: Galgut was challenged by his homosexuality and a cancer diagnosis in childhood; Dessaix was adopted and is also homosexual; Xingjian faced a cancer prognosis (albeit false) later in life; and I have been brought up co-dependently. The travel-inspiring trauma that we four share is universal: the longing for identity, love, time and a place to consider home.

All four bodies of work challenge readers to question and reassess the importance placed on the boundaries of genre as they navigate the liminal space between memoir and fiction. All four are admittedly autobiographically-inspired but only three are marketed as fiction—Dessaix's work is decidedly published as a memoir.

When the chosen works were published, Galgut was 47, Xingjian was 50 and Dessaix was 64 years old. Their travel memoirs span their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s respectively, over a range of eras, and hence cover various rites of passage. I am

34 and my creative work spans my 20s and early 30s as experienced between 2000 and 2015.

As authors, we are culturally diverse across the eastern and western world. The considered works are written by two Australians (Dessaix and myself—though, distinctly, we hark from opposite sides of the country), a South African of European heritage (Galgut, who perhaps can be considered as spanning the two worlds) and a Chinese (Xingjian). Each of us has experienced, and documented, globally-broad travels. We also differ in occupation: Galgut and Xingjian sit towards the more creative side of the scale, as they are both playwrights and novelists, whereas Dessaix and I sit towards the more analytical side of the scale; he is a novelist, essayist, lecturer and journalist, while I am a chartered engineer, essayist, tutor and creative non-fiction / literary fiction writer.

The process of writing my creative work, Travelling Without Moving, has been therapeutic yet traumatic and problematic, as I will elaborate in the Conclusion. In terms of narrative point of view, I have found myself gradually moving from the third person "she" to the first person "I" as my writing has progressed, which reflects the fact that the writing process has somewhat emboldened me and enabled me to conquer some fears and aspects of the past. While my creative work is life writing, I would also unequivocally classify it as fiction. In terms of identity formation in the writing of travel memoir, I have learned first-hand about dissociating yet identifying with the written material. I now understand and have applied the concept of discontinuous identity; that is, how the "I" writing in the present differs from the "I" experiencing in the past. And I now see the challenges and opportunities of that discontinuity, as a writer.

At times, physical travel has provided me with thinking space and time; it has removed me, as writer / protagonist, from the familiar so as to give perspective and objectivity. At other times, it has not. The *how* and *why* are the subjects of this exegesis. My own inner journey has equally been progressed (or conversely, stifled) outside of the realm of travel (i.e. in relationships, and in therapy) in what may be regarded as 'psychological travel' or 'travelling without moving'. But travel has uniquely offered me a paradoxical freedom from, yet constrain on, my true self as defined autopoetically (i.e. in therapy) and sociopoetically (i.e. in relationships). Travel certainly challenged and progressed my inner journey during my solo voyage to Switzerland in my 20s, which saw me take my first real step towards

independence. However, travel has also stifled my inner journey. Or, at least, put it on hold. For instance, during my solo voyage to Spain in my 30s, directly following the end of a seven-year career episode and my engagement—major life events on both counts—I grappled with the notion of newly-acquired freedom, maturity and interdependency, yet I drifted: I was essentially unmoved by my surroundings, thinking and longing only of home. My creative work encompasses and considers both events in terms of the transformative affect, or otherwise, of travel.

Galgut appears to concur with me in finding the writing of his fictionalised travel memoir therapeutic and traumatic; driven by the unresolved. And yet, unlike me, Galgut's narrative wavering between third and first person perspective does not reflect an emboldening of his identification with his writing as both his journey and work progresses. He ends the work by writing in the third person: 'it takes him a while to realise who he's really weeping for. Lives leak into each other' (In a Strange Room, 180). Galgut appears extraordinarily self-aware, even prior to travel, and conveys this in his writing; his psychological insight is compelling. Though he is not always able to make sense of his self, he is eloquent in describing his self, especially his 'shadow' tendencies. He appears to have realised the intrinsic connection between self and other.

Galgut appears to concur with Emerson's notion of travelling 'with the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that [he] fled from' (Essays, 71). Perhaps it is this resounding sense and concluding note of staying the same, being touched yet ultimately unchanged by travel, which differentiates his journey and work from my own. Also in contrast to my highly-organised self and itinerated travels, Galgut drifts with little direction, letting the chance encounters of the road dictate his path.

The people that Galgut journeys with shape his purpose, as if he can only exist in the eyes of others (i.e. sociopoesis). Each of Galgut's three journeys end in disaster for each of the three antagonists, but perhaps the greatest disaster is Galgut's unrequited longing for love and a home. He remains unsettled; counterproductively, perhaps even more so due to his travels. Galgut seems highly conscious of the suffering of the world, yet remains a sensitive innocent who is eternally lost and haunted by his unlearned lessons.

Dessaix, in comparison, appears to write from a perspective of learned lessons. His work presents as therapeutic in a self-assured and powerful way. He uses first

person narration throughout and, far from apologising or questioning, he continually justifies his sense of self. Yet, paradoxically, I infer that there may be insecurity lingering if such compensation is required. Dessaix looks to Gide as an inspiration with commonalities in order to define his own identity. Of all four works considered in this exegesis, Dessaix's is most overtly focused on the 'other', as a mirror and foil to his self; he appears to live vicariously through Gide:

> In retrospect, I suspect that I went to Morocco at the age of twenty-two at least in part to live out the self that Gide had fashioned in me (although not created) (Arabesques, 133).

Dessaix appears conflicted between autopoesis and sociopoesis; he focuses on the duality of the self and, reminiscent of Jung, he uses travel as a means to gain freedom and perspective:

> Sometimes you need to leave home to see this sort of duality for what it is. You need a vantage point, far from the habits of mind you've been nestling in, from which to look back with a fresh perspective at who you have been all your life (133).

He shares De Botton's view of travel as an art, and further believes that travel can illuminate and consolidate the numinous self.

> Travel is an art, it seems to me, just like painting or writing a novel, it crystallises things. It crystallises me. Whenever I feel that I'm on the point of disappearing, dissolving into a thousand selves—and that happens when you don't feel you have a single source—I make art. I tell myself a story, I tell others a story, and I travel. And tell stories about my travels. I crystallise anew […] I make art—and travel—both to remember [who I've been and who I wanted to be] and to forget. Like a crystal, you see—both solid and translucent at the same time (304-305).

The final chapter in Arabesques is aptly titled 'So Be It', as Dessaix reaches a nonchalant sense of absolution and resolution. His final line: 'I wake up. I know why I'm here' (306) reveals the true nature of his journey. He did not seek a place to feel at home (like myself, Galgut and Xingjian), as Dessaix had already found such a place; rather, he sought an understanding of his uncanny affinity (his paradoxical, simultaneous attraction and repulsion) for the aforementioned places in North Africa, which can be traced back to his early fascination with Gide, who 'was passionate about the same places I keep going back to' (3). '[But …] if I'm honest with myself, I don't even much like North Africa, I always leave disillusioned' (237).

Soul Mountain ends with similarly pithy epiphanies: 'there are no miracles […] And there is no joy. Joy is related to anxiety' (505), and 'the fact of the matter is I comprehend nothing, I understand nothing. This is how it is' (506). Xingjian appears ambivalent; the writing process seems neither therapeutic nor traumatic to him. I find his tone to be somewhat reminiscent of that of the twentieth century American author Francis Scott Fitzgerald, in that it is melancholic yet hopeful, and omniscient yet personal.

> Travel, which had once charmed him, seemed, at length, unendurable, a business of colour without substance, a phantom chase after his own dream's shadow (Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned, 54-55).

Furthermore, both Xingjian and Fitzgerald tend to focus on themes of aging, promise and despair.

Xingjian, in his solitary journey, appears autopoetic in his identity formation. He is driven by both sickness and homesickness; he seeks to physically and psychologically revisit his childhood to have another chance at life, to reverse aging and his lung cancer prognosis (which is later cleared), and to appreciate life's simple pleasures: 'You are always searching for your childhood and it's becoming an obsession' (Soul Mountain, 325).

> You can't help wondering whether you have another life, that you have retained some memories of a previous existence, or that these places will be your refuge in a future existence. Could it be that these memories are like liquor and after fermentation will produce a pure and fragrant concoction which will intoxicate you again? What in fact are childhood memories? How can they be verified? Just keep them in your heart, why do you insist on verifying them? (328).

His chapters interchange between first person and second person narration, with the former offering immediacy and the latter personally engaging the reader.

Xingjian's journey is metaphysical; he seeks the meaning of life both generally and personally. He concurs with Thoreau's notion of travel as a means to 'explore the private sea'. He confronts harsh truths about life and death, beauty and aging, love and loss, reality and illusion; his book makes for compelling reading. It is a work concerned with liminality: of the self and of the genre:

> But where is the boundary between memory and wishful thinking? How can the two be separated? Which of the two is more real and how can this be determined? (304).

In the next few chapters, I undertake a textual analysis of the chosen works of Xingjian, Galgut and Dessaix. I consider how they respectively treat liminality and transformation of identity while challenging readers to question the boundaries of genre.

Chapter Three—Galgut's In a Strange Room: Three Journeys

The Trauma of the Elusive Self

Damon Galgut's In a Strange Room: Three Journeys gives a contemporary account of the traveller's search for self. His unsettling autobiographically-inspired yet fictionalised tale (shortlisted for the 2010 Man Booker Prize) is a haunting evocation of his search for love and a place to call home on his three journeys, respectively titled 'The Follower', 'The Lover' and 'The Guardian'. Galgut's work is an intense and sensitive study of the pathos of thwarted desire, unlearned lessons, rootlessness and loneliness; ultimately, the trauma of the elusive self.

Galgut, as the narrator / protagonist 'Damon', speculates from the third person point-of-view that he is not a traveller by nature; that 'it is a state that has been forced on him by circumstance' (15). Though the closest that the reader comes to discovering his circumstance is via the story that he relates of his grandfather: 'rooted and sedentary for most of his long life' (16), who—twenty years earlier, when Damon's grandmother died—was 'broken' irrevocably and similarly compelled to travel. Galgut writes disquietingly on the use of travel to medicate against grief. He is acutely aware of his desensitisation, which in moderation is a psychological coping mechanism. In excess, it dissociates him from reality. As he observes in himself while watching a televised Gulf war report from Greece:

> Too much travelling and placelessness have put him outside everything,
> so that history happens elsewhere; it has nothing to do with him. He is
> only passing through […] As a result he is hardly ever happy in the place
> where he is, something in him is already moving forward to the next
> place, and yet he is also never going towards something, but always
> away, away (15).

And yet when Damon eventually leaves Greece and returns home to Cape Town in South Africa, where 'at the level on which life is lived nothing looks very different' (16), he again feels that he is only passing through and realises that his displacement is, in fact, internalised.

Throughout his travels, Damon also realises his psychological boundaries. For all of his desensitisation he still has feelings, which are tested on his next trek, through greater Africa with the German man Reiner whom he befriended in Greece. Damon notices their differences:

> What is painful to the one is interesting to the other […] there is
> something in Reiner that looks at all human failings with dispassion,
> maybe even with disdain […] When he talks it's in terms of distances
> and altitudes, spatial dimensions that can be collapsed into formulas,
> there is no mention of people or history, nothing matters except himself
> and the empty place he's projecting himself into (25).

Reiner's powerful presence and inflated sense of self over-compensate for his lack of introspection and empathy. Aptly juxtaposed, Damon witnesses the extremity of desensitisation in the narcissistic Reiner and is perhaps inadvertently drawn to him as a travel companion for this very reason, as a reprieve from realising such shadow tendencies in his self.

Galgut writes of the fear-freedom paradox of travel; of being committed to a situation with an unknown outcome; of possession and release. He compares travel to love in this regard. Damon numinously experiences their journey: 'the strangeness of everything scares him, but it thrills him too' (26). He reveals his unrequited love-of-sorts for Reiner, in the first intimation of his homosexuality; though 'he doesn't love Reiner […] their companionship does have the shape of a dark passion in it' (28). Damon speculates on the common purpose of their quest:

> By shedding all the ballast of familiar life they are each trying to
> recapture a sensation of weightlessness they remember but perhaps
> never lived; in memory more than anywhere else travelling is like free-
> fall, or flight (26).

This numinous encounter with the 'other' sets Damon's psyche violently oscillating; he seems to ask: is it love, or its inverse, power, that binds the two of them together? The notion of 'trying to recapture a sensation of weightlessness they remember' may also allude to travel's ability to reinstate the neurological configuration of our youth—a regression to when we were perhaps more in touch with our inherent self—which for many of us is when days seemed endless and we were less inhibited.

Damon considers their power imbalance in terms of the co-dependence of one on the other; namely, his subservience to Reiner. He explores the contradiction of being together, yet alone, and the dynamic by which confrontation with a vast external space may invoke a journey through an equally vast internal space.

> They walk and walk, all the motion latent in the vast curves of the earth
> somehow contracted into the dynamics of this movement […] alone he

would sit down and not move again, or alone he would not be here at all, but he is here and this fact in itself makes him subservient to the other, who pulls him along in his wake as if on thin threads of power […] they walk, sometimes next to each other, sometimes apart, but always alone. It's strange that all this space, unconfined by artificial limits as it spills to the horizon, should throw you back so completely into yourself […] afternoon storms happen almost every day, the heat will build intensity till it finally breaks, afterwards there is always this feeling of regeneration, in the landscape but also between themselves (30-31; 36).

I am inspired here to speculate that the traveller's co-dependence is ultimately with the environment; that the landscape becomes personified as the ultimate 'other'. As such, the affective states of Damon and Reiner are projected into, and shadowed by, their surrounds.

Their daily walks become rituals of 'collapse and renewal' (37). The building and breaking storms shadow the power flux in their companionship. Yet there appears to be entropy, not equilibrium, in the thermodynamics between protagonist and antagonist; they co-exist like an enclosed ecosystem that, without internal regulation or external intervention, tends towards disorder.

By now even the most trivial of events conceal some kind of groping for power. In the very beginning, two years ago, when they first saw each other in Greece, they thought of themselves as the same. On that lonely road they looked like mirror images of each other. Perhaps each of them thought of real communication as unnecessary, words divide by multiplying, what was certain was the oneness underneath the words. But now they refrain from talking because it might reveal how dangerously unlike one another they are. An image in a mirror is a reversal; the reflection and the original are joined but might cancel each other out [as per the physics principle of superposition] (41).

Such a dysfunctional push and pull cannot be sustained. And so, despite the promise of daily renewal, there comes a time in the greater chronology when Damon's numinous encounter with Reiner, and the landscape, eventually tears the thread by which Damon hangs, and he descends into an absolute negation, while Reiner ascends to an equally absolute affirmation ('travelling is like free-fall, or flight').

Something inside him is finished [...] he thinks about everything and resolves nothing […] in a strange room, you must empty yourself for

sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. The words come to him from a long way off. He puts the book down and stares at peculiar long-legged insects on the surface of the river, they dart frantically back and forth, living out their whole lives in a space of one or two metres, they know nothing about him or his troubles, even now they're unaware of him watching, their otherness to him is complete (46-47).

Damon's 'turning inwards' is evident in his philosophical speculation on the self: on what he is, what he is not, and what he never was. As a contemporary reading, this phrasing has a riddle-like and deceptively flippant Carrollian tone. But tracing far further back in human history ('the words come to him from a long way off'), it is reminiscent of the Greek philosopher Protagoras' aphorism from the fifth century BC: 'Man is the measure of all things—of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not' (Arendt, Philosophy and Politics, 89).

Damon and Reiner's power struggle culminates in a parting of ways for the second time since Greece, but now under less amiable circumstances, in the high mountains of the Kingdom of Lesotho, an enclave within South Africa. Reiner remains in Lesotho while Damon heads up to Pretoria, then back home to Cape Town. Over the course of the entire narrative, Damon darts frantically back and forth from South Africa to Greece, to Lesotho / South Africa, through greater Africa, back to South Africa, then to Switzerland, then to India, then back to South Africa again. He lives out his life in the space of one or two countries, analogous to those peculiar long-legged insects that he observes on the surface of the river. Quite literally, Damon's iterative travel path mirrors his circumambulatory search for his elusive self. Such recursion underpins In a Strange Room in the form of separation and attachment, or discontinuous union, between Damon and Reiner / successive antagonists; a sentiment of history repeated and lessons unlearned.

After Lesotho, Damon moves on to other mirror-image travel companions, and similarly co-dependent situations, while he is predisposed to self-defeat. But Damon's trajectory collides with that of Reiner once more, back in Cape Town, and their subconscious bond remains, powerful as ever.

He doesn't want to see Reiner; he doesn't want to speak to him. In truth he's shocked that he has appeared again; in his mind this episode has already been relegated to the past, this return feels almost personally

directed at him. But he has a fascination with his presence so close by, he makes constant enquiries about him […] he gathers from [their mutual] friend that Reiner is just as fascinated with him (62).

Some time afterwards, once all contact second-hand or otherwise has subsided and they have each physically moved on, Damon realises that his life-journey with Reiner has run its course. Yet it isn't until Damon throws away Reiner's contact details and letters—'it isn't revenge and nothing else will follow' (64)—that he psychologically moves on.

A few years later, Damon restlessly begins his second life-journey: through greater Africa, starting with Zimbabwe.

No particular reason or intention has brought him here […] His life is unweighted and centreless, so that he feels he could blow away at any time [...] In his clearest moments, he thinks he has lost the ability to love, people or places or things, most of all the person and place and thing that he is […] In this state, travel isn't celebration but a kind of mourning, a way of dissipating yourself (67).

Paradoxically, and numinously, travel as a rite (like mourning) 'in this state' also offers Damon some of his most sublime moments, such as that experienced on the overnight train to Victoria Falls, where he lies in his bunk in the dark and watches through the window 'the outlines of people and cattle and leaves stamped out in silhouette against the lonely light' (68). In that fleeting moment, despite the seemingly melancholic mood, he declares himself to be 'happiest', as 'the watcher hiding in the dark […] he doesn't want the sun to rise or [that] particular journey to end'; and yet, in the preceding moment, he states that 'he can't produce the necessary awe or ideological disdain, he would rather be somewhere else' (68). Once again, we realise that his displacement is, in fact, internalised.

In these excerpts, we can also observe Damon's relationship with darkness and light. Here I am reminded of Jung's archetypal experience in Africa, where he witnessed the drama of the birth of light and the soul's irrepressible urge to rise out of the psychic primal night. Jung came to see the primordial meaning of sunrise as a maternal moment that brings redemption and release. And yet Damon is happiest in the darkness and 'doesn't want the sun to rise'; he journeys with a sense of martyrdom ('he has lost the ability to love […] the person and place and thing that he is'). He seeks suffering because it feeds a psychological need. In Being and Nothingness, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argued that such masochism

is the desire of the consciousness to reduce itself to nothing, becoming an object that is drowned out by the 'abyss of the Other's subjectivity'.

Beyond Damon's counterplay against his successive companions, the act of travel itself offers the ultimate 'other' as an empty place to project himself into; a means to dissipate, and dissociate from, his self.

> It is incredible to see the volume and power of so much water endlessly dropping into the abyss, but part of him is elsewhere, somewhere higher up and to the right, looking down at an angle not only on the falls but on himself there, among the crowds. This part of him, the part that watches, has been here for a while now, and it never quite goes away […] though he seems content, though he talks to people and smiles, the part that watches isn't fooled, it knows he wants to move on (In a Strange Room, 68-69).

Just as Jung observed the singularity and duality of the self—the paradox of being two persons in one—we gain insight into the 'other' component of Damon's self. He depicts part of himself as 'the watcher' who lives predominantly through the visual and visceral, staring at peculiar long-legged insects on the surface of the river, observing people and cattle and leaves from his bunk in the dark on the train, looking down on himself among the crowds at the falls. As the passive person who is co-dependent on the other's activity for his own sense of being, 'their otherness to him is complete'. By travelling, it seems that Damon vicariously goes through the motions of self-progress and the makings of self-purpose; yet, in his recursive life-journey, we see that he is in fact travelling without moving.

Mythopoesis and Dreaming of Totality

Damon dreams of a 'centre' to his existence. The reader becomes acutely aware of this; how it evades him despite his seeming self-awareness, and how his travel orbits seek in vain to embody it in an 'other', either place or person. He continues on to Malawi, 'the destination he's had in mind since leaving Zimbabwe' (74).

> Everything he's ever heard about Malawi has been centred on that long body of water running up half the length of the country. Take a look at him there […] staring at the water with an amazed expression, as if he can't believe how beautiful it is. Light glitters on the tilting surface, the blond mountains seem almost colourless next to the intense blue of the water, a cluster of islands rise up a kilometre from the shore. A wooden canoe passes slowly in perfect profile, like a hieroglyph (74).

Again, we witness Damon experiencing a sublime moment; this time, his psyche is liberated beholding an image of 'perfection'—by definition, lacking nothing essential to the whole—perhaps one of life's most elusive myths, and an issue pertinent to the protagonist.

> Only someone cold of heart could fail to succumb to these temptations, the idea of travelling, of going away, is an attempt to escape time, mostly the attempt is futile, but not here, the little waves lap at the shores just as they always have done, the rhythms of daily life are dictated by the large ones of nature, the sun or moon for example, something has lasted here from the mythical place before history set itself in motion, ticking like a bomb (74-75).

And again, we can correlate the African journeys of Damon and Jung. Both felt that they had somehow already experienced that foreign yet familiar moment and always known that world, that mythical place dictated by the rhythms of nature, separated from them only by distance in time.

Yet the moment is short-lived and Damon's disquiet returns. He turns to observer and witnesses how 'the massive gravity of inertia' has set in for previous travellers:

> It would be easy to just stop and not start again, and indeed a lot of people have done that […] they've been here half a year, a year, two years, they all have the glazed half-shaven look of lethargy, or is it dope […] This is the real Africa to them, the one they came from Europe to find, not the fake expensive one dished up to them at Victoria Falls, or the dangerous frightening one that tried to hurt them on the train [to Malawi]. In this place each of them is at the centre of the universe, and

at the same time is nowhere, surely this is what it means to be spiritually fulfilled (75).

The sentiment of traveller's inertia and 'living on borrowed time' that Galgut expresses here is not unique to the writer or the landscape. It echoes the American novelist and essayist Joan Didion on her six-months-come-eight-years experience in New York, as penned in her seminal 1967 essay Goodbye to All That (originally titled Farewell to the Enchanted City).

> It never occurred to me that I was living a real life there. In my imagination I was always there for just another few months […] nothing was irrevocable; everything was within reach […] to think of "living" there was to reduce the miraculous to the mundane (Didion, Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays, 186-187).

Like Didion, Galgut posits the real sense of a place as subjective and reveals the deep human desire to reconcile our experience and worldview with our preconceptions of a place: 'the one they came from Europe to find, not the fake expensive one […] or the dangerous frightening one' (In a Strange Room, 75).

> He's as hedonistic as the rest of them. Towards evening he wanders with some of the others in the group, they are all talking and laughing like old friends, to a clearing behind the village where some bearded itinerant hippie is offering sunset flights […] the gentle suspension of the little machine in the last light contains something of the unreal weightlessness of being here. But the truth is that even in the first sybaritic day or two there is that same blue thread of uneasiness to him, no amount of heat or marijuana will quite sedate the restlessness. He is outside the group, observing (75-76).

In his first journey, Damon struggles with such 'weightlessness'; in this second journey, he attempts to overcome it. Something changes within him; he appears to free himself somewhat from sociopoesis and come closer to feeling, if not realising, his core issues.

We witness that his self-sabotage, the building and breaking of storms, is within.

> He sees properly for the first time the ragged clothes on the smiling children, the bare interiors of the smoky huts with their two or three pieces of furniture, the skeletal dogs slinking away at his approach, and for the first time he chooses to understand why people who live here, whose country this is, might want to run errands for these foreign visitors […] his headache is very bad, and through the haze of the pain the

beautiful landscape has receded and broken into disparate elements […]
he himself is startled at how furious he is […] the hottest part of it is for
himself. He is as guilty as any of them, he too is passing through, he too
has luck and money, all his self-righteousness will not absolve him […]
he knows that the spell is broken and he can't be one of the lotus-eaters
any more, he has to move on, move on (78-79).

In his first journey he co-dependently projects his 'centre' on to Reiner; in his second journey, on to a French-speaking Swiss man in his early twenties, Jerome. Damon appears to dissociate his self when he is in-between travel companions, such as when he explores Victoria Falls solo. His inner peace becomes somewhat restored as he intermittently reunites with Jerome, whom he first met on the train to Lusaka, then again on the bus to the Malawian border, and again on the ferry to Nkhata Bay.

It is a restful time, the substance of it made of warmth and moving liquid
and grains of sand, everything standing still and at the same time
pouring and flowing. At the centre of it, the only solid object, is Jerome
[…] But even here, he is outside the group, looking in […] Even if he
could speak French he could never close up the gap. This sets him
apart, making his loneliness resound in him with a high thin note, like the
lingering sound of a bell (83-84).

Traversing Uncharted Territory—The Realism of Travel

A recurring theme for Galgut is that of boundaries, both interpersonal and geographical. Like most people, he finds boundaries comforting when upheld, but confronting when challenged. And yet, he chooses to travel to push himself in this very regard:

> He has always had a dread of crossing borders; he doesn't like to leave
> what's known and safe for the blank space beyond in which anything
> can happen. Everything at times of transition takes on a symbolic weight
> and power. But this too is why he travels. The world you're moving
> through flows into another one inside, nothing stays divided any more,
> this stands for that, weather for mood, landscape for feeling, for every
> object there is a corresponding inner gesture, everything turns into
> metaphor. The border is a line on a map, but also drawn inside himself
> somewhere (85-86).

Damon again perceives the correlation between his internal state and his external environment. He projects his own misgivings into his latest travel location; despite the potential beauty and bounty of Tanzania's 'mountainous green countryside quilted with tea plantations […] it's as if he's arrived at a place outside time, in which he only feels its lack' (93). A few hours later, as his bus arrives in Mbeya, he describes the 'low, sinister buildings, made mostly of mud, crouching close to the ground […] a crowded street swirling with fumes […] He can't remember when he last felt so alone' (93-95). As a reader, you question the protagonist's psychological compulsion to perpetually expose himself to such dangerous places.

Abruptly, Damon's fate changes, and he is reunited once more with Jerome and his travel companions: 'in the space of five minutes, the whole world has changed shape, this town that looked mean and threatening to him is suddenly full of vibrancy and life' (95):

> They go by taxi to the [train] station. This building too is no longer the
> empty darkened mausoleum of last night; it's been transformed into a
> crowded public space filled with noise and commotion (95).

And yet, Damon slips seamlessly back into his former disposition at the prospect of retracing his route due to political unrest: 'returning along the same path in any journey is depressing, but he especially fears how he might feel on this occasion' (97). By 'this occasion', we can only speculate that Damon refers to his circumstance of both an unorthodox (bribed, visa-less) border crossing and of going it alone again, after having only just reunited with his travel companions:

> The part of him that watches himself is still here too, not ecstatic or afraid. This part hovers in its usual detachment, looking down with wry amusement […] it sees all the complexities of the situation he's in and murmurs sardonically into his ear, you see where you have landed yourself. You intended to visit Zimbabwe for a few days and now you find yourself weeks later on a train to Dar es Salaam. Happy and unhappy, he falls asleep in the end and dreams about, no, I don't remember his dreams (97).

Damon's numinosity at the reality of travel—'not ecstatic or afraid'; 'happy and unhappy'—is conveyed effectively by Galgut's innovative narrative style: his juxtaposition of the "he" of the past, who falls asleep and dreams; the "I" of the now, who cannot remember his dreams from that time; and the "you" in the mirror, offering accusations. To reiterate what was mentioned previously in Chapter Two, the power and insight of such a narrative derives from the narrator's alignment as an anthropologist observing and as his own informant. This dual perspective creates a cognitive dissonance and reflects the somatic deep structure of all identity narrative: a story of embodiment and disembodiment (Eakin, How Our Lives Become Stories, 41-42).

And, to draw back on Chapter One, Galgut shares Baudelaire's appreciation of liminal travelling places—specifically: train stations, bus depots, border crossings and hostels—as conducive to transience, introspection and traversing unchartered territory. Galgut concurs with Baudelaire, Emerson and De Botton in terms of a lifelong ambivalence towards travel, while frequently desiring to simply 'leave for leaving's sake'.

The Sensitisation of Solitude—My End is My Beginning

Damon, like many of us, is compelled by his search for love; a longing beyond solitude for a completeness that is projected onto the other, yet resides within: 'my end is my beginning'. His unrequited desire for Jerome gains potential in a rare moment alone together outside a bank in Dar es Salaam, where a brief exchange reveals that the feeling is mutual.

> It's like being struck by lightning. Or like being pushed over an edge, on which, he now realises, he's been balanced for days. Nothing is quite the same as before. When he follows the others down the stairs and out into the street he is looking at everything through a strange pane of glass, which both distorts and clarifies the world (In a Strange Room, 99).

Galgut suggests the analogy of a Carrollian 'looking glass' as a means to perceive the world as paradoxically distorted yet clarified, comparable to the numinous experience of Eros. Here, I am reminded of Jung's speculation that love and power is an inversely-related drive in humankind:

> Wherever the psyche is set violently oscillating by a numinous experience [such as an encounter with the 'other', potentially via travelling] there is a danger that the thread by which one hangs may be torn. Should that happen, one man tumbles into an absolute affirmation, another into an equally absolute negation (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 176-177).

Damon is invited to join Jerome and his companions on their further travels, but despite his desire to do so, he procrastinates and struggles with the commitment: 'His own life has narrowed to a fork, at which he dithers in an indecisive rapture. He doesn't have to decide now, there is always tomorrow, tomorrow. But in the morning nothing has changed' (In a Strange Room, 100).

His indecision becomes a decision in itself as he reverts to his default attempt to overcome 'weightlessness' and traveller's inertia by moving on. And so, Damon takes the path of least resistance and follows Jerome and his companions to Kenya. When they suggest continuing on to Greece together:

> He goes walking through the old city, between high and fantastic facades; movement has always been a substitute for thought and he would like to stop thinking now. Wandering around, he finds himself in an antique shop […] his eye slides off this material world until a human figure pulls it back. Where are you from […] South Africa, goodness me,

how did you get up here. Through Malawi, my word, I'm off to Malawi in a few days […] For some reason this lanky expat stays in his mind even when he gets back to his hotel, in all this grimy and half-decayed city he is the only person, aside from his companions, who knows my name (102).

Galgut perceives the significance of others knowing your name when itinerant on solitary travels. In this instance, it offers enough of an alternative bearing—tenuous and deluded as it is—to prompt a digression from Damon's default: 'the journey [with Jerome and companions] ends with four little words […] I must go back' (103). Damon instead chooses to accompany the antique shop owner (whom he knows nothing about, and only later learns is called Charles) to Malawi, mistakenly on the premise that Charles knows his name. Ironically, Charles does not even recognise Damon, let alone remember his name, upon a second visit to his shop the next day. And, in their future conversations, 'he always has to ask my name at some point, before immediately forgetting it again' (107). It eventually reaches the stage where Charles refers to Damon as 'Noel':

Why he's fixed on this name it's hard to tell, but I feel too weary to correct him. By this time there is a high level of irritation between them and being called Noel is just part of the deal (110).

Damon's desire to stop thinking, to stop moving and to return home at all costs (namely, to forsake the potential for love) mirrors his fear of progress and his desire to regress: 'not only is travel typically fuelled by desire, it also embodies powerful transgressive impulses [that is, impulses of transcending perceived boundaries, such as the ability to go back in time]' (Porter, Haunted Journeys, 8-9).

Damon profoundly regrets his decision to accompany Charles rather than Jerome; he seems consistently thwarted and sabotaged by his very self: 'a thin column of grief rises in him like mercury' (In a Strange Room, 106). Galgut writes a passage seeking forgiveness, both from Jerome (and his companions), and ultimately from himself:

Jerome, if I can't make you live in words, if you are only the dim evocation of a face […] and the others too […] if you are names without a nature, it's not because I don't remember, no, the opposite is true, you are remembered in me as an endless stirring and turning. But it's for this precisely that you must forgive me, because in every story of obsession there is only one character, only one plot. I am writing about myself alone, it's all I know, and for this reason I have always failed in every

love, which is to say at the very heart of my life. He sits in the empty
room, crying (106).

Referring to himself in the third person at the end of the passage, Galgut hauntingly echoes the disembodiment that Damon experiences at the loss of Jerome. Damon's endless quest for embodiment, identity and belonging appears somewhat tied up in his preoccupation with names. He fixates on such singular, discrete, concrete details ('names without a nature') in an attempt to ground himself, while psychologically distancing himself, in the disorientating realm of travel. Damon astutely perceives that his desire for closeness to others mirrors his desire for completeness within himself ('I am writing about myself alone').

And yet, Damon's digression with such details belies the affective impact that others actually have on him ('an endless stirring and turning'), which he eventually comes to acknowledge and act upon:

This is also the day on which the others [Jerome and companions] are leaving Kenya, he knows the time of their flight. So at two that afternoon, while he stands on a deserted beach […] he looks at his watch and feels their departure almost as a physical change in himself […] It's about now that he realises he has made a mistake. He should have gone with them, of course he should. Why is he going home. It's only a couple of days later, but already his decision is senseless. He sees clearly what he's going back to in South Africa, the same state of nothing, the drifting from place to place. Never has this condition so obviously been what it is, an absence of love […] What rises in him now is an urge to make the largest and most dramatic gesture of all, he will chase them not for a few hundred kilometres but halfway across the world […] he will arrive one night out of the dark, out of the recent past, with his hands open, smiling. It's me again, I came here to find you (108).

Once again, Damon has fearfully fled on impulse at the first threat of traversing unchartered territory within himself; whether working through a disagreement with Reiner and accepting shadow tendencies in others as in himself, as per his first journey, or following through on his desire for Jerome and risking all that love entails, especially the potential for loss, as in this second journey.

And yet, as Damon comes to realise, fleeing offers no escape from loss and other such affects. History repeats itself as Damon tracks the object of his co-dependence; this time, Jerome in place of Reiner: he romantically anticipates their

reunion and, suddenly decisive, he becomes 'consumed by the desire to get to Greece' (111). But when Damon returns home, something happens to him:

> Back among familiar things again, the objects and faces that are the icons of his usual life, a kind of apathy comes over him. It's as if he's in shock. Did I really do that, he thinks to himself, did I really go chasing them all that way. And instead of rushing out in a continuation of his old momentum to book tickets and make plans, he finds himself sitting in the sun, brooding about what's happened. He feels even less sure than before about the meaning of it all. By imperceptible degrees, then, he accepts the notion that the journey is over, and that he's back where he started. The story of Jerome is one he's lived through before, it is the story of what never happened, the story of travelling a long way while standing still (111).

The Shadow and the Sublime—Tracks into Infinity

Damon's second journey does not end there. Feeling psychologically unresolved, elusively seeking a centre outside of himself, he surreptitiously weaves his way through Europe to Jerome's homeland of Switzerland, four months later. But, as he approaches:

> […] he has a faint memory again of the fear that gripped him in Africa […] and feels doubt like a coldness in him […] now that he has waited so long and come so far, he is in no hurry to arrive. He sits in the shore for a long time, thinking. He would like this moment to suspend itself indefinitely, so that he need never stir himself again (112).

Damon summons the courage to proceed to Jerome's family home, and there is an artificial awkwardness to the welcome reception: 'the dialogue and the gestures are tinny and false, like some kind of bright paper wrapped around the meaning of the moment […] they don't know what to say to each other' (113). As Damon spends increasing time with Jerome:

> […] they are pleasant and polite with each other, but their interaction has something of the quality of a letter which Jerome sent him, the studied and careful presentation of words that have been translated and copied from a dictionary. It isn't only Jerome who makes things this way; he brings his own painful awkwardness to bear. He isn't himself; he is a guarded version of his own nature […] There are hints, perhaps, that it might be possible to move past this state […] the possibility of another shared journey floats in the air […] He knows already that he must move on (115).

When Damon and Jerome shake hands as a goodbye gesture, 'they have never been more distant, or polite' and Damon speculates that 'he has already left, or perhaps he never arrived' (117). Though Jerome begs him to stay, or at least return, Damon decisively goes to London; 'this [growing silence and placidity between them] isn't what he wants, it is very deeply what he doesn't want' (119).

But the same restlessness envelops him in London, so he keeps drifting from place to place; five months later, he finds himself in a strange country, at the edge of a strange town, with dusk coming down:

> He is watching people drifting into a funfair […] Circus music carries towards him faintly over the weeds and in the gathering gloom at the base of a high green volcano he sees the lights of a ferris wheel go round and round and round. He doesn't know why, but this scene is like

a mirror in which he sees himself. Not his face, or his past, but who he

is. He feels a melancholy as soft and colourless as the wind, and for the

first time since he started travelling he thinks that he would like to stop.

Stay in one place; never move again (117-118).

Eight months after he passed through, Damon is in London again, on his way back home to South Africa via Amsterdam and Paris:

[…] he stumbles aimlessly around the streets, wandering into shops and

out again, sitting on benches […] using up time, but the journey hasn't

ended where he wanted it to, it has frayed out into endless ambiguities

and nuances, like a path that divides and divides endlessly [like a fractal:

a natural phenomenon of an infinitely recursive pattern], growing fainter

all the time (119).

As in his first journey, Damon experiences unfulfilled expectations in travel, love and life; yet, on this second journey, as a lesson learnt, he grows somewhat in self-awareness (noting that he places himself in such predicaments) and decisiveness, and tries to regroup by taking a different route. He attempts to settle for the first time in a long while, in a country house belonging to friends, three hours from Cape Town; he has no other place to return to and 'the idea of this house, far away from all the old familiar sites, is like a fresh beginning, the possibility of home [… he] wonders what he's done to himself now' (121).

Damon's attempt to anchor himself is effective insofar as:

[…] a sort of intimacy develops between him and the place; they put out

tendrils and grow into each other. This process deepens as his life

overflows outdoors […] when old dead branches begin to sprout buds

and leaves, and then bright bursts of colour, he feels as if it's happening

inside himself (122).

His mood appears buoyed by the fact that he finally has a place to consider 'home': 'he doesn't feel like a traveller anymore, it's hard to imagine that he ever thought of himself that way' (122). This quells his wanderlust, but only for so long. Poignantly, Damon then feels ready to contact Jerome by letter, and invites him to visit, but instead receives the tragic news that Jerome passed away due to a motorbike accident, one week to the day after Damon returned to South Africa. This spirals Damon back into dissociation: 'as he sits at the epicentre of this soundless white explosion, that separate watchful part of his brain is back again, reading over his shoulder' (123). Despite (or perhaps, because of) their short-lived and unfulfilled relationship, Jerome's death has profound impact on Damon and his trajectory—not

only as the loss of a lover, but as the loss of his self which was tied up with Jerome co-dependently (i.e. beyond healthy interpersonal boundaries).

This prompts Damon to metaphysically and philosophically speculate on the futility of travel, and the inevitability of life:

> A journey is a gesture inscribed in space; it vanishes even as it's made
> […] behind you there is no trace that you were ever there. The roads
> you went down yesterday are full of different people now; none of them
> knows who you are. In the room you slept in last night a stranger lays in
> the bed […] soon your presence, which felt so weighty and permanent,
> has completely gone. Things happen once only and are never repeated,
> never return. Except in memory (123).

Damon seeks his self externally, sociopoetically and projected in other people (Jerome) and places (the melancholic funfair; the reinvigorating Cape Town 'home'). He chases the shadow and the sublime, and this continually undoes him. In Jerome's wake, he feels desensitised ('not seeing, not hearing anything'), disorientated ('everything he knows looks strange and unfamiliar, as if he's lost in a country he's never visited before') and driven once more to travel the tracks into infinity: he 'goes out, walking into the world' (123). Jung perceptively wrote on such an experience, differentiating a person like Damon at this point in the narrative from one who is individuated (i.e. living in tune with one's instincts):

> While the man who despairs marches towards nothingness, the one who
> has placed faith in the archetype [i.e. connected with his unconscious,
> repressed shadow] follows the tracks of life and lives right into his death.
> Both, to be sure, remain in uncertainty, but the one lives against his
> instincts, the other with them (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 337).

Where Power Predominates, Love is Lacking—One is the Shadow of the Other

Damon's antagonist in his third, and final, journey is an old friend: the psychologically troubled Anna, who is 'like a sister to him, somebody he loves and who makes him laugh […] he's always had a cooling, calming influence on her, she's always listened to him' (In a Strange Room, 131). Damon invites her to escape her recent psychiatric diagnosis and the strain of her high profile, powerful job by accompanying him for the first eight weeks of his six months in India: 'a chance for Anna to find herself and stabilise […] it seemed in the beginning like a good idea to everybody' (129). As he takes on a new role and identity as her 'guardian', held accountable to her lover and her psychiatrist, the depth of both his naivety and her trauma is dramatically played out against the fittingly disorientating cultural backdrop. Anna's first transgression takes place before their journey even begins; in the airport departure lounge, she breaks her pledge not to drink alcohol (which undoes her medication) and displays her anger at being caught out, foreshadowing the tumultuous times ahead.

At the outset, Damon suspends his disbelief, maintaining his denial and his numinous faith in travel; the benediction of the destination, despite the journey:

> […] things will be easier, he reasons, when they reach their destination.
> They are heading for a tiny fishing village in south Goa, where he has
> spent the previous two winters. There will be nothing to do except lie
> around in the sun or go for long walks on the beach or swim in the warm
> sea. Surely the indolence will slow her down […] at this early point, he
> still has patience and compassion (129-130).

In the liminal space of the train ride to Goa, he then reflects on how his travelling habits have changed, now that he is middle-aged:

> He has become more sedentary, staying in one place for longer periods
> of time, with less of that youthful rushing around […] he became aware
> that he was forming connections with the place […] setting up a web of
> habits and social reflexes that he usually travels to escape (130).

Damon's newfound sedentary nature is challenged by the manic fury and power that drives and endangers the obsessive-compulsive Anna, whose moods veer wildly between elation and despair: 'the force from which she must be protected, is inside her' (131). Damon has not witnessed her in this state before and narrates, 'I have some misguided notion that movement might be good for her, that the feeling of life passing by might suspend her internal clamour' (135-136).

As Damon finds himself constantly cleaning up, and anxiously checking on, Anna, they take on roles in a power-play. Beneath their spoken words 'another dialogue is in progress, in which she is somehow a victim and I the nagging bully. I don't like this role; I try to pull back from it' (136). Damon is co-dependent to an 'other' once more: in this third journey ('The Guardian'), he is the 'rescuer', while Anna is the 'victim'. And so the subtext of the book, Damon's greater journey, can be deduced. Over his three journeys, he attempts to transcend a dysfunctional psychological fate bestowed upon him: the victim-perpetrator-rescuer triangle of co-dependence, which accords with Jung's theory on the inverse relationship between love and power (as per the subheading of this section). Damon experiences each angle of this triangular dynamic over the course of the narrative. In his first journey ('The Follower'), he is the victim to Reiner's perpetration; Reiner clearly holds the power, while Damon follows out of love. In his second journey ('The Lover'), he is the perpetrator to Jerome's victimhood; Damon holds more power than love as he becomes the decisive one and 'calls the shots'. In this third journey, the love-power balance is indeterminate: 'he has no real power over [Anna …] he would have no recourse but to plead. Then they might both see where the power lies' (136).

Such awareness is the first step to breaking the cycle. Damon perceptively comes to realise that he is travelling with Anna's shadow self, which is exacerbated by her illness:

> It's begun to feel to him as if a stranger has taken up residence in her, somebody dark and reckless that he doesn't trust, who wants to consume Anna completely. This stranger is still cautious, still biding her time. Meanwhile the person that he knows is visible, and sometimes in the ascendant. Then he can speak reasonably to her and feel the she is hearing, or laugh with her about something funny, or enlist her on his side. But the dark stranger always appears again, peering slyly over her shoulder, doing something alarming, and the softer Anna shrinks away. At moments the pair of them are there together, the sister-Anna and her scary twin, and they jostle each other for the other hand. It's an uneven battle, the stranger is certainly stronger, but I keep hoping the pills will vanquish her (136-137).

At this point, Anna threatens to take all of her pills at once as a suicide ploy, but is prevented from doing so by the turn of events: she has forgotten her stash of pills at a train station cloakroom. Ever since Damon has known her, there has been such talk; never dramatic, merely as a casual aside in conversation. And so, even then,

when he sees her sudden seriousness, 'he can't quite get a hold on what she says' (143). They eventually recover Anna's pills and move on, taking a sojourn in Hampi—an extraordinary site of ancient Hindu empire ruins spread across a massive landscape of boulders. But Anna can't cope with the setting: 'the desolation echoes something in her, she's soon back in her familiar pattern. No sooner have they arrived at one spot than she wants to rush on to the next, nothing contains her, nothing holds her in' (144). So they promptly return to Goa and the same room in the same hotel as they stayed in just days prior, 'and the big looping journey they've made is just one more completed circle, bringing them back to exactly the same point' (145).

What then transpires is a compelling, chilling scene, with the climax spanning twenty pages (145-165), in which Anna surreptitiously realises her death wish by overdosing on two hundred and fifty pills in their hotel room. Damon foreshadows this:

> There's a curious feeling in the room, the spiky angles of confrontation that filled their earlier exchange have gone; she seems soft and somehow younger, as if she's retreated into childhood. The curtains have been drawn and there's a stillness over everything, completely at odds with the time of day. In retrospect these signs are obvious […] and it's an indication of how worn out he is, how lost in the endless repetitions of the scenario, that he doesn't understand. Afterwards he will blame himself' (145-146).

Galgut takes the reader through Damon's gradual dawning of the situation:

> It's a chance conjunction of images that finally draws the picture together […] Anna on top of the bed and on the floor underneath it a heap of discarded medicine wrappers […] that made the crinkling noise I heard, an insistent scratching and rustling that has picked at my mind, bothering me (147).

Galgut narrates in the third person as Damon dissociates and guiltily berates himself for allowing all of this to happen under his watch: 'now he understands that this has been coming all along, from day one' (147).

The drama of attempting to revive Anna unfolds amidst the ubiquitous derision, filth and rat-infestation of the archaic, defective Indian medical system, where patients share beds and even lie on the floor. Desperately, Damon runs back and forth between the hospital and pharmacy to purchase and provide all of the equipment

and medicine that is required in turn for each of Anna's procedures, while washing bedpans, keeping vigil and personally nursing Anna. Damon narrates, 'a sense of unreality has thickened the air, like a dream in which you cannot move, and through this fog I run back up the corridor' (150). When Anna pulls through a few days later, crisis averted, Damon comments that:

> She floats above all the pain and grief and guilt that she's created, looking down on our scurrying and striving. There is a very real element of contempt in the way she treats us now […] she is far beyond us all, because she's not afraid of death any longer, which is both her weakness and her greatest strength […] her demands become more insistent […] He just keeps shaking his head. No. There is a perverse pleasure in wielding that word, in being able to withhold death from her (165-166).

But there is more to the drama. Attempted suicide is a criminal offence in India and so the police begin an investigation into Anna's circumstance. Damon channels his power to coordinate her escape from hospital, under the premise of discharge against medical advice, to avoid her detainment. He makes arrangements for her to be escorted by doctors on her imminent flight back to South Africa, while he stays on in India as originally planned.

Finally, the evening arrives when he can bring her rucksack to the hospital, along with her passport and ticket, and say goodbye:

> After everything that's gone before, the moment is somehow small and empty […] the high tide of madness has receded, leaving behind this translucent husk of a woman who nearly resembles his old friend. But not quite. There is a chilly reserve between them, which covers over a gulf so huge that it can perhaps never be bridged (171-172).

The narrative closes with Galgut speculating on how 'lives leak into each other' (180) in travel, as in life itself. Damon spends his final weeks in Goa accompanied by Caroline, the English widowed ex-nurse who fatefully stepped in to help him when Anna overdosed. Their 'fraught and uneasy alliance' (174), which has by then evolved into owed debt and resented obligation, is compounded when Caroline seeks atonement and confides in Damon the dreadful details of her husband's fatal Moroccan accident, thirty years prior (details which are incidental to the narrative insofar as they are intriguingly withheld from the reader):

> Her story travels into him, his skin is very thin, there's no barrier between him and the world; he takes it all in. And even afterwards when he wants

to get rid of it he can't do it, in the weeks that follow as he tries to leave Goa and the village behind the things that he lived through there will recur in an almost cellular way, haunting him, and Caroline's story is part of it, joined somehow to Anna, all of it One Thing (175).

He parts from Caroline, and his onward journey northwards to Bombay and the mountains is 'like an endless running away' (176):

In all of this he tries to behave like an ordinary traveller, marvelling at what's around him. But he hardly ever manages to lose himself; mostly he is stuck in one place in the past. The physical world feels substanceless, like a drab dream from which he will wake up into a dirty hospital ward (176).

Damon receives second-hand updates upon Anna's return to South Africa (he feels that he can never again see her nor speak to her directly); she regresses and is intermittently readmitted to a rehabilitation clinic. He receives the inevitable news of her repeated suicide attempt; this time successful. Damon struggles to accept that she is dead, even when his politically-forced return to South Africa several months later silently confronts him with 'a bag of ash and bones, all that's left of her after the cremation […] It seems bizarre, to the point of bitter laughter, that a human being can be reduced to this' (179).

In his effort to forge completeness on this epic journey, and work through his meditation on mortality, Damon visits the hillside headstone of Caroline's husband when travelling in Morocco a couple of years later. He sobs inconsolably:

But it takes him a while to realise who he's really weeping for […] the past lays claim to the present […] He feels awful, but also relieved somehow, emptied out […] The day is wearing on and he has a bus to catch, a journey to complete. It's time to go (180).

Damon comes to realise that his personal boundaries remain permeable, and so he remains co-dependently susceptible to taking on, and weeping for, the lives of others—Reiner, Jerome, Anna, Caroline—whether they be his victims, perpetrators or rescuers. Ultimately, he weeps for himself; his relieved and emptied-out feeling of realisation is only the first step on the onerous path that he is yet to complete. In the course of his three journeys, Damon has confronted his own shadow: he is no longer the same self who set out trekking with Reiner. But he is yet to integrate his shadow, in order to pursue his own fate in his life and travels, and no longer act upon others nor be all-encompassed when they inevitably attempt to act upon him. Until then, he cannot 'lose himself' and stays 'stuck in one place in the past'.

Chapter Four—Dessaix's Arabesques: A Tale of Double Lives

Being Seduced by a Place—and the Landscape of Forgetting

Like Galgut's In a Strange Room, Robert Dessaix's Arabesques: A Tale of Double Lives, which was published as a memoir, dwells on the notion that the individual exists in a privileged and reciprocal relationship with the past. Dessaix takes on the 'reverie' mode of travelling, and the writing of such, producing 'a continual flux of lively storytelling, reminiscences and meditation' (2). He appears as interpreter and guide as he follows after Gide, through the casbah in Algiers, the seafront in Naples, Portugal, Morocco, Normandy and the south of France, in a pilgrimage that becomes Dessaix's act of personal redemption:

> […] the true vagabond in these pages is my mind […] Gide then
> shadows me throughout the book, giving shape to my own thoughts on
> religion, love, ageing and why we travel […] My encounters with Gide
> are a prism (2-3).

Arabesques has an inner tension; it is preoccupied with the 'fault lines of a personality'. Overtly, this refers to the protagonist Dessaix and his antagonist Gide, who: 'in the chapel of his innermost self […] hankered for the sensual tumult of the crossroads, while at the crossroads […] feared the loss of his innermost self' (4). Covertly, such an inner tension also applies to the reader: Dessaix attempts to shine a light on a fault line in the reader's own sense of self ("Pushing Against the Dark: Writing about the Hidden Self"). The overarching duality that Dessaix entertains is the paradoxical notion that we are transformed by travel, yet essentially remain the same person. Changed, but still you.

Setting is pivotal to the narrative; Dessaix refers to the casbah in Algiers, 'a tight tangle of grubby streets and steps jammed between ancient walls on a sharp ridge, knifing up from the port' (Arabesques, 14), as a place where 'shadows still meet shadows and who you think you are can still be ambushed by who you've been all along' (4). It is here, 'past the cramped, dark recesses in the walls where men sat playing draughts, having their hair cut and flapping at flies' (12), that Dessaix eloquently reflects on that singular, pivotal moment:

> […] when right out of the blue something (a word, a gesture) fits like a
> key into a clamp on our soul, unlocks it and throws it wide open, letting
> who we are come spilling out at last. At last we can start living out who
> we've been all along, at first in the shadows and now in the light (11).

He fails to recall his own such moment, and instead recounts the scene—somewhere nearby, a century earlier—whereby Gide experienced his moment of affinity, in an encounter with the notorious Irish writer Oscar Wilde. Back when the casbah was 'a roiling, roistering hotbed of life lived to the full' (12). Something in Gide loosened and came tumbling out; 'it was above all André's psyche rather than his body that went adventuring that night in the casbah: he was exploring his own mind's labyrinths rather than the casbah's' (17). Gide's moment, when 'time had evaporated […] he was nowhere and everywhere' (14), reminds me of the complex and personal notion of being seduced by a place and resonating with it, as also experienced by De Botton and Flaubert. That is, the idea that we may each value different, particular foreign elements because they seem to 'accord more faithfully with our identity and commitments than anything our homeland could provide […] what we find exotic abroad may be what we hunger for in vain at home' (De Botton, The Art of Travel, 78).

During his reverie in the casbah, Dessaix ruminates on why he conjures up Gide's moment, of all the consequential historical events that had occurred in the vicinity. This foreshadows Dessaix's own journey. He confides in the reader his uncanny sense of synchronicity: 'isn't everything that happens a sort of double helix of the willed and unwilled, if you look closely enough?' (Arabesques, 24). He is wary to differentiate this from 'fate', which he considers 'a lazy word […] almost meaningless […] anything you haven't consciously willed can be written off as [such]' (30). In contrast, Dessaix's concept scientifically allows for the randomness or disconnectedness of things, and pays homage to the Jungian shadow self (where the unwilled reflects our subconsious) as an internal rather than external (i.e. karma, god) determinant of our lives. I have always been equally uncomfortable with the term 'fate' and only now, thanks to Dessaix, understand why and note his alternative.

Dessaix observes that 'from the age of twenty-three Gide travelled above all, it seems to me, in search of [the pagan flute-playing goat-god of the wild, associated with sexuality] Pan' (28). Dessaix relates to Gide's travels to escape from the Christianity which had formed him as an escape from a strong attachment rather than from something disliked, and suspects that he has 'done much the same thing—in much the same places' (28). Namely, in Morocco, where Dessaix believes something may have been unlocked in him. Also, in cafes. Dessaix extols the virtue of cafes as the 'quintessence of travel' (31). Usually underrated as such, at least in

comparison to the likes of restaurants, beaches, museums, galleries and cathedrals, he sees their significance, beyond their relative informality and familiarity in expectations, simply as conducive to sitting down and being introspective. Dessaix comments, 'they're where you put yourself back together again, changed but still you, after flying apart in the Prado [museum] or the Kalahari [desert]. They're where you remember who you're supposed to be' (33). One of Baudelaire's liminal spaces. Dessaix adds, distinguishing the traveller from the holiday-maker, 'my kind of traveller needs [metaphorical] oases [such as cafes]' (33). Oases from which to process the sensory stimulation and affects of travel, where the traveller's language and memory trickle back after an encounter with a typical 'landscape of forgetting':

> […] chaotic, a tumult of colour and sound, thronged with merchants and shoppers, overflowing with shoes, silver, spices, perfumes, djellabas, glassware, crockery, croissants, oranges, aubergines, bangles, brassware—my mind has been just a jigsaw of images in a wash of sound. Language has fled (34).

This vivid scene conveying the clamour of the Algiers city centre instantly conjures up my own travels through cities like Kathmandu, Ubud, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Port Louis and Cape Town. I resonate wholeheartedly with Dessaix's insight, this humble yet profound truth, and only wish that I had noted it myself, and sooner in my travels.

Why Travel?—'Because I Knew I'd Find Myself Interesting Here'

In the Algiers café, Dessaix remembers his trip to Morocco at the age of twenty-two: 'it was the first utterly foreign place I'd ever been to' (34). He had stayed with an Arab family in a traditional, labyrinthine Arab house in the Arab quarter:

> I did time-travel in the medieval laneways of Fez and Marrakesh. And I
> did, like Gide, feel for the first time not so much the insincerity as the
> thinness of my fiercely eccentric religious self, and the stirring of another
> self […] it was time in Morocco to give an airing to the parallel life that
> reading Gide had hatched in me some years before (34-35).

Dessaix begins speculating: why Morocco, of all places? Yet his stream of consciousness is interrupted by the arrival of Yacoub: 'when we travel, we're prone to meeting up with friends of friends […] otherwise in a foreign city it's all too easy to feel you don't exist' (36). After their brief introductions to each other:

> The whine of a muezzin's call to prayer came drifting up the hill from the
> city, whisking me instantly back to Morocco where I'd heard my first
> muezzin, calling from a minaret just a few rooftops away in the early
> morning dark. I'd been so startled I'd stayed awake until dawn (37).

After Dessaix recounts Gide's visit to Blidah—a small town which sits just south of Algiers, about an hour away, at the foot of the Atlas Mountains—Yacoub suggests that they drive there to visit. Dessaix promptly corrects Yacoub's implication that he is on a pilgrimage, to which Yacoub knowingly replies: 'you're looking for something' (45). Dessaix later reflects on Yacoub's character: 'He's one of those people, I think, who never stop collecting the pieces for life's great jigsaw. He seems to be persuaded that it's all going to add up to something' (198). Dessaix notes: 'I wasn't looking for anything; I was waiting to be ambushed. There's a difference' (45).

Dessaix cannot see the attraction of Blidah, which was successively Andalusian, Turkish and French; cannot fathom why Gide (along with 'the moneyed classes of France and England') chose to visit here, of all places:

> There is no mysterious medina to get lost in, no casbah or citadel, no
> souk smelling of aniseed and cinnamon, awash with colour like a
> Delacroix canvas, not even a mosque worth more than a glance (50).

At first, the answer eludes both Dessaix and Yacoub; based on some of Wilde's quotes from the late nineteenth century, they can only speculate that Wilde, Gide and such others came here to escape serious thinking by enjoying themselves mindlessly in the sun. But there were many such places within similar proximity to France and England. Why Blidah? Dessaix comes to see that 'Blidah offered you

the Orient without putting you to the trouble of going all the way to Constantinople or up the Nile to find it' (52); it has a 'particular mixture of indolence and edginess […] graceful charm—together with something sharper, more troubling, like a half-hidden blade […the Arabs have] a strangely *embodied* sense of evil' (54). A setting conducive to surreptitiously embracing the shadow side:

> To disentangle myself from the educated clutter of my everyday life. To be naked again. To relive that moment when for the first time what had been kept invisible began to show through. For many Europeans with a veiled second self North Africa is still the perfect vantage point to let this happen. For some it might be an ashram in India or some remote village in Borneo, even a Greek island might fit the bill for others, but for me it is North Africa (237).

At this point, Dessaix reveals to Yacoub the personal motivation behind his journey.

A few years prior, while Dessaix was driving in Normandy with friends, they had happened to stop their car to allow a small, black caterpillar to cross the road unscathed, only to watch it inch towards Gide's childhood chateau. They saw synchronicity between this act and Gide's love of caterpillars. This triggered a surge of sentimentality as Dessaix recalled reading Gide in his youth, which he likened to a religious experience: 'I felt that I was renewing a valued friendship I'd unaccountably let slip […] I was restoring a lost intimacy […] it was like loving Jesus' (61). His friend Miriam observed: 'You really must try to remember more of what he meant to you. And it sounds as if remembering him will be almost the same as remembering yourself' (62). To which his friend Zaida, the compulsive traveller, suggested the makings of his journey. Yet Yacoub does not settle for this explanation, and Dessaix resists elaborating further:

> I was there, as always, when I travel anywhere, both to forget and to remember—the very same thing, sometimes. Algiers was simply the right place at that time to do those two things. "When I've worked it out, Yacoub," I said, "I promise I'll tell you." I had the distinct impression he'd make sure I kept my promise (66).

In truth, Dessaix was in Algiers 'because I knew I'd find myself interesting here' (64-65), which is the converse of Gide's comment upon visiting Rome: 'I don't find myself interesting here' (65). Still, this begs the question: *why?*

Redeeming the Utter Ordinariness of Everyday Existence

Finding yourself interesting ties in with seeking the meaning of yourself and your life. For some, this is defined by religion. Dessaix perceives a religious-like experience in his resonance with Gide ('like loving Jesus') and, ultimately, in his quest to uncover his double:

> Sometimes you need to leave home to see this sort of duality for what it is. You need a vantage point, far from the habits of mind you've been nestling in, from which to look back with a fresh perspective at who you have been all your life […] As a child you can run all over the house or out into the street, you can be yourself anywhere, but once you've begun to grow up you learn the rituals of what is to be hidden and what can be revealed—and where. You are now literally a man of many parts (133; 137).

Dessaix, who had considered himself a Christian due to his upbringing, plays in the liminal space between yet another shadowy duality as he embraces his inner Protestant-of-sorts a few weeks prior to Algiers, in a cathedral 'sublimely situated on a crag above the old red-roofed quarter of the city, which topples and slides down the hill in a maze of crooked, scabby lanes to the river' in the 'raucous, cluttered, cluttering sort of city' of Oporto:

> Wherever I see it, something about this arrangement—the citadel with its crumpled skirts of roofs and laneways falling away below it, and then the water—always hits me like an echo of an inner landscape. Like a tuning fork, I begin to sing the same note as what I'm seeing. I first noticed it at the Parthenon in Athens when I was twenty-one (112).

In the Oporto cathedral, Dessaix has an 'epiphany' and realises that, unlike the parishioners whose 'loose threads' had lovingly been gathered up into the Church, 'he has no sacred tapestry to weave himself into' (114).

This touches on the idea of belonging to give a sense of being; a form of sociopoesis. Dessaix continues:

> They had found a way to redeem what I never could: the utter ordinariness of everyday existence […] It's what [the Russian writer] Dostoyevsky calls the "lukewarm" life that it's difficult for people like me to rescue, all the bits that, in a novel, would be edited out […] for the first time in my life I thought to myself: I'm a Protestant (114-115).

Dessaix speculates that his most Protestant trait is a love of what he calls 'sufficiency': 'Gide once said he had a "horror" of comfort and that that was his most Protestant trait' (117).

> […] as the years passed, I discovered, as Protestants do, other coded texts [besides the Bible] to decipher […] Dostoyevsky, Proust […] Indeed, Gide. There were biographies, histories of China and the Aztecs, explorers' tales from Africa, *Seven Years in Tibet*, Jung, books about superstrings and black holes […] I was left rudderless in a vast sea of bibles. In the end the world itself became a kind of multifarious text to puzzle out. We were warned of this, it must be said, countless times right from the start: if you Protestants are going to vest all authority in the Bible, with no popes or saints or holy relics, you'll end up either indifferent to God or sunk in unbelief […] This is what will happen […] once every man is his own pope with his Bible in his hand. A mere book will not be enough. He was quite right. Look at Scandinavia (120).

This excerpt (which has a Jungian ring to it) stops me in my tracks, especially the final phrase.

I have always been compelled to travel to Scandinavia, above any other place, for reasons unknown to me. At least, beyond my love of pristine wilderness and a natural / minimalist aesthetic. Though a second-generation Australian, my heritage is German / Ukrainian-Polish / Yugoslavian-Austrian (transient times of displacement and changing borders); so, why Scandinavia? My two brief visits to Scandinavia to date—Norway, solo, in my twenties; Finland, with family, in my thirties—were imbued with expectation and the journeys themselves were distinctly, disappointingly unmemorable. Now I am starting to see that, as both Gide and De Botton testify, my agenda on those travels was 'vast, loose and bewildering' (De Botton, The Art of Travel, 185-186). Though I was christened as a Lutheran (I suspect out of fear and because it was the thing to do at the time), my upbringing has been devoid of religion, save for some cherished Catholic traditions passed down by my grandmothers; traditions that are in fact more pagan and cultural than religious, when you look deeper. Have I yet to embrace my inner Protestant-of-sorts; find my sacred tapestry? (Come to think of it, I do love sufficiency.) Do I seek the divine in unmediated experience? Is this why I am so compelled to travel, especially to places like Scandinavia, South Africa, North America, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and New Zealand, and to further explore my homeland of Australia? My travels to date in life concur startlingly with a world map of

Protestantism. As intended, Dessaix has indeed illuminated a fault line in my own sense of self.

My digressive reverie aside, I return to Dessaix:

> Protestant to the core, I still didn't think of myself as one. It took mass in the Cathedral in Oporto to make me do that. I might be a heathen, I thought to myself as I scampered downhill towards the river, but I am a Protestant heathen. In the early hours of the morning, around three or four [significantly: before the mythical sunrise], I might even be an atheist, but always a Protestant atheist. Late on a sunny afternoon, on the other hand, at the back of the house looking out on the garden, I'm inclined to mellow—at that time of day things don't look so black and white. But even then my mellowing is reasoned, sober, Protestant […] I began to see in a flurry of small illuminations why I loved as I did, thought and talked as I did, joked, voted, ate, even decorated my living room and chose my shoes and socks (not to mention my companions) as I did: I was a Protestant […] Now I felt translucent, almost liquid [as Dessaix explains later: 'like absence, not presence'] (Arabesques, 121-122).

Relative Reality and 'Nomadic Loops of Renewal'

Dessaix then finally reminisces about his trip to Morocco at the age of twenty-two, which he undertook 'at least in part to live out the self that Gide had fashioned in me (although not created)' (133). The parenthesised notion touches on Dessaix's earlier phrase of 'remembering himself', with which he implies that the self is essentially always there, within; it is just a matter of uncovering it. Dessaix recalls:

> What was not just exciting but intoxicating about being in Rabat [Morocco's capital city] was a sense of oblivion. Every night alone in my moonlit room I could recollect who I was supposed to be, but by day Morocco dazzled me. I could forget. I've never quite recovered (138).

On the sense of oblivion, Dessaix elaborates on feeling 'like an absence, not a presence' (143). Emerson uses a similar phrase in his Essays, when he laments on disconnect, 'a referred existence; an absence, never a presence', as a trait evident in both nature at large and its sub-set, humankind (Goodman, The Colors of the Spirit, 8).

Metaphysically, Dessaix describes how despite (perhaps, because of) his extreme sensitivity, the outer world, which he perceives with 'marvellous clarity', can at times seem not 'unreal' but only 'relatively real' to him. 'This sort of thing happens to me quite frequently, but especially when I travel, when I've been 'stripped' of my everyday self' (Arabesques, 139). In these moments, he resides in a liminal space:

> […] waiting for these two enactments of reality—what my eyes are seeing and what they still cannot—to mesh. My body is walking. *I* am stock-still (139).

Gide wrote on experiencing such a phenomenon, and I too can relate to a submission and resignation to the inevitability of overwhelming affective circumstances. Psychologically, such dissociation and related forms of detachment, including depersonalisation and derealisation, exist in people with 'impoverished psychic organisation' as a primitive survival strategy in response to trauma or intense experience, centred on relational affective transactions, specifically the vicissitudes of attachment (Watt, The Dialogue between Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience, 191). All schools of contemporary psychoanalysis are now emphasising the centrality of affect and its regulation to the emergence and maintenance of the self (Schore, Advances in Neuropsychoanalysis, 439). The risks of lacking an efficient affect regulatory system include deficits in: understanding and reacting to bodily and environmental stimuli; identifying a corporeal image of self and its relation to the environment; distinguishing the self from the other; and

generating self awareness (462). But perhaps the most profound risk of lacking an efficient affect regulatory system, particularly in the context of this study, is the decreased capacity for autoregulation, which is partially compensated for by an increased need for external regulators [other people and places, such as in travel] (461).

On this point, Dessaix's narrative proceeds to Gide's marital home in Cuverville: 'the pivot of his adult life, the unchanging, still centre he wheeled and swooped around in great nomadic loops of renewal' (Arabesques, 158). Paradoxically, Gide found this geographical and psychological centre both a hearth and stifling. This touches on De Botton's idea that it is not necessarily at home that we 'best encounter our true selves […] the domestic setting keeps us tethered to the person we are in ordinary life, but who may not be who we essentially are' (The Art of Travel, 59). Though his wife Madeleine ('who embodied goodness') gave him extraordinary liberty and the marriage was of his choosing, there at home in Cuverville he felt that he was 'rotting away, becoming a corpse, and that he wanted to live, and this meant travelling, meeting people, loving people' (Arabesques, 190). Yet he always returned; he needed both his home and his travels to satisfy either side to his self. He saw that the freedom of travel is problematic in and of itself.

As we move on to tranquil Sousse in Tunisia, 'where there's nothing at all you *have* to see [in the way of sightseeing …] You're free. Now you can start looking', Dessaix contemplates Gide's statement: 'to free yourself is nothing—it's being free that's hard […] It's when I'm freest that I feel the furthest from happiness' (198-199). After at first revelling in such freedom, Dessaix experiences this phenomenon first-hand as a 'surge of restlessness' on his third day in Sousse:

> I needed something to spark my flagging appetite for the coming day. As Miriam says, it's the third morning that is always the most fragile because by then you've drifted back down to earth, remembering, with a touch of disenchantment and a sense of growing 'clutter', as she puts it with a flicker of irritation, exactly who you're supposed to be (206).

Dessaix comes to see that happiness can be found in 'banality of a superior kind':

> What makes me happy […] is being interrupted while eating a sandwich in front of one of the Roman empire's greatest architectural triumphs by the waiter telling me what he thinks happiness is […] Just like the façade of the Temple of Minerva [which, above all else, captivated Goethe on his travels to Italy], this cut straight to my quick because it was both big

and little at the same time or, as Gide deftly put it when writing about Goethe, it was banality of a superior kind (211).

Pursuing, Remembering and Forgetting—Seeking 'Unmediated Being'

Seeking happiness or 'banality of a superior kind', in travel as in life, in fact stems from seeking 'unmediated being': a concept that Dessaix hones in on as he travels to Biskra, in Algeria, where Gide's double life was laid bare to him (and his mother), and where he returned obsessively for years:

> He came back to Biskra, this town whose charms were so limited, even in its heyday, the following year straight after his adventure in the casbah in Algiers, he came back on his honeymoon with Madeleine the year after that, and again in 1899 and 1900. He even bought a property in Biskra […] He didn't come for the invigorating dry climate, the thermal baths or the fashionable hotels. He came above all, it seems to me, because that's where the double that had been prowling in the shadows for so long first found itself blinking shyly in the light. He came back to remember oblivion (236).

Dessaix adds, 'on reflection, I'm sure that's why I, too, constantly go back to North Africa […] to remember just *being*, "unsullied" […] by everything that has formed me. It's hard for me think of where else that is possible' (236-237). An act of autopoesis. Unmediated being 'is always slithering out of our grasp at home […] it's momentary—it has to be momentary, you can't live like that, nobody would want to' (237).

In closing, Dessaix eloquently captures what exactly it is that we attempt to pursue, remember and forget in our travels: 'nakedness' from the 'stranglehold of culture, decency and morality […] the province of religious institutions' (244-245); a place where life can be lived 'with a kind of immediacy impossible at home' (244); essentially, an escape from the sociopoesis that stifles our autopoesis.

> I suspect that when we want to burn off all those clusters of self-awareness; want to taste life in all its rawness once more, there's an infantile impulse at work […] we're playing at being children again. We want to be given the chance to start afresh. We're almost certainly deluding ourselves [… as soon as we return home] that mass of things ordering our everyday selves: our habits of mind and speech, the plethora of small proprieties, the memory of what we know and believe, our whole history since our schooldays—sinks down on us again, muffling something joyous and innocent in us, telling us where to go, what to say, how to behave, who we properly are (238-239).

Dessaix takes this a step further:

[…] what do you *do* with your newly naked self? [… how do you] spend time in a way that means anything [? …] Choking the life out of your habitual self is one thing—breathing life into your primitive, unschooled self quite another. Travel to places like Algeria or Tunisia is like temporary suicide: it has all the advantages of killing yourself with none of the disadvantages […] In the public gardens in Biskra on my last afternoon I tried to let my untutored self take over one last time—to banish the mind, bend time, forget my lines […] For an hour or two it worked, but I can only forget so much […] bliss was fast turning to listlessness […] To have desire followed so immediately by enjoyment is a delight, but I need to love, [which is] a matter of cultivation […] what you do at home (246).

Chapter Five—Xingjian's Soul Mountain

Seeking Soul Mountain—'You Can't Explain Why'

Gao Xingjian's epic novel <u>Soul Mountain</u> is a philosophical, mythological, sociological travelogue poised between memoir and fiction. It is fundamentally based on the Chinese novelist-playwright's five-month, fifteen-thousand-kilometre walking tour of the ancient forest and mountain regions of Sichuan Province, whereby he traces the course of the Yangtze River from its source to the coast and encounters the likes of Taoist monks, mythical Wild Men and deadly Qichun snakes. His journey is an attempt to flee from Beijing in response to the threat of political exile in the wake of the Cultural Revolution and being cleared of a lung cancer diagnosis, the disease that killed his father.

The book's prologue, written by translator Mabel Lee, considers this work 'a literary response to the devastation of the self of the individual by the primitive urge for the warmth and security of an other, or others, in other words by socialised life' (vi). It is a study of abandoning sociopoesis in search of autopoesis. Xingjian achieves a critical analysis of the self of one man, his own self, in a metaphysical search for the meaning of existence. This theme, and Xingjian's claim of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000, imbues the novel with high expectations. While <u>Soul Mountain</u> is undoubtedly an ambitious work, I must confess that <u>In a Strange Room</u> and <u>Arabesques</u> resonated more with me because, I believe, of their unique insights and understated personal truths as opposed to unoriginal, grandiose truths relating to the human condition. In essence, <u>Soul Mountain</u> is an unconventional presentation of conventional ideas, as previously meditated on by the likes of Emerson, Thoreau, Jung and Campbell. The highly fragmented structure, meandering plot, depersonalised characters, surrealist narration, profuse descriptors, authorial self-parody and magic realism of <u>Soul Mountain</u>—though suited to the subject matter—can be distancing, convoluted and challenging to follow at times. Some reviewers consider <u>Soul Mountain</u> 'elegant', but for these reasons I disagree. Yet it is compelling for its evocative, and at times harrowing, imagery. Of the three chosen hybrid texts and my own creative work, <u>Soul Mountain</u> veered nearest to fiction. It is important to note that I am responding to a text in translation, and I realise that different stylistic norms might be involved from those expected in writing in English.

The novel's narration is, for the most part, an inter-play between the reader-engaging, sociopoetic second-person perspective ("you") and the immediacy of the autopoetic first-person perspective ("I"), with each respectively revealing a different side to the protagonist, parallel to the Jungian notion of a secondary, repressed 'shadow' self. In the opening pages, Xingjian refers to himself in the second-person as he claims:

> You can't explain why you're here. It happened that you were sitting on a train and this person mentioned a place called Lingshan [(Soul Mountain) …] You've been to lots of places, visited lots of famous mountains, but had never heard of this place […] you couldn't help being curious and naturally wanted to know which famous places you'd missed on your travels […] He lit a cigarette and couldn't stop talking as he told you about the wonders of Lingshan (2-3).

Xingjian then speculates on the circumstances and motivations that drive his desire to travel to Lingshan, as well as the social expectations that confront him. 'Could it be that you're bored, that you're fed up with your monotonous life devoid of passion and excitement and that you want to live again, to experience life again?' (41):

> You've lived in the city for a long time and need to feel that you have a hometown. You want a hometown so that you'll be able to return to your childhood to recollect long lost memories […] What else are you looking for? When a man gets to middle age shouldn't he look for a peaceful and stable existence, find a not-too-demanding sort of job, stay in a mediocre position, become a husband and father, set up a comfortable home, put money in the bank and add to it every month so there'll be something for old age and a little left over for next generation? (8-9).

Xingjian then takes an autopoetic stance and reflects, this time more personally, on the same concerns:

> I had just gone through a crisis [the threat of political exile] and then, on top of that, a doctor wrongly diagnosed me with lung cancer […] Life for me once again has a wonderful freshness. I should have left those contaminated surroundings [of the city] long ago and returned to nature to look for this authentic life […] I don't know whether I'm now on the right track but in any case I've extricated myself from the bustling literary world and have also escaped my smoke-filled room. The books piled everywhere in that room were oppressive and stifling. They expounded all sorts of truths, historical truths to truths on how to be human (11-12).

We see Xingjian travelling to escape; returning to nature to look for 'this authentic life'.

Xingjian's belief that the meaning of life resides in nature is an idea that predates his novel. It is an idea shared by Emerson and Thoreau, who were themselves influenced by the English poet William Wordsworth, who was inspired by German Romanticist writers like Goethe, who in turn drew on the French Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Xingjian might be drawing on Chinese cultural and/or literary traditions that predate yet concur with European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism. Like Emerson and Thoreau, Xingjian portrays nature as 'raw and wild, a reality independent of human thinking […] mediated by, or entangled with, the human being' (Goodman, The Colors of the Spirit, 1-2).

The Meaning of Life (as Found in Nature) and Being Authentic

Emerson considered nature subjectively, as a means for facilitating the human condition; he was less concerned with nature objectively, in and of itself. He saw that:

> […] nature is loved by what is best in us […] if there were good men, there would never be this rapture in nature […] our hunting of the picturesque is inseparable from our protest against false society (Goodman, <u>The Colors of the Spirit</u>, 6).

This implies that it is our shadow selves that inspire us to seek out (and take rapture in) nature, to 'redeem' our authentic, autopoetic selves from sociopoesis. Equally, for Thoreau, nature came to constitute a 'sweet and beneficent society'; a substitute for the society of mankind that he too found 'cheap and false' (11). Furthermore, Thoreau extolled the virtue of nature as encouraging 'presentness to the phenomena' (13), what we may colloquially consider nowadays as 'living in the moment': a notion pivotal to many a contemporary travel memoir.

But when Xingjian sets off in nature with the lofty goal of finding the meaning of life, an authentic life, he suffers from a feeling of insignificance in the face of what De Botton coins a 'vast, loose and bewildering' agenda (<u>The Art of Travel</u>, 185-186). 'My passing through here at this moment, even my very existence, is ephemeral to the point of meaninglessness' (<u>Soul Mountain</u>, 60).

> But why have I come to this mountain? Is it to experience life in a scientific research camp [in the ancient forest] such as this? What does this sort of experience mean to me? If it's just to get away from the problems that I was experiencing, there are easier ways. Then maybe it's to find another sort of life. To leave far behind the unbearably perplexing world of human beings […] Not knowing what one is looking for is pure agony […] I think I need to break away from analytical thinking; this is the cause of all my anxieties (50).

He adeptly perceives his need to 'break away from analytical thinking'; to get back in touch with his affects. And so he looks again to nature, now with this awareness:

> In between the thick spruce and hemlock trunks are some round alpine azaleas. They are about four metres high and covered in masses of moist red flowers. The branches bow with weight and, as if unable to cope with this abundance of beauty, scatter huge flowers beneath to quietly display their enduring beauty. This unadorned splendour and beauty in nature fills me with another sort of indescribable sadness. It is

> a sadness which is purely mine and not something inherent in nature.
> Up ahead and down below are huge dead trees which have been
> snapped by the assault of the elements. To pass by these towering
> crippled remains reduces me to an inner silence and the lust to express
> which keeps tormenting me, in the presence of this awesome splendour,
> is stripped of words (59).

Being 'stripped of words' is evidence that Xingjian is beginning to broach his affects; to journey into the realm of a prelinguistic corporeal change. The beauty of nature enigmatically evokes unexplored and unreconciled parts of his self ('a sadness which is purely mine'; later revealed to be at least partially attributed to 'homesickness'). Like Emerson and Thoreau, he projects onto nature all that is good and pure and beautiful; all that he seeks to revisit and reclaim within his self, to have bestowed upon him by his travels.

As he opens up to the experience, moving closer to the autopoetic "I", he taps into a sense of sublime ecstasy and the divine 'oblivion' that Dessaix writes of:

> Some distance away is a white azalea bush which stuns me with its
> stately beauty. It has an ethereal purity and freshness […] This is
> pristine natural beauty. It is irrepressible, seeks no reward, and is
> without goal, a beauty derived neither from symbolism nor metaphor and
> needing neither analogies nor associations […] I feel the very depths of
> my soul being cleansed. The air penetrates to the soles of my feet, and
> my body and mind seem to enter nature's grand cycle. I achieve a sense
> of joyful freedom such as I have never before experienced […] The air is
> so rarefied that the pine forests beneath the layers of cloud instantly turn
> a wonderful green which drives me into an ecstatic frenzy. It is as if a
> song is emerging from the depths of my soul (61-62).

Here, Xingjian overtly differentiates the natural world from the social world of rewards and goals and, at least momentarily, values the former over the latter as a source of renewal, benediction and redemption. But such sentiments are necessarily short-lived; as noted in Chapter One by Lombard (Sensory Intelligence) and Schore (Advances in Neuropsychoanalysis), one cannot dwell constantly in affects alone, just as one can seldom exist without society. (Though Thoreau attempted to do so, for two years, two months and two days, while he immersed himself in nature, as documented in his seminal work, Walden.) It is how we manage to find, and keep, our self in society that begs the question. And so, we begin to see that nature is but a catalyst; Xingjian must delve deeper, which involves

returning to society somewhat. He comes to this realisation, seemingly subconsciously, as he then physically and psychologically attempts to revisit his childhood, which is commonly thought to be the origin of our authentic, 'unsullied' self. He seeks belonging; the hometown of his dreams.

Returning to Sociopoesis—and Encountering Otherness

It is difficult to discern fantasy from reality in <u>Soul Mountain</u>, and decidedly so: this reflects Xingjian's creativity at play.

> So you arrive in Wuyizhen, on a long and narrow street inlaid with black cobblestones […] you seem to have spent your childhood in an old mountain town like this […] Had fate not otherwise decreed, you could have been born in this town, grown up, and married here […] You recall the back courtyard with the crumbling wall of your childhood home […] Your bare feet patter on the black cobblestone street with its deep single-wheel rut, you've run out of your childhood back into the present. The bare feet, the dirty black feet, patter right there in front of your eyes. It doesn't matter if you've never run barefoot, what is crucial is this image in your mind (16-19).

He philosophically teases the reader, and himself, with his speculations and assertions of a life otherwise lived. 'You can't help wondering whether you have another life, that you have retained some memories of a previous existence, or that these places will be your refuge in a future existence' (328).

In his return to sociopoesis ("you"), Xingjian confronts an 'other'. He finds affinity in a beautiful young woman whom he initially portrays as ethereal; perhaps a personification of the rapture that he felt in the presence of nature. 'Nature creates, in this mystical way, not only powerful vitality […] but also exquisite, ever-changing feminine beauty' (413). She remains nameless and receives minimal character description; again, the reader is left wondering if she exists or is a fantasy / narrative device:

> […] you can't say what she looks like or how her voice sounded. It seems to be something you have experienced but even more so it seems to be wishful thinking. But where is the boundary between memory and wishful thinking? How can the two be separated? Which of the two is more real and how can this be determined? (304).

Either way, she aptly represents Xingjian's 'anima' (to use a Jungian term): the female aspect of the male psyche; the archetype of repressed sensitivity and intuition, which Xingjian seeks to embody, given his new-found receptivity to affect.

> […] she wants to know about your past, your childhood […] she wants to go wandering with you through your memories, go deep into your soul […] curl into the deepest recesses of your soul and, together with you, manipulate your imagination […] she also wants to become your soul

[…] she wants to become the ends of your nerves, she wants you to touch with her fingers, to see with her eyes, to create images with her, to climb with her up Lingshan, she wants to look down on the whole of your soul from the peak of Lingshan, including secrets of which you are ashamed, hidden in the darkest corners. She savagely says that even your wrongdoings mustn't be concealed; she wants to see everything with absolute clarity (180-181).

She offers a vantage point from which Xingjian can objectively view himself, much as Jung sought in his travels. This is also reminiscent of Galgut's character Damon (In a Strange Room), who looks down upon himself as an observer and refers to himself in the third person ("he") at times.

As she evolves from 'ethereal' to 'seductress', at least in Xingjian's perception, he starts to see that the woman lacks love and belonging, and wishes to die. 'You need to search for happiness, and she needs to search for suffering' (Soul Mountain, 53). And so, in a Carrollian counter-logical way, Xingjian approaches happiness by challenging its opposite, as made manifest in the beautiful young woman anima. We see Xingjian attempt to woo his long-lost anima.

You ask if she will go across the river with you. Over there on the other shore in Lingshan where wonderful things can be seen, where suffering and pain can be forgotten, and where one can find freedom. You try hard to entice her (68).

The woman's desire to die reminds me of Fullagar's theory: that it is symbolic of a desire to 'become other'; a desire for transformation; a desire 'for intensities that connect the self with nature in such a way as to dissolve the familiar borders of identity' (Encountering Otherness, 62).

Xingjian has another significant encounter with otherness, in a museum in Guiyang. He arranges to view a carved wooden mask of a wild animal head with a human face. It has a 'demonic aura' and its prominent eye sockets 'terrify the enemy, which is precisely how it is when beast and man confront each other' (Soul Mountain, 140).

This very intelligent human face is at the same time full of animal savagery […] Without the tiger whiskers, it is a replica of the face of primitive man with markings on it. Their understanding of nature and the self is fully encompassed in the round black holes of the eye sockets. The two holes at the corners of the mouth reveal nature's scorn for man

and show man's fear of nature. The face also accurately expresses the animal nature in human beings and the fear of this animal nature within themselves (141).

The corollary is that 'man cannot cast off this mask; it is a projection of his own flesh and spirit […] he is always startled as if disbelieving this is himself, but this is in fact himself' (141). Xingjian's mask encounter echoes Jung's psychological theories of projection and of the shadow self, and Campbell's theory of 'primitive' mythology.

This contemplation of the face as a portal to the self appears to prompt Xingjian later in the narrative, when for the first time he truly scrutinises his photograph on a monthly bus ticket and, in so doing, scrutinises his shadow self:

At first I thought I had a charming smile; then I thought the smile at the corners of the eyes was rather of scorn, arrogance and indifference, all deriving from self-love, self-adoration, and a sense of superiority. But there was also an anxiety which betrayed acute loneliness, and fleeting snatches of terror—certainly not a winner—and a bitterness which stifled the common smile of unthinking happiness and doubted that sort of happiness. This was very scary, it was like a void, a sense of falling without somewhere to land, and I didn't want to go on looking at the photo. After that I went about observing other people, but wherever I observed other people I found this detestable omniscient self of mine interfering, and to this day there is not one face it hasn't interfered with (151).

Upon broaching such otherness, Xingjian takes fright and sets flight, seeking solace in nature once more, yet he is disillusioned as his perception of nature has now differed:

On the lonely lake, even the aquatic birds have gone. The dazzling surface of the water imperceptibly grows hazy, twilight emanates from the reeds and the cold rises from underfoot. I am chilled all over, there are no cicadas chirping, no frogs croaking. Can this possibly be the primitive loneliness devoid of all meaning that I seek? (112).

On Longing for Love; Longing for a Hometown

In the Miao Autonomous District, Xingjian witnesses a dragon boat festival on the broad banks of the Qingshui River. It is a momentous event that hasn't been held for several decades; a gathering of some ten thousand Miao from the stockades far and near.

> The love songs start at dusk, at first drifting across from the other side of the river. The bamboo groves on the mountain opposite are bathed in the gold of the lingering rays of the sun while this side of the river is already cloaked in night. Young women in groups of five or six come to the river-bank, some standing in a circle and others holding hands, and begin calling their lovers. Melodious singing rapidly fills the vast night […] the clear shrill sounds come from deep within so that body and heart respond […] It is totally instinctive, uncontrived, unrestrained and unembellished […] I am suddenly surrounded by an expanse of passions and think that the human search for love must originally have been like this. So-called civilisation in later ages separated sexual impulse from love and created the concepts of status, wealth, religion, ethics and cultural responsibility. Such is the stupidity of human beings […] I've never encountered this style of love. It's what I dream about but when it actually happens I can't cope […] I would like to be a wolf, to return to nature, to go on the prowl. However, I can't rid myself of this human mind (227-229).

Here, Xingjian touches on an issue that was similarly raised by Dessaix: the inner conflict between indulging 'primitive' and instinctive animalistic drives, such as love and lust, and being moored by society's conventions. Autopoesis restrained by sociopoesis.

Further along on his journey, in the Temple of the White Emperor on a sheer cliff of the Yangtze River, Xingjian views Han Dynasty tiles depicting the mythical union of the first named man and woman, Fuxi and Nuwa, with the bodies of snakes and the heads of humans, who were believed to constitute the collective consciousness. They began as animals, but became spiritual beings, then ancestral divinities. They prompt Xingjian to speculate (and reveal the basis of his narrative perspectives):

> At that time the individual did not exist. There was not an awareness of a distinction between "I" and "you". The birth of I derived from fear of death, and only afterwards an entity which was not I came to constitute you. At that time people did not have an awareness of fearing oneself,

knowledge of the self came from an other and was affirmed by possessing and being possessed, and by conquering and being conquered. He, the third person who is not directly relevant to I and you, was gradually differentiated. After this the I also discovered that he was to be found in large numbers everywhere and was a separate existence from oneself, and it was only then that the consciousness of you and I became secondary. In the individual's struggle for survival amongst others, the self was gradually forgotten and gradually churned like a grain of sand into the chaos of the boundless universe (307-308).

At this point, Xingjian ponders what he might do in the remaining years of his life. He scorns the impending construction of the Three Gorges Dam in the Yangtze River, believing that, once built, 'even this ancient Han Dynasty wall will be submerged so what meaning would there be in collecting the memories of people of remote antiquity?' (308). He struggles to find meaning—in love, in his self and in his work—when faced with such ephemerality.

This sentiment is echoed when Xingjian finally reveals that the hometown that he seeks in vain never actually existed.

Although you were born in the city, grew up in cities and spent the larger part of your life in some huge urban metropolis, you can't make that huge urban metropolis the hometown of your heart. Perhaps, because it is so huge that within it at most you can only find in a particular place, in a particular corner, in a particular room, in a particular instant, some memories which belong purely to yourself, and it is only in such memories that you can preserve yourself fully. In the end, in this vast ocean of humanity you are at most only a spoonful of green seawater, insignificant and fragile (328).

Xingjian seeks to reconcile the part of himself that finds affinity in a hometown as opposed to a 'huge urban metropolis'. I am reminded here once more of De Botton's and Flaubert's notion that we may value foreign elements because they seem to 'accord more faithfully with our identity and commitments than anything our homeland could provide […] what we find exotic abroad may be what we hunger for in vain at home' (The Art of Travel, 78). Furthermore, Xingjian considers himself to be 'a refugee from birth', as he reveals that he was delivered 'while planes were dropping bombs [… which] probably predetermined my habit of being perpetually on the run in life' (Soul Mountain, 381).

The Liminality between Happiness and Suffering—Joy is Related to Anxiety

On the south side of the Wuyi Mountain reserve, Xingjian beholds a huge, hollow torreya tree and this landscape confronts him with his own shadow:

> At sunset, the valley is plunged into shadows and above a sea of fine gentle bamboos burnished green and orange by the setting sun, this ancient tree suddenly looms up, its decaying black branches wilfully outstretched like a malevolent demon […] it chills my heart and I can't look at it for long. I realise that it brings to the surface the dark aspects in the depths of my soul, which terrifies even me. I can only recoil when confronted by beauty or evil (413).

Soon after, Xingjian symbolically finds himself in a liminal place, at an edge bounding the forest and the valley. It is uncertain whether this occurs metaphorically in dream or synchronously in reality. Irrespectively, Xingjian realises that beauty and evil, joy and anxiety, happiness and suffering are inextricably linked; they are simply different sides of the same coin, each possible (and probable to the point of inevitable) within the one entity. They are also mutually exclusive, as in Jung's theory on the relationship between love and power; the one is considered the absence of the other.

With this realisation, Xingjian has passed the threshold of 'initiation' (with 'separation' being the initial threshold, which involved removing himself from social mores). He now faces 'return', with an indelibly changed worldview.

> You realise you will never return to the human world with its anxieties and warmth. Those distant memories are tiresome. You cannot stop yourself from giving a loud shout and charging towards this dark River of Forgetting. Running and yelling, roars of joy emerge from deep in your lungs and bowels like a wild animal. To start with you came fearlessly shouting and yelling into the world, then you were stifled by all sorts of customs, instructions, rituals and teachings. Now finally you have regained the joy of shouting with total freedom […] you are weightless, relaxed, and experience a never before experienced freedom […] the despair of not belonging vanishes and your feet simply feel their way along the riverbed […] There is no logic to it all and there is no greater equality than in the River of Forgetting—the resting place for humans and wolves is ultimately death. This realisation brings joy […] you are drifting in this sea of suffering (418-421).

In the context of Campbell's theory of the hero's journey, Xingjian's liminality between the forest and valley represents his liminality between who he was prior to his trek and who he now is.

And so, we fittingly loop back to the beginning of this exegesis, where Campbell eloquently speaks of the inevitability and universal commonality of the hero's journey; that 'the world as we know it, as we have seen it, yields but one ending: death, disintegration, dismemberment, and the crucifixion of our heart with the passing forms that we have loved' (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 25-26).

> The objective world remains what it was, but, because of a shift of emphasis within the subject, is beheld as though transformed. Where formerly life and death contended, now enduring being is made manifest—as indifferent to the accidents of time as water boiling in a pot is to the destiny of a bubble, or as the cosmos to the appearance and disappearance of a galaxy of stars. Tragedy is the shattering of the forms and of our attachment to the forms; comedy, the wild and careless, the inexhaustible joy of life invincible. Thus the two are the terms of a single mythological theme and experience […] the down-going and the up-coming, which constitute the totality of the revelation that is life (28).

Xingjian closes with the statement: 'the fact of the matter is I comprehend nothing, I understand nothing. This is how it is' (Soul Mountain, 506). He has experienced the down-going and the up-coming. And both he and the reader are obscurely left wondering: what follows next?

Conclusion

As a parting thought, to rhetorically draw on a deeper liminality, I return to first principles: is there even an inner self to discover, or is it all a misconception? Jung considered the self to be unknowable because *it did not really exist*; he believed it to instead be a mythopoetic 'dream of totality' and a symbolic process of individuation (<u>Dissociation and the Self in the Magical Pre-Oedipal Field</u>, 73). Watson similarly questioned:

> Given the Aristotelian successes of both the remote and immediate past, is it not time to face the possibility—even the probability—that the essential Platonic notion of the 'inner self' is misconceived? There *is* no inner self. Looking 'in', we have found nothing—nothing stable anyway, nothing enduring, nothing we can all agree upon, nothing conclusive— *because there is nothing to find* (<u>Ideas: a History from Fire to Freud</u>, 1015).

Lacan and Derrida also concur with such a theory that the self is a fiction, an illusion constituted in discourse, a hypothetical place or space of storytelling: 'a true self can never be discovered, unmasked, or revealed because its core is […] an infinite regress' (Smith and Watson, <u>Reading Autobiography</u>, 206). The hybrid genre between memoir and fiction is fittingly liminal; with its loose yet architectonic structure, it is conducive to exploring the themes of transformation and identity in the realm of travel. As author / narrator / protagonist, the hybrid genre allows us to simultaneously identify yet disassociate ourselves from the ever-elusive subject matter: our self. A purely fictional account may lack the psychological depth and convincing continuity that is necessary to elucidate the characters and drive the plot, while a memoir in the conventional sense may lack the benefit of fictional writing devices, which can perhaps more readily engage the reader and convey 'emotional truths'. The hybrid genre enables the writer *to do it all*, which provides both opportunities and challenges, as explored within this exegesis.

By writing my own travel memoir in parallel to this exegesis, I have learnt first-hand that the non-fiction elements of the genre promote continuity of the author's / narrator's / protagonist's experience, in contrast to fiction. I perceive this to be a key differentiation, and ultimately an asset, from a travel memoir writer's perspective. By continuity, I mean that a writer of travel memoir has potential access (in so far as can be discerned or remembered) to all of the internal psychology and external

chronology of the narrator / protagonist, in all of its technicolour detail and often unpredictable dynamic (such is life), which is a considerable wealth of ground-truthed, intimate, immediate and palpable material. To write as convincingly and coherently in the realm of fiction takes a remarkable feat of study, assemblage and imagination so as to be believable in character and feasible in turn of event. Such a feat is exemplified by Munro, whose stories:

> […] remind us that the non-essential things—the things that didn't have to happen, that could have been avoided if people were a bit more rational, or a bit more careful, or if the world just made a bit more sense—so often determine the shape of a life (Jollimore, "'Too Much Happiness' by Alice Munro").

And yet, my creative work is decidedly fiction; spawn of the hybrid genre and born of that liminal space. That is, a work that originated as travel memoir has evolved, been edited and embellished, such that the details can no longer be truthfully claimed as facts that one could substantiate in the real world. Additionally, I have deliberately fictionalised certain aspects, because, as both a writer and a character, I am subjectively empathetic (even with antagonists) and objectively sensitive to the ethical treatment of the people being portrayed. I am wary of how both they and I will be perceived upon public reading of the work. Of the three chosen hybrid texts, I come closest to sharing Galgut's sentiment. Rather than seeking lofty universal truths as per Xingjian, or predicating on facts as per Dessaix's claim to memoir, both Galgut and I pursue 'writer's truths': those mundane truths 'on a plane of higher, less constructed, contingencies [which are] a function of art and art's inventions' (Williams, "The Booker Prize-Shortlisted Tale by Damon Galgut That's Both Truth and Fiction").

As for whether a writer of travel memoir is affectively transformed in identity or not, through the travel itself and through the writing of such, we see that Galgut (in the context of In a Strange Room) remains in an iterative loop between the thresholds of 'separation' and 'integration'. He has confronted his shadow self but is yet to become individuated and freed of the shackles of co-dependence, and so he remains 'stuck in one place in the past'. His life and travels remain motivated by his repressed dreams and desires; his repressed identity. Dessaix (in the context of Arabesques) appears to have travelled beyond the threshold of 'integration', yet loops between this station and the threshold of 'return'. He appears resigned to his regular North African journeys as a means to evoke and indulge his second self, yet seems unable to incorporate this aspect of his identity into his everyday life upon his

return home. Furthermore, he struggles to redeem the utter ordinariness of everyday existence. Xingjian (in the context of <u>Soul Mountain</u>) has broached the threshold of 'return' to the point of no belonging. Without a place to consider 'home', and unable to return to his previous everyday existence, he feels paradoxically liberated and reconciled with his self and his life, while at a loss as to how exactly to 'be' in the real world in light of this experience. Jung described this place, beyond individuation, as a place where conflicts and contradictions still abound—you are by no means immune to life's slings and arrows—but where a cohesive objectivity predominates. It is a liminal space, just shy of divinity.

I believe that I can most relate to Dessaix's level of affective transformation in response to travel and the writing of such, at least as presented in my creative work. As the author / narrator / protagonist, I have met my shadow and ventured beyond the threshold of 'integration', yet I too loop between this station and the threshold of 'return', still struggling to incorporate this aspect of my identity into my everyday life. This realisation has helped me to work through my expectations and better measure my experiences; essentially, to keep myself in check rather than surrender to that 'lost' feeling of numinosity for not finding what I seek, in travel as in life.

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