

YOU ARE THE LAND, THE LAND IS YOU

ENCOUNTERS WITH SPIRITUALLY-AFFECTIVE LANDSCAPES

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'You are the land, the land is you: Encounters with spiritually-affective landscapes'
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116,715 words

ABSTRACT

Far from being a neutral backdrop or innocent bystander, landscape exerts a powerful emotional as well as physical agency over the lives of those who dwell therein, influencing not just where we live but how we go about living: we shape the land, the land shapes us.

Making extensive use of autoethnography and experimental methodologies, this research explores the relationship between landscape, walking and spirituality through the lens of deep topography, incorporating elements of liberative theological thinking, and relating to personal encounters with the landscape walking several branches of the Camino de Santiago over a period of four years. It examines how landscapes evoke emotional, spiritual or religious experiences and assesses the crucial role of walking as a performative act in co-producing affect and emotion.

Of principal interest is the idea of 'landscape experience' which I describe as a two way process in which there is no subject or object but a fusion between two active agencies. It's this interaction – this transition from *being* to *becoming* – which opens up affective potentialities, from moments of fleeting sublimity to life-changing Damascene conversions.

I turn to pilgrimage as a means to develop further these dynamic themes, acknowledging and accounting for the influence of time and space in both momentary and cumulative form. Following Mandoki (1997), I suggest that the Camino de Santiago, a politically, culturally and religiously contested sacred space loaded with over a thousand years of human experience has the Camino have the capacity to 'bend' time and space. Put simply, the landscapes of the Camino can 'do' things other landscapes can't. Furthermore, it's the journey, not the destination that exerts this affective energy.

Finally I consider the wider theological implications of this transformative human/landscape encounter. If the spiritual or religious is indeed numinously present, is this experience restricted to the individual or personal spiritualities or does it have the capability to effect wider social and political change?

**This is my life's work, and I dedicate it to the memory of Marcella
Althaus-Reid (1952-2009)**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus declares that in the world to come 'the first shall be last and the last shall be first'. But as we're currently living in the very difficult present, top of the eternal gratitude list are my supervisors, Paul Cloke and Susannah Cornwall. And here the use of 'eternal' is no exaggeration. Seven years of research is a long-time, it seems even longer when studying part-time and trying – not always successfully – with a teaching career. To extend the biblical metaphor, over that prolonged period, both Paul and Susannah endured sufferings beyond the call of duty – petulance and hissy fits of which even a teenager would be ashamed – and, to extend the biblical metaphor, displayed the patience of a saint. They sustained me through some very dark times – personal as well as academic and never, ever lost faith - how they managed to do so is completely beyond me. When I say 'I couldn't have done it without them' I really do mean that. Paul and Susannah, you have changed my life – eternally!

There are many others in the Exeter University academic community who helped me *en route* and special thanks go to Gail Davies who got me through (yet another) meltdown as I negotiated the upgrade procedure. Also Karen Bickerstaff for advice and Ian Cook for inspiration.

On a personal level, I owe a huge – and eternal – debt of gratitude to my lifelong friend and 'old mucker' Jan Larkin, and her son Sean. It was on a road trip through France and northern Spain in 2009 that we visited Santiago and came across the Camino, from the bookshop in Auxerre Cathedral Jan bought me a book outlining the history of the Camino de Santiago and at once I was hooked. Three years later it was Jan who encouraged me to throw caution to the wind and go and hike the Camino and during the intervening years she's always been there with her life-saving life-coaching – she deserves an honorary doctorate for services to the fragile egos of doctoral students!

In 2012 I returned from the Camino with no fixed abode but was taken in by Julie and Phill Barnard-Jenkins and their sons, Alex and Toby (plus assorted dogs, cats and childminding children) in Wells, Somerset. They became – and still are – my 'adopted' family and without their continued love and support I'd have fallen by the wayside a long, long time ago. They made me laugh when I should've been crying and made sure I never took myself too seriously. Sadly, Phill, who indulged my love of walking and donated me his maps is no longer with us but his memory still spurs me on.

Last, but my no means least, my parents and sisters. I think it's fair to say that I've been a difficult child and sibling and that I've put them all through the mill at various times over the past five decades but they've stuck with me through thick and thin. Without my parents'

support I'd never have completed my master's degree, which was the precursor to this thesis. Thank you all for allowing me to commandeer your studies, your offices, your dining tables, your kitchens and your expensive gin in the singular pursuit of my academic goal!

In 2014 I spent a pleasant day hiking the Camino de Norte with Manuel, a Venezuelan exile living in Madrid. We were talking about roots and Manuel said to me *El Camino es tu casa* – 'the Camino is your home'. Very perceptive, Manuel! Once a nomad, always a nomad, now the writing is done I can get back to my true love and spend the rest of my days on the move. So to the Camino de Santiago I raise a glass of the most expensive Cava my money can buy. *Gracias, mi amor, te amo.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	.....	6
Introduction	.....	7
Timeline	.....	12
Part One: Genesis	.....	13
Part Two: Gestation	.....	16
The Toolkit	.....	17
La Ruta Metodológica	.....	65
Part Three: Praxis	.....	91
Prologue	.....	92
Stage One: Physical	.....	114
Stage Two: Emotional	.....	150
Stage Three: Spiritual	.....	186
Stage Four: Indifference	.....	218
Epilogue	.....	240
Part Four: Reflection	.....	252
Discussion	.....	252
Conclusion	.....	290
Bibliography	.....	332

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a journey, in more ways than one. There, I've said it! Reached for the inevitable cliché even before I've begun. It is, of course, a physical journey following Europe's most iconic hiking route, the pilgrim trail to Santiago de Compostela across France, Portugal and Spain. But it's also a personal one, engaging with autobiography and autoethnography, both of which feature prominently as both representative and analytical tools in an attempt to explain how this particular manifestation of landscape/human relations emerges from life experience accumulated over time and space. Or as, Anne Buttmer puts it, 'the culturally defined spatio-temporal setting or horizon of everyday life' (1976:277-292).

The reference to the accumulation of experience over time and space is an ever present throughout this narrative. Over the time and space of one day's hiking in June 2012 – the catalyst for this investigation, over the time and space of a six-week pilgrimage along the Camino in 2016 – the fieldwork, but also the time and space of a lifetime, from Dorset to El Salvador via a 'sex-change' – without which this investigation would never have come to pass. All these accrued events and experiences will come out, as they say, in the wash.

Accordingly, this thesis has three starting points. Or rather, three points of entry, each of which play an equally pivotal role in situating it geographically and theologically. They're like three spatio-temporal autoethnographical cogs of a phenomenological machine, neither of which can move without the other's momentum. The purported encounter with the divine occurred on my first pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago in 2012. I took to referring to this incident as 'it' simply because I could find no other words to describe 'it' and that's why, the following autumn, I embarked upon this project and four years later, returned to the scene to try to make sense of 'it', in the spirit of both academic enquiry and personal curiosity.

'It' troubled me. From where did it come? Not out of nowhere, that's for sure. Was it a *bona fide* encounter with the divine in the form of the Virgin Mary or was my mind playing tricks on me. Again. Because I have a history of mental health issues – hence the engagement with autobiography. And that's where the third point of entry comes into the equation, the third cog in the machine because this had happened before, in places as diverse as the pastoral vales of Wessex to the dry and dusty *tierra olvidada* of El Salvador.¹ I was already aware that the landscape possessed a capacity to affect bodies dwelling within it in a way that evoked an emotional and/or spiritual/religious response. Well, 'aware'

¹ 'The forgotten land', the department of Morazán in the north-eastern corner of El Salvador which, as one of the FMLN's heartlands, suffered particularly from military attacks and an exodus of refugees during the civil war.

in the sense that I'd 'felt' it. This seemed an appropriate moment to take the 'it' and place in a wider context, to explore in greater depth how experiences such as these emerge from complex relationships between the landscape, the self and what I refer to in this narrative as 'beyond-human', a term which helpfully (and maybe too conveniently) encompasses a variety of phenomena which may or may not exist – such as the divine or supernatural – or are non-material – such as emotions and affects.

What follows, then, is a piece of research which, while it has a departure and arrival, has no specific beginning and no definite end but brings together the three spatio-temporal autoethnographical cogs to try to make some sort of sense of 'it'. Building on existing geographical and theological research in this field, this thesis explores landscape/human relations through the means of pedestrian pilgrimage and examines the potential for these mobile practices to effect wider and long-term social and political change. To what extent can pilgrimage be considered theologically liberatory and socio-economically transformative? A cynic might argue, and with some justification, that walking the Camino de Santiago is little more than an exercise in solipsism for a privileged few who have the time and the money to indulge themselves. It's a far cry from the various examples of walking as protest, from the CND marches to the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in Aldermaston in the UK in the 1960s or the North American 'Peace Pilgrim' who vowed to 'remain a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace', criss-crossing the USA for the following 28 years, trusting to the kindness of strangers to shelter and feed her (Solnit 2000:55). The argument, here, is that pilgrimage can function as the reflexive precursor which initiates a more radical praxis. But it also acknowledges that radical is both relative and personal.

* * *

The map of this journey is roughly as follows. Below I offer a potted history of the Camino de Santiago which I'll expand upon in the text as and when necessary. Given that I make reference to several periods of fieldwork along the Camino de Santiago over a period of five years I've also drawn up a time line for reference.

Part One, 'Genesis', briefly recalls the context in which 'it' occurred, during a day's hike along a less-visited stage of the *Camino Francés* then sets out the autobiographical background, both geographical and theological, which brought me to this study after a thirteen year absence from academia.

Having dealt with the personal, Part Two, 'Gestation', sets out an academic approach to the investigation. Using the analogy of the one of the most important items of hiking technology – the rucksack – I sift through and explain the various analytical instruments I

used to dissect various events and episodes along the route. I collectively refer to these devices as my 'toolkit' and they draw upon approaches from geography and theology, ranging from deep topography and more-than-representational theories through pilgrimage to liberation and queer theologies². I then outline a *Ruta Metodológica* which I've divided into four 'staging posts' detailing the various issues that arose whilst planning and executing the fieldwork: the approach; the method, ethics and representation through creative and 'playful' writing.

Part Three, 'Praxis', relates the narrative of the fieldwork itself. It's part story, part commentary that attempts to capture both the moment and the context within which the moment occurs through digital voice recordings, posts on social media and an accompanying series of 'vignettes' in which I pause for contemplation. This chapter of the thesis comprises six sections: a prologue which covers the first few days on the road before beginning the research proper, three stages along the *Camino Francés* which traditionally relate to states of physical then mental torture followed by the ecstasy of arrival in Santiago (plot spoiler, I didn't get there along this route). Having bailed out 100km short of the Holy Grail the fourth stage follows the *Camino Portugues* from Porto to, finally, Santiago de Compostela then a short epilogue in the Catalan Pyrenees serves as a period of debriefing before the return home to face the inevitable 'post-Camino syndrome'.³

Part Four, 'Reflection', offers a discussion of my experiences on the Camino within the context of existing academic work on themes related to 'landscape experience' such as pilgrimage (Eade and Sallnow 1992), sacred landscapes (Lane 2002), landscape as tension (Wylie 2007), deep topography (Papadimitriou 2013), emotion and affect (Thien 2005), dwelling and becoming (Cloke and Jones 2001) and queer theology (Althaus Reid 2000, 2003).

Finally, the Conclusion, composed during the Coronavirus crisis, suggests possible future trajectories on research beyond the confines of the Camino Santiago and ways in which inclusive forms of slow or gentle mobilities might have wider political and spiritual implication. Reflecting on the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid, it ends on a personal note, a eulogy to walking and its restorative, therapeutic and liberative qualities.

² I adapted the idea of a 'toolkit' of analytical techniques from Gunnþóra Ólafsdóttir's 2007 PhD thesis.

³ See my blog post: <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/2012/11/post-camino-syndrome.html>

The Camino de Santiago: a brief overview⁴

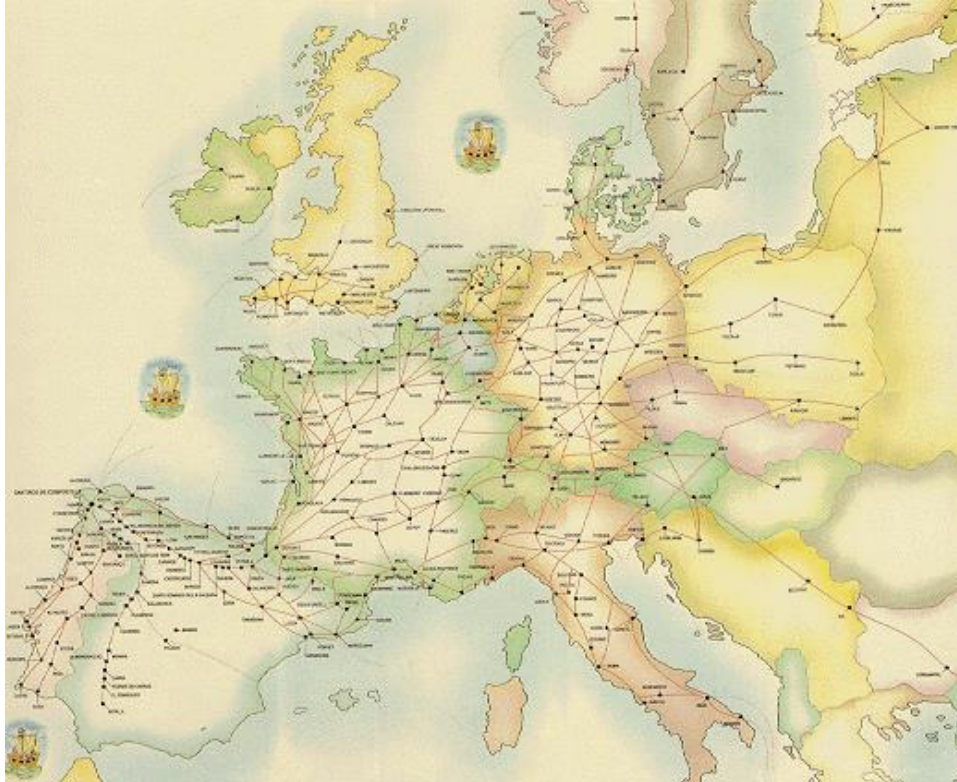


Figure 1: Network of Caminos de Santiago in Europe⁵

First things first, there is no single *Camino de Santiago*. What many people refer to as the *Camino de Santiago*, or, simply, the *Camino*, is, in fact, the *Camino Francés* or French Way, so called because it has as its starting point the town of St Jean-Pied-de-Port in southern France, in the northern foothills of the Pyrenees. It's by far the most popular of the Caminos which have Santiago as their destination, in 2019 accounting for 55% of arrivals (although only 17% of those set out from St Jean).⁶ Its recent popularity has been enhanced by Paulo Coelho's 1987 novel *The Pilgrimage* and more recently, the success of Emilio Estevez's 2010 movie, *The Way*.

Figure 1 gives an idea of the extent of the network of paths which constitute the *Camino de Santiago*, although it's by no means conclusive. With the increased popularity of the Camino, business forums and regional governments have sought to cash in, creating routes which have little or no historical authenticity.

'How', asks Nancy Frey, 'did the north-western hinterlands of the Iberian peninsula become the final resting place of an apostle martyred in Jerusalem?' (1998:8). There is, of course, no plausible or barely credible answer but legend has the remains of James the Elder, after being martyred at the hands of Herod Agrippa in A.D. 44, being transferred to

⁴ Nancy Frey's 'Pilgrim Stories' (1998) provides a more detailed account of the Camino's history..

⁵ <https://correodelcamino.wordpress.com/2009/08/13/mapa-de-los-caminos-en-europa/>

⁶ <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics/>

the Iberian peninsula on a stone boat with neither sail nor oars. As it neared the banks of the Iria Flavia, just 16km from Santiago, a horseman riding along the beach was thrown into sea by his bolting steed but instead of drowning emerged from the waves covered in scallop shells. Having pulled off its first miracle, St James' body was taken to the hill on which is founded present-day Santiago de Compostela where it remained forgotten for eight hundred years.

Sometime in the ninth century a hermit, Pelayo, observed what he thought to be a glowing star over St James' tomb, thus giving Compostela its name – *campus stelae* – the field of stars. On Pelayo's report, Bishop Teodomiro ordered the construction of a church which received royal patronage, beginning Santiago's long relationship with Spain. In 844 he appeared to King Ramiro I in a dream, telling him he would go into battle against the Moors. Thus was born Santiago Matamoros – Moorslayer – an icon of the Reconquista; by the time the Moors had been expelled in 1492, pilgrimage to the apostle's remains had become one of the most popular in Christendom.

Following the Protestant Reformation, the Camino's popularity began to wane and, with growing mistrust of pilgrims, the journey became increasingly dangerous. Fearing the arrival of the English navy on the coast, in 1579 the relics of St James were hidden and remained so until uncovered by excavations on the cathedral in 1879. Pilgrims still made their way to Santiago but post-World War II numbers had dwindled to a trickle.

The Camino's renaissance initially came under the auspices of *Franquismo*, with organised pilgrimages to Santiago becoming a manifestation of *Hispanidad*. But it owes much of its current success to international bodies: UNESCO, which named Santiago a World Heritage City in 1987 and the EU for declaring the pilgrimage the first 'European Cultural Itinerary' in 1988. From the 1990s onwards local governments, especially those in rural areas, became aware of the economic potential of the Camino and embarked upon extensive marketing campaigns and thus began the boom. To give some idea of the exponential growth in pilgrim numbers, in 2012, the year I first walked the Camino Francés, 192,000 pilgrims arrived in Santiago and registered for their Compostela at the Pilgrim Office; in 2016, the year of my fieldwork, that figure was 278,000 and in 2019 348,000. 2020, of course, will be another story and one which I'll address in the concluding chapter.⁷

⁷ <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics/>

TIMELINE

Although the ‘official’ fieldwork took place during the late summer of 2016, I make frequent references to previous pilgrimages along the *Camino Francés* and other pilgrim routes. For ease of reference, figure 2 (below) details these various excursions chronologically and locates them on an accompanying map.

2012	Camino Francés Camino de Finisterre	St Jean-Pied-de-Port to Santiago Santiago to Finisterre
2014	Camino del Ebro Camino del Norte Camino Lebaniego Camino Vadiniense	Tortosa to Zaragoza Santander to Serdio Serdio to Monastery of St Toribio Monastery of St Toribio to Leon
2015	Camino del Norte Camino Olvidado Camino del Norte Camino del Salvador Camino Francés	Irun to Deba Sodupe to Reinosa Pesues to Llanes León to Oviedo Sahagún to León
2016	Via Podiensis Camino Francés Camino Portugues Camino de Girona	Arthez-de-Bearn to St Jean-Pied-de-Port St Jean-Pied-de-Port to Portomarín Porto to Santiago Olot to Vic

Figure 2: Table showing Caminos walked 2012-2016



Figure 3: Map showing Caminos walked 2012-2016

PART ONE: GENESIS

'THE SUMMER OF SWEAT'



Fig 4: Signpost on Ruta Dragonte

Bierzo, Spain: Monday 4th June 2012

To be a pilgrim ...

Or maybe, just now and again, not. The Camino de Santiago, not so long ago an almost forgotten byway for religious eccentrics, has become a motorway of the soul, hiked by pilgrims from across the globe.

Sometimes, however, it can get too much and after one particularly trying night in an overcrowded albergue I decided to take the road less travelled.

And what a road it is. At Villafranca del Bierzo the Camino divides, the 'official' route following a busy highway. The alternative, the alluringly named Ruta Dragonte, is spoken of in hushed tones. Poorly signposted – often not signposted at all – the hospitalero in Villafranca pooh-poohed my idea, a red rag to my bull. So whilst my fellow pilgrims followed the ubiquitous yellow arrow, I took a tortuously winding road that lead up, through vineyards and orchards, into the cloudless heavens of the mountains.

The first ascent, to the village of Dragonte itself, was a relatively straightforward affair; I was three weeks into my Camino and in good shape. A taxi driver stopped to wish me 'buen camino', a much-appreciated gesture unless, of course, he was circling like a vulture, anticipating a premature – and lucrative – end to my adventure. Just above the village I paused to savour the view, and the fact that for the first time in 23 days there wasn't a single pilgrim before or behind; the handful of people I encountered that day were all locals.

Thus far I'd followed asphalted roads and tracks but now the path petered out amongst orchards and fields of vegetables and fruit. The intensity of colour was overwhelming: deep, russet reds, warm, earthy browns and verdant emerald greens. In the corner of this Arcadian tableau, a pockmarked muddy pasture led to a stream.

I was hemmed in, deep in the cleft of a riven valley and soaked in an immutable shadow that engulfed every hue and colour except the rippled silvery waters of the stream. I was lost and yet not lost; out-of-place but also acutely aware of being-in-place. Time and space ground to a halt and, for the next few minutes, it seemed to me that the earth span off its axis and inverted natural law.

I forded the stream. On the other side a thin trail traversed the mud and lead uphill. I tried it, it didn't feel right. Call it hiker's intuition or divine intervention, after five minutes I turned back. There was, gently contouring the slope, a faint trail, mostly obscured by fallen leaves. I followed it tentatively, as if each trepidatious step might lead me out of my prelapsarian Eden for I felt like an Eve, nervously transgressive and dazzled by the infinite possibilities of creation. That way madness lies, perhaps that's why I took the path. I'd put my trust in the numinous and the immaterial, step by step it led me up and out of the valley on a track that slowly became more and more distinct.

Thus, in 500 words, I described my hike along the *Ruta Dragonte* – a stage of the Camino Santiago.⁸ Five hundred words are woefully inadequate to describe the emotions aroused by a day of what I can only describe as ambulatory and spiritual intensity. At some point along the route, just after I'd passed through the hamlet of Moral de Valence, *it* happened: an immanent, divine presence in the valley, flickering scarlet and emerald behind and through the trees. Hiding, watching, guiding. I wasn't alone.

The energy of that encounter in the valley remained with me for the remainder of the Camino. It wasn't the first time I'd had felt a sense of enchantment, of being so powerfully 'at one' with the landscape that we were fused together, nor was it the first time the experience had had religious undertones. It soothed my temper, gave me space, heightened my senses, pummelled and stretched my body; it left me cerebrally, sensuously and spiritually satisfied. That day I walked in a way I'd never walked before, up and down,

⁸ For a Daily Telegraph Travel Writing Competition

up and down; cresting the ridge and descending again three times as if I were on anabolic steroids.

When I say *it* I do imply, academically and personally speaking, that the landscape performed and did so in a way that was, for me, indisputably religious, that it was somehow energised and animated. My gut instinct was that I'd been in the presence of the Virgin Mary but I also have to say that as gut instincts go this troubled me more than most. I spent the remainder of that, my first *Camino*, reflecting on what had happened, whether it was 'real' or whether it was the production of a mind and body slowed down, over space and time, to a trance-like state, by the rhythm of walking and the daily pilgrim routine. And perhaps, in the liminal space of the *Camino*, a sacred journey to a sacred place, my own personal backstory – my lifeworld – was playing tricks on me, making me experience what I'd wanted to experience ever since the idea of walking the Camino became more than an idle fancy. I have to be honest here, that brief encounter changed my life.

PART TWO: GESTATION

‘Any study begins with lived experience, being there, in the world. It must necessarily be embodied, centred in a body opening out itself to the world, a carnal relationship’

(Tilley 2004:29).

In the introduction to her PhD thesis *Relating to Nature: the performative spaces of Icelandic tourism*, Gunnþóra Ólafsdóttir writes ‘it is hard to say when anything begins or ends’ but locates the origins of her research in an event some seven years previously (2007:2).⁹ She describes it not as a life-changing ‘now-I-know-what-I’ve-got-to-do experience’ but rather a ‘moving, surreal sense of connectedness’. It transformed her worldview but left her with more questions than answers, trying to understand how ‘something so wonderful and unworldly could happen to someone as ordinary as me’. Yet the encounter leaves Gunnþóra in no doubt: ‘it *was* real. And, as mad as it may sound, from that moment on I’ve ‘known’ that there is more to life than (usually) meets the eye – another dimension, another connection, another way of being – where I realised that we *do* belong to something so much bigger’ (2007:2).

Uncanny? The ‘super-naturalness’ of that event sets Gunnþóra wondering ‘*how did this happen?*’ much in the same way that my purported encounter with the divine on the *Ruta Dragonte* got me thinking something similar all the way to Santiago. And beyond. It was unstable and unsettling, but not in a bad way. I was in the very early stages of my research when Paul, my geography doctoral supervisor, lent me a copy of Gunnþóra’s thesis. Right time, right place: in both content and style it set an academic precedent for me to embark on an equally personal quest using an approach that reflected the spirit of the enquiry. If the subject matter is unstable and unsettling, there seemed little point in devising a methodological or narrative approach that tried to organise everything into neat little boxes. It had to straddle the thin line between reflecting and representing what happened and the rigorous requirements of academia. Because it was my choice to study for a doctoral degree, nobody was putting a gun to my head. I was even paying for it myself!

Gunnþóra likens herself to the eponymous heroine of *Educating Rita*, I felt more like a student of Scumbag College from the *University Challenge* episode of *The Young Ones* but that was, I’ve now realised, an attitude disguised as a self-defence mechanism because after a thirteen year absence from academic I, too, had to play catch-up with a discipline I hadn’t studied since 1986. The ‘cultural turn’ had passed me by like a thundering high-

⁹ In the text (though not when cited as references or in the bibliography) I refer to authors I know/knew personally by their first names. To follow protocol and use surnames feels rude and contrary to the informal, conversational nature of the thesis.

speed train and I spent far too many hours wrestling with Deleuze and Guattari who, during the decades of my absence, seemed to have become the go-to men for discussing landscape/human relations. I was more comfortable with the authors of my undergraduate days, particularly W G Hoskins.

It wasn't only the concepts but, more significantly, how I'd apply theory to practice. And I think this is apparent in this thesis, there's a tension between the two that's often uneasy and occasionally uncomfortable. But here I drew on experience as a teacher working with dyslexic students, where the emphasis is on working with the condition, not against it, so I think that ultimately those tensions – and this is very much a project about and infused with tensions – are its strength as much as its weakness.

This is, ostensibly, a thesis about pedestrianism and pilgrimage as vehicles for getting under the landscape's skin. More specifically, it concerns pilgrimage as a spiritual/religious practice along the *Camino de Santiago*. From a research perspective it's already a well-ploughed furrow with Frey's 'Pilgrim Stories' (1998) enhancing more generic work by, amongst others, Coleman (2002) and Eade and Sallnow (1991). The wealth of literature concerning the Camino, academic and otherwise, has grown as exponentially as the numbers of pilgrims who make the journey on foot, much of it deals with the spiritual aspects of the journey (Scriven 2014) but for the majority the landscape remains where it does in most landscape/human encounters – in the background. It's no exaggeration to confess that this really does aggrieve me so my attempt to restore the landscape to what I consider its proper place is something of a personal crusade, as if I'm correcting a serious moral injustice. Because that's how it feels, and if the passion generated by that conviction comes across to the reader then I'll have succeeded on that point, at least. This is, after all, a work about emotions and their role in geographical and theological expression and the words 'feel' and 'feeling' crop up at regular intervals through the narrative.

So, in the world of this thesis, the landscape is no longer a passive recipient – of, for example, our emotions or spiritual/religious beliefs – but rather a performative, active agent with an affective capacity given that, as Thrift acknowledges, 'there is no stable definition of affect' (2004:59). Rather, affect is the 'transpersonal *capacity* which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications)' (Anderson 2006: 735). If that's the case, one of the key tasks of this research is how to represent it. To give it voice, to do justice to its dynamism and ever-changingness whilst recognising that inherent instability.

There came a point in early in my undergraduate 'career' where I came very close to dumping 'Geography and Landscape Studies' in favour of 'English and Media'. Yes, I know,

as confessions go that's tantamount to apostasy but the truth was that I was enjoying reading prose and poetry far more than I was textbooks on quantitative techniques or urban planning. In the end I came up with a compromise, write about the landscape from a literary perspective: problem solved!

Nowadays it's called geocriticism, described by Tally as 'literary cartography' (2011). Thirty-five years ago it seemed to me the most effective method for exploring not what landscape *is* but what it *means* and what it *does*, literature caused landscape to leap from the page and come to life. I was lucky. All landscapes are amenable to literary representation, even the 'edgelands' of industrial estates and retail parks (Farley and Roberts 2011) but I was living in the heart of Hardy's Wessex. Not just Hardy's but the Powys bothers too. Even better, it was just a short stroll from my student flat to the seafront which formed the backdrop to John Cowper Powys' novel *Weymouth Sands* (1936). In his *Autobiography* Powys wrote that 'every aspect of the Weymouth Coast sank into my mind with such a transubstantiating magic [that] it is through the medium of these things that I envisage all the experiences of my life' (1967:151). I felt much the same, thirty years later I still do, the intensity is still there.

I've adopted, therefore a 'Powysian method' in representing the landscapes of the Camino through which I walked. It's certainly an approach which uses autobiography – which is, after all, personal experience writ large – to draw out what otherwise remains unseen and/or 'felt': the non-human, the more-than-human and the beyond-human. It's a strategy that's both novel and not novel, Nick Papadimitriou's *Scarp* (2012), which exerts a huge influence over this work, similarly employs creative writing techniques in its 'deep topography' of the North Middlesex/South Escarpment. Landscape and personal history are inseparable; any attempt to tear them apart will suck the life from the land. Flatten it.

Papadimitriou's autobiography is as intense as his relationship with *Scarp*. Time and distance again, Papadimitriou has spent so long wandering the footpaths of Middlesex that he's become Middlesex, although the relationship isn't always harmonious. In this thesis I've tried to walk that fine line between autobiography as a tool and autobiography as a vehicle for the ego. It hasn't been easy. When I walk through the landscape, often in an almost trance-like state, it's hard to get away from who I am: my gender, my faith, my life-experiences – the good, the bad and the ugly – are present in every footprint. They shape the land, the land shapes me.

If Wessex shaped my geography then El Salvador did the something similar to my theology. It was revealed through experience rather than acquired through study: praxis preceded reflection. My first visit to El Mozote, a life-changing moment when I encountered

a war-torn landscape and its community in the process of resurrection, a pilgrimage to Romero's tomb and the sense that it was empty because his presence was still very much alive: '*si me matan, resucitaré en el pueblo salvadoreño* – if they kill me, I will be reborn in the Salvadoran people'.¹⁰

And then there's Marcella Althaus Reid. A chance meeting at feminist theology conference in the early noughties serves as another point of entry. For some reason, my Masters in Latin American politics and frequent trips to Central America emboldened my restored Catholicism and deepened my devotion to the Virgin Mary. But not the pale-faced, passive and de-sexed Virgin – Marcella's 'rich white woman who cannot walk' (2004:30) – but the feisty Latina 'Our Lady of the Libido', patroness of sexual liberation (Taylder 2004). Marcella and I disagreed on the role of the Virgin in queer and feminist theology but she called me an 'honorary Latin American' and encouraged me to pursue my research in Mariology from that perspective. The 'Catholic Gaze', the kaleidoscopic, faith-focused lens through which I perceive the landscape, is tinted with the vibrant Catholicism of Latin America. It's an embodied performance of faith, intimate and sensual as well as grotesque.

If this research has a 'Powysian' method then I like to think it has an 'Althaus-Reidian' attitude. I wrote earlier that I wanted to return the landscape to its rightful place but I also wanted to restore what has been, perhaps inevitably, washed-out by analysis and interpretation – fun. At the end of the day, I walk for sheer physical pleasure of putting one foot in front of the other, the Camino has its moments of physical pain and emotional discomfort but I'm no martyr, I'm here for the joy. And I'll admit it, I'm a big fan of eighties rock music, it's as much a part of me as my faith and gendered status. Quite often, when I'm alone on the trail, I sing to myself or write lyrics in my head. It's part of the Camino experience, the joy de vivre therefore it's part of the research.

So this 'Althaus-Reidian' attitude is ludic and founded in jouissance, a 'transgressive, excessive kind of pleasure linked to the division and splitting of the subject involved' (Childers & Hentzi 1995:162-3). It takes its cue from Marcella's 'Indecent Theology' (2000), like *Scarp* another text which gives me 'permission' to write in a different register and employ alternative representative techniques. I'm not quite on the same level, Marcella titles one of her chapters 'Indecent proposals for women who would like to theology without

¹⁰ Interview with Mexican daily newspaper Excelsior, March 1980: 'I need to say that as a Christian I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador...If they manage to carry out their threats, as of now, I offer my blood for the redemption and resurrection of El Salvador. If God accepts the sacrifice of my life, then may my blood be the seed of liberty and the sign that hope will soon become a reality. May my death, if it is accepted by God, be for the liberation of my people, as a witness of hope in what is to come. You can tell them that if they succeed in killing me, I pardon and bless those who do it. A bishop may die, but the Church of God, which is in the people, will never die.'

using underwear' (2000), I cite the lyrics of 'The Final Countdown'. It's another fine line to tread, between playing the irritating smart-arse and adopting a performative and sometime provocative writing method which uses entertainment as a form of representation.

That's the back story. A very brief history of Siân Lacey Taylder, 'the woman who isn't quite what she seems' (Taylder 2009). Crucially, from an autoethnographic perspective, I haven't talked about several other important personal factors that undoubtedly influence my emotional and spiritual response to the landscape: that I'm a transsexual, for example, or that I have, before and during the period of this research, suffered from mental health problems (what used to be called 'nervous breakdowns') and post-traumatic stress for which the walking and being in the landscape was the only effective therapy. I mention these at the end because they don't define my experience or shape my identity but I will refer to them in the text and they will play a part in the narrative.

Enough of creation, it's time for exodus. But before I do so I want, in the next chapter, to set out the analytical tools I'll take with me on the Camino. It's a diverse and, I hope, eclectic assortment but the crucial element in this is the technology in which I'll transport them along the way, the metaphorical rucksack. So I shall move from autobiography to autoethnography and explain how it functions as a receptacle, a mesh that binds together, sometimes tenuously, a loose assortment of themes that range from human and physical geography to pilgrimage studies and theology.

THE PACK OF DELIGHTS: DESIGNING THE TOOL KIT

So here we are, the point of no return. The first hurdles have been negotiated, the inevitable bouts of imposter syndrome and the upgrade from MPhil to PhD proper. The demands of balancing work and study have caused the project to fall behind but for part-time students that's par for the course and I'm this for the long haul. It's time, now, to dig out the rucksack and assemble the various analytical tools I intend to use to explore landscape/human encounters out in the field.

I call it a 'toolkit', what I really mean is a 'box of delights', recalling the magical landscapes of John Masefield's children's novel which, in its 1984 TV dramatisation, mesmerised me, even at the not so juvenile age of nineteen. It seems an apt analogy as I'm going in search of enchantment, whether I'll find it – again – is another matter.

The serious hiker takes packing very seriously, often obsessively. Lists are drawn up and torn in two over and over again before the final version is arrived at, paring down what to take to the absolute minimum because it's all got to fit into a rucksack that's going to be lugged across Spain. This is no walk in the park, for a long-distance pilgrimage the kit must be carefully chosen, with an eye to comfort rather than price. In the same way that the pilgrim becomes part of the landscape so the rucksack becomes part of her, to the extent that when she peels it off at the end of the day she feels naked without it.

A pack that's too large – anything greater than 45 litres – will encourage the pilgrim to overpack but one that's too small will have her cramming everything in so tightly that it'll interfere with the rucksack's ergonomics, impacting on posture and risking strains and injury. Which is exactly what happened to me.

What goes for material technology applies also to epistemological techniques. What they lack for in weight and volume they more than make up for in potential for cluttering. The appeal of the Camino is its uncomplicatedness, the same must apply to this research: keep it simple. So below I set out and describe the six areas of academic enquiry I intend to employ on the trail, both cumulatively (the *Chronos* of time and distance) and to specific moments and places (*Kairos*). But first, a few words on the receptacle that holds these themes and binds them together, my metaphorical and experiential rucksack – autoethnography.

Me, myself, I

Autoethnography is both method and text. That is, a textual record of people and place and a qualitative research method in which the researcher becomes both the subject and object of her field, embedded within because, after all, *I am the land, the land is me*. In the previous chapter I outlined my autobiographical relationship with the landscape and its study, here I use a reflexivity as a technique to avoid the ‘God’s eye view’ in which the researcher absents herself from the subject of her writing (Butz & Bessio 2009:1662).

Butz and Besio (2009) set out five categories of autoethnographic practices: personal experience narrative; reflexive or narrative ethnography, ‘insider’ research; native ethnography and subaltern autoethnography.¹¹ These they place on a continuum between ‘academic researcher’ and ‘research subject’, as in figure 5 below.

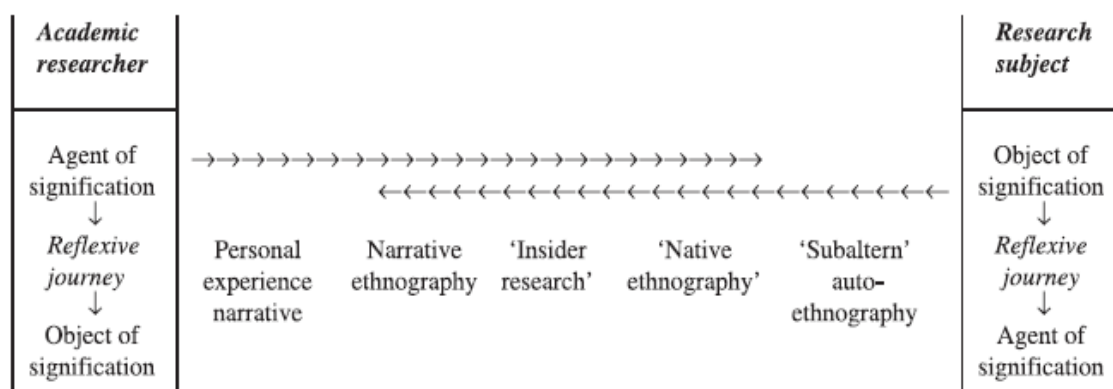


Figure 5: A continuum of autoethnographic practices (Butz and Besio 2009:1665)

To an extent, each and all of these apply to this research, this is a ‘messy’ geography which embraces the fact that the world is ‘more excessive than we can theorise’ (Dewsbury *et al.* 2002:437) and the boundaries will inevitably become blurred. The first category, personal experience narrative, will form the basis of my reflections on hiking the Camino but I want to focus here on the second category, autoethnography as reflexive or narrative ethnography, described by Butz and Besio as a ‘reflexive effort by field researchers to analyse how they are situated in relation to the people and worlds they are studying, and to the fields of power that constitute those relationships’ (2009:1666). It also offers me the ‘excuse’ of engaging with more creative and experimental means of representation, vis-à-vis ‘evocative and strongly first-person forms of writing’ (Butz and Besio (2009:1666). I am,

¹¹ For the purposes of this research I’m going to stretch the concept of subaltern or ‘from below’ to position myself ‘at the margins’ (1) within the pecking order of pilgrim types (i.e. as an ‘antipilgrim’) and (2) within the vertical and horizontal hierarchies of academia and the institution. Some of this positionality is acquired, largely through issues pertaining to gender and sexuality, some of it is attitudinal, through engagement with queer and feminist theologies of liberation.

after all, a writer as well as a geographer, I can't disentangle the two and nail them down in different boxes for the sake of this research.

I am to rucksacks what Imelda Marcos is to shoes. The top shelf of my wardrobe bulges with them, a different one for every hiking event. And even when they're so dog-eared that they're no longer fit for use I hold on to them because they're not just rucksacks, they're chapters of my life.

As much as I love their svelte and slender forms, a backpack is only a backpack when it's crammed full of stuff and the floor of my student warden room in Bath is littered with it. Stuff, that is. Time to sift through it and see what's worth taking and what'll have to be left behind.

You are the land, the land is you: the evolution of a title

I can't recall a moment when I specifically opted for the phrase 'you are the land, the land is you' as the title for thesis. The original working title, as stated on my proposal form, was *There's God in them there Hills: encounters with the spiritual landscape* but that soon felt too Christian-centric and, as pithy titles go, weak and contrived. And it felt topographically misleading because a good deal of the Caminos I walked followed the flat Meseta and the Portuguese coastal plain. The current title emerged organically as I criss-crossed Spain on less-frequented pilgrim routes for hours and hours without seeing a soul. I might as well have been the last person left on earth.

My only and constant companion during these treks was the landscape. With a minimum of distractions, I developed a relationship with it that was both personal and intimate, we were like two lovers who'd become so intertwined with each other – grown into each other like ivy on brickwork – that we had become indistinguishable. My initial thought was to change the title to *I am the land, the land is me* but, anticipating accusations of self-indulgence and because I wanted to produce a thesis that would be applicable to anyone and everyone journeying through the landscape, I opted for the second person: *You are the land, the land is you*.

The title is intended to encapsulate something of the personal experience of landscape-walking and pilgrimage-trailing on which the thesis is founded. It's a reflection on how, over long distance hikes, some people do develop connections with the land which don't exist in their daily lives. And as these connections become intricate, so the landscape's agency to effect personal transformation is enhanced. But I should make it clear that not everyone shares these emotions, not least those who, through various physical ailments, are forced to curtail their pilgrimages. I acknowledge that many others might feel indifferent to the

environment, their focus being on partaking in physical exercise, blowing away the cobwebs or simply having a good time.

Neither is the phrase certainly intended as a proscriptive homily or to imply that those who don't experience this sensation are somehow missing out or doing it wrong. I cited a passage from Papadimitriou's *Scarp* about what happens when the land and a person walking through it fall out, I experienced something similar on the fieldwork for this research, specifically on a stage of the *Camino Olvidado*.

The repetition of the title throughout the text is an attempt to employ a performative literary device to emphasise the manner in which landscape and the pedestrian come together over a prolonged period of time and space (another constant motif) and that's why, in the conclusion, I state a preference for the verb *to become* replacing the verb *to be* to acknowledge the ever changing dynamic in human/landscape encounters.

On my first visit to El Mozote in El Salvador in 1997 I experienced a different form of human/landscape fusion as refugees returned to a land from which they'd been ejected at gunpoint. But reflecting on the desirability of this landscape/human fusion, I recall visiting Nicaragua the following year when the land was blighted by drought and I began to wonder whether, given the climate-changing implications of the Anthropocene, the notion of us being the land and the land being us hasn't become a romantic pipe dream. Or, perhaps, the preserve of the privileged. In 2009 Australian journalist Dan Box received a Royal Geographical Society prize which enabled him to travel to the low-lying Carteret Islands in the South Pacific.¹² There he documented how sea level rise and increased flooding had destroyed the soil's fertility so that, unable to grow their own food, the inhabitants were preparing a mass evacuation. The land was disappearing and disintegrating at their feet, the land was being estranged from its people, and vice versa.

For many, those living in the squalor of shanty towns or struggling to survive in cities configured for the lifestyles of the wealthy rather than the needs of the poor, the land is not just indifferent to their fate but apparently hostile, even displacing those for whom it was once home, creating flows of migrants and refugees who are land/less.

In the concluding chapter I'll return to the refrain not as a statement of wishful thinking but as a potential source of restoration of a broken dynamic equilibrium. In this iteration, *becoming* the land through the act of walking as peripatetic kenosis serves the dual purposes of liberation/feminist theologies' emphasis on reflection and praxis. From this context, a further elucidation of 'you are the land' might reconfigure it as a commitment to the landscape and all those who dwell on and within it. And, to avoid further catastrophes

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00mcwv1>

such as that which has impacted the Carteret Islanders, to preserve its physical and cultural integrity. Which isn't to say that walking the Camino automatically transforms pilgrims into activists, at least, not activists with a capital A, but rather, because it is p or can be – reflection in itself, it releases the potential for change – with a lower and upper case C.

I might have re-titled this thesis after the 1944 Woody Guthrie folk song: 'This land is your land, and this land is my land' to stress its liberatory intentions. I might even have called upon the lyrics of one of the song's variant verses as an entry point into the narrative: 'Nobody living can ever stop me/ As I go walking that freedom highway/Nobody living can ever make me turn back/ This land was made for you and me'.¹³

But I didn't, because I wanted the title to remain true to the personal and academic experiences which gave birth to this project. The origins of the phrase 'You are the land, the land is you' come from Arthurian literature and the story of the Fisher King, linked to ancient fertility rituals and later explored in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) and Jessie L Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), both of which informed T S Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922). The lands of the wounded king lie desolate and barren until Percival heals the king and the fertility of the earth is restored.

Drawing on Angela Carter's feminist mythology to reinterpret orthodox Mariology without, as it were, throwing the baby out with the bathwater, I have proposed that 'instead of disposing of tradition, the accumulation of experiences that include resistance and rebellion, we must invest in it our sexual energy, in all its manifestations' (Taylder 2004:344). In this reiteration, Mary's virginity is released from the bonds of sexual oppression and returned as a symbol of fecundity and desire, of independence and autonomy, 'belonging-to-no-man' (Taylder 2004:350). In the same way, the gendered and sexualised dynamics of the Fisher King legend are replaced with a broader take on the nature of fertility which translates as an opening to creative and critical engagement and a willingness to change.

The pilgrim who arrives at the Camino trailhead worn down by life and circumstance, sometimes burnt out, sometimes, as I was in 2012, in a state of stasis, seeks solace in their passage through, across and within the land. Something has gone awry, like the Fisher King her ability to function has been impaired. The restorative for this ennui lies less and less in the spiritual power of the remains of St James interred in the crypt of the cathedral and more in the landscapes through which pilgrims pass.

¹³ This verse doesn't feature in the 'official' rendition of the song. See https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/This_Land.htm

But to what extent can humans become part of the earth beneath their feet, except at the end of our days? Is it just a convenient metaphor? Another literary device?

In 2017 the BBC, the UK's state broadcasting company, cottoned on to the pilgrimage's 21st century popularity by filming a group of celebrities along the *Camino Francés* to Santiago. Its success prompted them to extend the franchise and two years later another disparate group of entertainment and sports personalities followed the *Via Francigena* from the St Bernard Pass to Rome.¹⁴ Towards the end of the trail former Olympian Greg Rutherford and professional dancer Brendan Cole are shown in profound (and undoubtedly staged) conversation paddling in the shallow waters of an ancient Etruscan tunnel on the outskirts of Rome.

Cole reflects on the elemental energy he feels in this environment saying, 'I feel lifted and inspired to do something'. Rutherford calls him a 'pagan druid' to which Cole responds 'I'll take that. As long as it doesn't mean I'm worshipping something I don't believe in, that's great. But a pagan druid I will be, if it means the earth and I are one'.¹⁵

Cole feels a connection to the earth beneath his feet but does he become part of it? In its choice of participants, the BBC was keen to view pilgrimage through a multifaith lens, including practising and non-practising Jewish and Muslim celebrities alongside lapsed and devout Roman Catholics. The *Via Francigena* group also pitched an avowed atheist and gay comedian into the mix to promote the idea of a path for all people but this representation is a relatively recent phenomenon, historically the Camino has been anything but. Those who have overseen its renaissance have been careful to accentuate its diversity and play down its inauspicious past, particularly under the National Catholicism of Spain's *Franquista* regime (Pack 2010).

The conflation of land with those who dwell in and on it inevitably raises the spectre of ethno-nationalism and *Blut und Boden*. It's an ideology for which territorial attachment is synonymous with *la patria* or homeland and which has been appropriated by elements of the contemporary ecologist movement (Toulouse and Zimmerman 2016). In this manifestation, to *be* the land is to *belong* to the nation and subscribe to its attendant cultural and political values, one's identity and individuality is subsumed by the corporate state. There is only one way of being and belonging and it invariably privileges white, heterosexual masculinity. Deviation is subversion and must be eliminated. This much is

¹⁴ The *Via Francigena* pilgrimage was first broadcast in 2019. As with the *Camino Francés*, the group didn't walk the entire route and were transported between sections. In both cases they did, however, walk the final 100km to obtain their Compostela and lend the project some authenticity.

¹⁵ Reference

also evident in the National Security doctrines embraced by military regimes in Latin American during the 1970s and 1980s (Binford and Laura-Santiago 2004).

Taking its stance from theologies of liberation, and drawing on feminist and queer/indecent theologies, the role of the land – and landscape – in this thesis is to destabilise privileged identities and deconstruct oppressive structures. In this sense, and reflecting the multicultural nature of the twenty-first century Camino de Santiago, *You are the land, the land is you* is a call for participation, not a notice of exclusion.

1. Landscape

1.1 Landscape as culture and material

‘I felt in my bones that the landscape was speaking to me’ (Hoskins 1978:10)

It feels appropriate to let Hoskins describe the process of becoming, the transition from ‘merely’ hiking through the landscape to trying to get under its skin and become part of it. He makes a starting point for a discussion of the evolution of landscape studies within geography and its engagement with a broader range of disciplines, from anthropology to philosophy and literature.

I might have begun with a definition of landscape itself but that would be to tie down and restrict what is a dynamic concept, always in a state of flux.¹⁶ Landscapes are ‘human, cultural and creative domains as well as, *or even rather* than, natural or physical phenomena’ (Wylie 2007:8). Above all, writes Wylie, landscape is tension: between proximity and distance; observation and inhabitation; eye and land; culture and nature (2007). That tension will become an ever present leitmotif in this narrative.

1.2 From vision to interpretation

Back to Hoskins. Although eschewing formal theory, as Johnson points out, ‘Hoskins had a very strong metaphor: that of text. The landscape was there to be read – we simply had to learn the language’ (2007:57). He uses the analogy of the landscape as palimpsest, ‘an old document that had been written over and erased again and again’ (Johnson 2007:57). It’s a useful metaphor, but a static one, too. What happens when the layers are blurred and merge into one another, and what of the processes and agencies which aid and abet this messy blurring?

¹⁶ Crouch argues that the ‘stuff that is often substituted for what is landscape tends to be more in terms of countryside, but it can also include, broadly, the assemblages of landforms, concrete shapes, gutters, designed spaces and serendipitous collections of things’ (2013:123). It also, importantly, includes our own bodies.

My undergraduate forays were led by Hoskins and the 'Berkeley School' of landscape studies which introduced the concept of *landscape morphology*. For Sauer, landscape is a cultural entity, 'something human crafted, a modification of nature rather than a natural environment' (Wylie 2007:20): 'the cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result' (Sauer 1963:343).

In his essay *The Beholding Eye*, Meinig perceives landscape as a 'variegated scene ... 'composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads' which each observer will see differently (1979:33). His *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* emphasised the everyday and vernacular qualities of landscape, insisting we must regard 'all landscapes as symbolic, as expressions of cultural values and social behaviour' (1979:6).

I want also to acknowledge the influence of Jackson on my formative understandings of landscape and thus the impact of his work on this research. 'We are not spectators', he insists, 'the human landscape is not a work of art. It is a temporary product of much sweat and hardship and earnest thought' (1997:343). And Jackson introduces the notion of *moving* and *being* in the landscape. His way of looking is, for Cresswell, 'so much less reliant on that distant gaze from above and so much more practised – more embodied' (2003:275); his focus is all about inhabiting the landscape, experiencing it from within. As Jackson wrote:

'The view is no longer static ... the traditional way of seeing and experiencing is abandoned; in its stead we become active participants, the shifting focus of a moving, abstract world; our nerves and muscles are all of them brought into play' (1997:205).

1.3 Landscape and affect

This research attends to spiritually and/or religiously-affective landscapes, how they 'move' people in experiences which might be considered transcendent and beyond-human; the relationship between affect, feeling and emotion is another recurring theme.

Massumi equates affect with a 'sense of aliveness' (2002:36), describing it as a 'prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage of one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution of that body's capacity to act' (1987:xvi). For Anderson (2006), affect is neither emotion nor feeling, which are personal or socially constructed. Rather, it's a product of relations between things which comes before emotions which 'are ways in which individual bodies make sense of affect by giving it a meaning that is partly socially and culturally determined' (Cresswell 2013:230). Affect comes first, the moment of witness, the interpretation comes through emotions and spiritual

or religious inclinations. Though that, of course, presupposes that that what is 'spiritual' or 'religious' is reducible to personal expression and have no affective capacity in themselves. In this thesis I'm going to suggest they do.

Affect, then, emerges from relational encounters between walker and landscape but unlike emotion and feeling it's never entirely personal. Rather, it's the product of a complex mix of topography, light, shade, weather, the mind (mood) and the body (pain) and so forth. Something passes between one body and another, human, more-than-human or beyond-human, to generate the fleeting moment of affect.

1.4 Dwelling: from 'being' to 'becoming'

I want to extend the notion of landscape and ambulatory subject/object coming together by developing Heidegger's notion of 'being' – that is, the capacity to make sense of things – or rather, 'being-in-the-world'. Heideggerian concepts of dwelling have been criticised for their tendency towards nostalgia and propensity to treat certain ways of life as more authentic than others so, following Olafsdottir (2007), I prefer to apply Ingold's dwelling perspective (1993) and Cloke and Jones' *time-deepened* dwelling (2001) to enhance the performative understanding of landscape and enforce the dynamism of the relationship – a sense of *becoming* rather than *being*.¹⁷ Heidegger uses the German *dasein* to describe a being that is there, in-the-world. I wish to introduce a similar linguistic sleight of hand by using the Spanish verbs for to be – *ser* and *estar*, to represent this transition from simply *being* – i.e. existing (*ser*) to *becoming* (*estar*) which implies a more active and performative engagement with the landscape.

Ingold presents landscape and dwelling as indissolubly intertwined in a milieu of involvement, 'constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in doing so, have left there something of themselves' (1993:152). Thus Ingold's rethinking of Heidegger liberates the land from the restraints of the fixed scene and restores to it a sensuous corporeality.

In their paper on a Somerset orchard, Cloke and Jones describe dwelling as 'the rich intimate ongoing togetherness of beings and things which make up landscapes and places, and which bind together nature and culture over time' (2001:651), arguing that the creativeness of dwelling needs to be extended to account for both human and non-human agency. This *togetherness* is not merely spatial; places are permeable, 'meanings flow into and out of ... space in complex ways', not one but multiple 'taskcapes' (2001:662).

¹⁷ And on the Camino, this idea of authenticity plays a crucial role in pilgrim identity and, as a consequence, relations with the landscape (see Frey 1998)

Cloke and Jones cite, as an example of this, the paths in Brueghel's *The Harvesters*, described as being worn by countless journeys which are 'likely to have been markedly different in the nature. The labourers, the owners, the priest, the village officials, the women, the men, the children, the sad, the lonely, the happy, the poor, the wealthy, will have walked those paths doing differing tasks in differing ways and constructing the landscape differently' (2001:662). So, just as there is an *orchardness* of orchards, there is also a *pathness* of paths, understood by notions of movement, embodied practice and performance rather than the confines of the fixed gaze – the winding trail disappearing into a wood, behind a hill or fading into a distant horizon: we walk the paths, the paths walk us.

1.5 Phenomenology and post-phenomenology

'What' asks John Wylie, 'is the nature of the relationship between landscape and phenomenology?' (2012:56). Before answering we might address what we understand phenomenology to be, in relation to landscape and landscape experience. Creswell explains it as 'discovering what things really are – discovering their *essences*' (2003:111 his emphasis); for Wylie, landscape phenomenology 'lays stress upon some measure of direct, bodily contact with, and experience of, landscape' (2007:139). Phenomenology and landscape are much like the proverbial love and marriage, joined together like a horse and carriage: 'without phenomenological modes of thinking there can hardly be a concept of "landscape" *per se*' (Wylie 2012:55).

As an analytical tool, adopting a phenomenological approach to landscape allows us to find out what makes it tick and evoke emotion and affect. It removes the primacy of the visual and the all-seeing gaze to tease out aspects of landscape that can only be experienced through an embodied – and by embodied I mean the mind as well as the body – encounter. There are, writes Pardoel in his PhD thesis *Dwelling as an Approach to Place*, 'simply too many secrets, too many stories, too many details and too many relations which are all constitutive of a landscape' (2015:6), those who inhabit or pass through landscape, no matter how wide-ranging their grasp of geography and allied disciplines, can only attain a partial understanding of a specific landscape. Landscape is indefinite and phenomenology, like dwelling, implies a 'recognition of the richness of being' (Pardoe 2015:6) in all its non-coherences, multiplicities, messiness and flux. The source of the landscape's presence is, as Rose argues, 'excess: the overabundance of life in general' (Rose 2002:460).

It's this excess and messiness, and the landscape experiences they generate, which lies at the centre of this research, of how to understand, interpret and represent it. For this I turn to the emergent field of post-phenomenologies which don't 'leave behind the

phenomenological (as a realm of experience) but rather refigure what experience might be, where it might be located, how it comes about, and how we, as social scientists, might account for it' (Lea 2009:374). For Lea, post-phenomenology 'has the potential to refigure our understanding of the relation of the body to the world' (2009: 374) even if, as a distinct area of study, 'post-phenomenological geographies are ... not particularly cohesive' (2009: 377).

1.6 Beyond-human geographies

The post-phenomenological geographies articulated by Rose and Wylie (2006), Simpson (2009) and Ash (2020) represent a move away from a subject-centred approach to experience. In doing so, they offer an approach to considering the beyond-human, the supra-natural, the spectral and the unexperienceable, what Dewsbury describes as the 'folded mix of our emotions, desires, and intuitions within the aura of places, the communication of things and spaces, and the spirit of events' (2003:1907). The spectral and the ghostly unsettle spatial and temporal certainties and the way we evidence the world through sensation, disturbing the layers of the 'being-in-the-world of the phenomenological self' (Lea 2009:374).

Post-phenomenological geographies offer a shift from the emphasis phenomenology places upon intentionality and purposive action, which, argues Lea, is central to phenomenology, but 'constricts the possibilities of relation between body and world to those parts of the body that are involved in the making of sense (thus requiring the subject as a starting point)' (2009:376). This, for Harrison, enacts a lack of concern for passivity and the ways in which the subject might be held in relations of passive exposure, those that hold and bind in unchosen relations (2007). Citing suffering and vulnerability as examples of extreme passivity he asks what might happen if one takes a different starting point and grants a phenomenological role to the unwilled or the sensuous [i.e. the landscape]? Here we are at the limits of experience, an untried territory which raises questions such as 'what might a (post)phenomenology of the unwilled look like, or how might we do a geography of bodily states that do not have any phenomenal content?' (cited in Lea 2009:377). And it presents methodological challenges, too: how to account for movement and the moving body and how to research and represent passivity.

1.7 Land or Landscape?

This thesis uses the Spanish verbs *ser* and *estar* to distinguish between essence and state, between 'being' and 'becoming'. Doreen Massey's description of Skiddaw, a mountain in the English Lake District, as being an example of both. I extend this analogy to distinguish

between land and landscape. Neither are fixed-in-time, unchanging behemoths but each dances to a rhythm of its own chronological composition.

For André Corboz the land is not a given commodity but is a product of processes, physical and human:

‘On the one hand there is spontaneous transformation: the advance or retreat of forests and the ice cover, the extension of swamp land or its drying up, the filling in of lakes and the formation of river deltas, the erosion of shorelines and sea cliffs, the appearance of offshore reefs and lagoons, the subsidence of valleys, shifting terrain, volcanic eruption and subsequent cooling, earthquakes – all this bears witness to the instability of terrestrial morphology. On the other hand, there is also human activity: irrigation, construction of roads, bridges and dikes, erection of hydroelectric dams, digging canals, hollowing out of tunnels, terracing, land clearing and reforestation, land improvement and even everyday agricultural activity turn land into an unceasingly remodeled space.’ (1983:16)

Corboz’ distinction neatly sidesteps the risk of falling into a binary trap in which the land, due its geological longevity, is shaped by physical forces alone. He continues, ‘most movements affecting it – including climate modifications – extend over such a time spread that they escape the notice of individuals, or even of generations, and from this comes the immutable character normally connoted by ‘nature’ (1983:16).

Equally, this thesis has tried to resist the temptation to consider the land a pre-existing *tabula rasa* on which landscape inscribes itself, a geology to be shaped and formed by geomorphology. Or a staked-out shapeless territory (*à la* Christaller’s isotropic landscape) waiting for a nation to inscribe its socio-cultural values onto (and, indeed beneath) its surface. Instead, the land is understood as the result of lengthy and perpetually slow stratification which, Corboz argues, will restore to the land its ‘long term dimension ... [and] ... a depth which had been forgotten’ (1983:32).

If ‘land’ represents an entirety of the earth’s surface in terms of both time and space, ‘landscape’ could be described as ‘reflecting the character and identity of a *tract* of land, which gains meaning as a territory for the community that lives there and shaped it’ (Francis and Antrop 2021:9, my emphasis). In this understanding, a *tract* might be a landscape system (glacial or urban) or refer to a specific landscape (for example, the UK’s Jurassic Coast).¹⁸

The UNESCO World Heritage Convention considers cultural landscapes to be the ‘combined works of nature and of man (*sic*)’ (2008:14) whilst the Council of Europe’s European Landscape Convention has it as ‘an area, as perceived by people, whose

¹⁸ However, in many cultures ‘land’ might equally refer to an tract of land which is proprietorial and/or has an economic value (Antrop and van Eetvelde 2014).

character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (2008:9). In these administrative definitions the landscape is a coming together of human and physical processes but both assume a binary between the two, as if nature and 'man' were entirely divorced from each other.

2. Representation

If tension breathes life into 'dead' geographies' (Thrift 2000) and gives landscape depth and a performative presence, the fundamental question arises: how to represent this tension and the performativity, emotion and affect it generates?

2.1 More-than-representational theories

I turn, first, to 'more-than-representational' theories, Lorimer's (2005) re-envisioning of Thrift's non-representational theory (NRT) (1996,2000), in an attempt to 'cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more than textual, multisensual worlds' (Lorimer 2005:83).¹⁹

With 'more-than-representational' theories

'focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions ... which escape from the established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgment and ultimate representation' (Lorimer 2005:84).

It's worth noting that Thrift refers to 'nonrepresentational' as a 'style of work', not a 'new theoretical edifice that is being constructed, but a means of valuing and working with everyday practical activities as they occur' (2000:215-216). I'm drawn to Thrift's use of the word 'style' in a kind of *style versus substance/form versus function* way, partly due to the 'constraining' and 'flattening' nature of 'theories' and their inability to cope with the excesses and messiness of life and partly in an attempt to engage with frivolity and playfulness in a world that is often represented by geographers as universally sombre and dour.

'More-than-representational' theories particularly lend themselves to the study of human/landscape encounters in which both can be understood as complementary concepts in a 'constant state of 'becoming' through the other' (Macpherson 2009:1). Furthermore, they open up the way to incorporate the under-represented – feminist and

¹⁹ Lorimer explains his rationale thus: 'I prefer to think of 'more-than-representational' geography, the teleology of the original 'non-' title having proven an unfortunate hindrance. It is reasonable to expect an explanation of what that 'more than' might include. To summarize lots of complex statements as simply as possible, it is multifarious, open encounters in the realm of practice that matter most' (2005:84).

queer aspects of the walking body in the landscape, the way the female, non-heterosexual or religiously/spiritually-inclined body is positioned in the landscape – how it *performs*; a shift away from ‘socially constructed or individualized medical models of the body ... to a more complex understanding of the body as constantly in process’ (Macpherson 2010:3). Through a ‘more-than-representational’ approach, then, it’s possible to shift the focus of the performer from the ambulatory subject to the landscape itself, acknowledging its agency. Olwig sums up the situation thus:

‘When geographers and others use theatrical images, such as that of the ‘actor’ or ‘performer’, there is, given the differing ways in which theaters have been conceptualized, a need to consider the question of just what sort of theatrical space is implied as the setting for these actors and performers. If one’s model, for example, implies a notion of landscape as scenery, with human actors playing against a passive natural setting, then it might seem progressive to give the elements of the natural scene a more active role as actors in the unfolding drama of human environmental interaction’ (2008:1858).

Vidal de la Blache, pioneer of geographic possibilism and an early proponent of marrying the ‘bio’ and ‘geo’ in cultural geography (Whatmore 2006:605), cautions against considering ‘the earth as the scene on which the activity of man [*sic*] unfolds itself, without reflecting that this scene is itself living’ (cited in Sauer 1963:25). In this sense, the path is not merely a fixed trajectory across the earth’s surface, a thing to be followed, instead it *becomes* the actor performing the landscape’s agency.

How might this agency manifest itself in a spiritual/religious register? Macpherson, following Norretranders (1999), refers to the ‘user illusion’, the ‘half-second delay between the brain initiating an action and conscious sensation’ and ‘compels researchers to accept that there is not always a reflective rational subject who is in control of what they are doing’ (2009:5). This precognitive/preconscious sensation has potentially significant implications in exploring the notion of religious or spiritual affect as ‘our actions and conscious thoughts in any given environment may be the result of pre-conscious thought shaped by the technologies and objects available; and the contexts and cues of a particular landscape’ (Macpherson 2009:5).

2.2 Emotional Geographies

Whilst ‘more-than-representational’ theories emphasise the importance of inexpressible affects, emotional geography, argues Pile, ‘accentuates the significance of expressed emotions’ (2009:7). In their introduction to geography’s ‘emotional turn’, Davidson *et al* contend that ‘on the surface, the discipline of geography often presents us with an emotionally barren terrain, a world devoid of passion ...’ (2005:1).

Talk of 'emotion' has, for many in academia, an unsettling affect. As Harrison suggests: 'There is something about emotions, or 'emotional experience', that troubles the operation of social theory; that resists being bought into thematisation, conceptualisation and systemisation that must be part of any social analysis' (2002:3). But emotions – the way one *feels* about place – are as important as the way one *sees* it. In the words of Davidson *et al*, 'if [emotional responses] *insist* that we regard the world about us in more than abstract terms, then their absence from most geography texts seems very strange indeed' (2005:3).

Space and place are lived emotionally, the engagement between self and landscape is a relational encounter, existing in a constant state of flux that might oscillate wildly even over the passing of a short period of time. Sometimes emotions 'seem to envelop us from without ... surge up from within and comprise the very core of our being-here in the world, they inform every moment of our existence' (Smith, Davidson, Cameron and Bondi (2009:3).

Emotional geographies undermine the notion of both geography as an abstract discipline and the geographer as a rationally-thinking being. And just as not all geographers are white, male, able-bodied and heterosexual, not all of them are inherently emotionally 'stable'. There appears to be an assumption, albeit an unwritten one, that geographers are somehow immune to mental health issues or are at least reluctant to address how it might relate to or impact upon their work. Moss (2001) relates how chronic fatigue syndrome impacted on her academic career and Parr, Philo and Burns (2005) discuss the emotional geographies of people with mental health problems in the Scottish Highlands; there exists also a growing body of work on the therapeutic benefits of walking and being-in-landscape (Gatrell 2013) but an absence of material on the geographer-with-mental-health-issues as researcher and how those issues impact on her/him.²⁰ Do we hide or suppress it, or acknowledge its role and importance in our relationships with the landscape?

2.3 Psychogeography

'More-than-representational' theories and emotional geographies come together through psychogeography and deep topography, particularly in the notion of getting to know the landscape as a body through 'corporeal knowledge and deeply sensuous engagements with place' (Waterton 2013:96), but also in getting 'under the skin' of the world.

The term 'deep topography' was coined by Papadimitriou and might be distinguished from psychogeography by its attitudinal methodology. Papadimitriou asserts that 'the broad

²⁰ Papadimitriou (2012) is an exception to this rule. His troubled childhood and adolescence are integrally woven into his feelings for and perception of the landscape.

distinction between psychogeography and deep topography is that psychogeography at heart is Christian. It is always dealing with the notion of fallen man in his dumpy landscapes whereas deep topography is essentially tantric, it sees a kind of joyful sexuality in all things, even sewage farms. In fact particularly sewage farms'.²¹

Using psychogeography as an ambulatory method presents problems in terms of the *Camino de Santiago*. It is, as a rule, urban in nature and focused on the *dérive*, a spontaneous walking strategy developed by the Situationist International which, according to Debord, shouldn't be considered a 'journey' or a 'stroll' (1996:22). Debord encouraged walkers *to be aware* of 'fissures in the urban network ... microclimates ... administrative districts, and above all the dominating action of centers of attraction' (1996:22) yet the landscapes of the Camino are largely rural; urban areas tend to be rushed through or even avoided altogether.²² City centres are visited for their cultural and heritage attractions, in many ways an anathema to the ideas of the situationists, a group of 'radical poets, artists and writers who were concerned with how environments affect how people feel and behave' (Bridger 2013:2).

2.4 Deep Topography

So I turn to Deep Topography, described by Papadimitriou as 'an acknowledgement of the magnitude of response to landscape'.²³ His *Scarp* (2013), though not exclusively rural in its exploration of the hills of north Middlesex and south Hertfordshire, offers an intensely personal inquiry into the spirit of place. Papadimitriou seeks to 'gain a sense of Scarp's beginnings, to experience through my eyes and the uphill notion of my legs the exact moment when Scarp comes into being ... [and] ... gain an understanding of its structure and the relationship between its component parts' (2013:36).

Deep Topography gives the landscape a buzzing vibrancy through being, at one and the same time, deeply personal yet concerned also with its depths, its physical and human roots. Reviewing *Scarp* for The Guardian, Dee deems Papadimitriou's methodology 'bonkers but ... very engaging' with an 'indomitable playfulness'.²⁴

And Deep Topography, more than Psychogeography, succeeds in conveying the intensity of the relationship between the landscape and walker, in which every element of

²¹ <http://cryptoforest.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/psychogeography-vs-deep-topography.html>

²² Both Ian Sinclair's *London Orbital* (2003) and John Davies' *Walking the M62* (2007) stray from the urban and suburban from time to time and both follow specific trajectories, the M25 and the M62. Yet both are essentially urban – some might say 'metropolitan' – in outlook and character. Davies' work does, however, offer some ideas as to how a 'spiritual psychogeography' might pan out.

²³ <http://landscapism.blogspot.co.uk/2017/02/deep-topography-practice-landscape.html>

²⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jul/01/scarp-papadimitriou-walking-home-armitage>

the earth becomes part of the ambulatory subject/object. 'The land is beginning to hate me', writes Papadimitriou (2012:186) as he explores the uplands south of Hertford, reminding us that the hiker's lot isn't always a happy one and that sometimes the landscape fails to perform in the way we'd hoped it would. There are lows, and there are highs: 'It was as if the landscape itself was flooding into the front of my mind. I was in a state of ecstatic union with the Middlesex-Hertfordshire borderlands' (2012:10). Only Deep Topography, I contend, captures the agony and ecstasy of the relationship between the landscape and the walker, like a lover spurned and reunited, over and over again.

2.5 'Experimental' writing

'Geographical writers are forcing thought about the possibilities for, and styles of, narration, and diverse means for expressing the poetics of place. [...] Various creative writing enterprises – I think here of essays, photoessays, travelogues, prose-poetry, ethnographic and site-specific portraits, storytelling, life-writing and memory work – demonstrate a growing willingness to experiment with the character and form of writing, and a preparedness to consider style as a pressing issue rather than a supplementary concern' (Lorimer 2008:182).

If 'more-than-representational' theories help us tease from the cartography the relational performativity nature of landscape and perambulatory subject, we're still faced with the problem of how to represent it in a way which 'catches' the now myriad nuances, shades and tones of human and landscape experience. For Waterton, perhaps the thorniest issue in this regard lies with figuring out how to access the unspeakable – the agency of landscapes, affect and sensuous experience (2013:72). To address this I turn, as a writer and author, to what Ward calls 'Creative-critical Place Writing' (2014:756).

Although Ward focuses on the work of geographers, I want to move away from 'traditional' academic writing and experiment with more literary and poetic techniques along the lines of, for example, Solnit (2001), Papadimitriou (2012) and other geocritical texts.²⁵

Where there's a 'tension between scholarship and creativity' (Ward 2014:759) there exists the risk of being 'overly self-centred and introspective' (Blacksell 2005:518). Furthermore, as Cresswell concedes, there's a 'danger in writers thinking they can "be creative" without enough attention, practice or training' (2014:44). This, for me, is the greater risk. Not all geographical forays into creative writing 'work', from either a literary or academic perspective; some get bogged down in the no-person's-land in between.²⁶ The challenge, then, is to engage with the geographical and theological themes pertinent to this

²⁵ See Prieto (2011), Tally (2007), Casey (2009) and Malpas (1999).

²⁶ See Blacksell (2005) for a critique of Wylie's Coast Path walk (2005)

research and express them in a manner which is, for Ward, both 'a field of study and an art' (2014:764).

3. Walk this Way: Ambulatory mobilities

'Where does it start? Muscles tense. One leg a pillar, holding the body upright between the earth and the sky. The other a pendulum, swinging from behind. Heel touches down. The whole weight of the body rolls forward onto the ball of the foot. The big toe pushes off, and the delicately balanced weight of the body shifts again. The legs reverse position. It starts with a step and then another step and then another that add up like taps on a drum to a rhythm, the rhythm of walking' (Solnit 2001:3)

Even now, several years into this research, it feels strange to be writing about walking as an academic discipline. It's something I've done all my life, not walking as the most quotidian and mundane of acts but walking as an end in itself. In a way, something that I took to be an integral part of my character seemed far too self-evident for detailed analysis. But walking is enjoying a renaissance. The past decade has witnessed a flurry of literature on matters pedestrian, both literary (Macfarlane 2003, 2007, 2012, 2013; Solnit 2001, 2005; Gros 2014) and academic (Lorimer 2011; Edensor 2000; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Macpherson 2016; Wylie 2003, 2005). Furthermore, walking has become the *modus ambulare* for contemporary, experimental methods of landscape such as psychogeography (Sinclair 1997, 2002; Coverley 2010; Self 2007) and deep topography (Papadimitriou 2012).

In this section of the toolkit, therefore, I want to focus on walking as part of the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006), as an aspect of slow travel/tourism, on the technologies of walking and walking as embodied and reflexive practice.

3.1 Walking, the 'new mobilities paradigm' and new 'walking studies'

Until recently, social science has been dominated by sedentarist theories which 'treat as normal stability, meaning and place and treat as abnormal distance, change and placelessness' (Sheller and Urry 2006:208), citing, as evidence, Heidegger's notion of *dwelling* as to-be-in-one place, to *be* rather than to *become*.²⁷ What they fail to take into account is the increased mobility of people, specifically, for the purposes of this research, for pleasure. These *new mobilities* are 'more ephemeral, embodied and affective dimensions of interlocking mobility and immobility, including attention not simply to fluidity or speed, but to slowness, stillness, waiting and pauses, which are all part of a wider sensuous geography of movement, affect and dwelling' (Sheller 2013:50).

²⁷ In contrast, for example, to James Clifford's notion of 'travelling-indwelling' and 'dwelling-in-travel' (1992:108)

To walk is to slow down the world, in some respects an attitudinal statement, giving the finger to speed, as it were, To walk is to deepen one's relationship with the landscape in a way that the disembodied gaze from a car, bus or train simply cannot, not least because it engages more of the senses. Not only does walking create place, it animates through 'the shifting interaction of person and environment, in which the movement of the whole body is important rather than just an act of vision outwards from a fixed point' (Lee and Ingold 2006:68). The walker is always on the move, even when she or he stops.

3.2 Ways of walking

'There is, argues Wylie, 'no such thing as *walking-in-itself*, no certain physical motion which is, as it were, elementary, universal and pure. There are only varieties of walking, whether these be discursive registers (pilgrimage, courtship, therapy, exercise, protest), or particular modes of engagement (strolling, hiking, promenading, pacing, herding, guiding, marching)' (2005:235).

Highlighting the tensions which permeate every aspect of the practice, Edensor (2000) and Lorimer (2011) offer taxonomies of walkers and walking, some of which I unpack below with particular reference to their relevance to the Camino.

3.2.1 Walks as the Products of Place

A walk, suggests Lorimer, can be understood as a cultural activity made distinctive and meaningful by the physical features and material textures of place (2011). Across Europe, long-distance pedestrian trails link elite landscapes with their familiar red and white flashes painted on rocks and trees. Usually, topography dictates the path's trajectory, following the line of least resistance though in some cases it might deliberately follow a more precarious itinerary – the Pyrenean *Haute Route*, for example. Pilgrim ways, typically, are point-to-point routes, spiritual desire lines, fashioned by faith and belief that affords both path and landscape a sacred quality.

We tend to draw a clear distinction between 'thru-hike' and pilgrimage, as if their paths never cross, but Leila Dawney considers hiking the UK's South West Coast Path a 'secular pilgrimage' as it acts as performance as pilgrimage, contributing to 'a genealogically related set of ideas, concepts, technologies and practices of the body that feed into the cultural trope of the transformational journey or challenge' (2014:126).²⁸

²⁸ Generally, a long-distance trail and usually arduous trail, encountering hardship and potential danger, through wilderness and without regular waymarking which may take months to complete. Examples include the Pacific Crest Trail and Appalachian Trail in North America.

3.2.2 Walks as the products of distance

Distance matters. In the macho world of hiking challenges, the kilometre is king. Walks are undertaken for length as much as place, if not more so. Long-distance paths such as the Pennine Way in England become metaphors for Spartan stoicism, self-realisation through suffering (Strayed, 1992) and the often (but not always) amusing fallibility of human endeavour in the face of adversity (Bryson 1997).²⁹

But it's not about the walk so much as the walker and, with the exception of Cheryl Strayed, the walker is invariably male. It's a masculine domain of conquest and victory, a 'battle against [an often feminised] nature and against the over-socialized self' (Edensor 2000:93). Distance sculpts the mind and the body and promotes an aesthetic adulation uncomfortably reminiscent of the 'Strength through Joy' movement.³⁰

3.2.3 The social vs solitary hiker

We have the Romantics to thank for the stereotype of the (again, usually male) detached, solitary hiker, standing out from the crowd, at one with nature. Jarvis (1997) argues that for early practitioners of walking for pleasure, individuality and autonomy were means of rebelling against bourgeois norms of travel such as the Grand Tour. To walk alone is to have the solitary space to truly get in touch with oneself and one's surroundings, as if both these processes would be tainted by the company of fellow hikers. The solitary body has a superior moral status compared to that of the group – or perhaps, rabble, perhaps best illustrated by the comments of British historian G M Trevelyan: 'when you are really *walking*, the presence of a companion ... disturbs the harmony of body, mind and soul ... made together in mystic harmony with the earth' (cited in Edensor 2000:89).

Disdain for the hordes is a commonplace theme in walking literature yet it isn't always possible to avoid organised groups for whom walking is an inherently social practice. Indeed, the history of Rambling Clubs in the UK is based on a collective working-class camaraderie (Bunce 1994; Holt 1995) yet still the solitary – and quite possibly grouchy – walker might feel her/his personal space and consciousness interrupted and invaded by the blundering, insensitive intrusion of others.

It *is* possible, of course, to be alone and part of a crowd. On the Camino, where social relations evolve over time as opposed to existing from the start, participants tend to flow in

²⁹ The guru of English fellwalking, Alfred Wainwright, describes the Pennine Way experience as a '... tough, bruising walk and the compensations are few. You do it because you want to prove yourself that *man* enough to do it. You do it to get it off your conscience. You do it because you count it as a personal achievement. Which it is, precisely (Wainwright 1969:xiii; my emphasis)

³⁰ Although Matless (1995) notes that inter-war ramblers in the UK espoused the same Spartan discipline and hard physical exercise to promote working-class, leftist concerns.

and out of solitary status. Different speeds, different rhythms; the coming-together occurs spontaneously or by design, we lose one another on steep ascents where the fittest might prevail, and on the long flat tracks of the *Meseta*, when some like to get their heads down and walk without pause. In evening, in the *albergue* or *pensión*, except for the most determined loner, social relations will be restored.

3.3 The mind at three miles an hour: walking as a reflexive practice

‘I suspect the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an hour’ (Solnit 2001:10)

Solnit traces the relationship between thinkers, philosophers and poets back to the Sophists of Ancient Greece. Her ‘celebrity’ who’s who includes Aristotle, Rousseau, Kierkegaard and, of course, Wordsworth. Walking is, she suggests, not an analytical but an improvisational act, connected to ‘unstructured, associative’ stream-of-consciousness thinking (2001:21).

Walking offers an embodied, slowed-down, self-reflexive space in which to cogitate and contemplate, to ask questions and answer them, to create narratives and dream myths. Aided by a steady rhythm, the mind falls into a trance-like reverie that soothes and stimulates at the same time. The landscape plays its part in casting the spell, as do the elements; mountains might inspire, the hot sun on the streets of busy suburbs might have the opposite effect, the walker’s thought-processes are always intrinsically linked to their surroundings.

Lorimer argues that ‘In the midst of walking it is possible to think about being-in-the-world, and find grounds for a freer experiential exploration of what it is *to be* or *become*’ (2011:23). In this mode the walker seeks to reach into ‘intimacies of encounter – rather than focussing on the outer (symbolic or socialised) meaning of walking arts’ (2011:23).

Wylie’s walk along the South-West Coast Path sought ‘to activate a space and time within which [he] might engage with and explore issues of landscape, subjectivity and corporeality...’ (2005:234). This combination of the reflexive walking self in the midst of shifting hues, tones and colours and the ‘intensity of places and situations’ (2005:236) generates affect – ‘an intensity, a field, perhaps, of awe, irritation or serenity’ – which brings together walker and landscape in a union in which it becomes impossible to tell the one from the other: ‘landscape and self are mutually configured’ (2005:239).

3.4 The Girl's got Rhythm: Walking as an embodied practice³¹

Rhythm is the answer, the smooth-running, effortless state of kinaesthetic equilibrium which bring body and landscape together. As Casey suggests, bodies belong to places and help to constitute them whenever they stay in place, move through place or move towards other spaces (1996).

On long distance hikes, the body goes through a period of adjustment to the new regime. There's the daily process of overcoming residual stiffness as muscles warm up and the body gets into its groove. And there's the longer term response to walking day-after-day for twenty kilometres or more. The first day is surprisingly easy, the aches and pain set in on day two and usually get worse before they get better. It's only after a week or so on the trail that walking becomes effortless, both mind and body attuned to the changed circumstances, acknowledging that this is the way it's going to be for the foreseeable future. Daily distances increase and the pace picks up, though there is also the tension between this enhanced fitness and the desire not to rush, a conflict between mind and body.

Which is not to say that without rhythm the landscape will cease to perform; that unless one reaches a nirvana-like state of waking perfection, enchantment and awe will absent themselves. Rather, it's to stress that rhythm – or indeed, an absence of rhythm – plays a pivotal role in the long-distance walking experience. Not just the physical rhythm of the walk but the cyclical nature of the social, environmental and cultural routines which surround it.

3.5 Walking and mundane technology

And so I slip the walking element of my toolkit into my rucksack, but before doing so I pause to think about the rucksack itself, and the other material technologies which aid and abet my journey on foot, safely and (hopefully) free from ailments. 'Technology has', writes Michael, 'shaped our relationship with nature in many ways, not least in terms of the means by which we access nature, both physically and representationally' (2000:107).

Michael's narrative relates to walking boots but might equally apply to any other item of walking gear. In connecting the hiker to the earth beneath her feet, boots become a part of the environment but they are not 'simple intermediaries, going about their business as innocent conduits, pristine channels' (2000:114), they're part of the process of communication between landscape and hiker. Yet, at the same time, they serve as a surface of separation between the two. They both reduce and cause pain, and they

³¹ I'm inclined to think here of the Arthurian legend of the Fisher King and his relationship with the land. When the king is wounded (the injured or incapacitated walker), the land becomes barren and infertile. When the king is restored to health (the walker restored to full health) the land becomes fecund again.

damage not the wearer but the paths along which they walk. And boots signify status; set the 'serious' walker apart from the amateur or novice. The brand is important, but so, although many would deny it, is style: form and fashion matter, even on the *Camino de Santiago*.

I still have the boots in which I walked my first Camino, even though they're now held together with duct tape. So these mundane technologies are more than their material selves, within them, woven and stitched into the fabric, are my landscape memories. Still there, stuck fast. I cannot let them go.

4. Geographies of Religion, Spirituality and Faith

Whilst other social sciences have embraced the study of religion and spirituality, geography has, until recently, lagged behind.³² As long ago as 1967 David Sopher lamented the lack of published research on religion within geography, considering it a 'frontier territory' with vaguely mapped-out boundaries (1967:vii), fourteen years later he wrote that 'a modest increase in the volume of geographic writing on religions and religious institutions has not brought consensus on the nature of the pertinent field or even agreement whether there can be such a field at all' (1981:510). Yorgason and della Dora refer to the territory where geography and religion come together as 'the last *terra incognita*' which 'like any place, is not a blank space to be inscribed by colonizers' cartographic gazes and narratives' (2009:631).

Many of geography's encounters with religion have focused on spatial aspects of religious distribution and practices, to 'formalized systems of religions, particularly institutionalised, canonical religions of the text' (Kong 1990:367). This research, following Kong (1990:2010), attends to the personal religious experience of sacred space and spiritual landscapes which, until the recent manifestation of geography's 'emotional turn' (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005), have remained largely unexplored. It seeks also to explore the 'poetics' of place and religious experience, without which the religious landscape would lose its transformative quality' (Finlayson 2012:1764).

4.1 Spiritual or religious?

Dewsbury and Cloke make two distinctions between notions of religion and spirituality. Firstly, that spirituality isn't always religious in a formal sense and can manifest itself within or outwith religious contexts, such as nature. *Particularly* in nature, I would add. Secondly,

³² This is not to ignore the work of early 'pioneers' in the field such as Kong (1990), Park (1994), Tuan (1976,1978), rather to heed the call to 'explore emotional and performative aspects of religious practices and sacred space' (Finlayson 2012:1763) but see also Buttimer (2006) and Holloway (2006).

formal religious experiences are subject to the law of unintended – or perhaps wholly intended – consequences as has often been the case with apparitions of the Virgin Mary being appropriated by the conservative right (2009:696). Formal religious experiences are frequently not liberative in outcome.³³

Emotions are set free by affect, tend towards the ephemeral and might leave no long-lasting mark on the person who experiences them. They are cerebral but come from the body and often manifest themselves via the body – tears, for example. They may be the precursor to a spiritual or religious experience, may even facilitate it such as in the mood and emotions created in charismatic Christian worship – though those shared emotions are beyond the remit of this study.

Although both spiritual and religious experiences can occur spontaneously, apparently from out of nowhere, it seems that the latter are more likely to be ‘triggered’ by a person’s religious culture or formation, adherence to a particular doctrine, a religious ritual or practice (such as pilgrimage) and the sacred religiosity of a specific place. This isn’t to discount the possibility of a Damascene conversion but rather to acknowledge that in a religious experience there is some form of communication between the divine and the self. Hick (1989), for example, argues that religious experiences are structured according to tradition-specific sets of religious concepts such that all faiths offer the possibility but Catholics encounter the divine in Trinitarian – or frequently Marian – mode whereas Hindus do so as Brahman.

4.2 Sacred Space

For Mircea Eliade whose *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959) forms the starting point for understanding the concept, sacred space is where hierophany – the manifestation of the sacred – occurs:

‘When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse’ (1959:21).

Some places are important not because of physical features of the site nor because of their situation relative to other places but because they are sanctified. Following Julian Holloway, the definition of sacred space as ‘where the divine or the ultimate makes itself apparent (in whatever form, whether word, mystical revelation, profound deed, etc)’ is the one this thesis uses as its understanding of the concept (2003:1962). However, like Holloway and Tuan (1978), I acknowledge that Eliade’s account places the notion of

³³ See Perry and Echeverría (1988)

'sacredness' at one extreme of an experiential spectrum which favours the 'formless' and 'nonreal' over the mundane and the quotidian.

'Religion', argues Knott, 'which is inherently social, must also exist and express itself in and through space, and must play its part in the constitution of spaces' (2005:21); this research is concerned with how this sacred space is constituted or generated or, to put it more poetically, how it is cast, like an enchantment or spell. And it's a sensitive territory: Isaac suggests geographers approach the definition of sacred places tentatively for 'to broach the theme of holiness or the sanctity of place in geography always verges on the trite or the impertinent ... [and threatens] to intrude on a domain pre-empted by theology' (1964:28). He stresses the importance of awe and wonder in the experience of the holy, adding that 'on almost all levels of culture there are segregated, dedicated, fenced, hallowed spaces. The holy, or hallowed, means separated and dedicated' (1964:29).

Discussion on sacred space has centred on a specific place, often a shrine such as, for example, Lourdes (Eade & Sallnow 1991). Eliade, whose work influenced the Turners, considered the pilgrimage shrine 'an archetype of a sacred centre, marked off from the profane space surrounding it, where heaven and earth intersect and where time stands still, where there exists the possibility of breaking through to the realm of the transcendent' (Eade & Sallnow 1991:6). Much in the same way as they criticised the Turners' concept of *communitas*, Eade and Sallnow deem Eliade's concept of sacred space a 'rarefied generalisation which suppresses quite profound differences in the ways in which holy places are conceptualised from instance to instance, and sometimes in the same instance (Eade & Sallnow 1991:6).

Feels a bit like walking on eggshells! Treading the fine line between Eliade's transcendent, hallowed ground and Eade and Sallnow's contested sacred space and all the time trying to avoid the dangers of reductionism. And bearing in mind, too, my personal religious persuasions which incline me to side with Eliade whilst acknowledging that the *Camino de Santiago*, being both shrine *and* journey, is a space in which the sacred and the profane are in constant conflict.

So I turn to Mandoki's essay *Sites of Symbolic Destiny* (1998) for further illumination. Is the *sacredness* of sacred space produced by ritual and performance of both pilgrim and space or is that space already imbued with sacredness by the presence of something divine, supernatural or beyond-human? It seems to me that all the credit is being given to those who experience sacred space rather than the sacred space itself. Space is not, as Mandoki argues, an empty container, but 'somehow textured and bent not only physically but symbolically. Particular places have been experienced as loaded with specific

historical, noumenal and emotional value' (1998:73). Citing the history of Tenochtitlan/Mexico City, she argues that the history of the place 'has exercised a kind of gravitational pull upon its inhabitants and the inhabitants of the surrounding region: people have been drawn to the site, and moved to perform certain actions here, because of its past' (Wynn 2009:73).³⁴

As Wynn notes, 'Mandoki takes the idea that the site exercises a kind of gravitational pull quite seriously — she even asks whether this sort of pull is better understood by reference to a Newtonian or an Einsteinian theory of gravity' (2009:100). I intend to play with Mandoki's reasoning in exploring both the 'pull' of the Camino de Santiago (as opposed to Santiago as a destination) and the notion that its 'symbolic density' gives it an agency which interacts with the life experiences or faith of the pilgrim to 'conjure up' the sacredness of space and animate the landscape in a manner which might be considered emotional, spiritual or religious.

4.3 Sacred Geographies and Sacred Mobilities

Whilst sacred space pertains, in general, to a specific place – and time – sacred geographies refer to wider cultural and spiritual/religious practices which are bound up with histories and cosmologies in which axis mundi and memory anchors create connections across spatial and temporal realities (Van Dyke 2017). Significance is ascribed to unusual natural features which become liminal spaces between the sacred and the profane: mountain peaks are homes to mythic beings, caves are entrances to the underworld. Sacred geographies are territorially staked out by shrines, paths and votive offerings, rituals and ceremonies such as pilgrimage routinely take place to reiterate and reinforce the relationships between a people and the landscape in which they dwell.

But, as with sacred space, the concept should be approached with a certain amount of caution. As Van Dyke explains, 'the term 'sacred geography', with its implication that there is also 'profane' or 'mundane' geography, is somewhat misleading. Spiritual and special locales can be routinely encountered in the course of daily activities' (2017) which reminds us of Lane's encounter with the divine which took place in a place and time that was unlooked for and unexpected (2002:16).

After completing the fieldwork for this project and having relocated to Catalunya, I turned away from the Camino de Santiago and focused my hiking activities on the nearby

³⁴ Mandoki is referring specifically to the main square or *Zócalo* in Mexico City which was once the ceremonial and spiritual centre (*Templo Mayor*) of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan. Using the stones from the temples, the Spanish constructed the huge metropolitan cathedral on top of it. It remains the centre not just of the city but the heart of nation as a whole. Nowadays 'it is a place of peregrination from all parts of the country to demonstrate against the President and express dissidence' (1998:86).

Pyrenees instead. A winter mountaineering injury which required surgery dented my confidence and when recovered I approached the peaks with caution. To access the higher elevations I adopted a method which, on social media, I called 'Slow Pyrenees' and which entailed following the many forest tracks which zig-zagged up the slopes. It's less hare, more tortoise and means longer distances but offers a gradual and ever-changing opening up of vistas which put me in mind of John Wylie's ascent of Glastonbury Tor (2002).

The gentle incline affords time to process these affordances, to focus on the landscape rather than my own physical, gasping-for-breath effort. Neither, with the sureness of surface, do I have to worry about where I put my feet.³⁵ More often than not this subtle and ever-changing unfolding of the scene means I never actually get to the summit, instead of pausing frequently to catch my breath I pause frequently to take in the scene.

Zig-zag paths are not only the most efficient way of climbing a hill or mountain, they're also the kindest as they limit footpath erosion. Their antithesis are the desire lines which cut corners and take a plumb-line up the slope, carving out long, vertical scars. In several sections, the *Camino Francés* suffers a similar fate, the victim of its own popularity.

The path is to the pilgrim what the scalpel is to the surgeon, a means of opening up the landscape and getting beneath its skin. It facilitates access, often to those of limited mobilities who might not otherwise be able to explore it. Walking is inquisitive, argue Rae, Abbott and Bowring, and for those using it as a research tool the path is an interrogation of landscape such that over time it becomes difficult to separate walker from their path. Both are headed in the same direction; landscape moved in is landscape lived in, by walking the path we come into contact with materials outside ourselves (2017:233).

'When people engage in religious activities that involve travel along a prescribed path', observes Robert Stoddard, 'the role of distance seems to function quite differently than expressed by the major geographic principles ... which are largely concerned with the role of distance in spatial behaviour ... [and] ... usually involve concepts of least effort and the minimization of travel distance '(1987:96). For many pilgrims the appeal of the Camino is the path itself to the extent that, having reached the officially sanctioned sacred space of Santiago cathedral, they continue onwards to Finisterre. Which begs the question, is a path sacred in and of itself or is its sacredness a product of it joining sacred places? Had I asked my fellow pilgrims I suspect the responses might have reflected two contrasting views of the Camino, dividing those who favoured the destination from those who preferred the journey.

³⁵ It was putting my crampon-ed feet in the wrong place that caused the afore-mentioned injury.

In the concluding chapter, drawing on experiences in the field, I show how these concepts interact with each other and the pilgrim's life story to create the potential for spiritual landscape/human encounters. Or not, as the case may be.

4.3 Landscape and Divine Presence

The experience which prompted this research took place in the *Montes de León* in northern Spain, a landscape of high rocky ridges and deep verdant folds formed in the same Hercynian *orogeny* that uplifted the Alps and Pyrenees. The word *orogeny* comes from the ancient Greek, *óros*, 'mountain', and *génesis*, 'creation'; part of the story of a mountain is its story of creation, the immense and unimaginable tectonic forces which brought them into being and are still at work in the earth beneath our feet. It's not just the elevation which evokes emotions of awe and wonder in those who traverse mountain landscapes, it's the strength that can move mountains from the ocean floor to the rim of the sky. This, in a sense, contributes to the sense of mystery which, in turn, creates the potential for spiritual or religious experience. Anyone with a fundamental knowledge of geography has been taught the theory of continental drift and taken it as an article of scientific faith. But crossing the limestone Picos de Europa of northern Spain on the Camino Vadiniense we have a doubting Thomas moment, except that in this case seeing is not necessarily believing.

The highest mountains – and here relief is matter of relativeness rather than quantity – are the places on the earth closest to the gods. The indigenous name for the highest mountain in the world is known as Sagarmatha ('Peak of Heaven') and Chomolungma ('Goddess Mother of the World') by the Tibetans. Like the Camino, mountains are liminal landscapes, mediating between land and sky. And as della Dora points out, in the Abrahamic traditions God usually chose to speak to prophets and holy men in mountain wildernesses (2016:27).

In 'Key Terms of Material Religion', S Brent Plate (2015) argues that there has been a change of emphasis from ideas acting as generators of religion to that of the world itself as scholars focus on the physical aspects of religion and the lived approach to its expression – for example, the importance of the body and performative aspects of rituals (see Fedele 2013).

Plate's working definition of material religion goes thus: '(1) an investigation of the interactions between human bodies and physical objects, both natural and man-made; (2) with much of the interaction taking place through sense perception; (3) in special and specified spaces and times; (4) in order to orient, and sometimes disorient, communities and individuals; (5) towards the formal strictures and structures of religious traditions' (2015:5-6). Following Plate, this definition might be adapted to the study of the divine

presence within both specific (Camino de Santiago) and generic (mountain) landscapes to investigate sense perception in rarefied spaces. (Gunzburg and Brady 2020:3).

The landscape of the Camino de Santiago is almost predisposed to divine presence. I refer to it as a specifically 'religious' landscape – or sets of landscapes in which religious symbolism is visibly present – not because of its destination but because of its trajectory. Pilgrim routes rarely make a direct beeline for Santiago but rather lurch from sacred site to sacred site like an inebriated dot-to-dot puzzler. I'm inclined to call these landscapes 'scripted', or at least 'partially scripted': the clues are littered across the landscape, from cathedrals to wayside shrines and oratorios (which direct the pilgrim's gaze in a very Roman Catholic direction). To these we can add contemporary engagements with the paraphernalia of faith, some of which are personal and intimate: the crosses woven into wire fences, the votive offerings at the Virgen de Biakorri. These signals work at so many levels, for those not moved by the gothic grandiosity of Burgos cathedral (perhaps due to an animosity to formal religion), the intimate simplicity of the *Cruz del Ferro* might. It's almost as if the entire length of the various Caminos is criss-crossed by a network of affective triggers waiting to respond to the pilgrim's personal circumstance or lifeworld, not unlike Alfred Watkins theory of ley lines (1925).³⁶

Mountain landscapes, like those of the Camino, are liminal places. To traverse both is to enter an otherworld, a zone of transition. Writing of the folklore and mythology of the Brecon Beacons in south Wales, Bernadette Brady argues that it is only our ontologies that cast landscape as an inactive canvas, concluding that 'as an area becomes entwined with cultural layers [our palimpsest], so its potential to influence human activity increases' (Gunzburg and Brady 2020:7). This raises an important and potentially problematic issue. To whom are these landscapes 'spiritual' or 'religious'? If mobilities – particularly pedestrian mobilities – are the methods which generate affect, are these experiences equally available to those who dwell in these landscapes on a more enduring basis? To the Sherpa porter lugging a tourist's heavy backpack up to the Annapurna Sanctuary in the Himalayas or the guy in the snack van on the first stage of the *Camino Francés*, high up in the Pyrenees? On the Camino and in the mountains there's a human and physical permanence to the landscape which contrasts with the hiker's ephemerality. When we're dead and gone – or

³⁶ Watkins' theory, which became part of 1960s hippy counterculture, was more a series of ancient trade routes than an 'earth energy' grid. The mystical element was added by John Michell's *The View over Atlantis* (1969) and Watkins became heralded as a new age visionary. Despite the ensuing cynicism, ley lines feature in the landscape works of Richard Long and the early poetry of psychogeographers Iain Sinclair (1975).

when age has limited our mobility – the cathedral and the couloir will still be there, a testament to the perpetual in an age of transience.

This thesis has argued that landscape is more than a backdrop. On my final day of fieldwork I spoke of the corrie beneath the summit of Puigmal as a ‘theatre’, a year earlier, crossing the Cordillera Cantabrica on the Camino del Salvador, I Tweeted about being in a cathedral of rock. It’s the ‘staging’ of these landscapes. Stepping into them is like entering concert hall just as the action is about to begin, as the orchestra tunes up or dry ice billows across the stage. In Plate’s definition of material religion we’ve reached the point – a ‘special and specified space and time’ – when the audience, congregation, pilgrim or hiker, are disposed (dis/oriented) for the divine to perform. This may be within ‘formally’ religious structures, or might be a very personal, idiosyncratic response, perhaps even a hybrid of both. As Edwin Bernbaum puts it, ‘the sacred does not simply present itself into our gaze: it reaches out to seize us in its searing grasp’ (1992:xvi).

4.4 Spiritual Landscapes

I want, briefly, to broaden the concept of sacred **landscapes** to consider the idea that there exist certain landscapes which lend themselves to spiritual experience. What I mean by spiritual, of course, covers a wide range of faiths, beliefs and emotions and, for fear once again of tripping into the reductionist trap, I want to avoid constraining definitions and keep the field as wide open as possible. It might be useful, however, to cite Perriam’s understanding of spiritual experience which is:

‘... not necessarily religious nor ... always faith-based, and what we might call spiritual experiences of place are often perceived as traversing body and land. Spiritual dimensions of human experience range across faith-based systems of belief, ethical and moral beliefs in standards of human behaviour and heightened sense of purpose. This may also include cultural understandings of what constitutes goodness and strong feelings of compassion and love. Spiritual experience can also include momentary levels of heightened awareness of well-being induced by a variety of physical and non-physical actions, from meditation to evangelical, performative acts of prayer. It is possible for a strongly religious person to have a spiritual experience that does not directly involve any faith-based activity. Similarly, those with no faith-based practices or beliefs may be moved by participation in religious activity’ (2014:21).

Perriam (2014) cites the example of the spiritual landscape of the monastery or a place of retreat, Holloway (2003) describes the various ways (Christian and ‘New Age’) in which the landscape surrounding Glastonbury becomes imbued with a spiritual energy and, on a quite different level, Williams (2016) recounts his experiences with Hebron, a semi-monastic Pentecostal Christian therapeutic community. I discuss below the particularly Catholic-orientated landscapes through which the Camino passes and how they might

impact on the pilgrim who shares that Catholic faith but a question I might pose here is to what extent is the Camino is a spiritual landscape or whether parts of it are 'spiritually-affective', enlivened and animated by the accumulation of time, distance and experience?

4.3 Spiritually-affective landscapes

'Spiritual landscapes', argue Dewsbury and Cloke, 'are not just about religion, but open out spaces that can be inhabited, or dwelt, in different spiritual registers' (2009:696). They suggest three ways in which the spiritual might manifest itself: one, 'people engage in particular practices because they believe in one way or another in the spiritual; two, 'a belief in the spiritual means that certain things happen that would not happen otherwise; certain affects are produced that make people feel very real and specific feelings' and three, 'simply to say that the spiritual *exists* (2009:697). Following Rose and Wiley (2006:475), 'spiritual landscapes concern the tension between absence and presence – the performance, creation and perception of something unseen but profoundly felt' (Williams 2016:46).³⁷

Spiritually-affective landscapes are spectral landscapes, haunted by ghostly presences which may or may not be religious but make themselves apparent, or perform when spiritual elements elicit 'new imaginations of our place in the world and how that world works' and also present the 'unknown' to us (Dewsbury and Cloke 2009:698). Such imaginations, suggests Perriam, are 'contingent upon connection. The 'connection' suggested here refers to a sense in which self, others and the environment are related, including elemental forces and nature' (2014:21).

In asking how we might make sense of these relational affects and their what consequences for geographies of religion and belief, Holloway turns to Bennet's notion of *enchantment* as an approach (2006:185). For Bennett 'enchantment is something that we encounter, that hits us ...' To be enchanted is to be 'struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday ... to be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be caught up and carried away-enchantment is marked by this odd combination of somatic effects' (2001, 4-5).

Holloway argues that 'enchantment and enchanted spaces are sensuous spaces that cannot be reduced to societal processes, structures, or belief itself' (2006:186). *Enchanted* landscapes are not necessarily synonymous with *spiritual* landscapes yet in both spaces

³⁷ I'm not sure the *something*, is always *unseen*. It might be hidden or elusive or, recalling my personal experience, exist somewhere between the seen and the unseen. These presences are, after all, 'otherworldly' and 'beyond-nature' as well as 'beyond-human'.

the beyond-human – faith, the spiritual and/or the emotional – manifest themselves through performance and affect.

4.4 The ‘Catholic Gaze’

It goes without saying that the way in which we view our environment is shaped by our background and experience; we are what we see, and vice versa. In her essay, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Mulvey takes Lacan’s notion of *the gaze* and redefines it as the ‘male gaze’ which compels the audience to view cinematic narrative from the perspective of the heterosexual male (1975). The male gaze is clearly present in much of theology and geography and much literature on landscape on the environment – especially ‘travel writing’ – is predicated on it. Urry describes the ‘Tourist Gaze’ as being ‘socially organised and systematised’ and directed at ‘features of landscape and townscape which separate them from everyday experience’ (1990:1).

One of the aims of this research is to give some thought to the notion of a ‘Catholic gaze’, the idea that Catholicism, both ‘cultural’ and practised, influences the way we view and respond to our environment. Recently, I asked one of my ‘A’ level geography students what he thought a ‘Catholic landscape’ might look like; he replied that it would probably resemble the townscapes and rural landscapes of southern Europe, especially Italy and Spain. I tend to agree. My ‘Catholic gaze’ would be heavily influenced by the sights – and sounds, smells and feel – of Latin European and Latin American Catholicism.

But the Catholic gaze is characterized not just by what is visible but what is also ‘present’ at a ‘beyond-human’ level. It unsettles certainties and ‘sees’ things the non-Catholic gaze can’t – or doesn’t want to. Perhaps better articulated by Dewsbury and Cloke as ‘co-constituting sets of relations between bodily existence, felt practice and faith in things that are immanent, but not yet manifest’ (2009:696).

On the Camino de Santiago, for example, my embodied experience of the landscape, which engaged all the senses, was shaped not just by my faith and beliefs but in the manner in which I’d acquired that faith and belief, over space and time.

Just as ‘there is no single tourist gaze as such’ (Urry 1990:1) we might say there exists a multiplicity of Catholic Gazes, and that more than one can be at work simultaneously, or one may give way to another. The non-human or spiritual agencies at work in the Arcadian, prelapsarian landscapes of southern Europe are quite different to those that produce the blistered, arid landscapes of Central America where the Catholic gaze might – does, for me – take a different, more theologically-inclined perspective.

5. Pilgrimage

5.1 Pilgrimage as religious mobility in a secular world

'Pilgrimage', writes Scriven, 'is inherently about movement'. It's also, he adds, intrinsically spatial, about 'routes, destinations and departure/return points'. It's a transformative event in which belief is 'fundamental' (2014:252), though in a post-secular world the nature of that 'belief' has become fuzzy and blurred. For Solnit, pilgrimage is 'premised on the idea that the sacred is not entirely immaterial, but that there is a geography of spiritual power' (2001:50) whilst Frey suggests that 'when pilgrims begin to walk several things usually begin to happen to their perceptions of the world which continue over the course of their journey: they develop a changing sense of time, a heightening of the senses and a new awareness of their bodies and the landscape' (1998:72).

In theory, Pilgrimage is a leveller; there are no hierarchies, only shared goals. It enjoins its participants in a daily ritual and corrals them into communal spaces. Differences and weaknesses, cultural, religious and linguistic, become strengths. Even gender fades into the background (though doesn't disappear altogether). In that sense, pilgrimage is an act which undermines the established order.

Christian pilgrimage, be it walking the Camino de Santiago or travelling to Lourdes, has its roots in medieval Catholicism, Mariology and the cult of saints (Graham and Murray 1997).³⁸ In secular Europe it's managed to survive by embracing 'touchy-feely' spiritualities, New Age faiths and 'pick 'n' mix religion' (Bruce 1995). Or perhaps it's the other way round? The Camino de Santiago has survived through 'touchy-feely' spiritualities, New Age faiths and 'pick 'n' mix religion' embracing pilgrimage and offering different experiences of the sacred. Whatever the case, it remains a potent and increasingly popular phenomenon.³⁹

5.2 Anti-structure, liminality and *communitas* versus the 'contested sacred'

Central to the relationship between the walking pilgrim and the affective performance of landscape is the Turners' notion of liminality and *communitas*:

'Liminals are stripped of status and authority, removed from the social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and levelled to a homogenous social state through discipline and ordeal. Their secular powerlessness may be compensated for by a sacred power, however – the power of the weak, derived on the one hand from the resurgence of nature when structural power is removed, and on the other from the reception of sacred knowledge. Much of what has been

³⁸ As this thesis is concerned with the Camino de Santiago I discuss pilgrimage purely from a Christian, or more specifically, Catholic perspective/context

³⁹ Not just the Camino de Santiago. The annual Marian pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico attracts tens of thousands of devotees. In Europe Scriven (2014, 2019, 2020) has researched the continued importance of pilgrimage in Ireland whilst Duda (2016) documents the growing popularity of St Olav's Way in Norway.

bound by social structure is liberated, notably the sense of comradeship and communion or *communitas*' (Turner & Turner 1978:37).

For the Turners, the pilgrim is 'betwixt and between', always – or at least for the duration of the journey – somewhere between 'from' and 'to'. The pilgrim might not be, as Turner suggests, in a 'non-place' (Auge 1992) but she or he lies on the periphery or outwith society or culture.

The Turnerian model of pilgrimage has been critiqued by, amongst others, Eade and Sallnow (1991), Coleman (2002) and Bowman (1985). Drawing on fieldwork in the Peruvian Andes, Sallnow rejects the idea of *communitas* and asserts that pilgrimage is 'simply a setting in which social interactions can take place *ex novo*' (1981:90). Eade and Sallnow (1991: 9-10) argue that no place is a place outside culture and focus instead on conflict among pilgrims and between pilgrims and the settled societies in which they dwell or through which they pass, as well as between *communitas* and structure (Eade, 1991:75; Sallnow, 1987, 1991:147-8).⁴⁰

In a similar vein, Coleman argues that Clifford's 'notion of *dwelling in movement* [or dwelling-in-travel] (1992) often confounds or at least complicates the Turnerian image pilgrimage as anti-structural into set-apart, liminal/liminoid space and time' (Coleman 2000:156). Coleman is referring to pilgrims to Walsingham, many of whom make the journey on a regular basis and for whom the shrine is 'akin to arriving at a second home' (2000:156). The *Camino de Santiago*, too, has its own regulars and returnees, myself included, it's no longer unfamiliar but neither is it mundane. I'm interested, then, in how this repetition of hiking the route impacts on the relationship between landscape and pilgrim. If I know what lies around every next corner, does the (presumed) lack of anticipation negate the sense of enchantment that is so important in generating emotion and spiritual affect?

In recent years, the debate between *communitas* and contestation has taken on a more nuanced tone. Coleman proffers an olive branch: 'just as contestation is more complex than it might first appear, so the apparent deconstruction of universalist narratives of pilgrimage deserves to be examined a little more closely' (2000:360). From the perspective of a fellow pilgrim, I'm inclined to nod in approval when Slavin asks, 'what, though, if Turner is on the right track?' (2003:7). With the emphasis on the journey rather the destination, in this thesis I make a case for adopting a Turnerian approach in exploring the relationship between pilgrim and landscape. But there's a personal tension here between what Coleman describes as the 'Turners' position as that of committed religionists in opposition

⁴⁰ Bowman (1991:98) writes of the 'various Jerusalems' dependent on the religious affiliation of the pilgrim. Coleman (2000) describes discord arising between the differing devotional practices of Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics at the English Marian shrine of Walsingham.

to the more playful postmodernism of Eade and Sallnow' and also the latter's 'mistrust of the very category of pilgrimage' (Coleman 2000:361). As a practising Catholic, I'd like to think that one can be both 'committed religionist' and 'playful' at the same time. Furthermore, as Dubisch notes, the Turnerian approach itself calls attention to postmodern issues of performance and staging as well as play and reflexivity (1995:45).

5.3 Journey versus destination

Tuan views religious pilgrimage as a ritual by which we break up 'the drowsiness of routine' that dictates the pattern of our daily life. He contrasts being 'in place' and 'out of place', suggesting we spend most of our lives in place (surrounded by the security of familiar relationships and routines) but have a periodic need as individuals and society to transcend place (and then be out of place). These rituals that break up our routines expand our horizons – if only fleetingly – to embrace the entire cosmos, not just our own 'seemingly immutable social place'. By detaching ourselves from place during pilgrimage, argues Tuan, we see place for what it really is – 'a temporary abode, not an enduring city' (1984:9).

Unlike Lourdes, Santiago de Compostela is not a thaumaturgic centre, though that's not to say that the pilgrimage itself isn't a place of miracles. Slavin (2003) argues that arrival in Santiago doesn't produce material change or healing but I contend that the long walk to the cathedral does bring about personal as well as spiritual change, the pilgrim who started the Camino is frequently not the same person who completes it. The quotidian routine of walking pilgrimages embraces and opens up possibilities, the repeated act of putting one foot in front of another has an effect not dissimilar to saying the rosary; opening up a conduit to beyond-human or spectral experiences. Or rather, it creates fertile ground for these experiences. The walking pilgrim is off-guard, has lowered her defences; in a sense she is vulnerable, the kenotic act of pilgrimage creates that vulnerability. And maybe, just maybe, we see and experience what we want to see and experience, because we've invested so much energy and emotion into the project. We want the journey, not the destination, to change our lives. As Frey notes, 'the physical act of arriving at the Camino is anticipated by some kind of internal movement – a decision, an impulse, an unexplained prompting, a long-held desire finally realized, a promise seeking fulfilment, a hope for change' (1998:47).

On a long-distance pilgrimage, the only day-to-day certainty is the walk itself, the focus is on the rhythm of the walk and the well-being of the body. The pilgrim exists in the moment, 'rather than focusing on a material outcome or a concrete, spatial goal, pilgrims turned to examine the very process of the pilgrimage, the journey. This invariably involves an awareness of the embodied self in relation to the journey' (Slavin 2003:6). Furthermore, on the journey, the pilgrim can – and does – reassert control over her life, becoming the

mistress of her own routine. We are no longer at the behest of others: families, partner, employers or even PhD supervisors! We make our own decisions, we stop where and when we want, for as long as our whim desires. Not only does time slow down, it becomes inverted; we're out-of-time. As one pilgrim reported to Nancy Frey, 'There is no destination to which I am rushing. There is only this earth which I touch in some many ways' (1998:73).⁴¹

5.4 Pilgrim versus tourist: the impact of religious, spiritual or personal motivations

Discussing changing concepts in pilgrimage research, Collins-Kreiner (2010) argues that the difference between traditional pilgrims and tourists is fading. On an increasingly popular and commercialised pilgrimage such as the *Camino de Santiago*, which Murray and Graham refer to as 'route-based tourism' (1997:513), there exists a growing tension between the contested and sometimes conflicting motivations of pilgrims and the Camino's economic function as a cultural-tourism product. Murray and Graham (1997) argue that pilgrims on the road to Santiago perceive the Camino as a consumptive tourist experience and that the 'purity' or 'authenticity' of pilgrimage is often blurred by more touristic visits to cities such as Burgos where pilgrims may well take a break to 'see the sights'. Thus, in a sense, pilgrimage ceases to be the pilgrim's sole *raison d'être* as she morphs in and out of the sacred and the secular. Smith's (1992) tourist-pilgrim continuum offers a typology of these motivations, ranging from 'pious pilgrim' to 'secular tourist'.

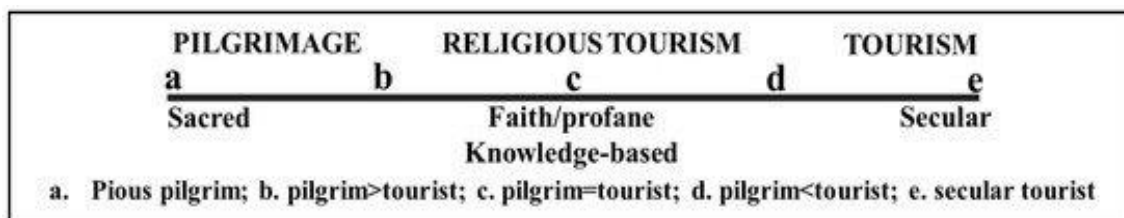


Fig 6: Smith's pilgrim-tourist continuum (1992)

It's a useful device but 'the difficulty of this scheme lies in the nature of piety and the multi-layered meanings of pilgrimage in a secular age in which 'holy' and 'pious' no longer define the spiritual' (Murray and Graham 1997:517). Furthermore, it assumes that motivation is static and unchanging. Haab (1996) notes that pilgrims on the Camino begin their spiritual journey in different guises. Some set out as pilgrims, others become so as the walk unfolds while others may not realise they are pilgrims until the journey is over, and feel compelled to return a second time to walk it as a spiritual rather than tourist journey.

⁴¹ For many pilgrims, however, time inevitably has the final say. They might have taken an extended period of leave but it will still be limited and many will walk the Camino in fortnightly sections over several years.

5.5 Pilgrim or Gyrovague

The English term *pilgrim* has its roots in the Latin *peregrinus* (*per* = through + *ager* = field, country, land) denoting a foreigner, a stranger, someone on a journey or a temporary resident. It can describe a traveller making a brief journey to a particular place or someone settling for a short or long period in a foreign land. Pilgrim and rover or drifter and vagrant? Fear and mistrust of those for whom movement is an integral part of their culture has always been with us and this applies to the contemporary pilgrim, casually losing herself from the bounds of the mundane to hike for weeks on end.

Gros suggests it was the *gyrovagues*, early Christian monks journeying ‘ceaselessly from monastery to monastery, without fixed abode’, who gave itinerants a bad name:

‘... they spend their lives murmuring prayers on foot, walking all day without destination or goal, this way or that, taking branching paths at random, turning, returning, without going anywhere, illustrating through endless wandering their condition as permanent strangers in this profane world’ (Gros 2014:108).

The early Church didn’t have much time for *gyrovagues*, denounced as wretched by Benedict of Nursia who accused them of indulging their cravings: ‘while the *gyrovague* is rootless, and therefore cannot really grow [up], the authentic pilgrim is someone solidly rooted’.⁴² With the establishment of the Rule of St. Benedict in the eighth century, the wandering monk phenomenon faded into obscurity.

I want to slip the notion of the *gyrovague* into the rucksack to explore the wider and more radical implications of pilgrimage and landscape, to go beyond the notion of the pilgrim and give it a more subversive edge. The pilgrim as nomad which, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) construct as a kind of pure traveller, occupying a liberated and liberating space outside the confines of modern Western society.

To what extent, then, is the pilgrim a nomad or is pilgrimage, particularly the Camino de Santiago, just another aspect of leisure as consumption in an advanced capitalist society which permits its citizens a few weeks of annual holiday to replicate elsewhere the practices-of-consumption they perform at home? In this scenario, landscape is little more than a commodity, an accompanying backdrop for our touristic photos which are, after all, just about *us*. As Debord claimed, ‘tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities, is fundamentally nothing more than the leisure of going to see what has become banal. The economic organization of visits to different places is already in itself the guarantee of their *equivalence*. The same

⁴² ‘New Pilgrims or Cultural Gyrovagues?’ Armand Veilleux, O.C.S.O. (Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance) <http://www.scourmont.be/Armand/writings/pilgrim.html> (retrieved 30/7/2014)

modernization that removed time from the voyage also removed from it the reality of space' (1967:168).

And I want to explore the concept of *gyrovague* and nomad from a feminist perspective, turning first to Braidotti and then Melissa Harrison, a contemporary English novelist. Braidotti argues for a nomadic consciousness, 'a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self (1994:25). She writes of nomadism as way of life, a grammar and an attitude:

'The nomadic tense is the imperfect: it is active, continuous; the nomadic trajectory is controlled speed. The nomadic style is about transitions and passages without predetermined destinations or lost homelands. The nomad's relationship to the earth is one of transitory attachment and cyclical frequentation; the antithesis of the farmer, the nomad gathers reaps and exchanges but does not exploit' (Braidotti 1994:25).

In her essay *On Being Disruptive*, Harrison describes a midweek walk alone in the Home Counties. She enjoys the experience but what she finds stressful is the 'constant sense of being in the wrong place. There I was, a lone woman, on a weekday, walking along a busy road with no pavement, in a not-particularly-scenic part of the countryside. Everyone else was driving the school run, or commuting, or doing their jobs. I didn't *fit*'.⁴³

The inference is clear: 'Why aren't you at work'? The itinerant is indolent and self-seeking, contributing nothing to society. Strange how, in a culture that celebrates the individual this act of individualism is often frowned upon. When I announced I was taking six weeks out to walk the Camino de Santiago I received a variety of responses. Most were encouraging but some were not: 'you don't even have enough money to rent your own flat, how can you afford to do that?'; 'Shouldn't you put the money to better use?'; 'What about your job?' and, most infuriatingly, 'shouldn't you be a bit more responsible? Especially at your age'.

'Especially at my age'! Since when has irresponsibility been the preserve of youth?

6. Theology

6.1 Geography and theology

It is, I concede, an unusual combination of disciplines and there's already a question begging to be asked. In a thesis essentially concerned with the affectivity of landscape, albeit from a spiritual and religious perspective, what's the function of theology? There's a steadily growing field of research in Emerging Geographies of Religions, Spiritualities and Faith and an increasing number of geographers producing work on geographies of sacred

⁴³ <http://www.gladstoneslibrary.org/blog/2014/02/14/being-disruptive-melissa-harrison/> (retrieved 30/7/2014)

space (Madrell 2019; Maddrell, Terry and Gale (2015), Maddrell, della Dora, Scafi, and Walton (2015), Scriven 2014, 2019, 2020; Della Dora 2016, 2018; Holloway 2003).⁴⁴ The studies of geography, religion and spirituality are no longer mutually exclusive and as Slater has shown, it *is* possible to profess a faith and ‘spend some time reflecting on it geographically’ (2004:246).

But theology is separate to and distinct from geographies of religion and spirituality. Vann (2007) describes a ‘geotheology’ as ‘an understanding of the connections between the worship of God and space’ but the study of theology goes beyond the ‘worship of God’ (or any deity/deities or divine being(s)).⁴⁵ Several geographers have tried to understand religion without understanding its theological underpinnings so I want to set out here a trajectory of theologies, broadly progressive and liberationist in outlook, to put the cart on the same footing as the horse, so to speak.

Sutherland (2017) sets out a ‘theography’ which places geography at the heart of the matter and ‘presents itself as a concept which can help geographers of religion to make sense of the fluidity of marginal and mainstream religious practices by advancing a coherent understanding of how subjects produce theology instead of recourse to crude analysis that consigns subjects to ‘progressive’ or ‘regressive’ blocs’ (2017:321). He notes how, although theology has begun to prick the spatial imagination, there’s little work focusing on how subjects reproduce theology in a more quotidian way, and the effect this has on spatial imagination and practices (2017:327). However, Sutherland’s work, like that of Megoran (2006) and Sturm (2013) tends to pertain more to the field of geopolitics than landscape studies.

6.2 Theologies of Liberation

For the purposes of this research, and for reasons outlined in the introduction, I refer predominantly to the Latin American, Roman Catholic tradition of Liberation Theology. Although, as Leonardo and Clodovis Boff argue in their *Concise History of Liberation Theology*, ‘the historical roots of liberation theology are to be found in the prophetic tradition of evangelists and missionaries from the earliest colonial days in Latin America’ (1987), Liberation Theology in its contemporary manifestation is generally acknowledged to have emerged in the 1960s as a response to Pope John XIII’s opening speech to the Second

⁴⁴ Sufficient interest to warrant two sessions at the RGS/IBG 2017 conference.

⁴⁵ In the ‘City of God’ Augustine of Hippo defined the Latin *theologia*, as ‘reasoning or discussion concerning the Deity’ and the sixteenth century English reformist theologian referred to theology as ‘the study of the science of things divine’. However, to a certain extent, what theology *is* depends upon the meaning its Latin and Greek equivalents acquired in patristic and medieval Christian usage. And in any case, this thesis is committed to not tying down, flattening or stifling concepts by adhering to specific definitions.

Vatican Council in which he declared, 'Where the underdeveloped countries are concerned, the Church presents herself as she is. She wishes to be the Church of all, and especially the Church of the poor'. Its key principle, first articulated by Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973), is a 'preferential option for the poor' based upon a new structural approach to theology which took as its starting point the question 'what does it mean to be a Christian in a continent of poor and oppressed people?' (Bingmer 2016:10).

'Theology is reflection', writes Gutierrez, 'a critical attitude. First comes the commitment to charity, to service. Theology comes 'later'. It is second' (1970:244). Whereas *theology* has come to be seen as abstract and divorced from the realities of ordinary life (Rowland 2007:2), theologies of liberation place emphasis on *doing* over theory and a critical reflection on *praxis*, or action (Boff and Boff 1987), although, significantly, Gutiérrez was keen to point out that liberation theology began with a mystical experience (1991). Furthermore, in a continent where religion was strongly linked with connotations of colonialism and the oppression of indigenous peoples and their religions, Latin American liberation theology spoke the language of the native cultures, validating their traditions, rituals and modes of worship (Bingemer 2016). This is reiterated by the Jesuit theologian Sobrino who suggests that European theology 'has been more interested in in thinking about and explaining the truth of faith, whereas for liberation theologians, faith runs parallel to real life and is in dialectical relationship with it' (Rowland 2007:3). Most importantly, liberation theology, as evinced by its relationship with grassroots groups such as Christian base communities, is primarily a theology from the roots up, making sense of the word of God from the perspective of the poor and the marginalised.

6.3 Feminist theologies

'Proper', or 'dogmatic' (Althuas-Reid 2000:31) liberation theology gained purchase in Latin America through its preferential option for the poor via what Segundo refers to as the 'hermeneutic circle', a theological methodology which entails 'the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal' (1976:8). But what liberation theology failed to acknowledge in this present-day reality were the structural sins of patriarchy, sexism and misogyny which manifested themselves, particularly in a *machista* culture such as that of Latin America, through endemic rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Liberation

theology, to some critics (Althaus-Reid 2000, 2003, 2004; Schüssler Fiorenza 1975, Vuola 2002), perpetuated the same androcentric myths as the system it was trying to subvert.⁴⁶

Feminist theology's methodology is a hermeneutic of suspicion (Radford Ruether 1985; Schüssler Fiorenza 1999). Schüssler Fiorenza highlights two forms, a modern hermeneutic of suspicion – a cold and clinical approach – and a postmodern one which is critical of the text as a partner (1999:36-37). It's the latter which this research adopts, emphasising as it does the need to be self-critical, suspicious of what the researcher brings to the texts and acknowledging that her interests and suppositions might well be prejudiced (Dreyer 2011). Sugirtharajah's comparison of liberation hermeneutics and postcolonial biblical criticism also serves as an important tool. Firstly in pointing out the inherent Christocentrism of the former – and the consequential 'unconscious conviction that the Bible cannot err' (2002:113) – and secondly in the former's romanticisation of the poor which it tends to categorise in a lumpen, homogenous group defined only by their economic constraints. With its emphasis on pluralism and an acknowledgment of the role and importance of syncretism within indigenous societies, Sugirtharajah's postcolonial exegesis also provides a link between a liberationist Mariology and the queer theology of Marcella Althaus-Reid (2002:119).

Writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, this presents a number of scriptural and doctrinal conflicts which, on first reading, appear irreconcilable. I will, below, attempt to make some sense of this apparently contradictory theological standpoint.

But before doing so I want take a step away from the often-perceived Eurocentric and North American-focused nature of feminist theology and discuss the Latin American texts which form the basis of my theological approach to this research, to tease out an active presence of the divine and articulate what that might mean for liberating 'theology-on-foot'. I turn to Latin America, partly because it was my introduction to theology as a discipline but also because it speaks of a theology of uncertain mobilities. It represents a 'lived-in' theology on the move, what the Honduran theologian Carmen Manuela (Nelly) del Cid terms a 'nomadic spirituality'.

'These people [marginalised communities in El Salvador] possess a sense of nomadic spirituality such as the Israelites had in the beginning. We have lost this because we have become too settled. They haven't lost it because they are always expecting to move on. They discover a God who walks with them, and so they can identify with a small God, a God who hasn't got an answer to everything, a God who is so weak that he suffers with him. But he is a God who is with them, there, and when they discover this more clearly they become

⁴⁶ See, for example, Gutiérrez' (1970) constant reference to *man* and 'man's liberation' in 'Notes for a Theology of Liberation'. See also Elina Vuola's criticism of Jon Sobrino (2002:101).

capable of greater commitment' (Nelly de Cid, cited in Best and Hussey 1996:23).

There's something about Nelly del Cid's relationship with God which resonates with the subverting of traditional relationships with nature and landscape, the 'bowing' and 'scraping', the 'I am not worthy' and the sense of one's insignificance in the grandiose 'majesty' of mountains. As such, this is also a theology of liberating intimacy, reflected in the *Nican Mopohua* narrative which relates the relationship between the Nahua peasant Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe, before whom she appears on the sacred hill of Tepayac in Mexico in 1531 (Elizondo 1997).

Whilst liberation theology embraces the preferential option for the poor, it does not, argues Sugirtharajah, take seriously the religious agency of the of the poor, expressed through mystical visions and dreams, healings and exorcisms, veneration of saints and relics, and through feasts, fasts, and religious processions' (2002:116). Since Vatican II, the role of the Virgin Mary in orthodox Roman Catholic practice has, in Europe and North America, at least, diminished (Spretnak 2004). In Latin America, however, Marian devotions remain an integral part of the religious calendar with festivals such as *La Purísima* (Immaculate Conception) vying for popularity with Easter. The *Nican Mopohua* thus offers a decolonised hermeneutic and also becomes part of a larger theological pool and not confined to a particular religious source (Sugirtharajah 2002:119).⁴⁷ It also reminds us that in the Roman Catholic tradition, divine revelation is not exclusive to scripture but manifests itself through direct and indirect experiences of God, often via the Virgin Mary.

On his first encounter with the Virgin, Juan Diego belittles himself as 'a piece of rope, a small ladder, the excrement of people' (Elizondo 1997:10). But the Virgin raises him up, refers to him not as *Indio* or *tú* but by name, which is 'uttered with the greatest respect, familiarity and affection' (Elizondo 1997:61): 'my most abandoned son, dignified Juan' (Elizondo 1997:9). For Mary Grey, Our Lady of Guadalupe is not just a Mary who 'speaks for the little people, oppressed and marginalized by a dominant culture, but [one who] through her 'Fiat', (that is, *active* cooperation), and her 'Magnificat', (that is, through protest and struggle against injustice), calls to participation in the redemptive process' (1989:339).

But the *Nican Mopohua* offers something more than text. It's rich in image and symbol, through the Nahua concept of *flor y canto* – flower and song – which signified divine truth. According to this view, writes Elizondo, 'ultimate truth can be grasped and expressed only

⁴⁷ See also Terri Rey's account of Marian/Vodou syncretism in Haiti (1999) for a more contemporary decolonisation of Mariology.

through the poetic and the artistic, through the beautiful and the rhythmic, through individuality and diversity' (1997:118).

6.4 Queer theologies

'What is queer theology?' asks Susannah Cornwall in *Controversies in Queer Theology* (2011:9). It is, she admits, an open-ended question. Although it borrows terminology and methodological background from queer theory, it's simply not sufficient to consider it queer theory applied to the critical study of the divine. So *queer* is as contested in theology as it is in cultural and social studies, if not more so. From a 'theology pertaining in particular to sex' to a 'successor to feminist and liberation theologies' to a 'justification of lifestyle' for those who wish to cling on to a religion or faith-based system which seeks to keep them marginalised – or about which, perhaps, they feel 'guilty' (Cornwall 2011:11).

For Susannah, then, Queer Theology is a contextual theology project which is 'broader than questioning heteronormativity, and it seeks to highlight and interrogate oppressive normativities of all kinds', not just LGB communities and theologies.⁴⁸ A theology of outsiders perhaps, or those on the periphery, which begs the intriguing question, 'if queer criticism and methodology are now absolutely mainstream in many university curriculums, is that something to celebrate, or might it mean that queer theory's capacity to critique and resist normativity is compromised?'⁴⁹

I want to turn from *queer* to the idea of *queering* and Marcella Althaus-Reid's 'Indecent Theology' which she describes as an 'out-of-the-closet style of doing theology' (2000). By theological queering, she writes, 'we mean the deliberate questioning of heterosexual experience and thinking which has our understanding of theology, the role of the theologian and hermeneutics' (2003:2). But Marcella goes beyond *queering* and offers a methodology of *indecenting*, 'a process of coming back to the authentic, everyday life experiences described as odd by the ideology – and mythology – makers alike [which] brings back the sense of reality, and not the commonsense reality politics denounced by Gramsci which constructs not only objectivity but subjectivity too' (2000:71). In this thesis, therefore, I want to take these two active gerunds, *queering* and *indecenting*, and apply them to a notion of a theology on foot, a liberating theology of landscape-human relations, a spirituality of the nomad and itinerant in the landscape – a mobile hermit, perhaps.

⁴⁸ Interview with 3:AM magazine 8 February 2014 <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/queer-theology-and-sexchatology/>

⁴⁹ Ibid

6.5 'Post-queer' theology

In *Indecent Theology*, Marcella's target is not only a liberation theology obsessed with class structures and oblivious to sex and sexuality but the Virgin Mary whom she describes as a 'rich white woman who does not walk' (2004:13). She writes of a 'vanilla Mariology' (2000:51) which 'does not risk anything because it does not come from women who love women enough' (2000:52). Marcella's dismissal of a liberationist Mariology is at odds with my perspective in which I argue that the rituals pertaining to the Virgin Mary represent an intimate communal celebration of the fecundity of nature: fecundity and desire, Our Lady of the Landscape, imbued with a sensual, erotic magic (Taylder 2004).⁵⁰

I think of theology, like geography, not as a linear concept with binary and polar opposites but a circular – or, perhaps, spiral one – which sometimes folds in on itself or returns to a point uncomfortably close to that which it set out to oppose. In this thesis I wish to develop ideas (Taylder 2004, 2009) of what I might tentatively refer to as a liberating 'post-queer theology' – or maybe 'post-queer *Catholic* theology' – which embraces *and* queers/indecents traditional aspects of Catholicism but doesn't, as it were, throw the baby out with the bathwater⁵¹. This isn't unexplored territory, even ignoring the camp elements of Anglo-Catholicism (partly because this research is grounded in Latin Catholicism but also because of its appropriation by often conservative (small 'c') homosexual men), Catholicism has a strong queer element which British Catholic scholars such as Loughlin (2007) have tried to reconcile with tradition.⁵² Whilst Loughlin's theology has been criticised for being 'strikingly apolitical' and 'on a plane safely distant from grassroots struggles and homophobic violence' (Cornwall 2011:244), others, such as Tonstad (2017) have reconsidered 'orthodox' discourses such as Trinitarianism and traditional Christian theologies of the family from a queer/feminist perspective.

6.6 Acompañamiento – a theology on foot

During the civil war in El Salvador, refugees fleeing the military's death squads were often accompanied by international religious and aid workers in a process of *acompañamiento*, deriving from Archbishop Oscar Romero's final pastoral letter which argued that 'one of the roles of the Church was to 'accompany the people' which he understood as the 'personal

⁵⁰ At a conference of the British and Irish School of Feminist Theology in 2003, Marcella and I shared a platform to discuss our opposing views on the role of the Virgin Mary. She later invited me to contribute to a book she was writing on Mariology (personal correspondence).

⁵¹ It might also be referred to as a 'have-your-cake-and-eat-it' theology

⁵² Personal experience with the gay Catholic movement in London in the late 1990s supports Stringer's (2000) assertion that there was a distinct whiff of misogyny within the gay male Catholic 'community' who wanted to play the priest leaving women to assume the role of altar servers.

evangelization of those Christian individuals or groups who have taken on a concrete political option' (cited in Berryman 1994:173).

The pilgrim is not, of course, a refugee, but she *is* a person out-of-place; a stranger in a strange land. And the pilgrim sets herself out-of-place in order to find her *space*, relating not only to the Turners' notion of liminality but solidarity and *communitas*, too. The displaced refugee communities in the department of Morazán, such as Ciudad Segundo Montes, created social structures that resolved the systems of patriarchal oppression they'd faced in their original settlements (Todd 2010).⁵³

For Marcella, 'Indecent Theology' is a *caminata* [hike], and to continue walking in this theological praxis requires us to forgo any claimed stability; we must be prepared to accept challenges and self-evaluation' (2004:64). Furthermore, 'Doing liberation theology ... is a style, a way of doing Theology which requires the liberationist to continue walking along that path. This theological journey involves taking risks' (2004:2). Thus the Camino becomes a *caminata*, a theology-on-foot which requires a 'different engagement with the bible' from a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion (Althaus-Reid 2004:12). The pilgrim-as-theologian engages in a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, like Christ on the road to Emmaus or, perhaps, Paul on the road to Damascus.

* * *

If rucksack-packing were an Olympic sport I'd be nowhere near the podium, let alone qualify for a medal. Despite decades of experience I just stuff it all in, without order or method. But that messiness serves as a metaphor too, the journey which follows will be haphazard and a bit all-over-the-place but such is life. Before I set foot on the *Camino de Santiago* I have another path to pursue, which *ruta metodológica* shall I follow? And does it only have to be one?

⁵³ But as Binford points out, these liminal changes, like those experienced by pilgrims on the Camino, didn't endure (2010)

LA RUTA METODOLÓGICA

You know what they say about driving instructors who, faced with a new student who's picked up all the worst habits from being taught by mum or dad? They sit behind the wheel of their Ford Mondeo rubbing their hands with glee, picturing an endless procession of twenty pound notes cascading into their bank accounts because it's going to take them twice as long to undo all the bad work done by bad teachers. Better the student as *tabula rasa*, a clean slate and fresh start.

There's an element of that to this chapter. Given the length of time I spent away from academia I suppose it's inevitable. I arrived at this point of the research with plenty of ideas based on previous experience in the field and with any number of thoughts as to how I might go about it. But, crucially, I lacked an academic framework within which to locate it so what follows is an outline of how I intended to go about research in the field, how I arrived at that method from previous experience and a discussion of the various approaches I planned to use.

I recall, many years ago, taking a bus ride into the snowbound Scottish Borders to attend a workshop on creating a 'dreamcatcher' and using it to 'trap' dreams and memories as a catalyst for writing.⁵⁴ In the morning we made our dreamcatchers, weaving threads and jewellery around a circular frame, then spent the afternoon searching for literary inspiration.

From the start of this project this was, crudely speaking, my approach. To seize the experience at the split-second of its emergence, before its intensity faded, dissipated or, as is generally the case, became blurred and buried by subsequent events. I wanted to adopt a methodology that would 'capture the moment' and not bear 'false witness' (Dewsbury 2003:1911); more than that, I wanted to give agency to the landscape and those who dwell in it. To give it, them and us a voice.

In the three years prior to undertaking the 'official' fieldwork I spent most summers hiking various Caminos and other long-distance trails in France and Spain. Although these were ostensibly for pleasure – or rather, a means of satisfying my ambulatory addiction – they also served as a sort of extended pilot study. Armed with a smartphone and Twitter account, I chronicled my journeys through posts on social media using and, when I could, blogging on my 'Ramblanista' website which I'd been using to experiment with what we

⁵⁴ Dreamcatchers are hand-woven structures roughly resembling a spider's web that, in Native American cultures, are traditionally used to protect sleeping people, usually children, from bad dreams and nightmares. As a symbol and practice dreamcatchers have been appropriated by New Age movements and healing communities for various purposes, from meditation to restorative therapies. See <https://nativenewsnetwork.posthaven.com/dream-catcher-cultural-appropriation>.

might call a hybrid form of writing intended to entertain and inform at one and the same time.⁵⁵ I reproduce examples of both below.



Fig 7: Tweet from the Camino del Ebro, June 2014



Figure 8: Blog from the Camino del Ebro, Thursday 19 June 2014⁵⁶

Two contrasting approaches, the brevity of the Tweet, which was then limited to 140 characters, versus the verbal extravaganzas of the blog, both playing to the audience in the form of 'likes' and views. Words for words' sake? Badley issues a crie de couer for

⁵⁵ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/>

⁵⁶ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/2014/06/gyrovagues-camino-jacobeo-del-ebro.html>

'playful and serious adventures in academic writing' (2015) and I'll develop his point later in the chapter but my desire was, as faithfully as I could, to represent the landscape the way I experienced it. Not just the visual, oral, olfactory or tactile but the multisensual, energised by feelings and emotions zinging hither and thither. There's so much going on, how can one possibly do it justice? That's a question for the methodology to address.

What emerged, almost organically, from three years of experimentation along the Caminos of northern Spain was the bare bones of a strategy, a synthesised process which was able to adapt itself to the plethora of physical, emotional and spiritual/religious sensations pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago arouses.

I say 'synthesised', what I really mean is a plurality of methodologies that doesn't simply flit from one to the other but brings them all together to offer a creative and imaginative approach to fieldwork in the realm of 'landscape experience'.

It's an approach others have already taken, a melange of mobile methods which seek to tease out and capture spiritual or emotional affect. Along with the deep topography of Papadimitriou's Scarp (2013), there's Wylie climbing Glastonbury Tor (2002) and walking the South West Coast Path (2005). The latter engages with the tension – perhaps even conflict – which emerges when walking for pleasure comes up against walking for purpose. And here I think of the forced exoduses endured by Salvadoran refugees during the civil war and also, having spent many months hiking the Pyrenees, the difficult and dangerous mountain crossings made by Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied France and then opponents of the Franco regime seeking refuge in the opposite direction (Todd 2010).⁵⁷ Wylie sets out with 'a particular intellectual agenda in mind' seeking to 'activate a space and time within which I might engage with and explore issues of landscape and corporeality' in the context of current trends in cultural geography and theory (2005:234). Indeed, at the end of the day, reflecting and writing up his notes in a bar, he expresses unease that the walk had taken on a 'rarefied atmosphere in which 'overly-reflexive and intellectual concerns are imputed to quotidian places and practitioners' (2005:244). Two points, then, are raised by Wylie's peninsular perambulations, both particularly relevant to this investigation specifically and research on walking (for pleasure) in general. One, to what extent are hikes like these academic exercises and what happens if, as was the case in this fieldwork, we fall out of love with the trail? Should we put purpose before pleasure? That would seem, to me, to undermine the ethos of the project. Two, how to avoid accusations of 'over-thinking'

⁵⁷These Pyrenean paths have been branded 'Routes of Exile' and marketed, sensitively, as tourist trails: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/spain/tourist-trails-mark-migratory-journeys-across-the-pyrenees. For accounts of these journeys see Stourton's *Cruel Crossing: Escaping Hitler Across the Pyrenees* (2014).

body/landscape encounters which appear to be, on the surface at least, spontaneous and ephemeral events.⁵⁸

On pilgrimage in general, Maddrell has explored 'faithscape, landscape and heritage' on the Isle of Man (2016) and, together with della Dora, Scafi and Walton looked at the relationship between landscape aesthetics, meaning and experience in Christian pilgrimage (2015). I wanted, in my methodological approach, to explore this notion of 'faithscape', how the landscape might be a vehicle for 'God's self-communication' and how 'sacramental encounters' might shape the way in which pilgrims experience space (Inge 2003:91) and create what Lidov (2008) refers to as a 'hierotopy'.

On the Camino specifically, Frey's *Pilgrim Stories* (1998) is probably the current 'go-to' reference for carrying out ethnographic research in this particular field, although it tends to focus on landscape as a by-product of pilgrim experience rather than a 'thing' in itself. Equally, Fedele's *Looking for Mary Magdalene* (2012) shaped my thinking as to go about researching 'ritual creativity' while this project was in its nascent stages. Equally influential, for its emphasis on performativity, was Gunnþora's thesis *Relating to Nature* (2007).

All these texts, and others, did some of the things I wanted to do but none did exactly what I desired. That wasn't wholly unexpected, the nature of this project – its commitment to a qualitative approach, its emphasis on subjectivity, its use of autoethnography, its understanding that both the landscape and the individual are unstable, constantly changing entities and its positionality vis-à-vis faith – required an approach which took all those factors into account and then did something more.

The Road to Santiago is paved with good intentions (Part One)

As I sat on the early morning train from Weymouth to Poole on 13 July 2016 I had a good idea as to what I was going to do over the following two months. The plan, inasmuch as there was one, was to insert myself gently into the pilgrim milieu via train and ferry for reasons I explained in a blog post at the time:

'I simply cannot bear to be plucked from one [landscape] and deposited, untimely, in another as if, like Hutton's unconformity, origin and destination share no relation with one another.

But the other reason, of greater significance when it comes to pilgrimage, is my notion of 'inserting' myself into the mindset of the long-distance walker. Of getting into the groove, not just physiologically, but emotionally, too. The world of the pilgrim, as Rousseau suggests, revolves at three miles per hour; four on a good day, with the wind beneath one's sails.

⁵⁸ Wylie's response is to acknowledge that the sensations which animate the hike and the hiker weren't an 'alien or fleeting façade obscuring some underlying, authentic landscape' nor a 'tissue of significations infusing an in-itself mute landscape with meaning ...' (2005:245). Which I translate, very loosely, as 'we are the sum of who we are and what we see (or experience).

Everything slows down to this speed: mind, body, spirit and soul. Even, dare I say it, the libido though I've not put that to the test – yet.

To uproot oneself and, in the space of a few hours, insert oneself in a quite different environment, culturally, linguistically etc, is, it seems to be, inconducive to the project which is to create a sense of enchantment and wonder. A time and place where strange things can and will happen. I'm the sorceress casting my hex: I will become the land, the land will become me. Subject, object: fused.

* * *

So here I am, in Orthez. It's 21:30, I left Weymouth yesterday on the 06:55 train, arrived here about 20:00. According to my calculations that's 37 hours and 5 minutes of travelling, including an overnight in St Malo, but every moment has been savoured; drawn out and lovingly indulged.⁵⁹

I intended to pick up the *Via Podiensis* in Arthez-de-Bearn and hike the 100 kilometres to St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, where the *Camino Francés* begins.⁶⁰ I wanted to use the first few days to relax and find my feet, to enjoy walking for the sake of walking and prepare myself for the task in hand. At St-Jean I'd run into the pilgrim hordes and that's when the research proper would begin. Based on experience from 2012, I anticipated falling into a 'family' at some point en route and conversation flowing 'naturally' through both the act of walking (Solnit's 'the mind at three miles an hour' at work again (2010:10)) and a shared, common purpose. In terms of the Camino, a 'family' is an informal pilgrim cohort, usually about half-a-dozen strong, which tends to congregate organically and spontaneously over time and distance. They may be individuals with no prior knowledge of each other or they may form around a nucleus of existing friends. For various reasons, families don't always make it together to Santiago, illness and injury or conflicting itineraries can lead to dissolution. Sometimes pilgrims gravitate towards other families, often they continue alone as existing social dynamics can tend towards exclusion.

But I was equally happy to talk with solitary pilgrims and dip in and out of conversations over time and distance. In fact as one who prefers to walk alone this would have been my favoured option but it was also the one that was least likely to provide a consistent flow of information. The reason for this is that 'families' tend to stick together on and off the Camino, often finding accommodation in the same albergue and sharing an evening meal and drinks. Individuals tend to have less-fixed walking schedules and might change their daily plans on an hourly basis, if, for example, an albergue is full, we don't like the place or we just want to carry on hiking. Even without allowing for extraneous circumstances, synchronicity between individual pilgrims isn't always easy to achieve and to get the

⁵⁹ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/2016/07/introduzcate-insert-yourself.html>

⁶⁰ The *Via Podiensis* starts in Le-Puy-en-Velay in the Auvergne and joins the two principal French pilgrim routes, the *Via Turonensis* and *Via Lemovicensis* in the village of Ostabat.

information I desired required establishing relationships over a period of days or even weeks.

The Pilgrim Office in Santiago Office publishes a wealth of statistics on a number of related-themes such as nationality, age, gender, departure point and motivation.⁶¹ These provide a usual contextual background but I was interested exclusively in qualitative data, delivered straight from the horse's mouth, as it were. I wanted to know how my fellow pilgrims felt about the landscape through which the Camino lead them. Did they feel a connect or sense of belonging? Did it inspire them? Did it move them, emotionally, spiritually or religiously? And did these sensations differ from one landscape to another, or change over time.

These, and many others, were just questions in my head, the data collection process would be necessarily informal and avoid orthodox techniques such as interviews. I anticipated, instead, that conversations would come into being on the move and that they'd be spontaneous, eclectic and often quite intense. They'd provide me with more far more information than was necessary for this project and I'd have to spend many hours sifting through it back home but I was already thinking beyond the thesis and too much is better than too little.

However, even 'informal' conversations are loaded with dramaturgical connotations and conventions in that I, as the researcher, am the co-producer of the conversation, even if I'm also a participant. Although, in theory, the conversation has the potential to go anywhere, it is unlikely to come out of nowhere and in order to solicit information I am, consciously or not, steer the dialogue in the desired direction. And at some point, sooner rather than later, I'll disclose my academic *raison d'être* and perform as a researcher, creating a subtle but perceptible shift in the conversational dynamic because once I flash my credential and repeat the magical letters 'PhD' some sort of authority is invariably invested in me. Whether I like it or not (see Berg 2008).

The urge to 'seize the moment' more or less restricted conversation to the hours of walking. There were several other reasons for this, in addition to the 'goldfish syndrome' I describe below. Remember, this was a personal, spiritual quest as much as it was an academic assignment and I wanted time to reflect on the day's events on my own. Neither did I want to interfere or compete with the post-walking socialising which, for many, is an integral part of the Camino experience. Such is the nature of pilgrimage that it can become a twenty-four-hours-a-day preoccupation.

⁶¹ <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics/>

En famille and with others, pilgrims often congregate in the evening to share food and drink and, on occasion, song. A frequent topic of conversations is comparing experiences and these often take a personal and/or spiritual turn. I had the idea of simply putting my Digital Voice Recorder (DVR) in the middle of the table and recording everything but this would generate long and complex discussions which would have been difficult to transcribe. It also raised the issue of ethics and informed consent and I wanted to keep these as uncomplicated as possible. Nevertheless, once relationships had been formed and confidence gained I left this open as an option.

In this way I hoped to achieve a balance between my thoughts, which I recorded on foot and often shared on social media, and those of others so that, having sifted through all the data, I could come to conclusions based on a *smörgåsbord* of evidence rather than a limited *hors d'oeuvre*.

When I set out from Weymouth I planned to go all the way along the *Camino Francés* to Santiago and beyond, following the *Camino Finisterra* to the where the land meets the Atlantic Ocean, the 'end of the world'. From there I hoped to take a train to the other side of Spain and spend a week in the Catalan Pyrenees to gather my thoughts and make sense of what happened in the field away from the field.

At the end of this chapter as a preface to the hiking narrative, I'll briefly relate what actually happened. It didn't turn out as planned but then again I wasn't really expecting it to. That was part of the methodological approach.

Methods on the move

'Mobile methods', writes Spinney, 'means different things to different researchers depending on where their interests lie'. Essentially, they seek to 'describe any attempt to physically or metaphorically follow people/objects/ideas in order to support analysis of the experience/content/doing of, and inter-connections between, immobility/mobility/flows/networks' (2015:232).

In response to Urry and Law's comments that new technologies and technological assemblages require that existing epistemological and methodological approaches to be reconsidered for fear of falling into a 'dead geographies' complacency (Thrift 2000), Spinney adopts the term 'go-along' for any method that 'attempts to (re)place the researcher alongside the participant in the context of the 'doing' of mobility (2015:232). Thus voice recordings, as mobile methods, address the problems of eliciting data on phenomena which arrive only during movement and are not only fleeting but might be

difficult or impossible to talk or write about because they leave only a transient trace of their existence (Spinney 2015:235).⁶²

Wylie's description of climbing Glastonbury Tor underlines the necessity of accounting for the ephemeral and the mundane: 'Dwelling, as a form of phenomenological ontology should ... be the milieu for material cultures and ways of being that are productive of multiple spatialities and temporalities, longstanding and momentarily, rural and urban, fixed and mobile, coherent and imaginary. In particular, it must enable the register of the transient and the fleeting as well as the enduring' (Wylie, 2003: 145). But in chronicling his experiences on the South West Coast Path, he adopts the customary habit of writing up his notes at the end of the day (2005). As I wrote in my blog about my experiences on the *Camino del Ebro*:

'It's often said – erroneously, I believe – that the memory of a goldfish lasts only three seconds. In this respect – and probably in this respect alone – they have something in common with the hiker and pilgrim who, I suggest, have a memory of span of between twenty-five and thirty kilometres. This might explain how, after spending a day toiling across the parched plains of southern Catalunya under a blistering sun, cursing the earth beneath my feet, I'd get up the following morning, pull on my boots and do it all over again. I'd already forgotten the curses I'd uttered – often quite loudly – when I lost the yellow arrows and my vociferously-expressed incredulity when, often out of the blue, I came across them again. I must have deliberately overlooked the cries of despair when, having crested a slope in the anticipation of finding civilisation on the other side, there was just more of the same – a dusty, bone-dry track lacing its way across an arid landscape in which fellow pilgrims – and, indeed, any evidence of human existence – were conspicuous by the absence. Solitude and sweat were my constant companions, along with the ever-present, sweltering sun'.⁶³

In the light of this experience, which I refer to as 'goldfish syndrome', I elected to eschew the traditional method of journal writing and rely on recorded thoughts and conversations to seize the immediacy. Once it was saved and filed it was safe from the influence subsequent emotions that might have contaminated the moment's 'purity'.

But I also wanted to adopt an approach which, having captured the moment's immediacy, its coming-into-being, could also represent how it evolves and unfolds when it comes up against affect and percept, these being 'that through which subject and object emerge and become possible' (Dewsbury 2002:439). It's from this conflict – 'configurations of motion and materiality' – that 'distinctive senses of self and landscape, walker and ground, observer and observed, distil and refract' (Wylie 2005:236). In my mind I picture this, in very simplistic terms, as a three-way process: human and non-human (in this case

⁶² Although Merriman is less enthusiastic, questioning why 'video recordings or autobiographical reflections on being in a physical environment are more effective at portraying, capturing or representing some-thing, some feeling about a situation, event or environment, than a written or verbal record (2013:10)

⁶³ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/2014/09/one-hundred-hours-of-solitude-walking.html>

the landscape) share an encounter which releases that fleeting moment of pure, effervescent and amorphous energy – which immediately – or rather after that half-a-second interval (Norretranders 1999) – becomes altered by materialities (the weather, for example) and non-materialities (the pilgrim's state of mind), like a newly-born child emerging from its mother's womb into the bright light of the world. This, in turn gives rise to feelings or sensations – for example, my sense that the Virgin Mary was present in the landscape.

The methodological task, therefore, is to try to record that intermediate stage and then represent it. As Spinney concedes, while 'go-along' approaches have the potential to deepen understandings of embodied mobile practice, there are limitations, not least the fact they offer only 'generalised sensory and affective accounts, telling us less about the separation of quality and intensity (feeling and affect), the levels of intensity experienced, and lacking specificity regarding the relationship between phenomena and feeling' (2015:238). So, to allow for the accumulation of time and distance, I extended Spinney's 'go along' into a 'going along' process, recording my thoughts and emotions whenever they 'popped up' in my head to provide an emotional and spiritual narrative that encompassed Chronos as well as Kairos.

Whose voice is it anyway?

I began with the premise that it's sometimes best to stick to the tried and trusted. My initial methodological approaches were based on experience from my master's research in El Salvador, given that it shared similarities with my current project in terms of dealing with spirituality and eliciting what might be sensitive information through informal conversations. I'd arrived armed only with a Dictaphone, a supply of blank cassette tapes and a letter of introduction from the Institute of Latin American Studies in London. Over the space of the following month I carried out a series of recorded interviews with a diverse range of individuals. I say 'interviews', most were extended, friendly discussions with generally empathic subjects and fellow travellers. I eschewed quantitative data preferring to capture the state of feminist theology in El Salvador 'in the moment' and using the words of my interviewees, although the evaluation and commentary were, of course, mine and done at a distance, back in the safety of my white European home.

Back in 2000 I was unaware of the concept of 'situated knowledge', rather I took for my methodological guidelines Maria Mies' programme for feminist research. In place of 'objective' research, she proposes 'conscious partiality', a research mode in which there is a 'partial' identification between researcher and research subject. This form of research 'enables the correction of distortions of perception on both sides and widens the

consciousness of both, the researcher and the ‘researched’” (Cited in Linkogle 1996:26). Mies posits a praxis-orientated research methodology in which the ‘view from below’ is given priority and the researcher is actively involved in transforming the status quo, in this construction, the researcher’s ‘bias’ [be it political or religious/spiritual] is actively expressed in the research process (Cited in Linkogle 1996).

The power relationships in my Salvadoran research were quite different from those I’d experience on the Camino. Devising a methodology for El Salvador, I was aware that fieldwork carries with it a set of assumptions regarding ‘the other’ and the researcher’s relationship to the subject/object of research. Not only the relative material differences between the researcher and the ‘researched’ but also because of the discrepancy between the status of women as subjects of research and the researcher herself. In effect, and in common with research which adopts an ethnographic approach: ‘the predominant mode of modern fieldwork authority is signalled: ‘you are there ... because I was there’” (Clifford, cited in Linkogle 1996:27).

Right from the start there was a danger that a hierarchy of voices would emerge, with mine at the top and those of my potential researchees/fellow pilgrims at the bottom. I’ve got a DVR and I’m going to use it, but to what purpose? I wanted to create an environment in which the landscape could speak for itself, rather than having me as its medium – a process which would run the risk of my testimony tainting its witness. Objectively, rationally, that doesn’t make sense – might even, to a cynic, seem a bit of a non-sense – but as I’ve already advocated for the landscape’s capacity for performative agency I can hardly shut it up in the place it matters most – out in the field. My voice became the conduit for the articulation of these intimate encounters, preserved for ever on a computer file then set down on a page: a fleeting dynamic suspended in time, like the frieze on Keats’ Grecian Urn.

In serendipity we trust

In terms of quantity the Camino de Santiago offers a potential huge resource. Not only of research subjects but research subjects who, from my experience and that of others (Frey 1997) are willing to talk about their experiences. In high season, with up to 500 pilgrims setting out from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port every morning, there appears to be an unlimited supply. And they’re there, more or less, 24/7. Not only that, the nature of pilgrimage – at least in terms of the Camino – tends to generate an ambience in which walkers come together, often for several weeks, and are willing to open up. They’re often there for a reason, in memory of a recently deceased loved one, for example, and the cathartic nature

of long distance pilgrimages – the Turners’ notion of *communitas* (1969:369), perhaps – seems to foster an atmosphere which, at times, can verge on the confessional.

The first day, up and over the Pyrenees, is a long slog, with no chance of breaking the journey before descending into Roncesvalles. Virgin pilgrims set out full of bonhomie but that begins to fade as exhaustion sets in. The views across the Pyrenees might act as a stimulus but by the end of the day the propensity to engage in social intercourse is much reduced, save for exchanging comments on wounds and injuries, as Crowley comments, ‘social experience is more environmental than personal or internal’ (2012:31).

In Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port everything changes and in 2016, even after only a few days on quieter roads, it came as a shock to the system. I should note here that in my day-to-day existence I dislike ‘small talk’ intensely and will suffer a long queue at the supermarket to use the automated tills rather than speak to another human being. Yet, as Driessen and Jansen contend, phatic communication is an ‘important if not central ingredient of working in the field ... which belongs to the systematic ‘hanging around’ which is still the core of fieldwork in spite of recent changes in fieldwork practices’ (2013:249).

But there is, I suggest, ‘small talk’ in the supermarket and ‘small talk’ halfway up a mountain in the Pyrenees. I’m unlikely to engage in a deep and meaningful conversation with the checkout operator in Waitrose but in the queue for a coffee on the Camino small talk can be the precursor to exactly that and, in several cases, this was my point of entrance.

There was, therefore, a huge degree of serendipity to my methodology. By Serendipity, or, perhaps, ‘happenstance’, I refer to ‘the art of making an unsought finding’ (Van Andel 1994: 631), as opposed to purposeful and deliberate discovery by experiment. And, given the nature of this research and my religious/spiritual leanings, the point at which ‘serendipity’ ends and ‘divine providence’ begins. But chance and serendipity are not one and the same thing. For Tilche and Simpson, serendipity ‘involves the accumulated knowledge to make the connections which appear serendipitous. In this sense, happy accidents are often seen as shaping the ethnographic encounter, as something that was previously hidden comes into view: pennies drop, ideas click, and so forth. In this light, the fieldworker is endlessly surrounded by potentially serendipitous moments, but only as she or he learns more of the relevant and contextualizing prerequisite knowledge can she or he understand these as serendipitous’ (2017:692).

'Chance', 'serendipity', 'divine providence'. Call it what you will, these, along with a good dose of 'hunch', were the means I relied upon to meet potential research subjects.⁶⁴ There was a certain degree of 'sizing them up', I was always keen to introduce the topic and nature of my research but I was also aware of the potential of coming over like a proselyting evangelist. The concept of religious experience had to be inserted tactfully and sensitively through improvisation and integrity, speaking in a way 'which allows of answers' rather than claiming a 'total perspective' (Williams 2000:5). As Scharen (2015) argues, to carry out theological research with integrity requires that theological conversations remain open to a God who does not withdraw the church from the world but who is revealed in the messy, intimate relationships of a church sent to and enmeshed in the world.

'Going Native': Participant observation and immersion on the Camino de Santiago

Putting to one side the term's colonialist connotations, the process of inserting oneself into the field and a group of previously unknown researchees has the capacity to cause trouble. It implies, initially at least, that there exists some kind of tangible or intangible divide between the researcher and the field and those therein. It also suggests that these barriers will be broken down over time and space but, perhaps, never be totally removed. Like the eccentric but brilliant teacher – Robin Williams in *Dead Poets' Society* – boundaries can be blurred but never removed in their entirety. They exist for a purpose, the hierarchy must be preserved.

Thus the researcher embarking on fieldwork on the Camino de Santiago might consider herself a 'reluctant pilgrim', never quite buying into the emotional, spiritual or emotional experiences of her fellow pilgrims. She maintains what Halloy (2016) refers to as an 'objectifying distance', which does not translate as 'cold indifference' but rather cultivates an 'epistemological attitude' and skills for 'empathic resonance'.

On the Camino I didn't 'go native' because I already was. Pierni questions the assumptions of the process and proposes an analysis 'discerning where relevant local categories from Western scholarly epistemologies and considering how they are produced in terms of experience' (2016:4).

To illustrate some of these issues in methodologies engaging with the ethnography of religion, I compare my pilgrim experience with that of Stefania Palmisano in becoming part of the 'Reconstructors in Prayer' (RIP) religious community in Piedmont, Italy. 'Some

⁶⁴ I use the term 'hunch' to draw together a disparate gathering of factors to be considered when approaching fellow pilgrims with a view to taking part in the research. These might vary from the pragmatic – language, for example, I could only converse meaningfully in English and Spanish – to the nebulous – did the person I'd identified look like the type of person who might want to converse meaningfully.

scholars', she writes, 'state that when researchers are willing to join in their hosts' religious and spiritual practices they gain a deeper understanding of the culture being studied'. However, she counters that 'this involvement entails a cost to the researcher, often in terms of identity struggle' (2016:106). Furthermore, as Palmer (2001) observes, experiencing altered states of consciousness or supernatural might jeopardise the objectivity of the researcher and her/his analytical frame.

But, here's the thing – and it's a key *thing*. I didn't have to make myself open or available to 'extraordinary' experiences in the sense that I had to reprogramme my spiritual mindset. That openness to 'extraordinary' experiences was present from the very start, from before the start, even. It's *always* there, doesn't just conveniently pop up when I'm in the field. Indeed, I anticipated, if not quite expected, 'extraordinary' experiences to occur in some shape or form.

And I find myself wondering about this 'cost'. Is it, perhaps, some form of sacrifice? Palmer (2001) advises ethnographers not to let themselves be manipulated by New Religious Movements, of which RIP, a syncretic Tantic Yoga/Catholic cult, might be considered one. But Palmisano does go native in that she alters her regular lifestyle: goes veggie, stops watching TV, gives up the booze and the fags. Her resistance to these new religious rules stems from her own, more orthodox, Catholic upbringing and, to a certain extent, I shared that resistance. Unlike her, however, I wasn't converted. But I was open to other, similar experiences and I'd have allowed myself to be taken into a deeper, more mystical Catholicism.

'Going native' is an overused cliché, even in the field of ethnography. It smacks of exoticism and the romanticised, mysterious 'other'. And even were it desirable, to what extent can the researcher breach the cultural, social, religious and linguistic gaps between herself and those she seeks to investigate? I'm reminded of my close friend who married a Mexican Mayan but, despite gaining a grasp of the language, was always treated as an outsider in the small Yucatan village where she and her husband lived.

But the barriers governing access to the world of the pilgrim are more easily opened; we live in a bubble but it is a closed rather than cloistered world. And maybe, rather like The Eagles' *Hotel California*, you can check out any time but once you're there it's difficult to leave – for some of us the Camino is with us 24/7, 365 days of the year. We leave our impression on the path, wearing it down with the incessant passage of rugged footwear, but the Camino leaves its mark upon us, too. It also, I might add, erodes any remaining vestiges of objectiveness; the path is straight but my thinking is wayward, meanders with the passage of distance and time.

In and out of position: the ‘problem’ of the Catholic Gaze

I’ve explained through autobiography and autoethnography my relationship with the Roman Catholic Church and the nature of that relationship – how it flirts with radical and orthodox Catholic theology and has a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary (Taylder 2004). Even if I wanted to, I can’t remove myself from the Catholic gaze nor replace it with lens of a different hue.

But my Catholic Gaze is only a ‘problem’ for ‘traditional’ neopositivist methods which specify a ‘strict dichotomy between object and subject as a prerequisite for objectivity’ and position the researcher as ‘an omnipotent expert in control of both passive research subjects and the research process’ (England 1994:81). I might as well confess here that I never really did feel in control of the research process – it felt that it was leading me rather than the other way round – and on the Camino all experiences are equal.

In theory, at least.

Whether in the field, in the office or in bed with our lovers, as researchers we remain, as Stanley and Wise point out, human beings ‘with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings and moods’ (1993:157). Fieldwork is a two-way, reciprocal ‘warts-and-all’ experience, in a constant state of flux. Who we are will impact on what we do but what we do will also impact on who we will become.

My Catholic gaze was personal, religiously-constructed way of seeing and experiencing, but I was keen to see how other, more ‘orthodox’ Catholics might perceive their surroundings. For a while I explored the idea of walking with an organised group of Catholic pilgrims, much in the same way as Fedele’s ethnography of alternative pilgrimages to French Catholic shrines dedicated to the eponymous saint and statues of the Black Madonna (2012).⁶⁵

Practical and ethical considerations prevented me from joining organised Catholic pilgrimages along the Camino. Many of these are aimed specifically at parish groups and very few make the journey in its entirety on foot. An indispensable element of my research is the notion of accumulation, over distance and time, to witness and record how pilgrims’ emotions and experiences change – or fail to change. Part of that experience is the ways in which the body and mind respond to the demands of hiking, day-in, day out: the response

⁶⁵ During supervisory meetings we referred to such groups as ‘mad Catholics’. The term isn’t at all pejorative, in some respects I tick some of the boxes myself, but rather to set those Catholics who walked the Camino to in the spirit of orthodox Roman Catholicism, to fulfil a ritual obligation, perform an act of devotion, to atone their own sins, live an experience of spirituality or implore a grace, a miracle, a cure. They are to be distinguished from those who walk without religious purpose: ‘sadly, though, there are more “pilgrims” making the walk for the sake of simply “making the walk” (sort of like hiking the Appalachian Trail) <http://catholicism.org/catholic-pilgrimage-a-spiritual-journey.html>

to pain and exhaustion, relief and exhilaration, calamity and the unforeseen. For the contemporary pilgrim, the search for spiritual enlightenment comes at a cost – which may be financial as well as physical – just as, for medieval pilgrims, the quest for redemption involved exposing oneself to the vagaries of The Way and putting one’s life potentially at risk. Nowadays the risk is less corporeal and, arguably, less existential, but it still exists; there’s an emotional and spiritual vulnerability – a kenosis – which I wanted to locate, explore and record over the passage of time and space.

But there was another, more personal reason, why I was reluctant to become part of such a group, besides the inevitable cost.⁶⁶ I’d assumed – perhaps, in hindsight, erroneously – that my personal understanding of Catholicism, feminist, queer and heavily influenced by direct experience of liberation theology in Central America, would be at odds with the dogmas of more orthodox Catholics. To what extent would I have to ‘come clean’ as a Catholic transsexual? Knowing full well that in the eyes of some my gender and sexuality might disqualify me from being considered a ‘Catholic’, which as part of my identity, is more important to me than either my gender or sexuality.

These were ethical as well as economic implications. Surreptitious, covert participation was not an option and I’d have to declare my academic interests. But in a thesis that is, at times, intensely personal, how much could and I should I have held back on my particular situation? If, for example, Camino conversations turned to matters of sexual morality? Could, should I have bitten my tongue? Ultimately, I trusted to luck and, I should confess, the Camino de Santiago’s spirit of generosity. My faith was rewarded.

Queering the field or queer in the field?

It’s hard to get lost on the *Camino Francés* but it’s all too easy to become disorientated in the unsettled and constantly-in-flux territory of queer theory which, by definition, can have no fixed or stable definition. Almost every academic exploration of the genre will begin with a section entitled, more or less, ‘what is queer?’ (Browne 2006, Browne and Nash 2010, Cornwall 2011). Does it pertain exclusively to the realms of gender and sexual diversity or is it, as Browne argues, located ‘in the radical requirement to question normativities and orthodoxies, in part now by rendering categories of sexualities, genders and spaces fluid’? (2006:886). Furthermore, from a theological perspective, how does one incorporate variation on the queer theme, such as Marcella Althaus-Reid’s ‘Indecent Theology’ (2000)?

⁶⁶ Most of the Catholic organisations who offer guided pilgrimages are US based and aim at the higher end of the market. For example, a seven day walking pilgrimage with Catholic Charities of California would cost US\$ 2000. Marian Pilgrimages (Ireland) runs a seven day ‘taster’ pilgrimage, cherry picking the most popular sections of the Camino.

Does this mark the emergence of a 'post-queer' strain or are we going round in theoretical circles already?

Queer theory originally came into being as a joke, argues Halperin, coined by Teresa de Lauretis to serve as the title of a conference that she hosted in February 1990 at the University of California (2003:339). Since then, scholars such as Sedgwick and Butler have dedicated much of their work to deconstructing hetero/homosexual binaries and questioning the normative use of these words and categories. To an extent, the root of the problem lies in the use of the word 'queer' itself. Is it to do with diverse sexual and gender orientations or is it about the 'weird', the 'unusual' or the 'strange'?

So many permutations, at times it feels like a queer methodology might be so nebulous, unsteady and beyond definition that, for want of a better phrase, it disappears up its own backside. If I strip my methodology to its nuts and bolts I'm left with little more than a participant observation process in which I walk with my fellow pilgrims, record both our conversations and my own, personal emotions, feelings and sensations. What, then, constitutes a 'queer' fieldwork methodology in terms of both geography and theology? And how relevant is to a research project that seeks to explore the spiritual affectivity of the Camino de Santiago an arena that many queer theorists might consider privileged and elitist and, perhaps more importantly, overwhelmingly heteronormative?

In a presentation to a joint postgraduate conference on theology and religion at the University of Exeter I explored Halberstam's concept of queer and time and space in terms of walking pilgrimage. Halberstam writes, 'queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction'; for Halberstam the queer *way of life* will 'encompass subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, forms of transgender embodiment, and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these wilfully eccentric modes of being ... part of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space' (2005:1).

I came to the initial conclusion that, in Halberstam's interpretation of queer time and space, the Camino is simply not *queer* but essentially *straight*. It is, for starters, a walk from an *A* to a *B* with no labyrinthine elements and though only a minority of those who make the pilgrimage do so for specifically religious reasons, it's still overseen by the Catholic Church and all its problematic baggage – Marcella's 'T'-theology (2003).

And yet, 'Lila', author of the blog *The Pace of Queer Time*, writes:

'I've been thinking recently that queer time for me is a self-declared snow day. A chance to stay in bed and explore ourselves unhindered by the

outside world. A chance to exist, to play — free from the hetero pillars of career, marriage, and lineage. A break from the ticking clock of larger society's notions of progression ... Queer time is a bushwhacked path, a sled's shaky trail, a web of continual reinvention in many different directions'.⁶⁷

In this sense, then, the Camino might be considered a queer path and place. Despite its *straightness*, a queer path and place that sets its own time and space. Here, normative time doesn't exist – indeed, time and space become indistinguishable, if not one and the same thing. How do we measure our walking day? In hours or kilometres? Over the space of the five or six weeks it takes to walk the *Camino Francés*, time slows down. Accumulated time and distance on the Camino are neither chronological nor sequential. Rather, they *become* more akin to the logarithmic Richter magnitude scale.

As I began researching and experiencing the *Camino de Santiago*, beyond the pedestrian motorway that is the *Camino Francés*, it was those issues, of queer time and space that began to influence the methodological approach. Which isn't to say that gender and sexuality weren't important, rather that I was drawn more to 'queer' as pertaining to the 'weird', the 'unusual' and the 'strange'.⁶⁸

I am the field, the field is me ...

From an autoethnographic perspective, it's important to note that when I carried out the fieldwork for my Master's dissertation I was in the process of re-engaging with Catholicism and, more specifically, Latin American feminist theology. It was also my second visit to El Salvador and I was falling head over heels in love with the country and its people, much in the same way that Julie Cupples did with Nicaragua over a period of several years. 'Shortly after starting my fieldwork', she writes, 'I began to experience a heightened state of awareness and stimulation' (2002:385). Her experience is much the same as mine, not least because I also 'cut my teeth' on Latin American politics in Nicaragua during the last months of the Sandinista regime. In El Salvador my state of awareness, like that of Cupples, was enhanced by 'the pleasure I gained from the way this familiarity played on my senses; the salsa or bolero track blaring out of the bus, the smell of fresh tortillas [*pupusas* in El Salvador], the historical traces of revolution in the landscape' (2002:385).

And in 2016 I was, of course, deeply in love with the Camino. But a question that was forever on my lips was 'does familiarity breed contempt?'. There are two issues to address. Firstly, I'd already walked the *Camino Francés* and even though it was four years

⁶⁷ <https://www.autostraddle.com/the-pace-of-queer-time-329459/>

⁶⁸ Although the 'weird', the 'unusual' and the 'strange' would also encompass gender and sexuality.

previously such was the impact of the experience that the memories were still fresh in my mind. Or rather I assumed so.

Secondly, in a piece of research that relies so heavily on subjectivity, would being enamoured with my field similarly undermine it? If the Camino committed a crime and the police asked me to confirm its false alibi would I tell lie to protect it? You bet I would! For a subjective approach to be academically effective, the researcher must build up a relationship of trust with her readers, many of whom might be of a cynical persuasion, the farther she shifts from detachment, the greater the suspicion that might be cast on her results.

Researching our passions is nothing new. When I teach 'A' level politics I engage in classroom discussions based on own political leanings and I argue them passionately – even with 17 year olds. But crucially, I make my ideological standpoint clear to my students, I can't imagine how 'flat' those discussions would be if I maintained the pretence of nonchalance and neutrality. The same idea applies to where I, as an academic, locate myself vis-à-vis my chosen field – because I did chose this field, even if it often feels that it chose me. Passion positions the researcher within the context of her research, not just in terms of her perspective but also the intensity of that perspective. One might equally argue that a lack of engagement might produce research that is little more than perfunctory and I think it would be difficult to animate the landscape without experiencing joy in being in its presence and in any case, for many pilgrims walking the Camino unleashes powerful emotions. We wouldn't supress them in the field, so any methodology has to work with them rather than reject them out of hand. And in case, this thesis presumes a relationship between pilgrim and landscape. Sometimes is does manifest itself as love but now and again that love turns to hate.

I know why the caged word sings ...

The 'dreamcatcher' analogy is a bit of a red herring. I certainly didn't want to ensnare any sensations that might arise during fieldwork, tie them down and take them home where they'd exist like thoughts in an airtight jam jar, eventually suffocate and die. Words breathe life into what would otherwise become dead geographies – decrepit theologies too – so we must think very carefully about how we use them. Papadimitriou does this in *Scarp* (2012), Marcella in *Indecent Theology* (2000); in removing the density of much academic writing both authors restore to words their freedom and allow them to perform.

So the writing up of what happened in the field is as important as what actually happened in the field. If the method of representing events, relationship, emotions, feelings and sensations fails to do justice to the experience then the whole project falls flat on its face –

as Arreola (2004) asked 'if writing is so critical to our craft, why, then, do we continue to insist that our students' theses and dissertations follow the too often tired formula of introduction, literature review, methods, data, and conclusion?'

Why indeed! Geography's cultural turn has acknowledged the importance of writing as a representational tool, particularly with regard to place (Ward 2014, Cook *et al* 2014). For Ward, the writing of these environments is a form of exploration and helps create a space for them in the popular, and geographical, imagination: the language of the author is a tool for doing geography, just as geography is a tool, or at least an inspiration, for doing writing' (2014:757).

As outlined in the Toolkit, the use of text to represent landscapes and the ways in which humans experience and encounter them is a key concern for this thesis. It's driven by a desire to move away from static and reductive representations to techniques which give full voice to the landscape and those who dwell within it. These ideas then influenced the way I went about research in the field, from the collection of data to its presentation and analysis and from the very outset – since before the research metamorphosed into an academic study – the style(s) I adopted to do this were crucial to its success.

A good third of this thesis takes the form of a narrative, a linear tale with a beginning and an end. When I'd transcribed my digital voice recordings I took on the mantle of storyteller so I adopted an appropriate style and tone. I'm not sure I entirely agree with Katherine Burlingame's assertion that in academia, 'storytelling is a fading craft' (2019:57), over the course of this research I've come across plenty of engaging and imaginative creative writing in the fields of geography and theology. But the increasing emphasis on being published (perhaps, one might suggest, for the sake of publication) has, as Burlingame suggests, had an impact on the quality of writing. Even as I submitted my proposal for this research, I had an eye on publishing a re-edited version as a commercial book and during the subsequent writing process there was a continuous conflict of style and tone.

My teaching style has always been to use an informal, spontaneous and entertaining style to ease students in to geographical concepts, to try to find a shared territory from where I can take the narrative and explore its possible consequences. As an example, when teaching A level geography, I use the car race scene from the movie *Grease* to preface a lesson on urban hydrology and the video of the pop band Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 1984 hit single, *Two Tribes*, to introduce 'superpower geographies'. It's a technique I've developed from writing: 'take the reader with you or they'll put down the book and never pick it up again' – the phrase applies equally to students and also to academic

writing. Laura Richardson admits to abandoning countless numbers of texts, half read, half scanned: 'I would order a new book with great anticipation—the topic was one I was interested in, the author was someone I wanted to read—only to find the text boring' (2000:818). This was something I wished to avoid at all costs.

I employ a similar method in this thesis. In the same way that creative strategies make teaching a pleasure, not a chore, I wanted to make the exercise an 'animating and enjoyable quest' rather than an 'anxiety-inducing task' (Badley 2015:211). The length of a thesis can be daunting and my first draft was in excess of 130,000 words, almost twice the length of my published novel which, due to less flexible demands of commercial publishers, had to be completed in a year. I'm not a planner, rather the sort of writer for whom the cognitive process occurs with the act of putting pen to paper, a spontaneous rather than 'mechanistic scientism' (Richardson 2000:818). In this I followed Dewsbury (2000, 2014) and Essén and Värlander (2013) who argue for a performative style which is less constrained by the formal demands of academic writing and adopts an embodied, open, passionate even sensuous or erotic style.

With this in mind, and drawing on my own experience as a published author (2006), I've adopted a narrative approach which is creative, playful and experimental. I do so for several reasons, to reflect the fact that, for all its profound moments, pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago is essentially a joyous and often frivolous activity, to reproduce stream of ideas, thoughts and sensation that pop up, apparently randomly, on the trail and contribute to the overall experience, not just of landscape but as a very specific mode of dwelling within it and to acknowledge that, as Roth argued, all writers, even academics, are playacting: 'I'm all for authenticity but I can't begin to hold a candle to the human gift for playacting. That may be the only authentic thing that we ever do' (1988:142). Far from being a flippant distraction, making ludicity part of the representation process is integral to faithfully reproducing the physical and emotional/spiritual reality of human/landscape encounters in the field.

What happens in the field should really stay in the field. Accordingly, in the hiking narrative that follows I've employed a conversational style that places the reader at my side as a fellow ambulatory pilgrim subject. I've tried, as much as is possible in an exercise such as this, to convey the changing landscapes and corresponding moods, the informality of the pilgrim experience, the highs and the lows, the good, the bad and the ugly, as they emerge and mutate over the course of seven weeks of constant mobility. I do this through a combination of reproduced posts and photographs on social media, blogs, voice recordings, ongoing commentaries, transcriptions of conversations with others and, at

significant moments along the way, observational ‘vignettes’. Here I pause and, metaphorically, pull an item of the tool kit from my rucksack to explore the moment, in the context of the moment, where and when it happened.

Ethical considerations

Faith is a sensitive subject but on the *Camino de Santiago* pilgrims tend not to shy away from talking about matters personal, spiritual or religious. Over time and distance, and as relationships are forged, tongues loosen, within the bubble people share stories they might not outwith it. Frey writes of an ‘openness fostered by an ethos of *communitas*’ (1998:235) and, like her, most of the pilgrims I spoke to curious about my research and keen to contribute.

The flip side of this utopian coin is that, paradoxical, vulnerability is also a serious issue. I have an abiding memory from 2012 when, arriving at the pass of O Cebreiro in Galicia, I overheard a family of Irish pilgrims talking about their deceased mother, in whose memory they were doing the Camino. And a woman with whom I shared a room who was literally – and I do mean *literally* – in between states. It’s a fine line to tread, this vulnerability is often so much a part of the Camino, our *raison de marcher*. Pilgrims walk to empty themselves out and make sense of the personal situation in which they find themselves by putting themselves in a ‘neutral’ physical situation.

But those conditions applied to me too, This wasn’t *just* an academic exercise, it was also personal journey which, at times, tested my own spirituality. Clearly my fieldwork proposals were passed by the University ethics committee and I adhered to all the standard safeguarding practises: written, informed consent, a full explanation of the project and what participation would entail, the opportunity to withdraw at any time and the option to remain anonymous. In doing so I followed Clifford’s ‘Prompts for contemplation and action’ which ask Before and during your research, have you considered the following? These categorised as consent, confidentiality, harm (physical and emotional), cultural awareness (particularly with regard to spiritual/religious sensitivities, dissemination of results and feedback (2008:39-40).

But if the Camino has an ethos, it also has a set of unwritten ethics to which, from personal and anecdotal experience, most pilgrims subscribe.⁶⁹ It’s what adds to the authenticity of the experience and makes pilgrims feel a little bit special, a badge of honour, if you like. Thus I’ve tried, as far as is possible given my own positionality in terms of my Catholic faith and relationship with landscape, to remain contextually neutral. By this I

⁶⁹ See also Frey (1998:235-256)

mean an acknowledgement that in presenting the views of others, either directly or indirectly, I am not and cannot be 'value free' but that on the Camino, where the researcher is also, at one and the same time, a pilgrim, the relationship between her and her research subjects leans towards the symbiotic. In my conversations with fellow pilgrims, they were as keen to tell me their stories as I was to hear them.⁷⁰ As one of Frey's participants urged of her: 'just tell us about ourselves' (1998:236). And that's what I, like her, set out to do.

Meet the Maltfriscans

I first encountered the 'family' with whom I spend several days on the Camino outside a bar, in the early stages, passing through the village of Zizur Mayor, 5km beyond Pamplona, the first principal city of the *Camino Francés*. I was walking with two American pilgrims at the time, Irene and Inés. Both were academics and Inés was a lapsed US/Filipina Catholic – though perhaps 'cultural Catholic' would be a better description. Sadly, they were on a self-guided excursion and would only walk as far as Logroño, some 600km short of Santiago.

The family was five in number, and in many respects they were the perfect researchees. Three were Roman Catholics, two, Chris (English) and Cornel (Scottish), were active members of a lay community, the Maltfriscans, an eclectic group of mixed ages, from newborn to almost 90, with many families, a smattering of clergy and a lively gang of young people and young adults'.⁷¹ Chris was on his own 'Inner Camino'. He was genuinely in earnest about this internal journey, though not to the extent that he was unable to gently and self-deprecatingly humour himself. It was a private journey but he was quite happy to talk about it, indeed, it was one of the first things he mentioned when we first met. The other member of the triumvirate was an English priest, also called Chris but who I shall refer to in the text as 'Father John' to avoid confusion.

I tried to pinpoint Chris, Cornelius and Father John on some sort of putative Catholic continuum. In my paper 'Our Lady of the Libido' (2004), following Spretnak's 'Missing Mary' (2004), I referred to the notion of 'Catholic Lite', a very English Catholicism heavily influenced by the Anglican trajectory the Catholic faith in the UK has followed since the Reformation. Our initial discussions seemed to put them in that category but over the days we spent together I got to know Maltfriscan spirituality much better. From a socio-political perspective it has much in common with Latin American liberation theologies and this

⁷⁰ One of Frey's research subjects observed that she, once an agnostic, 'had become more Catholic than those she studied' (1998:236)

⁷¹ <http://maltfriscans.org.uk/about-us/>

prayer from their website suggests that the Virgin Mary has not become an embarrassing oversight:

We learn and delight in her pure love and rejoice that Mary has chosen to be the mother of our family. We say a decade of the rosary each day for the community and the spread of God's Kingdom. In moments of parting or danger we ask her help:

*O Dear White Rose, whose petals enfold my heart,
draw me to the centre of your sweetness, Jesus.⁷²*

The 'matriarch' was Vera, a German woman in her early twenties with almost perfect English who appeared to have adopted the 'boys'. Or maybe it was the other way around? Vera appeared to calling the shots. She was, ostensibly, agnostic, and her reasons for walking the Camino were as much recreational as personal but she'd forged an emotional relationship with it. Or, perhaps, it had forged a relationship with her. The fifth member was Seyoung, a Korean Protestant, also in her early twenties who'd been dreaming about coming to the Camino for ten years and had quit her job as a speech therapist to do so. Seyoung was the most reluctant to talk about her religious experience, though this might have been a language issue.

Chris and Cornel achieved some notoriety on the Camino for their gregarious behaviour, it would be fair to say they were often heard before they were seen. On a night in Los Arcos the police were called to disperse a crowd of pilgrims singing (and dancing) in the plaza. They needed little excuse to launch into a rendition of Johnny Cash's 'Ring of Fire' but they also had an extensive repertoire of religious songs and hymns; on one memorable occasion, outside a bar in Castrojeriz, they shared an impromptu performance with two Italian women. But their Camino was as spiritual as it was frivolous and across the Meseta the intensity of their faith and its relationship to the landscape became clear. Perhaps ironically, Father John was indifferent about Santiago and both he and Cornel had planned only to walk as far as Castrojeriz. We continued as a quartet as far as Carrión de los Condes where illness struck. Seyoung had decided to continue at her own pace, Vera and Chris took a taxi and train to León to recuperate in a hotel.

I spent my final day on the Meseta with Hanzel, a Canadian Korean student with traditional Catholic leanings. Our encounter was both memorable and productive but sadly short-lived. She was walking at a different, more gentle, pace and had planned to intersperse her days of hiking with days of retreat. At this point, having traversed the Meseta, I was in the mood for speed.

⁷² <http://maltfriscans.org.uk/rule/>

Although, for the remainder of the hike, I encountered several other fellow pilgrims with whom I shared interesting conversations about my research, I never managed to forge the sort of relationships I had with the ‘family’ or Hanzel. I spent the remainder of the journey as a solitary pilgrim and, increasingly, gyrovague. The landscape of Galicia lacked the performative intensity of that of the Meseta, the mountains, or the hills of La Rioja. It began to feel rather anticlimactic.

The Road to Santiago is paved with good intentions (Part Two)

Browne and Nash preface their introduction to ‘Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science’ with the subtitle ‘What we thought this book would be about’ (2010:2). A similar sentiment pertains to this chapter because I never made it to Santiago de Compostela. At least not along the *Camino Francés*. I missed my Camino ‘family’ and once it became apparent that our respective itineraries would keep us several days walking apart I fell into an increasingly sullen mode. I was dreading arriving in Sarria, the point from which many pilgrims start to walk the final 100km required to qualify for their *Compostela*. More than that, my preoccupation was not with Santiago de Compostela but the *Ruta Dragonte*, the location of my purported divine encounter in 2012. It was a day of pure enchantment and after that, as pilgrim numbers increased, I lost my mojo. I passed through Sarria on the worst of days, a Thursday in high summer and shortly afterwards, in Portomarín, I quit the Camino.

Or rather, I quit the *Camino Francés* and took the train to Porto from where I set out along the 280km *Camino Portugues*, finally arriving in Santiago some twelve days later. Despite my alleged indifference to St James, it was important that I get there.

In a sense, this lack of structure was part of the structure, I’d kept all options open and allowed for every possible permutation of an ending – even no ending at all. And the methodological process didn’t end when I finally sat down at a desk and started sifting through my data. How I transcribed, interpreted and wrote about data about mobility and place wasn’t impervious to the influence of mobility and place; where I was – variously Exeter, Somerset, Catalunya, Vienna and finally Dorset – certainly influenced the words that finally came and the style in which they appeared as text. So a project that was born of nomadism finished in much the same vein.



Figure 9: Signpost at Condor ferry terminal, Poole, UK

Hold on to your hats! Are you ready for action? We've talked the talk, now it's time to walk the walk. The gangplank, first of all, to board the ferry, cross to Guernsey. Then the onward connection to St Malo. The sun is up, the sky is blue. What could possibly go wrong ...

PART THREE: PRAXIS

An accompanying note

The hiking narrative which follows adopts an approach which intersperses the accumulation of time and distance (Chronos) with moments of lingering contemplation (Kairos) in the form of vignettes. The latter occur at significant points along the way, whether in terms of specific landscapes or personal experience, where I pause to reflect on the experience *in situ*. These field reflections, scrutinised with the analytical tools I had immediately to hand in my metaphorical rucksack, represent a sort of halfway house between the moment occurring (witness) and the process of my making sense of it (testimony). I do this to acknowledge that the process of ‘making sense’ of events and experiences is, in itself, ongoing and in a constant state of flux, never quite reaching a settled state.

Based on transcriptions of thoughts recorded in the field, and in accordance with the ethos of this research, the tone is informal, conversational and spontaneous. I would like you, the reader, to exercise your imagination and put yourself in my shoes – or rather boots – as we embark on a one thousand kilometre trek across three countries and experience its highs and lows at my side. I would like you to *feel* the Camino with me.

As such the mood is necessarily personal. Within the practical confines of putting voiced emotions into words, I’ve tried to keep the narrative as ‘warts-and-all’ as possible and have exercised no censorship to present myself in a better light. I therefore apologise in advance for any expletives that arise in the course of the journey, these have been left in the narrative not for gratuitous shock value but to accurately reflect the tension between self and landscape in the field and *in situ* and *in the moment*.

With that in mind it’s time to pull on the rucksack and lace up our boots. We’ve an early morning train to catch.

PROLOGUE

Artix to St-Jean-Pied-du-Port



Figure 10: Route map, Artix to St-Jean-Pied-de-Port

In the beginning was the walk ...



Figure 11: Signpost in Arthez-de-Béarn

... and the walk became flesh

The purpose of these first few days on the trail was to relax and reflect whilst, at the same time, try to disentangle some of the thoughts that had been going around my head during the previous months. To this end I deliberately 'inserted' myself into physical and emotional environs of the Camino environment through 'slow' travel.⁷³ Whenever I make this journey I'm reminded of MacDuff informing Macbeth that he wasn't born of his mother but was from her womb 'untimely ripped'. To be clear, I'm not comparing train travel to natural childbirth but I suggest that flying from, for example, London Luton Airport removes the traveller, almost surgically, from one culture to another with an unseemly haste. Inspired by a railway journey between Milton Keynes and London, Massey suggests that 'as you travel you are part of the constant process of the making and breaking of links . . . of yourself, of London . . . of Milton Keynes, and thus of space itself' (Massey 2005:118).

Journeys across physical space afford the traveller emotional space. The 'slowness' fulfils a function similar to that of pilgrimage in that it can signify 'a very personal endeavour aimed at introspection and self-transformation' as well as being 'a meta-critique and an indirect subversion of the existing social order' (Howard 2012:12). It entails reasserting control of the rhythms and tempo of one's own life and entertaining an element of chance. Furthermore, the mesmeric *thadakh-thadakh* of the slow train weaves its enchantment, enters the carriage and lulls the willing passenger into its spell. *Thadakh-thadakh* and the morning sun flickering through the glades and glittering on the rippling water, the imagination slips free from its shackles and starts to play tricks with perceptive faculties. The experiences and emotions accumulated during the long, solo hours on the Camino begin to filter into daydreams and reverie.

And the notion of the 'geographical imagination' was much in my mind during this voyage, in as much as it relates to the role of landscape in influencing the imaginations of those who journey through it: the relationship between (slow) motion and emotion. In the introductory chapter to 'Travel and Transformation', Lean, Staiff and Waterton argue that 'rather than being treated as a surreptitious and peripheral component of the physical travel experience, the imagination is a facet of travel that warrants careful examination in its own right' (2014:11).

And so I relate below, on a day-by-day, blow-by-blow basis, the thoughts and events of those first few days along the Camino and, at the same time, attempt to use these initial experiences to illustrate the themes I've discussed when assembling my 'toolkit'.

⁷³ I acknowledge that in the age of high-speed train services, taking the TGV or AVE is hardly 'slow' so I use the term in a relative context and in comparison to air travel.

HOW DOES IT FEEL?

Day 1: Artix to Maslacq



Figure 12: Route map, Artix to Maslacq

The first steps. No longer, as they were back in 2012, tentative but, even though I'm now more veteran than virgin, the anticipation and an almost childlike sense of excitement is still there. It's Friday 15 July, I have the best part of two months uninterrupted walking ahead of me. But the luxury of time, perhaps like the luxury of money, tends to make one temporally avaricious. Two months really isn't enough, already I'm craving more. It's only day one yet I've already committed one of the Seven Deadly Sins, by the end of the hike I'll have collected the whole set.

The allure of time is enhanced by the deep pull of space. From the station at Artix it's ten kilometres to the yellow-arrowed road – the *Chemin de Saint-Jacques du Puy* or *Via Podiensis* – at Arthez-de-Béarn from where it's 88 km to the start of the *Camino Francés* at St-Jean-de-Pied-de-Port. The kilometres rack up like dollar symbols in the eyes of a cartoon character – over one thousand of them! Distance matters. I desire to consume it voraciously.

And looming on the southern horizon lies the first distraction, the Pyrenees, still flecked, in their loftier flanks, with flashes of ice and snow. They've already secured my gaze and, if I were walking purely for pleasure, I think my feet might have followed my eyes and pursued the GR11 Trans Pyrenean trail rather than plodding on to Santiago. For the first

four days the mountains dominated the southern horizon, creeping closer and closer with every kilometre and even when I'd crossed them, like Orpheus, I turned to look back.

The Gare de Artix made for an unusual starting point, in many respects the anti St-Jean-Pied-de-Port. No fanfares or flourishes, just me and my rucksack against the routine banalities of the morning which was, to all extents and purposes, just like any other.



Figure 13: Tweet from Artix Station, 15 July 2016

Except, here in France, it wasn't. Overnight a truck had been driven into crowds of Bastille Day revellers in Nice, killing 86. It wasn't just an assault on France, it was a calculated assault on *Frenchness* and what it means to be French.

I've witnessed the collective national and international responses to these sort of 'terrorist' events before but this resonated at a personal level. It felt like an attack on my own liberal and – I'll come clean here – Eurocentric values. I've discussed elsewhere how the *Camino de Santiago's* renaissance was predicated, to a certain extent, on its status as a contemporary icon of European heritage, this has always been, for me, central to its attraction. The political significance of the Camino has shifted significantly over the past fifty or sixty years. Once claimed by Franquismo as a symbol of *Hispanidad*, based upon an amalgam of national identity, Catholicism and expansive nationalism, it's since been embraced as an emblem of European unity (Talbot 2016). Setting out in the summer of 2016, barely two months after the UK EU referendum, this gravitational pull was exerting itself to the exclusion of all else. It wasn't enough to be simply *out* of the UK and *in* continental Europe, I had to walk *across* it. As if the act might not just consolidate my 'European-ness' but might cause me, somehow, to *become* (even) more 'European'.



Figure 14: 'Hikers!' Signpost on Via Podiensis near Artix

One of the first items in the toolkit was the notion of dwelling and the process of moving from 'being' to 'becoming'. I made sure it was packed at the top of my rucksack as I knew I'd have to make frequent use of it; in the end I shoved it on one of the hip-belt pockets so I could pull it out without stopping.

I'm rather taken with the warmth of Cloke and Jones' description of dwelling as 'the rich intimate togetherness of beings and things which make up landscapes and places and which bind together nature and culture over time' (2001:651). But you know what I'm going to say, definitions are problematic, things don't like being tied down. Descriptions are more fluid but even here I find myself seeking recourse to the inevitable inverted commas: what do we mean by 'dwelling' in this context.

For example, Kate Moles suggests 'the rhythm and practice of walking leads to a different understanding [of dwelling] from a static one.' Through living in the landscape, it becomes part of us, just as we become part of it – haven't we heard that somewhere before? 'Through walking we become a different part of the landscape, not a dweller but a *walker* (2008:1 my emphasis).

Moles is quite right, we *become* the landscape, but even that isn't a constant. The nature of walking, even on a long-distance pedestrian pilgrimage – perhaps *especially* on a long-distance pilgrimage – is in a constant state of flux: day-to-day, hour-to-hour. No stride is like any other, it's an infinite experience which is why, I think, walking is a liberating act. But it's also inherently unstable. The way we walk is impacted and influenced by, amongst many factors, weather, energy levels, topography and external events – apparently mundane matters such as the latest family news from home. The 'bubble' that is the Camino serves to take the edge of some of these but its intensity can accentuate others.

I wondered what might have happened had I been on the *Camino Francés* when the Nice attack happened. Would it have resonated as much or would it have simply bounced

off the bubble? As a pilgrim professing a spiritual/religious motivation, it often occurred to me – still does – that this profession of faith was both insular and exclusive. Far from stimulating critical enquiry, might the experience have the opposite effect and merely entrench existing attitudes? This is, after all, my comfort zone.

I wavered, but only momentarily, and put to the back of my mind the notion that in context this pilgrimage was ultimately futile. Despite the events of the previous evening, in the forecourt of Artix railway station life went on. I braced myself and set forth; like Captain Oates, I might be gone some time.



Figure 15: Hallelujah! I'm on the 'Way': signpost neat Arthez-de-Bearn

About ten kilometres from Artix, beside a chapel, I encountered my Yellow Brick Road. What a difference a stride makes. I have, on more than one occasion, high up in the Pyrenees, stood with one foot in France and the other on Spain. Here, the transition from the D263 to the GR 65 – the *Chemin de Saint-Jacques du-Puy* – was phenomenological rather than territorial. It was, in a sense, reminiscent of the popular nineteen-seventies children's cartoon, Mr Benn in which the eponymous hero enters a fancy dress shop clothed in standard suit-and-bowler-hat civvies and emerges via the changing room dressed as anything from a cook to a clown. In each episode, in a different guise, Mr Benn will embark upon an adventure from which he will return, inevitably, triumphant.

In the same way, once I'd set foot on the Camino I, too, entered a different world that was, in its own way, as magical as Mr Benn's. It was the presence of the accoutrements that set this 'walking space' apart from its secular counterparts; the transition from the red-and-white flashes to the yellow arrow and the scallop shell.

What a difference a step makes: the pilgrim 'experience' stakes out its territory formally and informally. Further on down the road this signage will become a cacophony of Camino-related graffiti, shouting progressively louder to attract the pilgrim – and her money. Here, among the gentle foothills, still a respectable shade of pastoral green even in the height of summer, it's more of a comforting whisper, like the soothing tones of the Lady Galadriel in 'The Lord of the Rings': 'all is well with the world and you, Siân Lacey Taylder'.

AS SWIFT AS A HAWK THROUGH THE TREES

Day 2: Maslacq to Navarrenx



Figure 16: Route map, Maslacq to Navarrenx

It was surprisingly easy to slot into a rhythm. Some days it just ‘clicks’, others you have to work for it and, just occasionally, it never happens at all. And this ‘getting into the groove’ is integral, though not absolutely essential to, the landscape ‘performing’ or animating itself. The earth beneath my feet slipped by, as if I were on a gymnasium treadmill, I simply put my head down and walked and walked and walked. I kept my digital voice recorder tucked inside my rucksack, I walked, therefore I was.

In terms of the unadulterated, uncomplicated joy of walking, day two was perhaps the most enjoyable day of the entire journey. Sure, the Pyrenees would touch me in places no other landscapes are able to reach and it lacked the physical and emotional intensity of, for example, my return to the *Ruta Dragonte* but I was reminded of the words of Rousseau, ‘I do not remember ever having had in all my life a spell of time so completely free from care and anxiety as those seven or eight days on the road’ (Solnit 2001:19).

ET IN ARCADIA EGO: LOOKING AT LANDSCAPE THROUGH ANGELA CARTER'S EYES



Figure 17: Pastoral landscape between Maslacq and Navarrenx

'There have always been two types of arcadia', writes Schama, 'shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and a place of primitive panic' (1995:517). And these two Arcadias exist side-by-side, in and on top of each other; the innocent has the capacity to suddenly turn nasty. As a child, Schama's mundane suburbia suddenly opens up – literally – to reveal a putrid, refuse-infested air-raid shelter; the 'languid nymphs and shepherds that populate the pastoral landscapes of the Renaissance' disguise a less pleasant reality, the original Arcadians penchant for bestiality. What you see ain't necessarily what you're going to get, beneath the verdant fecundity of rustic idyll, the earth is soaked in blood. Behind every beauty there's a beast.

I want to address this issue now, whilst the pilgrimage is young, because over the next stretch of the narrative, 'strange' things might start to happen, things that don't usually happen in a doctoral thesis. Angela Carter's landscapes are as gothic as they are pastoral but though imbued with the quasi-fantasy of magical realism, they're all quite real (Katsavos 1994). For Margaret Atwood, Carter's landscapes are 'macabre' paintings, filled with gruesome and melancholy prose. 'Not for her Hemingway's clean, well-lighted place, or Orwell's clear prose like a pane of glass. She prefers instead a dirty, badly-lit place, with gnawed bones in the corner and dusty mirrors you'd best not consult' (Lee 1997:146).

These are enchanted landscapes of shady nooks and crannies in which everything is not quite what it seems. But they're subversive, too. In the same way that Carter plays with and reinvents the conventions of tradition by using tradition itself so the landscape harbours tricks and snares to lure the unwary perambulatory intruder into a liminal state:

'The Woods enclose. You step between the fir trees and then you are no longer in the open air; the wood swallows you up. There is no way through the wood anymore, this wood has reverted to its original privacy. Once you are inside it, you must stay there until it lets you out again for there is no clue to guide you through in perfect safety; grass grew over the tracks years ago and now the rabbits and the foxes make their own runs in the subtle labyrinth and nobody comes.' (Carter 1981:96)

Carter's heroes are 'victims' in name only; unlike their fairy tale counterparts they have agency and, as with Beauty in 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon', they enter into traditional, gendered fairy tale scenario of their own volition.

What I'm trying to get at here is the notion that the pastoral landscape coaxes us into belief, a belief that extraordinary experiences might take place. It utilises a deft sleight of hand to play games with our psyches and ignite our imaginations. A walk in the wood becomes a flight of fancy and, hiking through this pastoral scene I felt like one of Angela Carter's protagonists; I was willing to be duped, maybe even wanted to be duped because that was, in a sense, what I was here for.

DRY COUNTY

Day 3: Navarrenx to St-Palais

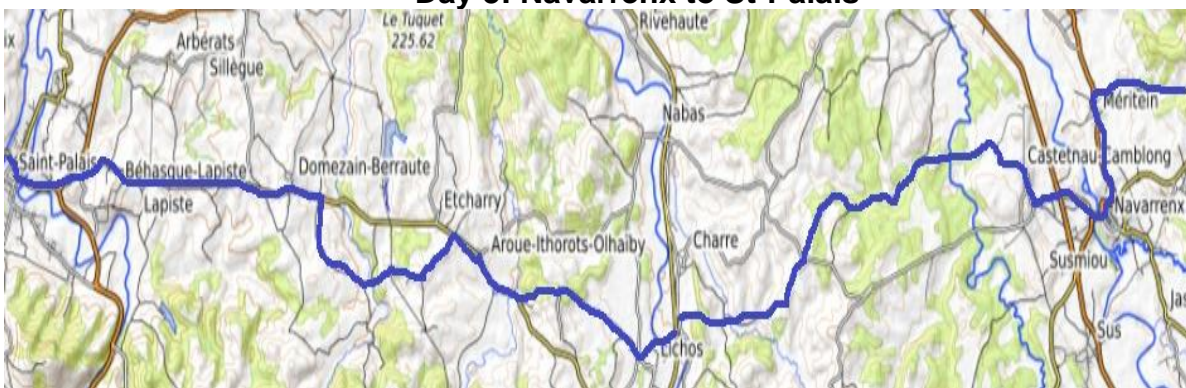


Figure 18: Route map, Navarrenx to Saint Palais

Remember, this route and the landscape was all new to me. Perhaps that's why I walked with the wide-eyed innocence of child, expecting the unexpected at every fork and turn. This naiveté is often present at the start of a long walk, a state of mind fostered by the romantic notion of the freedom of the road. The pilgrim, heady with the sense of freedom, is already 'betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life' (Turner 1974:273). But, as Janis Joplin sang, 'freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose', bringing with it a fresh set of problems such as uncertainty, lack of structure and risk.⁷⁴ Liberated from the constraints of quotidian, some pilgrims attempt to recreate a routine which is now delineated in space as much as time: 'we'll stop for a coffee and *bocadillo* after a couple

⁷⁴ 'Me and Bobby McGee', written by Kris Kristofferson, sung by Janis Joplin (1969)

more kilometres; ‘we’ll break for lunch in the next village; ‘let’s try to finish by early afternoon, before it gets too hot’.

Whilst medieval pilgrims faced a number of dangers – from wolves to marauding bandits – jeopardy on the contemporary Camino takes on a more mundane hue, the principal concern being the availability of a bed at the end of the day. The contemporary Camino, therefore, has smoothed the sharp edges of precariousness and rendered it virtually risk-free. Not only that, the contemporary Camino goes out of its way to cater for the contemporary pilgrim’s needs, from foot massages to rucksack transportation services to bespoke self-guided tours. As one who preferred the relative comfort of *pensiones* to the communal cut-and-thrust of the *albergue*, I mention this without judgement or prejudice, rather as an observation as to how the Camino – or at least, the *Camino Francés* – has become a relatively safe environment compared to, for example, the *Camino Olvidado* in Spain, which I mention below.

If we shave the ‘rough edges’ off the hiking routine, how much does this affect the landscape experience? Similarly, if we walk amongst and within crowds, does that, too, influence how we perceive our physical surroundings? Does it depend on the hiker’s character – introvert or extrovert, for example – or do other, external factors also intervene? Solitariness in the mountains on a sunny summer’s day might be pleasant but in mist and snow encounters with others tend to be reassuring.

The answers to all these questions are not, of course, binary but in a constant state of flux, changing with the accumulation of time and space. If walking is, as Rousseau suggests, an act of liberation – savagely noble – then what happens when we ‘tame’ it?



Figure 19: Claude Glass

The Claude Glass was a device popular with landscape ‘connoisseurs’ and painters from the late seventeenth-century through to Victorian times. It consisted of a small convex mirror bound in a carrying case and had the effect of removing the subject reflected in it

from its surroundings, reducing and simplifying the colour and tonal range of the scenery to make it look like a painting. It was also much appreciated by wealthy travellers embarking on the 'grand tour' of Europe, crossing the wild Alpine passes *en route* to the more pastoral landscapes of Tuscany. Whilst the latter landscapes, being milder, cultivated and peopled, were considered scenes of 'beauty', the former were 'sublime', a word conveying both danger and awe. The response of many of these early tourists, fearful of the savagery of the mountains, was to view the landscape through the 'lens' of the Claude Glass which effectively softened and framed it, as though it were a painting.

The mushrooming of the infrastructure and attendant services on the *Camino Francés* has had, one might suggest, a similar effect. This isn't, I reiterate, to denigrate the current experience rather to entertain ideas as to the myriad of ways in which a landscape may be deemed to perform to those who walk through it. And also to raise the question, what happens if the landscape fails to perform? Or, if we take it as read that if there is no such thing as a 'featureless' landscape, can there equally be no such thing as a landscape which doesn't perform? As Landscape can never be neutral, what happens when it performs in a manner that might be considered 'malign' or threatening? By means of illustration, I want to refer to a previous Camino experience from the summer of 2015 when I hiked part of the *Camino Olvidado* ('Forgotten Way').

I spent a week or so on the trail, which runs from Bilbao to Ponferrada in Galicia, where it joins the *Camino Francés*. The contrast between the two trajectories couldn't be more striking, like stepping off the London Orbital at Friday afternoon rush hour and following the a thin streak of a path that's choked with thigh-ripping brambles.

RAMBLANISTA

WALKING WITH ATTITUDE

***That was the summer that was: TransCantabrica - Stage Four, Areatza to Espinosa de los Monteros*⁷⁵**

I still remember the first time the landscape - my own, intimate, landscape - failed to 'perform'; remember it as though it happened only a couple of weeks ago.

It was, in fact, the long hot summer of 1988, West Dorset. The plan was to walk from Maiden Newton up to Powerstock Common and sleep out amongst its ancient, coppiced woodland. For reasons I still don't quite understand, Powerstock Common and its environs have always been a sacred, sensual space: ethereal, enchanting and fizzing with performative vitality. It was, and still is, a place of excess energy.

⁷⁵ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/2015/11/that-was-summer-that-was.html>

But that day the landscape failed to perform. We circled each other not like lovers in the throes of a tiff but as indifferent exes for whom the passion was all spent. Depression set in; I curtailed the walk and found the nearest pub before heading home to Bristol.

It was a long time ago but I can remember it as clear as yesterday. I was dejected, worried that the thrill had gone and would never return; that the landscape and I would exist only in the past tense.

That wasn't, of course, the case. Indeed, some twenty-seven years later I find myself two-fifths through a PhD exploring this intimate, spiritual relationship with landscape, though more in Spain than Wessex. As relationships go it comes with a hefty price-tag, but still we soldier on, together forever, as Rick Astley once sang.

A couple of years ago, when I came across Nick Papadimitriou's eclectic Scarp, I discovered I wasn't alone in experiencing this fleeting ambivalence - and for me, it was the ambivalence that drove me close to despair Papadimitriou (2013:235): 'The sense of triumph I'd felt the previous day had evaporated. I felt ill and old; my head ached, my thoughts diffused; I wondered what I was trying to achieve. Looking out at the landscape I even doubted Scarp's existence' (2013:235).

Although the *Camino Olvidado* is one of the more esoteric, less frequented routes, it's also more 'bona-fide' than most. It had always been on my mind but to follow it though not necessarily all the way to Santiago. At Sodupe I encountered my first yellow arrow in a fortnight, a smile burst out all over my face. Simple pleasures, and simple minds.

But the next few days weren't particularly happy, the landscape and I were at odds with one another, drifting in and out of love. Worse than that, there was an antipathy which slowly metamorphosed into darker, more malevolent emotions as I drifted through Balmeseda in the drizzle and then passed into the emptying-out hinterlands of Castille y Leon. Here we might say depression set in; the path, though reasonably well-signposted, followed the backroads, through vacant industrial lots to the futile barking of dogs protecting homes whose owners might never return. The valley proceeded westwards, the gradient gently increasing; to the north and south rose scrub and scarp, dry to the bone and, to my mind, hostile to anyone who might attempt to deviate from the road. It was 1988 all over again, the landscape trying to shrug me off.

The despondency deepened and then, as the track wandered away from the main drag into a landscape of sparse and spartan settlement I was overcome by a sense of isolation; for first time in as long as I can remember, I began to feel vulnerable. An irrational fear precipitated by a landscape in which neither I, a pilgrim, nor the path itself, were a natural fit. There were villages, right enough, but I passed through them with a blink of an eye; it

was a rolling, agricultural scene dotted with woodland but arid and inhospitable. Perhaps it was because there were *albergues* or hotels in which to stay; perhaps it was because I was reluctant, as a woman of a certain age, to make my first wild camp. I was carrying a tent and all the necessary accoutrements, why should I have been phased by a night under the stars?

As darkness beckoned I set up camp by an old church in the tiny hamlet of Iris, yet still I was too nervous to pitch my tent and I slept under the stars in a sleeping bag on an inflatable mattress. The following day I lost the path and, consumed by anger, risked minor injury negotiating a steep cutting which led back to a main road.

Everything and everyone was against me now. A cafeteria that served only coffee and nothing that might have constituted a much-needed breakfast, a surly sneer when I needed a smile. The terrain eased out into a dry, intermontane valley through which stormed a major highway. The sun made its presence known, the heat cranked itself up and the track just went on and on and on. I carried on swearing at inanimate objects until I arrived at Espinosa de los Monteros, a bit of a one horse town aggrandised by being pretty much in the middle of nowhere. And when I got there, guess what? That's right, it took me the best part of an hour to find the hotel I'd booked, for which I'd forked out a girt, humongous 62€. If it didn't get better soon, I'd be on my way home.

Home? Who on earth was I trying to kid? I didn't have a home.

It did, of course, 'get better soon'. It always does and it always has. I refer, again, to the 'goldfish syndrome', in which the memory of suffering is erased by a cold beer and a good night's sleep. And it occurred aplenty on this expedition, this being the first instance. As often as not, this condition is accompanied by the complementary concept of 'a walk of two halves', of which today's hike was a perfect example. This is how the day began:

It's day three of Saints and Cynics and I'm on my way to St Palais. It's about midday, it's very hot ... and I'm moving like a train. I've already overtaken three of my fellow pilgrims and I've been thinking how nice it is to move fast.

*I was thinking that some pilgrims would say that I'm moving **too** fast: that I'm not enjoying it, that I'm not being 'authentic'. But I think this desire – this pleasure of moving relatively quickly through the landscape – is a very embodied pleasure. It reminds me a bit of mortification of the flesh. Of course, it isn't like that at all but in one sense it is ... you're putting your body through something and at the end of the day, when you arrive at your destination and enjoy a cold beer, lie down on the bed, it's a **fantastic** feeling. It's not quite pain, but it's a great deal of pleasure...*

Recorded thoughts 17 June 2016

It didn't last. A heatwave had been creeping up on south-western Europe, it arrived that afternoon and, as it turned out, I wasn't best prepared: I ran out of water and the path ran out on me. Or maybe I just got lost? Either way, I had to ask a kindly farmer to fill up my

bottle and then endure a five-kilometre slog along a busy road into a small provincial town that was entertaining Sunday summertime blues. But you know what? The cold beer – and a pizza – worked their usual wonders.

THE HEAT IS ON ...

Day 4: St-Palais to St-Jean-Pied-de-Port

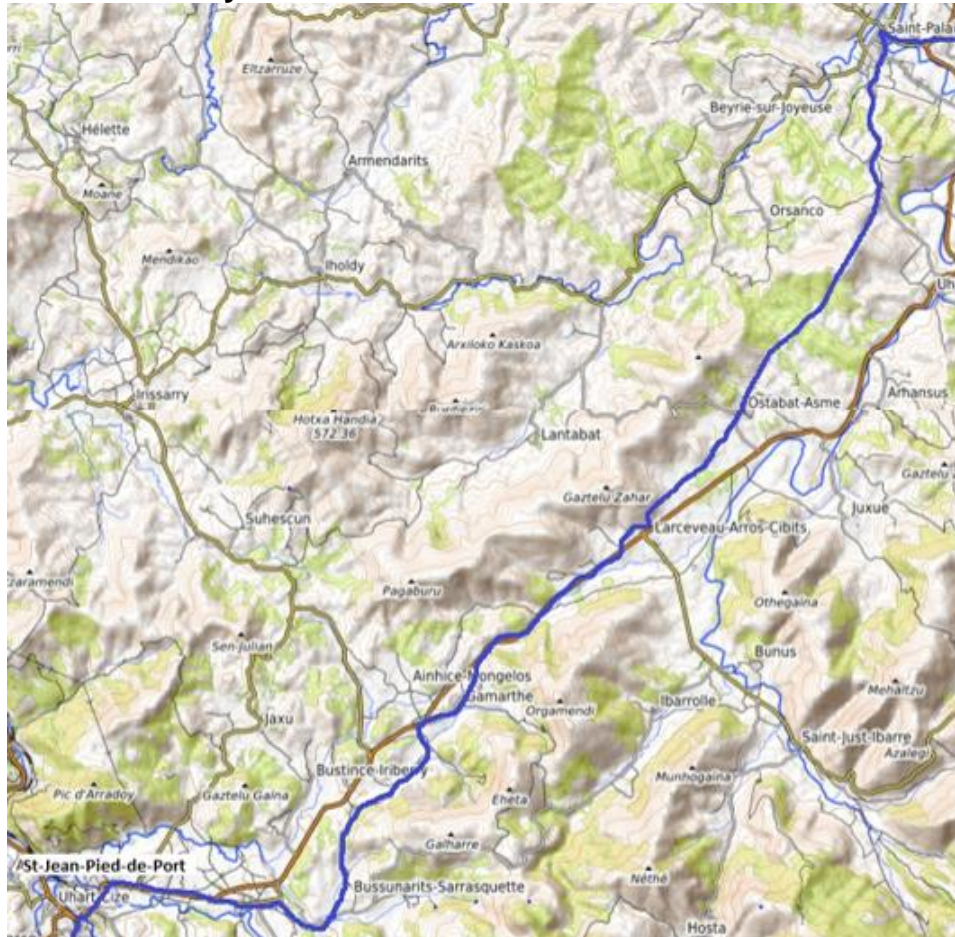


Figure 20: Route map, St Palais to St-Jean-Pied-de-Port

*'A brutal heat had descended upon the Pays Basques and, on day four of Saints and Cynics, it showed no signs of letting up. Au contraire, as the much-anticipated crossing of the Pyrenees edged closer, kilometre by kilometre, so the thermometer crept up, centigrade by centigrade. And so the sweat begins.'*⁷⁶

About an hour out of St Palais, at the top of a hill, I came across the Chapel of Soyarza. My left foot was giving me grief so it seemed a perfect place to pause, tend to my wounds and muse on the significance of where I was.

⁷⁶ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/2016/07/saints-and-cynics-day-4-st-palais-to-st.html?m=0>

THE CATHOLIC GAZE: THE RELIGIOUS PERFORMATIVITY OF LANDSCAPE

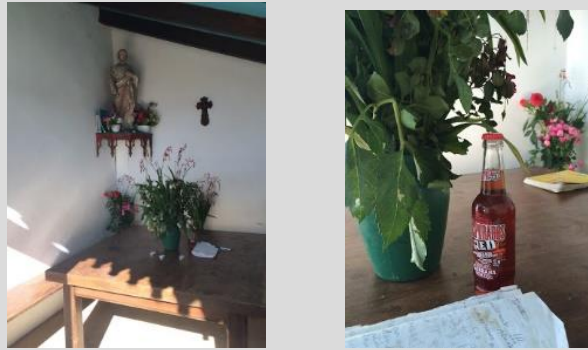


Figure 21: Offerings inside the Chapel of Soyarza

Many of the journeys I've made in my life have been through Latin or Hispanic cultures where Catholicism is, or has been, the dominant religion and has left its imprint on the landscape. This has been either bottom up – and here I'm thinking of religious symbols such as wayside shrines and oratorios which tend to express a more 'popular' piety – or imposed, as in the case of the Cathedral in Mexico City being constructed from stone from the destroyed Aztec temples of Tenochtitlan.

I've argued elsewhere that for all its many faults and sins, the Catholic Church has managed to retain a sense of embodied intimacy that is absent in Protestant and non-conformist faiths and that much of this intimacy is related to popular devotions to the Virgin Mary (Taylder 2004). And I remember Mary Warner's words in her analysis of the cult of the Virgin, 'a goddess is no better than no goddess at all, for the sombre-suited masculine world of Protestant religion is altogether too much like a gentleman's club to which ladies are only admitted on special days' (1976:338).



Figure 22: Cross in the landscape

The landscape of the Camino is littered with formal and informal religious and spiritual symbols but it's not so much the ontological presence of these objects but rather what we do with them, or rather, how we perceive them and through what lens. For some, including, perhaps, the Catholic priest with whom I walked later in Spain, they might have been little more than an historical artefact with no spiritual 'power'. Mine is a Catholic gaze but, that Catholicism is in itself complex and diverse. Here, it wasn't just the frequent encounters with chapels, churches and shrines but the manner in which their 'spiritual power' was activated by, for example, the presence of offerings at the impromptu shrine pictured below.

I say 'activated', I might equally have said 'triggered'



Figure 23: 'Our Lady of the Boots'. Informal oratorio dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes on the Via Podiensis between Naverrenx and St Palais. Note the appropriate offerings.

Although the landscape as a whole as felt quite ... well, I'm reluctant to call it 'pleasant' because it sounds like damning with bland praise but we'll stick with it for now ... Ostabat was the first place that felt 'special' as in imbued with some beyond-human quality. Here, where three Caminos come together, I experienced a frisson of excitement as I felt the presence of history in the landscape around me, cut into the earth by the feet of every pilgrim who's passed this way. And it felt, too, as if I was in the heart of Europe - or at least, Western Europe; a place of origins that have shaped the continent.

SITES OF SYMBOLIC DENSITY: GRAVITATIONAL PULL IN OSTABAT



Figure 24: Cat relaxing on a bench in Ostabat

How do cat lovers cope on the Camino? We seize on any opportunity for an encounter of the feline kind and so, coming across this fine specimen loafing outside a bar, I paused to sit down and downed a Coca Cola with copious chunks of ice. Time to open up the rucksack and take a toolkit-check. This seems an appropriate moment to invoke Katya Mandoki's 'Sites of Symbolic Density' (1998) which we might briefly describe as space having a variable density or difference which is connected to its history and exerts a sort of gravitational pull (Wynn 2009:74). Mandoki cites as examples Tenochtitlan and Mecca as well as Santiago but these are all end points, their 'gravitational pull' comes from the spiritual power ascribed to them, in the case of Santiago the remains of the saint.



Figure 25: All roads lead to Ostabat⁷⁷

There's a different type of gravity at work here. On the surface, Ostabat is an unexceptional village in the French Basque Country with a population of barely 200.

⁷⁷ Source: <https://www.gronze.com/#todos>

And yet, in terms of the Camino, its significance is huge. As the map shows, it's the point of convergence for three of the four principle pilgrim routes that pass through France en route to Spain; in medieval times most pilgrims from all points of Europe beyond the Iberian Peninsula would stop here, today there's just me. And the cat. For the majority of contemporary pilgrims the *Camino de Santiago* begins at St-Jean-Pied-de-Port. Ostabat means nothing to them but for me it's loaded with spiritual density, a bit like one of Mandoki's 'black holes' (1998).

What distinguishes Ostabat's gravitational function is not pull but propellant. I'm no rocket scientist but I do know that gravitational assistance can be used to accelerate a spacecraft or redirect its path. For me, Ostabat fulfils that function; here the confluence of the ways creates vast amounts of spiritual energy. It isn't just the coming together, it's the weight and quality of that spiritual energy, and the history which, like a river in spate, carries it along. In a sense, Ostabat is the John the Baptist to Santiago's Christ; without the former the latter could not exist in the way that it does. It has been carved into existence by the boots of pilgrims in whose footsteps I now tread. And right here and now that feels as literal as it does metaphorical.

Just after Ostabat the hike as pleasant ramble came to an end. Given the heat, I decided to follow the main road, all my thoughts were on crossing the Pyrenees the following day and I was hearing predictions of the mercury hitting 40 degrees. It wasn't a choice I wanted to make and I almost paid for it, the road was hard and hot and I was running out of water. About 12km out of St Jean I returned to the Camino and at another refreshment stop found a hosepipe and enjoyed an impromptu cold shower. I managed to repeat this several times, even when I'd joined the main road, once 'showering' myself in a church cemetery. In St Jean I booked into a cheap central hotel where it took me a good hour to fully cool and rehydrate myself.

BODY TALK: DIE WITH YOUR BOOTS ON



Figure 26: My poor left foot

There are arguments to be had, amongst the obsessed and the purists, as to which item of hiking technology is the most important, we spend hours ruminating on these esoteric matters. The rucksack, as we shall see later in the narrative, is a fundamental piece of 'kit'. It isn't just a question of opting for quality irrespective of the price, it's about making sure you treat the thing with respect. I didn't. Socks are the epitome of underestimation. I think nothing of forking out over a hundred quid on boots then balk at investing a tenner on a decent pair of socks. But the boots are the tools which modulate our embodied relationships with the earth beneath our feet. Footwear 'reshapes the affordances of nature by expanding the range of possible actions available to the body' and walking boots, in particular, are 'parts of the environment in themselves insofar as they are composed of surfaces ... As such they afford as well, and their affordances affect subsequent affordances' (Michaels, 2000:112).

Mike Michaels asks, rhetorically, why we should consider a technology as mundane as hiking footwear. They aren't, as he acknowledges, 'simple intermediaries, going about their business as innocent conduits, pristine channels'. Rather, they 'contribute to this process of communication – this exchange of meanings – by introducing their own heterogeneous messages. Or rather, they can act as interference' (2000:114).

And right then my boots were sending me very firm messages about the state of my toes which were in the process of acquiring a pair of prize blisters. The end result – pain – becomes an increasingly audible background noise, perhaps something akin to tinnitus, which threatened to drown out the pleasure of the pilgrim and landscape experience. The discomfort begins as physical but escalates into a pain which is as emotional as it is visceral.

Blisters are curious little things, perennially present all along the Camino, not just in its early stages. I've witnessed agony bring a premature end to the pilgrimages of a few but these small skin-bubbles have the capacity to wreak a havoc utterly out of proportion to their size and in doing so they disrupt the congenial flow of human-nature relations. They threaten to 'break the spell' that brings the landscape to life as we focus on our bodily suffering rather than our surroundings.

Can't live with them, can't live without them? To what extent is pain integral to the pilgrim experience? For Michaels, the 'process of being in pain can also lead to ways of distracting oneself, or of reconnecting with the surrounding sociocultural world' (2000:116). Pain, particularly and almost exclusively pertaining to blisters, forms part of the pilgrim *communitas*, it creates a common theme which binds us together, united against and in the face of anguish. It's a great leveller, too. Very few are immune.

And pain is also heroic, overcoming it even more so, in some circles a mark of prowess. I could, for example, dine out on the impressive scar resulting from surgery on the fractured kneecap sustained in a fall in the Pyrenees. Now fully recovered, the pain and the precariousness of my situation – high on a mountain in a snowstorm – have faded in the memory: goldfish syndrome once again.

I dealt with my blisters as best I could and plodded on. Far from being debilitating, the pain acted as an agent of enhancement and served to validate my status as *bona fide* pilgrim: I suffer, therefore I am.

Of greater consequence was the threat of dehydration and heatstroke, a threat that became increasingly real as the temperature climbed close to the forty degree mark. Somehow, these conditions seemed banal in comparison to more to bodily-focused pain yet it had the capacity to inflict more substantial, existential damage. I was acutely aware of this and even considered hitching a lift into St-Jean, working on the premise that although martyrdom has its appeal, I'm no Perpetua or Felicitas and the survival instinct will always kick in. In any case, continued my internal conversation, my journey proper didn't begin in earnest until St Jean so I wouldn't be, technically, 'cheating'.

INTERLUDE: PERFORMING PILGRIMAGE IN ST-JEAN-DE-PIED-DE-PORT



Figure 27: Candles and votive offerings in the church of Notre Dame du-Bout-du-Pont

This is where it really begins, in the church of *Notre Dame du-Bout-du-Pont* – Our Lady at the End of the Bridge. After four days of relative isolation on the *Via Podiensis*, arriving in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port came as a bit of a shock. Thus far the walk has been exclusively Caucasian, mostly French and predominantly middle-aged, from hereon in the Camino will be a glorious Babel of tongues, ethnicities and cultures. There was something of a transition from being a big fish in a small sea to being a sardine squeezed into a can in girt, humungous ocean. We're all pilgrims now, in one way or another, otherwise we'd be somewhere else. The moment we set foot in the town we become part of it, and its history.

It's a habit of mine, probably one I inherited from family hikes as a child, to visit any church or chapel I come across wherever I walk, not just along the Camino. But that evening I came to the church of *Notre Dame du-Bout-du-Pont* not out of an academic obligation to observe pilgrims performing being pilgrims in their natural habitat but because I felt a strong desire to fulfil the ritual for purely personal reasons. These were my thoughts immediately afterwards:

I caught the end of the pilgrim mass and the blessing in the church ... and ... there were about six of us ... and ... suddenly I just felt this incredible, intense wave of emotion. I was in tears rather like when visiting the tomb of the Monseñor [Romero] in San Salvador and I just thought this is going to be such an intense experience. In a sense it's more intense than the last time because I know exactly what I'm doing ... and I thought, well ... this is supposed to be rational, objective research but here's me creased up with emotion already. It was quite ... quite powerful ... and I wonder what it's going to be like in five or six weeks' time, if and when I get to Santiago. It bodes well and it doesn't bode well. It's nice to be here, it's nice to be amongst all

the pilgrims ... it feels ... different because it's a pilgrim town. If they were just ordinary tourists I'd be my normal misanthropic self but these are the people, some of whom I will be walking alongside for the next five or six weeks; some of them might even become friends – I don't know. But it's very ... very intense after the past ... four days, 111 kilometres, the heat, being on my own, the landscape it's all very ... very intense.

Recorded thoughts 18 July 2016

Two of my fellow pilgrims had acquired their shells and placed them among the candles before the Virgin Mary in a gesture which I found profoundly moving. I met them again the following day and spent many hours walking with them until they had to head for home in Logroño. They will be our companions for the next part of the story but first there are mountains to cross ...

STAGE ONE PHYSICAL

St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Burgos

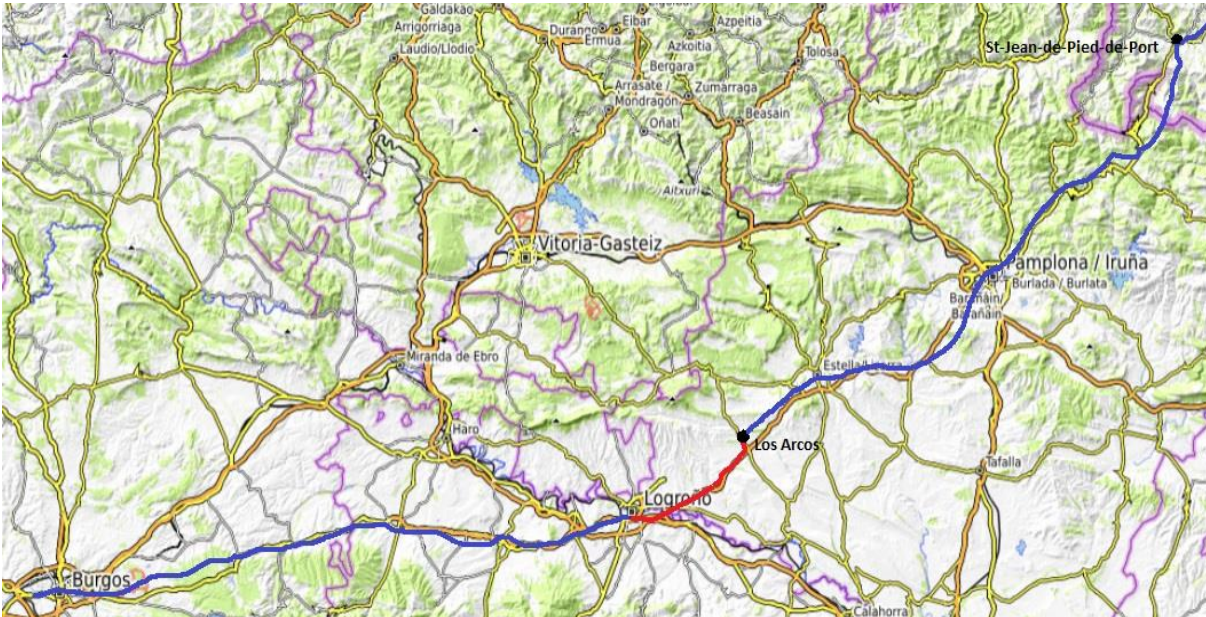


Figure 28: Route map, St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Burgos

*'I'm on the right track, baby
I was born on this Way'⁷⁸*



Figure 29: Boot, flowers and waymarking post

⁷⁸ With apologies to Lady Gaga (*Born this Way*, Germanotta & Laursen, 2011)

HIGHER GROUND

Day 5: St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Burguete

*I'm so darn glad he let me try it again
Cause my last time on earth I lived a whole world of sin
I'm so glad that I know more than I knew then
Gonna keep on tryin'
Till I reach my highest ground⁷⁹*



Figure 30: Route map, St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Burguete

It's twenty-two minutes past seven on Tuesday ... and I've set out from St Jean. The sun's just risen, it's bliss to be walking in the cool and there's actually a breeze, although it's a warm breeze. And I think ... I'm going to do it today, I should be okay. I've got two-and-a-half litres of water ... and the crowds are on their way too. It's interesting, listening as they pass, to narratives beginning. People have obviously just met the night before ... and I'm thinking how these narratives will unfold as the pilgrims make their way to Santiago. It's beautifully green, obviously; first rays of the sun, red kites circling above. The countryside doesn't look too vertiginous ... there's some rather large rucksacks ... very large rucksacks, I would say. See how we go ...

Recorded thoughts 19 July 2016

⁷⁹ Stevie Wonder (*Higher Ground*, Wonder, 1973)



Figure 31: It's a long way to the top ... And a steep one, too! Profile of the hike from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Roncesvalles (Brierley 2019)

I would like you, at this point in the journey, to exercise your geographical and spiritual imagination and position yourself beneath the Porte St Jacques in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port. I'd like you to do more than merely locate yourself physically but try to imagine the mixed emotions a pilgrim might experience in the hour-before-dawn half-light as she prepares to embark upon her journey.⁸⁰ Anticipation? Trepidation? A faint undercurrent of fear? Above all, perhaps a sense of uncertainty which triggers her (hopefully) fertile thought processes. Not knowing what to expect is part of the pilgrim experience and, indeed, one of the 'ingredients' that facilitate the landscape casting its 'spell'.

The accumulated history of pilgrimage weighs heavy here. She can almost feel it oozing from the stone walls, in thick layers, from the mists of the medieval to the walkers who set off only yesterday morning. To arrive in St-Jean-Pied-Port to hike the Camino is to become part of something that goes beyond time and distance yet is inherently intertwined with both. She's visited the pilgrim office to obtain her *credencial* which, she hopes, will afford her passage not to exotic lands on distant shores but to another beyond-the-ordinary world; it permits 'formal' entrance to the bubble she hopes to inhabit for the next month.⁸¹

But isn't she there already? No. St Jean is just the beginning and this is a process of *becoming*; it may take some time, it might not happen at all. For some the Camino will offer experiences that might be spiritual and life changing, for others it'll be little more than an extended hiking holiday. And a cheap one at that.

⁸⁰ 'Geographical imagination' is a difficult concept to define, though this thesis more interested in what it *might be* – or perhaps its possibilities – rather than what it *is*. For Gieseking, the it 'affords ways of thinking about space and place, whether conscious or unconscious, that evoke power as it shapes practices, behaviors, and social structures' (2017:1).

⁸¹ The *credencial*, or 'pilgrims passport' is a document which is stamped on a daily or more frequent basis at albergues and other establishments such as cafes and churches and is presented at the pilgrim office in Santiago for the pilgrim to receive her *Compostela* – a document certifying completion of the journey – a minimum of 100km for those on foot (Frey 1998:8).

But through the fuggy haze of hope and expectation, of myth and counter-myth, the dreams of self-transformation and of what lies beyond, wannabe pilgrims must attend to the demands of the here and the now, especially in the midst of a heatwave. They're prepared to sell their souls for the spirit of the Camino but they're not ready – at least not just yet – to lay their lives on the line. Sacrifice has its limits. It might be going a little too far to say that the sacred is about to get into a fist fight with the profane but there's certainly a tension between the two. Faith would have been the natural arbiter for traditional pilgrims but it's in short supply nowadays. Not only is it in short supply, it's also being thinly spread across different iterations. Faith in one God, the Father Almighty, now has to compete with faith in other gods and goddesses and, of course, oneself. It's this final expression of faith that interests me, the decline of faith as something that represents and brings together a community and the growth of a faith which has as its focus the individual.

THE CATHOLIC GAZE: MADONNA IN THE MOUNTAINS



Figure 32: The Virgin of Biakorri

It's about half-past twelve, I've arrived at the Virgin of Biakorri right up in the Pyrenees. It is absolutely fantastic! She is absolutely amazing ... a stunning piece of religious landscape, I suppose ... I'm not quite sure how the Virgin of Biakorri increased that affect. Do you have to be inclined towards the Virgin to feel that way? To what extent is it the Catholic Gaze? Is it a Marian Gaze?

Most people tend to carry on. It's only a hundred metres from the path to the Virgin, some people have come here to stop but of course there's plenty of ... mementos left for the Virgin.

It's not quite as emotional as it was the first time, perhaps because I knew what I was going to expect [but] it's still phenomenal. But the intensity I felt last night ... it's not gone, it's not quite the same ...

Recorded thoughts 19 July 2016

For most pilgrims the icon they associate most with the Camino is the statue of St James in the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, which they'll traditionally embrace on arrival. For me, however, it's the statue of the Virgin of Biakorri, located high up in the Pyrenees, just under halfway between St-Jean and Roncevalles.

When I first came across Her it was completely unexpected. I was blessed with a clear day in mid-May to make the crossing into Spain and huffed and puffed my way up the interminable slope. Almost immediately tears began to well (I'm aware this is a not infrequent expression of emotion in my personal landscape experiences) and my thoughts turned to my close friend who, several years ago, had encouraged me to make this journey.

I thought about the various factors that came together to produce this response back then and this time around: my devotion to the Virgin Mary, the physical effort expounded to reach this point, the sublime setting of the high mountains under an exquisite sun and sky, the thoughts of my friend. One could, quite possibly, put all the variables into a formula and come out with some sort of quotient. It might be an interesting experiment but it reduces the components to little more than bit part players and denies them agency. In any case, how would we quantify the impact of the beyond-human when, rationally speaking, they don't exist?

Many pilgrims approach this first stage of the Camino Frances with a sense of foreboding, a challenge to overcome rather than an experience to savour in itself. Certainly, it's full of potential pitfalls, during the winter this route is closed due to snow and throughout the year wind, mist and rain can render it equally impassable. The alternative Valcarlos route follows a national highway.

And the pull of Roncesvalles is strong. In a sense all locations on the Camino are iconic but some locations are more iconic than others, as Frey notes: 'For many, Roncesvalles becomes a marker of entry to the pilgrim, going back to the roots, where millions of people passed throughout the ages'. Indeed, she cites an entry from a Spanish pilgrim who wrote in the albergue's visitors' book 'Today I begin my pilgrimage. Yesterday, as soon as I got to Roncesvalles, I felt like a pilgrim' (1998:54).⁸²

I didn't feel the same way. Once again, Roncesvalles, crawling with both pilgrims and tourists (and tourist-pilgrims), failed to perform for me in the same way that it appeared to

⁸² In addition to its popularity as a pilgrim hospice and collegiate church, Roncesvalles is also famous in history and legend for the death of Roland in 778, during the battle of Roncevaux Pass, when Charlemagne's rear guard was decimated by Basque tribes.

for others. It feels it should have done, it ticked so many of the right boxes: nestling in a deep forested valley at the foot of high mountains – tick; site of (western) European cultural heritage – tick; a place where ‘the tradition of pilgrimage is so engrained within the culture of the dwellers that helping the people passing through has become part of the regular routine of the residents’ – tick; Catholic gaze – tick (Quedar-Embid 2008:32).

The former Conservative Party leader, William Hague, gained much notoriety for boasting about his drinking habits and wearing a baseball cap back-to-front. In a less banal moment he also claimed to find ‘spiritual fulfilment while walking on the Yorkshire Moors rather than in church on Sundays’.⁸³ Mr Hague was roundly pooh-poohed but I’d read Jack Clemo so I kind of knew where he was coming from, even if he hadn’t and didn’t. Before returning to Catholicism I’d got my spiritual kicks from a quasi-pagan relationship with the landscape so I didn’t join in the cynical pile-on because whether Mr Hague meant it or not, his assertion is one shared by many hikers, of all faiths and none.

I’m about five hundred metres beneath the Col de Lepoeder ... and it’s absolutely stunning ... it’s happened here, not at the Virgin of Biakorri. The landscape is absolutely stunning ... but what’s different from last time is that I’ve got a greater sense of where things are. I’m more ‘in place’, if that makes sense. It’s not just an arbitrary in which I’ve walked without any preparation, I’ve looked at the map and of course I’ve been here before. And the second thing is that I have also a very strong awareness of the path itself, the path in the landscape. I can look back and see it as it climbs up ... there’s a path that comes up from the road, you can see how it winds round, pretty much level, around the valley, past the font of Roland. And over to the east you can see the Pic d’Orhy and right in the background you’ve got the high points of the Pyrenees. It’s an almost perfect ‘V’ shaped valley, the Forest of Iraty. I don’t know why but it’s important about the path, I know where I am ...

Recorded thoughts 19 July 2016

⁸³<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1372796/Hague-seeks-to-win-back-religious-vote-with-leap-of-faith.html>

WHOSE CAMINO IS IT ANYWAY? PART ONE: WHO CONTROLS SACRED SPACE?



Figure 33: Pilgrim credencial

The *credencial* serves various purposes, some practical, some mundane, and tends to lend itself towards a contemporary reinvention of authenticity. Collecting *sellos* (stamps) en route presents proof to *hospitaleros* that the pedestrian pilgrim is genuine and, to claim the *compostela*, she or he must have the credential stamped at least twice a day over the final 100km. For many pilgrims, collecting *sellos* – which can now be obtained from a variety of sources and services – can become something of a mildly obsessional hobby and back at home it serves as receptacle for memories which can be recalled by unfolding its codex-like pages. The document's historic provenance is, however, questionable. Medieval pilgrims would carry some form of religious accreditation from a religious authority to prevent 'false' pilgrims (*coquillards*) from taking advantage of the system of hospitality but this was generally in the form of a letter.

Perhaps ironically, although a contemporary pilgrim can theoretically travel free of charge, she or he must fork out between two and three euros for the document which can only be purchased from organisations authorised by the Church. It is, therefore, emblematic of the way in which competition for governance of the Camino is a constant tussle between different parties, of which the Catholic Church is but one. Dunn poses the relevant question, who governs credential and the *compostela*? And does that same entity govern the Camino? (2016:26).

The politics of the Camino de Santiago are a concern of this project, where and when they impact the landscape's affective capacity they have to be taken into account. We must remember, for example, its link with Franco's National Catholicism

and how that shaped the pilgrim's perspective. Since Franco's death and the transition to a democratic state of autonomous communities, local and regional governments have begun to see pilgrims as a potential income stream, particularly in areas which have witnessed significant rural depopulation. This has impacted on the fragile pilgrim/pilgrim service-provider equilibrium, especially in the Camino's final stages. And, as the Camino's popularity has grown internationally, so have global institutions entered the fray, significantly the Council of Europe which, from the 1980s onwards, has presented it as an historical model of peace, harmony, tolerance and multiculturalism, claiming that these qualities 'are ingrained in the history and psyche of Europe' (Gardner, Mentley & Signori 2017:71). In this it shares the Church's idealised image of medieval Christianity and pilgrimage as a model for a return to Europe's historically Christian roots, conveniently ignoring how the Church has historically tended to neglect and often preach against those self-same liberal and progressive values.

Perhaps, because I'm one of Theresa May's treacherous 'citizens of nowhere', I tend to agree with Gardner *et al's* assertion that pilgrimage to Santiago is very much a global affair. Furthermore, with the rise of secularism alongside globalisation, the Church's grip on the Camino is less secure than it was only fifty years ago and so it has become 'less a religious road of devotion than a spiritual road of reflection' (2016:71). 'Less so', but perhaps not unequivocally, and I'm not entirely sure whether acts of devotion exclude acts of reflection, and vice versa.

So whose Camino is it, anyway? Like a cat, it has no owners. It exists in itself and for itself; it occupies its own particular space across space and time.

Into the toolkit I've stuffed a copy of Nilsson and Tesfahuney's *Performing the post-secular in Santiago de Compostela* (2016). It's littered with scribbled comments, questions I might ask myself right here, as I take a break outside the abbey Roncesvalles. I'm hiking alone, I might as well talk to myself.

WHOSE CAMINO IS IT ANYWAY? PART TWO: YOU SAY 'PLACE', I SAY 'PATH'



Figure 34: Roncesvalles

What is 'post-secular praxis'? The aim of the authors' article is to 'study pilgrimage tourism as an instance of "post-secular" performativity, an area where 'post-secular' praxis and discourse fuse' and to 'shed light on how the traditional religious meanings and place identity of Santiago de Compostela are being reconfigured by 'post-secular' journeys' (2015:20).

Does research on pilgrimage, including this paper, focus too much on Santiago and not enough on the Camino? I responded to this with a scribbled *I'm not saying [Santiago] is overrated but arrival can be anti-climax*. Even at this early stage it's clear it's the journey that matters but just here I'm inclined to ask myself another question, *am I, perhaps subconsciously, underestimating the performative function/capacity of Santiago?* I mean, I'm here on this particular trail and not, for example, the Camino Ignaciano.⁸⁴ The city and its cathedral still exerts a pull, even if my motivation is more Marian than Jacobean.

In response to the authors' assertion that post-secular religiosity is predicated on existing religious practices and rituals, and that in the case of Santiago de Compostela this is illustrated by, among other things, 'staying in hostels, accreditation of pilgrim status, walking stick and bag' I responded with *Do all pilgrims do these? Not me. On the Camino, one might start out as 'post-secular' but evolve en route* (2016:22).

I also took issue with the assumption that 'Pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela create experiences that are shaped by *a priori* beliefs about the site's meaning and mystical or hidden transformative powers' as scrawled a question mark in the margin

⁸⁴ The 'Ignatian Way' is a 'new pilgrim route for the 21st century' which runs from the home of Ignatius of Loyola in the Basque country to Montserrat in Catalunya and is 'characterised by its connection with Ignatian spirituality and the famous Ignatian spiritual exercises' (Abad-Galzacorta, Guerño-Omil, Makua, Iriberry & Santomà 2016:49).

(2015:23). This seems to me as another example of ascribing too much 'power' to the place and not the path one follows to get there, neglecting the affective capacities of the path and the landscape to work on pre-existing spiritual persuasions. Similarly, next to the highlighted 'no place is sacred a priori rather the sacredness of place is a social construction' I've written *I'm not sure*. Sitting on a bench in Roncesvalles I've shifted from *I'm not sure* to *I'm certain*. As our engagements with, amongst others, Mandoki (1998) and Moles (2008), will show, landscape possesses an agency of its own, sacred space is co-produced by a complex and constantly changing network of which social construction is but a bit-player.

The point here appears to be a post-secular conception of the sacred, which stands at odds with a religious understanding of the phenomenon. Nilsson and Tesfahuney cite a German pilgrim, Jo, as illustrating their no-place-is-sacred *a-priori* argument: 'sacred places can be [found] almost anywhere, if you make them sacred' (2015:25). But if sacred places can be found 'almost anywhere' – i.e. practically everywhere – how do we distinguish between the sacred and the profane? For they must surely function in opposition to each other.

Is the Camino's continued and growing popularity testament to the existence of the post-secular turn? Nilsson and Tesfahuney claim it's 'apparent' that the religious identity of Santiago is 'being reconfigured by new forms of religiosity and spiritual experience and transforming the identity of place and its meaning' to the extent that now it is 'Catholic only in form' (2015:27). But hasn't it ever been thus? I can't help thinking that the authors' argument founders on a monolithic understanding of Catholicism and fails to understand its nuances, particularly the discrepancy between orthodox and popular Catholicism and the way in which, with particular regard to theologies of liberation, the latter has informed the former. Has Mohammed come to the mountain or is it the other way round? Are these 'post-secular' pilgrims reshaping the Camino's Catholicity or is the Camino's Catholicity reshaping them? What's Santiago without its Cathedral and bones of St James in its crypt? Just another Spanish city to rival Burgos and Leon through which we'll pass *en route*? The fact that the bones might not be Santiago's really doesn't matter, the fact that thousands of pilgrims queue up to visit them on a daily basis more or less wills them into existence, for physical existence isn't a necessarily a prerequisite for faith and belief.

Let's see how this pans out and shapes our landscape experiences. Right now it's time to put the toolkit back in the bag and set out for the day's destination, Burguete. It's only

three kilometres away and a cold beer awaits. Roncesvalles is pleasant enough but it's not doing much for me, apart from its significance as the end of the Pyrenean crossing. The accumulation of faith and belief, repeating day after day by pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike has carved out its sacredness. Does the same apply to the Virgin of Biakorri or that spiritual/emotional frisson I felt close to the Col de Lopededer? Sacred place is fixed in space but sacred experiences are by definition fleeting and ephemeral.

'PRAISE GOD, THE EARTH IS MAIMED'⁸⁵
Day 7 - Zubiri-Pamplona

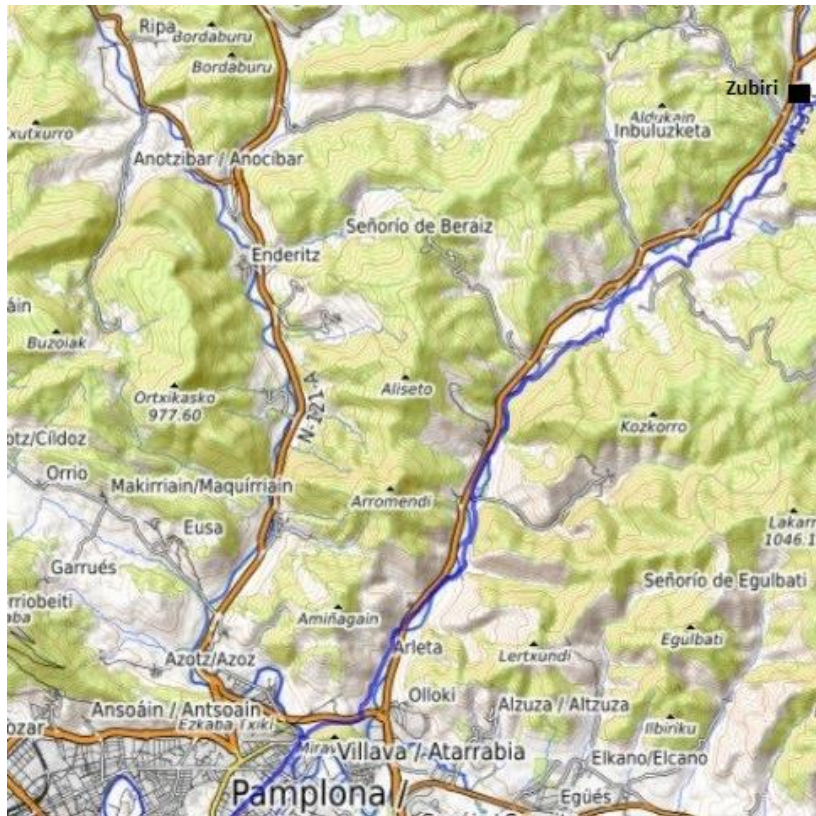


Figure 35: Route map, Zubiri to Pamplona



Figure 36: Magnesium mine, Zubiri

It's half-past eight, it's Thursday, I think, the twenty-first of July. I'm just leaving Zubiri and I'm going past a fabrica which I think is a magnesium mine of some sort and it's in sharp contrast, obviously, to the landscapes I've encountered so far.

And I suppose most people would find it a complete eyesore. They'd find it offensive, I suppose, in many ways, and it would lack spiritual, emotional or religious value but I can't help thinking of Jack Clemo here, this morning, 'Christ in the Clay-pit' ... and leaving aside all the kind of psychogeographical obsession with post-industrial worlds – this is not 'post-industrial', it's very 'industrial' – I find it really quite exciting, it's quite

⁸⁵ Jack Clemo 'The Clay-Tip Worker' (Thompson 2015:21)

invigorating. There's something going on, the landscape is busy and ... this processing plant with all its waste, its detritus is very much the landscape. It defies that dichotomy of nature and human. I can't imagine it not being here. It has its own kind of attraction, it's almost ... a dystopian look but it is, you know, it's quite natural. There are trees, plants, grasses growing all around the plant. It feels to me very much part of a living landscape.

Recorded thoughts 21 July 2016

In *The Clay-Tip Worker* Clemo rejoices in the destruction of 'nature' in the cause of industrial development. But here, as in many of his poems, 'redemption is understood as the destruction of creation, not its correction or rescue, and certainly not its fulfilment' (Russell Jones 2017:4). For Clemo, beauty is the enemy, 'the products of rebellion, delusion and idolatry' (Russell Jones 2017:5). As Russell-Jones notes, Clemo's 'anti-nature poetry' was produced explicitly under the banner of evangelical Christianity (2017).

There's the first filaments of a thread here. It was Russell-Jones' use of 'idolatry' that triggered it, that reminded me of the way in which devotion to the Virgin Mary is perceived by Protestants (and, indeed, many Catholics) and, to a certain extent, reflected how the Catholic priest we'll meet at the end of this chapter felt about the Camino. Anything which distracts from direct worship of God is to be viewed with suspicion; nature and the landscape have the capacity to deceive and the Camino can, quite literally lead the pilgrim astray.

Clema's poetry lies at the other end of a spectrum whose other extreme venerates a nature-without-humans. As if the two are incompatible. As if humans, when they come into contact with nature, are capable only of destruction. One doesn't have to adopt a psychogeographical method to perceive the aesthetic qualities of the environment of the magnesium mine (though it might help). Its 'busy-ness' appeals to me, and the infinite variety of means of dwelling that implies. And reminds us that 'nature' doesn't refer to a 'mute, physical world external to human thought' (Wylie 2007:159).

THE BELLS, THE BELLS: PERFORMING SACRED SPACE



Figure 37: Bell Tower, Iglesia de San Esteban, Zabaldika

It was the golfer Gary Player who, after holing a particularly difficult putt, allegedly responded to a spectator's jibe that it was just a fluke with the now famous quip: 'the harder I practise, the luckier I get'. Something similar occurred on the hike from Zubiri to Pamplona where two of my fellow pilgrims and I happened to be in the right place at the right time. Was it luck or, as Gary Player actually didn't say, hard work – in this instance putting in a bit of extra effort and imagination to allow the time and the space for 'things' to happen.

The church of San Esteban lies a couple of hundred metres away from the Camino in the village of Zubaldika, up a short but steep slope. There's an albergue here, run by nuns of the Sacred Heart who also offer tours of the exquisite gothic-Romanesque church which features an unusual case of Holy Family gender-role reversal, a statue of Joseph holding the Christ Child. None of this I knew at the time, like many of my fellow pilgrims I was focused on reaching the bright lights of the big city – Pamplona is only ten kilometres away. When I walked this way in 2012 I certainly wasn't aware of its existence.

I was hiking with Irene and Inés. who I'd first come across them passing the albergue in Roncesvalles where they were relaxing crossing from St-Jean-Pied-du-Port. As is often the case on the Camino, particularly in its early stages, our paths crossed occasionally and the previous day I'd walked with them into Zubiri.

We decided we'd make the short detour to take a peek in the church, assuming it would be closed. Not only was it open, we were greeted by two nuns who gave us a brief tour then let us climb the tower where, according to tradition, pilgrims are permitted to

ring the bells, which all three of us joyfully did. A 'special' moment. A 'spiritual' moment or just one of shared intimacy?

Apart from a few photos, I have no formal record of this event. I was getting into the habit of making digital voice recordings of my thoughts and emotions but it seemed rude to do this whilst in company and I'd not yet got to the stage where I felt able and confident enough to ask my fellow pilgrims to record theirs.

Lying, as it does, up and away from the main drag, the church and its bell-ringing tradition is by-passed by many pilgrims. Perhaps that's exactly why this was, for all three of us, a very special experience. I say 'special', it's an adjective that will, I suspect, become exhausted through overuse by the end of this thesis but I am, nevertheless, going to stick with it because it has the rare virtue of doing exactly what it says on the tin. These are experiences that are 'not ordinary or usual' and/or have 'a quality that most similar things do not have'.⁸⁶

For this landscape performance, for that's what I consider it to be, the nuns were key co-creators.

It was early afternoon and I'd reserved accommodation in Pamplona but in hindsight I wished I'd stayed the night in the albergue, I felt both guilt and sadness on leaving. I'm not sure whether the much-vaunted 'Camino spirit' – which might or might not be synonymous with Turner's *communitas* – exists but this, as described by a pilgrim in 2018, seemed to come close:

That night we share a simple meal of soup, salad, and bread. We do have wine to drink with our dinner. After dinner we head off to the church to sit in the balcony for a service to bless the pilgrims. Our journeys are shared in French, English, and Spanish. Then it is off to bed. Lights are out at 9:30 pm. The group is tired and no one really wants to keep the lights on longer. It is also decided by the group that 6:30 am will be the time we get out of bed. Decisions are made by the group not the individual. It is part of our journey to learn that we are not alone⁸⁷.

'Decisions are made by the group not the individual'. That sentence sums up my fear – I think it accurate to describe it as such – of the 'pilgrim experience', a fear which would, a few weeks later, manifest itself as a recurrence of my 'inner gyrovague'. It was a fear I never dared challenge, or, at least, was either too vain or unadventurous to do so. At the time I told myself I needed private space to reflect and write my notes but as excuses go that's pretty pathetic.

⁸⁶ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/special>

⁸⁷ <http://worldaccordingtoanthony.com/2018/05/04/zubiri-to-zabaldika-to-pamploma/>

ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE

Day 9: Pamplona to Puente de la Reina – 24km

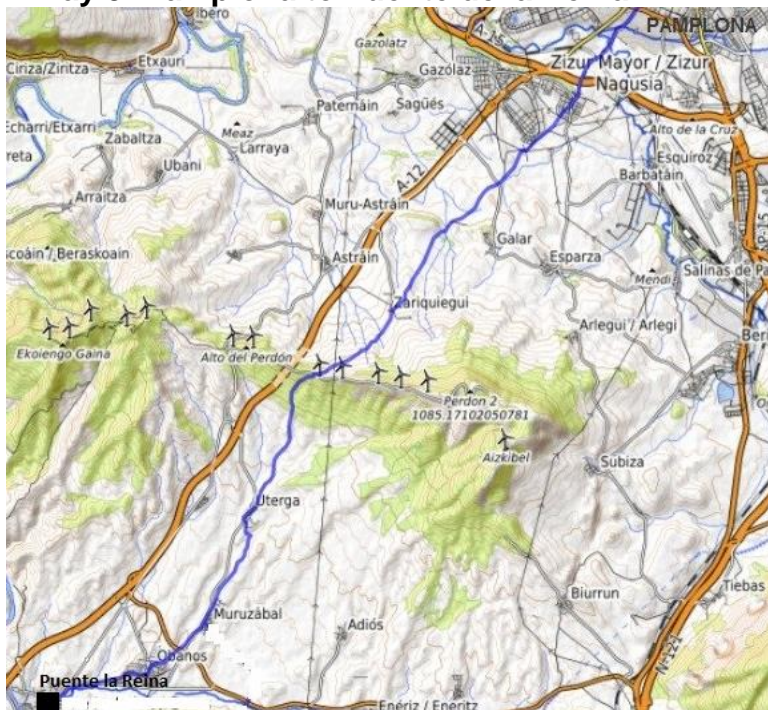


Figure 38: Route map, Pamplona to Puente la Reina



Figure 39: Approaching the Alto de Perdón from Zizur Mayor

The Camino, well-marked and well-trodden, wends its way out of Pamplona up to the *Alto de Perdón* through long fields of barely and of rye, that clothe the wold and meet the sky. Both the rhythm of the day and the landscape reminded me of Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott*, evoking memories of my schooldays. It was through Tennyson that I had my first literary encounter with landscapes and, perhaps because I was a naïve and wide-eyed seventeen year-old, it stuck. And there was something of the poet's tragic heroine about me, too. Alone in her tower, the Lady of Shalott weaves her magic web, and 'little other care hath she'. Remember the Claude Glass? It's a bit like that although instead of the 'mirror clear' the 'shadows of the world' appear through the translucent film of the bubble in which, after nine days, I'm already firmly entrenched (Ricks 2007:8).

And what if my Lancelot – or Lancelotte – suddenly turns up with his ‘blazoned baldric’ and silver bugle to shatter the spell? What if my mirror ‘crack’d from side to side’? For all his muscular Christianity, Tennyson had a point about the tension between isolation and being part of the wider (i.e. beyond the Camino) community. There’s a disconnect between us, the pilgrims, and the world outside. In hoping to come closer to God, or the Virgin Mary, or some form of spiritual nirvana, are we removing ourselves from people we purport to serve?



Figure 41: Irene at the *Alto de Perdón*

One of my favourite long-distance bus journeys is that from Mexico City south to the state of Yucatan. In the town of Fortín de las Flores, in the highlands of the Trans-Mexican Volcano Belt, the bus makes a comfort stop. One of the things that always strikes me when I alight is the smell which is now sweet, humid and musty, in contrast to the dry, sharp and slightly acrid scent we’ve left behind. It’s all in the nostrils, we’ve crossed the Great Divide, from the Pacific to the Caribbean.

I get a similar feeling at the *Alto de Perdón* where the Camino crosses the long east-west ridge of the *Sierra de Perdón*, although this time the sensation is more visual than olfactory. Something does happen here and although it’s related to the relatively mundane world of climate zones, a shift from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, the pilgrim, now attuned to her environment, is acutely aware of it.



Figure 41: View westwards from 'The Great Divide' (aka the Alto de Perdón)

Figure 42 shows the view that got my juices flowing in 2012 and did so again, in 2016. Having left the Pyrenees behind, the Camino now strides out boldly across a more open landscape, into the distance, towards the horizon and beyond. I asked Irene and Inés whether they, like me, could feel the profound change that had taken place in the landscape merely by traversing the *Alto de Perdón*. It took them a while, but as we began the stony descent they finally succumbed.

HEELS ON FIRE

Day 10: Puente de la Reina to Estella 22km



Figure 42: Route map, Puente la Reina to Estella

I'm so relaxed; so laid back. This is fantastic walking; again, I'm almost at the point of tears. It's as if I haven't felt like this for a long, long time; indeed, I probably haven't felt like this for a long, long time. The emotions are stronger, the intensity of tranquillity, if that's not an oxymoron.

To what extent is the landscape involved? This landscape – I don't remember it from last time; it all seems new, even though it's only four years since I was last here. I don't remember the hills, I don't remember the Basque mountains being on the fringes of the landscape though that's probably because I'm now more obsessed with the Basque mountains and because I've visited them since. I'm much more aware of the context of the Camino within the whole Spanish/Basque landscape; the Basqueland, the Basquescape.



Figure 43: The path is the ego: always the centre of attention, the focus of the visual and embodied gaze

It feels emotional, it feels ... comfortable ... no, not comfortable, it feels like a landscape which I feel very part of. I feel more at home, more attuned to this landscape than I would, now, to landscape in the UK. And part of this Camino is about being on the run, the sense of being a refugee ... I'm always on the move and when I wasn't on the move in Pamplona on Friday I was a grumpy git.

I just wanted to record this to show how the landscape is having this affect ... it's difficult to describe how I feel. It's almost ecstatic but in a way that isn't ecstatic – can one be calmly ecstatic? It feels perfect - just rolling along, dwelling in this landscape.



Figure 44: A landscape full of ways, full of routes, full of possibilities

I was thinking about yesterday's hike over the Alto del Perdón, how you begin to get a procession of villages and from there the path. Not just this path but lots of paths; it's a landscape full of ways, full of routes, full of possibilities. One dwells in it, one walks through it, one follows a clear path defined by its yellow arrows but that's not all one sees.

I wanted to think about becoming. This is Day 10, it's the ninth day of walking. One is constantly becoming, one never does become, one never gets to the 'ser' [essence], one is always 'estar' [transitional state]. But what I feel today is that I'm becoming part of the landscape, that a particular spell cast by the landscape is beginning to work, possibly helped by the weather, and it's becoming very strong.

I do intensely feel part of this landscape and if somebody were to come along and try pluck me away from this I'd get physically violent. The only way I'd leave this Camino now would be in a coffin, even if I were to sustain an injury I'd still hang around. This is where I belong, there's nowhere else I need to be.

Recorded thoughts 24/7/2016

BEWARE OF THE PROTESTANTS

Day 11: Estella to Los Arcos

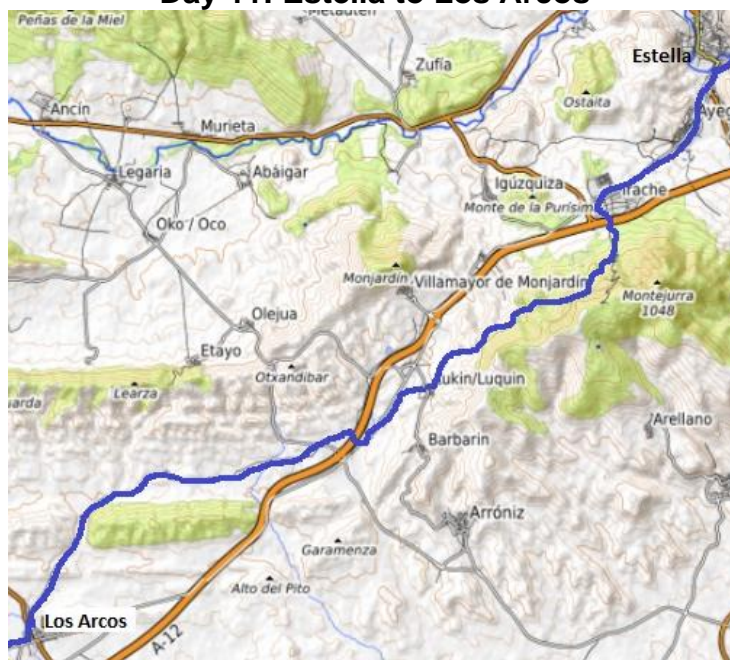


Figure 45: Route map, Estella to Los Arcos

An obligatory stopping point on the Camino Frances is the ‘wine fountain’ at the Bodegas de Irache which offers a steady but not constant flow of wine for the consumption of pilgrims only. It was too early for free booze so just after the adjacent monastery I left the main Camino and followed a *desvío* up through the woods and then along a path that followed the contours of the hills.



Figure 46: All roads lead to Los Arcos

I'd followed this alternative in 2012, primarily to avoid the possibility of having to stay over at the albergue in Villamayor de Monjardin. It was, according to my guidebook, run by a Protestant group from the Netherlands and, in contrast to most of the parish albergues associated with the Catholic Church, was keen to preach and proselytise, bringing what they refer to as ‘reli-travellers’ to Christ.⁸⁸

The Camino de Santiago and Protestant missions are not traditional bedfellows and as far I know this is the only place on the Camino where a non-Catholic

⁸⁸ I later learned that this was not the case and that, far from being fiery fundamentalists, the group that ran the albergue were are much more ecumenical. I think I probably exaggerated for my own religious and political advantage.

Christian denomination has a presence. The desire to turn pilgrimage into a conversion experience seems, ironically, contrary to the spirit of the Camino which works its own, gentle and subtle influence if the pilgrim was open to it. The path and the landscape through which it winds has its own agency and can 'speak' for itself.

In any case, I have an aversion to being told that to believe so once again I gave the place a wide berth and past an enchanted and most solitary morning on the other side of the valley.



*Figure 47: The landscape is busy, there's always something going on. There's a distinct network of paths that run alongside the fields, along the terraces, tracks, little paths ... this is really important to me, this network of tracks. The shape, the trajectory a path follows on the ground, the fact that you can see it from where you are, you can see where it leads to ... This is important, it means to me the landscape is **busy**, there's something going on. It gives it a sense of movement, it's not in a state of stasis*

Recorded thoughts 25/7/16

THE GERMAN FILLING

Days 12 – 14: Los Arcos and Logroño

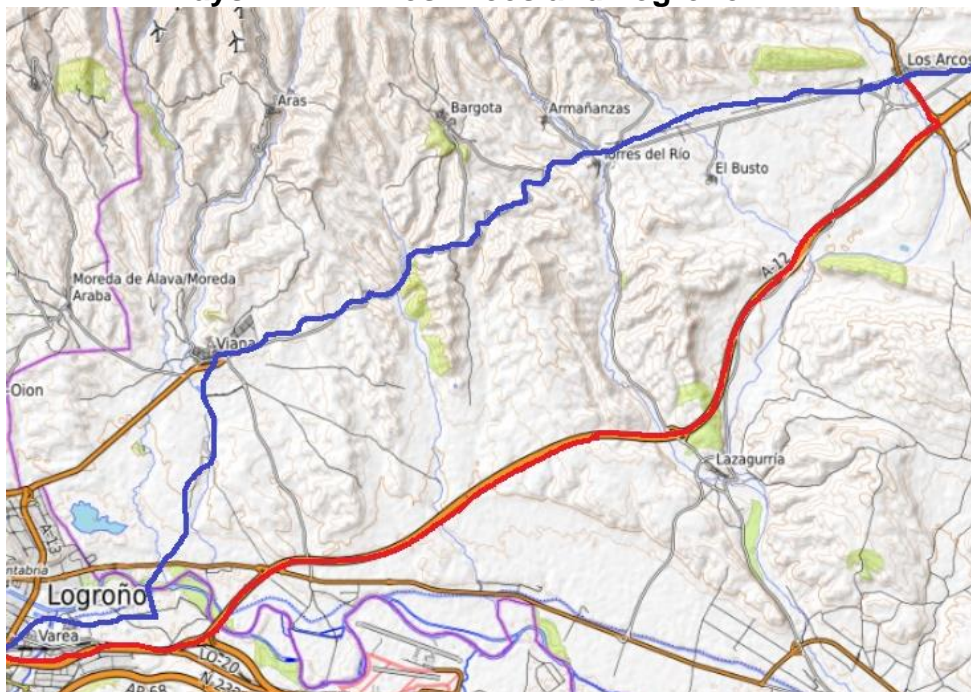


Figure 48: Route map, the bus ride from Los Arcos to Logroño (in red, Camino in blue)

Thus far I've focused on bodily suffering in relation to the obvious areas of physical vulnerability for walking pilgrims, the parts of the body which enjoy the closest relationship with the earth, the feet and legs. But ambulatory stress isn't confined to the lower limbs, the rest of the body keeps on functioning and malfunctioning, spiritual nourishment does not render us impervious to physical afflictions and I was very nearly undone by an injury as mundane as a broken tooth, inflicted by biting into a chunk of crunchy bread in Los Arcos. It didn't, of course, stop me walking. There was no pain, just an ugly fissure in one of my central upper incisors. I was 27 km away from Logroño, the nearest city. A comfortable day's walk. But instead of stoically sucking it up I surrendered to self-conscious vanity and hopped on the bus. In the pit of my stomach guilt began to curdle.

As a consequence I lost contact with a group of pilgrims I'd hoped would become my Camino 'family', the motley crew I'd come across two days previously in Zizur Mayor. I'd briefly explained to them my project, they were keen to participate. The intention had been to hook up with them as and when the serendipity of the Camino saw fit. That occurred in Los Arcos, as hot, dusty and sweaty as a desert in a spaghetti western. They arrived in a taxi outside the house where I'd rented a room for the night; that evening, in a bar on the main plaza, we drank and sang into the early hours.

It was a late night, I decided to take a rest day to write up my notes whilst they left late to make the relatively short walk to the next albergue; we agreed to meet up in Logroño.

But I spent much of the morning and afternoon idling away on the internet, perhaps the dental disaster was divine retribution.

As it happened, the tooth was easily fixed, and relatively cheaply too. My dentist was proud of his work and extolled the virtues of German dental technology – I had the Porsche of fillings, he said. And to be fair, it's still there. But I had to wait for an appointment and so one rest day finally metamorphosed into three. The enforced break put me out of sorts. I walk therefore I am, if I'm not walking I cease exist.

GUILTY FEET HAVE NOT NO RHYTHM

Day 15: Logroño to Nájera

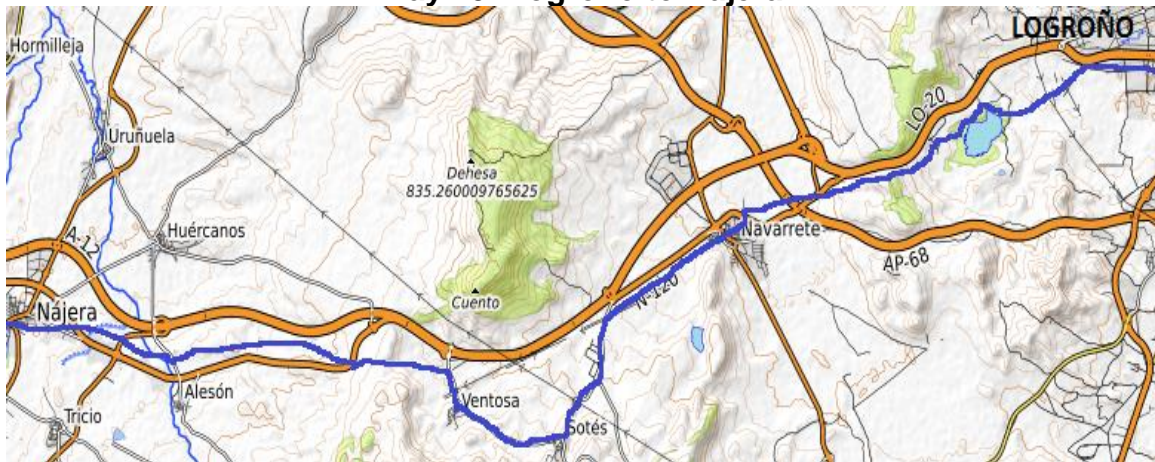


Figure 49: Route map, Logroño to Nájera

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Jul 29, 2016
My tooth is shining and I'm back on the trail #SaintsandCynics



Figure 50: A very happy Tweet from Logroño

One of the impacts of having a day off is the embodied one. I have no rhythm, knees are a bit dodgy. Not weak but they're not working properly. By the time I'd got to Los Arcos I think I was approaching 'trail fitness', it had taken me a good ten days and certainly when I climbed up out of the woods in Ayegui it felt as if I was moving well. Three days off, although I did walk around Logroño it's not quite the same walking around the city as it is walking on the trail. I reckon it's going to take me another two to three days to get back into the groove, as Madonna would say, and to get close to that trail fitness, that kind of Holy Grail.

The thing about spending two days in Logroño which might apply was this sense also of being and becoming. I wasn't moving but I felt myself

gravitated towards the railway and bus stations to see what was moving in a kind of proxy situation whereby as long as other people were moving I was happy. And I was away from pilgrims, I was in an entirely Spanish-speaking situation, especially in the dentist. So that was kind of interesting, I was away from the multilingual environment, I felt then that I was becoming more immersed in the actual Spanish culture. Away from the Camino, even though I was one the Camino, it was a very different experience.

Recorded thoughts 29 July 2016



Figure 51: In a state of permanent mobility

The Camino winds its way out of Logroño through industrial estates, with faint but fragrant tang of chemicals hanging in the air. Today, to atone for my sins, I was going to walk 29km to Najera but first stop was the town of Navarete, a hike of 12km. La Rioja is, of course, wine country and as soon as I'd crossed the city limits it was all vines, vines, vines. And a luscious, richly deep red soil. This combination, I noted at the time, gave me a 'spiritual feel, although I don't quite know why. I think it's the wine ...'



Figure 52: Riojan viniscape

Four years ago, trying to avoid the banal suburbanities I quite enjoyed this time round, I took the bus from Logroño to Navarete and spent the night in a cheap albergue. The town, like many on the Camino, is nondescript but I'd forgotten about the church ...

PERFORMING SACRED SPACE: WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CHURCH IN NAVARETTE

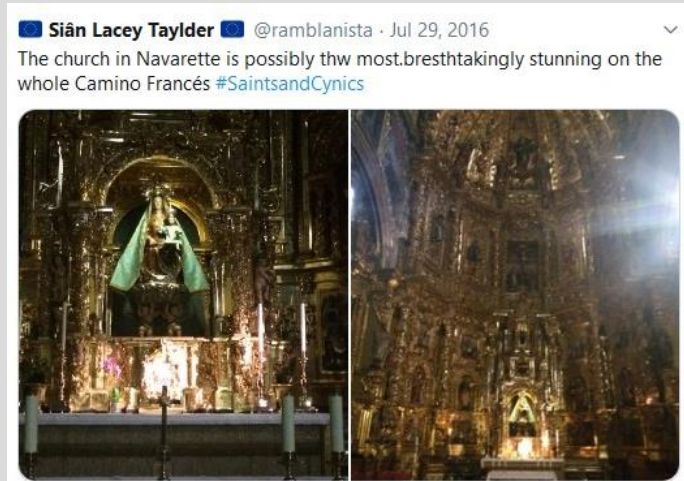


Figure 53: Interior of Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Navarette

It's about half-past ten, quarter-to eleven and I've arrived in Navarette. I'm in the church – there's nobody here so it's okay to talk. I remember it being stunning but it's absolutely overwhelming and almost the moment I came in ... it had me in tears, I don't know why. It is a fucking beautiful church. A golden altarpiece that extends all around a wide altar, a Virgin Mary and Child in the centre; as usual plenty of Virgin Marys. It's just ... the lights are low, there's music playing in the background which increases the affect. And that certain smell of incense long gone, it's a lingering smell of incense. It is absolutely amazing ...

Recorded thoughts 29 July 2016

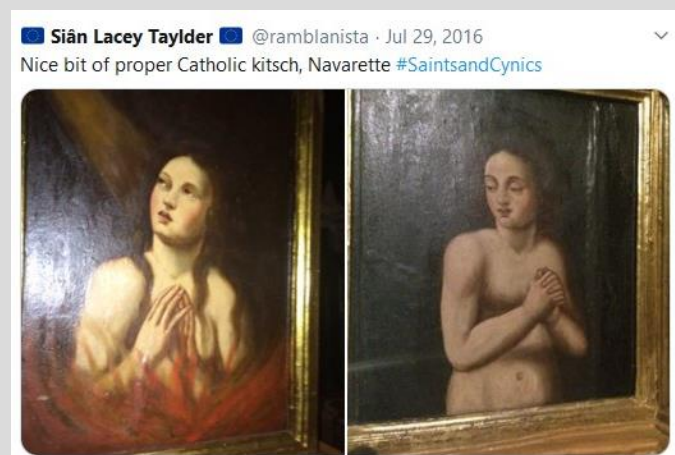


Figure 54: Catholic kitsch

My voice crackles with intensity then fades. On the recording there's a few seconds of silence then a snuffle. I was in tears then and now, several years later, I'm in tears again, as I type as the memories flood back. It strikes me that I could jump on a train this afternoon and be in Logroño in two-and-a-half hours and try to repeat the experience. But I know it wouldn't work, these landscape experiences are fleeting and ephemeral; they don't just happen by chance and neither can they be coaxed into existence.

In hindsight, it's not hard to see how circumstances came together – everything in the right place at the right time – to ratchet up the emotions to lachrymose levels: the relief of being back on the road, the path winding through an almost biblical landscape, the sheer joy of movement and then the sensual overload of the church, exacerbated by the choral plainsong playing softly in the background.

The first of Lefebvre's three dialectically interconnected aspects of social space – which share an inherently unstable relationship – refers to *representations of space* or *conceived space* which is space 'directly lived through its associated images and symbols'. It is the 'dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects (1971:39). It's also space that has been shaped by religious institutions and theologians (1971:45).

I thought about this as I tried to make sense of my experience in the church, an experience that might be described as 'moments of presence, glimpses of totality in the banality of everyday life when alienation is transcended' (Knott 2005:37). In their paper on religion as space for the expression of Caribbean identity in the UK, Chivallon and Belorgane argue that religious space is a 'space which serves to deconstruct the racial order inscribed in the British spaces and to replace them with representations more mental than material' (2001:477). Churches serving Caribbean communities, typically but not exclusively Pentecostalist, simultaneously criticise the imposed order and provide an alternative vision of the self (Knott 2001:38).⁸⁹

But religious experiences aren't confined to religious spaces – although religious experiences often turn previously 'neutral' space 'religious' – see, for example Lourdes. The presence of religious paraphernalia – spatial practices that are as aural, olfactory and tactile as they are visual – shape and consolidate what Chivallon and Belorgane call 'open' religious identity. Now, in terms of expressions of faith, Latin Catholicism and Caribbean Pentecostalism might seem poles apart but a closer examination reveals performative acts which share similarities. Speaking of her experience of a Pentecostalist church in Southampton, UK, one of Chivallon and Belorgane's respondents says 'I find that in a lot of white churches you don't have the freedom of expression that we have in our churches' (2001:470). Here, in the church in Navarette, the sensual loading of space was overwhelming, testing the elasticity of my emotions which, perhaps predictably, snapped. It was almost as if I'd wandered into a trap, into a

⁸⁹ Kim Knott cites Chivallon's work as an example of Edward Soja's *Thirdspace* and the potential of religion as a contemporary space of representation (2001:38).

religious space that ticked all my personal boxes that was designed and fabricated exclusively for me – though by whom I know not. And in the same way that Pentecostal church offers Caribbean believers freedom to express themselves away from the ‘constraints’ of traditional Anglicanism, so this church took me away from the dreariness of British Catholicism, or, as Charlotte Spretnak called it, ‘Catholic Lite’ (2004).⁹⁰ This was *Latin*, not Roman, Catholicism, in all its tacky and glorious excess.

THE DEVIL BIRDS ARE GOING HOME

Day 16: Nájera

And there are, quite literally, hundreds of devil birds. It's a #swift lovers paradise! @SaveourSwifts



Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Jul 30, 2016

Wow! The sky is full of swifts screaming and racing. Beautiful @SaveourSwifts #SaintsandCynics Nájera, La Rioja

Figure 54: Tweet from Nájera

It's about quarter to eight, Saturday the thirtieth, I believe, of July. Day 16 of Saints and Cynics and I'm just leaving Nájera. It's taking me quite a long time to leave Najera, not because of the beauty of the town which is, I suppose, in many ways typically ... faded glory – full of old disco bars which are now shut, very bizarre.

What's keeping me is just literally hundreds of swifts. Screaming, screeching, racing around the rooftops, through the streets. It's absolutely phenomenal, I've never, ever seen so many swifts in all my life, it's beautiful. Other birds just kind of standing, perched, as if they're completely flummoxed or overwhelmed by it all.

Recorded thoughts 30/7/16

⁹⁰ I acknowledge that this iteration of British Catholicism is, to a substantial extent, shaped by autoethnography/childhood experiences.

LA TIERRA BIBLICA

Day 16: Nájera to Santo Domingo de la Calzada



Figure 55: Route map, Nájera to Santo Domingo de la Calzada

I was thinking yesterday ... looking down to a shallow valley with vines running down the bottom, the red-brown slopes, scrub, bushes, pines ... I can imagine it being a very kind of biblical landscape. I'm not sure it occurs elsewhere, although perhaps you could think of the Meseta also along the lines of biblical walking in terms of Saul on the road to Damascus, the Road to Emmaus, the film 'Christ stopped at Eboli'. There is a character in this landscape to which I connect as being vaguely biblical, vaguely Christian. It's almost as if I have this notion, almost from childhood, from attending Catholic schools, of these images and the words I was taught, which I read ... and ... not imposing but placing them upon this landscape. This is what I imagine it would be like. It's the sort of place where you can imagine shepherds wondering through the hills – although of course it's all vines. And a Christ-like figure emerging.

I could turn a corner and in the same way that I was on the Dragonte route and there was this presence there, red and gold, which I assumed to be the Virgin Mary, I wouldn't be surprised if I turned a corner here and there was ... Christ. Which is unusual for me because I'm not really ... although I'm a Catholic, I'm not very much of a Christian.

And all the time I'm walking through these vines I'm thinking of the words from the Catholic mass – 'fruit of the vine, work of human hands, it will become for us our spiritual drink'. I didn't feel like this back in 2012 ... but it's interesting that in the more gothic, pastoral landscapes I feel a greater sense, even presence of the Virgin Mary but in these dry, arid landscapes it's very much more so Christ. Now is that something to do with eternal feminines, eternal masculines? ... Has it got something to do with my autoethnography?

And the concept of fertility. Even though this landscape is productive I see it as arid, I see it almost as a wasted land – perhaps there's something Arthurian coming in here too. The Fisher King: you are the land, the land is you – I guess that's where this all comes from. The land cannot be healed until the king is healed, his fertility is linked to the fertility of the land. But maybe those green verdant landscapes I associate with fertility, fecundity, desire ... I see them as positive. And these arid landscapes, the wide open skies, perhaps I associate them with periods of my life when I feel I've been in a state of stasis, stagnant, not moving. But you have to go through these landscape, these stages in order to get to your pastoral ... Arcadian landscapes. I suppose those are the landscapes I prefer.

So am I talking about potentiality or affect here? Or are they one and the same thing? There is the potential for a religious experience to

happen, there's the potential for Christ to walk around the corner, as I said ... with a bunch of grapes! It feels like these can happen. Doesn't mean to say they're going to happen but they can happen. It's, in a sense, blurring perhaps even breaking the laws of nature ... it's kind of a supernatural thing, the landscape takes on another dimension. Not in space, not in time but in something else. There's an enormous amount of potentiality on the Camino, things happen ... small miracles are constantly ongoing and a lot of these miracles are not caused by any spiritual power. Quite often they are just human agency but human agency in response to some kind of mood or ambience on the Camino. People find things by the roadside, you pick it up, you take it to the next town, the same thing I did with the Korean girl's shoe, there's a sense of responsibly.⁹¹ Strange things happen. Are they miracles? I think so. But then this is the potentiality of the landscape but also of the Camino itself.
 Recorded thoughts 30 July 2016

'ONLY THROUGH PAIN COMES TRUE PLEASURE'. DISCUSS
Days 17 & 18: Santo Domingo de la Calzada – Villafranca del Oca – Cardeñuela



Figure 56: Route map: Santo Domingo de la Calzada – Villafranca del Oca – Cardeñuela



Figure 57: Tweet from the church of St Peter the Apostle, Castildelgado
When I got to the church in Castildelgado [yesterday] and the old lady gave me a guided tour, it was just nice being there in that Spanish scene. I'm happy in that 'Spanishness'. And when I arrived at the pension, Silvia

⁹¹ Part of the Camino 'ethos' (see methodology) is the custom of pilgrims picking up items dropped or lost by pilgrims ahead of them then, at the next point of congregation, asking around to find their own. Things get back to themselves, as was the case here, with the lost shoe being reunited with its owner.

... like the old lady, was just gabbling away in Spanish. Sometimes when I'm with pilgrims talking in English I feel as though I'm not in Spain.

The 'Spanishness' of the landscape – to what extent is that important? And that 'Spanishness' is not accessible to all pilgrims, those who aren't Spanish and don't speak Spanish ... must be an entirely different experience and to what extent does this impact on the way you see the landscape? I don't know, do I see or feel the landscape differently because I have this fondness for Spain?



Figure 58: More 'body talk'

I have got a huge problem with my with the little toe on my left foot which has just mutated into one big blister. Very painful. I will carry on ... I don't know what to do with it. I put a plaster on it, didn't work, put another plaster on, swapped for a thinner sock. I think I'll be able get another 11 k[ilometres] ...

This is the weird thing. It's just after five [o'clock], Villafranca is in my sights, about fifteen hundred metres and ... I'm really enjoying this! I've done 35k, my little toe on the right foot has been giving me an awful amount of gyp for a couple of hours ... but I'm still loving it. I still love this act of walking and I'll go to bed and I won't be able to wait until the morning when I can start walking again, over the Montes de Oca. It's just bizarre; I should be crawling in, cursing, can't wait for a shower, cold beer, something to eat but I'm not. I'm really feeling good at the end of the day.



Figure 59: Tweet from the woods in the Montes d'Oca

This is absolutely delightful! In the woods ... I can feel the enchantment, that affect; every sense has to be aware. I know I'm talking into the recorder and that kind of goes against that theory but ... it's not enough just to look; your vision, your gaze is ... determined or constrained by the trees – these beautiful penduline oaks, the rock beneath us is the oldest in Spain – Palaeozoic – there are mountain cats here ... it's fantastic. You

feel it, you feel it. And that is not ... it's a physical thing, it's an embodied feeling. It's both cerebral and it's physical. Things could happen here, from the quite possible – unlikely but possible – appearance of the said mountain cat or some kind of creature that exists in these woods. It's an enchanted place.

Recorded thoughts 31 July 2016

WAYS OF WALKING: SCREAM IF YOU WANT TO GO FASTER

My recordings from this day's walking reveal an increasing conflict between a desire to get my head down and eat the kilometres and the need to dawdle to experience the landscape. As if to accentuate that, I seem to speak faster and faster, as if passion is getting the better of me. At times it sounds like I'm on narcotic-induced high.

'There's lots of conflicts in the way one walks this Camino if one wants to experience the landscape both for personal and academic requirements. But also as a pilgrim. That tension between pilgrim and ... researcher – let's call myself that.

Now I've done ... yesterday's 34, I feel I'm up for 30 k[ilometres] minimum every day. We are 520 k[ilometres] from Santiago ... at a push I could be there in 17, maybe 16 days. Just over a fortnight. I would feel great about this, there's no doubt about it, I would feel absolutely fantastic physically, that embodied pleasure. I like speed, I like long distances, I like walking 30+ a day.

However, today's a prime example. To rush through these woods would be, in terms of my thesis – you'd get nothing out of it. Just bomb through. So how does one walk to satisfy all these kinds of things?

Recorded thoughts 1 August 2016

There was no practical need to rush, time was a luxury that was on my side; it wasn't constraining me in the way that it compels others to walk to a specific timetable.

And yet:

'My temptation is to bomb through to Burgos today but I don't want to rush this section through the woods. How should I address the remaining 500 km because I'm a third of the way through already? It's a real conundrum, walk this way. It's not like city walking ... it's very different. I suppose as a researcher you need to take into account every aspect of the landscape, material and immaterial, be open to its affect. If you walk through fast, you tend not to but that's not always the case because going fast in itself can enhance a certain affect.'

Recorded thoughts 1 August 2016

ROLL THE STONES

Day 19: Cardeñuela Riopico – Burgos



Figure 60: Route map Cardeñuela Riopico – Burgos



Figure 61: Stones piled around wooden cross

It's another of those interesting contemporary elements of what we might call landscape art, human installations in the landscape. It's quite attractive and it feels kind of 'in place'

Recorded thoughts 2 August 2016

Four years ago I arrived on the outskirts of Burgos in a dreadful physical state having succumbed to a fever as a cold front brought unseasonal weather to northern Spain. As soon as I hit the main road I caught a bus into the centre and made straight for the albergue.

But this! This was like the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, *en familie*. This time, too, I'd had my fill of suffering which I bore, if not quite stoically then with a resigned state of forbearance and in the assumption that things could only get better.

And they did. My third week on the Camino was quite blissful. Everything and everybody was beginning to perform: my body, the landscape and my potential researchees with whom I enjoyed a leisurely and relatively short stroll into Burgos. Burgos is the third city through which the Camino passes and here, temporarily, the walls of the bubble thin a little, though they never come close to tumbling down. Since Logroño we've all been ploughing the same furrow, bumping into the same fellow pilgrims every day. Our contact with outsiders is limited because even those non-pilgrims we encounter aren't really 'outsiders',

their existences are invariably entwined with ours. Sweeping into the city opens things up a bit, the transition from rural to urban, a gentle realisation that there's life beyond the Camino de Santiago, even though we might not want to deal with it.

We've been wrapped, for so many days, in cotton wool; we might have set out on the Camino with anxiety and trepidation but we 'conquered' the mountains and we conquered those fears of the unknown. Now it's become our comfort zone.

We walked to the Cathedral then went our separate ways. In the evening we attended pilgrim mass together then went for a meal, performing pilgrimage perfectly, if you like, and keeping that bubble intact. On the other side of the city the Meseta loomed, its presence now almost tangible. But it had been dominating my thoughts for several days, in that bipolar love-hate way. Now, fit in mind and body, I was ready and willing.



Figure 62: 'We are family'

INTERLUDE: FORMAL VERSUS INFORMAL SPACE ON THE *CAMINO FRANCÉS*



Figure 63: 'Unofficial' distance marker, Montes de Oca

Some 5km before reaching the monastery and bar at St Juan de Ortega I came across a little oasis of a pitstop/art space in the middle of the forest. My recollections of the formal hospitality at St Juan were not good, poor service and a cankerous barman, so I decided to stop here and avail myself.

Like Roncesvalles, the monastery of St Juan de Ortega didn't 'perform' in the manner which their function suggests it should. These buildings are loaded in religious significance, they should, in terms of Mandoki's 'time-space bending' (1998), exert a strong spiritual/religious gravitational pull. Instead I find my space in the woods. It doesn't feel 'sacred' but it does exude a 'natural' harmony. And it feels intimate.

There are a number of things going on here, easier to see in retrospect, and from my photos, than it was to pick up on at the time.



Figure 64: 'Rest and be thankful'

First, even in the woods – perhaps because it's an opening in the woods – there's a feeling of space. And we come across it suddenly, there's no signpost to warn us of its impending appearance. Unlooked for, and in dappled beams of sunshine, this

idiosyncratic little halt is presided over by a Spanish woman who asks for only donations. It's as if, in the bubble, even money has less pull – pay what you want, pay what you can.

I sat and chatted with the 'proprietor' for longer than I normally do, let the sun do its work on my face and limbs. Once again it was nice to communicate in Spanish, in a sense it set me apart from my fellow non-Hispanic pilgrims.

It took me only a week to cross the *Meseta*. Yes, that surprised me too but that's what my voice recordings say – I'd long since given up on having my credential stamped on a daily basis. I'd also stopped writing my blog every evening. This wasn't, I can assure you, due to any indolence on my part but rather part of evolving social relations on the Camino. So maybe Turner was right (1978)? He argued that pilgrimage 'always tends towards *communitas*' which is 'a state of unmediated and egalitarian association between individuals who are temporarily freed of the hierarchical secular roles and statuses which they bear in everyday life (Eade & Sallnow 1991:4). The heady days of hiking to Burgos had indeed fomented a sense of Utopianism, we were all the land, the land was all of us. Except that we were increasingly more 'all about us' and less to do with the land. Social relations were beginning to take precedence over those with the natural environment but as I hinted at above, cracks were starting to show and hierarchies *were* beginning to emerge. Over the remainder of the Camino a pecking order would establish itself and some pilgrims would become more equal than others.

I'd bigged up the Meseta, would it 'work' in the way I wished? Could I, through gritted teeth and buckets of sweat, will its 'Meseta-ness' into existence? Was it simply a topographic, geological, socio-economic and cultural materiality or did it have its own spiritual agency? Can there exist theologies – or, perhaps a 'geotheologies/'theogeographies' of specific landscapes? Am I using too many inverted commas?⁹²

I think there is a 'geotheology' of the mountains. I also think the landscapes of the Meseta can shape and sculpt faith; even bend it out of shape, like a Uri Geller fork.

⁹² A serious question. At times I feel I'm constantly raising my hands to wiggle my index fingers to signify an 'air quote'. The Macmillan Dictionary refers to this device (a little hyperbolically, I think), as 'scare quotes', the function of which is to 'show that the word or phrase is unusual or perhaps not accurate'. I use them here to indicate that there's more to the text than meets the reader's eye and to highlight that the meaning of certain words and terminologies goes beyond the written text, that they are 'messy' and can't – and won't – be tied down by limited definitions. <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/scare-quotes>

But there are moments, too, when their use is more akin to shrugged shoulders; I'm not really sure *quite* what I mean and I'm struggling to find a way of articulating it more accurately but for the time being this is the best I can do. I'm hoping the journey might facilitate a better understanding but I wouldn't stake much more than the price of a cold beer on that happening.

STAGE TWO EMOTIONAL Burgos to Leon



Figure 65: Route map, Burgos to Leon



Figure 66: For we walk by faith, not by sight

So here we are again. Fresh-faced and fancy-free, full of vim and vigour: it's just like starting over again. The fleshpots of the city have revived those of us who've walked from St-Jean-Pied-du-Port and if you take a look around you'll see that, lo and behold, the pilgrim throng has multiplied. There are new faces, how will they get on with the existing

cohort?⁹³ Within the bubble, the past few days have been quite illuminating, social interactions have intensified, relationships have been established and ‘families’ are starting to come together.

EDGE LANDS

Day 20: Burgos to Hornillos del Camino

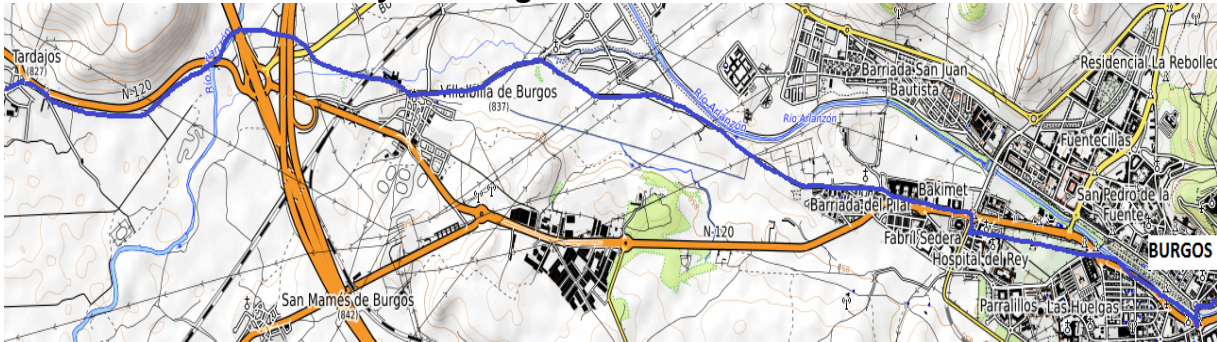


Figure 67: Route map through the Burgos edgelands

Over the past few years I've been fortunate to have enjoyed some memorable hikes through incredible landscapes, from the Camino to the Pyrenees and the volcanoes of Central America. But there's one which sticks in my mind and, perhaps, drew me to Nick Papadimitriou's *Scarp* which took place in a very non-elite landscape much closer to my then home.

For a couple of years in the 1980s I worked in the UK port of Avonmouth as a soil engineer. As ports go, it's a grim, uninviting place, lacking the seedy 'glamour' of, for example, Cadiz, but that is, in a sense, its appeal. It might be a dump, but it does 'being a dump' in a pleasingly understated manner.

I returned some twenty years later, on an appropriately nondescript afternoon in late winter. I was living in Bristol at the time, it must have been too late in the day to head for the Mendips and I needed some fresh air. It turned out to be a most exciting exploration of a place where maps forgot.

⁹³ Of the pilgrims who arrived in Santiago in August 2017 and attended the pilgrim office to register for their *compostela*, 634 (1%) had set out from Burgos. In addition, most of the 772 who'd walked from Bilbao and San Sebastian via the Camino Vasco would have joined the Camino Frances in Burgos. According to my very rudimentary calculations, around about 250 would have departed from Burgos daily during August 2016. <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics/>



Figure 68: *It's like a jungle out there ... Avonmouth, 2014*

The 1990s seemed to have bypassed Avonmouth, away from the docks the crumbling ruins of industry were being consumed by buddleia and brambles. As I wove my way through rusty barbed wire fences I imagined myself a latter day Stephens and Catherwood, hacking through the Central American rainforest in search of the overgrown remains of Mayan temples (2008).

In psychogeographical circles the term 'wasteland' has, like 'empty landscapes', become something of a cliché. In a 2002 essay Shoard coined the term 'Edgelands' to describe these transitional, liminal spaces that make up the urban hinterlands. Inspired by this, Michael Roberts and Farley's 'Edgelands' calls them 'untranslated landscapes ... part of the gravitational field of all our larger urban areas, a texture we build up speed to escape as we hurry towards the countryside, the distant wilderness' (2011:5).

And so here we are, trudging through the outskirts of Burgos. Its historic centre is slowly slipping away, here the Monasterio de las Huelgas, there the Hospital de Rey then a brief section through the university grounds before we veer off into the Edgelands.

The usual features were present: sewage works, the roads and the railways that bypass the city and a swathe of terrain that had, at present, no functional use and simply existed, an unloved *tabula rasa*.⁹⁴ And yet it just needs something – or maybe someone – to represent it. Or even love it. Papadimitriou's *Scarp* is an homage to these lost worlds, the territorial equivalent of the space down the back of the sofa, a dark and dirty place where the detritus of human domesticity accumulates but which occasionally produces unexpected treasures – such as a pound coin. *Scarp* offers a 'meticulous account of an intensely unpromising landscape of abandoned sewage works and heavily policed perimeter fencing manages, against all odds, to convey a magical sense of place' (Coverley 2018:180).

⁹⁴ See, for example, Iain Sinclair's 'Orbital' (2002), a 'pilgrimage' around London's M25.

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Aug 3, 2016
 Burgos edgelands. A suburb that never was or will be, adjacent to a prison. A purgatorial landscape #SaintsandCynics



Figure 69: Scenes from the Burgos edgelands

Here, in Spain, *las tierras de la periferia* bear witness to the continued impact of the 2008 economic crisis which tore the heart out of the nation, particularly its youth. This is, indeed, a spectral landscape of suburbs in the subjunctive, of settlements that will never be. These ‘ghost’ estates remain half-built, with cranes standing idly by, bearing an uncanny resemblance to the lifeless Martian tripods in *The War of the Worlds*.

It was a rare encroachment by the world-beyond-the-Camino into the bubble but by now those of us who’d walked from St-Jean-Pied-du-Port had been walking for a fortnight and had put the best part of 250 kilometres behind us. We’d become inured to anything that wasn’t on The Way, even though we walked right alongside it.

I left Burgos alone but came across my ‘family’ in Tardajos which, if I were a tourist marketing person, I’d rebrand as the ‘Gateway to the Meseta’ and probably install a ‘hands-on’, ‘multi-media’ visitor centre, so it’s just as well I’m not.



Figure 70: Approaching the Meseta

If we accept the thesis you are the land, the land is you, that one becomes part of the landscape, inseparable from it, then we must by extension be able to say ‘I am the Meseta, the Meseta is me’. Now what that does to me is another matter altogether. What do I become after spending these five or six days [in the heat] ...

Recorded thoughts 3 August 2016

NO ROOM AT THE INN Day 20: Burgos to Hornillos del Camino



Figure 71: Route map. Burgos to Hornillos del Campo

#SaintsandCynics Day 20. First day across the #Meseta, 21 hot & blistering kilometres. 'Enjoy' is not the word.



Figure 73: Except it was, of course. I was enjoying it immensely, otherwise I'd have gone home. But I had to play the martyr for my Twitter audience

I'd been told that the night before that Burgos was full and there wasn't a bed to be had for love nor money. The city's a 'pinch point', everybody wants to stay there and on the Camino, if there's constipation at the end of one stage it's likely to replicate itself further along the way. Hornillos del Camino, 21km distant from Burgos, is a case in point. Not much before and not much beyond. I'd left late and when I finally arrived the albergues were full.

I found a room elsewhere and prepared a quick snack – it was far too hot for hearty pilgrim stews. It didn't take me long to find my 'family'. It's not that there was a magnetic pull that drew us to each other, wherever we were on the Camino, more the fact they were the noisiest and most gregarious party on The Way.



Figure 73: By their songs ye shall find them ...

And once again, dear reader, I would like you to close your eyes, engage your geographical imagination and open up whatever sense of spiritual curiosity you might have. It's evening here in Hornillos del Camino, the temperature has just started to turn itself down a notch or two but we're sitting outside the bar in shorts and t-shirts – it's balmy. There's a group of English-speaking pilgrims sitting together, caught between the jovial and the earnest – which isn't a bad place to be. There's a priest, softly-spoken but with the 'natural' voice of authority, and someone recording a conversation that's taking place against the chinking of crockery and glasses and the crying of a baby in the near distance. Cold beer is flowing, of course, but this has opened up the voices of our family, and perhaps their souls, too. Come closer, let's hear what they've got to say.

Fr John: The common feeling is that God ... [created the world] ... and [creation] simply floated off and it's kind of minding its own business out there and every now and then God sort of intervenes for a bit. Creation is inside God, because God is present everywhere. So we are, at this moment, by being in creation, inside God, one might say.

But then what is creation? The key thing there is to understand the difference between Adam and Christ. That Adam was modelled on Christ ... it's not that the human race got into a mess and the Father and the Son had a little discussion, aided by the Holy Spirit [*puts on a 'fatherly' voice*] – 'What are we going to do to sort this out'. And the Son decided, 'Oh, I can go down and become one of them, isn't it lucky they're human'. Because ... Adam is a design based on Jesus because Jesus was always intended to occur, because God always intended to enter into His own creation. That's the key thing. Always.

He always intended to enter into his own creation in order to bring it back to Himself. So that you have the model of the Trinity, which ... the best we can understand is that the Father gives Himself totally to the Son in love, so the Son is the perfect image of the Father and, being love, returns the love to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the bond between them so you have this eternal dance of love. The Creation goes into that because the Creation is the work of the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit and it has to come back to the Father as well. It has to return. Which is what happens in the Resurrection. So Jesus comes, becomes part of creation in order to start

that return journey of Creation to the Father. And the New Creation and the new heaven and the new earth.

And if we're talking about the Meseta ... okay ... doesn't the landscape fit in there? This thing about ... we have to go, you might say a-walking, this idea of a linear retreat, away from distractions and so on ...

Chris: A linear retreat ...?

Fr John: It's what you were talking about as the inner Camino, you go inside, you start looking at yourself, that's where you begin to find God. And to the extent you find God in there, then you come back out into world and Creation and find that in God.

Me: Might you fall out with God on the Camino? On the Meseta?

Some food arrives

Fr John: The walking isn't just a pleasant stroll ... if you were just out for a gentle stroll ... the danger there is that you actually just get lost in the Creation. The Meseta is, in a certain sense, brutal and ...

Chris: ... brutal ...

Me: It is a very brutal landscape ...

Fr John: Good word, that. You come into yourself. Which is why it's not necessary to get to Santiago. Why does somebody actually need to get to Santiago?

Me: Alpha and Omega. I wrote about this once. You have to have a beginning and an end. But [getting to Santiago] doesn't matter that much, I kind of half agree with you.

Chris: So that's why you can take taxis, coaches ... course you can ... you haven't got to get there. I've got to get there, because my plane takes off from Santiago. I've got a hotel booked ...

Fr John: You could, as it were, find your Santiago in Zubiri ...

Me: Yes, I found my Santiago, as it were, just going off into the mountains. Everything else after that was an anti-climax. Once I'd got off onto this trail, the Dragonte Route, it was ... that's why I had to go on to Finisterre. Because you have to keep on walking, that's the problem, it isn't Santiago ...

Fr John: But someone could go from St Jean to Santiago and never get there, physically there, but actually nothing's happened.

Me: Nothing's happened ...

Fr John: Yes. All they've done is a walk.

Me: But that depends on how much you bring to the [Camino]: your background, what you expect out of the Camino ...

Fr John: ... and your openness ...

Cornelius: I think probably that's slightly ... not arrogant, I don't mean arrogant but I mean ... anybody who completes the entire walk will change. In a way, they will. I think it'll happen to them.

Me: When you think about the different ways people do it, some people do it just to get fit, like in the film, the guy wanted to lose weight ... these are all valid reasons why you might want to ... but it will change you.

Fr John: But you're then back into the question, what does it mean to do the Camino? You can physically move your body from St Jean to Santiago with the mind and soul never really involved.

Me: For some people the purpose is just to get to Santiago, get that certificate, the compostela ...

Fr John: ... yeah. I've done it. Got there, done that, ticked it off.

Cornelius: Well that guy that we met ... somewhere ... Steve! Did it in 22 days last year and then realised actually there's a lot more to this than meets the eye and came back to do it very slowly this year.

Me: I'm enjoying this much more than my first Camino ...

Chris: Well you've met us so it's not surprising!

Fr John: We met one character who was on his seventieth Camino ...

Chris: Yeah, we met him, I had my photo taken with him. He's a legend of the Camino. Maybe he's a bit obsessive as well ...

Vera: Yeah, for sure ...

There's a brief review of the day's walking in which the words 'hot' and 'brutal' feature

Me: So it isn't just the landscape, it's the weather ...

Chris: It was brutal, it was hot ...

Me: It's that the state of the path itself ...

Chris: I think for an hour and three quarters I was totally on my own, And, I have to say this, I got the most vivid of flashbacks! So vivid, past events, really vivid. Is that usual, unusual? Anyway, it happened to me. Maybe I imagined the flashbacks to keep going because I was ... you know ... physically it was challenging for me.

Me: What do you do when the landscape doesn't change much?

Chris: It was physically challenging. I'd finished praying, I thought I can't do another five decades of the rosary. I'd finished all that, I'd got to my rock bottom ... and I was just having very vivid flashbacks.

Fr John: It's interesting. I had flashbacks early on, all sorts of weird things were going on.

Me: What's the mind doing? Rousseau talks about walk being the mind at three miles an hour, four point five kilometres. So, is walking meditative? Do you drift off? Especially when the landscape isn't changing much ...

Chris: It was changing as well, there were sunflowers ...

Me: ... it was subtle ...

Chris: I saw lots of changes. I saw people, I was overtaking people actually. I wasn't arrogant, nobody overtook me. But that was not an issue, they could have. But I overtook people and I was talking to them as they overtook them just to break it up but they didn't want to engage.

Me: I didn't want to engage today. I didn't want to speak to anybody.

Fr John: You have got the aspect of the landscape changing, when you walking it doesn't change very much. Because the speed you're going ...

Chris: ... God help us, the Meseta's just starting, isn't it? Does it go all the way to Leon? So how many kilometres of Meseta ...

Me: It's six or seven days. A hundred and fifty k.

Chris: A hundred and fifty k of Meseta?

Fr John: Flat, flat, flat, flat, flat ...

Chris: So your soul bares itself in this time ... (sighs)

Me: Which is why it's such a fascinating place ...

Food arrives

Chris: Well, I'm going to bare my soul tomorrow then ...

Me: When I was thinking about this research, and how you record your notes and how I compare my experiences with other people's ...

Chris: I think it's going to be very difficult to pull all this together ...

Me: It's not, because it's a qualitative exercise, there's no fixed way of doing this. I want to represent the landscape and I want to represent how the landscape feels to me and how to it feels to other people so I do that through writing. There doesn't have to be a conclusion, doesn't have to be a beginning and an end.

And then There's a call for more beers and the conversation fizzles out.

As conversations go it's rather rambling and inconclusive but it's also, I think, illuminating. It succeeds, too, in capturing the moment, a freeze-frame, if you like, of a 'day-in-the-life'. I wanted to reproduce it in full to try to convey its 'messiness' and to let it stand for itself.

I had, at this point in time, three different takes on the relationship between the landscape – specifically the landscape of the Meseta – and religiosity – specifically, a Catholic religiosity – from three contrasting perspectives: my own, that of a (British) priest and a member of the mendicant Maltfriscans. In conversation a few days earlier, during the entrance into Burgos, Father John had come across as rather conservative or, perhaps a better description, 'orthodox'. As Catholic priests go, he wasn't particularly 'old'. Listening to him confirmed my concerns that the Church had entered a prolonged period of stasis in which progressivism had been stopped in its tracks but reactionary movements had failed to make any consequent headway. Instead, against a background of clerical sexual abuse scandals, the pews were continuing to empty, in Europe to secular pluralism and in Latin America to the increasing popularity of Pentecostal evangelism. Within this doctrinal void, orthodoxy had imposed itself with a rigour which attempted to cauterise not only the liberals and liberationists but also some more extreme elements of the ultramontane right and 'popular' Catholicism.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ See, for example, Marcel Lefebvre and the Society of St. Pius X. The rejection of 'popular Catholicism', by which I mean elements such as Mariology and devotion to the saints and sacred relics as well as pilgrimage, is also part of this 'new orthodoxy'. See Greely (2004)

In a sense, the Maltfriscans, in the form of emboldened laypersons, were also a product of this post-conciliar tension. They were happy to embrace unorthodoxy in the practice of their faith as well as some of its teachings but remained firmly mainstream on others.⁹⁶ And, as the above conversation shows, Chris and Father John had contrasting views on the spiritual purpose of the Camino, the former being more adventurous in exploring his faith, particularly through his 'inner Camino'.

That said, and remembering that my theological formation is informal and organic, I was grateful for Father John for trying to locate the landscape experience within Catholic doctrine. Two things strike me: one, his description of the Camino as a 'linear retreat' which, although interesting and pertinent, plays down the traditional spiritual importance of pilgrimage and two, his determination to see the landscape as part of the 'New Creation' and thus, in my eyes, deny it its spiritual agency. His theology was very neat and tidy and a bit too 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' – the 'fatherly voice', though funny, rather than confirmed that. Through the lens of Father John's theology, the Meseta seemed monolithic, and God a supreme dictator, paternal but benign. Perhaps most significantly, his rejection of the Camino's importance struck me as almost sacrilegious. And he reminded me of Jack Clemo, to invest too much spiritual capital in the Camino and the landscape was tantamount to idolatry.

I was particularly taken by Chris' method of walking and praying, saying the rosary. These seemed to me to be a perfectly appropriate method of teasing out the landscape's spiritual affect and a few days later, along the last stage of the Meseta, I would undertake something very similar with a fellow Catholic pilgrim, Hanzel. I also liked the way in which he was, in contrast to Father John, equally in awe of the Meseta. Over the next few days our *modus ambulare* would be only partially collective, we might walk in pairs or small groups for some of the time but for the most part we set off at our own pace and gathered together at bars and cafeterias.

⁹⁶ On the Camino neither Chris nor Cornelius expressed concerns about my 'transsexual' status and at a post-Camino get-together both Chris and his wife were delighted to learn I was in a relationship with another woman. They were, however, unequivocal in their condemnation of abortion.



Figure 74: The loneliness of the long distance pilgrim

In front of me there's a small group of people ... there's a slight incline here ... but whenever I look up and see them it's almost as they are mountaineers, close to the summit of Everest, crawling up every step, every pace a real effort, walking sticks like ice axes. It has that kind of feel to it ... very draining ...



Figure 75: 'It's on, and on, and on. It's Heaven and Hell'⁹⁷

So what I was thinking was that this becoming in the Meseta is a new becoming and whatever happened in the previous section is kind of null and void. It might have benefitted the pilgrim physically but there's no way it's prepared the pilgrim for this. Or maybe I'm just making too much out of it, those people ahead of me are simply strolling through, singing songs ...

Recorded thoughts 5 August 2016

⁹⁷ Black Sabbath, 'Heaven and Hell' (Dio, Iommi, Butler, Ward 1980)

THE VERY RICH HOURS

Day 21: Hornillos del Camino to Castrojeriz



Figure 76: Route map, Hornillos del Camino to Castrojeriz

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Aug 4, 2016
Day 2 on the Meseta. A before-dawn start to counter the heat
[#SaintsandCynics](#)



Figure 77: The hour-before-dawn dark

I'm not averse to hiking in high temperatures, in fact, I get quite a kick out of it. There's something heroically romantic about a bronzed, bandana-ed body, drenched in sweat, striding across the Meseta. Somewhere between the sexy and the quixotic. And it adds to the achievement, makes the end-of-the-day afterglow all the more satisfying. However, the family wanted to avoid the heat and voted to hour-before-dawn twilight so, for social as much as academic purposes, I acquiesced.



Figure 78: The Meseta at dawn

It's six o'clock ... it's quite magical, as you probably would imagine. The affect of dawn, the first rays of sunlight above us, the compostelae, the field of stars. I don't particularly like walking in the dark because you can't see anything. However, at that hour-before-dawn-twilight it's a different story. Slowly the landscape begins to emerge from darkness, in the east there is a growing light and here's the sound of boots crunching the path underneath, the scrape of bastones ... and I've turned off my torch because I just want to try and experience the moment at its most elemental. Within half an hour the sun will be up and the Meseta at dawn will be a fascinating place.



Figure 79: Walking on sunshine ...

It's been a stunning walk, despite the 'sameness of the landscape'. A lot of it is the actual walking itself, good tracks. You can easily set a good pace, get into the groove. After bigging up the Meseta up I feel I'm its greatest advocate now. I don't know whether I've made my peace with it but it did get quite emotional there, fifteen minutes back, with the sun finally poking its head above the horizon.

I was having a chat with Seyoung. She's a protestant and she's quit her job as a speech therapist to take some time off – she's been dreaming about coming to the Camino for ten years. A lot of expectation ... and Cornel asked her about her religious experience, she was a little bit reluctant, of course there's always the language although her English is good but sometimes translation can lose the meaning. She said she was really struggling out of St Jean up into the Pyrenees and so she said the prayer which she said came naturally to her, which was the Lord's Prayer, and she said [that] she said this for one or two hours as she was climbing and she said it sustained her. She said she was in tears when she did it.

Recorded thoughts 4 August 2016

YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE Day 22: Castrojeriz to Boadilla del Camino



Figure 80: Route map, Castrojeriz to Boadilla del Camino

WE ARE FAMILY: FAITH, SOCIAL RELATIONS AND LANDSCAPE

It feels like today something's changed, there's a new dynamic. I've walked mostly on my own within the family, I think the family has probably dissolved now.

I think the family represented a quite 'authentic' form of contemporary pilgrimage. They had that religious motivation, I suppose, which somehow puts them apart in my mind's eye from the majority of pilgrims.

Recorded thoughts 4 August 2016



Figure 81: The Last Supper

From Castrojeriz Father John and Cornel left to return home. Appropriately enough, on our final night together we shared a dormitory in an albergue. I cooked a spicy stew which was washed down with plenty of wine and cold beer. I worried about Chris missing his friend, at times they seemed to be joined at the hip, and wondered whether he would become less gregarious. The Camino was getting busy, and the Meseta's 'blocking points' were getting booked up.

What does it mean to walk the Camino, or least part of it, in the company of others? This is, remember, a rarified atmosphere; any barriers, in as much as they exist, are the walls of the bubble, between the pilgrim and non-pilgrim world. Some come to walk

alone, others seeks camaraderie, the social is as important as the physical, perhaps more so.

In contrast to my previous experience, this family was less nuclear and a little more porous, usually sweeping up waifs and strays *en route*. It was mostly jolly, and full of wine and song, but each person knew when and where to have their thoughtful and solemn moments. With the exception of Vera, we all expressed some sort of religious faith and it shaped the way we experienced the landscape, some more than others.

This vista that opens up, this – and I’m going to use the words ‘sea of gold’ because I can’t think of a better description. It’s a vast open landscape of blond fields, occasional greenery – there’s a kind of oasis ahead – but it is really just gold. It’s a very human landscape, it’s a classic case of human activity creating this landscape, dwelling in it and perhaps leaving its mark in layers, going back to the palimpsests I was taught [as a geography undergraduate].

The Meseta, contrary to how I remember it, is a constantly changing place. It’s almost a landscape of milk and honey. It’s a landscape that provides. And in the same way that I liked the presence of the magnesium plant in the landscape just after Zubiri, I like this too. It’s not wilderness, it’s the opposite of that, but it’s humans creating the landscape and the landscape doing something.

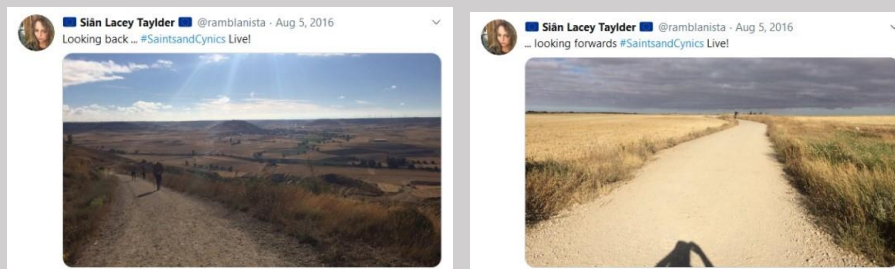


Figure 82: *‘I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow
at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful
of dust.’⁹⁸*

Just taken a picture of this part of the Meseta, because I think it’s quite characteristic. The usual white, bleached path climbing, winding up between low hills on that low ridge. It struck me again ... if I’m thinking of the elements that give the landscape that life, vitality – one of the things I’ve taken lots of photos of is the path itself. So we could identify that as a major talking point, the path in the landscape. A second one would be the nature of the walking, and how that changes cumulatively, as ritual, but I would add to that the ritual of the daily routine, especially in the albergues. This morning the lights went on automatically at half-six and it was as if we all unconsciously, subliminally slipped into getting-ready-for-the-day’s-walk mode.

There is that kind of ... you’re almost on automatic pilot but I wouldn’t call it ‘automatic pilot’ ... but what I would say is trance-like, in a strange way. Not the ‘trance’ as in ‘trance music’ or any kind of narcotic-induced

⁹⁸ T S Eliot, ‘The Wasteland’: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47311/the-waste-land>

trance but the trance of walking every day. You get to your location ... and then we'll do the things we do in the afternoon. The things I do in the afternoon are slightly different – at least I try to do things academic in the afternoon but it doesn't often work. I'm afraid.

Recorded thoughts 5 August 2016

WHOSE SHARED SPACE IS IT ANYWAY?

Day 23: Boadilla del Camino – Carrión de los Condes



Figure 83: Route map, Boadilla del Camino – Carrión de los Condes

The family didn't dissolve immediately. Boadilla del Camino was a convenient overnight stop but not a place to loiter; it sticks in the memory only for the lack of culinary delights – microwaved ready meals. It also sticks in my mind because it was here we encountered Hansel, a Korean Canadian studying for a masters' in Catholic culture in Rome. She produced a card saying that if she was dying someone should call a Catholic priest. Her more structured, traditional Catholicism was at odds with Chris's Maltfriscan charismatic Catholicism.

Chris and Vera were quite surprised at Hansel's card but it seemed normal to me. It was the type of Catholicism in which I grew up and rejected in my late teens; when I eventually came back the importance of the sacraments was one of the things that, perceived through a different lens, made sense. And Hansel was to feature in one of my most memorable walks.



Figure 84: Image of 'Our Lady of the River'

Just stopped off at the Ermita of our Lady of the River. Quite powerful. I had a moment in there, a 'Virgin Mary moment'. It's a very simple church with a huge statue of the Virgin of the River on the altar. I wasn't quite expecting that, it's quite a strong image of the Virgin with black coral hair. It's difficult to explain, it is a dream? Have I conjured it up myself? I don't really know.

When you think about this kind of religious/spiritual landscape – not just the churches, not just the ermitas, the shrines, the statues, the crosses – the naming of the landscape, 'Virgen del Camino', it's a layer in the landscape in terms of dwelling. It's carved itself, it's still there, even though many of these relics are ancient – four hundred, five hundred years old, they still exist, they still perform, they still do things.

Despite the fact that I'm enjoying this crossing of the Meseta ... it just occurred to me that it feels intense. There's an intensity to the landscape, to the pilgrimage itself, I don't know if that's the flatness of it. And looking forward obviously to getting towards the mountains where I feel, already ... I'm going to feel a great deal of relief. It's difficult to explain that – the freshness, the lack of the horizontal, the variety ... I'm thinking of the three stages and that third stage being the mountains and I'm also thinking that if I go to the [Camino] Portugues then ... what comes after? There's a fourth part, what comes after the spiritual revelation, I don't know?



Figure 85: This is **exactly** how I was feeling ...

I'm thinking about staying in the Casa Spiritual [albergue] in Carrion and part of me just wants to get a hotel room on my own, just lie down and detach myself from it all. To go through the routine and ritual of a religious house might be too much ... it feels very tiring.



Figure 86: The side of the road

*I don't know where Vera and Chris are so I'm on my own. And the most depressing end of the day. The horrible straight 6k to Carrion de los Condes. I hate it already, really hate the path. It follows the road, it's more or less straight, it goes very gently uphill so you can even see where you're going, just **really** pissed off now. It's been a very intense day, I don't know why. I don't really want to stay in Carrion de los Condes, I just want to get on to the 17.5 but I don't really want to break up the family. It's the accumulation of things, I feel ready to move on.*

HERE COMES THE GYROVAGUE ...

Looking back, it's possible to identify Carrion de los Condes as the moment when my inner anti-pilgrim – or 'Gyrovague' – began to make herself heard above the convivial, communal din of the Camino. That part of what many pilgrims refer to as the 'magic' of the experience was starting to lose its lustre.

It was a familiar sensation, and one I'd anticipated. I also expected it to stick around for the remainder of the journey, increasing in its passion. And it didn't come from out of nowhere, I'm still trying to work out how the happy hiker turned misanthrope and how the Turners' *communitas* broke down and, to borrow from Eade and Sallnow (1991), how the sacred become not so much contested as riven by conflict.

One of Eade and Sallnow's criticisms of *communitas* was its failure to consider the mundane conflicts inherent in pilgrimage; it was too much idealised discourse and insufficient empirical description. Writing ten years after the publication of *Contesting the Sacred*, and attempting to find some common ground between conflict and *communitas*, Coleman asked 'Do you believe in pilgrimage?' (2002). A rhetorical question but at that time I wasn't one hundred per cent sure. I hadn't turned full-on atheist but the niggling agnosticism which has been present on all my Camino ventures was nagging away

again, rather like a perennial groin strain. I think I did – and still do – believe in Pilgrimage but, re-reading Coleman’s attempt at mediation and trying to pick a course between *communitas* and confrontation, I felt torn between Scylla and Charybdis. Ultimately, Coleman plumps for the former, favouring a ‘healthy scepticism towards overly essentialist claims’ (2002:362), and, as an academic, I felt I should too. But despite that my gut feeling, through being in the field and doing and/or performing pilgrimage, was that what Coleman refers to as ‘sacred travel’ (2002:364) is essentially ‘special’ and its ‘sacredness’ comes from distancing itself, over time and space, from the sacred. But perhaps that simply turns pilgrimage from a spiritual journey with attendant rituals to Father John’s ‘linear retreat’.

I finished the Meseta walking with Hanzel who then took the bus to Leon. She wanted to spend time walking on her own then stay at the monastery at Rabanal del Camino.⁹⁹ She saw pilgrimage as more than walking and wanted some spiritual time, she too saw the Camino as a kind of mobile retreat. Staying at Rabanal appealed to me too but ultimately I was too keen to stay on the move. The antithesis of Hanzel, for me, the most important aspect of pilgrimage is walking and there was no way I could stay still. The Rule of St Benedict – which, if you remember, warns against the likes of us gyrovagues – is typically summed up by the motto *laborare est orare*, a philosophy which seemed to me to be at odds with the tenants of liberation theology. I’d (re)discovered God through journeys on foot so it seemed pertinent – as well as pithy – to rephrase the Benedictine maxim as *ambulare est orare* – ‘to walk is to pray’.

So this transition from pilgrim to gyrovague was a personality shift waiting to happen. The initial catalyst was arriving at the albergue in the Convent of Santa Clara which is run by nuns. Who are, apparently, well-known for making sweets. There was nothing vaguely saccharine about my mood when I arrived and found a long queue of ‘fellow’ – please note use of inverted commas – pilgrims waiting to be processed.

⁹⁹ Rabanal del Camino is an example of how the Camino has played a vital role in breathing new life into the economies of rural settlements along the Camino, particularly in Castilla y Leon and Galicia; without it Rabanal would almost certainly have joined the list of *despoblados* (abandoned villages). It now boasts four albergues, seven hotels, three food stores and several restaurants. The Benedictine monastery of San Salvador del Monte Irago, founded as recently as 2002, runs for of these hostelries but also offers pilgrims the opportunity to take time out from the Camino and enjoy a longer stay, experiencing the daily monastic routine of the Rule of St Benedict <https://monteirago.org/en/comunidad/>.

THE MESETA FIGHTS BACK

Day 24: Carrión de los Condes to Sahagún

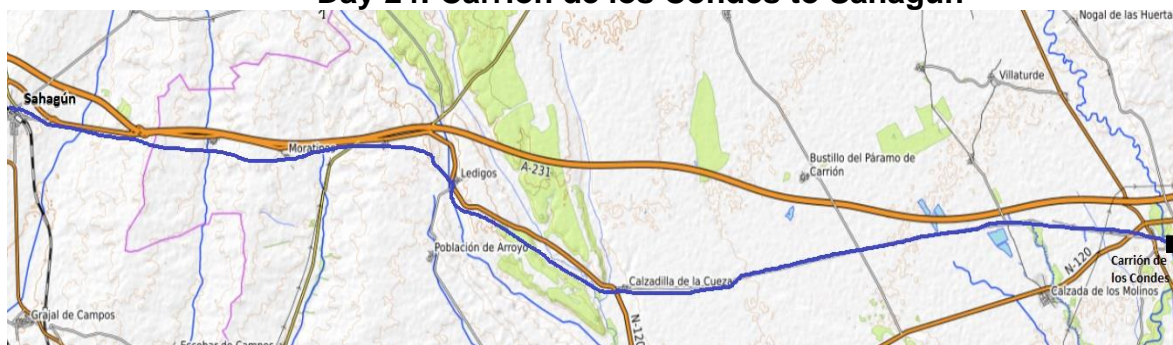


Figure 87: Route Map: Carrión de los Condes to Sahagún

It's been a difficult twenty-four hours. Yesterday's walk was lovely until we got to Villacazar and that's where things changed. Just that last 6k is an absolute killer, the Meseta fighting back. All of us were worn down by it yesterday, I think. Chris wasn't well ... and I was fuming when I got finally to the albergue which Vera very kindly sorted for us before we arrived ... really angry. I hated my fellow pilgrims, they took so bloody long to cook. I was scowling at people. Vera too said she wanted to get away from the pilgrims.

Chris' stomach got worse, I eventually managed to track down some pills for him; that was merry trail around Carrion de los Condes. [I found a pharmacy] and then tourists come in and ask the pharmacist for a recommendation for a decent restaurant. Fucking hell! Anyway, Chris got his pills, he's no better this morning and now Seyoung's gone down with something too so ... poor Vera's chaperoning them ... they've gone off in a taxi to Sahagún from where Chris and Vera will take the train to León where they should be tonight in their parador. And I think that's what Chris needs, a really comfy hotel room, the city, not to be worn down by this endless procession of flat farmland.

It would've been nice to walk the whole thing with them because we were just developing some interesting ideas, I didn't have time to finish the discussion with Chris because yesterday he was ill, so it's my intention really ... to catch them up. Because nothing would please me more than to walk into Santiago with them.

Recorded thoughts 7 August 2016

RAMBLANISTA

WALKING WITH ATTITUDE

Saints and Cynics: The Meseta and the Dreaded 17.5¹⁰⁰

The Meseta. You'll have twigged by now that it's become something of an obsession, that it dominates my every waking thought and enters into my dreams and nightmares; can't live with it, can't live without it.

I've just completed my sixth day on the plateau, six days and 140km as a high plains drifter. Tomorrow I'll quietly slip off and file my way along the road to León. There'll be relief but that relief will be tinged with sadness and I dare say that when I'm up in the *Montes de León* I'll turn round and gaze wistfully at the golden haze in the distant east.

¹⁰⁰ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/2016/08/saints-and-cynics-meseta-and-dreaded-175.html>

Things fell apart along that final stretch of path into Carrión de los Condes. It wasn't so much that the Meseta had broken us, more that it had worn us down. Walking through it, we'd all, I think, become connoisseurs as well as admirers, it was a spell that only walking - dwelling - in the landscape could create. To the unembodied observer it all looks the same, day-in, day-out, and I can understand that perspective. But when you're etching your way through its infinite layers you soon come to realise that every step just isn't the same. We talk about making a 'crossing' of the Meseta, as if it were a vast uncharted ocean. The maps and guidebooks tell us what's taking place at ground level, what happens when the land comes into contact with our own moods, emotions and personal histories is another narrative altogether. There were storms brewing, shipwrecks on the horizon.



Figure 88: Carrión de los Condes, Sunday morning. Do NOT let this apparently verdant oasis lull you into a false sense of security. It will hit you like a hammer

At Carrion de los Condes two 'family' members went down with diarrhoea and took a taxi to Sahagún, thus missing out on the Meseta's grimmest torture. Just when you think you've got the better of it, the Camino lays down its greatest, most arduous challenge. Forget the crossing of the Pyrenees, forget the long climb up to O Cebreiro, the 17.5 km hike between Carrion de los Condes and Calzadilla de la Cueta is *the* test. Like Jacob wrestling the angel.

I've described the elation I felt as I passed the Virgen de Biakorri and the mountains opened up before me, my continued engagement with the landscape as the Camino wound its way through the vineyards and fields of Navarra and La Rioja. This is a bounteous earth that eases the mind and the soul, if there's ecstasy it's restrained and understated. Then you get to the Dreaded 17.5 and all hell breaks loose. I have, of course, made this particular crossing before, back in 2012. Then, as now, I realised one required a strategy to get through with one's sanity intact. Mine was basic and consisted of two components: (1) walk like f***, close to the speed of light and (2) try to overtake as many of your fellow pilgrims as possible.



Figure 89: It's getting closer. Getting closer all the time ...

Where the Camino leaves the asphalt and drives off in a straight line along a dust-track I start to move. It's a nuanced acceleration, I don't want to go down injured at this, the most crucial stage of the pilgrimage. The pace picks up, 500m ahead I spy a poor innocent who clearly has no idea as to imminent and immanent torture. She's ambling along as if she were out for a Sunday stroll by the sea.

This path ain't wide enough for the both of us. I pick her in my sights and, minutes I've surged past her. Blam! It only takes a couple of seconds. There's a brief exchange of *buen caminos* then I'm gone, disappeared in a cloud of dust.



Figure 90: Carrión Regardless

I've overtaken another dozen souls before arriving at the 11km point where the mobile cafe *should* be. Only it's not, and I don't stop to see whether the fountain is dry. Time is my enemy and by now I'm on a roll, pumping adrenalin, moving like a highly-strung athlete rather than an effete academic. This is so good it really hurts.

'Right! It's twenty to eleven and I'm fucking motoring' I utter breathlessly into my digital voice recorder. At times I'm close to running and for a moment I do, actually, break into a

jog, carried forward on a heady cocktail of angst and elation. Then, just at the point where it might have gone arse over elbow, yellow-painted words on a bridge wall: *tienda 6km*. The *tienda*, of course, is the end.

The wind buoys me. I'm no longer a mere pilgrim or Exeter University research student, I'm Mercury with winged Berghaus boots, eating up the kilometres before a late breakfast. And suddenly, there it is, the church to the left and, before I've taken it in, the village of Calzadilla de la Cueva and a welcoming bar. I look at my 'phone, it's taken me just over two and a half hours - seven kilometres per hour. Predictably, but unashamedly, I go overboard into my digital voice recorder: *'Fucking Hell! I've only just done it! Seventeen-point-five!! Wow! Half-past eleven ... fuck that ... that's brilliant! I can't believe it ... this is the happiest I've been for so long. It's fantastic. Absolutely fucking brilliant.'*



*Figure 91: This is the end, beautiful friend, the end ...
I'll never look into your eyes, again*

Twenty-four hours later and still the buzz is burning. It was one of the happiest days of my walking life and thus, by definition, one of the happiest days of my life. With the Dreaded 17.5 burnt to a frazzle, the Road to Santiago is now clear.

Elation but melancholy, too. The moment is gone, I'll never enjoy the intensity of that emotion again and even though I made the most of it, like all landscape experiences it is fleeting, ephemeral. I down a celebratory Coca-Cola then lumber on; still 20km till my end-of-day destination. No sleep till Sahagún.



*Figure 92: For those whom the Dreaded 17.5 has destroyed, in mind
and/or body, a taxi awaits ...*

In an ideal world I'd be able to reproduce my voice recording in aural form. One of the main aims of this project, as outlined in the toolkit, is using more-than-representational theories to animate the landscape. I also referred to the concept of 'user-illusion', the 'half-second delay between the brain initiating an action and conscious sensation' (Macpherson 2009:5) and it was with this in mind that I chose to use a digital voice recorder as my principle source of data collection.¹⁰¹

But this method brought with it the additional problem of 'doing justice' to the live recordings. In the same way that photography tends to 'flatten' the multi-dimensionality of landscapes, transcribing 'live' voice recordings can dampen and muffle emotions. It's all very well using writing as a means of breathing life into the land but it's important to acknowledge that even this 'experimental' technique isn't a universal panacea.

Several things struck me as I sat in my room transcribing the voice recordings. It was both emotional and frustrating, I smiled and, on occasion, came close to tears as I re-trod my steps. I'd often lose myself for hours poring over online maps, planning future Caminos. Writing about walking is a privilege and a pleasure but in comparison to actually, physically walking it comes a very distant second. Walking is how I define myself: I walk therefore I am, and I hope to die on my feet. In motion.

This project is ostensibly about pilgrimage but the evidence, particularly as presented in these representations of hiking across the Meseta, suggests that there's more to it than that. Indeed, listening to that recording again and again – because I really do love it, it gives me a buzz – I sometimes wonder whether the 'pilgrimage' component of the toolkit might be a bit of a sham. That, at the end of the day, it was just about a long, long walk which dovetailed neatly with pilgrimage and being – or becoming – a pilgrim.

By the time I arrived in Sahagún I'd walked ten days and night on 250 km without a break since being holed up in Logroño. I've said it before, I'll say it again: time and distance matter, and on that slog along the dreaded 17.5 I felt I'd become an integral part of the path. What was going on beyond the immediate environs of the Camino was no longer any concern of mine, I woke up each morning with only one, singular purpose.

Two of theology and literature's epic walking narratives are Christ's *Via Dolorosa* and Frodo's journey to Mordor in *The Lord of the Rings*. Both carry their burden, and, as they

¹⁰¹ 'In addition to capturing candid emotions' write Cottingham and Erickson, 'audio diaries can be a tool for documenting the self as an unfinished project' and capturing 'emotional reflexivity' (2019:7). When I sat down to write in the evening, which I didn't do very often, I would often pause to ruminate and press the backspace button if I wasn't comfortable with what I'd typed; to a certain extent, a form of self-censorship. The written word can easily be erased, the spoken word less so. Of course, in the editing and writing-up process I could just ignore anything I might consider vaguely awkward or even embarrassing but (a) that would defeat the purpose of my research methodology and (b) I'm a kind of 'warts and all' person.

get closer to their destination, it begins to weigh them down. On Calgary Christ will lose his life, on the slopes of Mount Doom Frodo will lose his *raison d'être*. Santiago is two weeks and 400 km away (see what I mean about time and distance!) but with every step my burden is becoming lighter, and not just in the form of physically losing weight. I was reminded of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in which this heady notion of 'lightness' is synonymous with freedom.

'The heavier the burden, the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become. Conversely, the absolute absence of burden causes man [sic] to be lighter than air, to soar into heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant.' (1984:3)

The thing that's always puzzled me about the title of Kundera's novel is the notion that this 'lightness', this ecstatic union (in the case of the novel it was sex that brought two objects together, in the case of the Camino it was walking that fused the landscape and me) should be considered 'unbearable'. But Kundera was right, it would become unsustainable, it couldn't last.

DOES BOREDOM MATTER?

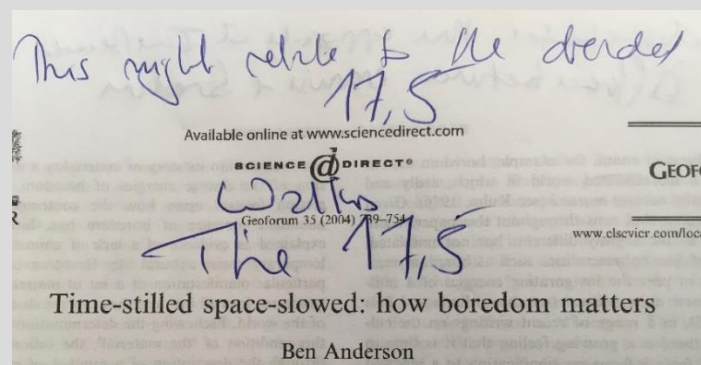


Figure 93: Interrogated academic paper

STOP! Siân Lacey Taylder, *Ramblanista*, whatever you want to call yourself. You're all over the place with emotion. Just stop. And think.

We know how important this Camino is to you, personally as well as academically but this pilgrimage is in danger of becoming increasingly bipolar; you sound like a woman on a single-minded pursuit of intensity. Time to calm down, have yourself another Coca-Cola – plenty of ice with that slice – and read this paper secreted in your toolkit. You've already scrawled across it so it must be relevant. And right now I think a bit of boredom might go a long way.

For Ben Anderson, *boredom* is not 'the grandness of ennui' but rather 'acts to trivialise a disenchanting world in which, sadly and consequently, *nothing matters*' (2004:740). It

is, as I scribbled at the top of that page, the antithesis of Jane Bennet's notion of enchantment (2001). Anderson identifies four explanations 'that link the thesis of disenchantment rise of boredom as a uniquely modern phenomena' which vary from 'the process of secularization' and 'modern forms of individuation that have led to the rise of ... individualism' to 'the changing conditions of leisure' and 'the rise of standardized, standardizing organisations of time-space' (2004:741).

Is boredom, unlike 'disaffectedness' (or even 'entropy') an active state? It seems to me that it covers a multitude of conditions such as anxiety and depression which are worlds away from the clichéd image of bored kids on the street which was prevalent during my childhood. But isn't that angst? Boredom given a political hue? And what about restlessness, not kicking the heels but chomping at the bit, like a coiled spring? Not lacking in energy but overflowing with it. Are boredom and routine one and the same thing? If that's the case then walking the Camino is a long, long exercise in monotony, but of course it isn't, because even on the Meseta, even on the 'Dreaded 17.5' which is sort of über-Meseta, the Meseta exaggerated and amplified in every direction, no step is the same.

The idea of excess has been an underlying theme throughout this project based on the premise that if you try to cram either geography and theology into a neat little box there'll always be 'stuff' left over, even more so if you try to force them both into the same receptacle. It's a messy business, and I'm especially interested in what that excess and messiness does, what phenomena it might create or co-create? If it can't be contained, is it uncontainable, disorderly and disobedient? Does it have a life of its own? Is it a law unto its own? Is this what God is all about?

Enough of the questions already. Kierkegaard considers it strange that 'boredom, so still and static, should have such a power to set things in motion' (Anderson 2004:747). I think boredom can be a yearning for excess, a desire that for various reasons – that we might loosely lump together as 'responsibilities' – has to be oppressed for boredom is drawn to its antithesis like a moth to a flame.¹⁰²

And the consequences? The devil makes work for idle hands but what about idle feet? 'Idle' in the sense that are not contributing, economically, neither producer nor consumer. Remember novelist Melissa Harrison's description of her weekday walk in the Home Counties, of not 'fitting in' or feeling 'out of place'? Desks are empty, bank accounts are depleted, lawns are unmown; are we busy doing nothing? Will this

¹⁰² By 'responsibilities' I mean social, economic and emotional commitments.

experience change anything? Not just us but the world we'll have to return to, and our future relations with it.

Do I need a stiff dose of boredom to calm me down? A touch of yoga or meditation? That's what various therapists and counsellors have prescribed in the past, worried that intensity would burn me out. I listened attentively but carried on ploughing my own furrow.

I walk therefore I am, without this energy I'm nothing. And things won't happen.

ARISE, WALK ABOUT THE LAND THROUGH ITS LENGTH AND BREADTH; FOR I WILL GIVE IT TO YOU¹⁰³

Day 26: Calzadilla de los Hermanillos to Puente de Villarente

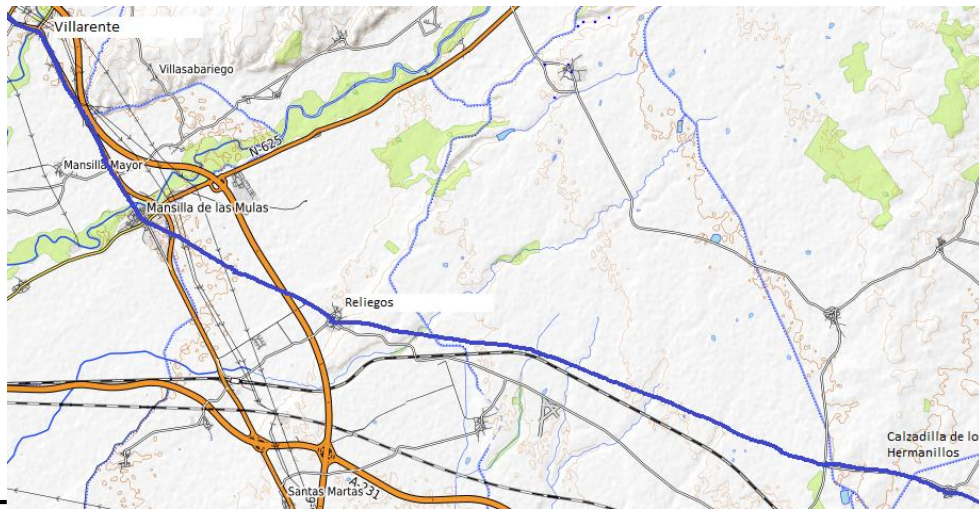


Figure 94: Route map, Calzadilla de los Hermanillos to Puente de Villarente

Just outside Sahagún the Camino divides again, the 'official' route hugging the motorway for eighteen kilometres whilst the *variante* slips away, almost unnoticed, over a bridge. On the other side, everything changes. Why anyone should opt to follow the main drag is quite beyond my comprehension.



Figure 95: The Meseta shows its soft side

¹⁰³ Genesis 13:17

For me, the ‘softest’ landscape of the Meseta is found on this *variante* between Sahagún and Calzadilla de los Hermanillos, and because it’s a *variante* the pilgrim density is low. If the ‘Dreaded 17.5’ represents the harshest extreme of the Meseta continuum, here we have it at its cute and cuddliest. In places dreamy and balmy, it’s the perfect antidote to the previous day’s exertions. Not that I need wrapping in cotton wool.

I’ve walked this stage of the Camino three times and on each occasion I’ve stayed at a friendly little albergue in Calzadilla de los Hermanillos, a small island in a cereal sea. It makes for a pleasant morning’s stroll after which one can pass the afternoon relaxing on the terrace, watching fellow pilgrims pass through. Perhaps predictably, the final day on the Meseta is a bit of an anti-climax, petering out along yet another long stretch of unswervingly straight asphalt which tests the patience of the keenest pilgrim.

But fate had gifted me Hanzel.



I would like to invite you, once again, to step into my size eight Berghaus boots, battered and dusty though they are, and join Hanzel and me as we complete the trans-Meseta traverse together.

A word of warning, though. On my part, especially, emotions are raw and running high. Hanzel and I are in an intimate and perhaps exclusive relationship with our shared space and our faith. If I had to resist the temptation to consider the Maltfriscan community ‘Catholic lite’, here I through in my lot with a much more orthodox performance of Roman Catholicism.

Serendipity. What's it all about? When I teach earth hazards to A level geography students I refer to the often calamitous concept of being 'in the wrong place at the wrong time'. Thus far, and across the Meseta in particular, the right people had been in the right place at the right time, firstly, in the form of my Camino 'family' and now in the form of Hanzel. It reminded me of my encounter with Madre Barbara in El Salvador; the landscape imagery seemed appropriate too, the long, hot and dusty track to El Mozote, like Saul on the road to Damascus. And here, in the blistering heat of the Meseta, it seemed familiar territory.

In 'Landscapes of the Sacred', Lane asks what relations can be drawn between Spanish geography and Spanish spirituality, citing Ortega y Gasset: 'Tell me the landscape in which you live and I will tell you who you are'. The Meseta is a 'land of saints and boulders' which has 'bred half of the thirty-some saints of the Counter-Reformation' (cited in Lane 2002:103). 'This part of the part of Spain', writes Crow 'that gives the country its stern character, stoic endurance to pain and suffering, its vitality and its bareness' (1963:4).

The 'Catholic guilt complex' is tired and worn cliché but Catholicism's relationship with pain is illuminating. I've written elsewhere about how, behind its veneer of righteousness, Catholicism, particularly in its Latin manifestation, is a sensuous faith, with a tendency towards the kitsch (Taylder 2004). Its tendency to wallow voluptuously in pain, to the point of a physical ecstasy that's uncannily reminiscent of orgasm, is equally complex.¹⁰⁴ Take, for example, Teresa of Ávila, an early example of masochist pornography: '... this pain is so delightful that there is no other pleasure in life that gives greater happiness' (Kavanagh & Rodriguez 1987:190). What is this? Erotica dressed up as mysticism or vice versa?

Does physical pain and mental torment bring the believer – or rather the Catholic believer of a certain performative hue – closer to her God? To what extent are they necessary in the production of religious experience? The landscape of the Meseta, it would seem, is fertile ground for a queer-ish theology where pain meets pleasure and the physical orgasm is replaced by a spiritual ecstasy of equal intensity.

Out of respect to Hanzel, I think I need to be careful what I write here, and articulate it sensitively. Our shared faith came together in its performance but I suspect we might differ terms of Catholic moral teaching. It was Hanzel's practice to say the Liturgy of the Hours, which she'd downloaded on to her smart 'phone, during her morning walk and she invited me to join her. So together we strode across the Meseta, taking turns to recite and respond.

¹⁰⁴ Catholicism is perverse in its attitude to the body and bodily functions. It condemns excesses such as lust with the language of lust and excess. See Karen Armstrong's description of Tertullian in 'The Gospel according to Woman' (1986).

At the risk of spoiling the plot, the singular highlight of the summer's Caminos would come, appropriately enough, on August 15 on the Ruta Dragonte but I think this morning's shared and intimate experience came a good second. Remember what I said about synchronicity, coincidence and the possibility of miracles? I'm inclined to think the divine might have been in attendance on that final traverse of the Meseta, making its presence known through the day's readings which seemed to resonate with the landscape and add to and amplify its spiritual affect.

Or perhaps it was just me? And Hanzel and the simple poetry of the psalms? And an intensity I find hard to describe? 'He holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the highest mountains as well. He made the sea; it belongs to him, the dry land, too, for it was formed by his hands'. I've read, I've listened to the recordings, looked at the photos and read what I've just written over and over again and I still can't make up my mind.

Psalm 95 Encourage each other daily while it is still today (Hebrews 3:13)

Come, let us sing to the Lord
and shout with joy to the Rock who saves
us.

Let us approach him with praise and
thanksgiving
and sing joyful songs to the Lord.

Ant. Come, let us praise the Lord; in him is
all our delight.

The Lord is God, the mighty God,
the great king over all the gods.
He holds in his hands the depths of the
earth and the highest mountains as well.
He made the sea; it belongs to him, the dry
land, too, for it was formed by his hands.

Ant. Come, let us praise the Lord; in him is
all our delight.

Come, then, let us bow down and worship,
bending the knee before the Lord, our
maker.

For he is our God and we are his people,
the flock he shepherds.

Ant. Come, let us praise the Lord; in him is
all our delight.

Today, listen to the voice of the Lord:

Do not grow stubborn, as your fathers did
in the wilderness, when at Meriba and Massah
they challenged me and provoked me,
Although they had seen all of my works.

Ant. Come, let us praise the Lord; in him is all our
delight.

Forty years I endured that generation.

I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray
and they do not know my ways.'

So I swore in my anger,

'They shall not enter into my rest.'

Ant. Come, let us praise the Lord; in him is all our
delight.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:

as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be for ever. Amen.

Ant. Come, let us praise the Lord; in him is all our
delight.

Figure 97: Psalm 95, as recited by Hanzel and me on the final stage of the Meseta

📍 **Siân Lacey Taylder** 📍 @ramblanista · Aug 9, 2016
And so, after seven days, the Meseta comes to an end. I feel sadness and relief in equal measure #SaintsandCynics



Figure 98: All good things must come to an end

INTERLUDE: IN AND OUT OF LEÓN

Day 27: Puente de Villarente to La Virgen del Camino



Figure 99: Route map, Puente de Villarente to La Virgen del Camino

León. My favourite Camino city. Its compact, labyrinthine medieval centre is surrounded by parks and wide, sweeping boulevards with a fin-de-siècle feel. It doesn't take life too seriously and feels pleasantly at ease with itself.

The Meseta peters out into corridor of semi-urban sprawl alongside the now largely redundant N-601. Time has played tricks with space in parts of twentieth-first century Spain, uniting its urban centres via the *autopista* and the *AVE* but, at the same time, consigning large tracts of rural hinterland to stagnation or worse. It's all very Newtonian, for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction: entire landscapes – and the communities that dwell therein – have been bypassed, not so much erased from the map but pushed to one side, with the casual nonchalance of the croupier's rake. But still the Camino, the oldest mode of mobility, plods on, learning from history, constantly reinventing itself to remain relevant. A shimmy here, a sidestep there, an occasional *volte-face* to keep up with the ephemera of ever-changing spiritual fashions. Under the omniscient eye of whichever deity you choose to worship, deny or ignore, nothing is permanent, but the Camino de Santiago is always there, oblivious to eternity. It has, almost literally, carved itself a niche and as long as humans require something to follow it will still be there.

In 2012, indifferent to the appeal of edgelands, I took the bus from Mansilla de las Mulas into León, stayed the night and slipped out the following morning on a bus to Villar de Mazarife, slicing two days and 37 kilometres from the journey. In the bus station café the radio was playing *The Final Countdown*, it felt like all my Christmases had come at once.

Last year I'd arrived in León direct from the coast where I'd debunked from the Camino del Norte to walk the Camino de San Salvador. The five day, 122 km hike over the Cordillera Cantábrica to Oviedo is truly a little gem of a pilgrimage, when I arrived at the cathedral in Oviedo and obtained my certificate I broke down in tears.

My *modus ambulandi* doesn't really believe in talking time out from the trail for long breaks, in the macho world of *Ramblanismo* lunch is for losers and there's an almost

Protestant walk ethic. I stop when the mood takes me and more often than not, that mood is dictated by the landscape rather than my physical needs. But here, in one of León's many sun-drenched plazas, freed from the fervour of the Meseta, I allow myself to sit down and unpack my rucksack.

I'm close to the point where the Camino San Salvador and Camino Frances divide, so it seems appropriate to let the TV screen go blurry and slip back in time. To the previous summer and my #TransCantabrica trek, when I set out from French/Spanish border with only a vague intention of where I wanted to go.

RAMBLANISTA

WALKING WITH ATTITUDE

Monday 5 October 2015

To be a Pilgrim?

The #TransCantabrica trek didn't turn out as I'd expected, but then these sort of expeditions rarely do. It mutated, deviated, returned and reinvented itself over six weeks and about seven hundred kilometres. Of course, the primary *modus ambulandi* was just to get walking: day after day, week after week. You might think six weeks a long time, I'd beg to differ; I've promised myself there will come a time, once the PhD is done, that I'll set out on a hike with no time restrictions, I shall walk myself into the ground.

I want to address one of the questions that have been bugging me: Am I a hiker – a 'thru-hiker', perhaps – or a pilgrim? I might as well state here and now that I still haven't found the answer and in many respects it doesn't really matter; you get on the trail and put one foot in front of the other. The pilgrim's destination might be imbued with sacred properties but it might be the same as the hiker's, who walks for any number of reasons that might not be religious or even spiritual. The trail is a liminal space which 'allows room for the pilgrim to reconceptualise their own identity removed from the confines of their society, and additionally creates a space in which pilgrims can critically examine the society from whence they came' (Turner and Turner 1978: 2).

In the complex religious-spiritual landscape of contemporary Europe it's often hard to draw a line between the two. Julian Holloway's (2003) research on the 'sacred' rural reflects my personal experience of living in and around Glastonbury and exploring its spiritual/religious landscape: where do Glastonbury's community of 'New Agers' fit into this equation? Does neo-paganism qualify as a religion or 'alternative spirituality'? As often as not, conflation is the name of the game, be it in the syncretism of Catholicism and pre-Columbian religions in Latin America and in contemporary, religiously-pluralistic Europe with its culture of 'cashpoint religions' and 'pick 'n' mix' spirituality.

Perhaps the whole messy situation is best summed up by US pop singer *Pink*: 'I love Native American spirituality and paganism, and I've studied Buddhism - I steer clear of organised religion and go straight to spirituality'.

If I, like Pink, have got my work cut out trying to distinguish the spiritual from the religious, heaven help me in my quest to work where the hiker ends and the pilgrim begins. I find myself wondering whether it's actually necessary to separate the two; rather than being either one or the other, perhaps it's perfectly possible to flit between them, or even be both at one and the same time.

Nevertheless, the distinction still bothers me. There's an assumption that the landscape might perform in a different way to the pilgrim than the hiker, partly because each one is expecting something quite different in the landscape. If we assume that the pilgrim walks with a motive that is either spiritual or religious (or both), then might she be more disposed to experience the landscape spiritually or religiously? If that's the case, then will the hiker's engagement with the landscape be profoundly different, if, indeed, it exists at all?



Figure 100: Municipal welcoming party, León

Does the hiker choose the path or the path choose the hiker? The 2012 manifestation of myself was a bit of a lightweight but the 2016 version was made of sterner stuff, determined keep her eyes on the prize so I entered and exited León on foot. The Camino cleverly avoids direct contact with the highway before arriving in the city via a gentle downhill stroll. Just over the Rio Tirío the local tourist board had posted a welcoming party to meet and greet pilgrims and encourage them to avail themselves of León's numerous attractions. And who could resist a day of R & R away from the heat and dust of the trail?

Apart from me, that is.



Figure 101: Cultural appropriation?

Put yourself in Jesus' shoes – preferably something more substantial than sandals – as he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Like him we've been tried and tested in the wilderness; not quite forty days and forty nights but it feels like that. We're minus a donkey but the people of León – in the shape of the tourist board – have come out to receive us and although there are no palms being waved the local Burger King will give you a 'Camino de Santiago' baseball cap if you purchase their *Menú Peregrino*.

And so begins our passion, our final days on the Camino. Death by a thousand kilometres. And then what? Resurrection or condemned to walk the earth forever like the Wandering Jew? My feet were itchy and my patience was running low. I went in and out of León in a day and still I hungered for more.

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Aug 11, 2016

After 28 days and 576km the Way has consumed me; no earthly force can stop me now. I am the Camino, the Camino is me #SaintsandCynics

Figure 102: 'Ain't no stopping us now, we've got the groove'!¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ McFadden and Whitehead (1979) *Ain't no stopping us now* Cohen, McFadden & Whitehead

STAGE THREE SPIRITUAL

THE VERY WORST KIND OF PILGRIM

Day 37 – 48: León to Portmarín



Figure 103: Route Map, León to Portmarín

🇪🇺 Siân Lacey Taylder 🇪🇺 @ramblanista · 12 Aug 2016

The key to the essence is prescence. I think that's going in the thesis
[#SaintsandCynics](#)



Figure 104: Sign on the Camino - the key to essence is presence

MESETA LITE

Day 28: La Virgen del Camino – Hospital de Órbigo

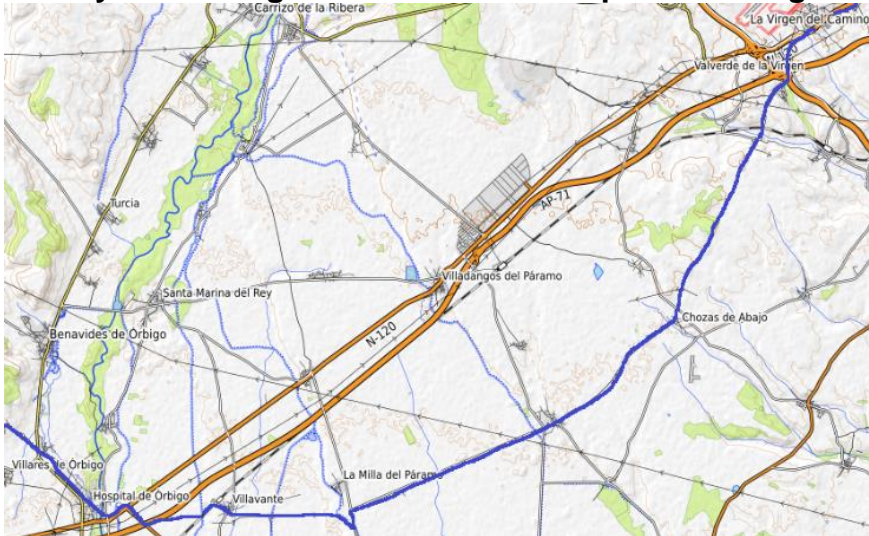


Figure 105: Route map, La Virgen del Camino – Hospital de Órbigo

Are you ready to start all over again? You haven't had time to even catch your breath and we're back on the road. I've denied us the pleasures of León's swish bars and swanky boutique hotels. All you got was a threadbare room in a roadside *hostal* with a vending machine. But at a special 'pilgrim rate' of 18€ it was an absolute steal. If you blinked you missed the city pass by, I'm going to make a terrible tour guide.

A MARIOLOGIST ON THE ROAD TO SANTIAGO: LOOKING FOR THEOLOGICAL INTIMACY ON THE CAMINO FRANCÉS



Figure 106: Image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, La Virgen del Camino

What's that you're saying? That we traipsed all the way through León just so I could satisfy my Mariological desires in the Basilica of *La Virgen del Camino*? If I did, and I concede that I just might, subconsciously, have done so, then it was a bit of a let-down. This brutalist homage to concrete, constructed between 1957 and 1961 to replace the original building feels like an unlikely union of Franquista austerity and sixties' utilitarianism and leaves me quite cold. And yet housed within, inevitably, was

an image on Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose tender conversations with the Virgin, as recounted in the Nican Mopohua, have formed the basis for more intimate theologies of liberation.

From a liberationist perspective one might argue that Roman Catholicism sits uncomfortably astride a fence from which we might tumble, on the one side, into orthodoxy and be swept away on by the sensuality of its ritual, forgetting the Church's commitment to social justice. But equally, just one misplaced move could see us falling into a current which expresses solidarity with the oppressed but occasionally neglects the Church's rich spiritual and liturgical tradition. Talk about being stuck between Scylla and Charybdis, or is it more a case of Humpty Dumpty? Either way, those of us who've made the decision to straddle the boundary only avoid the inevitable sore backsides by making posture-defying theological contortions.

So how does a Mariologist find herself on the road to Santiago? St James the Great does nothing for me. It's not entirely his fault, his reincarnation as Santiago *Matamoros* – Moor-slayer – hasn't helped his cause, neither has his association with the *Caudillo*. It might be the Way of St James but St James doesn't really feature until right at the end, and by then it's probably too late. The sight of the towers of the cathedral might fill the weary pilgrim with a wave of emotional elation but is the presence of the remains of St James in the crypt just a final flourish to the Camino experience, another pilgrim tradition to be ticked off?

For all its lack of aesthetic appeal the *Santuario del Virgen del Camino* is further evidence that the 'Jacobean-ness' of the Camino de Santiago is little more than nominal. We've been here before, so many times, so many places – Navarette, Biakorri – and we'll be here again. The Virgin Mary is a constant symbolic presence along this and so many other Caminos but is She here, in the landscape, in some other spectral form or manifestation?¹⁰⁶

So what is it? This imperative that's driving us on. Santiago de Compostela? It's not really in my thoughts at all, let alone uppermost therein. At this point in time I still assume that I'll get to Santiago via this Camino but I'm already giving thought to what happens afterwards. I'm concerned about the growing number of 'fellow' pilgrims I'm likely to encounter on this stretch of the route but what I'm getting increasingly worked up about is the prospect of returning to hike the *Ruta Dragonte* which, according to my bag-of-a-fag-packet

¹⁰⁶ For example, the Via Podiensis sets out from the shrine to Our Lady of Le Puy in Le Puy en Velay. There are also Caminos from Montserrat (Our Lady of Montserrat) and Vezelay (relics of Mary Magdalene).

calculations, is now only five days away. More than that, whether by coincidence, unconscious design or divine intervention, I'll be walking it on 15 August, the Feast of the Assumption.

No pressure then! My excitement is at childlike levels but not my naïveté and I'm acutely aware that this could go horribly wrong and end up in damp squib territory. My more mundane worries concern the weather and the possibility that rain might negatively impact the day's experiences. The forecast suggests there's not much chance of that but there is the prospect of isolated storms in the afternoon.

Storms good, rain bad – what's that all about? Thunder in the mountains is a sublime event which transforms the landscape whilst also, at times, representing a potentially fatal threat. Like snow, it heightens and alters the perceptive capacities of each and every sense: the deep, deliciously ominous rumbling of thunder, the searing flashes and forks of lightning, the sweet taste of warm rain and the heady scent of petrichor rising from the earth, like a perfume on the wrist of the land. There are days, hiking in northern Spain, when I yearn for the thunder like the spurned lover in Tennyson's *Mariana in the Moated Grange*. The sound of thunder receding without depositing more than a sprinkling of raindrops which soon dissolve into the dust is one of nature's cruellest tricks. It tempts and titillates, only to withdraw at the final moment.

But rain? A relentless procession of low, grey cloud scudding across the landscape and scraping the summits and a tenacious damp that seeps into every crack and pore. Sure, there are affective agencies hard at work here, conjuring moods and playing up the melancholy and, with the luxury of shelter it can look very romantic but when you're out and in it, even appropriately attired it's not much fun.

But my greatest fear is that I'd turn up to hike the *Ruta Dragonte* but the landscape wouldn't. I didn't expect my experience of 2012 to repeat itself but part of me secretly hoped it might. And it was no longer just about me, on Twitter my 'Saints and Cynics' hashtag had garnered a small following who I didn't want to disappoint, part of the anticipated pleasure lay in communicating landscape experience by words and photographs across social media. This stage of the *Camino Francés* is the climax of the whole walk, of the entire summer, it has the potential to fall flat, quite spectacularly, on its face.

And then what will I do? Make it up? Pretend *something* happened? I've got a thesis and I'm gonna prove it, to hell with the ethics. Spoiler alert – we'll see in the epilogue what happens when the landscape really does fail to perform, and the emotional and even existential catastrophe that ensues: it's not a pretty sight!

But I think it's hard to fabricate extremes of emotion and in a sense, reminding myself of Keats *Ode on Melancholy*, the lows are, in a perverse sense, as rewarding as the highs: 'none save him whose strenuous tongue/Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;/His soul shalt taste the sadness of her might,/And be among her cloudy trophies hung' (Barnard 2007:195). At least there's something going on. At least there's something to write about.

IT'S MARAGATERÍA TIME!¹⁰⁷
Day 29: Hospital de Órbigo – El Ganso

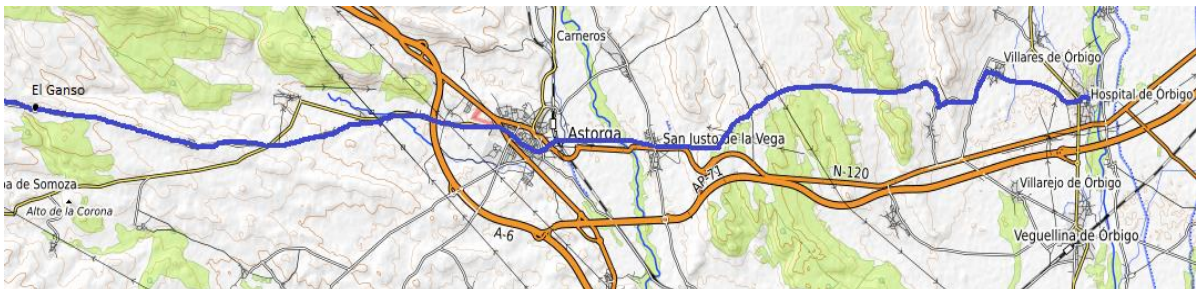


Figure 107: Route map: Hospital de Órbigo – El Ganso

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · 11 Aug 2016
 After 28 days and 576km the Way has consumed me; no earthly force can stop me now. I am the Camino, the Camino is me #SaintsandCynics

Figure 108: Tweet from Hospital de Órbigo

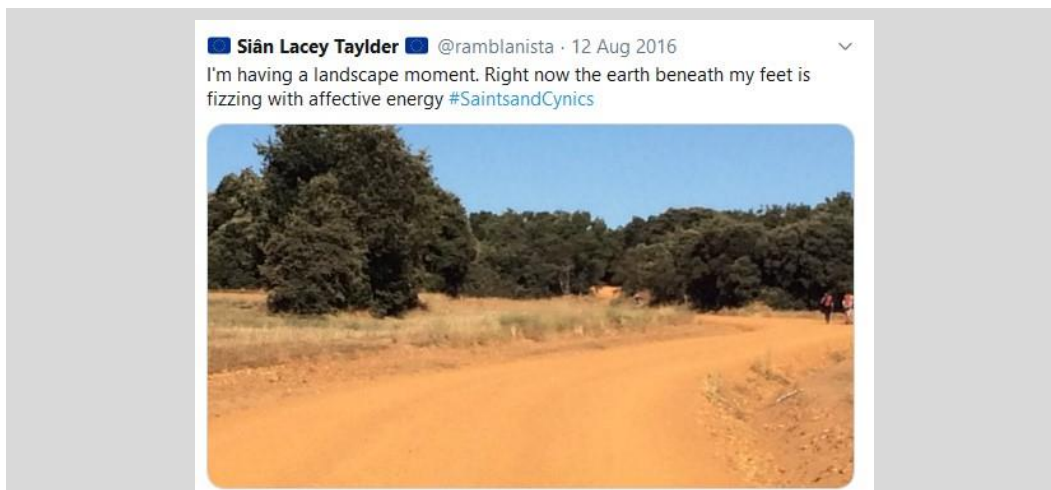


Figure 109: The moment comes into being ...

It's a beautiful morning and I'm having one of those moments so I thought I'd try and record it as it happened. The landscape has changed, subtly but quite drastically, if that makes any sense. The Meseta which has dominated the past more than ten days has given way to these beautiful gently, rolling golden hills. It's the gold of the cereal crops but also the soil, a deep, rich red. But what we also have is a return to green. Not quite verdant but dotted with bushes, green crops ... and these massive vistas. But the vistas are framed so the gaze is shaped by the rolling hills.

¹⁰⁷ Not to be confused with the almost eponymous Status Quo 1983 hit, 'It's Marguerita Time' (Rossi/Frost).

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · 12 Aug 2016

A shrine/homage to the pilgrim #SaintsandCynics



Figure 110: Postmodern homage to the pilgrim or homage to the postmodern pilgrim?

*I stopped at a shrine and it's a kind of mix. Part of it's an homage to the pilgrim, there's a cross so there's the traditional here and ... well, it's kind of postmodern, a shrine to itself, the pilgrim paying homage to itself. But it **is** beautiful and I wondered to what extent these shrines are affective. For me the shrines give the landscape a spiritual or religious affect. It's part of that palimpsest, I don't how you'd describe it.*



Figure 111: Petition to Our Lady of Ta' Pinu

It's a beautiful place ... the little pictures of people, there's an envelope with a petition to Our Lady, and it feels very pastoral. This landscape has a quite strong feeling, it's engaging with me emotionally. It's beautiful, absolutely beautiful.

It's close to a perfect landscape and I don't know what makes it, for me, perfect. There's definitely a human presence ... things can happen here, it's one of those places, it reminds me of Dragonte. I don't know why. Why is this spiritual? It feels very religious, it feels as though I'm walking into a landscape painting. It feels as though time has stopped here.

Recorded thoughts 12 August 2016

The Dark Afternoon of the Soul Day 30: El Ganso – Ponferrada

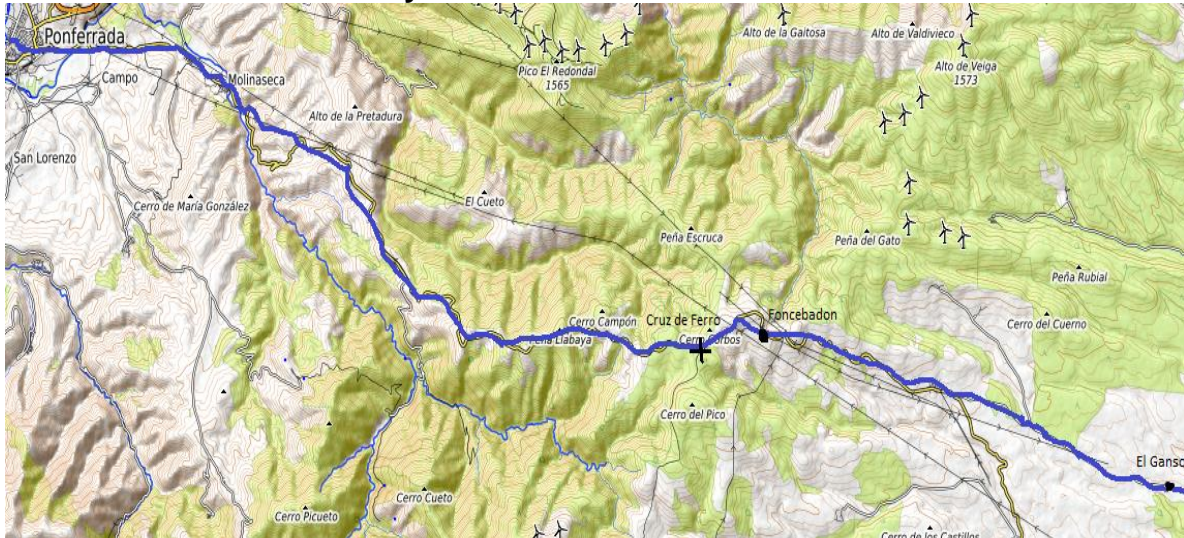


Figure 112: Route map: El Ganso – Ponferrada

Oh dear, oh dear. The day didn't start at all well! It was a beautiful morning, plenty of shade, and I'd anticipated this being another magical day of walking but it just wasn't working and I was managing to find fault with everything. I blamed the wind turbines, the early starters and their music, the shoddy *hospitalero* who'd forgotten to dry a 'fellow' pilgrim's clothing forcing him to delay his departure. I even put it down to my laxness in attending pilgrim masses since I'd bade farewell to my 'family'. They were such a positive influence, now I was beginning to resemble a cantankerous adolescent: 'it's so unfair!'

I'm in a foul mood this morning, the albergue wasn't my favourite. The wifi connection was rubbish, the hospitalero was non-existent, it was noisy, creaky, everything clunked. I got woken up before fucking five o'clock by some arsehole clunking around downstairs. What's the point in getting up that early? It's not light till seven, so you'll be walking with a headlamp and see nothing. Once that person was up that was it, no going back to sleep. The light was turned on just before six and I was on my way about half-past.

There's a group in front of me ... they're playing music, that's really pissing me off. And last night they were playing music in the albergue. It wasn't late but ... it's a shared space. I don't want to listen to your fucking music, get some fucking headphones. Anyway, I stopped, went off the path, the other side of the road, so they passed by. I didn't even have to acknowledge them, I'm not saying 'buen camino' to people who really fuck me off.

Recorded thoughts 13 August 2016

THE DESCENT INTO THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND, A BLOW BY BLOW ACCOUNT THROUGH TEXT AND TWEETS

'This miry Slough is such a place as cannot be mended; it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run, and therefore is it called the Slough of Despond: for still as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place; and this is the reason of the badness of this ground' (Bunyan 2009:33).

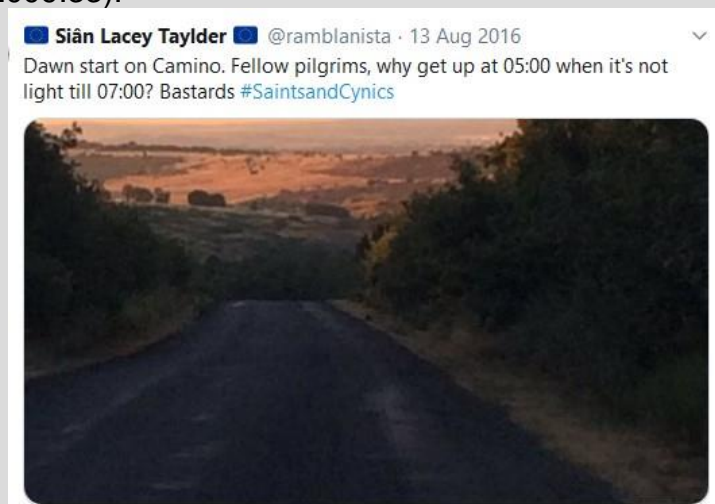


Figure 113: It's all downhill from here ...

My body isn't performing. And when I say body I don't just mean my legs, I mean the whole body: mind and emotion. I haven't got a rhythm, and I think it might be more to do with my mood than my legs.¹⁰⁸



Figure 114: Anger management issues on the Camino

The landscape doesn't work unless you are working yourself. Unless things are okay within you.

This fucking road is just going on and on, by the way. Really fucking hate it, despite the fact that there's a brilliant view.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Recorded thoughts 13 August 2016

¹⁰⁹ Recorded thoughts 13 August 2016



Figure 115: Harry Potter meets Gandalf and assorted druids on the Camino



Figure 116: There's a hermeneutic of suspicion and then there's childish petulance ...



Figure 117: Pride comes before a fall ...

The mountains seem full of promise, the mountains are greener, the mountains are the receptacle of something life-giving ... water ... and something less tangible than that. They feel kind of sacred, in a way. Not sacred with a capital 'S' but sacred with a small 's'.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Recorded thoughts 13 August 2016



Figure 118: Mad dogs and English pilgrims ...

The Wasteland

It's very hot, very dry. About half an hour ago I passed someone who was – I hope he's okay – he seemed to be asleep, talking to himself. He hadn't fallen over because he'd taken his boots and rucksack off. Maybe I should've stopped.

When I went through Riego de Ambrós a woman from the albergue came out and asked would I like a room. I said I was on my way to Ponferrada, she said do you want to come in and relax and I said I've got to get a move on. I'm not very good at relaxing en route, I have to get there. And there's something ... both those episodes illustrate something which is unnerving me: it's a very selfish Camino, for me. That albergue was dedicated to creating jobs and training people ... I'm missing something here. It's taken me four weeks ... I wasn't missing it when I was with people but it isn't just that I'm on my own, I've missed opportunities here. I'm so keen to push on, so keen to get somewhere in the evening. I haven't let fate take its course.

So there's something missing here and it's bugging me. Maybe I'm being a bit hard on myself, maybe just because it's hot, because I've been walking all this time, thinking too much. I'm always looking, trying to find some way in which the landscape animates me, animates itself. But I wanted a theology, I wanted to see if I could work out a theology from that, not just the gyrovague wandering around because that's what I am at the moment. A modern day gyrovague.

This is the worst part of the whole Camino, the past hour. It's just been horrible, I absolutely hated it. 'Hate' isn't even a strong enough word, I'm angry. It's the landscape, it's completely turned against me. It's one of those paths that goes on and on and on. Stony, rocky, ankle-twisting. Heat, too much fucking heat, heat baking off the rock. Just heat everywhere, the back of legs are burning. Nobody around, I feel forsaken. Just dry valleys that are totally devoid of water, just dust in my face. No water anywhere. The paths today have been horrible, this landscape is just wearing me down, it's undermining me.

There was a point where I thought the path would go on into eternity and never, ever end. I'd be always on that part of the Camino, there would be never any rain, it would be always hot and I'd be burnt to a cinder.

Recorded thoughts 13 August 2016



Figure 119: Looks like I'm not the only grumpy pilgrim on this stage of the Camino

It's twenty to ten, Saturday thirteenth August. And I thought for the first time I'd do a post-stage recording. I wanted to try and express that post-walk feeling, after a really hard day. In 2012 everything just clicked well ... but today was just hot and towards the end, from Molinaseca into Ponferrada, it was a wall.

It was very difficult with that kind of spiritual – not crisis but ... low point. A bit of a nadir.

Anyway, the point why I wanted to record this ... and I've had a few beers, I've been to a kebab house which is always the best place to go for volume of food. It was a hard day but in the evening I feel great ... it's that lovely ... my legs ache ... I don't know what it is, it's very masochistic ... maybe that's why I do it.

But you just lie here and that angst, the frustration, the agony ... dissipates and you get that lovely warm feeling. I don't think there's anything like it. You just walk. There were moments today when I thought 'why am I doing this?' Not really but ... should I just take it a bit easier tomorrow, take the bus, cut corners ... but I don't think I will. It's a really strange thing.

Recorded thoughts 13 August 2016

TODAY EXISTS ONLY FOR TOMORROW

Day 31: Ponferrada to Villafranca del Bierzo

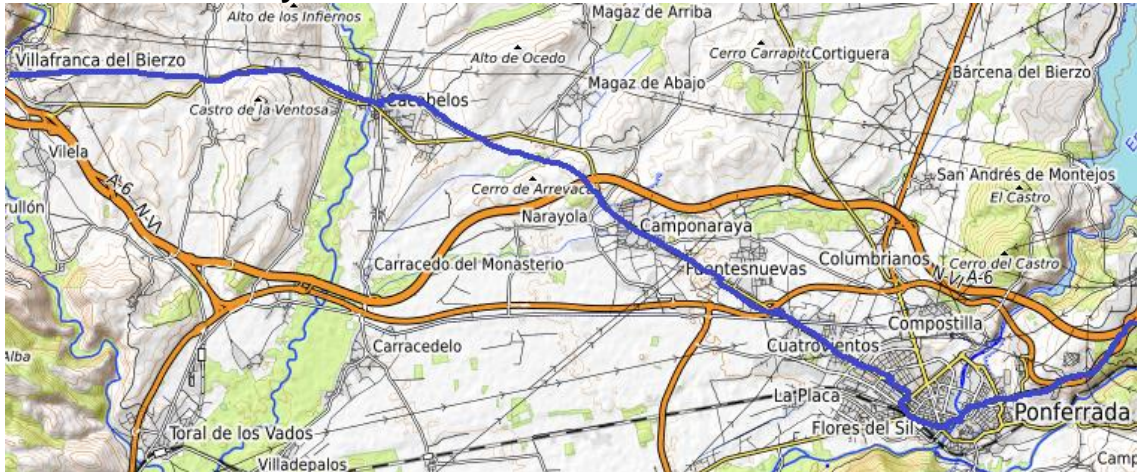


Figure 120: Route map, Ponferrada to Villafranca del Bierzo

Between Camponaraya and Cacabelos I fell in with Manuela, an administrator from Alicante who was also doing the Camino for the second time. She was saying that when she was walking to Reliagos on the Meseta she saw in the distance a church tower and when she got there she asked someone ‘where’s the church tower?’ and it wasn’t there. It was a mirage, she’d imagined it. And she said that crossing the Meseta caused her ‘mucho tristeza’ – *much sadness* – and talked about the ‘mental torture’.

I’d have liked to talk more with Manuela, I wanted to get more input from Spanish pilgrims, but – and here’s the rub – she and I were too alike. Like me she preferred to walk alone which makes the task of talking and recording experiences *en route* extremely difficult.

Remember Mandoki’s space-time bending (1998) and the apparent ability of some places to absorb emotion and experience and then radiate them back, like a limestone boulder soaking up the sun’s heat during the day and returning it to the atmosphere at night? Something similar might be going on in Villafranca del Bierzo, although in less congenial terms. The spirit of the hospitalero who registered me back in 2012 and poo-pooed my intention of walking the Dragonte still hangs heavy over the town. Just imagine what would – or rather, wouldn’t – have happened if I’d followed his ‘advice’! His lack of faith merely spurred me on so I probably owe him a vote of thanks.

TAKE ME TO THE EDGE OF HEAVEN – THE *RUTA DRAGONTE* REVISITED

Day 32: Monday 15 August – Festival of the Assumption

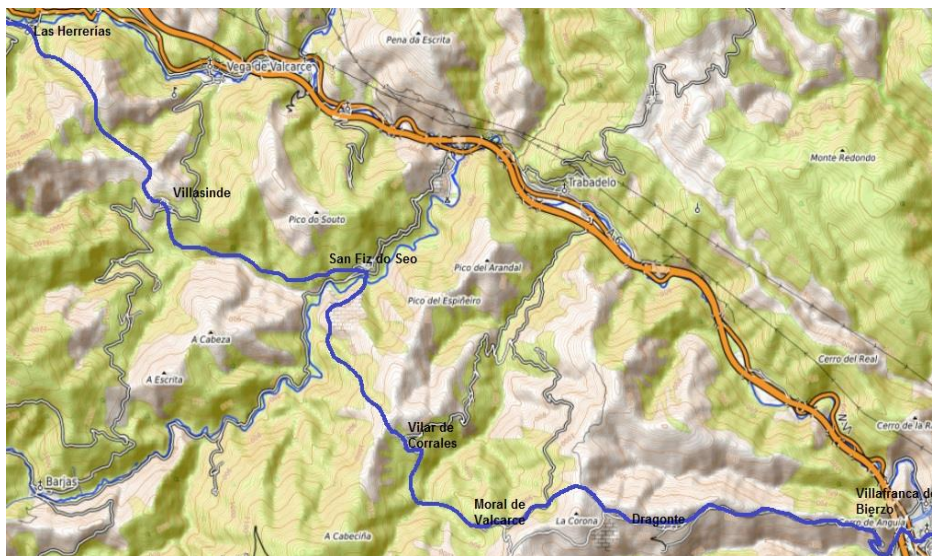


Figure 121: Route map, the Ruta Dragonte from Villafranca del Bierzo to Las Herrerías

Good morning! We've walked all that way for this: over the Pyrenees, across the Meseta, through suburbs and industrial estates, endured a broken tooth and a Slough of Despond, experienced highs and lows, suffered slings and arrows of various vicarious fortunes.

You get the idea. The accumulation of time and distance are crucial to this thesis and, more importantly, to moments like this. But time and distance are more than empty vessels, waiting to be filled with emotions and experience. On the Camino time and distance are agents, facilitating the emergence and development – and often the intensification – of emotion and affect. In this semi-permanent ambulatory mode the mind doesn't idle away like a Ford Cortina stuck at traffic lights on red, nor does it automatically switch itself off, like the engine of the Audi at the back of the queue. Cut loose from the constraints of the quotidian, the mind is free to indulge itself with flights of fancy or, if you like, enters a higher plane. This is the 'deep topography' of Papadimitriou's *Scarp*, explored through vicarious devices that include but also go beyond autobiography and autoethnography to get beneath the landscape's skin:

'Merops flaps, a frayed scarp of sky-stuff, through ever thickening air. Then he holds his wingtips steady and glides across the traffic lanes, under the fizzing power cables. The clouds are hanging heavy and threaten to release a belly full of rain as a deep darkness builds in the west. A 747 rising from Heathrow climbs overhead, the screams of its engines shaking the windows of the motels along the A41, loosening the particles of soil packed around Philippa Gordon, resting in her grave on Sandy Lane' (2013:238).¹¹¹

¹¹¹ 'Variously encompassing the voices of a murderer, an animal, a deceived young woman, a master botanist, the inclusion of Merops, a black crow with a special capacity to travel freely across space and time, is particularly noteworthy' (Mudie 2018:225)

Some might consider it frivolous, I think it an acknowledgement, perhaps even celebration of, the instinctive, the spontaneous and the involuntary, Hannah Macpherson's 'half-second delay' (2009:5). The emotions that get lost between experience and recognition. Merops, in particular, represents an innovative and imaginative example of more-than-representational theories, a voice that allows the landscape to speak for itself.

Does the devil make work for idle feet? Only if reflection is a mortal sin. The Camino is a walked Rosary, every step another Hail Mary, every pause to take in the scene an Our Father. There's a hypnotism to the rhythm of the stride, a dreamy meditation drenched in sweat and caked in dust – you see, now, how that thin divide between the landscape and the landscape dweller is becoming more blurred with every step. And so is the narrow border between the landscape and the mind of the landscape dweller.

But here, on the *Ruta Dragonte*, things are suddenly quite different; at least from what we've experienced on the *Camino Francés* thus far. Gone are the long stretches on the flat and the extended, gentle climbs. The *Dragonte* is a series of ups and downs, it requires a different rhythm, a specific walking strategy. After overnight rain it was slightly cooler, perfect walking conditions. Something – or somebody – was looking down on me favourably.

STEP-BY-STEP, TWEET-BY-TWEET ALONG THE RUTA DRAGONTE



🇪🇺 Siân Lacey Taylder 🇪🇺 @ramblanista · 15 Aug 2016

Here we go. Ruta Dragonte, Festival of the Assumption. Morning sky has shades of red! #SaintsandCynics

Figure 122: Are you ready? Let's fill our boots!

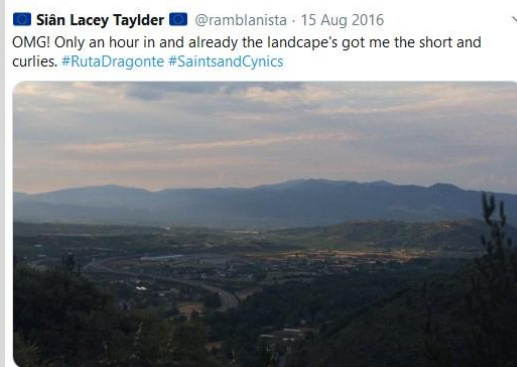


Figure 123: Live from the Ruta Dragonte

About four k[ilometres] in and so far so good. In fact, it's everything I wanted it to be thus far. (Voice cracking) ... it's making me feel really emotional, don't know why. It's worth walking thirty-one days to get here and it wouldn't be the same if I hadn't walked ... well ... a good way, with a significant starting point. I couldn't just rock up in Villafranca [del Bierzo], it wouldn't have the same affect.¹¹²



Figure 124: Live from the Ruta Dragonte

¹¹² Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

This isn't a wild part of Spain. Off the beaten track, but only just. I've been passed already by half a dozen cars, to my left there are planted chestnut trees, to my right there are vines. Even down in the valley, people live there, they work. It's not uninhabited. It's not wilderness ... but it's not about wilderness, it's about enchantment. About magic, and I use that word in inverted commas. It's about the landscape, and the way it interacts with humans, and to a certain extent it's that human interaction, both mine and the people dwelling within – a complex set of relations – which to my mind create that enchantment. This is already stunning.¹¹³



Figure 125: Live from the Ruta Dragonte

It's about eleven o'clock and it's happening ... it's more beautiful than I imagined it was. It is ... I've got to stop and put my arms to one side ... and just oh my God. It is absolutely incredible. It's not that incredible vista of huge expanses of mountains wilderness, it's looking down into the valley. It's something about the valley, there's something in there, it's green. After all that ... after all that blasted, yellow, parched grass, cereal dust and soil, especially on Saturday afternoon, it feels like salvation has come here, in this valley.

This strikes me as significant. I think it's impossible to capture the 'enchantment' of this landscape, impossible to imagine how beautiful it actually is when you're in it. It reminded me of the closing lines of Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'— that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'.¹¹⁴



Figure 126: Live from the Ruta Dragonte

So now I'm winding down this asphalt road ... and I don't know what to make of it. It's just ... I'm lost for words ... and that doesn't happen very

¹¹³ Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

¹¹⁴ Barnard (2007:191)

*often. It's something about this valley, why is it this valley? What happened here? Why does this resonate so much with me? Are the proportions perfect? Is the mixture perfect? Does it fit my idea of a Catholic gaze? It's prelapsarian but it's prelapsarianism is, of course, very much human-orientated. It's amazing.
What's gonna happen down there?¹¹⁵*

I swear I hadn't touched any form of narcotic when I made this walk, but listening back it does indeed sound that I've been partaking of some form of amphetamine. My voice is rushed and garbled, like Alan Partridge in an episode of *Knowing You, Knowing Me* when he unknowingly insufflates a line of cocaine.



Figure 127: Live from the Ruta Dragonte

I've just passed through Moral de Valcarce and everything's on edge ... I'm just ... woah, it's too much ... Loads of chestnut trees, I wonder what ... chestnut trees are fantastic and they reach right down almost to head height and they frame the path. They accentuate, enhance the gaze. They really are an important part of this landscape, is there some kind of significance with the chestnut, like the apple?

Something's happened here, something ... maybe it's because of what happened last time, it's left its mark on the landscape ... I'm close to tears again (voice wavers) ... really feel it, I've never felt like this anywhere else ...¹¹⁶

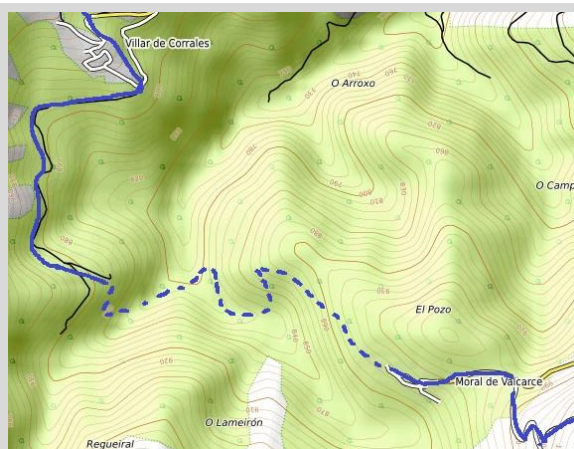


Figure 128:: Map of where 'it' happened

¹¹⁵ Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

¹¹⁶ Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

Right! It's the day of the Assumption, about midday, Ruta Dragonte ... this is where it happened. Fourth of June 2012 ... the path comes down from [Moral de Valcarce] ... steep valley, increasingly difficult track, reaches the stream and then you come ten metres up from the stream there is a fork, one path that looks less-used goes to the left, probably goes nowhere, actually and then this more trodden path goes up to [Coral]. It happened here ... or did it happen here? It's difficult to say ... there's an enchantment, that's for sure.¹¹⁷

Oh my days! After 800 km and 32 days blindly following the yellow arrow and suddenly there's no path! What does this mean? What impact does it have? Liberation? Trepidation? For four and a half weeks I've known my place, now, even though I've been here once before, I'm not one hundred percent certain of where I am. I'm reminded of the words of Rebecca Solnit: 'To lose yourself: a voluptuous surrender, lost in your arms, lost to the world, utterly immersed in what is present so that its surroundings fade away. In Benjamin's terms, to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery' (Solnit 2005:121).



Figure 129: Live from the Ruta Dragonte

I can't make it happen. I can believe it will happen, I can believe it did happen. I can believe that it could happen, that the possibilities are there and the accumulation of so many things could make it happen. The enchantment in that valley is just enough.

The intensity, that little stage there, two or three hours, down into valley, it's unbeatable. I recognised much of the landscape down there. I took one wrong turning, took me 100m in the wrong direction and ...¹¹⁸

In the midst of the aesthetic overload I thought a lot about the excavator. Some of that thinking was based on practicalities: if I could find the excavator, I was on the right track – assuming it was still there. But some was predicated on the poetry of Clemo; this rusting earth-removal machine became a symbol not of wanton destruction but salvation.

¹¹⁷ Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

¹¹⁸ Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

COULD IT BE MAGIC ... ?

Well, could it? At first sight it seems counterintuitive, the notion that the 'magical' has any sort of place in what purports to be a rational science. But the world of geography has changed since I was an undergraduate in the 1980s, academics such as Holloway (2010) have introduced the 'spectral' genre and for Bonnett 'across the varied terrain of psychogeographical walking, magic is used to allow, or conjure, an openness and vulnerability to voices 'hidden' in the landscape' (2017:1).¹¹⁹

Bonnett calls upon *Scarp* to illustrate what he refers to as 'environmentalist magic', arguing that Papadimitriou 'summons [the North Middlesex/South Hertfordshire escarpment] into being through a posture of radical openness to 'voices' that come to him on his long walks over the years' (2017:7). For pilgrims, long distance walks induce a 'trance-like state' which manifests itself in 'frequent breaks with reality' (2017:7). In a similar vein, fellow 'psychogeographer' John Rodgers employs a self-mocking humour to create a subversive and disorientating magic to offer a vision of 'a hostile landscape that needs magic' (Bonnett 2017:8).¹²⁰ On one of his walks Rodgers enters a bingo hall where The Beatles had once played a gig 'to see if I can access that hysterical moment in pop history' and acknowledges their spectral presence (2013:50).

Deep Topography is littered with references to the spectral but there is no mention of the spectral being religious or spiritual. It doesn't seem unreasonable to assume that there exists a continued unease when engaging with the personal practice of religious faith.

To call this a *glaring* omission would be an overstatement but in the growing field of how landscapes impact emotionally there is something missing. Various academics from a wide variety of disciplines have touched on it (Fedele 2012), exploring the parameters – such as the importance of ritual – that frame the 'landscape experience'.

And so, with great reluctance, I have to take issue with Mr Manilow. There's no *could*, it *was* magic.

¹¹⁹ There is an increasingly extensive bibliography of 'geographies of modern magic and walking' (Bonnett 2017:2). Authors include Cosgrove (1990), Matless (1991, 2008) and Woodyear & Geoghegan (2012).

¹²⁰ Bonnett's paper offers an intriguing introduction to the relationship between psychogeography and magic but, at the risk of coming over as pedantic, I take issue with his description of Nick Papadimitriou as a 'psychogeographer'. As discussed in the 'Toolkit', Papadimitriou's methodology, *modus ambulandi* and use of creative writing set him apart from the likes of Iain Sinclair and Merlin Coverley and for the purposes of this research this distinction is crucial.



Figure 130: Looking down into the valley whence lies the 'main drag'

Somewhere down there are my fellow pilgrims. I have to say I don't envy them. This is by far the best way to get over these mountains. But it's a difficult path, I nearly got lost even having been there before; I don't know how I did it the first time, apart from, of course, perhaps the presence of the Virgin Mary ...

There's a stretch where there isn't really a path, you've got to clamber up a short but steep slope which is full of dry chestnut mulch and leaves, a bit precarious with a rucksack, you could easily fall over and do a bit of damage. It's okay down to the river, it's when you leave the river, turn up to the right, then you have to take a left on the zig-zags. There's no waymarking and perhaps that's the way it should be.¹²¹



Figure 131: Live from the Ruta Dragonte

I'm leaving San Fiz, there can't be more than 10km to go, I can just see Villasende from the top of the hill. This path will cut along the side of the valley and then head up towards the village later on.

I was thinking that I wish all the Camino were like this ... off the road, through hills, less busy ... I wonder who the last person was to walk the Dragonte, this is just a perfect pilgrimage. With the heat and the sun I'm feeling a bit tired now.¹²²

¹²¹ Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

¹²² Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016



Figure 132: Arriving in Villasinde

It's half-past four and I've got to Villasinde. I'm beginning to struggle a bit in the heat ... flies, the path's beginning to ascend. The sun was getting stronger but there's some clouds around. In the space of about ten minutes the cloud had bubbled up and expanded quite massively to cover most of the sky. And then it began to spot with rain. And then the heaven's opened, you could see it in the valley. It was beautiful ... it was just ... what I'd dreamed of.

There was something beautiful about being stuck in that rain. I wanted it to go on, it didn't last long enough but it made me feel quite emotional. It's been an emotional day, I feel quite tearful.¹²³

I have a memory from visiting Villasinde in 2012 the reliability of which I cannot be certain because I kept no photos or records on that pilgrimage. There *is* a bar there but it was closed when I passed through this time. In my mind's eye I have an image of me coming across the bar, physically and emotionally exhausted – bear in mind that this was all new back then, I had no idea of what I'd encounter on the *Ruta Dragonte* and 'it' had happened – and overcome with emotion, bursting in to tears. But I note that this was also the experience of the fellow pilgrim cited previously so have I, subconsciously, appropriated it? Am I the autoethnographical equivalent of Emily Brontë's Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights*? Too intensely wound up in events to offer an objective perspective.

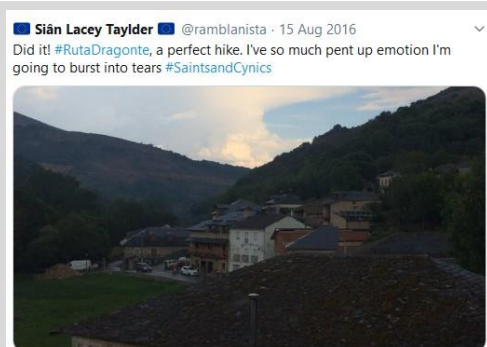


Figure 133: At the end of the day ...

I'm walking up the final incline from Villasinde. I'm going very slowly now, bit because I'm knackered ... but [also] because I don't want to leave. I don't want to stop walking. There's going to be tears at some point tonight. The greenness, after all those days and weeks, has got to me.¹²⁴

¹²³ Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

¹²⁴ Recorded thoughts 14 August 2016

I'd dearly love to hike the Ruta Dragonte again, and I suspect I probably will, perhaps on a long, long Camino celebrating a successful submission of this thesis. There's a risk that next time it'll fail to perform or, even worse, fob me off, but I'm prepared to take that chance. But I must make this absolutely clear, I could only do so as part of a longer Camino. This walk, as stunning beautiful as it is, cannot exist in isolation.

RAMBLANISTA

Tuesday, 16 August 2016

Saints and Cynics Day 32: *La Ruta Dragonte* revisited

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that what happened on the June day in 2012 completely changed my life. What happened deep in that verdant valley, between the tiny, run-down villages of *Moral de Valcarce* and *Villar de Corales*, by the silvery waters of the *Arroyo de Moral*, has since become the subject of my doctoral research. That *landscape experience*, with its religious and spiritual connotations, has been my *raison d'être* ever since.

I have no other life.

I was always destined to return. Not only for this, my fieldwork but, I imagine, again and again; the *Ruta Dragonte* passes through a landscape that has me hooked. In the deep folds and lofty slopes of these mountains I am ... well not at *peace* – the intensity of emotions the landscape evokes won't allow for that. Instead I'm fizzing and buzzing, torn between tears of ecstatic happiness and extreme melancholy. I turn a corner, another vista excites my gaze and I can't contain my emotions. And I mean that quite literally; I mean that, quite literally, my breath is taken away and I can't cope with what I'm looking at, what I'm taking in with every available sense. It is, simply put, just too much for my poor little mind and soul; sometimes I cry, sometimes I shout out, expletives deleted.

I wrote that my methodological approach would be both creative and experimental. I think I should point out here that they're not necessarily synonymous and that by 'creative' I mean along the lines of Nick Papadimitriou giving full rein to the imaginations yet still grounding that in an academic context. So in this case, this kind of deep spiritual topography of the *Ruta Dragonte* is an example of that, probably the most prescient example. And the point is that these things don't always work, the bringing together of concepts, themes approaches that might be like magnets of polar opposites and it's just impossible to bring them together. Other times they made need a bit of force, like in high energy arc welding and then sometimes you just need to bolt them together, really tight because otherwise they'll fall apart. Or perhaps slowly, over time, work themselves loose.

This is not so much a network as a scaffold. But it's equally complex, I suppose, and it doesn't stay together without tinkering. Like a rock whose joints are exposed will be subject to weathering so we've got to be really careful about this.

'IT WAS ALREADY BEGNNING TO DAWN': THE NICAN MOPOHUA – A DEEP TOPOGRAPHY

They were both ordinary days, we were both – peasant and pilgrim – ordinary people, just five hundred years and nine thousand kilometres apart. It's not hard to put myself in Juan Diego's shoes, to enter his character just as Nick Papadimitriou becomes Merops. As we set off in the hour-before-dawn dark, we're both about to undergo experiences that will change our lives forever and neither of us has any idea it's going to happen. Neither did Saul. This is the beauty of the path, even when you've walked this way before, around each and every corner possibilities await. Of the Guadalupe apparitions Elizondo writes that he doesn't know of any other event since Pentecost that has had such a revolutionary and liberating impact on Christianity (1997:xi), my experience in June 2012 was a microcosm of that; my world was turned upside down.

It matters not whether the events described in the Nican Mopohua are historically correct, the existence of the text keeps the narrative alive in the collective conscious of the Mexican faithful, much in the same way that the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe at the basilica breathes life into Her existence.¹²⁵ The language of the poem, its visual precision, elegance, beauty, sound and symbolic meaning animate the landscape and the encounter between the Virgin and the peasant. But to fully appreciate it, one has not just to read it but to 'experience it with all the senses, the mind and the heart' (1997:3).

When the Nahua spoke about divine revelation they did so in terms of 'flower and song', mere words were inadequate when it came to describing the sacred: 'rational discourse clarifies yet limits the mind, flowers and song stimulate the imagination to ponder the infinite ... only through poetic communication and beauty [can] the heart of human beings enter into communion and communication with the divine' (Elizondo 1997:35).

'Maybe I'm in the land of my ancestors ...?'¹²⁶ Poor Juan Diego. On encountering the Virgin Mary he thinks he's died and gone to heaven but in the midst of the midst of so

¹²⁵ Elizondo writes that the complex and inexact origins of the text are 'problematic for modern historians who have created criteria of history that were not necessarily those of the times of the Nican Mopohua (or of the Gospels)' (1997:3).

¹²⁶ Elizondo (1997:

much beauty he's critical enough to pinch himself: 'By chance do I deserve this? Am I worthy of what I am hearing? Maybe I'm dreaming?'¹²⁷

But with the first appearance of the Virgin Mary the landscape responds in a riot of sound and colour:

'and the rock and the cliffs where she was standing, upon receiving the rays like arrows of light, appeared like precious emeralds, appeared like jewels; the earth glowed with the splendors of the rainbow. The mesquites, the cacti, and the weeds that were all around appeared like feathers of the quetzal, and the stems looked like turquoise; the branches, the foliage, and even the thorns sparkled like gold'.¹²⁸

The presence of the beyond-human – in this case the divine – plays havoc with time and space, everything suddenly *appears* quite extraordinary and out-of-place: 'there were all kinds of exquisite flowers from Castile, open and flowering. It was not a place for flowers, and likewise it was the time when the ice hardens upon the earth'.¹²⁹

What strikes me about Juan Diego's experience, and mine, is the dissipation of tension in the presence of the sacred and the deep sense of harmony this presence instils. There's no bowing or scraping, the encounter is one of intimacy and equality. It's a cosmic event, a moment when time ceases to exist in the chronological sense. How long was I in the valley? Five minutes? Half an hour? A hundred years? The transit of an entire geological epoch as I passed from the Pleistocene to the Holocene in less than the blink of an eye? As Elizondo observes, 'we are in the very center of creation, where heaven meets earth'.¹³⁰

FROM A LEAK TO A SHRINE



Figure 134: *Our Lady of the Underground*

At the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City pilgrims queue up to pass beneath Juan Diego's *tilma* bearing the image of the Virgin, housed in a glass case, on a series of four

¹²⁷ Ref

¹²⁸ Ref

¹²⁹ Ref

¹³⁰ Ref

moving pavements. Something similar happened in a corridor of Hidalgo station on the Mexico City metro from 1st June 1997 where a water leak had dried leaving behind a twenty-centimetre long stain which resembled the upper part of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The archbishop of Mexico City attempted to play down the 'apparition', trying to convince the faithful that the function of all Marian manifestations was to 'improve upon and complete the definitive revelation of Christ'. Nobody was listening. By late July *La Virgen del Metro* had become a cult, removed, preserved and attached to a wall.

Dario Gamboni, whose paper documents the story of the phenomenon, saw the image for the first time in September 1997 and recognised a 'relative similarity in the general shape of the silhouette and that of Our Lady of Guadalupe'. However, someone familiar with Guadalupe on a daily basis would, he acknowledges, be 'expected to recognise it instantly on the basis of very few elements', automatically attributing to it extraordinary powers and cultivating a personal relationship with it (2012:126).

La Virgen del Metro is not alone in being an example of an unofficial Marian apparition, nor is she the first which the Church has tried to suppress. As Gamboni's paper illustrates, the Virgin Mary, particularly in her manifestation as Our Lady of Guadalupe, tends to pop up in the most unlikely places. I say 'unlikely', there's an underlying connection in that the context is always Latino, from Chapala to Chicago.

Like Juan Diego's *tilma*, the image of *La Virgen del Metro* is considered 'acheiropoetic' – not made by human hands and of divine origin. We might attach that label to space or place which has been shaped not just by geomorphological processes and human habitation but the presence of the divine. This would tie in with Mandoki's 'space-time symbolic implosion of meaning' (1998). For the Aztecs (Nahua) she writes, 'time beats in the heart of space. Space is a mortal organism whose destiny is determined by discrete 'quanta' of time' (1998:81).

AND NOTHING ELSE MATTERS ... Day 33: Las Herrerías to Fonfría

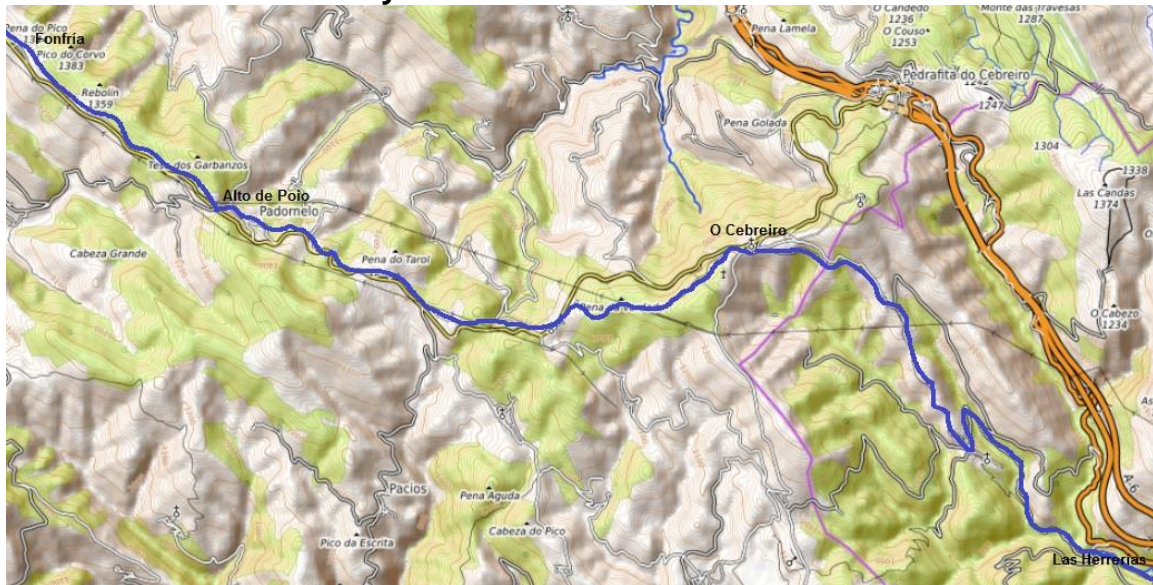


Figure 135: Route map, Las Herrerías to Fonfría

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · 16 Aug 2016
The climb up to O Cebreiro: an over-exuberance of landscape
#SaintsandCynics



Figure 136: An over-exuberance of landscape

SAINT VERSUS CYNIC: A CONVERSATION

Cynic: Really. Is there any point in going on? Nothing can top that, I know because we've been here before.

Saint: Come on. It might not be that bad. There's still the walking plenty of walking to do. And there's always O Cebreiro. Remember what happened there last time?

Cynic: Everything changed on the *Ruta Dragonte*. It unlocked feeling, emotion and affect and brought me back, metaphorically and spiritually, to the way: pilgrimage, pilgrims and I were all reconciled.

Saint: But the following day we hiked effortlessly up to O Cebreiro. There in the Romanesque church the simple statue of the Virgin and child reminded you of the Virgin

of Biakorri. Outside, now deeply relaxed, you strolled towards the car park which afforded a spectacular view eastwards over the *Cordillera Cantábrica* stretching out to the horizon and beyond.

That's when it hit you. The realisation, now made visible in distance, that we'd had walked all that way, as far as the eye could see, choked you with emotion; you didn't bother fighting the tears.

Cynic: Yes, I remember ...

Saint: I thought so, you're going all misty-eyed ...

Cynic: There's always O Cebreiro. It's the beginning of the end ...



Figure 137: O Cebreiro, the Blackpool of the Camino Francés

Arriving at O Cebreiro has taken the wind out of my sails. I think what's happened here, given what I saw in the car parks, is that there are groups of people on supported, stage-by-stage walks.

So there were buses, minibuses, one large bus in the car park with a support van and supplies of Coke and drinks. And obviously people had started at the bottom in the valley and they'd hiked up to be met by their support groups. They'll get in their buses and move on to the next stage, and the chances are, given that today's Tuesday, they'll be doing so to arrive in Santiago on Sunday.

And the church was closed, that beautiful Virgin Mary which reduced me to tears along with the view from the top of O Cebreiro. It wasn't open so I just missed it.

I don't want to stop, I've no intention of stopping, but I've just lost that joy of walking.

Recorded thoughts 16 August 2016

O Cebreiro was just horrible, tacky, touristy ... urghh! ... it really got my hackles. It seems like reconstructed heritage, 'false' place. It had lost much, if not all, of its qualities as a place of sacred space.

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · 16 Aug 2016
... and not for the better. From now on the Camino becomes more of a cash cow.



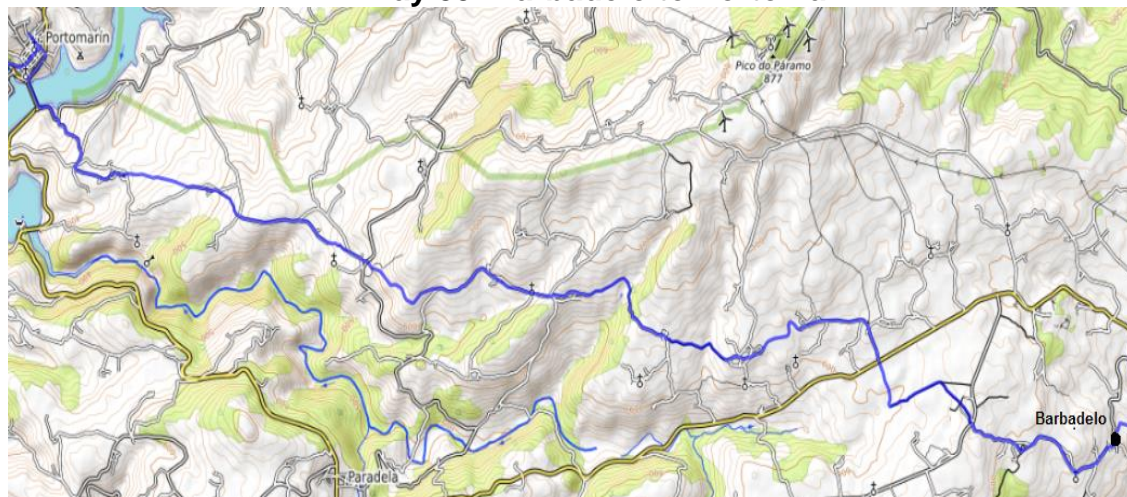
Figure 138: The rot sets in ...

I feel sad that that delight [in walking] has been diluted for me. I anticipated it happening at Sarria, I didn't expect it to happen so soon. The Galician landscape doesn't work for me. For me, another hundred k[ilometres] through Galicia, I think I'd rather have a hundred k[ilometres] through the Meseta. I didn't think I'd say that at the beginning of this escapade. [The landscape] doesn't move me ... it doesn't excite me, it doesn't incite any emotion. It's not quite saying it's a 'dead' landscape but it seems too familiar.

I'm just coming up to the Alto de Poio. It's a little stretch of the path I remember very well because it's horrible, really horrible ... I hate it, there's no saving grace. Sometimes you can admire uphill, they have panache, they're hard but they're worth the effort, you get something out of it. But this has no value whatsoever, it's one of the horrible-est uphill stretches on the whole of the Camino Frances.

Recorded thoughts 16 August 2016

THIS IS THE END, BEAUTIFUL FRIEND ...
Day 35: Barbadeleto to Portomarín



Figure

Figure 139: Route map, Barbadeleto to Portomarín



Figure 140: Hordes of the Things, pilgrims approaching Portomarín

Spirit versus camaraderie. I think what's happened for me at O Cebreiro, certainly at Sarria, just thinking about all those albergues yesterday. I'm sure there's still spirit on the Camino but I think that the camaraderie between pilgrims that existed a hundred kilometres back is beginning to get diluted by the number of people now joining the Camino.

I think there's a crucial difference there, solidarity – yes, that solidarity has gone. I think it's less likely that people would pick things up, carry them forwards, look for people who've lost things as happened in Carrión de los Condes and other places.

I also think this is the part of the Camino where pilgrims start to get in the way of the everyday lives of the people who live alongside it. Crowds of pilgrims, big groups along narrow lanes. Of course, the pilgrims are providing for the economy, there's bars, albergues every two or three kilometres.

Prior to, for example, O Cebreiro, people didn't get in the way, they were part of the landscape. They weren't unobtrusive, they were noticeable but they seemed 'natural', in proportion to the landscape. They belonged there. Here, I don't feel that way.

Recorded thoughts 18 August 2016

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · 18 Aug 2016
This is Portomarín. Here I take my leave of the Camino Francés
#SaintsandCynics



Figure 141: Portomarín, a bridge too far

I sat by the bus stop in Portomarin and watched them file through, a never-ending flow of happy pilgrims. Once I'd made up my mind I didn't waver. The bus arrived, I jumped on it and headed back to Sarria to catch a train towards Portugal. I switched off my digital voice recorder and took some time out.

INTERLUDE – TIME OUT FROM THE TRAIL

Sarria – Vigo – Porto

📍 Siân Lacey Taylder 📍 @ramblanista · 18 Aug 2016

Now I'm away from the Camino, for the first time in five weeks, I'm experiencing a strange sense of calm and relief #SaintsandCynics

Figure 142: A temporary lull, normal service will soon be resumed ...

The premise of John Wylie's 'Landscape' is not just that 'landscape is tension' but that it is 'precisely and inherently a set of tensions' (2007:2). Often, but not always, these tensions are abstract but there are times when they almost tangibly fizz and buzz, and perhaps here we have something that might help us to dissect this notion of landscape experience.

What is this tension? How does it manifest itself and from where does it come? Wylie argues that it is a 'creative tension between the self and the world' but on those final stages of the *Camino Francés* the tension was anything but 'creative'; it was destroying my relations with those with whom I was dwelling in the landscape – not just my fellow pilgrims but those who drift in and out of the Camino bubble – and the landscape itself. I've made some tough decisions in my life, life-changing even, but this wasn't one of them. No regrets, as the song goes.

RAMBLANISTA

Monday 22 August 2016

Saints and Cynics Day 35: Why I quit the Camino Frances

It was a tough one. Not in terms of making the decision to take my leave of the *Camino Francés*, I'd already given it a twenty-four hour stay of execution and by the time I'd got to Portomarin I'd come to the end of my tether. As I sat waiting for the bus to Sarria I watched over a hundred fellow pilgrims trudge into town. Portomarín, like Sarria, was a maze of restaurants, bars and, of course, albergues – dozens of them. It was one o'clock in the afternoon, they were all filling up fast.

When the bus finally arrived I climbed aboard without the slightest tinge of regret, my only concern was that leaving the Camino only 90km from its goal might have a detrimental impact on my research but the truth is that if you ain't with a family by the time you get to Sarria and the magic 100km point, then you're going to be on your own all the way to the Plaza Obreidero. Tough luck, loser. Emotionally? Well, having walked the Camino Frances in 2012 I know from personal experience that the final walk-in to Santiago can be a disappointment, you're just one face amongst the crowds, another pair of boots on a long-line of pilgrims queuing to get into the city. And if you're hoping to seek spiritual solace in the cathedral you might as well forget that too; prepare to be

battered and bruised by hordes of smartphone-wielding tourists taking pot-shot photos of anything that remotely resembles a Jacobean relic.

You'll hate the bastards. And you'll hate them all the more when you remember the simple solitude of the church in Navarette. Or the golden swathes of the Meseta where you felt alone and closer to God. Or the moment you watched the sun rise over the Montes de Leon. There's nothing you'll want more than to pack up your rucksack, pull on your boots and get the hell out of town, probably to Finisterre.

But just in case there is any residual desire to commune with St James - not at the top of my list of favourite saints - I can rest easily with the knowledge that I'll be going to Santiago anyway, only just by another route.

It was a tough decision because it sort of defines me as an elitist misanthrope, a pilgrim snob who refuses to engage with the masses. My decision to quit says much more about me than them and it also, I fear, speaks volumes about the nature of my research.

It also suggests that I'm more anti-pilgrim than pilgrim.

I took the bus to Sarria and waited for a train that would take me, eventually, to Vigo. Both the bus and railway stations are little more than 500 metres from the Camino but they might as well be on the other side of the world. And as I sat on the platform, a curious sense of relief swept over me, it was as if I'd been hiking under an enormous pressure which was now suddenly removed. For five minutes the railway line followed the route of the Camino Frances before it broke out and filed south into the Rias of Galicia. And like the dawdling train, within a short space of time I, too, had put the Camino behind me.

STAGE FOUR INDIFFERENCE

Day 28 – 35: Porto to Santiago de Compostela

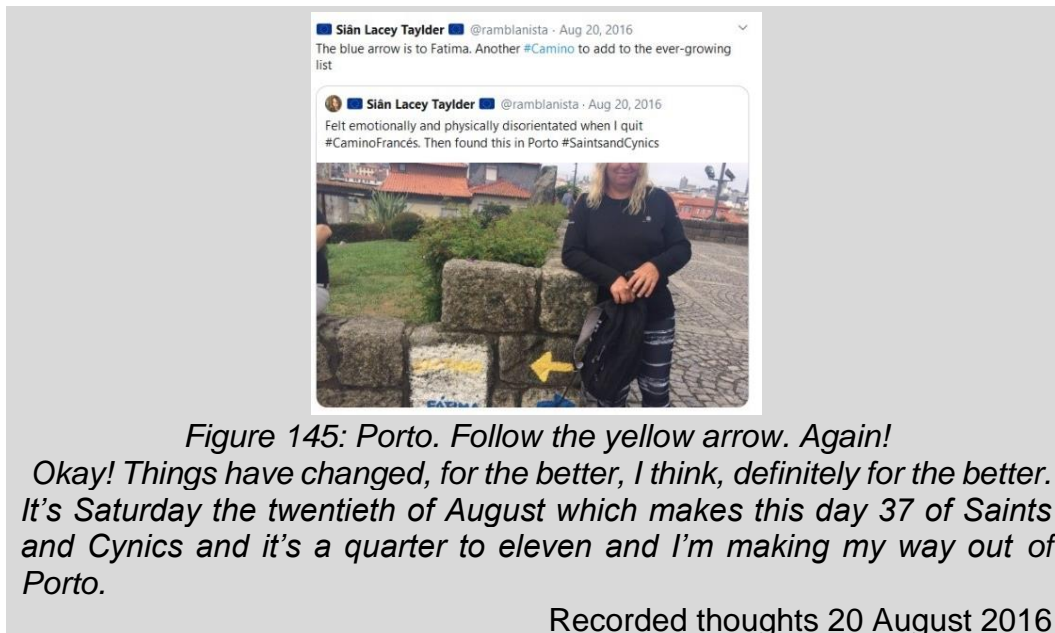


Figure 143: Route map, Porto to Santiago (Camino Francés in red)

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Aug 29, 2016
I'd like to rear up this sign, take it home and hang it on my wall. It's what #SaintsandCynics is all about



Figure 144: I'm going to have this engrained on my tombstone



This is a further example of how transcribed voice recordings fail to bring out the nuances and thus offer a 'flattened' or 'dampened' representation of experience. Here, there's a lightness to my voice, a resonant harmony overflowing with joie-de-vivre, barely recognisable from the world-weary, worn-down tones of the pilgrim who turned her back on the *Camino Francés* forty-eight hours previously. The tension, it seems, has melted away, the weight removed from her shoulders; not so much Atlas shrugged as Atlas with a skip in her step.

Has our *land-loper* succumbed to the discipline of the road? According to the Rule of Saint Benedict, there's more than one way of being a nomad, a right and a wrong way of being a pilgrim. Even in movement there is stability, provided one walks in the footsteps of God. As Augustine said 'our hearts are restless until they rest in you'.

Let's see if this renewed humanity lasts as far as Santiago. I'm one hundred percent certain she'll get there now but she won't be the same pilgrim she might have been had she continued along the *Camino Francés*. If only your uncle had been your aunt! Enough of the subjunctive already. We might question her decision and her commitment to her research but her commitment to the Camino remains unchanged. Everything is changed now, it's a fresh start. She might even make a more amiable walking companion.

Don't hold your breath.

OH I DO LIKE TO BE BESIDE THE SEASIDE ...

Day 37: Porto to Vila do Conde

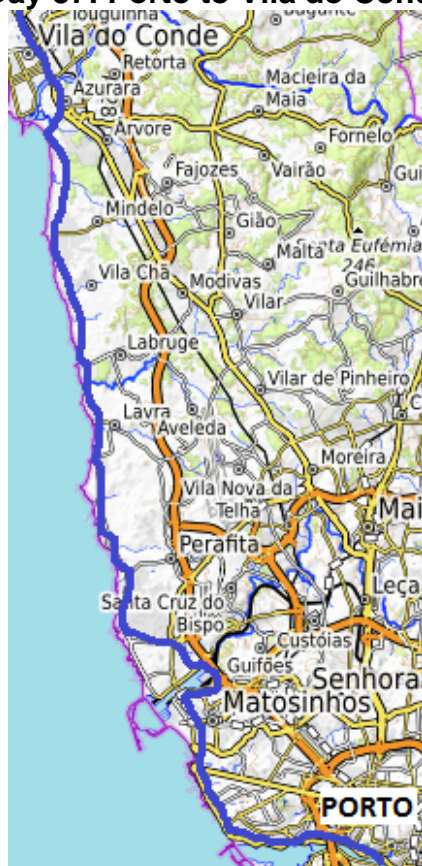


Figure 146: Route map, Porto to Vila do Conde



Figure 147: It's a question that would bug me all the way to Santiago

We're in grockle land.¹³¹ Most of the grockles are Portuguese and I wonder how things change now because I'm out of my language comfort zone. Does that change the way I relate? It's a summer Saturday, high season; it's very much beach-beach. Just keep plodding along today. I'm not sure what to make of it ... it's all a bit strange.

Recorded thoughts 21 August 2016

Everything's changed but the destination. Despite this being *another* Camino to Santiago, the journey's end has never been as important as the journey itself. And I think it's worth

¹³¹ In Dorset, 'grockle' is the pejorative term used by locals to describe tourists

noting here that when I drew up the toolkit and packed it safely in my rucksack I hadn't anticipated making such a significant change of trajectory, Portugal wasn't on my mind.

So as we wander through the suburbs of Porto and slide through the seaside towns as if nobody can see us – and yes, I know you're asking yourself 'is this *really* pilgrim territory?' – perhaps we should take a break and have a good sort out? My right shoulder's giving me grief, I'm carrying too much weight in the pack and I could do with shedding some excess baggage. Heaven knows, I'm even tempted to tear up the toolkit and shove it in the nearest bin. It's served its purpose, maybe it's time to just enjoy the walk for what it is.

This looks like the perfect place for a lunchtime picnic, in the shadow of the chemical works, and just downwind ...

CAN'T HAPPEN HERE? (PART 1)



Figure 148: A perfect picnic spot

[I saw] what I thought was a very small church in a style completely different to anything I've seen in the past five and a half weeks so I crossed the road thinking it might be a really old chapel but it wasn't, it was somebody's house ... it struck me immediately that ... an absence of religious symbolism and iconography so far. The Catholic gaze doesn't work here ... and because of that lack of iconography it doesn't feel so much like a pilgrimage and it's lost much of, if not all, of its religious or spiritual purpose.

Recorded thoughts 21 August 2016

Strange things don't have to happen in strange places. Miracles might occur, even in drab municipal boroughs on a wet Wednesday evening in November. This is the essence of magical realism, in Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Remedios the Beauty, too wise for the world, suddenly ascends towards heaven one afternoon, in the parlour, folding a sheet. Thus far, the more memorable experiences along the Camino have taken place in what we might consider to be 'landscapes of distinction': the mountain and the Meseta. This gentle trundle along the Atlantic coast of

Portugal shimmies through a countryside that's pleasant enough but won't get the juices flowing in the same way as, for example, the Pyrenees.



Figure 149: From the sacred to the profane ...

NO EFFORT REQUIRED ...

And there you have it. It feels a little too easy, no physical exertion or emotional stress. The conflict of which I spoke during the interlude seems to have ebbed with the tide and now does little more than lap at my toes as I hike, bootless, across the sand. This isn't what I signed up for! There was a sense, on the climb over the Pyrenees, that the magic, when it occurred, was at least partly produced by the energy expelled to get there; I felt I'd earned it. A long littoral slog might test the stamina but it lacks the gritty glamour of the Meseta's heat and dust. Suffering is conspicuous by its absence.

I spread the contents of the toolkit across the parched grass and gulp down a can of Coca-Cola. I've been on the road for over five weeks, now's not the time to make rash decisions, each item is still worth its weight. There are several points which immediately strike me; that febrile tension which existed has certainly dissipated – whether it's completely vanished only time will tell – but it's been replaced by a sensation that's less intense but is still, nevertheless, nagging away, unsettling me. It's all very well saying 'walk this way' and feeling very clever about appropriating an eighties rock song but right now I'm feeling I should've added a question mark and interrogative. Walk this way? Walk which way? Walk the ways which were made for walking, such as the *Camino Francés*? Are some pilgrim routes more authentic than others? The accoutrements are still here, no longer central stage but woven into a landscape of daily life which begs the question, to what extent is the faith performed by pilgrims – of whatever spiritual/religious hue – different to that practised in the suburbs of Porto and the shiny shopping centres of Povoia do Varzim? Call yourself a pilgrim? As Nancy Frey points out, being a pilgrim is an attitude, 'doing things differently in everyday life'

(1998:51). But at what point does pilgrimage *become* everyday life? It had been the focus of my life for the best part of four years, my existence was intrinsically intertwined with it: I walk, therefore I am.

On long-distance trails we tend to think exclusively of our feet, as if they weren't connected to the rest of our body. The feet do all the work, they take the pain and the strain as well as functioning as shock absorbers, shielding the torso from the daily pounding. But over the past couple of weeks I'd begun to feel a niggling pain – a dull but persistent ache – in my right shoulder.¹³² I didn't think much about it at the time, until the episode at Chafe below. I thought I'd eventually walk it off but its continued persistence was begin to have an impact on the walk.

I mean *pilgrimage!*

Maybe I'm missing the tension already. Can't live with it, it can't live without it. Relieved of the conflict, this so-called 'pilgrimage' is in danger of becoming little more than a long walk by the sea across a landscape that is flat both literally (almost) and metaphorically.

Or maybe that should be 'is becoming flattened'. Language matters, grammar is imperative and verbs are like alchemists, tinkering with meaning and turning base text into bright shiny prose. When I introduced the Spanish verbs *ser* and *estar* in the toolkit I referred to their use as being a 'linguistic sleight of hand', in hindsight I think that was a little disingenuous. The landscape always *es* (*ser*), it has its essence, its ontological existence although that is, in the course of geological history, ephemeral (*estar*); it is always in the process of *becoming*, through tectonic shifts or the forces of erosion. Those of us who dwell in landscapes in an ambulatory manner are, equally, both *ser* and *estar*, both exist in a dynamic tension – there's that word again.

We create and we are created, simultaneously. My boot leaves its imprint on the ground, the form of that boot – its make, for example, the nature of my gait and the weight in my rucksack – all influence the nature of that imprint. We are, in effect, little gods, or at least we're playing at being little gods. But the landscape leaves its mark on us. Whatever I was (*ser*) before I started this Camino, the day's stage, the barefoot stroll across the sand, I will never be (*ser*) again. I am changed; I have *become* (*estar*).

What I'm trying to say here is that tension, perhaps to the point of conflict, is one of the key factors driving and guiding this *becoming*. The greater the tension, the greater

¹³² It was only later, on my return to the UK, that I researched this – on the internet, of course – and discovered that it was, in fact, a thing – 'backpacker's palsy'. It was caused by carrying too much weight in a relatively small backpack, the principle culprit being my laptop. It took several weeks and a couple of massage sessions for it to return to normal.

the potential for change, be it physical (for example, losing weight), personal (time for reflection) or spiritual (conversion or consolidation of faith). It's that tension that both holds the world together and, from time to time, tears it apart; it's a tension that destroys and creates at one and the same time. It's always going on, usually imperceptibly, even here on an apparently innocuous stroll on the beach. Incidents such as that *Ruta Dragonte* and below at Chafe are rare phenomena but it's my contention, and one of the principal contentions of this thesis, that pedestrian pilgrimages have the potential to increase both their frequency and intensity.

I'VE A FEELING WE'RE NOT KANSAS ANYMORE

Day 38: Vila do Conde – Apúlia



Figure 150: Route map, Vila do Conde to Apúlia

Do you remember Melissa Harrison's paper on being the wrong type of person in the wrong sort of place? It struck me as being particularly pertinent here. On the *Camino Francés* pilgrims were expected and pilgrim 'behaviour' was the norm. They were part of the landscape, like Bruegel's harvesters. But here it was different, pilgrims were few and sometimes little kids gave you a funny look. There was no hostility, of course, but I felt in a minority, not just as a pilgrim but as a hiker and a pedestrian, an *ambulante*.

I, a person consumed by my own mobility, am surrounded by sedentarists – people lying on beaches, sitting at table, reading, drinking, sunbathing. It's a bit like doing a pilgrimage along Weymouth esplanade! And like Weymouth esplanade, all human life is here.

WHEN THE VIRGIN MARY IS A WHITE WOMAN WHO DOES NOT WALK



Figure 151: Live from Sunset Strip ... I mean the Camino de Santiago

It struck me that whereas a pilgrimage to St James might go across the mountains, a pilgrimage to the Virgin Mary might also go along the sea – Our Lady Star of the Sea, that long association with the Virgin Mary. But it's a bit weird, I'm constantly wondering – and worrying – how this fits in with my research, it doesn't seem to fit anywhere, it's not even me having a holiday really. It's just me walking along the coast, through various seaside resorts.

Recorded thoughts 22 August 2016

WHAT WOULD MARCELLA SAY?

'A group of poor Latin American women were doing theology, discussing the role of the Virgin Mary in their lives. Asking themselves if they identify with the Virgin Mary in their sufferings, one of them, looking at the Virgin's statue, said, 'No, because she has expensive clothes and jewels, she is white and she does not walk' (Althaus-Reid 2004:30).



Figure 152: Our Lady of Aguçadoura

Here, in Aguçadoura, I finally came across a physical example of Marcella's description of the Virgin Mary as 'a rich white woman who does not walk' (2004:14). She is, as you can clearly see, **very** white, pure white, unhealthily pallid. I understand where Marcella gets her imagery from, in Hispanic Catholicism the Virgin Mary never walks but is carried around on a bier. Is putting one foot in front of the other beneath her – metaphorically

as well as literally – or are we, the practising faithful, at fault for putting her on a pedestal – literally as well as metaphorically – from which she cannot descend? Or maybe she wants to get down and walk but we won't let her, because that would mean questioning the way we perceive and venerate her. And then we might find ourselves in a baby/bathwater situation.

But here we have a Virgin who floats, on a barge laden with flowers that reminds me of Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott*. It was the final day of the week-long *Festa de Nossa Senhora da Guia* (Our Lady of Guidance) and as I passed through Aguçadoura they were preparing for the evening's festivities; later in Apúlia, I watched a procession from my hotel window.¹³³ Perhaps I'm getting a little blasé about the Virgin Mary, our shared space has become a comfort zone. At such times it's always good to invoke the memory of Marcella Althaus-Reid.

At first glance it seems Marcella's position vis-à-vis the Virgin Mary was overwhelmingly hostile and negative, reflecting contemporary feminist critiques of Mariology (see Warner 1983) though from the perspective of marginalised Latin American women. That was my thinking at the time though I was soon proved wrong. 'Mariology is crucial', she wrote to me in email dated 3 June 2003, what she argued against was the ideology that supports Mariology, which 'sacralizes and dictates how to be a woman in Latin America, and works as the cornerstone of the feminization of poverty on the continent' (2004:31).

I wonder what might have happened to *Nossa Senhora da Guia* had the boat sprung a leak or capsized. Would she sink or swim? Would she save the souls of those tasked with taking her out across the waves?

In *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, Marcella talks of 'betrayals', of how women doing theology are 'always accused ... of being unfaithful to patriarchal ideologies' (2004:3). But in the chapter *When God is a Rich White Woman who Does Not Walk* she also writes of how the Virgin Mary has let down those women who turn to her for succour. Who is that beneath her skirts, what is it? 'Once the statue of the Virgin is in its place, nobody can see what is hidden under the skirt' (2000:61). Nobody has tried to lift up the Virgin's skirts to see what's concealed beneath, perhaps nobody dares to. Perhaps they're scared? Perhaps they're worried about seeing something they didn't expect – or want – to see.

¹³³ Also known as *Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem*, Our Lady of Good Voyage

Here's the point where queer theology comes up hard and fast against orthodox Mariology – it was always going to happen. Even though I understand the liberative and transgressive connotations, I don't want to perceive the Virgin Mary as a 'divine Drag Queen' (2000:79). What if God is not a woman? Not even queer? What if the Virgin Mary has *cojones* not just metaphorically but literally too? Marina Warner's reluctant acknowledgement of Virgin's importance comes to nothing if she's really a bloke in a wig and dress (1983:338).

The faithful of Aguçadoura will send their Virgin out to sea, as they do at this time every year. She'll return and then the fiesta will commence, with drinking and dancing till dawn. She knows how to party, that's one of Latin Catholicism's great attractions, its inherent, subversive hedonism. That's all very well, who doesn't love a Virgin who can dance the Fandango? But what if this white woman who cannot walk suddenly turned the fiesta on its head and started rocking the boat? How *queer* would that be?

CAN'T HAPPEN HERE? (PART 2)

Day 40: Marinhas – Viano do Castelo

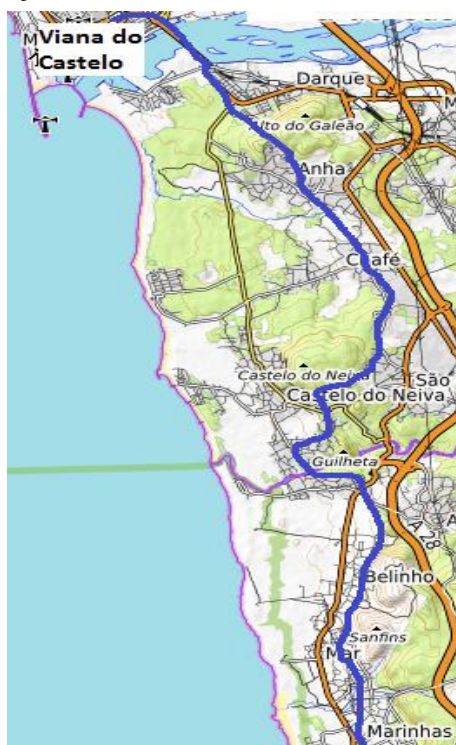


Figure 153: Route map, Marinhas to Viana do Castelo

During my MSc sojourn in London I had to work part-time to pay my fees and sustain myself. Depending on where I was temping my route to work on the London Underground generally involved a combination of the Central, Jubilee and Northern lines. It occurred to me, from observing train indicator boards, that contrary to the laws of physics, time – as in the duration of a minute – differed from line to line. Central line minutes were, for example, shorter than their equivalent on the Northern Line.¹³⁴

Something similar seemed to be happening here. The *Camino Português* lacked the urgency of the *Camino Francés*. At the time I commented: 'It's been a lovely walk, so far, and it's been lovely not going very fast, so I think this is going to be a slow Camino. It's not stunningly beautiful but it's got a very relaxed feel. That's the current *modus ambulandi*'.¹³⁵

The current *modus ambulandi* was one of comfortable contentment, but wistful too. In hindsight, I'm not sure that was necessarily a good thing.

Just leaving the albergue at Marinhas. We might say that last night was an example of how it's supposed to be. I stayed at the albergue, there were forty beds and it was virtually full which surprised me. No fart-arsing around at five in the morning, there was wifi, a good atmosphere and I actually had dinner with company, I guess this was what I wanted the Camino Francés to be like.

Recorded thoughts 23 August 2016

¹³⁴ For a short period, when I had to take the decrepit North London (overground) Line, the notion of regular time caved in on itself as minutes lapsed into hours and trains failed to depart at all, let alone on time.

¹³⁵ Voice recording 23/8/2016

SOMETHING HAPPENED ON THE ROAD TO CHAFE ...

I got to a church, and opposite was what I assumed to be a via dolorosa. It's a steep hill, reminds me of Guadalupe, climbing up to the chapel on the hill. It's interesting that you have to climb. There's a small chapel at the top and there's a statue, of course, of the Virgin Mary and Child. And there's a kind of wide stone platform which affords excellent views to the east.

I didn't have to climb up here but I did, I felt the urge to climb up here. I just Tweeted that here I feel so very alive, it just came over me, it's kind of like I'm tingling with energy. There's a stone bench and a stone wall and I just want to climb over them like I'm a child. And I don't know where this has come from, it's a weird feeling. It feels solid, it's almost as if there's something coming up from the earth. As if the Catholic iconography has plugged itself into something even more elemental.

*I've no idea why it feels like this. Tingling ... very strange ... very strange
Recorded thoughts 23 August 2016*



Figure 154: Tweet from the top of the Via Dolorosa

This is officially rather weird. I've got so much energy up here. Can't stop moving. And I swear ... that this may have been going down before ... that the pain in my right shoulder, I assume from carrying the rucksack ... it's especially achy at night. There's a knot at the top of it, a very nasty knot, which was quite bad on the train from Vigo to Porto.

It's gone. I don't know if it's just the way I feel at the moment, it feels okay. It may have gone before, I don't know. Who knows? This is very, very strange.

Recorded thoughts 23 August 2016

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Aug 23, 2016
View from the top of Via Dolorosa. Reminds me of Mesoamerican pyramids!
#SaintsandCynics



Figure 155: Looking at this photo I find myself wondering if being up high and looking down had an impact on the incident

I've just passed through Chafe ... and I don't know what to make of that incident. My arm is a lot freer ... I just don't know. If things get healed, do they get healed completely? Or is just getting better anyway? I've got stiff muscles in the back of my left calf, why were they not dealt with at the same time?

One thing I need to point out, what has made this landscape ... given it more religious significance is the preponderance of religious icons. Little shrines with candles, little portraits of the Virgin Mary, crosses which are part of walls. Those shrines are important, those shrines are many years ago what made me think of this religious landscape ...

Recorded thoughts 23 August 2016

... OR DID IT?

Was it just the power of the spiritual imagination conjured up and urged on by relationships with the landscape? It's almost as if the chapel of Our Lady of Castro and the church of São Romão de Neiva had seen me coming and decided to lay a cunning trap. Or maybe it wasn't so cunning because I've got my heart and my soul dead set something and I'm like a kid in a candy store. Either way, the conversation might have gone something like this (translated from the Portuguese):

Our Lady of Crasto: Look! Here comes Siân Lacey Taylder, the pilgrim who's been on the road for nearly seven weeks and might be a little bit doo-lally. You know she's got a BIG crush on me and she's so desperate to believe. Shall we play a trick on her?

São Romão: Why would you want to do that? Because of the things she's written about you?

Our Lady of Crasto: No, I rather like the things she's written about me. You know what my critics say, that I'm either a White Woman Who does Not Walk or that I'm 'rooted in apparitions and at the service of manipulative power'.¹³⁶

São Romão: Neither of those accusations are true, and yet at the same time, they both are. But this woman seems to want the best of both worlds, a theology which bridges 'the gulf between the relatively sober language of Marian doctrine and the often

¹³⁶ Perry & Echeverria 1988:313.

unrestrained excess of Marian devotion'. I get the feeling she wants to 'reintegrate the two in a holistic encounter between Christian belief and praxis'.¹³⁷

Our Lady of Crasto: She wants to experience me as 'queer, as an unsettling presence with the potential to disrupt the order of [her] theological and social systems' but she needs me to be 'a mystery with the power of consuming fire'.¹³⁸ Clearly I can be all things to all people but performing spiritual somersaults is hard work.

São Romão: Given that, as the Mother of God, you're divinely omnipresent, how can you simultaneously be divinely concentrated in one particular time and place, such as on the *Ruta Dragonte* on an early June morning in 2012? Surely all spaces are spiritually equal? And if you did appear ...

Our Lady of Crasto: ... make my presence known ...

São Romão: ... if you did make your presence known to your dutiful daughter, was it on your terms or hers? Did she conjure you up or did you deign to appear? I mean, make yourself known. I'm reminded of the words of Lily Kong, 'if sacredness is not inherent, attention must be paid to how place is sacralised'.¹³⁹ Did you do it ...

Our Lady of Crasto: ... or was it a simply function of her overactive and often febrile emotion? Was it the land? Or was it me? This bothers me, I don't wish to be complicit in academic fraud. How can I be certain that this woman, with all her emotional baggage, hasn't just talked herself into faith?

São Romão: She's certainly couched her language very carefully. Imagine if she'd just come out with it and said 'The Virgin Mary appeared to me on the road to Santiago'? It seems an indirect religious experience is more plausible than a direct one.

Our Lady of Crasto: Indeed, though I think a book on the geography of religious experience might make for an interesting piece of future research, if she ever gets her thesis done.

São Romão: So what trick do you intend to play? Are you going to heal her dodgy shoulder?

Our Lady of Crasto: No. But I'm going to convince her that I have capacity to do so if I wished. If the time and the place are right.

São Romão: That sounds like a cruel test of faith.

Our Lady of Crasto: Perhaps. But I think that's what she – or rather her project – needs.

¹³⁷ Beattie (2007:294)

¹³⁸ Beattie (2007:294)

¹³⁹ Kong (2001:13)

IT'S THE FINAL COUNTDOWN ...
Day 48: A Picaraña to Santiago de Compostela



Figure 156: Route map, A Picaraña to Santiago de Compostela



Figure 157: Are you ready? Big days always begin quietly

So here we are, now entertain us. It's been seven weeks and a thousand and more kilometres and even though I've been here, done it all before, it does feel a bit 'epic'; if I weren't surrounded by dozens of 'fellow' pilgrims I might even feel a little heroic – in the Byronic sense.

And even though I've been here before, and despite my protestations about Santiago not really mattering, I'm not at all sure how I'm going to feel. If nothing else, there is the sense of an ending, I've come all that way for this.

The landscape's not doing much for me, hasn't for several days. There's no hostility, no antagonism but no fiery passion either, it feels like my betrothed and I walking together down the aisle. And I think that metaphors sums it up perfectly. The land and me, more wedded than welded together.

Look, today of all days I'm not going to go stop, not even for a coffee and *bocadillo*. There's a sense of urgency. If I'm going to have to do this I might as well get it done quickly and move on. I'm not planning to hang around.

So I'm going to let the day speak for itself. The only context I will add, in the light of what I've said above, is that the importance of time and space, the accumulation of days and distance. I know this has been a constant mantra but here it becomes the defining factor. It's that sense of achievement that will set us, the arriving pilgrims, apart from them, the tourist crowds, as we enter the Cathedral. The Santiago we experience is different from theirs, not because we're superior (although it's difficult not to feel smug) but because it has a different meaning.

Okay! Lace up your boots, pull on your pack and take a deep, deep breath. This is a once in a lifetime experience. Be in the moment.¹⁴⁰

I left A Picaraña at 08:00 so I'm on my way, about 12 k to go, I suppose. And yesterday afternoon I was feeling quite emotional. I'm not sure if that's walking all day, slightly dehydrated, the heat, the dust, it seems like a battle, it gets the emotional juices flowing ...¹⁴¹



Figure 158: Live from the Camino Portugues

This morning feeling a lot ... well, I don't know what I'm feeling, I'm feeling emotional and struggling to get into a stride. That may be part of it, I suppose, I think it's going to be a bit uppy and downy. I want to be on my own ... I may not enjoy this

It's about 10:15. I suppose we're ... not quite the suburbs of Santiago but the settlements on the outskirts. Six k to go. I'm still not feeling, well I felt a bit up there, I've caught the first glimpses of Santiago on the horizon ...¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ For most. Serial pilgrims exist but we are in a minority.

¹⁴¹ Recorded thoughts 31 August 2016

¹⁴² Recorded thoughts 31 August 2016



Figure 159: Live from the Camino Portugues

I've just turned the corner and I can see it. Not nearly as far as I thought it would be. I can clearly see the spires of the Cathedral. It's just in reach, it's so close

That was a lovely feeling, seeing it just there and although the route here has been quite messy, with the huge deviation from Portomarín to Porto, I'm rather glad that this is the way I entered Santiago and I didn't stick with the Francés. I can imagine even now they'll be all piling in along that route, past the airport. This one? I don't know how this one's going to end. I'm beginning to feel a bit emotional now ...¹⁴³



Figure 160: 'City of Gold' or 'City of God'?

And now it's looming closer, I think we're just a kilometre or so from the outskirts and of course the first sign that we're near a major city is the rivers of traffic, knotted together. The roads flowing like rivers through the landscape, all over the place.¹⁴⁴



Figure 161: Santiago Edgelands

It's ten-fifty and I think now we're officially on the outskirts of Santiago. We've negotiated the ring of concrete which is the motorway and ring-road

¹⁴³ Recorded thoughts 31 August 2016

¹⁴⁴ Recorded thoughts 31 August 2016

network and now the path is winding its way through the [outskirts] of the city. There's about ten pilgrims before and behind me. I wonder what it's like for them, I wonder how they're going to feel. I can already feel ... just when I see the cathedral towers I feel this very strong upwelling of emotion. It's very powerful, something you can't resist, you can't try and be calm, I suppose. And it's a funny thing because I always say the journey is far more important than the destination and arriving in Santiago isn't the be-all and end-all, I remember Chris the priest not bothering about this but I couldn't have done the whole trip without arriving in Santiago. That would've just been impossible ... it would have left the whole thing hanging uncompleted. At the end of the day one has to go to Santiago.¹⁴⁵



Figure 162: Just you try ...

So how do I feel negotiating this interminable stage which seems to go on for ever? Sometimes I think of all the places I've been in the past seven weeks ... the people I've met. The people I've met and sadly didn't finish the walk with. I miss them, it was the family that wasn't meant to be. But we've all got here, eventually ...

But if I think back to setting out from Artix ... and when I set foot off the train, that was an awful morning after what happened in Nice, knowing I had a thousand k to go ... so I think back almost symmetrically, as I've got perhaps not much more than one k to go, one thousand and forty kilometres since setting out from that station, walking up the road, up the hill to Arthez-de-Bearn,[where] the road joined the [route from] Le Puy.¹⁴⁶



Figure 163: Are we there yet?

¹⁴⁵ Recorded thoughts 31 August 2016

¹⁴⁶ Recorded thoughts 31 August 2016

One of the first things I noticed, ironically, when I saw the city, was the route out! The first thing I thought was, after seeing the Cathedral towers, the hill behind, that's the way, you head on to Finisterre. And there was a moment when I thought, well, you could still do that but ... it's time to finish here. It's time, I think, to knock Saints and Cynics on the head.¹⁴⁷



Figure 164: So close you could reach out and touch the spires I might as well record this, there's so many people here it doesn't really matter. It was a long, long hike, trudge through the outskirts and the suburbs to get to the [centre] and predictably it's full of tat and tourists. I'm about 500 m from the actual cathedral, walking through the narrow streets which are, of course, very familiar to me. Strange how, from a distance, the cathedral towers got my juices going but not now that's been tempered by the tourists. Just a sea, a mass of restaurants ... tourists everywhere.

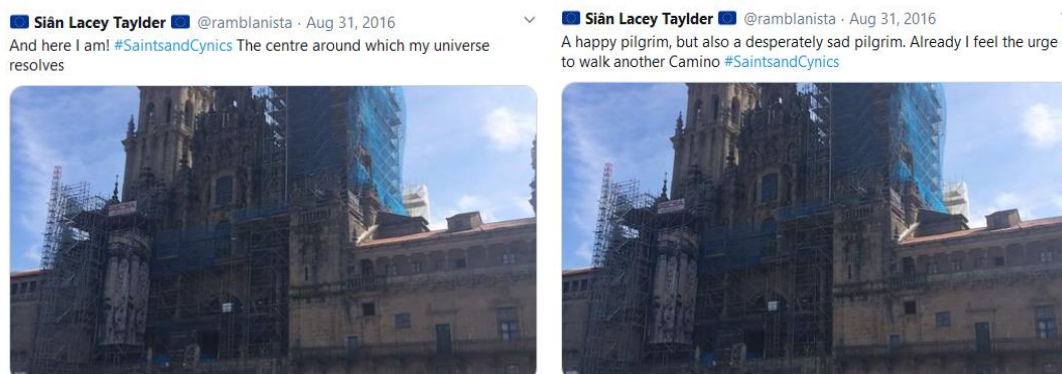


Figure 165: Words are not enough ...

And that's it! There is no more. What happens at the end of the Camino stays at the end of the Camino. Even for me, a cynical Gyrovague, the Plaza del Obradoiro is a sacred, inner sanctum and the experiences of all of us who walk there, no matter how far, no matter what our motivation, are all equally valid. I turned off my digital voice recorder and let the moment have its time and place. This was deeply personal.

I sat on a stone bench admiring my legs and watching the constant flow of pilgrims into the square. As spectacles go it's hugely compulsive, an endlessly changing scene. The cliché 'all human life is here' is overused and inappropriately employed but here it is

¹⁴⁷ Recorded thoughts 31 August 2016

perfectly apt. There was laughter and there were tears, I shared in these too. For most it was an end, for others it was just the beginning.

And for some of us it's neither. We just keep on walking, as if it's the only thing we can do. Love Santiago, hate Santiago; either way, I'll be back again soon.



*Figure 166: O happy band of pilgrims,
Look upward to the skies:
Where such a light affliction
Shall win you such a prize¹⁴⁸*

¹⁴⁸ *O happy band of pilgrims* (Joseph Barnby 1887)

INTERLUDE

THE END OF AN AFFAIR

Santiago to Olot

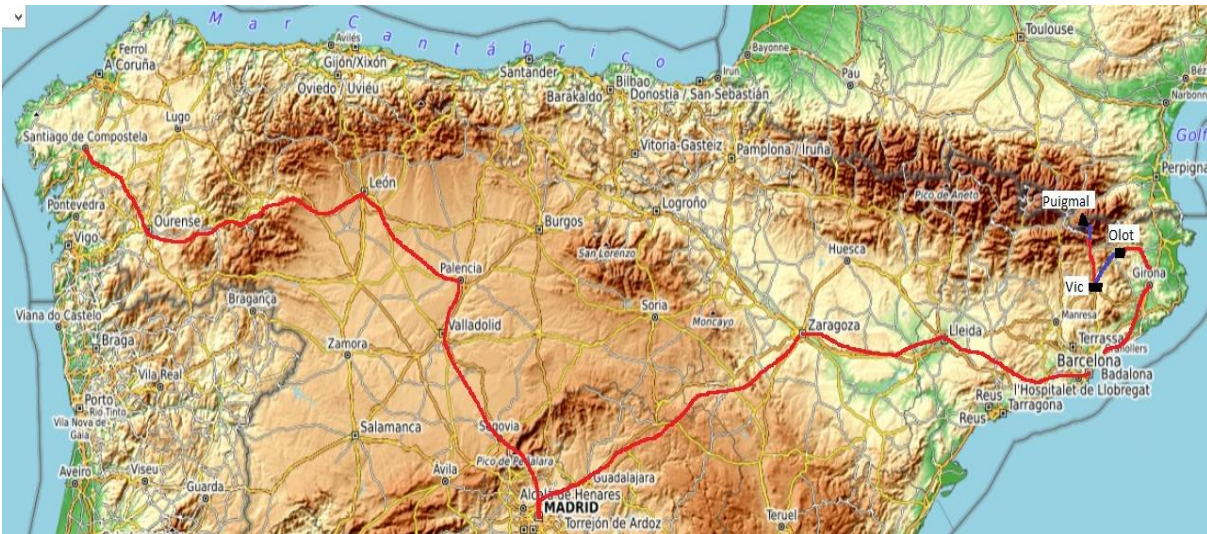


Figure 167: Route map, Santiago to Olot

In 2012 my arrival in Santiago, in thick, persistent drizzle, had been a huge anti-climax. There was a celebratory meal, drinks were downed and experiences shared but four years later the sense of it being a significant moment didn't hit home and I had no inclination to hang around. I'd booked myself into a hotel well away from the historic centre, as if to put some distance – some space – between myself and the Camino. The next morning I was up in the early autumn darkness to take the first train to Madrid. The AVE split the landscape in two, making a mockery of the weeks I'd spent trying to get to Santiago, the sun rose over the Meseta Central and, unlike Orpheus, I didn't look back. Within five and a half hours I was in Madrid, by early evening I was safely ensconced in Girona, my Catalan home from home. The next day I took a bus to Olot to explore the Garrotxa volcanic zone and the Pyrenees.



Figure 168: Two questions for the end of the road

So how was it for you, dear reader? Did the earth move, under your feet, as we walked together for 1200km and 41 days? Did you, too, experience the highs and the lows or was it just a long, long walk. Am I guilty of the sin of exaggeration? Have I willed into existence, through the medium of my prose, things that didn't exist and events that never happened?

We're nearly done, just bear with me for a few more days. What's that you're saying? Why didn't we just jump on a plane from Santiago to Stansted and get the whole 'post-Camino blues' syndrome over and done before term begins? That this is just prolonging the agony?

You've got a point. Nancy Frey documents this 'return to normality' at length, asking why pilgrims so rarely return by the same pedestrian means as they arrived, as their predecessors invariably did (1998:179). For some, she notes, the Camino becomes 'home', leaving 'a question mark as to where to go next' (1998:182). For those of us with nomadic tendencies, for whom the Camino represents the consistency and stability most associate with 'home', this journey back can be painfully depressing.¹⁴⁹

If I've written a prologue then symmetry demands I finish up with an epilogue. If I've written about the importance of slow insertion then I really need to counterbalance it with an equally unhurried extraction. I've never taken the plane home from a pilgrimage, I don't intend to change that habit now.

But the epilogue should have purpose, it can't simply exist for its own sake and here the intention is twofold. Firstly, I've talked before about the importance of reflection so here is the chance to put that into practise before the inevitable journey back to the UK where the mood will be tinged by Brexit-related angst. We need distance and another place that feels more like 'home' so the plan is to spend a few days in Catalunya. Secondly, and if you knew how many times I've had to edit out references to 'longing for the mountains' this would come as no surprise, I wanted to end the 'Summer of Sweat' on a high. Literally. But, with a view to future research in this field, I also wanted to see whether the emotional and spiritual experiences would 'work' away from the confines of the Camino. And if so, how.

¹⁴⁹ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/2012/11/post-camino-syndrome.html>

EPILOGUE

A SORT OF HOMECOMING

*And you know it's time to go
Through the sleet and driving snow
Across the fields of mourning
Light in the distance*

*And you hunger for the time
Time to heal, desire, time
And your earth moves beneath
Your own dream landscape¹⁵⁰*

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS ... La Fageda d'en Jorda: Day 51, Saturday 3 September

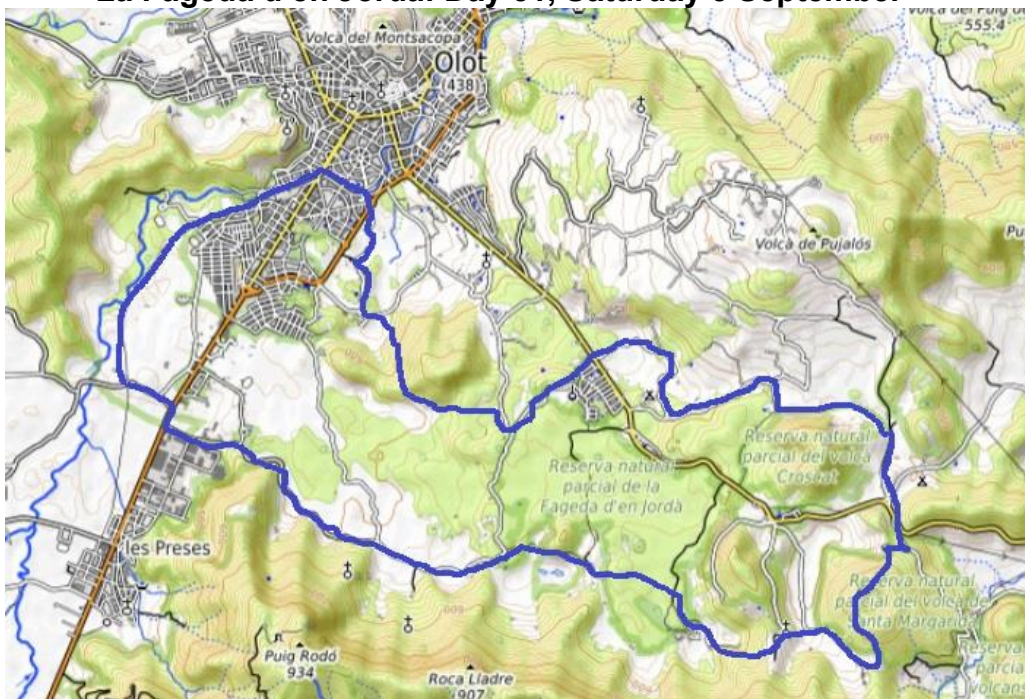


Figure 169: Route map, day hike around the Fageda d'en Jorda

■ Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Sep 2, 2016

Much as I adored my #SaintsandCynics pilgrimage, it was intensely emotional experience. Now, in Catalan mountains, I feel queerly liberated

Figure 170: Liberty, a curiously ironic symptom of post-Camino syndrome

Today's is a strange walk in many ways. Firstly, because it's circular, I'm going back to the place I started. It's not a linear hike. So that has all sorts of connotations. In a linear hike I normally have an end point, and in theory you can stop whenever you want. Here I can, at any point, because I've got a map and there's plenty of paths, I can turn round and go back. There are infinite variations on a circular walk.

Secondly, I feel quite liberated from the tyranny of the yellow arrow. And I really do mean that! It's difficult to explain. There is this sense of physical freedom, I'm not tied to that yellow arrow so there's this enormous sense of

¹⁵⁰ U2 *A Sort of Homecoming* (Evans, Clayton: 1984)

relief. I am so happy. Now that's strange because I was genuinely very sad on Wednesday when I finished in Santiago, it was that really fine balance between extreme happiness and real devastation. But, you know, it's like a drug, that Camino, and the best way to reduce the impact of cold turkey is to go off and walk somewhere like this.

I daresay there'll be a time when I want to go back on the Camino but at the moment I would just be happy to base myself here and just walk around, to get to know this countryside. I feel a desire here not just to pass through but to dwell more, to dwell longer. There's a certain ephemerality to being a pilgrim. On the Francés, I suppose, because I'd done it before, that made the second walking more enjoyable – I was more in tune with the landscape because I was aware of my landscape.

So! Another question is, am I still doing fieldwork? It's a Saturday morning, I'm in Catalunya, I'm just going out for a hike. But I'm still acutely aware of the landscape, I'm still engaged, it still has this emotional affect. It may well get spiritual, there's already a certain spiritual element to it ... you don't have to be on the Camino to engage with the landscape spiritually.



Figure 171: Tweet from the Fageda d'en Jorda

One of the things which makes this entirely different from the Camino is the nature of the people on the path. Now clearly, because it's Catalunya, there are plenty of cyclists: if you're born Catalunyan I dare say you're also born a cyclist. I'm the only solitary person, interestingly. And what's nicest about this, there have been kids. I did see, on the Camino, a handful of kids. That's in nearly seven weeks, a handful. Today I've seen three or four families, perhaps more, out with their children and the children were walking. And that has given the landscape, the ambience, the path, a frivolity the Camino doesn't have. I suppose it takes itself very seriously – sometimes. And I think pilgrims – me included – take ourselves far too seriously. Except, of course, on the last one hundred [km] which is an interesting observation, I think. When the Camino got frivolous, I quit.

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Sep 3, 2016
Landscape ecstasy? Is it a thing? A psychological condition? Because I think I'm 'suffering' from it! #SummerofSweat



Figure 172: Landscape ecstasy

In the space of about an hour the clouds began to build and thunder has been rumbling around for the last twenty minutes or so ... it's touch and go whether the storm is going to pass over me. It's been a really stunning day, if I thought on Wednesday that I was going to be depressed ... God, this is just the perfect antidote. I've been buzzing all fucking day, ever since I set foot outside the hotel, just walking and walking and walking. I've just felt the energy ... I can see the Pyrenees and I can see it's raining hard there so I feel electric at the moment, I really feel electric. Tingling. It's like that energy in the storm has translated to me. Wow! This has been an amazing day. Extraordinary.

I feel totally part of the land today, this is one of those days when you are inseparable.

Recorded thoughts 3 September 2016

Are you old enough to remember the magician and TV entertainer Paul Daniel's catchphrase 'you'll like this ... *not a lot*, but you'll like it!'? Unfortunately, fifteen years after my first visit, those words, articulated in *that* accent, still echo through my head whenever I visit the town of Olot in northern Catalunya.

This elongated journey has encountered a number of what we might call 'memorable' places, or maybe it has 'animated' places to make them become 'memorable', etched into the memory like paths across the landscape. Some, like Santiago, are weighted with a shared history that's left its presence over hundreds of years. Others, like Olot, are more private and personal.

I first came here in June 2005 for a week-long hiking holiday. My first day's walking took me into the Fageda d'en Jorda which shimmered in a late spring haze, sunlight filtering through the beech trees turning the forest floor into a kaleidoscope of ever-changing sylvan shades. It was – here's that word again – 'magical', no other adjective works in summing it up.

I call Olot and the Garrotxa 'familiar' but I didn't return until earlier in the summer of 2016, on a north-south thru-hike through the Catalan Pyrenees. I approached – through the Fageda d'en Jorda – tentatively because Olot is also a place of a painful memories – these,

too, leave their lines on the landscape, like the knife-scars of self-harm wounds. They fade but never completely disappear.

What happened in Olot on the night of 4 June 2005 stays in Olot. How do you exorcise those demons from the past? How do spirits haunt our internal and external landscapes? Does one steer clear for ever or, like falling off a bike, get up and ride again? I've revisited the scene on several occasions but that first time was a truly ghostly experience, the very definition of 'spectral'.

'Our emotions *matter*' exclaim Bondi, Davidson and Smith (2005:1). I say *exclaim*, perhaps the italics make feel like that, and in a good way. Emotions have run high throughout this journey, almost fever pitch at times, but this feels different; the relationship between the landscape and me feels different. There's an intimacy here that's been absent thus far; there's a tension, for sure, but it's a tension that's charged with an erotic energy, a powder keg landscape that's giving off sparks.

Have you ever experienced that moment when your eyes meet another's across a crowded room and it's love at first sight? This is exactly what happened between the Fageda d'en Jorda and me all those years ago and now, like long lost lovers, we're finally reunited. Small wonder the basaltic lava flows are flooded with passion.

It came as no surprise to learn that in 2018 the directorate of the Parc natural de la Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa and the l'Associació Selvans inaugurated a *bosc terapèutic* (therapeutic wood) with a two kilometre long *itinerari terapèutic Salvador Grau* (therapeutic walking route).¹⁵¹ Sitting on a tossal, now seems an appropriate time to pause, open the rucksack and have a quick rustle through the toolkit.¹⁵² Fortunately, I have everything to hand on my tablet so I can immediately download a PDF of Geraldine Perriam's exploration of 'Scared Spaces, Healing Places' (2014) which I discussed in Chapter Three. As I breathe deeply and let the enchantment soothe me, I want to reflect on the notion that the Camino might be, for some, not only a 'linear retreat' but also an extended 'therapeutic itinerary', and how that contrasts with the Fageda d'en Jorda as a *place* of healing.

In that sense of alleviating stress and angst, for me the Fageda d'en Jorda has never failed to perform – and since that second visit in 2016 I've returned many times. With regards to Mandoki's 'time-space bending', it feels that the landscape here has a symbolic order which is 'substantially charged with energy, time and matter, motivated by specific events and strongly culture specific' (1998:74). It's almost as if, borrowing from her line of

¹⁵¹ *Who was Salvador Grau?* <http://www.radiolot.cat/noticies/garrotxa-ja-bosc-terapeuti/>

¹⁵² 'Tossals' are rocky hummocks about a metre in height formed by air bubbles in cooling basaltic lava from the Middle Pleistocene to as recently as 12,000 years ago.

thinking, these concepts – energy, time and matter – align themselves in a particular, shared, mutually-contracted direction. Which is, I suppose, an attempt to explain ‘bliss’.

If the Fageda d'en Jorda feels like a natural high, in comparison the moments of ecstasy that occurred on the Camino – the Virgin of Biakorri, completing the ‘dreaded 17.5’, the Ruta Dragonte – were precipitated by some form of kinaesthetic narcotic, vis-à-vis the act of walking. But not just the ‘act of walking’, the act of walking in a particular manner and with a particular purpose which might pertain to pedestrian pilgrimage but not exclusively so: other ways of walking are available.

And that is, more or less, the purpose of this epilogue, apart from the simple pleasure of walking for the sake of walking, how often have I forgotten that? But one more thing, before I pull on my rucksack and click together the buckles of the hip belt. If pilgrimage is to effect personal or spiritual – and then social or political – change, then there must be some form of tension to keep the prospect of change alive. For some reason this puts in my mind the *via dolorosa* and Christ struggling under the weight of his cross. *We all have our cross to bear*, is this just a banal cliché or does it have an inherent meaning? Where do I go from here? Up to the mountains and then home, just to write up the thesis? *Just?* Is that all there is. *Just* a means to an end in which the end is *just* becoming Dr Siân Lacey Taylder. There’s not much theology in that, queer, feminist or otherwise. This project has always teetered on the precipice of self-indulgence, here in the Fageda d'en Jorda it feels as if, step-by-step, I might be edging closer to the edge.

Enough of the introspection already! Here comes the thunder ...

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Sep 3, 2016
Thunder rolling over the woods of Fageda d'en Jorda, rain on the canopy: a truly magical experience #SummerofSweat



Figure 173: Thunder over the forest

SAME OLD STORY, SAME OLD SONG AND DANCE

Days 52 to 53: Olot to Vic



Figure 174: Route map, the Camino Real from Olot to Vic



Figure 175: Like a moth to a flame (again)

It's Sunday 4 September, it's about 18:00 and I'm hopefully on the last 2k of today's stage of the Cami Sant Jaume.¹⁵³ And it's been a long day. I wasn't going to record anything today, I was just going to walk but I think I do need to say something.

I started out on the Via Verde, which was pleasant and I went at a good pace. After some rummaging around I found the Camino Real, signposted to Vic. It was a quite steep climb at first ... nothing I couldn't have handled but it seemed to go on and on and on. It just seemed to go on and on all day and I was quite grumpy about that. Which was a shame because there was some great scenery.

Today should have been a much better walk. And this bit now is just ... it's rough track through dry scrub, rock and concrete and loose stones. I just want to get to the hotel.

Maybe the summer's come to an end and I need to stop for a while. Even nomads aren't continuously on the move ... Tomorrow I'll have been on the road eight and a half weeks. That's a long time and that needs to

¹⁵³ The Camino Sant Jaume is one of several variants of the Camino de Santiago in Catalunya.

be brought into the equation when I start to think about this, now it's coming towards the end. That's a pretty dreadful prospect, even though I'm tired.

I was so grumpy yesterday! The woman in the hotel who offered me use of a 'phone ... horrible. Sorry! I lost the arrows by the pig farm, this is not a nice stretch of walking: pig farms, a huge abattoir. So I don't know what's going on with the yellow arrows. There's one here pointing left it appears into a field of maize ... I don't understand ... this is totally doing my head in and I can't be doing with wandering around the countryside trying to find little bloody yellow arrows today. Not in the mood.

[Last night] I was really tearful. Really down, I suppose. Yesterday should've been such a superb day, lovely landscapes, the path was good ... but it wasn't. And I felt disappointed. The landscape hadn't performed or I hadn't performed, something was wrong there. It was all about performance.

Last night was quite upsetting. This is the thing, I thought I'd let the landscape down. I felt I'd let my emotions get the better of me. I don't know what it was but it was my fault and I kind of wanted to go back and do it today, to walk back to Olot to do the path justice because I hadn't done it justice.

Recorded thoughts 5 September 2016

RAMBLANISTA WALKING WITH ATTITUDE

Saturday, 28 June 2014

CALM DOWN, SIÂN LACEY TAYLDER, IT'S ONLY A YELLOW ARROW



Figure 176: Yellow arrow on the Camino Vadienese, June 2014

If only. It's not just an arrow, not just a symbol. The arrow has ceased to be a mere tool that guides me along the Camino. Oh no, the arrow has turned into a metaphor that's wandered free from the confines of materiality; it's an icon out of context and out of control.

You don't believe me? You think the crazy middle-aged pilgrim's had a bit too much sun and psychogeography? You think that all those hours on the *Camino*, alone and aloof, have given her too much time to think? To analyse and concoct geographical fairy tales? Who's to say you're wrong? The ritual, the liturgy, of walking day after day,

step after step after step can do strange things to the psyche – can do even stranger things to the soul. But who's to say I don't want that to happen? Perhaps, rather than remaining permanently wary and prudent, I might want to throw caution to the wind. I am the land, the land is me, what is there to fear but fear itself?



Figure 177: Waymarking signs on the Camino Francés

To follow the yellow arrow is to make a leap into faith: it's all or nothing, no time for wavering or pussyfooting around. You can't follow the arrow half-heartedly, you have to throw in your lot and trust it to the *n*th degree, even when it seems to be leading you astray. The arrow says turn left – you turn left; the arrow says turn right – you do so without a moment's hesitation. You're standing alongside the CA-185, the road that winds tortuously up from the pretty town of Potes to the glacial austerity of Fuente Dé. For the tired pilgrim it's a highway to hell: BMW drivers sniff pedestrian blood and drive like petrol-head Beelzebubs. Then you catch sight of the omniscient yellow arrow and it's like all your Christmases have come at once.

The arrow whisks you away from the tedium and banality of the road and, with its long, elegant digits giving you the come-on, lures you back onto the path, the not-so-straight and the not-so-narrow. Do not think the yellow arrow will lead you to self-righteousness, it is deviancy and deviousness personified. It will take you from Alpha to Omega. Eventually, once it's run out of juice.

The yellow arrow points up. You follow, cursing at every uphill twist and turn. Gasping for breath you find yourself badmouthing the arrow and before you know it you're both engaged in dialogue which, yesterday, went something like this (believe me, I'm not making this up):

The yellow arrow: Calm down, Siân Lacey Taylder, there's no need for that sort of language. Certainly not from a pilgrim who's just touched the wood of the One, True Cross.¹⁵⁴

The pilgrim: I'm tired and I'm hungry and I'm very, very angry. I just want you to take me to Espinama, with minimal effort and distress.

The yellow arrow: Then take the road, it's simple and straightforward. It'll get you there before me. Nobody's making you take this path, nobody's put a gun to your head and told you to go walking in Spain. I'm neither demagogue nor despot but an agent of liberation. You follow of your own volition.

The pilgrim: That's as well as may be, but can't you, just now and again, cut me a bit of slack?

The yellow arrow: Why should I? You wanted deviance, I'm giving you deviance. You wanted to throw caution to the wind, I'm blowing a gale to scatter your prudence across the four corners of the globe. But you have to believe.



Figure 178: Waywarking on the Camino Liébana

The pilgrim curses under her breath. 'What's that?' asks the yellow arrow. 'You heard', she replies. Strange how, from that moment on, for the last three kilometres alongside the Rio Deva, the arrow is suddenly absent and I feel like a spurned lover. I traipse into Espinama in a fug of guilt and shame. Tomorrow I'll have to find the arrow again, I need it to take me over the mountains. Without it I am lost.

I hate the arrow, I love the arrow, like pleasure and pain they're just extremes of the same emotion.

¹⁵⁴ This conversation occurred whilst walking the *Camino Liébana* in the Picos de Europa in 2014. It visits the monastery of *Santo Toribio de Liébana* which venerates the largest piece of the *Lignum Crucis*, the cross on which Christ was crucified.

BEING THERE

Puigmal: Day 55, 7 September



Figure 179: Route map, ascent of Puigmal from the Basilica of Val de Nuria

🇪🇺 Siân Lacey Taylder 🇪🇺 @ramblanista · Sep 7, 2016

Today is the final day of hiking for the #SummerofSweat. I hope to finish on a high - literally - by climbing Puigmal (2910m)

Figure 180: Demob happy?

🇪🇺 Siân Lacey Taylder 🇪🇺 @ramblanista · Sep 7, 2016
Have I reached heaven yet? Feels high enough #SummerofSweat Live!

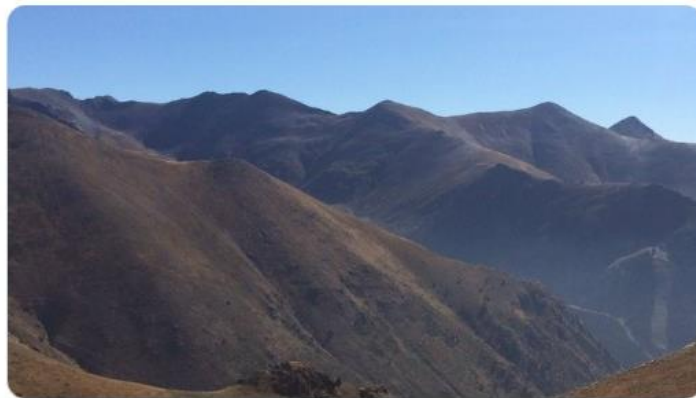


Figure 181: High up in the Catalan Pyrenees

Here I've got the best of everything. The rock beneath me shattered, frost-shattered, it's just beautiful. Even here there's a nice little path that's winding through the shattered rock, quite gently up to the summit. And of course, the vista changes subtly, even every minute or so. These little spikes of weathered rock, quite a harsh landscape here. Harsh but beautiful. It's an amazing place.

It's about 12:45, I've come off the ridge, and this is true rebellion, right at the end! I'm not even following a path. How about that! For a project that started off and has been all along dedicated to following a yellow arrow – there's no need for a map, I'm just making my way across rough ground. So that's two fingers up to the path, right at the end of the day.

Siân Lacey Taylder @ramblanista · Sep 7, 2016
Replying to @GodSheRambles
I'm simply intoxicated by the earth beneath my feet!

Figure 182: Altitude as narcotic

I wanted to say that the landscape is performing even now, to the very last. This is why I don't walk fast, the landscape performs every minute. There's some change in the hue, the tone, the sound, the smell. Or the arrival of somebody. I'm quite animated, I really am fucking animated. I've seen changes, it's never the same, the gaze is constantly changing, the colours. I've watched this cloud behave in a completely unpredictable way, ever since I started off. Wisps of it drifting upwards then it disappears, there's a stable layer above. It's condensing at the bottom and warm air is above. Little wisps come and they go, they shade, they hide the summit, a crag; it's just beautiful.

Up on the top the rocks were harsh and jagged ... but lovely. Here, walking down to the river and they're worn, there's more grass.

So I just can't. You know, I'm not going to get my head down here. On the Camino I can get my head down and walk and walk and walk. Here I want to take my time, to appreciate, to become part of it. To fuse with the land. I am the land, the land is me.

Recorded thoughts 7 September 2016

Yes, those really were my final recorded words of the 'Summer of Sweat'. They weren't forced or contrived but if they sound theatrical that's probably because they were. I've talked a lot about performance and performing so it seems logical, here at the end, to talk also about theatre and audience; we might even say that rather than being an 'epic' hike it was, for the most part, soap opera with a touch of comedy, romance and even tragedy. But there was drama, and plenty of it.

Up there in the corrie that sense of theatre was almost tangible, the proverbial and clichéd 'amphitheatre of rock'. But who was centre stage? I was more than a figure in the landscape or a bit-part player but even though I have an actor-sized ego I certainly wasn't the star. I am, I should add, no stranger to the stage, though as a guitarist rather than thespian, and I'm one of those guitarists that likes to play to the crowd.

In a sense, completing a long pilgrimage or hike is a bit like coming to the end of a successful gig. There's a sense of triumphant elation, a buzz that won't subside for hours and the immediate desire to repeat the experience as soon and as often as possible. And there is, of course, an inevitable come-down, a period of time when the world as we once knew it no longer makes sense.

The landscape is my crowd, and I am its. But I have another audience on social media, one that I've carefully cultivated over not just the past few weeks but over the several years I've been hiking the Camino(s). There was one follower, in particular, with whom I was

communicating on a regular and intimate basis and she was responding in all the right ways vis-à-vis my writing – you might say she was massaging my ego. But there were many others, who we might call, perhaps with our tongues slightly in our cheeks, ‘respected members of the literary, psychogeographical and nature writing community’. I was keen not, perhaps, to impress them, but certainly to earn their validation. I like to think that my Tweets were a spontaneous response to the changing scene and to a large extent they certainly but the truth is that I often paused for a minute or so to carefully consider what words I might best use to convey my emotions, within the then parameters of 140 characters. It’s not easy!

Is that the contemporary equivalent of Narcissus – who I think gets a bad press – gazing into a lily-fringed pool or have I become an Echo, wandering the mountain valleys alone until nothing is left of me but my voice on social media?

There are worse ways of passing one’s days.



Figure 183: Obligatory end of fieldwork selfie

I don't know if this is the end of the Camino, whether I'll go back. I don't know if I have to go to Santiago any more.

I was almost in tears about five minutes ago, speaking has just calmed me down a bit. And I was thinking after eight weeks, fifty-six days on the road. This is it. Here, like the Dragonte, I have become the land, the land has become me. There is no difference between us, we are one and the same thing.

Recorded thoughts 7 September 2016

PART FOUR: REFLECTION

DISCUSSION

Fifty-five days and eleven hundred kilometres across three countries and an infinite variety of landscapes: mountains, Meseta and the coast; urban, rural and the edgelands in between. Not really an *epic* hike but a long one, in terms of time and distance. And one which served its purpose as both an academic and personal venture; it wasn't always easy to keep both satisfied and there were times when I privileged one over the other. That was just one of a complex assemblage of tensions which exerted stresses and strains on the relationship between the landscape and me as I ploughed on, sometimes with a smile, often with a frown.

In this chapter I look back over that trajectory and, in the light of praxis, reflect on the ideas about landscape and spirituality I introduced in the toolkit, bearing in mind that reflection on that praxis has prompted significant revisions. But equally, given that they emerged through years of walking experience on and off the Camino de Santiago, those ideas which began as nebulous suppositions have acquired, through praxis, a depth and clarity to the extent to which I think they could now be applied to a variety of similar landscape/self encounters. They have, if you'll excuse the pun, grown legs and learned how to walk.

I begin by revisiting the principal theme of 'landscape experience', asking what it might constitute in terms of time, space and life-histories of the person on the receiving end – their spiritual demeanour, for example. Or, indeed, lack of it, the extent to which these experiences pertain to people of faith or the spiritually-inclined rather than those whom we might broadly lump together in an group which includes people of no faith. Given that, over time and distance, the land and the pilgrim/hiker become as one, and there's neither subject or object, does the nature and intensity of the experience depend on the landscape or the person experiencing it? From where does it emanate? In my mind's eye I picture it as an arc of electricity passing between both, a reciprocal rather than a one-sided relationship.

You can take the woman out of the landscape but you can't take the landscape out of the woman. As a pilgrim with a passionate attachment to both the landscape and the Camino, I try to situate this discussion not from an insider/outsider binary but from somewhere betwixt and between. I can't suddenly pluck myself from the subjective and reinsert myself into the text as an objective onlooker because even whilst I'm writing this

analysis I am still part of what I experienced. So instead, acknowledging that in the name of academic rigour some sort of detachment is required, I position myself at several points along an insider/outsider continuum. In doing so I argue that the unique circumstances of the *Camino Francés* create an environment in which emic/etic divisions are blurred.

I then address the factors which co-produce these experiences, with particular reference to the accumulation of time and distance. Though here I distinguish between the developing long-term relationship between the pilgrim (Chronos) and the landscape and the momentary *vignettes* which 'pop-up' *en route* in terms of being and becoming (Kairos).

Turning to the landscape itself, I look at the ways in which the path exists as part of the landscape and also as a means of accessing it: its function and its form. The path, I argue, is much more than the texture of its surface and the steepness of its gradient. Rather, from a psychogeographical perspective, it *becomes* a portal which opens up opportunities such that it has the potential to take us to a specific physical destination whilst at the same time carry us away to more transcendent territories.

This process of *becoming* rather than merely *being* is the beating heart of this thesis. I use the two Spanish verbs for the English 'to be', *ser* and *estar*, to illustrate how, during the extended period (time and distance) of mobile dwelling that is pilgrimage, the landscape/self relationship is one of essence but not permanence, it's never the same from stride to stride, let alone one day to the next. This constant state of reinvention presents problems for anyone trying to represent this animated landscape through more conventional means so I call for the use of more creative and experimental techniques such as deep topography (Papadimitriou 2012) to depict relationships with landscape in the same way that queer and feminist theologians have used methods such as 'indecenting' (Althaus-Reid 2000) to represent the instability and messiness of relationships with the beyond-human.

What is the relationship between landscape experiences and 'sacred space'? Do these experiences emerge in places that are considered 'sacred', officially or otherwise, or do they appear, as it were, out of nowhere? Using Mandoki's approach to experienced space (1993), I explore why some spaces might be considered more sacred than others – and, perhaps more significantly, *who* is doing that *considering* because this feels like an encounter between the subjective, the numinous and the mundane. Much discussion on sacred space focuses on sacred centres (Eliade 1963), fixed places where 'time stands still' yet pilgrimages are linear spaces so how does the transcendent manifest itself in the transient? (Eade and Sallnow 1991:6). Is the entire length of the Camino imbued with some sort of divine quality – a spiritual potential energy – or does it manifest itself in fleeting

moments, what we might call ‘third spaces’ (Moles 2007) or ‘thin spaces’, ‘rare locales where the distance between heaven and Earth collapses’ (Weiner 2012). Developing this theme, I draw upon Lane (2002) to ask whether landscapes, as opposed to specific places and spaces within them, also possess this divine quality through a complex interweaving of myth, symbol and individual or collective spirituality.

I returned to geography as an academic discipline after a protracted hiatus. In so many respects, the subject I studied as an undergraduate seemed to bear little resemblance to that I encountered thirty years later. For once I didn’t fall victim to nostalgia but rather embraced the potential offered by geography’s ‘cultural turn’, particularly in its acknowledgement of the role of the emotional (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2007) which shares affinities with psychogeography and deep topography. In this section I set out how engaging with emotions opens up new possibilities in expressing how we engage with landscape at a visceral level, giving rise to alternative registers and voices seldom heard before. From here I reflect on the dynamic relationship between emotion and affect and then attempt to unpack the religious/spiritual dichotomy that has permeated an investigation in which I’ve tended to observe the landscape through a Catholic gaze. I’m interested in how that coming-together of the human, the non-human and the beyond-human – a convergence which lies at the heart of these landscape experiences – might emerge through other faith-based lens as well as those without any spiritual or religious affinity.

I mentioned above that one of the challenges in a piece of research such as this is drawing out the intense vitality of the landscape. Not just the topography but the dynamism of landscape/pilgrim encounters. How to avoid both dead geographies (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000) and their theological equivalents, flattened and with the life sucked out of them. What breathes back into these landscape is tension, ‘of presence/absence and performing, creating and perceiving presence’ (Rose and Wylie 2006:475). In this section I examine the underlying conflicts, particular those which arise through the accumulation of time and distance on long-distance pilgrimages and, invoking Keats’ notion of negative capability, argue that this tension has destructive as well as creative possibilities in terms of the landscape performing. Or not, as the case may be.

This *frontera*, the borderland where geography’s territory comes up against that of theology (as opposed to religion and/or spirituality) remains something of a *tierra desconocida*. Sacred space is not the same as theological space, if such a concept can be said to exist. In the toolkit I tried to locate the Camino in a queer context with reference to Marcella’s *caminta* (2004) and ‘walking with women serpents’ (Hofheinz 2015). But as I

acknowledge below, my relationship with 'queerness' has undergone not quite a *volte face* but a significant reorientation so I want to consider what a post-queer Camino might look like and then query rather than queer the Camino experience through a process of decolonisation.

1. What constitutes a 'landscape experience'?

It all comes down to this. If we were strip this thesis down to its bare bones this would be its beating heart, from this phenomenon all the resultant enquiries flow. So before addressing them it seems logical to put some flesh on this concept, beginning by saying what it's not, or what it's more than. It's not, for example, a purely visual sensation such as the vista that opens up when one tops a mountain pass and it's more than an 'appreciation' of a landscape, more than an aesthetic – which we might define here as a matter of 'taste'. More *mélange* than *mise-en-scène*.

For the purposes of the research – and for me personally – a 'landscape experience' is a two way process in which there is no subject or object but a fusion between two active agencies – *I become the land, the land becomes me*. It's a sensorial process created through bodily movement – in this case hiking – and its encounter with topographical, socio-cultural, emotional and spiritual conditions. There is, I think, something in the tension between the immovable and the ephemeral that casts this 'spell'. Wordsworth comes close to this in 'The Prelude' where his protagonist, drawn out by nature to row across a lake into the 'the hoary mountains' of the English Lake District, encounters a huge cliff which, like a living thing, strides after him until, with trembling hands, he turns back. For Wordsworth, and other more contemporary writers such as Macfarlane (2003), this notion of the sublime is accompanied by a passive 'we are not worthy' mode, an unequal relationship, devoid of intimacy, which puts the landscape on a pedestal and denies it its own voice.

Something passes between the self and the landscape, like a vector which has magnitude and direction but is in search of a destination. Where it goes and what it does is dependent on a number of contesting and conflicting causes but on a long distance pilgrimage such as the Camino de Santiago, where a sort of ambulatory kenosis is at work, it finds chinks in the personal and spiritual armour. This amorphous 'energy' adapts itself, appropriately, to its immediate environment, both the self and the landscape. In the liminal bubble of the Camino it encounters a willing subconscious and takes shape in the form of emotional or, in certain situations, spiritual/religious affect. In this context the 'subconscious' pertains to Macpherson's identification of the 'user illusion', the 'half-second delay between the brain initiating an action and conscious sensation' (2009:5). In that

moment, when then mesmeric act of walking has lowered the pilgrim's defences, these affective energies take their cue and manifest themselves as experiences of the landscape.

I want to distinguish between two different forms of these experiences because their affordances are quite different yet at the same time they're very much part of the same equation. On the one hand there are enduring *becoming* experiences which emerge with the accrument of time and space (*Chronos*). On the other *vignettes*, significant but fleeting moments which pop-up and disappear in the space of a few seconds or even less, often leaving emotional or spiritual confusion in their wake (*Kairos*). Examples of these are the sudden vistas afforded from mountain paths that seem to offer moments of revelation, divine or otherwise.

It's almost as if these *vignettes* have an affective, autonomous capacity of their own yet also contribute to the overall affect. They can act as a catalyst, setting in motion a chain of experiences, such as, for example, my encounter with the Virgin of Biakorri, or they can maintain or boost the ongoing sense of affect – here I'm thinking of walking into the dawn on the Meseta. I'd also suggest that these 'moments' merge together to form a sequence of affective experiences each of which feeds off the previous to exacerbate the impact of the next, not unlike a succession of dramatic moments which rise to a crescendo.

From a religious perspective, I'm keen to know whether these experiences are fashioned by theology or whether they are, in themselves, theological phenomena. In other words, and putting sceptical implausibility to one side, was the divine speaking to me through these experiences or was the landscape manifesting itself in line with my understanding and expression of the divine.

On the *Ruta Dragonte*, for example, my emotional and spiritual defences were fully lowered. The second time around, in particular, given that it was such an auspicious date, I felt a synchronicity at work (there's that word *feel* again). Pugmire (1998) speaks of 'dramaturgical' and 'narcissistic' cases of emotional and religious experience and my concern at the potential for self-delusion, subconsciously rather than wilfully, was an ever-present, increasing as the walk went on.

At the climax of Tennyson's 'Morte d'Arthur', the fatally-wounded king asks his loyal knight Bedivere to 'take Excalibur, And fling him far into the middle mere'. Twice Bedivere attempts do this and on each occasions fails, Arthur isn't fooled by Bedivere's description of what happened because he knows what *should* happen. The third and final time, of course, 'an arm, Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful' reaches out and catches Excalibur by the hilt.

I think it's difficult to convincingly 'fake' these sort of emotionally and/or spiritually-charged experiences due to their spontaneous and unpredictable nature. Who knows what shape or form they might take? Unlike King Arthur, we don't know what *should* happen. Some of us with the appropriate religious upbringing might have an idea as to what's *supposed* to happen but the fact that what's *supposed* to happen *doesn't* happen tends to lend the experience a hint of credibility, contextually at least. Because if what *does* happen happens independently of antecedent religious experience then the imagination has no precedent or prototype on which to predicate the current experience. Ergo, I suggest, the novelty of the way in which the divine manifests itself is a form of verification.¹⁵⁵

That isn't to deny that doctrine plays a part in shaping religious experience of the landscape, rather that the divine reveals itself contextually, in terms that the person experiencing the phenomenon can understand and make sense of. In that sense, given the nature of my Catholicism and my lived and learned experience of the faith, if God is going to reveal Herself – and the reasons why God should reveal Herself is another discussion altogether – it's going to reveal Herself in the form of the Virgin Mary to maximise its potential for transformational change.

2. Insiders, outsiders and other places in-between

This is a very personal piece of work, one which I've described as an *opus vitae*. And the cliché, 'I've poured my heart and soul into this', is pertinent. It would be remiss of me not to mention that, from both a subjective and objective perspective. If the personal can be political then it can also be scholarly.

As such, the dominant voice thus far has been that of the insider, someone with an intimate knowledge of and relationship with landscape in general and the landscape of the Camino de Santiago in particular. I'm part of the picture, a participant and dweller, not a detached spectator with an omniscient gaze. And I've adopted a ludic attitude to try to convey the mood of the Camino and communicate the day to day experience of being a pilgrim.

That personal register might work as performative writing but I am, I concede, in too deep. The insider-orientated method of representing both the landscape and pilgrim experiences is all very well for narrative purposes, for communicating the quotidian highs, lows and messiness of life on the Camino but it's a method which runs the risk of getting

¹⁵⁵ I suppose one could reinterpret Cowpers' 'God moves in mysterious ways, His (sic) wonders to perform' (1773) along the lines of the divine reveals itself in an infinite and arbitrary variety of ways all of which are beyond the capacity of human anticipation.

stuck in the liminal bubble whence it came. Shades of Plato's cave here, or even the Lady of Shalott who sees the outside world through a mirror, like the Claude Glass.

At some point one has to extricate oneself, take a step back and embrace a more objective approach. My methodology employed polyvocality as a tool to reflect the experiences of others beyond myself. I think that polyvocal method applies as much to the discursive as it does to the narrative, the conventions of scholarly writing, presenting landscape from a more detached position. To put it bluntly, just because I know what I'm talking about doesn't mean to say that others, with no experience of the Camino de Santiago or spiritual/religious leanings, do.

And so, acknowledging that a more focused and analytical voice was required, I set about writing this chapter from a more objective, 'outsider' or 'etic' perspective, almost as if, at the end of the previous chapter, I peeled off the rucksack containing the personal – the autoethnographic, if you like – and left it there. But in doing so I took a step too far in the other direction and found myself with a voice that better articulated a sufficiently rigorous analysis of events but struggled to represent me as part of those events.

I'm wary of turning this discourse into an either/or situation, an insider/outsider dichotomy centred on the primacy of objectivity which, with regard to religion, argues Ferber, becomes a 'loaded and dangerous term' (2006:176). Furthermore, pitching the objective against the subjective runs the risk of researchers partitioning themselves into 'separate persons' (2006:178) with negative implications for the research itself.

So I've attempted to not simply sit on the fence, slap bang in the middle of two binaries, but adopt stances on a continuum in between, on an as-and-when-needed basis. There are concepts best served by a detached, more theoretical approach, others where a personal inflection enhances the point I'm trying to explain. Thus, in the field, the pilgrim experience was favoured over the academic, in the analysis, it's the other way round. But the emphasis is on the word 'favoured'.

Where do pilgrims on the Camino sit on this insider/outsider continuum and are the former, due their engagement with and acceptance of the supranatural, more disposed to the sort of experiences described in this thesis? In short, is there anything in this for the outsider? For atheists or those who might consider themselves tourists in search of a cheap hiking holiday. When does a pilgrim become a tourist and pilgrimage nothing more than a long walk? Is to set out to walk the Camino to buy into its values and spirit?

I wrote of how the start of the *Camino Francés*, in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port at dawn, resembles the TV cartoon show 'Wacky Races'. It's a scenario repeated over and over again, further down the road – at Pamplona and Burgos, for example – in ever greater

numbers. But the jostling that ensues is not for first place on the podium but rather pilgrims searching for space to make sense of themselves, even over the space of a single day the vagaries of the road and the elements might sway them wildly between one and the other. In that sense, I think it reasonable to argue that the moment one sets foot on the Camino and enters the bubble of *communitas*, one spontaneously becomes an insider, even if, in terms of faith, one considers oneself an outsider. By the same token, an apparently obvious insider, such as myself, might drift to becoming more ‘outsider-ish’ by turning, for example, one’s back on that *communitas*.

Do only theists shed tears? The religiously/spiritually-inclined might arrive on the Camino pre-programmed for landscape/self encounters but that doesn’t equate to some form of predestinarianism in which atheists, agnostics and *turigrinos* are exempt from spiritual experience. In Western Europe, despite its long association with Christianity, pilgrimage is fundamentally rooted in human nature and thus, suggests Radcliffe, may be ‘expressive of deep conviction but also gives space for the unsure’ (2005:10). Remember that on the *Camino de Santiago* ‘spirituality’ is a nebulous and individualist notion which sits neatly alongside a pick ‘n’ mix approach to religion, it’s an ‘inner journey’ to which even practising Catholics like Chris subscribe. Farias *et al.*’s research on atheists on the Camino gives lie to the assumption that atheists are ‘paragons of cold logic and rationality’ but also experience ‘deeply moving moments of profundity and transcendence’ (2019:30). Indeed, there’s much to suggest that the Camino’s *communitas* blurs the boundaries between the cynical and the spiritual, and that an emotional desire to be close to nature, the need for time and space to mull over very practical and potentially life-changing decisions are not mutually exclusive.¹⁵⁶ For many pilgrims, the Camino offers the opportunity to re-insert ‘meaningful practices’ into their daily lives. In a sense it represents ‘secularisation in its most perfectly realised form, religious practice freed from institutional control and filled with the possibility of persona meaning’ (Norman 2011:63).

In the toolkit I reproduced Smith’s (1992) tourist-pilgrim continuum to illustrate the variety of motivations people cite for walking the Camino in which we might equate Smith’s ‘pious pilgrim’ with Knott’s ‘insider/complete participant’(2009:262) and Smith’s ‘secular tourist’ with Knott’s ‘outsider/complete observer’ (2009:262). A continuum might be more representative than a dichotomy but it’s still problematic and given the rapid rise in popularity of the Camino, arguably out of date. Swatos (2006) for example, explores the porous boundaries of the pilgrim-tourist and engages with the ways in which tourist-pilgrims

¹⁵⁶ Alex Norman cites three very mundane reasons: a woman who’d decided to leave her husband, a pilgrim regretting setting up a new business and another hoping to discover more about himself on the road. (2011:50)

'live on the hyphen' (Coats 2008:362). Furthermore, in this research I've argued that the creation of spiritual and/or religious affect is influenced by phenomenon over which the pilgrim, tourist or not, has little or no control: bodily exertion, physical and emotional pain, the elements and the nature of the path. These factors, peculiar but not exclusive to the Camino in comparison to other pedestrian pilgrimages, foster cross-cultural relationships within social cohorts or 'Camino families', further diminishing the divide between the pious pilgrim, the pilgrim/tourist and the secular tourist. Outsiders come in from the cold and insiders occasionally shift to the periphery.

It's probable that there are pilgrims who for whom the Camino is just a long-walk, though it's equally improbable that those who use the Camino for a cheap hiking holiday have zero engagement with the landscape given that hiking, along with other 'slow mobilities', is a means of exploring and experiencing it (Macpherson 2016). The *Camino Francés* is far too long for a glorified birthday bash, hen party or stag night. It attracts a few sponsored walkers but like many charity treks the attraction lies in the event rather than its charitable consequences.

All the *Caminos de Santiago* share a collective goal, but in terms of social conviviality and shared experiences *Camino Francés* is unlike any other. But drawing on years of personal experience hiking various other Caminos, I'm inclined to suggest that the *Camino Francés* generates its own affective capacities in the same way that a large volcanic eruption generates its own weather systems. I'm not quite saying that in the case of the *Camino Francés* standard analytical models don't apply but that's the gist. When pilgrims arrive at the start of their journey they almost, by default, self-elect as insiders, to a certain extent they've already bought into its ethos. They might set out with a only vague ideas of transformation but as Radcliffe contends they all hope 'to find *something* on the way or at the end' (2005:10, my italics).

3. Time and distance

Time and distance have been constant themes in this project. Not as passive objects, events occurring, unnoticed and unobserved, in the background: time as the minutes that pass while I'm waiting for the train in Sarria, distance as the kilometres I clock up walking round Porto in tourist mode. Along the trajectory of this research time and distance have acquired different characteristics and become active instruments. They *do* things, they *make* things happen, they are the agents which turn *ser* into *estar*; time transcends chronology, distance exceeds space. When I mention walking the Camino the first thing people want to know is how *far* I walked and how *long* it took me. When I tell them I walked more than a thousand kilometres over the space of two months they do, invariably, look

impressed. Because it is a long way and it takes a long time. How, they ask, did you manage to get so much time off work? It's a way of measuring time, the fortnight's summer holiday, neatly packaged with a beginning and an end. Time is the enemy, we're constantly fighting against it. So much to do in so little time, raging against the dying of the light.

Away from the Camino, time and distance are tedious impediments which have to be endured if we're to get from A to B. Right now I'm thinking about the ten hours I'll spend on a plane to cover the nine-and-a-half thousand kilometres to Mexico City. I'll take a book and pass the time 'constructively' while the plane eats up distance at over eight hundred kilometres per hour. We say *constructively* like it's a moral imperative: time is a vacuum which must be filled, it cannot exist or be enjoyed in its own right.

But on the Camino de Santiago, time and distance become our friends. We'll cosy up to them, day and night, not want to let them out of our sight, for that's when the pilgrimage will come to an end. At first the signposts are reassuring. In Roncesvalles, a mouth-watering 770km ahead of you, passing through Logroño, still 620km to go, that's a good four weeks of walking; entering Burgos, another 500km; even, leaving Leon, there remains 220km and ten days before towers of Santiago's cathedral show on the horizon.

And at that point comes the desire for both time and distance to stand still. After 750km and five weeks, walking has become our *raison d'être*. The mind and the body have begun to behave as if they've known no other way of existence, we feel like finely-tuned hiking machines, at one with our internal and external landscapes. Daily life has become ritual; we note the passing of time by the tying and untying of laces at the beginning and end of the day, by the pulling-on and pulling-off of the rucksack when we stop for lunch. By the shower in the albergue at the end of the day.

You get the picture. On the Camino our relationships with time and distance change and this will, in turn, impact on our relationship with the landscape. It will also dictate with whom we walk, our relationships with fellow pilgrims, the formation and dissolution of Camino 'families'. Time and distance will bring together but they will also estrange and tear asunder.

4. *Ser* and *estar*, being and becoming

I am the land, the land is me. But how do we get there? It's an ongoing process, we don't begin from that perspective. On the south-bound train it's not just the window that separates me from, the observer, to it, the observed. Only being out in the field, immersed in the landscape, over time and distance, will bring us together.

In that sense *I am the land, the land is me* would translate into Spanish as *yo soy la tierra, la tierra soy yo*. Our relationship is an essential one, but not necessarily permanent.

It's that relationship that's produced this thesis. If it weren't one of essence but of a temporary state that existed, for example, only for the duration of the pilgrimage or a day's hike, then the landscape would perform in a very different way. Or, more likely, it wouldn't *perform* at all and remain a backdrop, the object of my gaze. The rocks on which I tread would lack vitality, reduced to the flatness of the era and the processes of their formation, a geological document. They wouldn't be able to speak to me. But the *ser* that unites subject and object animates them, they become shimmering silver limestones that reach up towards the sky in vertiginous knife-edge ridges.

But the act of walking in the landscape is one of *becoming*, a change of state that never reaches a final conclusion because the relationship is in a constant state of flux. One step is never the same as the one that preceded it, nor the one which will follow. The sun will flicker and slip behind the cloud, a thunderstorm will rage and echo in the mountains, the blister on my little toe will cause me to walk with a limp, I'm tired and exhausted and I just want to lie down.

In this transient iteration of the relationship, *yo estoy la tierra, la tierra estoy yo*. Only with the accumulation of time and distance will I become the land, as if, with every day and kilometre it becomes harder to distinguish between me, the hiker pilgrim, and the earth beneath my feet: *poco a poco* – little by little.

How does this work in practice, in the field? It's a process that's both physical and mental; the body becoming accustomed the 'new normal' and the strain that places on its muscles and sinews, the mind succumbing to the discipline of the daily ritual. What are usually minor and mundane quotidian rituals, the lacing of the boots, begin to take on a greater significance. This is all we have to distract us, we can focus on the job in hand. The layers of 'life-stuff' which usually distance us from our surroundings are now reduced to the basic – eat, sleep, drink – and through this other mental and emotional states emerge.

For this process of *becoming* to be most effective, the distractions of life beyond the Camino have to be kept at arm's length. If we lose a day, we lose momentum. I took a day off in Pamplona to write, but I ended up kicking my heels because my heels weren't kicking the ground. I lost a couple of days from the broken filling, it took me several days to recover my equilibrium. But both these incidents occurred early on in the narrative, I can pinpoint, almost to the exact time and place, where I slipped effortlessly into the groove – on day 17 as I approached my evening lodgings in the Montes de Oca:

I've done 35k, my little toe on the right foot has been giving me an awful amount of gyp for a couple of hours ... but I'm still loving it. I still love this act of walking and I'll go to bed and I won't be able to wait until the morning when I can start walking again, over the Montes de Oca.

Wylie (2009) describes how, after driving through nondescript farmland he enjoys a sudden vista along 'coastal cliffs and canyons, and far out to sea'. His response was that 'somehow this moment revealed the true and original textures of the landscape. It was as if I'd been granted for a minute an untarnished perception of things' (2009:275-276). Something similar happened on the *Ruta Dragonte*. For a few magical hours the landscape and I had become fundamentally fused. *I was the land, the land was me*, in terms of both *ser* and *estar*, essence and state.

Experiences like these have the rarity and intensity of a solar eclipse. It was as if I'd been permitted access to the secrets of creation, to the very first hours of the earth's existence, to the processes that have and will shape the earth, to a world as God intended and can, still, be. It wasn't primeval, the word I used at the time was *prelapsarian* but it might also be described as 'new resurrection', the like of which I was privileged to experience arriving in El Mozote many years ago.

In the *Our Father*, the line 'on earth as it is in heaven' speaks to me not of a celestial afterlife presided over by a bearded white male which is only accessed via death or an apocalyptic Armageddon but a very real heaven on earth. Father John alluded to this when he said:

The creation goes into that because the Creation is the work of the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit and it has to come back to the Father as well. It has to return. Which is what happens in the Resurrection. So Jesus comes, becomes part of creation in order to start that return journey of Creation to the Father. And the New Creation and the new heaven and the new earth.

But in this creation, and drawing on the theology of Nelly del Cid, it's not 'God' or God's son who's responsible for constructing the 'new earth' but the people (of God) themselves. 'What is this kingdom [of God] if not a world, a society, where we can live like true human beings, true children of God' (Best & Hussey 1996).

Catherine Keller speaks of a God who is in a 'profound interactive relationship with the universe', a universe made up of interactions rather than 'things in a void'. It is, she argues, a 'whole force field of continual interactive processes'. In this 'theology of becoming' these 'events of becoming in relation' go beyond human beings and God to include all of creation, the animate and the inanimate, from creatures to rocks and every quantum electron. Our life-worlds and emotional baggage too. Not every part of this creation is conscious but 'to be a creature in this creation is to be alive in radically different ways'. There's a rhythmic vibrational sense of the creation unfolding and God is taking part in it. God is inviting it,

God is calling it forth moment by moment, not forcing anything. It's not a will that coerces but a 'divine lure' which calls forth new possibilities which we are free to act on or not.¹⁵⁷

Keller's God isn't a sovereign image based on figures of temporal power but a God in a constant state of flux, always becoming. A God who's reminiscent of Nelly del Cid's 'small God, a God who hasn't got the answer to everything' (Best & Hussey 1996:23). It's the God of the Nican Mopuha in which the Virgin Mary, through an indigenous peasant, turns the world upside down and brings forth the possibility of a new creation, a transformation epitomised by Juan Diego who is converted from 'the pain of social nonbeing to becoming a full, confident and joyful human person (Elizondo 1997:88).

The landscape of becoming, like Keller's process theology, is shaped by uncertainty and ordered by chaos. Doreen Massey describes how Skiddaw, a mountain in the English Lake District, began life (as it were) 500 million years ago as sediments under the sea south of the equator then wandered upwards in terms of both latitude and altitude (2006:34). If you look up at Skiddaw, a 900 metre-high bulk of slate, it seems it's been there since the days of creation and will remain so until the end of days. Solid, permanent, an essence: *ser*.

Yet Skiddaw is in a permanent state of change. In geomorphology, what comes up – through tectonic uplift, for example, must come down – through weathering, mass movement and erosion. In Spanish the verb *estar* crops up in situations when one might logically expect *ser*. Death, for example, is not an essential process but a change of state: *yo estoy muerta* – I am dead. So although we can say Skiddaw *es una montaña (ser)*, we can also say Skiddaw *está una montaña* in that, over geological time, it will be worn down to a stump.

In process thought, argues Keller, what I am, at this moment, isn't exactly the same as what I was when I began writing these paragraphs a couple of hours ago. Moment by moment I'm evolving but not in isolation, even though I'm writing alone. My past is there too, all that I've ever experienced is flowing into this moment.¹⁵⁸ Neither here, in my sister's flat in Vienna, nor hiking the *Camino de Santiago*, am I an isolated atomic being. Rather, each moment arises from my experience of my environment, the human, the non-human and the beyond-human. Whether it's actually a real 'thing' or just a belief, the latter is always present, it's up to me whether, through an engagement with the landscape, I access it or not.

So, in the case of the landscapes of the *Ruta Dragonte*, and El Mozote, there exist two possible explanations. As much as it feels uncomfortable to suggest this in an academic

¹⁵⁷ <https://thedeconstructionists.com/ep-33-catherine-keller-a-theology-of-becoming/>

¹⁵⁸ <https://thedeconstructionists.com/ep-33-catherine-keller-a-theology-of-becoming/>

context, I can't rule out the idea that some sort of divine encounter did indeed take place with the landscape as its conduit. The alternative is that the accumulation of time and distance came together to produce a kenotic affect which produced a momentary clarity of theological vision. For there was nothing new, no ground-breaking revelations, these are the tenets of the liberation theology which drew me back to the Catholic Church, it was just for the duration of that day's walk they became acutely clear.

I'd love to return to the *Ruta Dragonte* and walk it again but with the qualification that it would have to be in the context of a longer pilgrimage. I could never walk it as, for example, a day hike. Glastonbury Tor's capacity to enchant is enhanced by the surrounding Somerset Levels, Mullion Cove exploded into life partly because of the drive through nondescript farmland that preceded it, the *Ruta Dragonte* becomes sacred through weeks and hundreds of kilometres of walking that preceded it.

Then things fell apart. *Becoming* became *detachment*. It wasn't a falling out of love, more a growing sense of disillusionment. Perhaps, after the *Ruta Dragonte*, this was inevitable. Landscape had taken on an intense spiritual intensity, it, rather than Santiago, had become my goal. In many senses that detachment was quite *unbecoming*, as witnessed, for example, by the language I used to express my disdain for my fellow pilgrims but anger was the only way I could express the grief at my loss-of-dwelling.¹⁵⁹ For the remainder of the Camino I drifted in and out of place.

5. Hodology or the Importance of the Path

We think the paths roll themselves out before us, neutral routes, a linear *tabula rasa* which gives the illusion of freewill: we can go where we want. But we can't. Or, maybe, we don't, for absolute freedom, like infinity, can be a terrifying concept. We need the Claude Glass again, in pedestrian form. The path fulfils that role. Its direction and gradient, moulds and manipulates the landscape and our perception of it, through bodily movement the sensorial experience comes into being. In many respects the path is a conniving trickster, it allows us to think we're in control and when we arrive at our destination we take all the credit. It was our effort that got us there, our own sweat and tears.

Kurt Lewin (1934) coined the term 'hodological space' to describe the ways in which the primordial act of walking is affected by topological, physical, social, and psychological conditions.¹⁶⁰ What goes on in hodological space, how these conditions interact and conflict, shapes the path: desire lines, up and downhill zig-zags, the short cut through the

¹⁵⁹ See Wylie (2009:288 note 1)

¹⁶⁰ From the Greek *hodos* meaning 'way'.

bushes to the Student Union bar. The Camino de Santiago has its own hodology and hodological space where the religious and the spiritual are additional agents fomenting, one might say, a fear of deviating from the straight and narrow for authenticity is etched into the earth by the path's trajectory. Even though, over the years, its course has meandered like a river to satisfy economic as much as spiritual needs. The yellow arrow draws the pilgrim in, like a moth to a flame, and the relationship isn't always healthy. In Sarria I left the Camino's increasingly enclosed space and walked towards the railway station. I hadn't gone much more than fifty metres when the spell began to wane, by the time I boarded the train to Vigo I felt relatively normal again. It was as if I'd escaped from a cult.

We carve out fine lines which others will follow, like the Camino as it winds its way across the biblical landscapes of La Rioja. I wrote of the significance of paths in the plural, the 'networks of tracks ... the shape, the trajectory a path follows on the ground, the fact that you can see it from where you are, you can see where it leads to ... the landscape is *busy*, there's something going on, it gives a sense of movement, it's not in a state of stasis.'

There's something in the shape of the path as it traverses the scene. An aesthetic allure, particularly in La Rioja where it winds its way sinuously through a languid topography of vineyards, red earth and low rolling hills. The path brings all these elements together, it energises the landscape, gives it *oomph*. The path transforms the landscape's inherent energy from potential to kinetic. We feed on this, sometimes voraciously, sometimes just for sustenance: it's like manna from heaven.

I am the path, the path is me. The path performs on so many levels: it is the interface on which the earth and the pedestrian come together; it can facilitate or thwart our passage through topography or its physical state. Those deep red earths of La Rioja make for excellent walking in the dry but during a storm they turn to thick treacle. In 2012, after a night of heavy rain, a muddy morass that resembled the Glastonbury Festival in a bad year reduced walking speeds to the equivalent of a slow crawl.

The path opens up the landscape, permits us entrance. We can go in without it, of course, but that would turn us from walkers into something else, explorers or pioneers, swinging a machete and swigging on a water bottle like Indiana Jones and adventure's not really what we're after. Not of that sort anyway. Treading in another's footprints provides reassurance, if somebody's been here before we can proceed without fear of getting lost or, worst luck, the path petering out. That particular nightmare brings a fresh set of dilemmas, do we trust to fate – or maybe divine intervention – and follow thin traces through

the undergrowth that might just be bona fide trail but might equally be a wild boar run or just a line in a landscape, because not everything has purpose.

This doesn't happen on the *Camino Francés* because the trail never fades. Unless you break ranks and follow a *desvío* such as the *Ruta Dragonte*.

But becoming lost – accidentally and temporarily estranged from the path – has its own thrills and spills. As Solnit writes, it leaves open a door for the unknown without, in most environments, putting the wayward sheep in any physical danger (2010). And that's why, I think, the *Ruta Dragonte* exerted such an intense affective power.

6. Ways of walking: how do you like your hike?

What does it mean, to walk? This most natural and subconscious of bodily functions. Strange how such a straightforward action can have almost limitless iterations. Wylie argues that there's no universal, elemental notion of 'walking in itself' (2005:35), amongst others, Lorimer (2011) and McFarlane (2007) have attempted to draw up taxonomies of walking. In the Toolkit I drew attention to Shelly and Urry's 'new mobilities paradigm' (2006) as a means of exploring the technologies of walking and walking as embodied and reflexive practice, a theory that seemed to resonate with pedestrian pilgrimage.

It's my contention that walks are not, as Lorimer suggests, simply *products* of place, defined by topography and cultural activities. Rather, I argue that they are co-producers of place, preventing it from being rooted in time and space. Given that the *Camino de Santiago* is a pilgrimage to a specific sacred place and is indeed, influenced by mountain passes and the pull of religious buildings such as shrines and cathedrals, this might seem disingenuous; without Santiago, one could argue, the Camino would not exist.

But equally, without the Camino that leads to its doors the Cathedral of St James would not be one of the great Christian pilgrim destinations. It would be the sum of its parts, vis-à-vis, the remains of St James the Apostle and the sensuous glory of its interior décor and exterior façade and in the same league as, for example, Lourdes. It's walking *to* Santiago that sets it apart, even from Rome and Jerusalem.

On a recent trip to the mountains I mused on the physical and emotional aspects that might distinguish walking as in hike from walking as in a stroll in the local park. I'd exerted a considerable amount of energy climbing a track through the forest to the higher slopes, now I was enjoying the benefits – a free and easy descent which undoes the sweat and angst of the ascent, almost a virtuous reward. It is, in itself, a peculiar mode of walking which is dictated as much by the topography – the gentle downhill gradient – as bodily effort. It's like sticking a car into neutral and freewheeling for kilometre after kilometre and

has a tremendously liberating effect, there are times when that free and easy gait almost trips into a hop or a skip or a jump.

I had, as always, a rucksack on my back and sturdy hiking boots on my feet but both of these essential pieces of hiking kit have an impact on my posture and gait and therefore my stride. This, in turn, feeds into my ever-changing relationship with the earth beneath my feet and the world around me, constituted, in this case, of vertiginous walls of rock and high alpine pasture. Walking *up* is not the same as walking *down*, it might be awarded a taxonomy of its very own, not just a sub-species.

What do time and distance make? Velocity. Speed matters too. Not just in the sense of fast and slow, as if there were nothing in between, but in terms of pace, rhythmic variation over time – the course of the day and the duration of the pilgrimage – and distance – the liberating sensation of that ‘second wind’ which tends to kick in after twenty-five kilometres. It doesn’t always materialise but when it does it feels as if you can walk forever.

But there’s speed and then there’s *speed!* On the first few days of the walk I remarked that I was ‘moving like a train’, swift and easy, spurred on by the sense of liberation the first few days tend to bring. Flying out of the traps.

That was a natural velocity, an easy speed without haste. A kinaesthetic rapport had been established between my body and the path and this facilitated free and easy movement. It was almost as if the landscape had lifted me up and was gently nudging me along. This momentum – that felt as heady as a narcotic – didn’t come from my body alone but was rather a product of the path itself. Several weeks later, the mad dash along the ‘Dreaded 17.5’ was an altogether different experience, the product of anger rather than harmony. In Aquitaine the path twisted through the pastoral Carteresque landscape, offering light and shade. On the Meseta it ploughed ceaselessly to an infinite horizon without deviation and I had to work hard to crank up speed but when I reached ‘the zone’ the countryside flashed by as if I were watching from the window a high-speed train. There was no nuance or subtlety, both the act of walking and the landscape itself were brutally beautiful. But here’s a thing, nearly four years later I can remember almost every stride of that day’s hike, and I walked, in total, 35 km.

There’s a link between topography and ambulatory velocity: up slows down, down speeds up. The horizontal is haste’s best ally and as such one might have expected that along the Portuguese coast, as fit as a pilgrim thoroughbred after four weeks on the road, I’d have raced along the littoral. But the opposite happened. I dawdled, lost interest. The conflict and tension that had fired me up along the *Camino Francés* had mostly subsided and the landscape had lost its sparkle.

Thus far, the focus on pilgrim walking has been on the physical but long distance walks require substantial reserves of emotional stamina. You'll recall that in Camino folklore the second stage of the *Camino Francés* is associated with mental torture. By the time we reach Burgos, pilgrims who've set out from France are bodily acclimatised but the wide skies and a blazing sun offer a different challenge. For Barbara Haab the Meseta is variously a place of crisis, sickness, catharsis or purification and it certainly tests the mind (1996:33).

I think there exists a tendency to romanticise the emotional/landscape encounters that take place across the Meseta. Although Frey's correspondents tend to fall in with Haab, and the members of my Camino family would also concur, there are many for whom this part of the *Camino Francés* is just boring.¹⁶¹ In the absence of physical distractions and spiritual/religious motivation the mind risks drifting into a state of ennui. If it finds nothing to latch on to, where does it go? Does it shut itself off and, in doing so, draw a veil over its gaze such that the landscape reverts to its role as passive backdrop. You see it but you don't, for want of a better word, *feel* it because the gaze is embodied. And without *feel*, there is no affect or emotion.

There are pilgrims who take the bus or train between Burgos and Leon and miss out the Meseta altogether. To me that sounds like sacrilege but I'm sure many would consider my decision to bail out in Portomarín equally heretical. But I had the option to keep on walking via another Camino, and by the time I reached Galicia the act of walking had probably become more important than being a pilgrim. So I close this section of the discussion by turning from walking as a means to an end to walking as an end in itself, as a form of therapy or, even, perhaps, as an act which has addictive elements. It's not easy to describe but this quote from an interview with Nick Papadimitriou comes very close when he refers to it as a *sine qua non*:

'When I started walking in the peripheries, I did not really quite know why except I was very hurt and angry. It was my way of gaining mastery over defining myself with a larger current than the one that went along with the people around me. I began to notice after a while that during these walks, I ended up with a magnitude of experience that did not sound like the rambler's associations – the people who go walking in the countryside, for instance. Mine were strange, very intense experiences, due to the sheer magnitude of hyper-particularities that I engaged with on the walk, and a sense of traversing the landscape and carrying pain with it sometimes'.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ A Basque man who worked at a refuge on the Meseta reported that people often arrived shaken emotionally by the limitless horizon (1997:78)

¹⁶² Interview with Arup K. Chatterjee 2018

It's not enough to say walking as therapy, or even walking *is* therapy because although it has those healing effects it shouldn't be seen as a pedestrian Prozac that papers over the emotional cracks. As Papadimitriou intimates, the human-landscape relations generated by a certain form of walking have the potential to expose vulnerabilities too.

For me, as with Papadimitriou, there's an existential component to walking in which this most natural and instinctive of acts becomes, at one and the same time, a conscious activity. Tina Richardson describes his method thus:

'He occupies [the landscape] and enquires into it in a way which is different to most people (the passer-by, the pedestrian, the commuter on the way to the tube station – or even the political activist). He does not place himself central to the landscape, nor in a privileged position'.¹⁶³

This approach to walking – I want to call it an *attitude* – is also an intensely creative practice with the ability, to alter consciousness and heighten what Papadimitriou calls a 'deep topographic sensibility'.¹⁶⁴ This capacity for walking to alter consciousness is hugely significant because it opens up the 'possibilities' for encounters with landscape that engage with the beyond-human and supranatural. If one walks this way, strange things may always happen because we are open to those possibilities.

7. Some spaces are more sacred than others ...

Despite my indifference to the appeal of Santiago de Compostela, the *Plaza del Obradoiro* is one of my favourite places on earth. Beneath the *Pórtico da Gloria* and the magnificent façade of the cathedral this sweepingly expansive square is the pilgrim's ultimate goal. It is, writes Frey, both a physical place and an abstract idea: 'an imagined vessel into which [they] may have poured hopes and dreams' (1998:154). For some it's a disappointing anti-climax, for others the start of a new journey. For many, it has to be said, its significance is less profound. Just the end of a weekend walk.

When I arrived along the *Camino Portugues* the Plaza del Obradoiro was a fizzing and buzzing selfie-city. It was a place of pure, unadulterated joy, the mood was infectious and I sat on a stone bench in the warm sun just watching, observing and enjoying the scene. Even a cynical gyrovague like was moved to tears.

¹⁶³ Interview with Anna Chism (2016) <http://particulations.blogspot.com/2016/11/a-psychogeography-bucket-list.html>

¹⁶⁴ *Ventures & Adventures in Topography* A Resonance FM series presented by John Rogers and Nick Papadimitriou that ran from 2009 to 2011. Episode 1, The English Topographical Tradition and Psychogeography. https://ia800203.us.archive.org/13/items/VenturesInTopography-Episode1/Ventures_in_topography-4-11-0996.mp3

There is, between the informal 'spiritual' space of the plaza and the cathedral's religious formality, so much going on in terms of the production of sacredness, webs of constant ebbs and flows. The plaza is a site of spontaneous jubilation that comes and goes in waves of crescendos, when another pilgrim group walks in, for example. It's a space that belongs to pilgrims, the tourists look on, bemused, *en route* to the Cathedral steps, might as well not be there.

But the moment pilgrims enter the Cathedral their comportment changes. Even those with no affiliation to the Catholic faith behave as if the divine were physically present. The imposing interior, with its overpowering sensual brilliance, seems to demand they behave accordingly and although the emotional energy released by arrival is still intensely present, it's metamorphosed into one of quiet respect. They take care to observe the appropriate ritual, hugging the statue of the apostle and queuing to visit his remains in the crypt. Many will attend the pilgrim mass and baulk at having to share this sacred space with tourists who'll perform the same rituals but in a manner which feels vaguely disrespectful. They haven't *earned* the right to partake in these sacred activities, it's an act of parody.

Pilgrims entering the Cathedral, perhaps in a desire to be perceived as 'authentic', perform a form of 'über-Catholicism' that many contemporary liberal Catholics might not recognise. It seems to me, as both observer and, at this point, detached participant, that the sacredness of this space, isn't, as Eade and Sallnow suggest, contested, exhibiting the 'profound differences' in the ways holy places are conceptualised (1991:6). Rather, I'm more inclined to fall in with Eliade's insistence that the pilgrimage shrine (cathedral) is an archetype of a sacred centre, set away from profane space (the Plaza del Obradoiro) (1963). If the Cathedral is where heaven and earth intersect and the emergence of the transcendent becomes possible, then the plaza – and maybe the Camino as a whole – represents some sort of purgatorial space. Only through walking here can it be accessed.

8. Which came first, place or pilgrimage?

For Mandoki places such as Santiago de Compostela offer evidence that 'not all places are equal and that their significance is determined by their history and quality of events [that] occurred exactly there' (1998:73). And in the case of Santiago, that process is not only ongoing but, with the Camino's growing popularity, increasing in intensity again. But Santiago is a city of 100,000 people, the capital of the autonomous community of Galicia and the home to one of the world's oldest universities, with a student population of nearly 30,000. Tourists and pilgrims contribute significantly to the local economy but the farther one wanders away from the historic centre, the less 'Santiago' the city feels.

I'm intrigued by the spatial distribution of this sacredness. What are its territorial limits? Where are the hotspots? Does it follow the trajectory of the Camino as it meanders through the outskirts of the city? I think it fair to say that some sort of 'magic' kicks in at the first sight of the cathedral towers but that's not necessarily one and the same thing. It's almost as if I had some sort of Geiger counter which buzzes when it encounters places which are 'substantially charged with energy, time and matter' (Mandoki 1998:74). One might assume the machine would go berserk when confronted with the remains of St James the Apostle or his statue, these are the magnets which exert the city's spiritual pull but not everyone is susceptible to it. For some, Santiago's importance is its being the end of the road. A final destination adorned, admittedly, by a fine cathedral but whose affective capacities exist and work their spell not because they are they, fixed in time and rooted in place, but because we, the pilgrims, have traversed time and space to get there. It is mobility that animates Santiago, not the sedentary.

On the twentieth of February 1943, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, Dionisio Pulido was working in his cornfield near the town of Anguahan in Central Mexico. Suddenly the ground heaved and a two metre fissure opened up beside him, from which emerged a snake-like hissing and the stench of rotten eggs. Within hours, the fissure grew into a small crater.

Thus, apparently out of nowhere, was born *Volcan Parícutin*, creating, over the next nine years, a four-hundred metre high ash and cinder cone. The volcano is now extinct but a nearby church, 'miraculously' left standing despite the lava flow, has become a place of pilgrimage, much to the delight of local horse-owners.

The eruption didn't of course, come out of nowhere. It was preceded by five weeks of earthquake swarms which increased in intensity with 300 reported the day before Don Pulido's cornfield disappeared into the lithosphere. But one day there was nothing, on the surface, at least, now there's a volcano that still smoulders in the rain. The earth's capacity to effect such elemental change was always present, it was just waiting for the right moment.

Something similar happened along the course of the *Ruta Dragonte*, a unexpected emergence of enchantment that flowed like basaltic lava through the valleys and over the ridge along the trajectory of the Camino and turned profane space sacred.

But there the similarities end. *Parícutin* came into existence due its location on a tectonic plate boundary. And it's not alone, there are over a thousand cones and craters dotted across the region; one day in the not too distant (geological) future another *Parícutin* will erupt into life and (geological) history will repeat itself all over again.

There's no such underlying cause beneath the landscape of the *Ruta Dragonte*, no evidence of ley lines nor history of spiritual or religious events. Santiago has its bones, Glastonbury has its myths and legends, the Basilica of Guadalupe has its *tilma*. These are all places that have *become* sacred and have had that sacredness authorised, whether officially (by an institution such as the Church or tourist board) or unofficially (sheer number of pilgrims or devotees). It's often the weight and momentum of popular belief that gives space its sacred quality, with official institutions often reluctantly caving in.

Is it enough to say I *felt* it? It's a verb I've employed on a regular basis over the course of this thesis, indeed, there are times when its very existence seems predicated on emotional states of varying hues and intensity. And it feels, once again, as though I'm drifting towards solipsism. If I try to strip away the subjective I'm left with little to no evidence of anything actually occurring aside from the exhilaration of walking through an 'elite' landscape, in glorious solitude on a hot summers day. Who wouldn't be moved?

Eight years after the original event, four after the reprise, I'm still trying to work through this and think about the mechanics not just of *how* space becomes sacred but for *whom* it takes on a divine quality. I think adapting Papadimitriou's deep topography to account for those moments when spiritual currents running through and under the earth's skin come up against personal lifeworlds is key to this, along with a move to using creative geographies and theologies.

9. From sacred place to sacred landscapes

The problematisation of the 'sacred', argues Knott (2005:95), begins with Durkheim's totemism and extends to Eliade's dialectic of sacred space in which the pilgrim wants both to arrive in Santiago to experience its sacred centre but, at the same time, want to keep going (1958:382). In both cases specific locations are imbued with divine power, perhaps produced or enhanced by ritual, in this case walking and its associated acts which might be sacred or profane.

But this thesis deals with encounters with landscapes in general rather than place. These are complex relationships and to represent them requires a 'poetic character and experiential approach' (Knott 2005:95). For this I, like Knott, turn to Lane (2002).

Torn between essentialist and constructivist approaches, Lane is fascinated by the 'messiness, ambiguity, and mystery of people's deeply personal experience of place, as [it] works its way through the cultural grid that they inevitably bring to it' (2002:6). He illustrates the importance of this personal experience with an anecdotal account of his search to 'rediscover God in some grand and mystic encounter' but, like Papadimitriou's *Scarp*, it never turns out as well he'd hoped (2002:16). The event, when it finally happens

is unlooked for and not what he expected but walking home he feels an enormous joy. It was a 'momentary, ambiguous encounter with that which is smaller than one dreams, yet larger than one expects' (2002:18).

I know how he feels, it's an encounter which raises so many questions but doesn't really offer any answers. And that's why I'm still here, tip-tapping at my keyboard, no longer trying to find answers but looking for potential explanations.

We're used to grand narratives of divine revelation which usually involve a celestial personage – ninety nine times out of a hundred it's the Blessed Virgin Mary – appearing in person. Not quite live from the London Palladium but something along those lines. But that's not how it happens (if, indeed, it *happens* at all). Lane outlines four 'axioms' or basic, self-evident principles that underlie the way by which landscape is moulded in the religious imagination: sacred place is not chosen, it chooses; sacred space is ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary; sacred place cannot be trodden upon without being entered and that is both centripetal and centrifugal, local and universal (2002:19). Lane abandons his search for an axis mundi and allows himself to be found. Does this sound a bit passive? I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see? 'God', announces Lane, 'chooses to reveal himself only where he wills' (2002:19).

But God does reveal *Herself* in ways that are as meaningful as they are mysterious and because God is omnipresent all spaces must surely be potentially sacred. Even an isolated valley in rural Spain or on the Mexico City metro. The sacred is inherently present, just waiting, primed and loaded, to be brought to life, by the right person at the right time. Since it is, by definition, supranatural, it can only be accessed when it manifests itself through human/landscape encounters. Perhaps sacredness is another layer in the landscape, waiting to be exposed. Like the 400 million year old Silurian rocks in the Mendip Hills I used to hike. If the overlying strata hadn't been ripped away by quarrying, you'd never have known they were there. But now these ancient lithologies have become objects of pilgrimage themselves, by geologists and earth science students who queue outside their shrine in hard hats and hi-vis jackets.

There's a problem here, if the divine is present in concentrated form in certain, sacred places, how does that tally with the omnipresence and omnibenevolence of God? It might be a Christian-centric question but it has implications beyond Christianity. And there are political connotations: all are equal under God but some places are more equal than others. If the divine favours one place, and favours a particular person in accessing that place's particular spiritual power, how can the divine be truly equal in expressing Her love? For Thomas Aquinas 'God exists in everything by his power (inasmuch as everything is subject

to this), by presence (inasmuch as everything is naked and open to his gaze), and by his essence (inasmuch as he exists in causing its existence).¹⁶⁵ On this approach, suggests Wynn, 'God is present in all places on the same basis since all regions of space are equally open to God's knowledge and sustaining activity' (2009:2). And don't we run the danger, to recall the thoughts of Father John on the Camino, of putting landscape over the divine? As Anselm blusters, it's a 'mark of shameless impudence to say that place circumscribes the magnitude of Supreme Truth' (Cited in Wynn 2009:2).

Is the Pope a Catholic? Is Father John? Technically he is but I mean, just how *catholic* is his Catholicism. Or rather how *catholic* is his gaze? It's very different from the Spanish priest who told Nancy Frey that he'd become part of the earth and 'couldn't distinguish between what was me and what was around me'. He is at one with all parts of creation, not knowing in moments if he was God or part of God' (1998:79). There's elements of syncretism at work here, pointing towards a Catholic spirituality influenced by deep ecology, reminiscent of the coming together of the indigenous 'earth goddess' Tonantzin and the Virgin Mary on the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico City to become Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation. As with Juan Diego in the *Nican Mopohua*, these new ways of seeing have the capacity to become new ways of *being*.

But pilgrims are more than our gaze, which can, in any case vary over the time and space of the Camino. We think with our booted feet but we see with them too. Not just in the sense that we develop an instinctive 'feel' for the surface of the path that guides us safely along the way, but in that they ground us. Our boots are souls as well as soles, purgatorial places of suffering which connect the mind and the body with the earth beneath our feet.

And so our stories shape the landscape, sacred place is 'storied place' stretching back to the Egyptian pharaoh bound for the underworld, of Abraham on his way to Canaan (Lane 2002:15). Lane sets out five landscapes – we might call them *cultural* landscapes for the purposes of this discussion but each possesses its own unique physical and human characteristics – in which ordinariness cloaks a sacred centre. Each pertains to a particular belief system and their collective expressions of faith. This is their stage, these are the sorcerers, those are the things and the words and that will conjure their spell. Must each of these elements be in place for the landscape to perform in a way we might consider sacred? Sometimes it feels like I'm baiting a trap, coaxing the divine into an existence. It's already there, but in a presence that mere humans cannot sense or discern. It's like a cat hiding in dense thicket, and I'm trying to woo it out with soft words: 'come on Tiddles',

¹⁶⁵ Summa Theologiae <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2001.htm>.

shaking a box of its favourite biscuits. Why won't it come out? Why won't the landscape 'perform'? Is it perhaps, because I don't have sufficient faith? Or the right kind of faith? Or maybe the landscape, like Tiddles, has no faith in me. And if I want it *too* much, I can simply dive into the bushes and drag it out, hissing and caterwauling. But it's not the same thing, the relationship is mutual.

Lane refers to this communication breakdown as 'the paradox of being present to place'; one can *be* there and yet *not* be there at the same time' (2002:29), occupying space is not synonymous with *dwelling* in place. In the same way that living implies something more dynamic and animated than merely existing, so dwelling implies more than presence. It's being open to the world and its possibilities, fully open, not half-cocked, and prepared to accept where the Camino takes you – theologically as well as geographically. As Dawney's meeting with a recently-unemployed hiker on the UK South West Coast Path illustrates, even if such encounters are rarely Damascene in their personal impact, they still have the capacity to change lives and or lifestyles:

'He had been walking for 7 weeks and was nearly at the end of the path. He was in no rush to finish, however – time was not a constraint for him. He told me he saw walking as a new way in which he defined himself, and a practice that enabled his reinvention of himself as someone who views time differently' (2014:130).

I see a lot of my 2012 self in this gentleman but not the 2016 version. It feels like I missed out on an opportunity, as evidenced on during my dark afternoon of the soul on the road to Ponferrada. In hindsight I think that at that point I'd become too full of myself to let go and embrace the possibilities that becoming-in-the-landscape presents. I didn't just fail to embrace it, I spurned it, like Peter denying Christ as the cock crowed.

In the toolkit I wrote of how 'the walking pilgrim is off-guard, has lowered her/his defences. In a sense she or he is vulnerable, the act of pilgrimage creates that vulnerability'. This becoming vulnerable is, in a sense, a kenotic process, a self-emptying of the messiness of the distractions that prevents us from seeing beyond the banal and the mundane, as Marcella writes 'processes of transformation require risk and an acceptance of failure too' (2004:72). Becoming vulnerable is a powerful act and one which opens upon possibilities that sticking with the comfort of the tried and trusted closes off, but it's also theologically problematic if done from a position of passivity rather than active choice.

Why was Jesus killed? asks Nelly del Cid of pastoral workers in El Salvador. Because he was a 'big-mouth' comes the response, a 'big-mouth' who wasn't asking the people to be passive (Best & Hussey 1996:23). This is also the message Our Lady of Guadalupe gives to Juan Diego, her 'most abandoned son' who worries that the bishop won't listen to him, a mere peasant. Humility, I think, is overrated and can be potentially self-destructive,

in the presence of the landscape or the face of the divine there's neither power nor potential in bowing and scraping and claiming 'I'm not worthy'. In any case, when I set out on a hike I enter into a relationship with the landscape, and I prefer that to be one of equals and not as a subaltern.

Mainstream theological discourse on kenosis speculates on the divine nature of Christ, and, as we're interested in the spiritual, we might extend that speculation beyond theological discourse to consider human relations with the beyond-human. We're transformed by encounters with the divine and/or the *extraordinary*, sometimes fleetingly, sometimes for life, this thesis was borne out of an experience which did the latter. But we aren't – or rather, shouldn't be – debased by them, otherwise it would not be a liberative experience.

For Coakley, kenosis is 'power-in-vulnerability'. That is, vulnerability as a form of human strength rather than a (typically female) weakness, a vulnerability which transcends victimhood; only through emptying oneself can one make possible the reception of the divine (2002:32-39). On the Camino, kenosis takes on an existentialist dimension, a self-emptying in that the pilgrim casts away comforts and securities and fully commits to the vagaries of the road (the cliched 'Spirit of the Camino'). That was me in 2012 but four years later my situation was very different. I had money, a job, and a project to fulfil and this, I think, made a significant difference. It suggests that being in the privileged position of being able to do fieldwork on the Camino might deaden its transformative capacity as academic commitments limit the extent to which one can truly empty oneself out.

This is a fleshy theology that wears its soul on its sleeve: 'A theology moving along over fertile earth' (Boff 1984:xi), the liberative capacity of which lies in its capacity to affect change, be it spiritual or temporal. But there's a *quid pro quo*. *You are the land, the land is you*, to *become* one has to give of oneself, to put an implicit and unconditional trust in the path to take you somewhere beyond Santiago.

The logical extension to this argument would be to suggest that dwelling in the landscape through walking is to become into the presence of God, or the divine or the extraordinary (in the sense of being the unexpected). It's not the notion of the landscape being a 'natural cathedral' or any form of what might be considered 'sacred' space – and 'sacred' might be personally memorable or special. The landscape is neither neutral or passive, neither is it a *tabula rasa* but it does have the capacity to be coloured in by cultural and religious practices, as Lane demonstrates.

Lane's mythic landscapes include Puritan New England, Native American Colorado, Shaker Massachusetts and Baroque Catholicism in New Spain. It's the latter that interests

me; what relations, he asks, 'can be drawn between Spanish geography and Spanish spirituality?' (2002:102). I'm glad I'm not alone in making the link between the 'hidden mystery of suffering' and masochism which puts pain and pleasure in the same experiential category (2002:104).

Once again, the Catholic Gaze becomes multi-sensational. Pain has been a constant throughout the narrative but it's never been debilitating, always the right sort of pain. Good pain. Pain that enhances rather diminishes the affect. Sure, I don't want the searing pain of an injury that requires me to quit the Camino, but equally I very much do want some form of physical suffering. There was, if you recall, a day when a blister was so painful that I thought my little toe might drop off but I think that in the overall catalogue of pain my ongoing shoulder discomfort, the backpacker's palsy, gave me the most satisfaction.

I don't mean to be frivolous but for me, at least, pain is a way of 'feeling alive' (Frey 1997:111). Across the annals of Camino research, personal experience narratives invariably place a high spiritual value on physical suffering. It has a transformative function, laden with symbolism, creating a 'vast arena where the symbolic and spiritual significance of the journey was played out' (Luik 2012:30). The metaphors become clichés, we all have our cross to bear, but pain never seems to exist for its own self, as a powerful physical sensation and an intense emotion.

I'm not quite saying 'pain is pleasure' ... except that, I suppose, I am. Physical pain – the right sort of physical pain, clearly – has a huge impact on the production of emotion and affect. Mountains seem higher, paths longer and more stony and space feels more sacred. Masochist or martyr? A bit of both, I suspect.

10. Emotion and affect

This is the sun around which this thesis orbits, a messy tangle of human engagements with the more-than-human and the beyond-human. But trying to ascertain what constitutes an *emotion*, let alone explain how these feelings or moods might be drawn out or enhanced by encounters with landscape is immediately problematic, not least because *emotion* is a loaded term, with multiple personal interpretations that present a potential minefield in an academic terrain that's still suspicious of inter-subjective or 'relational' phenomena (Bondi 1999:19).¹⁶⁶ Emotions are far too important to be put quietly to one side just because of their complexity or nebulousness. I'm old enough to remember the rallying call of second wave feminists in the 1970s: 'the personal is political'. It drew predictable responses from what were then referred to as 'male chauvinist pigs' but it succeeded in bringing domestic

¹⁶⁶ Bondi 1999:19. See Anderson and Harrison (2006) for a critique of Thien (2005)

violence and sexual abuse into the public eye. And this in a world that privileged (and still does) 'abstract' over emotional intelligence, the ability to put a number of shapes in order in an IQ test is still valued more than being able to talk a friend out of a personal crisis.

In the same way, acknowledging the importance of emotions and their role in our daily lives is profoundly political and not just the whim of a naïve academic. Engaging with and becoming attuned to the language of emotions gives voice to those who, for whatever reason, are excluded by 'masculinist reason' (Thien 2005:452). And by 'those who' I refer not only those who are frequently overlooked due to their sex and/or gender but a much wider diaspora of dissidents who, if you like, speak through different registers. Here, drawing on professional experience of working with a mental health charity, I'm particularly thinking of *those who* suffer from, for example, clinical depression or bi-polar disorder.¹⁶⁷ Those who are often subject to comments such as 'cheer up, love, it might never happen' or 'wake up and smell the coffee'; these are the imperatives of a prescribed mind-set and associated lifestyle which is often uncomfortable with unpredictable excess of emotion and seeks to control or suppress them.

At first I was inclined to agree with Conradson's understanding of emotional experiences as '*affective* outcomes of relational encounters between self and landscape' (2005: 104, his italics). In comparison to 'individualised formulations of emotion', he suggests, 'affect is more attentive to both the embodied and intersubjective dimensions of human feeling (2005:105). But I share Thien's concerns that 'emotion' has been jettisoned in favour of 'affect' in a reworking of the 'binary trope of emotion' positioned negatively in opposition to reason, 'as objectively soft and implicitly feminised' which reinforces the personal and political divide (2005:452).

So, in the context of this research, what is the relationship between the two? It's my premise that *affect* is the capacity of the landscape to perform in a way – because it has its own agency – that arouses emotions in those who dwell in them as pilgrims, and that *becoming* a pilgrim further enhances the intensity of the emotional response. Because in this context, emotion is a response and the extent of one's 'pilgrimness' will, in turn, affect that response. And by 'pilgrimness' I don't mean displaying the outward 'authentic' attributes of being a pilgrim but rather embracing the pilgrim state of nomadic liminality, which is a constant state of *becoming* rather than an essentialist *being*. And it's this

¹⁶⁷ I was research assistant for the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health's User Focussed Monitoring project which recruited and trained mental service users to carry out assessments of local mental health facilities and services. Central to the project's ethos was that the researchers themselves, myself included, were or had been service users too. We shared a way of communicating with was respectful of our 'otherness' such that when one user, who suffered from schizophrenia, commented that he heard voices in one brand of supermarket but not others, nobody thought it remotely strange.

nomadic liminality that facilitates the flow of emotive energy between landscape and pilgrim. It's disruptive and destabilising, because that's what emotions do. They disturb the rational and the logical.

Affect, then, is analogous to that immediate assault on the senses by the environment; it doesn't have to be an external landscape, something similar happened in the church in Navarrete. There's a half-second of sensory overload before the mind and body begin to make sense and act upon it. The affect mingles with whatever emotions are to the fore, both at the time of the event (mood, for example), and the longer term (disposition or attitude; ongoing physical ailment; memories, dreams and ambitions), to become the overall 'landscape' experience.

The emotions evoked by landscape are a stimulant, but landscapes can have the opposite affect and serve as a calmativie, as was the case in the therapeutic woods of the Fageda d'en Jorda. This wasn't a new experience, I can draw upon several similar occasions when walking in the landscape has been a healing process during times of trauma.

But it isn't all sweetness and light. As the narrative shows, alongside elation and tranquillity comes anger and irritation. On the *Camino Francés*, particularly on the later stages, there were periods when my temper came close to getting the better of me and I stomped off in a flurry of expletives. These destructive emotions tended to emerge through tensions created by the various, conflicting mindsets and motivations of different pilgrim types as well as, perhaps, a general weariness. Though they might appear negative they pale into insignificance in comparison to my greatest fear: an absence of emotion, when the landscape either rejects or turns on me.

Papadimitriou writes of how, on an excursion through *Scarp's* eastern heights, that land begins to hate him. He senses that it's trying to stare him out, to be driven from farmyard by stones and dogs, ignored by staff and shoppers in village convenience stores. In the end he 'loses the imperative' and heads home, his heart sinking with the realisation of his own failure (2013:187-188).

It's happened to me, on my dark afternoon of the soul on the Camino then in Catalunya: 'I thought I'd let the landscape down, I felt I'd let my emotions get the better of me. I don't know what it was ... I hadn't done it justice'. If I describe the emotion as one of grief and loss I run the risk of being thought melodramatic but that was *exactly* how I felt. There's a sense of 'is this it?' The end of long and intense relationship that just fizzles out among pig farms and parched pasture. *I am the land, the land is me*, it feels like it's always been thus but that doesn't mean it always will be. There are days when the landscape *underperforms*,

through the grey, steady drizzle of Galicia, for example but that's okay because the sort of passion we share isn't sustainable. But that day when I feel nothing, when we feel nothing for each other, I dread.

Even as backdrop the landscape of the Camino de Santiago presents as a rich and dense fabric, tinged with ever-changing shades and hues. It's *being* can be represented in any number of ways, from a topographical map to a painting or photo. But once the shutter has clicked, the brush is put down and the theodolite has been packed away we're left with a story in stasis, trapped in time and space. But the landscape is in a constant state of *becoming*, and in relation to its constituent components, not all of whom or which are visible or even material but are still, in some sensual form, *felt*. To represent these moments is to tell a story which captures the richness, vitality, mobility and unsettledness of *everyday* life without resorting to a self-orientating narrative (Cloke and Pears 2019:9, my italics). I italicise 'everyday' to emphasise the ordinariness of the experience and highlight the risk of the story focusing on the exotic or unusual, or the story becoming its own subject. Even if extraordinary things happen, they do so against the backdrop of the mundanity of walking, eating, sleeping, in Camino-based narratives it's all too easy for the Camino itself to suck the life out of its surroundings.

The challenge for research which seeks to explore affective, emotional and/or spiritual experiences isn't only how to give witness to them but also to create a testimony that 'goes beyond that which 'fits' expected patterns of representational explanation' (Cloke and Pears 2019:11). To avoid, particularly when the use of social media is an integral part of the methodology, playing to the audience; to tell them what they want to hear or what we think they should hear. And that audience is now two-fold consisting not only of those who read this thesis but those who followed, read and replied to my Tweets. In the field there was always the pressure to keep the latter entertained.

As soon as I seek to communicate an experience, I seek, subconsciously or not, to impose some sort of order on what's intrinsically messy. There's also the danger of historically fixing something that existed in the moment and thus flattening or sucking the life out of the experience. On a very practical level I hoped that relying on a combination of recorded thoughts and Tweets – usually accompanied by a photograph – rather than writing up notes at the end of the day would minimise that process, particularly in that the then Twitter character limit reduced the potential for contemplation.¹⁶⁸

One might reasonably assume that my Twitter audience was largely self-selective, the following I'd acquired was composed mostly of fellow travellers in the fields of

¹⁶⁸ It was for precisely this reason that I preferred Twitter to Facebook or Instagram

psychogeography/landscape studies, dedicated 'Remainers' and followers of a popular nineteen-eighties-based music radio station.¹⁶⁹ The wider audience, to which this thesis is addressed, is quite different, although no more or less eclectic. The issue here becomes one of how to adopt a witnessing/testimony approach that incorporates 'the imperceptibles elided by representation [including] emotions, passions and desires, and immaterial matters of spirit, belief and faith – all forces that move beyond our familiar, (because) denoted world' (Dewsbury 2003:1907). Testimony should be faithful to witness, if my witness is loosely but essentially religious/spiritual, or at least determined to expose those qualities in the landscape, does it resonate only with a similarly-inclined audience? If I tailor my testimony to appeal to those who might find it too intimate, 'squared at a too personal, specific concepts or microlevel', then it runs the risk of failing to occupy the space needed to reinvent and reinvigorate political and theological concepts and challenges (Dewsbury 2003:1927). If a story is full of knots and tangles, it's not the narrator's job to disentangle it just to make it easier on the ear.

Because the story has to go somewhere, the experience doesn't exist only in and of itself. Pears and Cloke call for practices of witnessing to be 'fully followed through into the practices of testimony' reflecting the 'multiple ways of knowing about people-place reflections'(2019:10). Where this hopefully takes us is on another journey, because the walking doesn't come to an end with this thesis but rather continues along Marcella's *caminata*, an idea of 'theology of theology as a creative path of acting and reflecting about the presence of God in our lives' (2004:12).

11. Unpacking the religious/spiritual dichotomy – time to stop beating about the burning bush.

At what point do emotions take on a spiritual or religious hue? And what, in turn, separates the spiritual from the religious? Are emotions produced within the mind and the body whereas the spiritual/religious pertains to the beyond-human and beyond-human experiences?

The more I try to tease these three responses apart, the closer they bind themselves together, as if to defy separation. 'It doesn't work that way', I can almost hear them crying. 'Are you assuming that each of us occur independently of the others, that one can draw a thick line in the sand such that one can feed off and into another?'

¹⁶⁹ The two might seem mutually exclusive but my pilgrim experiences generated considerable interest outwith the 'psychogeographical/landscape community'.

It's an accusation I want to avoid precisely because all three inhabit and function in a similar sphere. In the toolkit I talked of a spiritual-religious 'continuum', I think describing something as existing in a range of manifestations to be a more accurate representation of what *is* rather than what *should be* or what *we'd like it to be* so, in terms of trying to explain how landscape is experienced, it's helpful to make some distinctions in order to draw some theological conclusions.

Do the spiritual and the religious *dwell* in the landscape in different ways? I think my experiences in the church in Navarette and on the *Ruta Dragonte* are indicative of this. The church is an example of an experience (which I might, to further confuse, describe as a religiously-orientated *emotion* rather than 'experience' *per se* as there was no 'felt' presence) that took place in a space reserved for and dedicated to religious activity. On the Ruta Dragonte, in the mountains, a spiritual encounter – even a spiritually religious encounter – would be more on the lines of the landscape as a display of God's goodness rather than God – or in this case the Virgin Mary – being present in the landscape.

I think it pertinent to mention religious experience not only as a presence but also a distressing absence, as when landscape/self relations break down. On that dark afternoon of the soul, during the never-ending descent from the *Cruz del Ferro*, it really did seem that God had deserted me, and had taken the landscape with Her. The retreat of the divine but also the breaking of the spiritual bonds that tied me to the Camino and prompted a cascade of emotions oscillating between anger and self-loathing.

I tease them apart and they all come together again in a reminder not only of their interconnectedness but also that spiritual and religious are not necessarily singular events but part of much longer process over time and space, be it the duration of the Camino or an ongoing, lifelong encounter between self and landscape.

I recall, in the early 'noughties', hiking with my friend Nancy, an archaeologist, in West Dorset. We were close to several prehistoric landscape features including The Grey Mare and her Colts, a megalithic long barrow.¹⁷⁰ In the valley below stood the seventeenth century Bridehead House and village of Little Bredy, until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the sixteenth century all the land thereabouts was owned by Cerne Abbey.^{171,172} It wasn't only these detached, chronological histories that had written themselves into the landscape, it was experiences too, of humans, non-humans – the sheep that scattered as we approached – and the beyond-human – whatever religious rites had led to the creation of the long barrows and tumuli that surrounded us. And even as Nancy and I walked we

¹⁷⁰ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1002671>

¹⁷¹ <http://www.opcdorset.org/LittleBredyFiles/Little%20Bredy.htm>

¹⁷² <http://www.domesdaybook.co.uk/dorset2.html#littlebredy>

were adding to that record, like human agents of a spectral geomorphology, simultaneously eroding and depositing, leaving part of us behind in physical and emotional form.

What happens on the earth leaves a physical trace, we can dig down and expose them, that's part of Nancy's job. As Derrida notes, we pass into and are incorporated by other states and forms (1994). Without death there can be no life. During the Carboniferous, dead molluscs sink to the ocean floor and, through the process of lithification, return to the earth in the form of limestone, the body of King Richard III of England lies under what is now a car park for five hundred years until it's exhumed. The remains are still present in physical form but the memory of their dynamic presence, – their becoming – in the landscape is long gone.

Or so it would appear. 'Pasts and futures, even if they are no longer; even if they are not yet, still haunt the present, and are, in a supplemental relationship to it, *always coming back*' (Wylie 2007a:172); 'a spectre', argues Derrida, 'is always a revenant because *it begins by coming back*' (1994:11, emphasis in original). Thus far I've spoken of presence in the landscape, even when that presence is not visible; presence as a matter of force, energy and process, landscape present and alive in its ongoing animation and becoming (Wylie 2007a; Rose and Wylie 2006). Its presence, I suggest, is religious or spiritual, coaxed into a concealed existence by human/landscape interactions: just because we can't see it, doesn't mean it's not there.

You say spectral, I say spiritual. Are they one and the same thing? Are we in one-person's-coincidence-is-another's-miracle territory? There might, I think, be a distinction in terms of inclination and disposition. If I'm inclined or *become* disposed towards the religious/spiritual, the phenomenon makes itself experienceable through religious/spiritual imagery, symbolism or doctrine. But what of the agnostic, atheist or indifferent? How might they experience the spectral or unexperienceable? And how does absence make itself present through any other means that sensation?

But even coincidences unsettle in the form of *déjà vu* or 'someone just walked over my grave' so perhaps we're talking about what these absences do to the world around us rather than to ourselves. For Wylie, the spectral isn't limited to uncanny correspondences or elective affinities. Instead he turns to the geographies of W G Sebald which are 'more essentially spectral in that their concern is with the unsettling of places and selves as a primary and generative process' (2007a:175). For Gericke, the Book of Lamentations, in which Jerusalem is 'empty and desolate ...' depicts a 'haunted' space in which the character of Yhwh is like a ghost who never speaks yet is spoken to by those who can

neither reach nor escape him (2012:166).¹⁷³ In this Derridian ‘spectral theology’, a hauntological analysis attends to ‘the layers of fizz, crackle, hiss and white noise that haunt the text’. Spectral theologies are subversive, ‘unsettling the places where hegemony attempts to assemble and join’ (2012:170).

In both situations, the spiritual manifests itself momentarily through the conduit of presence, believed (or, perhaps, meditated/prayed) into existence; the spectral *haunts* through its absence and is ‘always-already’, always there, even ‘if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet’ (Derrida 1994:176).

12. Tension as energy

I am the land, the land is me. It’s a relationship which suggests a Utopian harmony, that as I walk I am at one with myself and the world around me – in its human, non-human and beyond-human manifestations. Judging by the evidence set out in the narrative, that’s clearly not the case. Indeed, the only stages of the journey when friction was at a low ebb were on the *Camino Portugués*. It would be unfair to call those days *dull* but the lack of tension had a curious impact on my relationship with the landscape. I’d been on the road too long – time and distance again, I was welded to The Way and only physical force would have ejected me from it. The spark was gone. We were like a happily married couple celebrating our silver wedding anniversary rather than young lovers sizing each other up and wondering which way the relationship might go. As Santiago came closer an inevitable sense of anticipation served to liven the journey but at times it seemed too comfortable.

Without conflict there is no drama. That was my A level English teacher’s favourite opening gambit and the words come to mind as I address the different sets of tensions that emerged and dissipated during the walk. ‘Landscape is tension’, writes Wylie, between proximity and distance; observation and inhabitation; eye and land; culture and nature (2007). It runs through the earth like an electric charge, cracking and fizzing and buzzing, forever poised to make the conductive leap from land to those who dwell in and upon it.

Insulation. It’s either the problem or the solution, depending on one’s point of view because tension isn’t everyone’s cup of tea. In British pop culture the phrase ‘behind the sofa’ has come to refer to children hiding from the TV screen when Doctor Who, the hero of an eponymous BBC science-fiction series, was faced with a particularly terrifying monster or adversary. Too much tension, it makes us feel vulnerable so we don the emotional equivalent of rubber boots and insulate ourselves from it.

¹⁷³ Book of Lamentations 5:18

Tensions of landscape are creative and productive in the sense that they emerge from positive rather than negative processes or side effects – a *coming-into-being* in and of itself rather than a *consequence* or *lack of*. But these tensions also have the capacity for devastation or destruction, particularly, in spiritual terms, of the self. My thoughts return again to that ‘dark afternoon of the soul’ and I ask myself what happened to makes things go awry.

In a letter to his brothers in 1817, John Keats introduced his notion of ‘Negative Capability’ as

‘when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrarium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration’ (Keats 1899:277).

Hawryluk and Shilton suggest that Keats might be referring to a ‘higher order experience, than that of consciousness, something almost divine’ and that the process of committing oneself – they give the example of a poet but this commitment pertains equally to the pilgrim – to space and place can give rise to uncomfortable experiences (2015:52). A moment of connection, a glimpse of the divine, can serve as a reassuring, validating experience, from which the subject walks away with her convictions intact. But it can equally produce a disturbing, unsettling response; these landscape/self tensions produce a spiritual energy that can illuminate but also burn.

Anger is an energy and tension, inevitably, gives rise to emotions which, given the enclosed nature of the Camino, have nowhere to go. Instead of fizzling out they feed on themselves and multiply. Some pilgrims are easy-going through and through, others only on the surface, it doesn’t take much to upset their equilibrium. I have my ideas of what constitutes pilgrimage and when these are challenged I sometimes become upset or even irate. It seems we share a symbiotic relationship; can’t live with tension, can’t live without it. Its presence prompts the landscape to perform and fires emotions, its absence causes it to withdraw, and the world to recede resulting in the sort of depression both Papadimitriou and I have experienced out in the field and which feels, to me, as if I’ve fallen from grace with God.

13. Queering the Camino

A few weeks before setting out for the Camino I attended a conference celebrating the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid. It was titled *Fetish Boots and Running Shoes: Indecent Theology Today into Tomorrow* but I attended in sensible footwear because I knew there’d

be a long walk to the pub. The theme was, in the words of organiser Hannah L Hofheinz, to ask whether we should (or ought to) run with Marcella or indecent theology into the future? And if so: how, why, and with whom?¹⁷⁴

For sure, fetish boots wouldn't be much use on the Camino de Santiago, I don't think juxtapositions come much more juxtaposed than the vertiginous heels of a dominatrix's thigh-high leather boots and the sturdy Vibram soles of my preposterously practical hiking boots.

Doesn't seem like an auspicious start! In so many respects the Camino de Santiago appears to be the epitome of what Marcella referred to as 'T-Theology' or traditional theology.¹⁷⁵ It's straight, suspicious of deviation; despite – or maybe because of – its anti-structuralist liminality and *communitas* – it feels a very safe, stable and heteronormative place. Maybe my intention to 'queer' the Camino was a bold and, in hindsight, reckless statement; don't promise what you can't deliver.

Adopting Halberstam's (2005) concept of queer time and space, the Camino does appropriate some of that notion of *queerness* but doesn't address the nebulousness of *queerness*, where does it begin and where does it end? If something has a beginning and an end can it be considered *queer*? The beginning and the end fix the Camino in time and space, seemingly rendering it stable, and queer theology must be 'stubborn' in its refusal to become stabilised or fixed (Althaus-Reid 2008:10).

14. Querying or queering?

A transsexual on the Camino is no big deal. A transsexual playing the recalcitrant teenager in a Camino family which includes three committed and practising Catholics, one of whom is a priest, presented zero problems. Nobody cares, and that's been the case with the majority of my engagements with the Catholic Church and its faithful since I returned to the fold in female form over two decades ago. I think it important to remind the reader that my engagement with theology has always been 'as a woman', albeit a transsexual one, so when I read, for example, the first chapter of Tonstad's *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics*, I struggle to locate myself in an every-growing morass of gendered identities and acronyms such as 'QUILT BAG' (2018:3).¹⁷⁶ Because gender had been so entwined with my formative understanding of queer theology I'd assumed they were one and the

¹⁷⁴https://www.academia.edu/21150360/CFP_Fetish_Boots_and_Running_Shoes_Indecent_Theology_Today_into_Tomorrow

¹⁷⁵ In *The Queer God*, Marcella calls 'T-theology' as the 'theology of empires (2003:33) and 'theology as ideology [that is] a totalitarian construction of what is considered as "The One and Only Theology" which does not admit discussion or challenges from different perspectives ...' (2003:172).

¹⁷⁶ 'Queer/questioning, Uncertain, Intersex, Lesbian, Trans*, Bisexual, Asexual, Gay/genderqueer'

same thing. At the time I considered the unstable nature of my gender to have subversive potential in a Church which was patriarchal and androcentric, the shock value of Marcella's *Indecent Theology*, which came into my life at the right place and time, gave that potential a liberationist direction and charge. There was a creative tension there, between being an active member of a Catholic Church that wasn't supposed to approve of me and being an active member of a feminist theological movement which has sometimes viewed people like me with suspicion (Taylder 2009).

But neither organisation excluded me. On the contrary, both lay and clerical Catholics and feminist theologians made me very welcome so that creative 'queer' tension began to ebb. My gendered identity became no more important to me than, for example, the brand of my boots which is why I prefer to adopt a 'post-queer' perspective in which postcolonial theories of hybridities and resistance 'queer' the Camino (Cornwall 2011:20). By 'post-queer' I refer to David Ruffolo's proposal that queer theory's concern for (some might say obsession with) the subject is replaced by an engagement with the body as an agent of transformation and the site of potential, adopting instead a 'Deleuzian approach that looks past the subject in favour of a focus on life, in particular its quality of being in a perpetual state of "becoming"' (Boyle 2012:271, Ruffolo 2009).

15. Decolonising the Camino

It's just a long walk, isn't it? As simple as that. No need to dissect or deconstruct it. Perhaps so, but some paths are less neutral than others and despite – or because of – their planned and organised nature, pilgrimages have 'a contingent aspect that turns them into political and cultural arenas in the wider struggle for recognition' (Salzbrunn & Von Weichs 2013:185). But any attempt to *queer* the Camino de Santiago and give it a theologically liberative *raison d'être* has to query the power relations at work: pilgrimage isn't always a convivial practice and not all bodies move through space equally' (Truman & Springgay 2019:2-3).

I discussed the notion of walking pilgrimage being an act of kenosis though making oneself vulnerable and how, during my 2016 Camino, I opted for comfort and thus limited the kenotic potential of the pilgrimage. And maybe I was too tied up in the academic nature of the walk to do that. In *Blister*, an enthralling piece of theatre-led research, Sarah Peters presents a 'model of pedagogy of vulnerability by depicting characters in navigating their sense of self, and their relationship with place and other bodies in response to their experience in the Camino' (2019:75). The path, like the street, becomes a pedagogic space of both 'total involvement and immediate disconnection' as pilgrims move along it and also

a 'place of vulnerabilities where we simultaneously aren't at home or "there"' (Hickey 2010:162).

Vulnerability is liminality, reminding us of Van Gennep's tripartite model of rites of passage which involves an individual (1) removing themselves from society to enter (2) a state of transition in a liminal, in-between state which can become sacred before (3) re-inserting themselves into society in their new identity and/or status (1960:ix). This is a reasonably accurate description of the archetypal contemporary pilgrim before, during and after Camino, although more often than not the new identity/status struggles to maintain itself. What emerged during a process of disorientation becomes submerged beneath the flotsam and jetsam of the returning home. Enough remains to make a long-term difference, perhaps, but it's like swimming against the ebb tide.

I'm interested in these orientations, disorientations and reorientations. As Ahmed explains, the body is affected by its orientation in the world: 'orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward' (Ahmed 2006:3). For Ahmed, bodies in the Western world are orientated towards a standard of being white and heterosexual, but that might equally apply to the political, cultural, socio-economic and spiritual/religious structures which keep people firmly in their place, either consciously or subconsciously. Becoming aware of these structures and trying to deviate from them is the key to Ahmed's queer phenomenological approach, as summed up by Wennerscheid: 'The individual has to look around and to disrupt their course, they have to change sides and see the world and themselves in a new light' (2018:67).

The above comes with the proviso, of course, that most pilgrims enjoy some sort of privilege, not least in having the time and the money required to spend five weeks on the road. And that most will also have responsibilities from which the Camino offers a brief but liberating respite. There are those of us, the permanent nomads and gyrovagues, who will walk the earth for as long as we can because that's what we do. But in the conclusion I want to look at the implications for those who, for whatever reasons, are restricted by immobility and/or circumstance. How can the Camino speak to and for them?

CONCLUSION

*Ain't nothin' gonna break-a my stride
Nobody gonna slow me down, oh no
I got to keep on movin'
Ain't nothin' gonna break-a my stride
I'm running and I won't touch ground
Oh no, I got to keep on movin'¹⁷⁷*

The concluding chapter is divided into a series of five reflections which deal with (1) landscape, mobility and affect; (2) key academic issues which arose during the research (3) methodologies and the wording of the title; (4) how to represent the unstable, the more-than-human and the beyond-human and (5) the theological and socio-political implications of spiritual encounters in the landscape.

1. LANDSCAPE, MOBILITY AND AFFECT

1.1 THE OVERWHELMING EMOTIONAL POWER OF LANDSCAPE

'This fear of the landscape seems to have been with us always and there is no known group of people at any point in the world or at any point in time that does not have a sense of the numinous. By numinous I mean a sense of otherness which we project as a spirituality into things, including landscape and especially landscape, for me.

Is this landscape sentient?'¹⁷⁸

'That deep connection with the land which doesn't stop at ground level. A ploughed field is not a ploughed field, it goes down and down and down, in space and time. And into timelessness, not into liner time, into cyclical time. The rock, the earth, the wood ...'¹⁷⁹

I can think of no other way of naming this, the final episode of this journey. A sort of homecoming, back to the egg. No pithy title followed by the inevitable colon and explanatory clause. Sometimes, representation just has to do what it says on the tin.

Remember the Claude Glass? Victorian travellers journeying in fear of the sublime? And Wordsworth, in *The Prelude*, rowing across the lake until, overcome with trepidation at the majesty of nature, he turns back. In presentations on this thesis I've often mocked Wordsworth's response as pathetic – man goes out in boat, gets scared by the mountains, comes home and writes a poem about it from the safety of his study – but in hindsight I think I've been a bit hasty.

Remember the ruined chapel at Minsden? I was about eight years younger than Wordsworth was when he began *The Prelude*. I went out for a walk in the Hertfordshire

¹⁷⁷ Matthew Wilder, 'Break my Stride' Private-I records (Wilder/Prestopino, 1983)

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Alan Garner, 'Fear in the Farrow', BBC Radio 4 (first broadcast 31 October 2019)

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

countryside, burst into tears, came home and wrote a poem about it from the safety of my bedroom. It was Hertfordshire, for heaven's sake! The Home Counties! Not a lofty crag in sight! I'm a lightweight in comparison.

How can landscape do this? And why? Whence comes this affect? From me or the earth beneath my feet? And whence comes the spiritual and the religious? From my God or my ego? The answers to all these questions are, as this project has illustrated, complex. Indeed, every time I home in on a satisfactory response another enquiry pops up. They breed like rabbits. What *is* clear, from this research and personal experience, is that landscapes, irrespective of their topographical or cultural status *can* do this in the context that to *do* is to *perform*.

And maybe, because they *can*, they *do*. Both the non-human and more-than-human have agency.

And it's a two-way process of becoming. *I become the land, the land becomes me*. We both have agency so it falls upon time and distance, dwelling through pedestrian mobility to play the broker, to bring us together despite – or maybe due to – the tensions and conflicts within this ever-changing relationship. I say *despite* as these tensions are constantly trying to sabotage my relationship with the landscape and *due to* because they also provide the fizzing energy on which a creative and vibrant life depends. These tensions are in tension, if you like.

How this shared experience manifests itself depends on the nature of the landscape and the nature of me. Not just the present – immediate or otherwise – but the past and, to a certain extent, the future: my dreams and aspirations, which is why I've leaned so heavily on autoethnography. It's almost as if I lay all my cards on the table and we talk through all the possible permutations together.

So here we have a coming-together of the human, the non-human and the more-than-human. That much, I think, makes reasonable sense, rationally and academically. The problems start to pile up when I introduce the beyond-human into the maelstrom: the supra-natural, the spectral and the unexperienceable, Dewsbury's 'folded mix of our emotions, desires, and intuitions within the aura of places, the communication of things and spaces, and the spirit of events' (2003:1907). It becomes even more testy when I give a name to the beyond-human – spiritual or, in this case, a specific religious belief – and concede that it has agency; that the divine has the capacity to intervene in self/landscape relations even when its unexpected, unlooked for or unwanted.

Spiritual or religious experiences rarely take place in a vacuum. If the person on the receiving end doesn't act on it, chances are somebody or something else will and bend the

theology towards its own ends.¹⁸⁰ The personal is political and it's also theological in that it can reinforce existing structures or challenge them. If the past informs the present then the present has implications for the future. Pilgrimage, even when it doesn't dovetail with research, performs in a similar fashion, what does the pilgrim take from one life into the next? Even if it's nothing more than 'the Camino sucks. I'm done with walking holidays', it's still life-changing.

So the question here is, given all that's gone before, what happens next? What, if any, are the implications? This thesis has been a long time coming, it's not quite *Chinese Democracy*, but the world has moved on whilst I've been walking and writing.¹⁸¹ The imprint of Brexit is writ large on this research, as a source of tension and, ultimately, an act of political suicide that was the catalyst for my relocation to Spain, where much of this thesis was written. And then, right at the end, a global health crisis that changes maybe not everything but, given that mobilities are central to this work, certainly a good deal. In that sense the bloated delay has been a blessing in that what follows is more pertinent than it might've been had it been written a year earlier. And, while the playfulness remains, I think it's a more considered and thoughtful. In this, the final chapter, it feels as though the thesis has made peace with itself.

But in curious case of art imitating life, I don't want to stop, writing or walking. Which is hugely ironic given that I came close to quitting this thesis on several occasions. In June 2012, when I arrived in Santiago, I kept on hiking until I got to Finisterre. It was the end of the earth, I could no further so I took a train back to Irun on the Spanish/French border to catch a coach for London. Irun is the starting point for the *Camino del Norte* (Northern Way), which hugs the Atlantic coast for several hundred kilometres *en route* to Santiago and whilst I was waiting for the bus I happened upon the albergue and the Camino's beginning. I came *that* close to turning round and starting all over again.

And that's where I find myself right now. The end of this long, long trek is just around the corner but other paths are already emerging and each of them branching out, a network of endless possibilities. In terms of 'landscape experience' I'd like to take this research away from the yellow arrows of the Camino de Santiago and look at emotional self/landscape encounters in other scenarios – particularly intimate, close-to-home and/or 'mundane' landscapes – from a spiritual/emotional perspective, using this research as a

¹⁸⁰ For contrasting ends see Perry and Echeverria (1988) on how the Virgin Mary has been appropriated by the conservative right and Rey (1999) by progressive liberationists.

¹⁸¹ Geffen/Black Frog Records (2008). It's all relative. The Guns 'n' Roses album took ten years to produce and reportedly cost in excess of \$13 million. This thesis has taken seven years and cost me somewhere in the region of £20,000. That might not be a lot of money to Axl Rose and his record label but it is to me!

template or starting point.¹⁸² Does the transformative capacity of the experienced world have to take place at an arm's length? *Scarp* suggests it doesn't, and also points to ways in which we might represent our personal relationships through experimental or creative writing such as poetry (see Cresswell 2014,2017).

From a religious/spiritual perspective, I'm interested in pursuing the borderlands where geography meets theology (and vice versa) to explore how a 'theology of landscape' might emerge from this coming-together of the human, the non-human and the more-than-human. How it might emerge and where it might go from there. And thinking about trajectories and destinations, and trying to shake off accusations of Eurocentrism, I think there's considerable scope for taking this research to Latin America and, further developing Mandoki's 'Sites of Symbolic Destiny' (1997) exploring pilgrimage and the creation sacred space in different cultural, theological and political contexts (see, for example, Sallnow 1991). Over a period of twenty years I've observed the tomb of Monseñor Romero, in the metropolitan cathedral of San Salvador, go from informal to formal, Church-endorsed sacred space with a consequent increase in visitors – or pilgrims, perhaps, from El Salvador and further afield so this seems a logical point of entry to further research in this field.¹⁸³ Like the peasant who watched Paricutín emerge from the aesthenosphere, and after my experience on the Ruta Dragonte in 2012 I want to push Knott's 'unapologetic insider/complete participant' (2010) to its epistemological limit, like the volcanologist who goes right to the edge of the bubbling, seething active lava lake to take samples.

1.2 I WALK THEREFORE I AM: MOBILITY AND IMMOBILITY

Nine years after making my first pilgrimage and I'm still going on. And on and on and on. Walking has become an addiction. As addictions go it's not so bad, you might say, and I tend to agree but like all addictions it has its downsides.¹⁸⁴ On my smartphone I have an app which records distances to the nearest 100 metres, I make sure I walk a minimum of eight every day. The successive lockdowns I went through in Spain only exacerbated the situation, the more 'they' tried to pin me down the more I sought to escape until I wandered the streets of Lleida like a runner from the 1976 film 'Logan's Run'.

We tend to take mobility for granted until we're deprived of it: the holiday in the South of France cut short by quarantine regulations. Enforced immobilities are even harder to bear, during the latter stages of this research I spent two months on crutches following a

¹⁸² As opposed to culturally 'elite' landscapes, typically mountains or wildernesses, often with an official status such as national parks.

¹⁸³ A regular UK-based pilgrimage offers 'a chance to walk in the footsteps of the newly canonised St Oscar Romero' <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/el-salvador-pilgrimage-2019>

¹⁸⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/jan/11/walking-case-studies>

mountaineering accident and then several months confined to my flat and then the city of Lleida due to Coronavirus restrictions. Only through fleeing to the relative liberty of Vienna could I get it finished.

If there's a patron saint of doctoral students she was surely looking down on me, not least because I was also furloughed by both the Spanish government and a UK exam board. I had no excuse but to get on.

But I didn't. I came to a complete halt. In between sneaking out for illicit strolls I idled away the hours playing the electric guitar I'd purchased to get me through the incarceration. It was as if the mind and the body were locked into some sort of mutual agreement wherein if one came to a stop so did the other. Slavin (2010) suspects walking and thinking are especially fine companions and reminds us of Solnit's suggestion that 'the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an hour' (2000:10).

But I'm fortunate in that I'm physically able to walk long distances on a daily basis and privileged in that even in the time of virus I can do so. I can still, for example, move across Europe and, due to my having spent my formative travelling years as a hiker and learned to hike without the fear of sexual assault, I have the confidence to do so. And this research has focused on an idealised subject who is mobile in so many senses of the word, who enjoys physical, social and cultural freedom. Who is also a white, biologically male, reasonably well-educated, middle class European.

I didn't think about immobility until it was foisted on me, I didn't really think about what it might be like not to be physically able to walk until my father suffered a stroke and had to rely on a mobility scooter and walking frame to get around. Could he still 'walk' the Camino or is it restricted to those with fully functioning legs?¹⁸⁵ Some parts of the *Camino Francés* are 'wheelchair-friendly' but, surprisingly, there isn't an officially created or sanctioned 'wheelchair-friendly' route. And what about those with other impairments which hinder their ability to enjoy the movement I revel in and take for granted? Someone with a visual impairment, for example. And in both these cases, would those limitations diminish their engagement with a landscape which is experienced not only through the visual?

A key theme of this chapter is the concept of *acompañamiento*, a theology of collaboration and cooperation and *becoming* community. Given the solipsistic state into which I slipped so often on the later stages of the Camino, this sounds a bit rich but praxis – even 'bad' praxis – begets reflection and the process of listening back to my recorded thoughts and writing up the hiking narrative drew my attention to this. In the moment, on

¹⁸⁵ There's an unfortunate dearth of academic research on this theme. Personally speaking, I've never seen anyone with visibly reduced mobilities on the Camino.

See <http://amawalker.blogspot.com/2010/08/pilgrims-with-disabilities.html>

the trail, I was oblivious to ... well, everyone but myself and the landscape. In more political terms, the landscape is a resource for emotional and spiritual well-being as much as the soil is a resource for growing food. Both the landscape and the soil sustain us and from both a religious and non-religious perspective, there's a responsibility to *actively* share it and *actively* make it available to those who face difficulties accessing it. And I italicise the 'actively' to call for a general coming together which avoids the power relations of charity.¹⁸⁶

This, I think, is the essence of *acompañamiento*, an act described by Nell Becker as being 'rooted in the act of walking with Jesus and the accompaniment of his body and blood in the Eucharist' in which 'Jesus' eucharistic presence is identified with everyday life ... a sacramental act, an experiential from of knowledge'.¹⁸⁷

If we identify the Camino de Santiago as a resource for spirituality and emotional well-being as well as for the religiously motivated, how might we then preserve its integrity to prevent it becoming worn out through (ab)use? And by 'integrity' I don't mean the much-contested notion of 'authenticity' which can be used as an exclusionary tool, tradition as barrier. The popularity of the *Camino Francés* has increased exponentially over the past twenty or so years, and as that particular route has filled up, pilgrims have turned to others, many of which are being actively marketed by local governments. Below I suggest a role for pilgrimage in general and the Camino de Santiago in particular in a world that's been severely impacted by Covid 19.

1.3 PILGRIMAGE: A POST-VIRUS MANIFESTO

On Saturday 14 March 2020, in response to the growing number of deaths from the Corona Virus, the Spanish government decreed a state of alarm which imposed one of the strictest confinements in Europe. For six weeks children were incarcerated in their homes and even leaving one's place of residence for exercise was technically illegal.

The Camino network shut down immediately. Santo Domingo de la Calzada, a small town in Rioja for whom pilgrims are a lucrative source of income, suffered one of the highest mortality rates in Europe and although pilgrims were not the cause, they were an obvious potential vector for the disease.¹⁸⁸ As I write, four months later, the Camino is beginning to open again, albeit under the restrictions of the 'new normal'; the mix of cultures

¹⁸⁶ Searching the internet for resources for visually impaired pilgrims I can across a sponsored walk organised by a Northern Ireland based charity to raise funds for their work supporting blind people. Ironically it makes no mention of blind people taking part on the walk themselves! <http://www.ncbi.ie/ncbi-camino-way-2018/>

¹⁸⁷ In Nell Becker Sweden's review of Goizueta (2003): <http://www.bu.edu/cpt/resources/book-reviews/caminemos-con-jesus-by-roberto-s-goizueta/>.

¹⁸⁸<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/04/spain-la-rioja-small-town-one-of-europes-worst-covid-19-hotspots>

and nationalities that have come to constitute the contemporary Camino experience may not return for some time.

I spent the lockdown in a small flat in Lleida, Catalunya, with two sisters from Ecuador. Over shared meals we discussed, from a feminist perspective, how society might emerge from the crisis a better place, how the virus might be a catalyst for change. Those days were desperate but at the same time tinged with hope. Ironically, as Spain emerged clumsily from its lockdown that hope began to fade: 'business as usual' is the new mantra, same as the old mantra.

A huge opportunity missed, perhaps, but not all crises are best-resolved by revolutionary change and the ground remains fertile. Unemployment in Europe is soaring and set to increase still further, try as they might, governments are going to struggle to shove the genie back into its box – it's become too fat and bloated. They can, as the Spanish government has proposed, introduce a guaranteed minimum income scheme or, as seems more likely in the UK, opt for a higher dose of the same neo-liberal medicine.¹⁸⁹ More significantly, from my perspective as a tutor, is the disproportionate impact on young people, not just in terms of jobs but also access to university as the higher education sector shrinks and/or becomes a predominantly online experience. Another avenue cut off: more time, less money.

This is where, I propose, the Camino comes in. Not just the Camino, not just pilgrimage but walking as a whole. Long walks, shorts walks, thru-hikes and evening strolls. Walks as periods of reflection and meditation, of slowing down the world just to think things through.

I think it fair to say that the virus has changed people's relationship with space. For many, during lockdowns the local park, the walk round the block acquired new significances. No longer 'mundane', these places and activities now performed vital roles in terms of mental health and emotional well-being. Places of escape from confined spaces, dysfunctional families and abusive partners; absence makes the heart grow fonder even lovers need time out and a little distance.

Suddenly space that is near matters more than space that is far, because the far that was once so accessible – by air travel, for example – has been declared out of bounds. Borders are closed, mobility curtailed, and even when restrictions are lifted many are reluctant to travel. And even if they do, the way in which that space is utilised, the way it performs, is changed too. Fewer sunseekers on the beach, the dance floor closed and

¹⁸⁹ https://english.elpais.com/economy_and_business/2020-05-25/spains-minimum-guaranteed-minimum-income-scheme-set-to-rescue-850000-families.html

intimacy reduced to the bare minimum. And, for much of 2020, no pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago.

In 2006 Sheller and Urry observed that:

‘All the world seems to be on the move. Asylum seekers, international students, terrorists, members of diasporas, holidaymakers, business people, sports stars, refugees, backpackers, commuters, the early retired, young mobile professionals, prostitutes, armed forces – these and many others fill the world’s airports, buses, ships, and trains. The scale of this travelling is immense’ (2006:207).

But the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ they set out appears to have become outdated, almost overnight. The extent to which this *new* ‘new mobilities paradigm’ becomes permanent remains to be seen, whether *less* travel as well as *slow* travel become essential components of the ‘new normality’ or developments in health and medical technology facilitate a return to the *status quo*.

Mobility won’t come to an end, people will continue to move for all manner of motives, including pilgrimage and tourism. From personal perspective, as a perennial nomad, I consider the advantages of mobility to outweigh the disadvantages in that it entails sharing and exchange, though clearly not always on an equal basis. Societies that seek to reduce movement, no matter how laudable the motive, run the risk of becoming isolated and, impervious to beneficial external influences, such as human rights legislation. In that case perhaps *thoughtful* travel might be a satisfactory outcome, mobilities that are governed by informed decision-making rather than political sanction; bottom-up is always preferable to top down.

To become a tourist – and/or pilgrim – one must be in possession of both (a) time and (b) money. This equation has generally privileged the wealthy over the poor who, as if to rub salt into their wounds, are called upon to provide the services that constitute the ‘tourist experience’ on exploitative terms and conditions. But here hiking in general and pilgrimage in particular have the capacity to rearrange this equation and, in a more mutual relationship, ensure that the social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits are distributed equitably.

We might recall the working class roots of British hiking in movements such as the YMCA and various rambling clubs providing access to then uplands of Northern England. The mass trespasses on the grouse moors of the English Peak District in 1932, organised by the Young Communist League and the creation, in 1930, of the Youth Hostelling Association which offered cheap food and lodging and enabled the young and the less well-off to access the countryside Solnit (2001:194). According to Samuels, ‘hiking was a

major, if unofficial component of the socialist lifestyle' encouraging a passion for the land and natural history (1997:297).¹⁹⁰

In a Europe that, even in current circumstances, enjoys far more mobility than it did one hundred years ago, the *Camino de Santiago* has the potential to fulfil a similar, liberative role. It's not just a question of a return to the ethos of those pilgrims who can afford it subsidising those who can't – through *albergues donativos*, for example, or those run by religious orders. I'm not sure that ever went away, rather that it was overshadowed by communities which, in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis that hit Spain particularly hard, took advantage of the commercial opportunities the almost exponential growth of the Camino's popularity offered.

Many pilgrims who have gained so much from the Camino have returned the favour, by volunteering as *hospitaleros*, for example. Now would be an ideal moment to extend those themes of reciprocation – for reasons of power relations I'm reluctant to call it 'charity' – and establish funds or foundations to support, financially and logistically, those who would like to walk the Camino but lack the resources and/or confidence. To produce an infrastructure that is affordable to those who use it but still benefits the communities through which the Camino passes.

Outwith Spain I suggest there is also scope to develop pilgrim paths to a similar level as the Camino. The spiritual impact of the virus on a post-secular Europe interests me greatly, will the economic downturn and its socio-cultural consequences result in less focus on the material? Even before the virus decimated huge swathes of global economies people, young and old, were turning away from 'owning' possessions and looking instead to 'enjoy' experiences, this might, in part, account for the rise in popularity of the Camino de Santiago.¹⁹¹

Many years ago, I worked with a mental health charity, one of whose projects was investigating the relationship between spirituality, faith and mental health issues from the perspective of service users, a topic that was something of a no-go area, recalling Kung's claim that religion was psychiatry's last taboo (1987). Given the inevitable psychological consequences of both lockdown and reduced socio-economic opportunities, it's quite possible there'll be a renewed interest matters 'spiritual' – here I use the term in its loosest

¹⁹⁰ It should be noted, however, that the mass trespasses weren't supported by all rambling groups, many of who feared they would do more harm than good. There were also concerns from respectable 'ramblers' (who disliked the Americanism 'hiking') who disapproved of the young 'troubadours' and 'jazz-band larrikins'. See <https://keelehistory.wordpress.com/2015/03/06/mass-trespass/>

¹⁹¹ It's easy to get bogged down in an intergenerational conflict between 'millennials' and older generations ('boomers') but there is evidence that this phenomenon applies to the middle aged as much to the young. See, for example: <https://www.frontier-economics.com/uk/en/news-and-articles/articles/article-i7361-ownership-and-the-experience-economy/>

definition – as an alternative way of dealing with the emotional stresses and strains that will emerge in post-virus societies. And while I want to distinguish between those ‘emotional stresses and strains’ and more serious psychological problems such as PTSD and bipolar disorder, I think therapeutic walking which facilitates a deep engagement with the landscape offers an alternative/complement to orthodox treatments. This isn’t landscape as distraction or suppressant but landscape as stimulant.

Or maybe as a hand to hold on to in times of acute crisis. Again I speak from personal experience, walking has always been my default response to traumatic events. In 1986, as a final year undergraduate, I suffered what was then called a ‘nervous breakdown’ and was prescribed medication best described as a ‘chemical cosh’. After a week or so of staring at the television I ditched the drugs, returned to Dorset and hiked the Coastal Path. Thirty-years later I still have an abiding memory of swallows flying off the sea on their migration from the Sahel, of climbing St Aldhelm’s Head and seeing Weymouth Bay open up before me. A sort of homecoming.

It wasn’t a permanent respite from mental health issues but it was far more effective than the pills. And in their paper ‘Processes, Effects and Therapeutics of Pilgrimage Walking the St. Olav Way’ (2020), Jørgensen, Eade, Ekeland and Lorentzen posit something similar. One of their correspondents comments:

‘My mental health is always worse when I start walking but becomes better afterwards. Pilgrimage walking prolongs my life. I’ve had serious hospitalisations, also between walks, but it is pilgrimage walking that has saved me each time’ (2020:41).

But it’s worth noting that Jesús de la Gándara, a psychiatrist in Burgos, a popular stopover on the Camino, is critical of the idea of pilgrimage walking as therapy. Based on a few cases, he claims that walking the Camino can provoke relapse among psychotic, bipolar and depressive walkers, and calls the Camino a ‘mobile mental hospital’ (Jørgensen, Eade, Ekeland & Lorentzen 2020:35). Here I think it useful to distinguish between ‘pilgrimage walking’ and ‘being in the landscape’. As this research has shown, the latter can be as unsettling as it can be soothing if, through the kenotic emptying out I discussed in the preceding chapter renders us emotionally and spiritually vulnerable.

What the Camino also offers in a post-Covid world is solidarity, solidarity *between* as opposed to solidarity *with*. As the spaces and places for social interaction and support become increasingly virtual, pilgrimages and walks, perhaps local in nature, offer opportunities to reconnect. In a way, and thinking back fondly to the days I spent on the Camino with Chris and Cornelius and their love of wine and song, I see potential for a form of conscientisation that might be described as (very) loosely spiritual; reflection through

communitas and conviviality and praxis through participation and activism. In the words of Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'our [loose] spirituality is our methodology' (1984, his italics). And our *modus operandi*.

2. KEY ACADEMIC ISSUES WHICH AROSE DURING THE RESEARCH

2.1 GEOGRAPHY OR THEOLOGY? OR SOMEWHERE INBETWEEN?

In 2014 I gave a paper at the BISFT (British and Irish School of Feminist Theology) summer school entitled, after the Tom Petty song, 'You don't have to live a refugee'. In the introduction I confessed to feeling something of something of an interloper, like a gatecrasher at a party to which I've received a warm invite but where I'll inevitably bump into a former lover and her close friends. Or the only geographer in the village. The paper reflected the tension that's existed in this project since day one, am I writing for an audience of geographers or theologians? Bear in mind that it was supervised by a geographer (albeit one who's written about faith issues) and a theologian. If I seek to publish papers in journals, in which academic discipline should I look? Bear in mind also that although my formal academic training is in geography, I've been published more widely in theology, specifically feminist and queer theology.

In the 'Toolkit' I raised some of the issues that arise when bringing together subjects as diverse as geography – in both its human and physical disciplines – and theology and briefly discussed some of their existing combinations such as 'theography' (Sutherland 2017) and geotheology (Vann 2007). I also referred to the recent trend in geography for addressing themes such as emotion and spirituality and to how a geographer's faith might inform their engagement with their academic field (Slater 2004). The reorientation of human geography and its turn to the cultural created an audience that wasn't around when I was an undergraduate but even that brief is broad and all-encompassing. In 2016 I attended the International Colloquium in GeoHumanities in Barcelona which included themes such as art and cartography; geography, creativity, experimentation and innovation; geography, media, and social networks and nature, environment and humanities. To highlight the novelty of this approach to geography, the first edition of the GeoHumanities journal was published only the previous year. The GeoHumanities forum blog describes GeoHumanities as an 'umbrella term that has emerged internationally over the last 2 – 3 years to signal the growing interdisciplinary engagement between Geography and arts and humanities scholarship and practice'.¹⁹²

¹⁹² The GeoHumanities Forum is a blog produced to support and promote activities and events related to the GeoHumanities and is run by the Royal Holloway Centre for the GeoHumanities.

If this thesis has a protagonist, it's the landscape. Its relationship with and impact on the self, emotionally, spiritually and/or religiously is its focus. When the human exists stage left, the landscape is still there. Always will be. Yet there exists no single academic discipline which explores landscape in its variety and entirety, it remains a contested field torn between geography, history, archaeology, ecology and landscape design. The undergraduate degree which inspired this work – Geography and Landscape Studies – no longer exists, even the Society for Landscape Studies, which 'provides a forum for all those interested in a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the landscape and its evolution', reveals its slant with its journal *Landscape History*.¹⁹³ Which is not to say that the themes explored in the thesis aren't relevant to students of landscape history, there are several points of mutual interest such as Angel Paniagua Mazora's geographical perspective on 'The (lost) life of a historic rural route in the core of Guadarrama Mountains' (2017).

In the absence of landscape studies *per se*, GeoHumanities, being rooted in the pre-disciplinary origins of Geography and its earth writing, and acknowledging that 'Geography has never been the exclusive preserve of Geographers and has always sat uneasily across modern disciplinary division' seems a natural place for this research and any future projects that come from it.¹⁹⁴ Not least because, in the editorial to the first edition of *GeoHumanities*, *Imagining and Practicing the Geohumanities: Past, Present, Future*, Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon include 'Creativity, experimentation, and innovation' and 'Religion, belief, and the cosmos' as potential lines of enquiry for exploring the landscape (2015:1-2).

So, at the risk of posing another rhetorical question, is the a geography paper written by a theologian, or the other way round? At times I found myself working out the subject distribution on a percentage basis – maybe 60% one, 40% the other, the ratio fluctuated but geography always seemed to be in the ascendance, from a quantitative perspective, at least. Academic formation makes a difference, I feel comfortable speaking as a geographer, comfortable speaking as a political scientist yet if I address a theology audience I feel compelled to explain myself. That said, this thesis was very much written for a theological audience though perhaps for one which leaned towards practical and contextual theology, with an emphasis on the Mariological rather than the Christological.

Finally, given the debt it owes to Nick Papadimitriou's *Scarp*, and because psychogeography and, in particular, deep topography influenced its method, this thesis has also been written with those genres in mind. I address this in more detail below.

<https://geohumanitiesforum.org/about/>

¹⁹³ <https://www.landscapestudies.com/about/>

¹⁹⁴ <https://geohumanitiesforum.org/about/>

2.2 IN SEARCH OF COMMON GROUND: RESOLVING ACADEMIC TENSIONS AND DIVIDES

‘Landscapes refuse to be disciplined. They make a mockery of the oppositions that we create between time (History) and space (Geography), or between nature (Science) and culture (Social Anthropology).’

Bender (pers. comm.) (cited in Massey 2006:34)

One of the principal methodological approaches to this thesis was an engagement with psychogeography and deep topography. Both of these are represented in various manifestations of geography’s cultural turn, notably emotional geographies, phenomenology and post-phenomenology, more-than-representational theories and mobilities but none of these, individually, explore human/landscape encounters to the same extent.

Of the two, psychogeography has gained purchase in academic circles through the work of Alastair Bennet (2014, 2017), Morag Rose (2015), Phil Smith (2010) and Alexander John Bridger (2013). Tina Richardson’s *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography* (2015) was arguably the ground-breaking volume which persuaded even those tasked with drawing up A level geography specifications to take it seriously.¹⁹⁵ But this thesis has, on more than one occasion, stated its preference for deep topography which Eddie Procter considers ‘a more nuanced counterpart to the now perhaps over-cooked concept of “psycho-geography”, less shackled to its conceptual and urban prescriptions’.¹⁹⁶ One of the intentions of this research, therefore, is to lure deep topography further into the academic fold, without losing any of its subversive playfulness or diminish what Nick Papadimitriou’s referred to its ‘magnitude of response to landscape’.¹⁹⁷

This thesis has attempted to broach several intra and extra-disciplinary divides. That between geography and theology, for example, and the territory where human and physical geographers diverge – like two tectonic plates drifting apart. Its engagement with cultural geography and pilgrim studies has also brought it under the influence of anthropology, sociology and philosophy and at times it’s felt as if the geography’s being crowded out by these welcome but arriviste interlopers. When people ask me what I do they invariably get a glazed look in response. I tell them that technically, by academic discipline, I’m a cultural geographer but that I get my kicks from the physical stuff. And this is true. As I write this I’m preparing for a trip to Mexico which will involve encounters with active and dormant

¹⁹⁵ Personal conversation with OCR A level geography senior examiner, September 2019

¹⁹⁶ <http://landscapism.blogspot.com/2017/02/deep-topography-practice-landscape.html>

¹⁹⁷ Interview with John Rogers. From sound file: Papadimitriou, Nick and John Roger. 2009. *Defining Deep Topography*. Filename: nick deep top. mov [from soundfile]

volcanoes. I shall explore lava fields and fumaroles and, from a distance, gaze at the red glow of a simmering crater. I'm interested in the affect of these volcanic phenomenon but I'm equally interested in the processes which produce them, from lithology to geochemistry.

In his assessment of the future of geography, Nigel Thrift listed four problems he considered a blot on its otherwise successful copybook (2002). The first and most important he identified as human and physical geography splitting apart. This he attributed to physical geography moving into the sciences as human geography became more markedly social and cultural. The reason for this, he argues, is partly institutional as earth sciences have embraced physical geography whilst the social sciences have become markedly spatial such that each part of the discipline is as likely to seek allies from outside the discipline as it is inside it. As Doreen Massey put it, physical geographers like to carry the imprimatur of 'science', and as such are often saddled with 'physics envy' (2000).

So what's left of geography? An empty husk? The physical geographers have left for earth systems science, the human geography for social sciences. Is anybody actually *doing* geography anymore? This thesis attempts to follow the efforts of, amongst others, Doreen Massey, to bind the two sides of the subject back together by 'emphasizing how recent changes in scientific thinking (e.g. complexity) form a common ground for thinking about the nature of the world and for imagining new forms of space and time which do not rely on old-style models from physics' (Thrift 2002:295).¹⁹⁸ Massey's paper, *Landscape as a Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains* (2006), offers a way of restoring some form of entente cordial from where further excursions into how physical processes begat human responses.

Thrift was writing 21 years ago. He, Massey, Keith Richards and Barbara Bender continued the conversation with physical geographer Francis Magilligan in a paper entitled *Thinking Across the Divide* (2004). Here, Magilligan expresses the hope that 'the realization that physical geography operates within the bounds of interpretation may be one arena that spawns an important dialogue between human and physical geographers' and suggests that 'as the nature-culture debate rages in the new cultural geography, there may be important spaces in this debate where physical geographers may offer important voices' (2004:438).

¹⁹⁸ Thrift doesn't seem to hold out much hope for these rapprochements: 'I am sceptical about these efforts even as I support them. What I think is missing most is mutual respect and I think that that kind of trust is very difficult to build over the short-term' (2002:295)

So while this thesis is an attempt to place deep topography under the lens of academic examination (and maybe sprinkle it with the glitter of ‘respectability’), it’s also intended to be an exhortation to get back to *doing* geography using the mobile methods of deep topography and psychogeography in order to get under the landscape’s skin. In this I was encouraged by discussions with fellow doctoral student Lewis Winks as to what strategies could be adopted to pursue this. Clearly mine is through hiking in general and pilgrimage in particular, Lewis’ interests are in outdoor and environmental education, cultural transformation and teaching and learning in higher education (2018, 2019).

In *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene*, authors Bob Jickling, Sean Blenkinsop, Nora Timmerman and Michael De Danann Sitka-Sage make an urgent call for ‘a new attentiveness to the wild, while promoting a very anthropological – and realistic view of landscape’ (Winks 2019:1). With this research I’m trying to do something similar, and through this project outline ways in which humans might open themselves up to the landscape, emotionally, spiritually and/or religiously – a sort of template for future explorations of what the landscape is, how it came to be, and how we respond to it. In that sense, it serves as a staging post between the wide range of existing work on landscape and walking, affect and emotion and more personal and experimental explorations of landscape which fosters a spontaneous curiosity.

Given the above, it’s perhaps ironic that a thesis which strives to make geography whole again actively embraces a discipline with which it has, on the surface at least, very little in common. As an academic genre, pilgrimage and pilgrim studies have grown as exponentially as numbers on the *Camino Francés*. York University has its Centre for Pilgrimage Studies, Oxford a Pilgrimage Studies Network and in the USA William and Mary [university] hosts an Institute for Pilgrimage Studies. Whilst this thesis will add to the research with which these and other organisations and individuals are engaged, it’s also an exercise in exploring the theological consequences not just of pilgrim walking but of being in the landscape, immersed in it like a baptismal subject. This is not a biblical theology of landscape, along the lines of that outlined by František Štěch who suggests that ‘geographers, like theologians, always ask: What is behind the horizon’ (2017:154). His theology of landscape is a balanced relationship between the cataphatic and apophatic traditions, the sacred is both revealed and hidden. The divine is a personal mystery, lurking in the landscape, but also a revealing itself in ongoing acts of creation.

Like resurrection, creation is usually spoken of as a single, literally earth-shattering event but, like resurrection, it’s an ongoing process, which Nelly del Cid calls a commitment to building a different world which is ‘done day by day, with small acts’ (Best and Hussey

1996:23). In the same way, as rocks are deformed and destroyed as they plunge deep into the asthenosphere then thrust violently upwards in humungous orogenic movements, so the physical world is in a constant state of becoming, of re-creation. Without death there can be no life, this applies as much to the abiotic as it does to the biotic. The theological challenge of this thesis is to make creative use of this inherent instability in the form of nomadic spirituality, or, as Marcella and Nelly del Cid put it, a spirituality on the move, 'not settled, with elements of expectation in this walk with God which is [our] theology' (Best and Hussey 1996:203). To safely and fruitfully negotiate the earth's volatility is to adopt Marcella's *Caminata*, a theology of liberation. Like the Camino it is, if one so wishes, a never-ending process.

Finally, the style of this thesis and its engagement with literature are intended to contribute to the ongoing debate on representing landscapes through creative writing and, bearing in mind that Marcella Althaus-Reid's was one of the catalysts for this work, exploring narrative styles which challenge academic orthodoxy without being self-consciously (or, indeed, self-righteously) inflammatory. The 'indecent' in her *Indecent Theology* is not provocation for the sake of provocation but rather a marker of the position of poor women in both society and theology – even liberation theology and especially Mariology. *Indecenting* oneself, though the act of undressing, brings back the sense of reality and becomes a process of 'coming back to the authentic, everyday life experiences described as odd by the ideology – and mythology – makers alike' (2000:71).

3. METHODOLOGIES AND THE WORDING OF THE TITLE

3.1 WRITING FOR AN AUDIENCE

Universities and publishers alike are constantly behaving academics to use blogging and micro-blogging to maximise the impact of their research and reach audiences they might not otherwise have access to.¹⁹⁹ The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) has a website devoted to academic blogging which lists three basic kinds of academic blog posts:

1. Blogging for content tells people about research you're doing, or what you found.
2. Blogging for comment contributes to public conversation and debate, using your research and/or experience as material.
3. Blogging for reportage would include write-ups of events you went to, or things you've read.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ <https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/research-impact/how-to-write-an-academic-blog-post/>

²⁰⁰ <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/knowledge-exchange-and-impact/kei-guide/academic-blogging>

Interestingly, in response to its own question ‘is blogging *actual* research?’ (my emphasis) the LSE’s response is ‘no, but it can help improve your work’.²⁰¹ I’m unsure as to what does and does not constitute ‘actual research’ but from the very outset of this project blogging served as an important reflective research tool in the field. As it happens, I had intended, post-fieldwork, to use my blog for the purposes stated in the LSE’s guidelines, to share my research on a wider stage and engage in public conversation and debate, much as Eddie Proctor’s *Landscapism* blog does (see below). But the like the road to heaven, the long, long journey to good academic practice is paved with good intentions.

The use of social media is the subject of much earnest and often animated discussion on Camino forums. There exists a category of pilgrims, who might be described as forever pursuing authenticity, for whom the use of any digital technology is a no-no. A further subset might approve of keeping a blog, provided it’s written at the appropriate time and place (i.e. at the end of the day) but tend to disapprove of their fellow pilgrims spending time staring at their smartphones rather than gazing at their surroundings and generally ‘being in the moment’. This issue manifested itself during fieldwork and I reproduce below screenshots from a Twitter conversation I shared with novelist Melissa Harrison whilst departing Burgos.

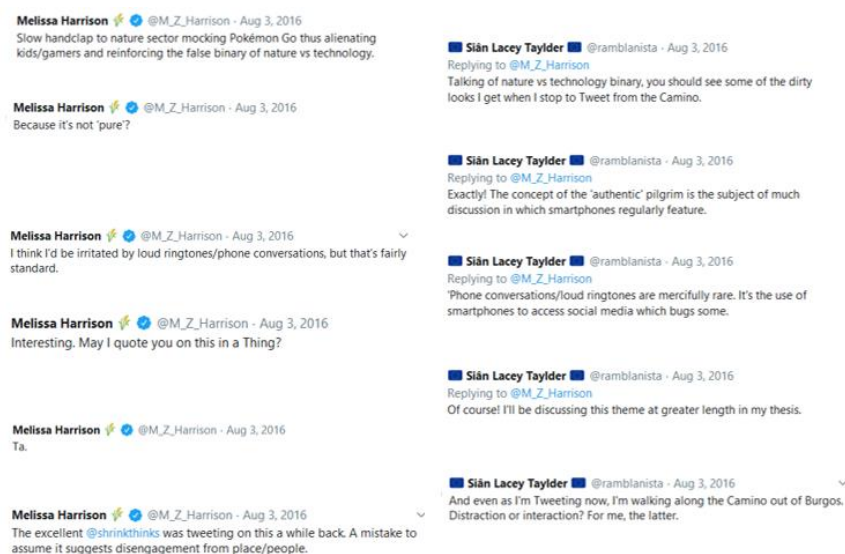


Figure 184: Screenshots of Twitter conversation with Melissa Harrison (3 August 2016)

Blogging and micro-blogging have the potential to move beyond being a digital record or diary which is shared with friends and family to speak to a wider audience. Inevitably, this creates a network of tensions between the researcher, the landscape and the path and her immediate and virtual audience. For Mortensen and Walker, these tensions occur as the blogging process ‘straddle[s] the boundaries between publication and process, between

²⁰¹ <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/knowledge-exchange-and-impact/kei-guide/academic-blogging>

writing towards others and writing for oneself. A weblog is always both for oneself and for one's readers' (2002:256). What was originally a private experience becomes a very public event.

This research initially employed three methods of data collection, principally to avoid the 'goldfish syndrome' I outlined earlier. Of these the most important was a digital voice recorder (DVR) which I used to record experiences and emotions as and when they happened. I consider this particularly effective on several occasions, notably in the church in Navarette. For me, this immediacy was essential which was why I eschewed using a conventional field notebook. But of course, in talking to oneself one can only have, at best, one eye and one ear on what's unfolding around oneself. Instead of writing up or transcribing my notes of an evening I tried to churn out a blog. The intention was to do this on a daily basis but I soon fell behind and eventually gave up and came to rely exclusively on my Twitter feed and DVR recordings.

Bonnie Nardi notes that posting of blog entries provides immediacy as well as 'a strong sense of the author's personality, passions and point of view' and here, perhaps, lies the crux of the difference between blogging and conventional note taking (Nardi et al 2004:42). The existence of the 'publish' button alters the dynamic, I'm no longer writing for myself and the research project but reaching out to a wider audience. The extent to which this alters the register depends, to a certain extent, on the researcher her/himself. On his *Landscapism* blog Eddie Proctor posted updates on the progress on his PhD thesis *Topographical legacies of monasticism: evolving perceptions and realities of monastic landscapes in the southern Welsh Marches*.²⁰² In his posts, the subject matter is always to the fore, the author's voice reassuringly at a distance whereas on my *Ramblinista* blog I adopted a more performative, informal and conversational style to both fieldwork write-ups and general comments on my research.²⁰³ My stance on this has always been that a thesis which seeks to explore the performativity of landscape using autoethnography as a tool should reflect the presence of self in its methodology. It's part of the process of animating the landscape and trying to represent all the emotions that swirl within and around it and therefore constitute it. To represent the landscape as the sum of all its parts rather than a series of individual and separate artefacts.

In his book *Our Virtual Shadow: Why We Are Obsessed With Documenting Our Lives Online* Damon Brown argues that by constantly documenting the events of our lives online, we risk reflecting on the 'memory of a personal event while it's happening, but we're less

²⁰² <http://landscapism.blogspot.com/p/phd-research.html>

²⁰³ <http://ramblanismo.blogspot.com/>

apt to truly process events happening outside of ourselves' (cited in Ogden 2015:89). This sentiment is even more pertinent for microblogging on sites such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter in which users are constantly connecting to and updating social media on their journeys. Ogden refers to this as 'accelerated reflection' and suggests it's not in how the journey is blogged but how the blog is eventually read (2015:89).

Unlike blogging, which permits at least a modicum of reflection before pressing the publish button, Twitter is much more a spur of the moment phenomenon and with a 280 character limit (140 at the time of fieldwork) it requires brevity. On the one hand, that brevity can focus the mind but on the other it can render the Tweet as important – if not more important – than the event it purports to represent. To this I plead guilty, on occasion I spent so long choosing the right words, or rather the words I thought my audience would appreciate, that the moment risked losing its vitality.

My thinking behind using Twitter not just as an accessory but as a principal research tool was as follows: We might consider the passage of an event on its trajectory from when it's observed or experienced to when it's given shape and form in text, on a page of this thesis, for example. On each incremental stage of this journey the event acquires a greater degree of stability as the observer tries to make sense of what happened. The first stage is to capture the moment as it happens, or as near as possible, by jotting down a note, taking a photo or making a voice recording. Then begins the process of making sense through reflection and evaluation, initially from personal experience but becoming progressively more grounded in analysis. It's a journey that rolls out across time and space and may continue even after it appears to have arrived at its destination, because no event is immune to revision.

In practice, this journey might take one or more of several routes, each of which speaks to a different audience, in terms of both quantity as well as constitution. At first I am speaking or writing only to myself. It's a private affair and may well remain so should I choose not to make it public, I may spend some time deciding whether or not it's relevant. When research takes on a personal or autoethnographic hue this timescale becomes significant. I can still, through self-censorship, assert control over its description, explanation and interpretation but once it's out of the bag it can't be undone.

It can't be undone but as long as the audience is limited there's still time for damage limitation. If I write up my field notes in an end-of-day diary my reflections remain safe in the private sphere, if I publish them on a blog they're visible to an audience, an unfiltered audience over which I have no control. A reasonable inference here might be that the

although the content of both the journal entry and daily blog are ostensibly the same, the way they're presented will be quite different.

All well and good but what differentiates microblogging – Twitter, in particular – from a more conventional blog (such as Eddie Procter's) is the audience. Whilst both generally engage in public engagement through comments, the to-and-fro between the person who Tweets and her/his audience is much more immediate. More than that, Twitter followers tend to be greater in number than those signed up to a blog and unlike blogposts there's always the potential for a Tweet to go 'viral'. At the time of fieldwork my Twitter account numbered about 1500 followers, but several of those had in excess of 20,000. Unless disabled, every Tweet comes with three buttons: 'respond', 'retweet' and 'like'. The last two are potentially problematic. In a situation, such as on the Camino, where there are few distractions, the 'like' button can facilitate an obsessional vanity – 'why is nobody liking my Tweet?' 'What am I doing wrong?' 'If a tree falls in a forest and there's no one around to hear it, does it make a noise?' 'If I Tweet and event and nobody likes it, has it really happened.'

So it's not just the Tweet, it's the aftermath that risks losing the moment. How easy it is to slip one's smartphone into a convenient place where, unwittingly or not, it can be checked with compulsive frequency. In my rucksack belt I have a pocket wide enough to insert my iPhone, I've given in to temptation far too many times. The 'retweet' button does something similar. I might have an immediate audience of only 1500 but if one of my followers 'retweets' one of my Tweets, the potential audience is immense and global. That possibility is also on my mind when I Tweet whilst out in the field, and this applies to all hikes and climbs, not just those on the Camino de Santiago.

Asking myself how this impacts on the conduct and conception of this research is a tricky question which requires some honesty in answering. Yes, I am aware of my audience and my Tweeting is performative. I tend to be a solitary walker and Twitter is a form of sharing my hikes and experience, in real time, with virtual companions. So, as I walk, I am often engaging with my followers and, perhaps, not giving the landscape my full attention. But social media also offers channels for proselytising, for spreading the word not just about my thesis but its underlying ethos, with an audience that's neither exclusively academic nor exclusively pilgrimage-oriented.

3.2 TONE AND STYLE

In her examination of Influencers use of selfies as a 'purposively commercial, thoughtful, and subversive endeavour', Crystal Abidin recalls how, at a conference, an academic

who'd briefly heard about her research topic bemoaned, 'Aren't these just young, rich women doing vain things online?' (2016:1). A similar accusation might be levelled at any researcher who invokes frivolity as a writing technique. In short, if the author isn't taking herself or her work seriously, why should the reader? Are the asides and fourth-wall-breaking conversations an attempt to disguise a lack of academic rigour and deflect deeper discussion? Here comes the opposition, I'll try to head them off at the pass with an attempt at humour.

In this thesis I employed frivolity – a term which, for the purpose of this research, encompasses devices such as jokes, fourth-wall-breaking asides and pop cultural references – for several reasons. Firstly, because it's my default style of communication, whether written or verbal. For example, I called upon these techniques in the upgrade process from MPhil to PhD, in both the presentation and the text. Secondly, because in writing a document in excess of one hundred thousand words over a time period of seven years it served a vital purpose in averting tedium and was a vital part of the cognitive process. A substantial proportion of this document was written during Spain's strict lockdown where I was confined to a small room in a first floor flat. I had only music for distraction, perhaps inevitably it seeped into and became part of the text. To remove it, almost surgically, in subsequent edits, risked breaking up both the train of thought and the narrative flow. Furthermore, during that period particularly I suffered from frequent and persistent bouts of writer's block which could only be released by thinking and writing with that Peter Elbow refers to as 'inventive fecundity' (1981:7).

Thirdly, because I take frivolity seriously and consider that, particularly in autoethnographic and autobiographical writing which 'includes the researcher's vulnerable self, emotions, body and spirit and produces evocative stories that create the effect of reality and seeks fusion between social science and literature', it can play an important role in questioning the notion of a coherent, individual self (Reed-Danahay 1997).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my intention was to employ frivolity as a form of self-reflexive subversion. At first sight, frivolity might be perceived as nothing more than an antonym for academic seriousness but Badley argues for its use as 'a way of resisting the dualisms that structure our understanding of being, knowing and judging'. These dualisms include depth/surface. essence/appearance, competence/performance, authenticity/pretence and truth/lies (2011:256).

For Badley, as for me, frivolity is too often presented on the pejorative side of these dualisms, playing into and maintaining damaging stereotypes. For example the subject matter of women writers was once (and, to a certain extent, still is) judged to be lightweight

and trivial whilst their male counterparts were regarded as serious contributors to knowledge and truth (2011:256). Instead, Badley follows McLure (2005) in calling for frivolity to ‘resist closure, to resist academic writing as certainty, as finality, as transparency and as universality’, citing Derrida as a prankster who suggested the university ought to be, a place of cerebral fun (2011:256). Indeed, for Derrida ‘writing represents (in every sense of the word) enjoyment. It plays enjoyment, renders it present and absent. It is play ...’ (1976, 312) and Badley goes so far as to argue that deconstruction is usually a ‘respectful but sometimes a frivolous analysis of texts to see how they function internally’ (Badley 2011:258).

But Derrida had his critics, who deplored descriptions of his work as ‘free imaginative play’ (Rorty 1998:338) and Elbow qualified his counsel by adding ‘tough critical-mindedness’ as a necessary complement to his inventive fecundity (1981:7). The comedy of UK double act Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise often appeared spontaneous but was, in fact, carefully scripted by writer Eddie Braben.²⁰⁴ As Wise commented in an interview ‘Eddie sends us a completely scripted show on which Eric and I will do some further work with the gags and situations’ (Hewett 2021:3). And this, though perhaps in reverse, is the key to the effective employment of frivolity in academic writing, for the spontaneous to prompt the scripted so that neither outshines the other – as with Eric and Ernie, the seam shouldn’t show. However, it’s for the reader, not the author, to assess how far I’ve succeeded in that.

Spontaneity prompted several of the talking points, both in the field, through voice recordings, and in the textual reproduction and commentary – and recall that I wanted to reproduce what happened in the field as accurately as possible and there were several pop songs that seemed relevant to the subject matter for more than having a pithy title or lyric. Madonna’s *Get into the Groove*, for example, exemplified the importance, physically and mentally, of establishing a rhythm when walking as did the lyrics to Matthew Wilder’s *Break My Stride*, reproduced to preface the concluding chapter, was intended to emphasise the almost obsessional desire to keep on walking even on arrival in Santiago. I consider these examples of performative writing rather than frivolity *per se* though I’m acutely aware they could be perceived as some sort of game of sneaking cultural pop references into a thesis without the reader noticing.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ The Times, 29/8/2004 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/eric-and-erns-winning-air-of-spontaneity-was-a-hardwon-illusion-zx9ws6nn7j3>.

²⁰⁵ I imagine the challenge would be to do it without either supervisors or examiners realising. There are several anecdotal examples of this but these may well be a case of urban myths or gratuitous bragging.

So, principally for the field report narrative, but also, to a lesser extent, in other sections, I adopted a spur-of-the moment, 'stream of consciousness approach' in which I explored themes through a variety of techniques which include imagined conversations, asides and cultural references to pop songs. The aim was for the writing to bring to life not just the landscape but the encounters I and other pilgrims shared with it. The problem with this approach to academic writing is that in trying to win hearts of readers it also runs the risk of alienating them by coming over as teeth-grindingly ingratiating. Nobody likes a smart-arse, there's a fine line between adopting a playful tone and trying – and failing – to be too clever. At some point the narrative collapses in on itself and begins to metamorphose into parody. The desire to take the reader with me backfires and I fall victim to a similar fate to the pile of rejected books on Laura Richardson's desk.

I'm not suggesting that tried and trusted methods of academic writing are passé. In writing the discussion chapter, in particular, I moved towards them for the sake of clarity. But it was one of the more difficult tasks of the project, reining in my 'natural' expansive style, trying to represent the vitality, the *joie de vivre* (and whatever is its antithesis) of the Camino experience whilst at the same time grasping with complex themes. This thesis is my life's work, over seven-and-a-half years I've poured all my physical, emotional and, indeed, financial resources into it. And, most importantly, it's a serious piece of research. I want my voice and the issues to be taken seriously and to contribute to larger bodies of work. But, like my rucksack and walking boots, it's become intrinsically part of me. It's a fine line to tread, the expression of self within and as part of research and the requirement to communicate in a language and style that is inclusive for all, particularly those for whom English is not a first language or with whom cultural references might not resonate. It might be ironic that in attempting to move beyond the borders of the Anglophone world and incorporate language and ideas from Hispanic and Latino cultures, I may well have unwittingly rendered my research less accessible to the very people I'd like to reach, to those for whom the existing lexicon of academia is more page-burner than page-turner.

In the conclusion to his paper on the use of frivolity in academic writing, Badley reminds us that 'whilst we must be concerned about writing for our academic peers we should also remember that the true writer always plays to an audience of one' (2011:264). Here, I suggest, are the horns of the dilemma which faces anyone trying to push the boundaries of academic writing, to be both entertaining and instructive. I think this thesis shows it's not

However, The Guardian documented this instance of Swedish-based scientists inserting Bob Dylan lyrics into research articles as part of a long-running bet.
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/sep/29/swedish-scientists-bet-bob-dylan-lyrics-research-papers>

at all easy but, equally, I don't think that should preclude academic publishers from encouraging authors to experiment with different and innovative registers. In a project that was beset with tensions that, for the most part, fostered creativity, this was probably the most enduring and difficult to resolve. Writing is a very personal act, a presentation of self through text. Words matter and I think lovingly about each and every one I type. I'm in my mid-fifties, it's a hard habit to break and writing is also part of my job, teaching students essay-writing skills. I wanted to be a published novelist even more than I wanted to be a geographer, and long before I became a theologian. Perhaps that shows. By the time I'd completed my final draft I'd reconciled the geography/theology dilemma and made my peace with academia, we'd had our differences but the writing style employed here isn't an expression of that or an attempt to dismiss its agency. Neither is it a manifestation of the imposter syndrome which dogged my time of study, though it might not be unreasonable to wonder whether it could be an attempt to paper over any intellectual gaps or deflect critical attention.

What constitutes 'experimental' research isn't easy to define. For Angela Last, 'experimental geographies' include 'anything from embedding new forms of citizen involvement in institutional processes to questioning disciplinary boundaries through the use of poetry in academic writing' (2012:707). It also includes collaborative approaches such as this work which combines geography and theology. But not all experimental methods achieve what they set out to do, producing outcomes that are unexpectedly familiar or which leave situations unchanged. Furthermore, because they are, to various extents, ground-breaking, experimental methods bring with them an element of risk. I took a cue from Ian Cook's *You Want to Be Careful You Don't End Up Like Ian, He's All Over the Place* (2001) which, from an autobiographical, 'confessional' perspective, tells the story of his PhD experience through a series of rhetorical questions. It's a narrative with which I have a great deal of empathy, in terms of both subject matter and style. Like Ian, I didn't choose to write in an informal register just because it was the 'latest clever, "cutting edge", groovy thing to do', I chose it because it seemed the most effective way of representing the unrepresentable (2001:105).²⁰⁶

As it happens, I'd be more than happy to end up like Ian and, although my doctoral research is very different to his, like him I've tried to write something I'd have loved to have read at an earlier stage in my academic career (in geography, at least. For theology Marcella fulfilled a similar role). I, too, have found writing to be a liberating act from the

²⁰⁶ I should add here that I worked as a post-graduate teaching assistant on one of Ian's cultural geography modules at Exeter University, hence the first-name terms.

'straightjacket of proper research' and I ask myself the same questions: 'Does it work?', 'Can you take it as a serious piece of academic writing?', 'Am I clever enough for this game?' (2001:118-119).

I can't answer those questions. When you stray from the signposted path there's always the risk of getting lost, as almost happened when I first walked the *Ruta Dragonte*. Now, I actively embrace the possibility of getting lost. In the words of Rebecca Solnit, it leaves the door open for the unknown (2006:4) though I'm acutely aware that many fellow hikers find it a disconcerting experience. But I never go walking without a map, and because I've been doing this for so long, I can always find my way home. My audience doesn't have that luxury, I am their guide through this narrative just as I am on the walks I lead. To get lost in the middle of the countryside with a group of ramblers would be a personal embarrassment and professional *faux pas*. My punters have paid for a specific experience, they expect it to 'do what it says on the tin', to coin another ageing cultural reference. If I want to make random deviations, best do it in my own time and space.

The very first words of this thesis referred to it to a journey, a journey that is as much personal as it is physical, engaging with autobiography and autoethnography. The road to Santiago is so busy and well-signposted it's almost impossible to go astray, the narrative that describes human/landscape encounters on that road are necessarily less direct and in places veer into less-frequented territories. It's a road paved with good intentions but like all good intentions there's the potential for idealism to emerge the worse for wear when it comes up against pragmatism. But those hard-nosed realities shouldn't deter experimental methods. Indeed, as Isabelle Stengers argues, no method is neutral, and 'the intrinsic complexity of living systems ... does not impose a dramatic limit on any possibility of experimentation. What it imposes is the necessity for an intelligent experimentation, which assumes the risky responsibility of asking relevant questions' (1997:16). If we stick to the tried and trusted we also take risks, of 'silencing the very thing [we are] interrogating' (Stengers 1997:16). For experimentation to work requires a close interrogation of one's methods, an awareness of what is and isn't relevant and the ability to acknowledge when a particular method hasn't worked – or even backfired.

So, like liberation theology, experimentation is a process of praxis and reflection which, following Zoë Bennet, requires three moments: 'the moment of praxis, the moment of reflection on praxis, and the moment of return to a renewed praxis. It begins and ends in praxis' (2007:39). In a sense, this thesis, which has undergone a prolonged process of genesis and gestation, is a piece of work still in search of the right method for representing landscape/human relations, like a cyclist pedalling uphill, constantly trying to find the right

gear. And like the cyclist, only when I get to the finishing post will I know whether or not I've made the right choices.

3.3 AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

You can take the woman out of the landscape but you can't take the landscape out of the woman. If I've already written that elsewhere I make no apologies, I think it's worth repeating: *I am the land, the land is me*, the first person singular, subject and object has been the principle line of enquiry. That wasn't my intention but the same synchronicity which drew my Camino cohort/family together also forced it apart and from Carrión de los Condes onwards, with a couple of fleeting exceptions, I failed to make similar connections. I tried but maybe, as I got closer to Sarria, I didn't try hard enough.

Nevertheless, I'd argue that this isn't a predominantly univocal narrative. If I've succeeded in my task, there's one other voice that should come through as loud and clear, that of the landscape itself. The land, like me, is subject, object and co-protagonist. One of the principal aims of this research was to 'catch' its emotional and religious/spiritual performativities through methods which 'orthodox' representational approaches tend to flatten. To do this I had to transform myself into a sort of phenomenological 'insect trap', drawing sensations to me. Triggered by affect, emotions emerge and criss-cross the human/landscape encounter like charged atoms. But they're also parasites, searching for home in lived human experience, otherwise they'll fizzle out and fade, become nothing more than a fleeting memory, soon forgotten.

The pilgrim on the Camino makes for ideal receptacle for these emotions and sensations. As a researcher my role is quite simple, to expose myself – or make myself vulnerable – by revealing the autobiographical and autoethnographical circumstances which brought me there. They're like moths to a flame, all I have to do now is the slam the lid such as quickly as I can to avoid the risk of 'goldfish syndrome'. And that's why I came to eschew traditional recording methods such as journal writing and rely purely on a digital voice recorder and social media. Thus, to paraphrase Aull, the focus seems to be on the self but is, in fact, the self as acted upon and fundamentally altered by contact with others, in this case the landscape (2012:219).

I'm not just walking *on* or through the landscape but walking *with*: 'foot touches matter but matter touches foot as breeze touches skin; the world displays sensibilities other than our own, prior to consciousness, even to bodily-based perception' (Clough and Calderaro 2019:xiii). This thesis asserts that the landscape is a more-than-human presence and possess a 'character' and 'temperament' of its own. This has always been, for me, an

innate sensation that struck me as something more tangible when I first read Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native* as an adolescent. From that starting point, John Cowper Powys' *Wessex Novels* quartet was a the next logical stopping point on a trajectory that found a logical destination in the psychogeography of Iain Sinclair and, more pertinently, the deep topography of *Scarp*.

The connection is how the landscape is represented through text, the shared theme what might loosely be called 'creative writing' (or even 'writing geography creatively' (Ward 2014:755)) but, in this instance, is more akin to giving one's imagination full rein to dig deep and get beneath the earth's physical skin. Not like the geotechnical drilling rigs I used to come across in my brief career as a soil engineer, more the brush and trowel of Nancy the archaeologist. As pilgrims and walkers we have our own tools that sift the earth as, with every step, we dislodge the surface. Our boots. If, as Edensor suggests, our bodies are the means through which we experience and feel the world by writing their own meanings and feelings upon a space in a process of continual remaking then our boots are the nib of our fountain pens (2000:100). And here's the crux of the analogy, the nib both deposits and erodes. Even as it leaves a trail of thick black ink it scratches the surface, disturbing the layers beneath and leaving something of itself, memories and emotions, hopes and fears, behind.

3.4 A REFLECTION ON THE ROLE OF THE TITLE IN THE TEXT

As a child, reciting the rosary seemed a pointless exercise, the same repeated litany going round and round in circles, literally. I've compared reciting the rosary to making pilgrimages and thru-hikes and in the same way that it took praxis (direct engagement with theology) to understand the function of the rosary as meditative or reflective prayer, that led me to understand that even though all paths have a destination the peripatetic act doesn't have to lead down a dead-end road. But repeating a mantra ad nauseum won't make it come true and that's why, in the final paragraphs of the thesis' concluding chapter, I change the emphasis of the verb in *you are the land, the land is you* from *ser* to *estar*, from be to become.

Getting to that point required time and distance. Firstly, over the course of several summers of pilgrim-walking followed by two months on various Caminos for the 'official' fieldwork and then latterly, through the lengthy process of writing up and making sense of these experiences, the title began to define me as much as I had initially defined it. Ultimately, it took the enforced immobility of Spain's Covid lockdown and its impact to prevent it becoming an end in itself. In its most essential sense, the land becomes me and I become the land when we know each other inside out and possibly too well, when I've

walked all its paths in all weathers and seasons. When we've exhausted one another and the thrill is gone which is why, at the end of this journey I have no desire to *be* the land because there are other paths to walk and other stories to tell.

So the final refrain of the title is a personal one and with those last words this particular journey came to an end but the journeying didn't. In the same way that being at one with the land risks being consumed by it, subjugating one's identity to its physical characteristics, economic possibilities and socio-political/cultural values, the driving desire to make sense of it through scholarly research can do something similar. Not quite 'I am academia, academia is me' but something along those lines. Writing this thesis has been a journey of reflection but it's time to move on to other lands and landscapes and put into practice what I've learned over the duration of this project, explore its wider implications. Because once this thesis is done another journey begins and the process repeats itself elsewhere. 'Praxis begets reflection, reflection begets praxis': if I were starting this project all over again that might its title.

* * *

You are the land, the land is you. It's a phrase that recurs, like a refrain, throughout this thesis. Almost like a mantra, at times. If I repeat it often enough, maybe it'll come true. Where does this merging of the human with the more-than-human begin, and where does it take us in the end? It's not so much fusion as symbiosis, the 'living together in more or less intimate association or close union of two dissimilar organisms'.²⁰⁷ With the accumulation of time and distance, the pilgrim becomes indistinguishable from her surroundings, blending in and adapting, like a mountain hare in winter. She learns how to modify every aspect of her daily life to these changed circumstances, how to move easily and effectively through the landscape, where to put her feet, how to cushion her blisters.

At first she sees the land as a challenge, an obstacle to be overcome, like the climb from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port over the Pyrenees. She eyes it up like an enemy, and prepares herself to withstand any impediment it can throw her way. Presently, she learns the importance of rhythm and stride and begins to realise it isn't a place to be conquered or colonised, that if she wants the land to take care of her, she must take care of it. Talk about Stockholm syndrome, by the end of the trail, because it's literally with her every step of the way, she's invested in it all her emotional energy and confided her most intimate fears. It becomes the portal to her dreams, a pathway to transformation. Whether she acts on it is another matter, but the potential is there.

²⁰⁷ Merriam-Webster dictionary

For all but the most dedicated or obsessive pilgrim, there comes a point when she has to stop walking and return home, to take her leave of the lands and landscapes which have part of her daily existence for weeks, even months. The suddenness of separation is in stark contrast to the slow and steady process of coming together, the rupture is distressingly painful. It's reverse Fisher King syndrome, torn from the land, without a yellow arrow to follow, the pilgrim becomes a pale shadow of herself, listless and without direction. And that's what many return to the Camino de Santiago year after year, to restore the equilibrium they encountered whilst hiking the trail.

And in that sense, 'you are the land, the land is you' could be construed as an undesirable, solipsistic relationship, as destructive as any physical addiction. If the land is an end in itself rather than a means to an end then it risks losing its liberating, transformative potential and the pilgrim or hiker risks missing out on the opportunity of losing her way.

4. REPRESENTING THE UNSTABLE, THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN AND THE BEYOND-HUMAN

4.1 A PLEA FOR PLAYFULNESS IN REPRESENTATION²⁰⁸

I think it fair to say that had Marcella not published *Indecent Theology* (2000) nor Nick Papadimitriou written *Scarp* (2013) this thesis would not have come into being. Two key texts united by a common theme – their use of creative and, in the case of Marcella, provocative writing to pursue exciting new trajectories in their respective fields of knowledge and experience. I was drawn to the works and the author because both were fused in their writing, and of course I had the privilege of meeting with Marcella in person.

This is a project which leans heavily on autoethnography and from the opening salvo there existed a tension between the personal (what I want to do) and the practical (what the academy requires me to do – or rather, what I thought the academy required me to do). Over time that tension has eased to the extent that, thanks to my supervisors' forbearance, the academy and I have made our peace but I've tried to maintain an air of frivolity as well as 'playfulness'.

Badley argues that when academics choose titles for the texts they also reveal something about who they are, that titles are 'not only thresholds into what academics write but also into what and who they are' (2013:626). On embarking on this prolonged exercise, perhaps my principal fear was that the landscape would get bogged down. Not just in a morass of jargon and verbiage but in its attitude. The landscape doesn't take itself too

²⁰⁸ *Animate* literally translates as 'animate or enliven yourself' but is equally used for 'cheer up' or 'go for it'.

seriously and neither do many pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. At least, not all of the time.

In the Camino narrative I've written about pain, physical and suffering, though perhaps I haven't stressed enough how this a self-elective suffering. With titles such as 'I want to feel the Camino in my legs' (Egan 2011) and 'Meaningful pain' (Luik 2012) one might get the impression that pedestrian pilgrimage is the pedestrian equivalent of mis-lit. The reality is quite the contrary; far more tears are shed through joy than sadness. Remembering how Chris and Cornelius' penchant for stories and song preceded them, and how two Italian pilgrims burst into a spontaneous rendition of *Ave Maria* in a café in Castrojeriz, I wanted to convey the effervescent fun of being in the world and also, of representing how the world comes into being in the text.

4.2 WRITING THE WORLD INTO LIFE

It turns out that I have several things in common with geographer/poet Tim Cresswell.²⁰⁹ We were undergraduate geography students at the same time – albeit at institutions at different ends of the higher education ladder – and we both used poetry to express ourselves geographically. An indolent student, I spent much of my lecture time writing poems which focused on the landscape of Wessex and the beginnings of my struggle with gender dysphoria. I don't think they were particularly good poems but equally they weren't that bad. Turning to poetry to explore the landscape seemed a most natural form of expression and my dissertation, on landscape and literature, drew on contemporary Cornish poets such as Peter Redgrove, which is how I came across the work of Jack Clemo (Redgrove 1983).

And like Cresswell I've spent much of my academic life torn between formal disciplines (geography, political science and theology) and creative writing, to the extent that in 2008 I was accepted to study for an MA in Professional Writing at Falmouth University. For Cresswell, geography, it seems, is very much part of the poet's toolkit, for me creative writing, both poetry and prose, is part of the geographer's toolkit (2014:144). Following Tally, I use literary cartography to map the social spaces of my world, 'drawing particular attention to the spatial practices involved in literature' (2011:1). I'd like to extend Tally's critical practice to include theology because if one can explore place and space through literature one can surely do the same with spirituality and religiosity. And on a practical basis, my only published novel attempted both, though not, at the time, intentionally:

'A thick, impenetrable haze shimmered and flickered with such intensity that it drained the parched grass to a bleached, insipid orange; the whole valley

²⁰⁹ As he describes himself (2014:144)

seemed to lay under a self-imposed siege of silence. The sun was consuming everything, each and every one of us, the fragments and fractions of our erring souls.

The alluring meadows of the nascent River Bride: even in this driest of summers, still lush and luxuriantly verdant; replete with relentless growth, still heady with fecundity and desire. We wandered together through the waist high grasses and flowers; omniscient nature, blood red and predatory, hungry in tooth and in claw' (Taylder 2006:189).

In a sense, the fact that it's fiction is irrelevant because the landscape it seeks to represent is very real. This is, of course, what authors do, from Hardy to Powys but even academic writers, from Dewsbury to Badley, in their 'animating, embodying, *trying adventures*', can, as Roth suggests, pretend to be anything they want (cited in Badley 2015:717).²¹⁰

4.3 THE SECRET LIFE OF FOOTNOTES

Hidden in the 'notes' section of Badley's paper on 'adventurous' writing is a most intriguing confession: 'I might well have been a cultural geographer myself had I not been ejected from the School of Geography in 1959 ...' (2015:717).²¹¹ I immediately began to wonder under what circumstances Professor Badley had been 'ejected' from university. How euphemistic is that 'ejected'? From the wording it feels like some great injustice was done to him (as he's 'fessed up' I'm supposing he wasn't guilty of a serious offence, criminal or otherwise). Above this I've scribbled, in pink highlighter 'I bring my life to this', because that was the thought which immediately crossed my mind, and, in terms of witness/testimony, I think immediate thoughts are worth preserving as they are immediately thought.

Badley's comment took me back to the 'chicken and egg' conundrum I toyed with for much of this project but hasn't, until now, made it into the final cut: *I am this thesis, this thesis is me*, but which came first? I might have breathed academic life into it on a Friday afternoon in October 2013, over drinks in the postgraduate canteen in Exeter University's Amory Building but it was already extant in potential when I was an adolescent teenager, moody, confused and often at odds with the world.

'I bring my life to this'. But how much? When is too much information? A butterfly flaps its wings in the Amazon and a tornado forms over Texas; in the summer of 1991 a twentysomething male drops out of an MSc in Geotechnical Engineering at a college in north-west England and a PhD thesis in geography and theology begins to take form. How sweet is failure?

²¹⁰ It doesn't have to stop at creative writing, that just happens to be my *modus operandi*. A couple of years ago I saw an enthralling staged performance of Joe Simpson's 'Touching the Void' which captured the raw emotions of a mountain tragedy quite perfectly. (I have a reference of staged one woman Camino show for this).

²¹¹ According to his brief biography, Badley ended up a university professor interested in academic/faculty development' (2015:719). Cultural geography's loss?

There are two reasons for bringing up this particular incident (although I can think of at least half a dozen more personal ‘failures’ which shape this work). Firstly, because hiking the Camino de Santiago is the sort of thing people undertake when they’ve done something like being ejected from or failed at an educational establishment, in that sense they’re already ‘betwixt and between’ when they arrive at their starting point. How they experience the landscape is thus predicated, to a certain extent, on that ‘failure’ (and, hopefully, maybe against all odds, succeeding in arriving in Santiago). Secondly, because I think that to non-academics, academics appear simply to *be* (Gramsci’s (1998) ‘traditional intellectuals’, if you like), we hear very little about how they *become*. And I think this can be problematic in the way in which academics speak to the world because – and here I speak from outsider experience as masters student at the Institute of Latin American Studies in 1998 and latterly as a doctoral candidate at Exeter University seven years ago – it seems, to paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, that academics are born and not made.

So I’m keenly interested in the autobiographical/autoethnographical life stories which precede the research and academic projects because motivations don’t suddenly appear from out of nowhere. Why, for example, has my geography supervisor Paul [Cloke] focussed on faith-based geographies as well as rural geographies and time-deepened dwelling? And what brought Susannah [Cornwall, theological supervisor] to queer and intersex theology? Throughout this thesis I’ve tended to wear my heart on my sleeve, not just because it was part of the methodology or because, I tend to be a warts ‘n’ all sort of person but because it’s an integral part of the performative process.

5. THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE LANDSCAPE.

5.1 TOWARDS A LIBERATING THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTERS IN LANDSCAPE

As part of its recent renaissance, the Camino de Santiago has been utilised as a form of restorative justice for young offenders, practised by organisations such as the French *Seuil* project, whose *raison d’être* is ‘to bring young people in difficulty, socially disrupted, often plunged into despair, to become the actors of their own reintegration through an individual walk [of] about 3 months, 1600 km, abroad, without phone or music in your ears’.²¹² In this reincarnation of one of the original purposes of medieval pilgrimage, taking a troubled

²¹² <https://www.assoseuil.org/pourquoi-seuil> (my translation). Sadly, in 2012 the Belgium government withdrew its funding for an organisation called *Oikoten* which arranged these trips. See <https://newint.org/features/2012/07/01/redemption-road-pilgrimage/>.

person out of their place (or comfort zone) into an unfamiliar landscape and culture for a prolonged period of time and distance is intended to effect a personal transformation.

It's not essential that such endeavours take place in 'exotic' foreign climes or even within the context of historically religious or spiritual environments. One of the post-doctoral aims of this research is to explore the potential for setting up similar projects with interested parties on a more every day and accessible basis.

But given that much of the liberatory transformation that takes place on pilgrimage is internal – and not necessarily enduring – it's important to consider how this manifest might itself on a wider stage and incorporate groups and communities for whom walking the Camino is, ultimately, an irrelevance. Damascene conversions are all very well but what's of more concern to this thesis is where the energy generated by these experiences is directed. A butterfly flaps its wings in northern Mexico and a tropical storm begins to brew in the South China Sea; a pilgrim hobbles into the Plaza del Obradoiro and ... what happens next, beyond that immediate elation and longer-lasting sense of satisfaction.

Heather Warfield suggests that pilgrimage is a psychological universal and that, because of the universality of the phenomenon, there may be shared experiences and narratives that could lead to a transformation of humanity as a whole (2019:2). There have been several studies recording how transformation occurs on and over the course of the Camino de Santiago but less on the long-term consequences (Frey 1998). What happens on the Camino tends to stay on the Camino and that often includes memory and experience. The pilgrim returns home bursting with evangelical mission, determined to proselytise but nobody wants to know. Although I met up with several members of my Camino family a few months after we'd all returned home it was nothing more than a social get-together, a time to reminisce. There was no follow-up research, formal or informal, to have attempted to do would have been beyond the remit of this project but I *am* interested in the extent to which the transformations affected by the landscapes of the Camino might be reproduced in local, more mundane environments, the sustainability of that affect, if you like.

The Camino de Santiago has a range of characteristics peculiar to itself in terms of method of mobility, faith, duration and popularity. Of Christian pilgrimages, only the Via Francigena from Canterbury to Rome compares in length, and the numbers of pilgrims who follow it are tiny in comparison. Its demographic differs greatly from other Christian pilgrimages both within and outwith Europe, others, like St Olav's way, are less Catholic in

nature (Grau 2021).²¹³ And this thesis hasn't even touched on pilgrimage in other faiths, such as the Hajj. But it's its contention that walking plays a pivotal role in the Camino's capacity and that its length – time and distance – increases the possibility for personal change to be enduring. In light of this, it would be useful for future research to make comparisons between long distance pilgrimages and long distance secular hikes.

In the introductory chapter I wrote of my wish to explore the notion of a 'theology of landscape', one that would fit comfortably in bookshelves marked 'theologies of liberation'. But on reflection a 'theology of landscape encounters' would seem a more accurate description. Here I prefer 'encounter' to 'experience' as it suggests a relationship of equals and rejects notions of agency and passivity and brings to mind the meeting between the Virgin Mary and Juan Diego on this hill of Tepeyac in the *Nican Mopohua*.

In that narrative, the sacred speaks to the profane using the language of landscape – *flor y canto* (flower and song). It represents the coming together of the human, the more-than-human and the beyond-human to forge new relationships, represented in the countenance and dress of Our Lady of Guadalupe and hailed by Elizondo as a 'new creation' which overturns the colonialist *status quo ante*. This is what distinguishes liberative landscape/divine encounters – more specifically, liberative landscape/Marian encounters – from those which reaffirm orthodox ideologies, for example the appearance of the Virgin Mary at Fátima in 1917.²¹⁴ In both Pre-Columbian Latin America and pagan, Mediterranean Europe, the landscape was a potent divine force, an inherently 'sacred ecology', as William Christian argues (1996:302). With varying degrees of success, the Church has progressively appropriated these landscapes, and the rituals that were practised therein, to control the expression of popular belief.²¹⁵ It hasn't been an easy task, not least because the divine itself resists attempts to be sequestered – in the Guadalupe narrative, the Church had to come to Juan Diego and Tepeyac, not vice versa. And the divine often turns to the marginalised and oppressed – women, children and the indigenous – to serve as intermediaries. Anna Fedele's (2012, 2014) work shows how, from a feminist perspective, the sacred within the landscape can be accessed and recovered through rituals and, I suggest, pilgrimage does just that .

²¹³ See for example, Richard Scriven (2014) on day pilgrimages to Croagh Patrick, Sallnow (1991) on pilgrimage in the Andes and, from personal experience, pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

²¹⁴ The Fatima apparitions, like those in Ezquioga, Spain in 1931, were appropriated by conservative, anti-communist elements in the Catholic Church, such as the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fátima (see Perry and Echeverría 1988, Hammington 1995).

²¹⁵ In the early 1970s the Catholic primary school I attended in the English Midlands still chose a May queen and danced the maypole (Taylder 2004).

To an extent, pilgrimage along the *Camino de Santiago* is an example of this decolonisation. The saint who inspired the path to where his remains are interred has been celebrated as *matamoros* (moor slayer) and arrogated to promote Franco's policy of National Catholicism has lost much of *his* potency (Kissling 2003). The contemporary pilgrim might still follow the way in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment but is more likely to tap into it for reasons that are more cathartic than Catholic, more therapeutic than doctrinal, and as likely to be directed at the imminent as the eternal. Warfield and Hetherington suggest that the pilgrim's interaction is now with the natural environment and that leads them to feel a sense of integration with water, soil, trees, even the clouds. It's this sense of integration with nature which brings a 'heightened awareness of the role of humans in contributing to the environment and interacting with out surroundings on a more holistic manner' (2019:2).

I can still remember my first encounter with liberation theology, not in war-torn El Salvador but in the small English town of Market Deeping in the mid-1970s. I must have been no more than eleven years old and already fed up with being dragged to mass every Sunday morning but one evening, whether through parental persuasion or choice, I attended a talk on liberation theology given by a priest from Peru. That I can still remember the event, and its mention of Gustavo Gutierrez, suggests it made a deep impression and even as I rejected the liberal Anglo-Irish Catholicism of my youth I still held a candle for its occasional engagement with progressive politics in Latin America and, some twenty years later, in Timor-Leste (East Timor).

This was a time, and I was of an age, when Catholic schools would entreat their male pupils to consider whether they might have a vocation to the priesthood. Because we were young and gullible and brought up in the faith, many of us took the call to search our souls with some gravity before rejecting it out of hand. The point was that for even those who didn't shun the Church, who grew up and repeated the cycle of the reproduction of faith with their own children, it was a step too far. It asked too much of them, there was a limit to the personal sacrifices they were prepared to make. It was the responsibility of the clergy to effect spiritual and political change, the role of the laity to follow.

I think the laity underestimated themselves and their agency. Many years later, carrying out research on Christian Base Communities in El Salvador confirmed this. Here were 'ordinary' people *doing* theology, often without official sanction. And in the same way that faith is passed down from parent to child, so I returned to the UK with the zeal of an evangelist. Some people listened, more than I'd anticipated, so even though our local

church's way of *doing* theology continued to revolve around the traditional food and alcohol, there was engagement, discussion and an openness to change.

Hilary Janks distinguishes between politics with an upper case P and lower case p. The former pertains to macro politics: 'government and world trade agreements and the United Nations' peace-keeping force ... ethnic or religious genocide and world tribunals' whereas the latter is about 'the micro-politics of everyday life ... the minute-by-minute choices and decisions that make us who we are' (2012:151). I make a similar distinction with theologies of liberation. Their eschatological vision, based on a 'preferential option for the poor', is to overturn existing socio-economic structures to create a society in which full worth and dignity is restored not only to the marginalized and the oppressed but the insignificant, the unimportant and, echoing the words of Romero, those without a voice. Upper case Liberation Theology speaks of the grand narratives of resistance, armed struggle and guerrilla warfare, David versus Goliath, all of which grab headlines but are, of course, susceptible to romanticisation. Lower case liberation theology is more quotidian and mundane, often apparently inconsequential. For the poorest in society, particularly women, attending Sunday mass in their best finery is an expression of their dignity in the face of material adversity – the bastards will not grind them down (Taylder 2002:61).

That pilgrimage can be construed as a transformational quest was noted by Winkleman and Dubisch, who stated 'Life-transforming experiences are at the core of both "traditional" and more contemporary forms of pilgrimage' (2005:xxi). Damascene conversions do happen on the Camino de Santiago, moments of revelation in which clarity suddenly shatters the haze, individual pilgrims have gone on to do great things but as often as not they come almost unnoticed, the movement from sickness to wellness, for example, from grief to closure and from fractured to integrated.

But the liberatory capacity of landscape/human encounters lies in their ability to work minor miracles over time and effect a transformation that is, arguably, more durable, one that's been ground into the earth with the passage of the pilgrim's boots and left its mark both physically and mentally.

The Camino induces disruption to varying degrees but it's a disruption that comes from below, not above. It's neither imposed nor enforced, the pilgrim walks into it – literally – of her own accord. The peasant, in the face of persecution, has little choice but to flee or fight back, the structures of oppression must be dismantled or even destroyed before creation can begin. Without death there can be no resurrection, I'm reminded of my first visit to El Mozote, a community in the throes of reconstruction, of life returning to the *tierra olvidada* of Morazán after a decade and a half of trauma.

In contrast, the micro-transformations of human/landscape encounters on the Camino have a different point of origin. Conflict is internal and emotional/spiritual rather than external and material, liberation is freedom from the constraints which stifle wider and more enduring change. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction, the process of *becoming* part of the landscape requires a corresponding extrication from something else. In this sense, *becoming* becomes a form of ambulatory self-reflexive meditation, not just of being-in-the-world but being-at-one-with-the-world and muffling the cacophony of white noise which drowns out creativity and imagination. Clarity of thought – and then clarity of decision and level of commitment – is achieved through being out of place.

Recall the parable of the Sower and the Seed. The seed which fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil or moisture, sprouted but when the sun came out it withered in the heat. From a liberationist perspective the allegory acquires a new meaning, the seed that falls on infertile ground reminds us of Ernestina Rivera's 'skyrockets' (Best & Hussey 1996:3), proponents for revolutionary change whose passion and zeal is unsustainable.²¹⁶ Though laudable, this evangelism can do more harm than good, the promise of a new world left rotting in the empty husk of a half-completed project.

More tortoise, less hare. Sometimes it's better to chip away at the incarcerating wall rather than blow it to kingdom come, as the work of *Oikoten* and *Seuil* shows. In the tension within human/landscape relations lies a residual latency which the pilgrim, depending on circumstance, may or not tap in to. On my first Camino, deep in a valley on the *Ruta Dragonte*, I embraced it to the extent that it changed my life, four years later, on the descent from the Cruz del Ferro during my 'dark afternoon of the soul', I chose to reject it. What's the lesson here? The landscape can only do so much, you can take a horse to the water but you can't make it drink and ultimately, recalling Rousseau, the impetus for liberation must come from within.

Rahner uses the language of transcendence for the human capacity to identify an infinite horizon, which makes reflection possible and opens the self to 'unlimited possibilities of encountering this or that particular thing' (1986:61), reflected in Nelly del Cid's perception of the spirit as 'the winds of change' (Best & Hussey 1996:28). Theologies of liberation are theologies of potential and possibilities which centre creativity as the catalyst for change, the spark which transforms reflection into praxis. For Padilla, citing Rahner, liberation can 'harbor the potential for newness, and creativity, the possibility of disrupting non-beneficial

²¹⁶ Ernestina is a 'prayer lady' from Aguilares in El Salvador. She describes 'sky rockets' as 'Christians who only point up to the sky, like rockets, the kind that only pray with their eyes gazing up to heaven and don't look at what is all around them and don't care about their neighbours' (Best and Hussey 1996:3).

patterns of being human, It can provide occasions for making a difference, of another age emerging' (2016:57).

The part played by the landscape, therefore, in effecting wider social and political change is twofold. One, the passage of the pilgrim over the earth becomes a form of ambulatory meditation which is amenable to reflection, enhanced by time and distance. The solitary pilgrim in the landscape might be compared to a contemporary, mobile hermit rather than the solipsistic gyrovague. But most pilgrims are gregarious creatures and as my experience with my Camino family shows, human/landscape encounters are often communal experiences: *we are the land, the land is us* – the landscape is constituted not just of the inanimate and abiotic, all who dwell within it are part of its scene.

Two, liberatory spiritual encounters with the landscape are 'spiritual' in the most catholic sense of the word. Rather than effecting dramatic and often unsustainable transformations, they can take the form of micro-provocations in which the pilgrim, through an ongoing process of kenotic self-reflection, emerges with altered perspectives and attitudes. The coming together of human, more-than-human and beyond-human is a transcendent experience which opens up new horizons and possibilities. Through the lens of my personal and academic experiences of theologies of liberation, this represents a creative revolution of the spirit that inspires the person to effect change rather than effecting change itself.

5.2 WHAT WOULD MARCELLA DO NEXT ...

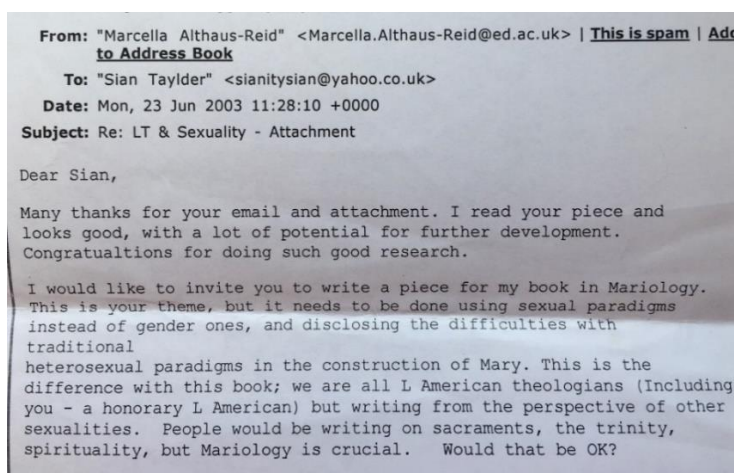


Figure 185: Email from Marcella. 'We are all Latin American theologians, including you – an honorary Latin American'. I still treasure this email and wear the badge with pride!

I only met Marcella once, at a Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology (BISFIT) conference in the early 'noughties'. We shared an impromptu debate on the Virgin Mary and talked about further research to follow up my paper on Mariology and sexual liberation.

But once again, life – in the form of a series of unpleasant events – intervened and apart from a chapter on transsexuality and religion I contributed to *Trans/formations* (2009), edited by Marcella and Lisa Isherwood, nothing came of what might have been a productive academic relationship. She died eight months before *Trans/formations* was published. I wasn't the first person to be smitten by Marcella's charisma and fierce intelligence, her passion and willingness to adopt controversial positions left a lasting impression. Crucially, and perhaps surprisingly, Marcella's work on queer and feminist theologies offers some important pointers to liberative theologies of life on the road.

Marcella, writes Hofheinz, 'never stops walking her theological *caminata*, but she does not orient toward a determined destination' (2015:101).²¹⁷ It's a way of walking – I tend to think of it as a 'strut' – where style is as important as substance.²¹⁸ Indecent Theology itself is a *caminata* and to walk this way, in this theological praxis, argues Marcella, 'we are required to forgo any claimed stability; we must be prepared to accept challenges and self-evaluation'(2000:64). I took Marcella's words to heart and, during the fieldwork, attempted to playfully undermine the stable – and somewhat staid – image of the pilgrim by eschewing the usual symbols, dressing entirely in red and black and 'branding' myself 'Ramblanista' on social media. It seemed to me that the Camino was in danger of taking itself too seriously and collapsing under the weight of its own historical and spiritual self-importance. My 'dark afternoon of the soul' suggested it was telling its own story, a narrative that was going round in circles like a dog chasing its tail. There seemed to come a point when the process of becoming had ground to a halt and was stuck on repeat. The erosive trail of my boots was digging me into a rut and I'd switched, subconsciously, from *estar* back to *ser*. And no longer wanted to play the pilgrim, all the more so as the Camino turned itself into a pedestrian *autopista*.

5.3 WALKING WITH WOMEN SERPENTS

Tennyson's 'The Lotus Eaters' tells the story of Ulysses' crew stranded on island where the inhabitants do nothing but eat lotus, a flower so delicious that, upon tasting it, the sailors lose all desire to return home, preferring to remain in Lotusland, yearning to settle into a life of inertia and entropy. It's a land free from toil, redolent of a prelapsarian Eden, a deceptive harmony covering the cracks of the tensions inherent in creation (Ricks 2007).

²¹⁷ Caminata is Spanish for walk and is traditionally used in Latin American liberation theology to indicate a style of 'doing' theology in a community process or 'walk' (Althaus Reid 2000:12)

²¹⁸ Bearing in mind Marcella's penchant for performance: 'From her dark curly hair to the poncho that encircled her, the petite woman vested the British space with the female body and accoutrements of a Latin American *Other*. It was a performance that dislocated the room. Indeed, it was a style of performance that Althaus-Reid would perfect over the years to come' (Hofheinz 2015:50)

From the moment I embarked on this research this notion troubled me and as my inner gyrovague made itself increasingly visible it worried me more and more. I felt that in terms of theology I was losing the plot, I'm quite certain that this unease, along with the heat and the never-ending steep and stony path, co-produced my 'dark afternoon of the soul'.

In 'Walking with Women Serpents', Althaus-Reid suggests the act of walking across time and space creates labyrinthine knowledges through which we walk to explore a 'shifting, surprising, and never completed network of possibilities'. Sometimes we walk alone, striding out confidently or stumbling with the faltering gait of a child's first steps, sometimes we walk together, in community (or equally, clique). Often we do both, switching between the loneliness of the long-distance walker to the camaraderie of the Camino crowd. But walking ensues that knowledge never settles; rather it remains stays 'multiple and fleeting, in and of the patterns of creation and destruction' (Hofheinz 2016:51).

I outlined in the toolkit how walking could be disruptive, simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, even in the suburbs of the Home Counties. I think the Camino can no longer do that for me, it's served its purpose as a catalyst for this research, now it's time to move on. I've walked it twice, retraced my own footsteps. I'm no longer an apprentice but a time-served veteran. If this research is to have any long-term impact I need to graduate from straight lines to Marcella's labyrinths, come out of comfort zone, come out of my [scallop] shell.



Figure 186

*The Road goes ever on and on,
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.²¹⁹*

²¹⁹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*, 'A Long-expected Party'.
[http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/The_Road_Goes_Ever_On_\(song\)](http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/The_Road_Goes_Ever_On_(song))

Alpha and omega, a beginning and an end. At the same time as one pilgrim rests her weary legs in front of the cathedral in Santiago, another makes her first tentative steps in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port. And so it goes on, year in, year out; the memories and experiences that I, like a glacier, deposited, still remain but they've *become* part of a dense, unsorted and unstratified matrix – an emotional till or boulder clay – into which have been ground and absorbed the memories and experiences of every pilgrim whose walked that way. And the rain and the incessant passage of feet churns them into a thick mud, like the rich red earths of La Rioja saturated by a summer storm, which clings to our boots and drags us down, as if the land didn't want to let go. The only consistency is inconsistency, in every sense of the word.

Walking with women serpents demands greater commitment, I see it as both a form of kenosis and a process, not just academic research but a way of life. If this narrative has a sequel it will be following other trajectories, literally and metaphorically; physically harder, more emotionally demanding, a firmer and more assertive grasp on the theology and politics of hiking in general and pilgrimage in particular.

Recall the child, the first time she lets go of her mother's grasp and, with a delicate balance, puts one foot before the other, that split second of uncertainty that, to a toddler, seems like an eternity. Her face, crumpled with concentration, suddenly erupts into a girt, humungous smile that seems to consume her whole body. And no wonder, she's done it! Unbounded joy, tottering few metres from parent to parent; her life will never be the same again.

And so it goes with the Camino. Those who wish to walk in complex labyrinths must first learn to walk the line. If this thesis persuades just one person, academic or not, to set out on the road and put herself at the vagaries of the elements to arrive in Santiago then all the time, money and angst I've exerted will have been worthwhile. If I strip way all the noble intentions this is what's left, to entice people out into the landscape and share the liberative nature and transformative energy of becoming-in-the-world, whatever their mobile status. To play the nomad you don't have to live like a refugee. Seriously, you don't.

I am the land, the land is me. But it's taken me one hundred thousand words to realise that I'm not, and can never be. And neither do I want to because to **be** – *ser* – suggests an end objective, that the process of **becoming** – *estar* – has run its full course and there *is* nowhere else to go. All paths have been walked, all possibilities explored, we're up the creek without a paddle.

And then what? If you start me up, I'll never stop, not because I don't want to but because I simply can't. Or rather, I'm *no longer* able to. Not in the Plaza de Obradoiro before the

cathedral of Santiago de Compostela after six weeks and one thousand two hundred kilometres, not on the very last page of this thesis, after seven years and one hundred thousand words.

Not now. Not ever.

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