

BORDER CROSSINGS, IDENTITIES, AND CREATIVE NONFICTION:

HAITIAN TRAVEL GUIDES AND WRITING ABOUT HAITI

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

BORDER CROSSINGS, IDENTITIES, AND CREATIVE NONFICTION:

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Introduction

It was an almost an accident that I ended up writing about place and travel. Like so many creative endeavors, I began with one idea. Seven left turns, a couple years, and a few map reorientations later, I find myself standing at some kind of intersection where place, travel, and social justice meet writing creative nonfiction. Even though I enrolled in graduate school with the intention of writing about a ten-year interest in Haiti, I had no idea what form it would eventually take: an essay, a book, a different way of looking? My time back in school, it turns out, has yielded all three. I find my writing process to be simultaneously winnowing away (*what's below the surface that needs unearthing?*) and building (*how can I stack these blocks to make a structure?*). This is one way that my creative work is mirrored by my scholarly work—it's a process of both addition and subtraction. One of the things I found so helpful about the formal program for creative writing was the challenge to entwine my creative work with my academic scholarship. I know I couldn't have done the kind of creative work I'm doing without this marriage and I know my scholarly interests would not have been as engaging for me without tying in writing.

My interest in Haiti first began just over a decade ago with a book. I read *Mountains Beyond Mountains* by Tracy Kidder at a time in my life when I was longing for something bigger—something that would remind me that life was more than the high school I attended; that there were people who were doing good work living up to a code of values they had created. The book was about Dr. Paul Farmer and the founding of the nonprofit Partners In Health, but it was also about inequality

and justice. It was about health as a justice issue—which of course requires a conversation about jobs and land and gender and more. I had always loved to read and to learn, and *Mountains* was a great read that introduced a different kind of worldview. From then, I was off: the teacher who assigned *Mountains* helped me navigate texts about injustice in the American public schools, the US’s juvenile justice system, landmines left over from wars, the Rwandan genocide, and more. Yet, Haiti was the frame I kept returning to. I got ahold of history books that taught me about French and US colonialism and neo-colonialism, which began long before Haiti’s 1804 Independence and continues to this day. My interest in Haiti has shaped my view of American political, social, and economic systems; it has helped me to see and understand privilege abroad and at home; it has caused me to examine the very language I speak and the order in which I think. I love to learn, and Haiti has been my greatest teacher.

In this Master’s thesis, I intend to address questions I’ve come across in my research and writing. Eight years after I read *Mountains*, I finally visited Haiti. I’ve spent the last two years of my program trying to write about it. Again, I’ve found that Haiti cannot be put into a box— my desire to write about Haiti has ballooned. To write about Haiti, I don’t just have to think about Haiti, I have to think about travel, the perception of the “other,” place, travel writing, how the genre of creative nonfiction can move, and so much more. On some matters, I have claims and arguments. On others, I have merely questions or propositions. My intent with this project is to discuss a few very specific ideas and then lay out broad questions for how the collective “we” of people interested in writing, thinking, or interacting with other places and people can move forward in a way that preserves the dignity of the people and the places involved. This discussion will include implications for travel writing

and for the genre of Creative Nonfiction—both the practice of its form and content, and the space it occupies in the ongoing creative conversation.

Ultimately, this exploration considers how writers of Creative Nonfiction can use research, critical theory, and self-awareness to create a new version of travel writing. When I initially began writing about my travels, I was hesitant to call it “travel writing” because the genre is often situated in one of two camps: uncritical and not self-aware (“fluff” pieces, so to speak) or reportage-oriented with several facts, but little reflection (more traditional journalism). I believe new points along this spectrum of travel writing are needed—and utilizing the essayistic form and tools of Creative Nonfiction may be one way to create a new kind of hybrid. I hope to bring more self-consciousness to travel writing by including substantial reflection and meditation about where and how the narrator is connected to her subjects and places.

In my manuscript, I ask the question, “How can I acknowledge my bind and transcend it?” That is, how do I understand and sit with all of the work that problematizes writing about travel and still write about travel? When we feel we must tell stories in our own imperfect way, can we examine that urge to tell the story *and yet still tell the story*? This thesis, alongside my manuscript, is my attempt.

*

Though travel writing has become more established as a field of inquiry in recent decades, its very definition, as Tim Youngs points out in the *Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, remains a bit amorphous. Travel writing is an inherently flexible genre. It includes letters, telegrams, and tweets; it includes current articles, journals, and tour guides. Travel writing, as well as the problems and issues the genre faces, can be found everywhere, from illustrated news comics to advertisements for different

soaps. One of the reasons I'm particularly interested in travel writing is because of its mirroring effect: we learn about "the other," through travel— but we also learn about ourselves. Like the artist who sits down to paint her subject, viewers of the portrait learn, in some instances, more about the painter than the subject. One's worldview is revealed, at least in glimpses, in the work one produces. Examining travel writing, in other words, allows us to step away from a portrait and to see yet another perspective: we look at ourselves looking. In this reflection, there is room to consider, and perhaps tease out, both individual and larger cultural concerns. Moreover, a heightened awareness of the position we occupy can also, hopefully, lead to a more nuanced and dignified representation of the places and people we write about. By examining layers from different angles, we create room to appraise systemic patterns of privilege and distancing.

Much of my discussion will center on an examination of travel guides as artifacts. While I will explain more about what and why I think travel guides are worthy of study when I introduce each guide in the sections below, broadly speaking, my travel guides include: a British travel guide to India around the turn of the 20th century from the ubiquitous travel company Thomas Cook & Son; a *Guide to Hayti* from 1861, edited by James Redpath, which begins with an "Invitation" from the then-president of Haiti Fabre Geffrard for blacks in America to move to Haiti to help the country "regain her ancient splendor;" a Pan-America guide to Haiti called *Visit Haiti* from the 1950s, and the most recent 2011 Lonely Planet *Guide to Dominican Republic and Haiti*. This selection offers a few different things: a comparison of the traditional colonizer/colonized relationship (between England and India) as put into a travel guide, an example of a neo-colonial relationship as put into a travel guide (between the US and Haiti), and glimpses over the course of one hundred and fifty years of how

guides in the English speaking world paint Haiti—what’s changed in the narrative and what has not.

In Section I of this paper, I explore the idea of identities as they play out in the roles of “traveler” and “tourist.” I argue that those roles are artificial, yet still provide people with a strong sense of identity. Then, I consider how a conflicted identity manifests itself and forms the chain of *experience-as-product-as-identity* before moving on to examine how what we carry (our baggage) impacts agency and identity. Throughout this section I pull from James Buzard’s essential theories of travel writing and also consider how my research and claims about these guides and theories relates to my own creative work. In Section II, I ask how the description of landscape and the idea of voice intersect in each of the guides as well as in my own work, and how this relates to hybrid forms of writing and power structures. In this section, I work with Mary Louise Pratt’s iconic book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Finally, I end with Section III, where I consider the issues of identity and writing form that I’ve raised in Sections I and II and consider how the guides deal with translation, what translation entails, and end by asking what’s next in the genre of creative nonfiction travel writing and offer a few concerns and ideas.

Chapter 1

What Are We? Authenticity and Artificiality in the Traveler and the Tourist

in the crowd
They could not deem me one of such; I stood
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts . . .
— Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Lord Byron

One of the key artifacts I will be examining for this investigation is a 1903 *Thomas Cook & Son Guide to India, Burma, Ceylon and South Africa*. I will use the guide to inquire into fin-de-siècle values, fears, and anxieties as reflected in one of these popular travel guides of the time. The Thomas Cook & Son guide appealed to me for several reasons. In terms of importance of publication, the guides were wildly popular, grossing thousands of copies and charting over a dozen travel destinations. The guidebooks were targeted at upper class and upper middle class men and women (with a few provisions in the books for children who might be traveling with them). The Cook trips were for the affluent who wanted to travel with a familiar guide or outpost along the way.

The British guides from Cook & Son, and, more broadly, England at the fin-de-siècle offer interesting parallels to our condition. Like much of our art today, several significant pieces of literature at the turn of the twentieth century in England were quite taken with decline and degeneration. As Darwinian ideas of evolution became increasingly widespread, more theories about how we, as humans, became who we are (Lamarckism, for example) brought a collective concern with where we, as a species, were heading. We see this concern in many fin-de-siècle British novels: in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll Mr. Hyde*, Stevenson explores the duality of man and

the “natural state;” in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde considers how art and aesthetics play a role in decline; *The Jungle Book* paints Mogley as the insider-turned-outsider who then looks in at his own culture; in *The Time Machine*, Wells shows us a horrendously divided and primitive world. Many of these texts, too, have to do with travel or transportation. Similarly, today we can see in our novels and films a preoccupation with massive decline: Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and Christopher Nolan’s *Interstellar*, for instance, consider what Earth post-apocalypse or post-environmental disaster looks like for humans. In current discussions over climate change, anthropocene, and post-humanism, an Earth in decline, and without humans, is a key component. There’s also a concern with decline on a very singular, human level—in other words, aging— as evidenced in books like Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead* and films like Richard Linklater’s *Boyhood*. Interestingly, in British literature at the turn of the century, there was also a growing tradition of novels that featured mythological-level demons—Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* nearly a century that) are predecessors to today’s zombie obsession (*Walking Dead*, *Pride and Prejudice for Zombies*, etc).

What I find most compelling about the connections between “then” and “now” are what these literary trends say about our communal consciousness: there seems to be a particular interest in ruin. During the British fin-de-siècle, it was the worry over the empire’s impending ruin. Today, it is the worry of our unfolding environmental catastrophe as we recover from 2008’s devastating economic collapse. At the fin-de-siècle, Britain was at the end of Victorianism and on the cusp of modernism, and with the potential of modernism came the fear of failed promises—what if all that was hoped for wouldn’t be realized? Similarly, today we are at the end of postmodernism and on the cusp of something else (something that has not yet been defined)—and we,

again, have concerns over broken promises: where did postmodernism leave us? What will the wreckage of what we built look like?

Moreover, like the turn of the century, an increasing number of people on the planet are accessing travel for the first time. In the way that travel by sea from England to the colonies became a reasonably customary pilgrimage for young British upper class men of at the turn of the twentieth century, increased air travel in recent years has set new records. Young tourists spent 217 billion dollars in 2012, Forbes reports. Also in 2012, 1 billion people traveled across an international border tourists, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. In 2013, the Air Transport Action Group recorded more than 3 billion people using the world's airlines. Of course, air travel is inaccessible to the vast majority of people (1 billion is only one seventh of the Earth's population), but it's worth considering how this increase in travel influences our cultural concerns and values. Guide books offer us a microcosm of some of these travelers— and by examining the text through the lens of the audience, the author, and, ideally, the people and places that are visited, consider how these guides offer insight into collective concerns and how we perceive and treat a foreign “other.”

As it turns out, Cook & Son would go on to be one of the most popular tour companies of all time, influencing what millions of customers saw during the course of their time abroad and how they saw it. The company, now under the name Thomas Cook Group, still operates today. Moreover, the Cook guides were so widely distributed and well known that other travel writing texts often compared themselves to them. In her essay, “Modernism and Travel,” Helen Carr examines Hilaire Belloc's 1898 poem called *The Modern Traveller* which, she writes “is not about a tourist setting off with Thomas Cook, but a returned colonial adventurer reporting on

his exploits to the *Daily Menace*” (71). This kind of mention-in-passing of the Cook guides is only one reference of many peppered throughout fin-de-siècle texts that demonstrates just how ubiquitous these texts were.

It is this popular aspect that makes the Cook guides so appealing: they own their temporary nature. Everyone knows guide books won't be good forever— something will change and a new version will be issued. And this known and accepted expiration date affords a kind of freedom: there is no pressure to be timeless; there is only pressure to be helpful and relevant *right now*. Its faceless narrator who pops up between charts of railway times and luggage fees does not have the same obligation or pressures of a novelist trying to write a new classic or become the next Charles Dickens. The “nonfiction” offered in this guidebook reflects the public and private desires and fears of the time it was written. We can gain insight into the immediate concerns of its audience by looking at the text.

I will first focus on the general set-up of the guide to explore basic paradoxes of “traveler” and “tourist,” as defined by travel scholar James Buzard. I will explore how these identities relate to physical (external) and personal (emotional, psychological, and internal) borders. Since this particular guide has several hundred pages of information, maps, narrative, and advertisements, I will look specifically at the India section, in part because of the colonizer/colonized relationship between Great Britain and India, in order to consider questions of narrative voice, travel expectations, and fears about changing identities.

Then I will consider the framework of ideas from the early 20th century Cook guide for India and compare it to a study of three Haitian travel guides: the 1861 “A guide to Hayti,” a guide from Pan America in the 1950s, and the most recent “Guide to the Dominican Republic and Haiti” from 2011 Lonely Planet. By examining travel

narratives, as presented in the travel guides genre, we can see the kinds of dominant narratives about the foreign and the “exotic” that were prevalent (or at least widely distributed) in the mainstream audience’s culture. By looking at several Haitian guides over time, we can see if and how these narratives have changed.

Ultimately, I am interested in borders: the borders of identity, the borders between the guide’s writer, reader, and subject, and “the other” in the travel landscape. By looking at a purely colonial British guide alongside a series of Haitian guides that demonstrate only slightly less overt colonial relationships, we can see how the guides attempt a reconciliation of conflicting identities yet fall short of changing or breaking any kind of border.

After analyzing these artifacts, I turn my gaze to my own work to discuss the challenge I continue to have over how to draw attention to the seemingly entrenched narratives that the guides espouse and how, hopefully, contemporary writers can begin to transcend them. Though I’ve yet to come up with a groundbreaking solution, one approach that helped me was a willingness to play with the tropes — to twist, contort, and rearrange them on the page — in an effort to subvert them.

Symbiotic Clashes: Travelers and Tourists

One of the paradoxes of travel writing involves the nonphysical boundaries of identity. The distinction between traveler and tourist — or more accurately, traveler *versus* tourist — has been important since the beginning of the travel writing. (Even the beginning of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, which travel-writing scholars claim as a father of the genre, pinpoints how characters have different intents for their journeys.) As I will argue, the distinction between traveler and tourist is largely

artificial, but the perceived linchpin of the “conflicting” or “different” identities is authenticity. The traveler, as James Buzard explains in his book *The Beaten Track*, “exemplifies independence and originality” and “exhibits boldness and gritty endurance under all conditions (being true to the etymology of ‘travel’ in the word ‘travail’)” whereas the tourist is a cliché, a “cautious, pampered unit of a leisure industry” who goes places in large groups (2). Put simply: the traveler is the rugged, adventurous, often-male trail blazer and the tourist lags behind, sometimes years, decades, or centuries later, ruining the path with their big groups and the requirement of luxury.

However, these identities become complicated and, ultimately, shown to be artificial by the fact that each role’s existence relies on the other and the way in which the roles change from circumstance to circumstance, even within one person. Without the tourist for comparison or without the tourist following his footsteps, the traveler is not superior; he is simply a wanderer. Likewise, without the traveler initially to explore an area and come back and talk or write about it, the tourist would not venture far from home. The task of defining yourself by what you’re *not* requires an “other” for comparison, and this distancing manifests in the travel writer’s voice. As Buzard explains:

The privileged notion of ‘the traveller’ was concurrently redefined in opposition to these new tourist-serving institutions, and it became an expected feature of much travel-writing for authors to set themselves apart from such structures by refuting their assertions of authority, by self-consciously demonstrating independence from them. (*The Beaten Track* Buzard 47)

The result of this self-consciousness was a “determinedly *self-interrupting* form” (*Disorienting Fiction*, Buzard 7) wherein the travel narrator, aware of his role, had to distance himself from societal authority (else he be too boring by not exploring new territory) while seeking some kind of narrative authority to gain a reader’s trust.

One of the most interesting things about the self-interrupting form is the room that the self-interruption makes in the text. When the narrator interrupts herself, she reminds the audience, either purposefully or not, of the space between the story she's telling and her as the storyteller — and she also reminds readers of the gap between “her” and “them.” This gap exists between the writer and the audience as well as between the writer and the subject. In this space, there's an opportunity for the narrator to reflect on her own stance toward the subject of the text. If the narrator doesn't create this space by self-interruption, then it's far easier to forget where she stands in all of this and oversimplify paradigms — and this is how the story we've seen before where the narrator is the savior can be so easily told. It's also important to note that this “othering” process between the traveler and the tourist happens on the *same* side of the visitor/visited divide. It's when the narrator allows for the possibility that she isn't utterly right that there is multiplicity of truth, and that ambiguity can be represented in the form that the narrator creates space to think about the border of visitor/visited.

This false binary between traveler and tourist is even further dismantled, and the border between visitor/visited made more porous when one considers the history of the word “travel” and the tradition of the idea of a “guide.” The English origin of the word “travel” comes from the Middle English word “travail” (whose variants include “trauail,” “trauayll,” “trawayle,” etc.). “Travail,” the Oxford English Dictionary tells us, can be defined as “bodily or mental labour or toil, especially of a painful or oppressive nature; exertion; trouble; hardship; suffering.” We can also see how this links to languages we may more readily recognize, such as the Spanish word “trabajo,” the Portuguese word “trabalho” and the Italian “travaglio. In modern French, “travail” means to work both physically and intellectually, as well as to labor

in childbirth. Each of these origins are evident in the very first definition in the OED of the verb “travel:” “to torment, distress, to suffer affliction...”

What can it mean for the word “travel” to be so closely associated, and at one point synonymous with torment, pain, labor and work? (Before Old French, “travail” came from the Medieval Latin word “trepalium,” which was an “instrument of torture” with three stakes). One interpretation is that travel has never been easy. It was often painful, particularly before the advances of trains, automobiles, and planes. It’s still work today to plan, coordinate, prepare, gather, pack—and that’s before you even leave home. The approach one takes to this work depends on one’s purpose, or intent: for many business travelers, a trip is just another to get ready for and from which to catch up after; for many vacationers, travel is a luxury and becomes a labor of love; for first-time travellers, travel can be worrisome and scary; for people who never travel, the practice of travel may be as foreign as the place they would be heading. Travel takes us out of our comfort zone, both physically and mentally, whether it’s going to a new place in town or a different country. Travel is work for both the “traveler” and the “tourist” and the constructed divisions over these identities stem from *how much* work: the “authentic traveler” would exert herself more than the tourist who takes the well-trodden path.

However, even the “authentic traveler” requires some kind of guide—which is, in part, why we can see these distinctions between labeled identities crumble. The “authentic traveler” may see himself as one who doesn’t need the travel guide, but even the earliest explorers used different kinds of guides. The Oxford English Dictionary lays out categories under the entry for “guide” that include “one who guides” and “something that guides.” Under the first category, “one who guides,” the first entry is “one who leads or shows the way, esp. to a traveller in a strange country;

spec. one who is hired to conduct a traveller or tourist (e.g. over a mountain, through a forest, or over a city or building) and to point out objects of interest.” The first quote entry for this definition is a text from 1362 from poet William Langland called *The vision of William concerning Piers Plowman* and it reads “This weore a wikked wei bote hose hedde a gyde, That mihte folwen us vch a fote forte that we come there.” William discusses having a “gyde” to keep him safe from something wicked. Guides have been employed throughout centuries to lead and to familiarize, to interpret a place and sometimes the people living in it for the traveller. The essentialness of guides and their prominence in travel situations causes us to wonder: if the “traveler” used a guide, wouldn’t that make him a tourist? If, as Buzard suggests, the identity of “traveler” versus “tourist” hinges on authenticity, and authenticity is defined by your ability to pave your own way, but both parties are following some kind of guide, then the line between “traveler” and “tourist” becomes fuzzy.

After the entry for “guide” lies an entry for “guide-book,” and it’s what we might expect: “a book for the guidance of strangers or visitors in a district, town, building, etc., giving a description of the roads, places, or objects of interest to be found there.” Interestingly the first recorded entry was from a published journal in 1814 and appeared again nine years later in Lord Byron’s *Don Juan: Canto XI*. What I find compelling about the “guide-book” entry and the marriage of the word “travel guide” is that it does not indicate for whom the book is intended. By not specifying the audience, we can assume that the guides are intended for anyone who is traveling (“strangers or visitors,” according to the “guide-book” entry); it was only later that connotations about who use guide books and whether those people were “authentic” were formed. The travel guides and guide-books were originally a source of information. And information is neutral, though the editorial decision of *what*

information, *how* it is presented, and *who* says it certainly isn't. It's this *what* and *how* and *who* that complicates my argument that the "traveler" and "tourist" are merely constructs. I would argue that a distinction between "traveler" and "tourist" might exist, though not because of a division between authentic and inauthentic, but rather because of the filter for their information. If a "traveler" doesn't use a guide-book and instead interacts with someone where he is (by employing a local guide or otherwise), then the information he gets is different from a printed or official narrative from the guide-book. She is still employing a guide, but the guide is less fixed; there isn't a singular or dominant guide (like a printed guide-book) that defines the conversation. Even with this complication, however, I find that tracing the words back helps us understand how we've constructed identities.

*

Many of Buzard's ideas about the self-interrupting form and my own thoughts on the artificiality of the traveler/tourist divide play out in my creative work. In the first full draft of this text, I was utilizing the self-interrupting form too readily; the feedback I got from initial readers was that I was "apologizing too much." I thought about these comments a lot; I needed first to figure out *why* I felt the need to apologize and *what* I was apologizing for. Only then could I recognize and catch myself mid-apology and figure out if (a) an apology was, in fact, needed in that moment and (b) if it could be done more concisely. It took about a year before I realized that when people said "apology," many of them were using it as a catch-all term; what I was doing I was interrupting myself and using the space created by that interruption to make some kind of concession. This may sound like an apology, but I

think it's slightly different: I would make a statement about a belief, or I'd be explaining my interest in Haiti, and I'd concede, nearly but not quite sorrowfully, that no, the statement wasn't unimpeachable; it was complicated by several other factors. As I developed my manuscript, I realized it was exactly these complications that drew me to Haiti in the first place. I took the "Yes, but..." or "Well..." or "You have to consider..." method I had practiced from learning about Haiti and applied it to considering US news or more local issues. Haiti held up a mirror — maybe some kind of fun-house mirror that reflected over a century of US-Haitian colonial relations — and what I was seeing, for the first time, was my own country in a different way. Haiti and the self-interrupting form taught me nuance.

As I began to write about Haiti, and I ran into the challenge of how to put these nuances on the page. One way, as I mentioned, ended up sounding like an apology. Another way, wherein I included more reason and thinking onto the page made one first reader comment:

"I think we need more of... you — that is, *your person* — on the page. We have a lot of thinking from you and a lot of thinking from other people [I use many outside sources in my creative work], but we don't have enough *you*."

Finding this balance (first too much pathos via apology, next to much logos via linkages), left me searching for a goldilocks solution (just right) that I'm still striving towards. This idea of the balance, whether it's in using source material alongside your own voice or using scenes alongside your own reflection, is not new in Creative Nonfiction — or any writing, for that matter — but it does become extra challenging when I'm trying to cultivate and reflect the nuance that these topics require and convey that the systems I'm describing, and some of the traditions I'm writing against are far from balancing forces. This, to me, is a moment when there's an opportunity

for form to reflect the content, or when I can try to be creative with structure to try to subvert a traditional narrative, be it through an overarching framing device (i.e. the essay as “notes” or a notebook with rough sketches like Barry Lopez’s *Desert Notes* or Eula Biss’s *Notes from No Man’s Land* or perhaps a reflexive form where the essay that features grammar lessons is structured as a grammar lesson like Michele Morano’s *Grammar Lessons*) or through something else. The challenge to make the essay work hinges on these decisions. (Fortunately, though, the revision process allows for *many* attempts.)

In the Cook guides, and in many guides (a travel writing subgenre whose convention requires authority), there is very little self-interruption or nuance. One of the easiest ways to show individuality, eschew the “tourist” label, and establish authority as a guide is to assume the role of explorer. Yet, the self-aware explorer realizes that his paying audience, or at least those who follow him, are most likely those who will never be explorers; they will most likely be tourists. The trick then comes to occupy some kind of borderland: you identify yourself and gain narrative authority by showing you’re a traveler because you’re *not* a tourist while simultaneously shying away from disparaging tourists *too* harshly for fear of losing the audience who funds your work.

These roles are a performance that both the performers and the audiences seem to embrace. Even explorers who don’t intend to write a travel guide for the masses, or who are alone and plan to keep their findings to themselves, are performing if they consider themselves “explorers” or “tourists” or “travellers.” That type of performance is the same as performing gender; it’s a performance that might be heightened or more formerly constructed when there’s an “audience” (i.e. someone else in the room or someone else reading the book or following you), but merely

identifying as a “man,” “woman,” or “transgender” acknowledges, and thereby engages in and at least minimally performs, a kind of construct. For the purposes of my study, however, I primarily focus on the explorers who provide the source material for guides, and an audience who, by either identifying with or attempting to reject the label of “traveller” or “tourist,” participates in a discourse of identity.

When we consider the symbiotic relationship between the traveler and the tourist, the categories break down even more. If one party cannot exist without the other, then surely they can’t be so independent after all. In the process of creating more available travel, the lone traveler ends up needing the social system, with all its establishments, which he had worked so hard to escape:

A central irony in the histories of the Baedeker and Murray handbooks and of the Thomas Cook company is that all three began with nearly heroic efforts of individual initiative and discovery, undertaken by men who saw themselves as helping to make travel both more accessible *and* more independent; but the way to achieve this goal was ultimately to put those efforts and that desire to work in an increasingly organized, bureaucratic framework. (*The Beaten Track*, Buzard 47-48)

When it comes to the codependent identities of traveler and tourist, paradoxes are built upon paradoxes. The mutual and self-perpetuating need of the traveler/tourist to “other” the other in order to solidify one’s own identity is reinforced by both the mutual need of a narrator for an audience and the mutual need of producers and consumers in an economic system. In this case, the experience is a product — a trip, an excursion, an adventure — and the consumers, or tourists, are people who can afford such an experience without abandoning expectations of comfort. In their travel guides, Thomas Cook and Son attempt a trapeze act wherein they try to contort these identities into being distinct with their guide serving as the high wire that connects them.

Yet, the idea of experience as product is not only prevalent in the Cook guides at the fin-de-siècle; in contemporary culture, there's an increasing emphasis on experience as one of the few products you can't easily replicate and experience as representative of the self. Experiences are one way to define one's identity. In a recent article in "Fast Company" called "Why Millennials Don't Want to Buy Stuff," the author points to a trend wherein shopping for objects is being replaced by "buying into new ideas." Josh Allan Dykstra writes, "We are starting to think differently about what it means to 'own' something. This is why a similar ambivalence towards ownership is emerging in all sorts of areas, from car-buying to music listening to entertainment consumption." The article goes on to discuss why people buy things, if not just to own them. Dykstra, responding an *Atlantic* article on decreasing car ownership among millennials, hints at the tie between experiences and identity. Indeed, we often trace our beliefs and personality traits back to formative experiences we've had. And while the chain *product is experience is identity* is an important one, it's also something that's been prevalent in travel and travel writing for a long time.

In the Haitian travel guide from 1861, for instance, the guide whose goal was to entice black Americans to move to Haiti, the very first line of the introduction "sells" Haiti as a product that can only be experienced:

There is only one country in the Western World where the Black and the man of color are undisputed lords; where the White is indebted for the liberty to live to the race which with us is enslaved; where neither laws, nor prejudices, nor historical memories, press cruelly on persons of African descent; where the people whom America degrades and drives from her are rulers, judges and generals... (Redpath, 9)

In this passage, the editor, James Redpath, does not try to entice people to move by merely painting a picture; he is convincing people by inviting interaction and involvement. He is framing Haiti as a completely new experience —where blacks will

encounter liberty and property ownership. That is relocating to (and not merely visiting) Haiti is not just about passively admiring natural beauty; it's about what you can *do* in Haiti.

One hundred and fifty years after Redpath's guide, we still see an emphasis on experience. In the 2011 Lonely Planet guide to Haiti, the guide offers: "The richness of the country lies in its history and culture" (Clammer, 265) and "Haiti was once at the forefront of Caribbean tourism. In the 1950s, Port-au-Prince was rivaled only by Havana as a destination for the rich and famous; its jazz clubs and casinos a favored getaway for the Hollywood elite" (Clammer, 264) and "More than just rubble" (Clammer, 264). While it should come as no surprise that these guides focus on experience (after all, people primarily travel to see and try new things), what these texts uniquely reflect is a shift in *how we talk about* Haiti. The "we" in this case being the largely US audience for whom these guides are printed.

In other words, these sentences demonstrate one aspect of a "Haitian identity" from the perspective of an outsider looking in. In the case of the 1861 guide, it's a narrative of hope: *here is what you can have if you come to our shores*, the guide promises. In 2011, we see more of scramble: *here is what Haiti used to be*, and there's still shuffling around the question of what or who we are now and now we are "more than "rubble" though too hard to define. In the older guide, the experience promised is marked and clear; in the newer guide, the experienced is mixed (you'll see some rubble, but you might also find white sand or learn something of the culture). In both circumstances, there isn't any kind of "Haitian voice" writing this narrative—it's a traveler writing to tourists and therefore keeping the conversation on the "visitor" side of the visitor/visited border. (On top of which there's the question of what a "Haitian voice" means, as if there's only one, or as if including one is

token.) Later, when I discuss voice in what Mary Louise Pratt calls “contact zones,” the conflicting narratives of a place’s identity –or what Haiti is to whom— as well as the idea of “anti-conquest,” I consider the role and inclusion of some kind of local or “visited” voice.

Agency and Baggage

The very name “travel guide,” with all its maps, attractions, and packing tips is a nod to the constructed “traveler” and “tourist” identities. An explorer/traveler, as I discussed, could most likely employ a local guide, but calling the text a “tourist guide” would carry connotations of unoriginality. Thus, the idea of the “travel guide:” a book for tourists who seek, and can afford, an alternate label.

In the Cook and Son guides, we can find their attempts to appeal to the self-assigned identities of both the “traveler” and the “tourist” from the very beginning. The cover reads “India, Burma, Ceylon and South Africa. Information for Travellers and Tourists;” the first paragraph of the introduction says: “This handbook is published with the view of affording in a compact form a variety of useful information for travelers going to or returning from India...” (Cook iii); and the Table of Contents is divided into four parts: “Information for Travellers *to* India...,” “Information for Tourists...,” “Information for Residents *in* India,” and “Information for Travellers *from* India...” (Cook v, emphasis added). This last section, for travellers from India, comes at the very end. It includes basic logistical information (such as where and when to make travel ticket deposits) and begins the section with “The following information will be found useful for passengers, *either tourists or residents*, leaving India either for Europe, Australasia [sic], China, Japan, United

States, or Canada” (Cook 126, emphasis added). One message, then, of this section: no matter your label, this is need-to-know information. Utility, it seems, trumps a reader’s self-selected and performed identity.

In its attempt at a widespread appeal, the Cook company highlights a preoccupation with the question, “What category do I belong to?” and provides crosscutting options along with special instructions for each identity’s discrete needs. (Nevermind the fact that the instructions and unique solutions were mass-produced.)

One thing is evident from reading the Cook guide: tourists and travelers alike are made to feel unique from the get-go. Whether they are following detailed instructions on pick-up and drop-off of luggage, selecting one of the many route options (“Anchor from Liverpool to Gibraltar, Egypt, and India,” “City from Liverpool to Egypt and Calcutta,” (Cook 9), etc.), or picking from the numerous excursions listed in the Guide, the Cook company offers the tourist or traveler a sense of control over his own trip— and, accordingly, his own identity. (What’s to stop the tourist from flipping to the traveler portion of the guide? And what is a traveler, if not a master of his own fate?) Cook’s choices provide readers a vast number of curated options; the customer is not only buying a ship or a train ticket, they are buying their own agency.

The idea of notion of agency pops up all over the guides as an idea of particular importance. (The Cook company are, of course, travel *agents*.) In the fine print of the “Special Notice,” below the Introduction section, the text reads “Thos. Cook & Son give notice that the arrangements shown in this Pamphlet are made by them in their capacity as Agents only” (4). The guide goes on to state that all the advertised fares for various forms of transportation apply only when Cook & Son makes the arrangements and that, if one goes outside of the employment of the company for services, Cook & Son is not liable for any loss or negligence. The options included in

the guide, unsurprisingly, are limited to Cook's services and this concept of contained agency manifests itself in smaller aspects of the guide, such as the treatment of luggage. The guide explains pick-up and drop-off on page four: "at both European and Eastern ports our baggage clerks meet steamers to assist in the clearance of baggage through the customs" (Cook). We will cover you, the guide claims, as long as you follow these rules and stick with us. We will take care of you if you take care of us, it suggests; and the deal of alliance is sweetened by the fact that the guide's reader is about to face unknown people and places.

Baggage — both the literal baggage the Cook guide discusses and the metaphor of the "baggage" one carries — to be an important point of consideration. First, there's the question of what to pack. In an initial nod to the seasoned veteran, or "traveler," who might already know what to bring, the guide states: "many of our readers who have already paid one or more visits to India will not need any information on this subject" (Cook 7). Then, the guide spends a great deal of time detailing recommendations, at first for men:

To those travellers visiting India for the first time, say between November and March, the following simple outfits may be recommended: — For men, ordinary summer clothing as worn in England, tweed and flannel suits (coats made to wear without waistcoats if desired), morning and dress suits of thin black cloth, white and flannel shirts, flannel sleeping suits (pyjamas), woolen drawers and vests, linen collars, merino socks, light walking boots, brown shoes, a light and a heavy overcoat. Pith or sun hats and umbrellas should be purchased in Bombay. (Cook 7)

The light, conversational tone ("..for the first time, say between...") attempts to balance the heavy packing list, but it does not mask the fact that the guide is essentially advising men to bring some of everything, from warm flannel, tweed, and wool to light linen and jackets. The sheer number of recommended clothing, which seems to include the whole range of seasons (linen or thin summer suits *and* tweed

and flannel and wool and sun hats) offers an unspoken message: be prepared for anything. This message is echoed in the women's section, though less drastically. It begins "Ladies travelling in India need not burden themselves with such large quantity of baggage" (Cook 8) but then goes on to suggest spring and summer dresses of silk and cotton as well as several other items. "Washing can be done at short notice everywhere in India," (Cook 8) the guide concludes in the women's section. It's difficult not to read the packing list as rife with gender and class issues: the wardrobes show men as heavier, more equipped, and robust while the women are instructed to pack finer, wispier, and lightweight pieces. The audience as a whole, the guide assumes, is people who own a complete wardrobe for each season and can afford to travel and pay others to do their laundry.

Yet, this straightforward gender and class reading is not the only worthwhile interpretation of baggage. More complexities emerge when we read baggage as metaphor. The luggage one carries on a trip isn't merely material possession; it's an amalgamation of pieces of home a person chooses to bring, and, as the name suggests, lug (or pay someone to lug) around. Luggage is the curated materiality of identity. In the same way that the train's dining and sleeping cars are described as having "every convenience for the journey" (16), baggage is about comfort. And for Cook's audience, and most audiences today, comfort is equal to luxury. The more baggage, the more comfort, and therefore more luxury.

As it turns out, luxury can be heavy. On page 18, a table provides weight limits for first and second-class passengers as well as for children (who cost half of their parent's rate). A first class passenger's luggage on a ship had to weigh less than 336 pounds, or, for a train, be smaller than 40 cubic feet. (The British did not adopt the metric system until the late 20th century.) Second-class's weight limit or trunk size

was half (168 pounds or 20 cubic feet) that of first's, while a child's baggage limit, like the cost of their ticket, was half a parent's. Passengers were to drop off their luggage four days before they boarded a ship and remove or "obliterate" (Cook 18) all previous travel labels on their bags before replacing them with the colored labels provided by the company.

While weight specifications and the concept of wiping the slate clean of any former labels isn't foreign to us (we have weight and label requirements every time we fly), the sheer amount of baggage travelers could carry and the detailed labeling instructions suggest something about the fin-de-siècle audience's priorities. One packs heavy, not only to be prepared for everything, but because one believes that the material possessions he carries *will* prepare them for anything. It suggests a belief that objects, or external materiality, are what we trust to keep us safe. Moreover, in packing heavy, one doesn't have to make as many taxing decisions; there's room to say "yes" not only to the comforts of home but also to the idea of more — more items, more luxury, more security. Which, in turn, means fewer unknowns, less unpreparedness, and less fear. Conversely, we're left wondering if the "authentic" traveler packs light. Packing light suggests self-reliance and an ability to make decisions (perhaps based on previous experiences); it shows a confidence in one's own ability to make do with what's available. The baggage, then, serves as an emblem of fear of the unknown and of a trust in external materiality to assuage that fear.

*

In my own manuscript, I also consider unpacking and baggage as a metaphor. I talk about packing specific supplies that one of the founders of the birthing home I

visited in Haiti sent with me. She's a doctor on the East Coast, so she mailed me extra supplies from the hospital where she works and I repacked those supplies and carried them on my trip. There's a scene where I'm cutting open the spine of one big package I've been mailed to transfer the umbilical cord clamps and hospital sheets into my supplies suitcase. However, this comes (at least for now) at an early part in the manuscript. Along the edge of the suitcase, I squeeze in a few deflated soccer balls. However, this part currently comes after I've laid out a pretty clear case in my manuscript for "donate money, don't send stuff." It's a moment of internal conflict: on one hand, I'm thrilled to be bringing something that's useful and requested (and I have the opportunity to do so, since my stuff is in a carry-on), but on the other hand, I believe in the efficacy of dollars over supplies. On yet a third hand, I know that setting my broader philosophical beliefs ("send money, not stuff") aside in favor of listening to what the people on the ground request is one version of "right." What is so challenging – and also what makes this packing scene worth putting into the book – is holding all three (and maybe more) such ideas in my head at once. They seem in conflict, but cognitive dissonance is something I discuss in my book. It's demonstrative of how what I'm packing says something about the packer and the receiver. It's a moment of conflict; a clearly illustrated sticky situation— which, as it turns out is one of my theses of the book: how the more I learned about Haiti, the better I understood that "helping" is rarely simple.

In another section of the book, I use the illustration of "unpacking" my experiences and thoughts. It's a frame for reflection; I begin by picturing my mother's hands unpacking a box we've had in our attic since my family moved into their current home fifteen years ago. I ask about "the things we want to carry, the things we want to hold, the things we want to leave wrapped up." I want to examine

them, and in doing so, figure out the answer to my central question: why, once I started learning about Haiti, could I not look away? Like my analysis of the travel guides, it is the metaphorical, not the literal concept of packing that guides my inquiry. I love the idea of unpacking because of what the act itself requires: examining things one by one, categorizing them, and figuring out where to put them. The spatial element of unpacking provides a dose of the concrete, or tangible that we so often lack when we try to organize ideas.

At this point, I'm still working on how to extend this metaphor further in the final sections of the book and trying to figure out how it can help me work towards an ending. The form of the essay, the classical nonfiction form, requires an unpacking of itself to work well. It's also something anyone who travels must do. For these reasons, I know I'm not alone in thinking about how this metaphor can extend. In one way, the process of unpacking is a natural conclusion to travel; in another, it's the beginning— because unpacking is when you take out the objects (or ideas or experiences) you brought back home and incorporate them back into your life. The essay, too, asks us to dissect our curio cabinets of experience— and see what they can show us or teach us or help us remember.

Chapter 2

If We're Here/There, How Do We Talk?

At the heart of the concern over how the “traveler” and “tourist” labels impact how visitors self-identify and what they carry is a conversation about discourse. How do we describe a place? How do we talk when we're in a place? Who talks? These are all questions wrapped up in how we talk about landscapes, language, and voice. In her seminal work, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt discusses the place that these observations visitors make about the visited and the interactions between the travelers and the natives as “contact zones.”

These contact zones are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (Pratt 7). The beauty of the phrase “contact zone” is that it “shifts the center of gravity and the point of view” because other synonyms, like “colonial frontier” are “grounded within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is a frontier only with respect to Europe)” (Pratt 8). It's a term that subverts because it does not focus on the separateness in the relationship between the visitor and visited, it instead focuses on “co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices” (Pratt 8). Contact zones are particularly useful when thinking about how travelers interact with persons and landscape (and with landscape as persons). Because of the term's subversion of colonialism, it also proves useful in thinking about voice and “giving” or representing voice.

It's nearly impossible to talk about a place and not talk about the landscape. Landscapes can change from cities to countrysides, from skyscrapers to mountain ranges, from frozen tundra to imagined intergalactic universes, and more, but a story needs to have a setting. Portrayals of landscapes, like so much of our language, tend to say something about the speaker and her values that may not be spelled out in the text on a first read. Landscapes, how they're described, and who's describing them can also demonstrate how the gaze itself can be imperial or conquering. There is, of course, the gendered approach to discuss landscape (reading of the landscape as feminine), which is often seen in the metaphors we use to talk about our surroundings, but it's also worth a close read to ask what other values and assumptions of the speaker towards the subject we can parse out.

In the first part of this section, I'll be examining the portrayal of landscape in the Cook travel guides, in the 2011 Lonely Planet Haitian travel guide, and in a section of my own work. In this section, I will discuss the broader idea of voice. I will consider what it means, once we've put voice to landscape, to also put voice to people (who already have their own voices). Throughout these sections, I will be considering and building on Mary Louise Pratt's work, as well as others, to examine how the way we talk about place and voice changes perspectives of the visitor and the visited. Finally, I will discuss how these questions came to a head in my own creative work.

Landscapes

One of the guide's many options that Thomas Cook's customers, luggage in tow, can explore is Calcutta. The section on Calcutta begins with the location of the travel agency's office and hotel options. Then, it discusses the city's population (1,101, 334

people), its three seasons, and the surrounding landscape (Cook 54). After the basics, the guide goes on to discuss attractions:

The chief objects of interest in Calcutta are: Fort William, built 1773. In form it is an irregular octagon with five sides towards the land and three towards the river. It is surrounded by a dry ditch, which, however, can be filled with water by a sluice from the river. The whole of the defences are faced and palisaded with great care and are kept in admirable condition. The fort mounts several guns of various calibres. (Cook 54)

The first attraction in this part of India, according to the guide, is a British fort, the banner of military superiority and masculine strength. (Fully equipped with “several guns of various calibres.”) Then, in Cook’s order: the post office, the telegraph office, the government house, the town hall, the cathedral, the University, and, finally, The Indian Museum (55). All of these highlighted attractions are hallmarks of European civil society; they emphasize literacy, communication, and discourse. Why travel all the way to Calcutta to see buildings like the ones you can see at home? For a fin-de-siècle audience, the response echoes the question: you travel all the way to Calcutta *in order to* see buildings like the ones you have at home. You can see (forced) assimilation; you can see how foreigners have assumed your “proper” order of procedures; you see the fruits of the “civilizing” mission.

A witnessed familiarity eases the anxiety of degeneration; if a different culture can demonstrate its similarity to British imperial culture, then it is a welcome homogeneity. In his discussion “On Mimicry and Man,” Homi Bhabha advances the idea of mimicry-as-imperial when he says “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (126, original emphasis). The mimicked, he argues, needs a certain “ambivalence” with “slippage” (Bhabha 126) to reveal the mimicry – that way, something can stay the “Other” can be comfortable enough to be familiar (a luxury in

its own rite) and yet different, at least in “slippage” moments so that the conqueror can put distance between himself and his subject to ease his conscience.

At a time when, as Anne McClintock discusses in *Imperial Leather*, the late Victorian audience moves (as observed by Edward Said) “from the ‘filiation’ or family relation to ‘affiliation’ or (non-familial relations)” (44-45), the longing for the familiar, or family, creates room for the idea of the family to expand. Or, at the very least, creates an increased emphasis on the importance of familiarity. There is less to fear if the “other” is adopting British ideals; it means the family (in a broad sense) and the culture are expanding, not declining.

After the familiar post offices, telegraph offices, and cathedrals, the guide details a uniquely Indian excursion: The Brahmaputra, The Rhine of India. It is in this section of the guide, with prose and descriptive language of how to get to the river (which is, for familiarity’s sake, compared to the famous Rhine in western Europe), that we hear the strongest narrative voice. The Brahmaputra is first described as not-to-be missed, if for no other reason than (in predictably British fashion) it is alongside the “important tea-bearing districts of the country” (Cook 92). The guide goes onto paint a scenic countryside:

The snowy range runs fairly parallel with the Brahmaputra, and the early riser will admit that no scenery can be compared to the rising beams of the sun striking on the snow-clad mountains. At noon on the first day Goalpara is reached picturesquely situated at the foot of a conical hill. (Cook 93)

Yet the narrator does not allow the beautiful description of the sun’s reflection over a snowy mountainside to linger. The smooth lines of a “conical hill” are counterpoised in the very next paragraph with the fierce alligator and gunfire:

Numerous muggers (alligators) will be seen basking their ugly carcasses [sic] on the many sand-banks and the sportsman will doubtless amuse himself by shooting some of these dangerous reptiles, which simply swarm in the river the whole way up.

(Cook 93)

The quick switch between the scenic and the violent echoes a duality ever so popular with a fin-de-siècle audience invested in question of a human's natural yet evolving state as one who something possesses both good and evil. The fear of pushing too far, thus crossing the border from one side (good or evil) and into the other led to, "narratives about the danger that a frontier willingly but temporarily breached might vanish completely, stranding the explorer in the Other's place. There are, of course, the years of Jekyll and Hyde, of Kurtz..." writes Buzard in *Disorienting Fiction* (10). One can appreciate the snowy mountainside and beautiful views, the Cook guide suggests, but beware of the ever-present ancient alligators who "swarm in the river the whole way up" (93) and who are yours to shoot, should you desire.

In her article, "Geography as a Science of Observation: The Landscape, The Gaze and Masculinity," Gillian Rose discusses the power dynamics of gazing at the landscape, something the Cook guide, the Haitian guide books, and most other guide books I've seen, mention. Rose operates under the idea that the landscape is feminine and claims that the eye "held the landscape together as a unit" (342) for the geographer to study, but that "the gaze also gave pleasure to the geographer" (343). The idea of receiving pleasure from the gaze was often, in fieldwork, believed to be *at the expense of* the "scientific gaze"—that is, aesthetics and analysis were at odds (Rose 343). In the Cook guides, the narrative does seem to swivel between describing the beauty of the place, or the pleasure in the gaze (the aforementioned snowy mountainsides) and the cooler, calculating tone of taxonomy (the alligators, what they look like, where they are located, their habits). This tension not only paints the landscape as feminine, but also holds other implications about what Rose calls the

“discourse of the feminine nature” (346). If the feminine landscape provides what is seen as a captivating kind of beauty, and it is at the expense of what is seen as progress vis-à-vis the scientific impulse from the male scientist, then we have lurking under the surface of these descriptions of gazes of landscapes, assertions about who can do what kind of research: men can do science and science is the most valuable way of documenting foreignness.

These unspoken and spoken borders between masculine and feminine, good and bad, picturesque and dangerous, purity and reptilian, are alluring to the travellers precisely because of their risk: as a fin-de-siècle audience knew from many of their novels, if you go too far, you may never come back.

So what does this flirtation with the border of decline say about the identity of the traveler or the tourist? Buzard claims:

In crossing over, the mobile authority lays claim to the ability to set aside identity for a time, implying that such identity is there to begin with and that it will be recovered, rather than invented and defining contrast to, and engagement with, the visited (often the colonized and available-for-visiting) Other. In all these instances, authority derives from the demonstration not so much of some finally achieved ‘insiders’ in the alien state, but rather from the demonstration of an *outsider’s insideness*. Anthropology’s Participant Observer, whose aim was a ‘simulated membership’ or ‘membership without commitment to membership’ in the visited culture, went on to become perhaps the most recognizable (and institutionally embedded) avatar of this distinctively modern variety of heroism and prestige. (Disorienting Fiction, 10)

The ability, then, to shed an identity, if only temporarily, is also a luxury. Like the baggage one carries around, one can leave an identity (for example, “tourist”) unattended for a short venture into the “other’s” space. And, absorbing (though it *must* be temporary, else you fear staying too long and permanently inhabiting, or becoming, the other; that is, “going native”) is the ultimate power. Crossing into another group, being accepted, and knowing that your previous identity still awaits

you –that is, the freedom to *choose* and *act on that choice*— is the height of control over one’s own narrative, which is something one struggles for in the midst of an identity crisis.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cook’s guide and focus on landscape and description falls just short of an interactive border crossing between the visitor and the visited. You can rise to watch the sun and travel with the alligators, but even when describing, a few paragraphs later, the “temples which can be visited,” the tone stays outsider-esque: “There is another temple on Peacock Island, in the centre of the river close to the station, and although the place does not swarm with these holy birds formerly, yet the temple is curious” (Cook 93). The visitor is painted as an observer, there to view curiosities.

On a language level, Cook reinforces the distance between observer and subject through, as Spurr discusses in the *The Rhetoric of Empire*, a rhetorical tool pinpointed by Roland Barthes. In colonial vocabulary, the importance of the noun “destroys the verb... so that the noun tends to identify non specific objects or actions, but more generalized notions (nature, mankind, humanity) which carry the moral weight of the discourse” (Spurr 31). Accordingly, language centers on familiar concepts and cannot be refuted (Spurr 31). In the case of the Cook guide, the passive voice (“no scenery can be compared,” “Goalpara is reached,” “will be seen basking,” etc.) divorces the actor from the action. The result of this distance between the looker and the looked upon is twofold: the anonymity of the speaker provided by the passive voice means the reader can better imagine himself in the text, but, since he is in his imagination, he is less connected to *actually* seeing what is in front of him. That is, when we are busy imagining what we *will* see or *thinking* about what it is we see, it is much easier to forget to look. The mind’s expectations can get in the way of observing what is.

Regardless, the ability to gaze, and then act by categorizing or not act based on that gaze is a luxury that suggests some kind of ownership of or superiority to the gazed upon land or people.

Moreover, the Cook narrator uses nouns early in sentences to create an image that sustains throughout the paragraph. For instance, “the snowy range” and “numerous muggers (alligators)” set the tone for the paragraph while still being sufficiently vague. The lack of specificity of which mountain ranges, what kind of alligators or what they look like gives the reader room to conjure his own internal image. “Travel texts are not fixed or stable,” writes Youngs in summary of Holland and Huggan, “their meanings are determined by readers as much as by authors, and those meanings may vary according to readers’ social, geographical and historical contexts and according to the critical approach consciously adopted” (174). Filling the vagueness with imagination brings the reader closer into the text, but not closer to knowing the place they will really see. (Or at least as close to “knowing” a place as we can ever be, since we are constantly reading and interpreting places, just as we are reading and interpreting texts.) The imagined, in this case, might make the reader feel engaged when he is simply reading the book, but after he has arrived in person and begins looking *for* the experience the book promises, a pre-existing image makes it easier for him to adopt tunnel vision. The imagined as well as the noun-as-nonspecific-image perpetuate a fantastical sensation of place.

Haitian travel guides, too, there is a focus on landscape and language that separates the reader from the place that’s visited. In the 1861 guide, which is essentially an advertisement for African Americans to move to Haiti, begins with an Introduction, which comes after then-Haitian President Geffrard’s “Invitation” to black Americans and uses race as a selling point:

There is only one country in the Western World where the Black and the man of color are undisputed lords; where the White is indebted for the liberty to live to the race which with us is enslaved; where neither laws, nor prejudices, nor historical memories, press cruelly on persons of African descent; where the people whom America degrades and drives from her are rulers, judges, and generals...” (Redpath 9)

The guide, including President Geffrard’s aforementioned invitation and Redpath’s Introduction was a renewal of the immigration policy that several heroes of Haitian Independence, including Jean-Jacque Dessalines, had created and supported. President Geffrard’s policy, and the call to action of the 1861 guide for African Americans to emigrate to Haiti, corresponded with the US abolitionist movement. After the South succeeded as part of the US Civil War, Haiti was (conveniently) recognized by the US government—a recognition that had been withheld since Haiti became the world’s first black republic in 1804— and the US Navy used Cap-Haitien as an operating port and Haiti, albeit briefly, was permitted to import its cotton to the US.

In the section called “The Vegetable Kingdom,” includes lists of all of the crops and natural resources Haiti has to offer.

Cotton grows with extraordinary facility, requiring no culture whatever. It is of a fine and silky quality.

Coffee flourishes in the highlands.

Sugarcane is native of the plains, where the traveller often sees, with astonishment, gigantic specimens of it, varying from 18 to 24 feet in height.

Cocoa grows in the valleys, on trees, and requires little attention. It is a profitable and important article of export.

Rice, of good quality, is cultivated with success, but hitherto on a limited scale. (Redpath 45)

And the list goes on with descriptions of tobacco, Indian corn, ginger, indigo, manioc/cassava, oranges, arrowroot, and more. This guide catalogues “natural history for the purpose of “provid[ing] means for narrating inland travel and exploration aimed not at the discovery of trade routes, but at territorial surveillance, appropriation

of resources, and administrative control” according to Pratt (38). The result is that the landscape is not just about passing *through* on trade roots, but also about *using* up. The personal stakes are raised, then, for the people who are using the land, because there is so much more than transit to gain.

Similarly, in the Haitian travel guide nearly a hundred years later, we see the land as something other than land – as at our disposal – by imposing on it human characteristics. The mountains and oceans are painted by language like portraits. The anthropomorphized land is evident in the 1956 Pan American Union guide, *Visit Haiti*, in sections like:

Haiti’s brilliant hues are tempered with deeper tones, both in nature and human types. One sees them in the depths of shaded coffee groves, in the mountains darkly purple at dusk, in polished mahogany and rosewood pieces... in the ebony skins of the peasants, descended from African chieftains... In the *café-au-lait* complexions of the mulatto minority (2; ellipses included in text).

Indeed in this section, the people and the land are intertwined, which is something the privileged gaze is able to observe from a distance. It’s hard to distinguish if, when talking about the “shaded coffee groves” and “complexions,” the narrator is talking about the landscape or skin color. The conflation of identities between the land and the land’s residents runs parallel to the way the Cook guide confuses what is expected with what might actually be there. In both instances, there’s an element of the imagined — the narrators are describing a place to the reader. In the case of the Haitian guide, there’s some kind of safety in casting the landscape in the same light as the people: readers can imagine they “know” what they’re getting into, both physically and culturally. If readers can picture a different setting, they can picture a different people inhabiting it. In both the Haitian and the Cook guides, the readers’ feeling of “knowing” what’s coming means there’s a greater chance that readers will

find what they expect to see (rather than something else— something that surprises or doesn't align with their expectations).

In both of these cases, considering these descriptions of place as these guides' versions of contact zones is useful. Focusing on the landscape, or even "the people" instead of individuals creates a contact zone with slightly less contact (or more comfort for the reader). That is, the focus on a description of the land, comparing the people to the land, and anthropomorphizing it shifts the reader's focus from contact zones with single persons. This move both defamiliarizes the place (because readers never "meet" anyone specifically) *and* familiarizes the place (*because* readers never meet someone foreign, they picture the scene and, like the Cook guide's comparison of the Indian Brahmaputra to the Rhine, compare it to something they already know. A contact zone without a specific person is barely a contact zone at all; it keeps readers fairly comfortably situated with their pre-written descriptions.

In my own work, I tried to incorporate individuals (or people I met whom I considered "guides") as often as I could—and while this did create more deliberate contact zones, it also brought with it a slew of different challenges. For instance, when I described a community soccer game and recounted the conversation I had with two men on the sidelines, I shared as much as I knew about them, but they still seemed (readers have told me) somewhat flat when compared to the Haitian doctor with whom I spent the most time. Certainly, a big part of them appearing "flatter" is because I didn't get to know the men very well (we only met in passing), but does that mean I should cut them out of the soccer scene and only describe the way the players set up from the game and the mountains that surrounded the plateau we were on? Cutting Juanito and Emmanus, the two men I met, and keeping the landscape would soften or eliminate a contact zone, but keeping them if they appear flat as characters is

not doing them any kind of favor. This kind of dilemma also brings me back to questions about what it means to “give voice” and how the very notion of “giving voice” problematizes the way we see or portray the voices of the person to whom someone “gives voice.” In this particular case at the soccer field, I’ve been trying to figure out alternate ways of keeping them as characters, as well as other people who I met only once.

One method I’ve seen in other texts is a pastiche effect— where individuals interviewed as “background” to a scene are listed quote by quote by quote, without sentence tags. In John McPhee’s *Encounters with the Archruids*, he just lists quotes from people who spoke about a certain topic. For instance, when describing a developer named Charles Fraser, McPhee offers a glimpse of how other people view him when he writes:

“He walked into Cloister at Sea Island and he said, ‘I’m the goldenboy of the Golden Isles, and I’ve just bought three thousand acres of Cumberland Island.’”

“I want to shoot the son of a bitch.”

“He is a visionary young man who has learned that conservation can pay.”

“No. Charlie is a conservationist in the real sense. He wants to harmonize a modern environment with all the endowments of nature.”

“Conservation to Charlie means, in great part, that Charlie should not be bitten by a mosquito.”

“He thinks he’s a home boy with a lot of clout in Georgia, but he’ll find out what he can do with his pink-sock golfers.”

(McPhee, 100)

And so on. McPhee uses this technique several other times during the book, most notably to describe the auditorium at a Sierra Club meeting near the book’s end. This move allows McPhee to paint a verbal portrait; it’s an auditory sketch through overheard voices, snippets, and one-liners. He lists so many (one assumes different) quotes that there’s a sense of fairness to how the voices are portrayed and what they paint— McPhee is not just choosing voices that all say the same thing, he’s showing

shades of interpretation, and by incorporating several voices in a short amount of time without giving us the background (or even the name!) of the voices, there's a sense of leveling out opinions through anonymity. Here are some other people, McPhee shows us, and here is what they say. It is one moment where we linger in what could be a larger perception of the character, and then we dive back into a thoroughly researched and documented scene.

The challenge of writing about landscape seems full of unavoidable questions: how do you determine and provide the “right” amount of information about a place? Can you paint a picture of the place without anthropomorphizing? Do you have to?

Surely part of the fun of writing about other places *is* the landscape— it's to allow the reader to experience a sense of traveling and crossing, alongside the writer. We often read in order to travel — we allow texts to sweep us off to unknown worlds and places. In some ways, there's nothing more important to a story than a sense of place, and creating a sense of place so often requires a description of a landscape.

We anthropomorphize this landscape to understand it better. When, in a section of my manuscript I describe the flight descending over Hispaniola, I tell of mountain ranges as an old and wrinkled forehead with its valleys, peaks, and brown age spots. Surely that offers a clearer picture than just saying “the mountains were brown and rough from this altitude.” I do wonder, though, if anything is lost in describing the landscape as human; perhaps we lack the vocabulary to describe landscape as *landscape* because we're so used to describing it as human. Perhaps in my choice to describe it as human, I remove agency from the land; I'm not using terms unique to the rock formation and, in opting for a comparison I can better understand, I sometimes wonder if I diminish its grandeur.

Similarly, one concern I came across when describing Haiti was how my choices to highlight the landscape (or not to) would relate to the ongoing narrative about an “exotic” place’s “beauty.”

My own concern over this speaks to what Mary Louise Pratt would as the “anti-conquest,” or “the strategies of innocence [that] were constructed in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era” (9). My choice to describe my surroundings was based on my desire to have a strong narrative where the reader felt oriented and could focus on the story at hand. However, this choice, as one reader pointed out, lead to a situation where I was offering landscape details and at the same time thinking, “I’m tired of everyone in Haiti talking about how beautiful it is — I want to broaden the conversation.” This kind of catch-22 echoes a question I ask in the first few pages of my book: “How can we acknowledge our bind and transcend it?” I think this question somewhat complicates, though still engages, Pratt’s notion of anti-conquest, because I try to make it very clear to my readers that I do *not* feel innocent. Yet I also don’t feel purposefully imperial. Yet I know on some level my mere presence is inherently imperial (and therefore not innocent). This kind of conflicted middle ground is where I find myself stationed, and thus my question about what’s next. How to transcend? Or, at the very least, how to unwind from the pretzel-esque pose?

And while I don’t know the answer (or that there’s *an* answer to be found), I do think that we can begin to offer more answers by considering the self-correcting and hybrid forms. In my earlier discussion of structure and content, I talk about opportunities for the structure to support the content’s aim at subversion. In the larger field of Creative Nonfiction, these are questions that we have to continue to write towards. If we don’t try to figure out, collectively, how to address the traps and

tropes of writing about a place, and then move forward, then we will be creatively struck, in both craft and content.

Chapter 3

Translating Form and What's Next?

After considering language and voice in the contact zone, I believe stepping backwards to consider the how language and voice work together, and are translated, can offer a useful way of moving forward. In this section, I conclude my analysis of the guides by discussing how translation is brought up the Cook guide and in the Haitian guides. I also consider how translation plays a role in my manuscript. In discussing translation, I find many literal ways we translate every day (through tone and meaning) as well as figurative ways we translate (by bringing our own background knowledge, for instance, and allowing that to color our understanding). Our communications are full of these varying forms of interpretations, and so I ultimately ask what that multiplicity could look like in terms of form: can some kind of hybrid approach reflect the multifaceted approach to understanding? I also ask what's next in terms of moving forward with travel writing, even given all we know about the traps and problems of writing about the "other."

Translation

The Cook and Son guide, for instance, gives information about how to obtain a translator, where language schools are located, and then proceeds to translate the city (the attractions, the accommodations— in fact, the whole trip) for its readers. We can see, after a close examination of the tips, explanations, and rules, that the guide

actually translates place, not just language, for the readers. It is through this translation, helpful though it may be for travelers and tourists, that an impenetrable space is created; the guide can never close the gap for its readers and allow them to cross the border to inhabit “the other.” It can offer its readership the choice of identity on “this side” of the border — traveler or tourist; city or countryside; India or Burma or Ceylon or South Africa — but it never crosses the tentative no man’s land between visitor and visited to inhabit the other side.

When we view the guide as a form of translation, we consider how, as nonfiction writers whose narrators serve as “guides” to the reader, we frame the place we write about. How much history do we provide? Which version of what history? Where do we rest our gaze? How does our voice sound? The editorial choices that actual guides and writers-as-guides make translates traveled spaces for the visitor or the reader.

In some of the Haitian travel guides, the space is often translated based on previous expectations of the place. In the case of the 1956 Pan American Union guide, the translation requires the reader to consider former European and Haitian history:

Even more mysterious is the tale which is told of the child Dauphin, Louis XVII, who was spirited out of France during the Revolution and hidden on the island. A grave in a lonely grotto, discovered years later, is believed by some to have been that of the child king, the last of the true Bourbons.” (29)

This excerpt draws on a mix of background from the reader: the passage requires some knowledge of the French Revolution, plays on the mystery of an unknown grave, and highlights the romanticized nobility of European monarchs. Underlying this session, too, is a tone of exotic voodoo mystery — verbs like “spirited” and phrases like “hidden on the island” and “lonely grotto” suggest a haunted a paradise.

In this case, as with much of the rest of the text in the guides, the unspoken but fully translated message is equally, if not more, important because it cues the reader toward a picture and tone of a place.

In my own work, I struggle with spoken and unspoken translations. In one section, when I describe working with my translator Rozambert to talk to some of the women who are at Maison de Naissance, the birthing home I visit, I narrate: “I’ve explained to Rozambert more than once that I need a direct translation— so if they say ‘I’ then he says ‘I,’ not ‘he’ or ‘she’ or ‘they.’ Sometimes it works.” Later, in another scene, it becomes unclear whether Rozambert or the woman I’m speaking to is the one talking. I, too, was confused for a few moments even as I stood there, listening: was Rozambert giving his version of the answer the woman was giving or was he actually translating directly? Can a translator ever *not* be giving their own version of what someone is saying? How close can a translator really get?

In writing the scene, itself, I found that although many of my first readers could appreciate the confusion I felt, they wanted to know that I was confused, too. They could forgive the confusion as long as they understood, while reading, that it was confusing for me as well. Since one of the themes of the book is language and how our labels and categories impact the way we see and treat each other, the upfront discussion with the reader over the challenges with literal translation builds on one of my central ideas.

Similarly, challenges with unspoken translation also play a role in the book. Again, with Rozambert I wonder what he’s not saying when, in a different section of the book, I try to ask him about contemporary Haitian political history and he does little more than list off names of presidents. When I ask Kirsty, a Canadian midwife who was the Clinical Director of Maison de Naissance when I visited, about some of

my questions, she goes into much more detail. She also tells me that the kind of questions I'm asking about aren't talked about in the way I'm asking them. They're talked about around the well or after dinner one night in someone's home. When I consider what she means in her responses, that is, when I translate the conversation about translation (in a non literal way; we were speaking in English), she confirms something I knew but hadn't yet said: I'm not going to get the conversation I want. I get this from our conversation because she says that even she, who I know has lived here for years and has a Haitian husband and a baby says, about her relationship, with her husband: "It's never that more heart-to-heart sit-down where he says *Honey, this is how it was and it's terrible*. It's not that revealing moment you sometimes envision. It's not like that at all."

Ultimately, the reason the guides cannot bring the reader closer, and therefore transcend the identity borders between the reader and the "other," is because of a language barrier. This, too, is one of the reasons I fall short in my work; I can't have some of the conversations I would like to have because I don't speak the requisite language. As Tim Youngs writes, "In short, translation furnishes another example of layers of mediation between the act of travel and its relation" (171). Indeed, a language barrier creates further distance between the traveler and visited — "layers of mediation" that, even with a translator, are often not be fully bridged. The concept of translation, when applied to speech with all its nuances, *as well as* experiences interests me. When we consider translation as not only a matter of language but also as a lens through which we see the place that is being translated, we can begin to see how the translating effects of a guide ripple outward to curate and define the traveler's experience and the visit's experience. The contact zone, where the visitor and the visited interact and where the literal translations might occur is not just about

replacing words one for one, nor is it about a *transfer*, but, as Pratt tells us, about transculturation, a process where cultures converge or even merge—and understanding that encounter more fully or complexly requires a significant investment in language and time. Experimenting and playing with how transculturation might continue to represent itself in form *and* content is one way in which Creative Nonfiction can push the boundaries of its genre—something this relatively new label for a type of writing with deep roots— continues to try to do. Perhaps this will assume some kind of hybrid form, not only between written genres (like poetry and essay with the rise of the lyric essay), but, potentially, with a hybrid that mixes medium. Many storytellers of Creative Nonfiction are asking, for instance, how video or audio or other types of mixed media work alongside the written work in one piece.

What's Next?

In writing about transculturation, I'm left wondering how that process can be reflected in form. There's writing back, where underrepresented voices address the effects of colonialism and colonial canon. As I've discussed, there's the idea of a self-correcting form that, in its interruptions and ruptures, makes space for acknowledging and problematizing one's position as a writer. Yet, my main questions center on the effects of being hyper-aware of the self and the role sincerity plays. This hyper-awareness could be another form of what Pratt would consider "anti-conquest" wherein one shade of the "anti-conquest" narrative is that it offers a *promise* of a "different," narrative, and so often provides a problematic one with the old familiar tropes. It is certainly a possibility that I'm doing this, despite my best efforts.

But in particular, I'm interested in further studies on how being hyper-aware of the self impacts the authority of the writer; if one is constantly self-correcting, then is one's authority diminished? Or, is authority heightened because the reader can see the writer's critical thinking on the page?

And, in a genre like creative nonfiction where many (I'd even say most, though it's hard to quantify— in part because the genre includes several sub-fields and in part because there has no unifying study) contemporary practitioners are women, does the self-correcting form seem less like an intentional move and more like a cultural practice? There is wisdom in recognizing that, as writers, we have our biases and we will never know everything, but does that admission sound different coming from a woman writer or a trans writer or a person of color than it does coming from a white male? I think so, in part because people who are not white males have often had to practice establishing—rather than assuming-- credibility and authority.

These questions, of course, consider beyond my current inquiry, but I think they need to be considered for a conversation about form to move forward. Other than a self-correcting narrator, which is a hybrid that happens on a sentence or paragraph level, there's a hybrid form to be considered on a structural level of an entire work—and this is where I think a conversation about sincerity enters the picture. In much of creative nonfiction, and particularly in memoir, there's the expectation of self-actualization, as theorists Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest in their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Yet, when we consider the falseness of identities like “traveler” and “tourist” alongside the contact zones between the writer and foreign people and places, I'm not sure that I believe a full self-actualization can always be the ending. What if actualization weren't a

destination, but rather a process— a process that extends beyond the pages of the book?

More contemporary writing is trying to do this –mine included— and I think at the heart of this question lies the corner where form and content intersect: are you concerned with shaping your story into the mold of “actualization comes at the end” or are you interested in grappling with tough questions and concerns on the page, while understanding that you might not come up with singular answers? To me, the second option is more honest, and more reflective of reality.

These challenges of narrative go hand in hand with form and content because both form (or structure) and content (or what a piece is really “about”) are something that we who write Creative Nonfiction write *towards*. We cannot start a true essay, that is, an essay in the truest sense of the word – an attempt or an experiment– if we know exactly where we are going and what we are doing. The beauty of the form, and perhaps more importantly, of the *practice* of essaying is in the struggle. It is in the willingness to abide in complexity.

This, perhaps, is the way forward. This might be the way beyond “anti-conquest:” a form that acknowledges its position and then figures out how to move past questions of positioning, perhaps by embracing hybridity in both its genre and its medium. Regardless, the way forward in Creative Nonfiction (a long tradition with a new label) is to grow in a way that includes these concerns, a multivalence of voices, and pushes the boundaries of structure.

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