

# Why Travel?

## Literature & Art



### Introduction

Books and pictures have always enabled the static viewer/reader to imagine themselves transported to other worlds - real or imaginary.

However, many artists take the alternative view and feel strongly that travel and direct contact with nature, other cultures and other artists is essential for good writing or painting.

“  
*I`ll make a tour - and then I`ll write it.  
You well know what my pen can do,  
And I`ll employ my pencil too:-  
I`ll ride and write, and sketch and print,  
And thus create a real mint;*

(William Combe – 1809 writing as Dr Syntax to mock the fashion for Grand Tour bad taste)

”

## Key Aspects

### Childhood

Our earliest travels are in the mind : the enduring power of nursery rhymes 'Simple Simon met a Pie man going to the Fair' or 'To market to Market to buy a fat pig' remind us that the main journey away from home for centuries was to buy and sell goods or find work. Fairy tales explore more symbolic journeys to self-knowledge or moral advice: Goldilocks and Little Red Riding Hood stray from the paths good girls take into the forest where 'Anything can Happen' and usually does.

## Practical Implications

### Literary heritage travel

The places where writers have lived or have placed their creations acquire their own celebrity: the Lake District owns Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter as Chawton in Sussex housed Jane Austen or Dorchester Thomas Hardy. There are regular Ulysses study tours in Dublin following the footsteps of Leopold Bloom and endless romantic trips to Paris to track the haunts of Hemingway and the Impressionists. Similarly, for many, the visit to the original setting of a film is a motivation for travel and there is a huge industry dedicated to supporting such inclinations.

### The age of the camera

Meanwhile before the age of the camera western artists played a vital role in documenting the flora, fauna and cultures of unfamiliar lands. And the eclectic British islanders collected more plants from the world than any other nation so successfully that Kew Gardens was established. When photography liberated the arts from pure representation the role of the visual turned away from mapping the external to exploring the internal. Meanwhile the ordinary traveller with their pocket camera could themselves become an 'artist'.

## Key Questions

- How can cultural tourism ensure that imaginary journeys stimulate without suffocating us?
- Is the current retrenchment of children's access to the outside world affecting their own sense of adventure and shrinking their imaginative engagement with their environment?
- How do locations without an obvious Heritage Trail (Hardy's fictional Wessex or George Eliot's Derbyshire) attract visitors?
- Can education in art engage people's imaginations to become less passive and more interactive? Is travel an essential aspect of achieving this objective?

### Quests

Journeys towards an actual or moral goal appear in the folklore of every nation. They require great courage on the part of the hero or heroine in overcoming many obstacles. Examples are the Odyssey or Pilgrims Progress. The earliest written quest is the 5000 year old Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh (where our demigod hero travels to find the sage Utnapishtim who purportedly survived the Great Flood). Centuries later pure Gawain and flawed Lancelot seek the grail of redemption: as Knights Errant – errant literally meaning 'wanderer'.

### The Grand Tour

Egyptians painted for spiritual utility to ease the journey to the next world though like all good tourists they took basic necessities with them. But the Renaissance began disengaging from purely religious art where the main journey was by the Magi and art spread into secular life. Later, Northern Europeans seeking the glories of the classical world developed the Grand Tour mostly to Renaissance Italy (Greece was too dangerous) and returned to create a classical northern Eden. Soon landscape design developed as independent art: (the painter William Kent, educated in Italy, became the influential garden designer at Chiswick and Stowe). and almost all architecture sprouted Grecian columns and rusticated quoins.

## Further Reading/Resources

Virgil: *The Aeniad* (Penguin Classics translated by Davis West 2003) and Homer: *The Odyssey* (Penguin Classics - translated by E V Rieu 2003)  
For classic accounts of quests.

Hughes Robert: *The Shock of the New* (Thames and Hudson 1991)

For a very accessible summary on the influence of travel on the development of art genres.

Lyons, M. (2011) *There and Back Again: In the Footsteps of J.R.R. Tolkien's England*: Globe Pequot.  
Follows the story locations from charming Staffordshire villages to breath-taking Somerset caves.



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