The Ekphrastic Poetry of Tourism

Olivia Christine Milroy

Gastonia, North Carolina

Bachelor of Arts, Wake Forest University, 2011

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Introduction

The destabilizing forces of modernization and globalization have led tourists and poets to ask a similar question: what is the self and how can it be constructed? Both Romantic and modern poets often travel to search for answers, turning to landscapes, works of art, and architecture as interlocutors for their inner dialogues. Shared concerns about authenticity, site-marking, and commemoration thematically unite poetry and tourism, while the seriality of the tourist's vision and the portability of both souvenirs and poems create a further, formal association. In ekphrastic poems, poets work to make sense of their relation to the world by measuring their position and perspective in relationship to a particular object. Rather than categorizing the poem's spatial relationship to the ekphrastic object as merely "on-site" or "off-site," my research suggests ekphrastic poems be arranged on a spectrum with on-site poems at one end and poems with imaginary subjects (notional ekphrasis) at the other. Once this spectrum is established, a generic pattern emerges. In the poems I have considered in this project, on-site poems take the form of an ode, off-site poems elegy, and notional poems dialogue. The relationship between the self and the other, the poet and the object, the tourist and the site, becomes increasingly fluid as poems move away from the site and toward the imagination. The dialogic nature of notional ekphrasis opens up rather than closes down the interaction between the self and other and offers an example of what Jahan Ramazani calls "self-interruptive paratourism."[1]

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[1] Jahan Ramazani, "Poetry and Tourism in a Global Age," *New Literary History* 46.3 (2015), 475.

By considering ekphrastic poems, which purport to describe visual works of art, yet often display the mind of the poet and engage the history of a particular poetic form, we can see the ways in which poet-tourists' perceived positions are manifested in the genres of their poems. This paper explores three primary poetic perspectives and their correlated poetic genres: first, Richard Wilbur's "Fountain in the Villa Sciarra" demonstrates how on-site poems perform a dialectic ode; second, William Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas" and Agaha Shahid Ali's "Postcard from Kashmir" both reveal the off-site poem's reliance on elegy to convey the sense of distance and loss experienced by the post-tourist; third, Elizabeth Bishop's "The Monument" and Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias" describe an imaginary work of art by means of dialogue in order to offer a self-aware and self-critical triadic structure for "reading" a tourist site. If the tourist is "one of the best models available for the modern-man-in general," as Dean MacCannell has argued, the poetry of tourism provides an important view of the potential problems, but also of the generative possibilities of contemporary, voluntary travel.[2]

Though valuing travel as a means of "finding oneself" has a long history, including the Grand Tour and the contemporary "road trip," travel has also been seen as a threat to identity and community, as well as a false escape from one's self. In his essay "Self-Reliance," Ralph Waldo Emerson insists "Traveling is a fool's paradise" that provides no self-knowledge or self-escape and offering, at best, distraction:

> It is for want of self-culture that the superstition of Traveling, whose idols

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[2] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: a New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

are Italy, England, Egypt, retains its fascination for all educated Americans. They who made England, Italy, or Greece venerable in the imagination did so by sticking fast where they were, like an axis of the earth. … The soul is no traveler; the wise man stays at home, … He who travels to be amused, or to get somewhat which he does not carry, travels away from himself, and grows old even in youth among old things. … He carries ruins to ruins.

Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. At home I dream that at Naples, at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea, and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from.[3]

Emerson describes, with undeniable accuracy, the sense of expectation and disappointment that almost every tourist experiences. Sites that we have first made "venerable in the imagination" have no chance of living up to the fictitious image we have formed of them. Furthermore, changing one's setting does not change the self. Yet, both of these critiques of tourism fail to consider what would happen if traveling for pleasure was not treated as a mere distraction. The ekphrastic poetry of tourism provides an alternative to escapist and consumerist models of tourism by staging a scene of reading. The poet-tourist's sustained meditation on the unfamiliar is the antithesis of distraction. In addition, it troubles the boundaries between inside and outside, self and other, by bringing the poet face-to-face with the other.

Emerson claims that identity is stationary and located at home, since travel takes us "away from the self." So where is our being? Is it here, or elsewhere? Gaston

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[3] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self Reliance," *The Project Gutenberg Ebook of Essays* (2005), Web. 27 March 2016.

Bachelard asks similar questions when he speculates about which half of Heidegger's term *dasein* (or *être-lá* in French) should be emphasized, "being" or "there"? "In *there* – which it would be better to call *here* – shall I first look for my being? Or am I going to find in my being, above all, certainty of my fixation in a *there*?"[4] Bachelard goes on to suggest that existence must be seen as "circuitous, roundabout, recurrent…a spiral [of] … invertible dynamisms."[5] In other words, we are both here and there. The soul certainly *is* a traveler. It moves and can only be seen when we move ourselves. Poet-tourists often look for a uniform seed of self-ness, only to find a web of insufficiency and inconsistency: "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself."

Travel and Ekphrasis

The histories of travel and poetry are closely intertwined: Plato's eviction of poets from his Republic, wandering Orpheus, medieval troubadours, and the Grand Tour all point to the mobility of the poet. Though poets may travel in search of themselves, no travel occurs in a vacuum. Tourists, who voluntarily "travel for pleasure or culture,"[6] make up an extremely small and economically privileged class. Although the persona of a "tourist" is temporary – you become a "local" again once you return home – not everyone can become a tourist. Jamaica Kincaid points out this distinction in her harsh critique of tourism in Antigua: "For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every

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[4] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1994), 213.

[5] Ibid., 214.

[6] "tourist, n." *OED Online,* Oxford University Press, September 2015. Web. 8 April 2016.

tourist is a native of somewhere…But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor."[7] As tourists, poets can facilitate the movement of languages, religions, philosophies, and art forms through their work, but they can also contribute to ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism. Poet-tourists can resist participating in these forms of domination by mediating travel experiences through formal elements like ekphrasis, acknowledging their position as interpreters and challenging accepted views of landscapes, markets, cultures, and works of art. In his recent essay "Poetry and Tourism in a Global Age," Jahan Ramazani suggests that "self-interruptive paratourism can serve as an ethical and intellectual model—actively rethinking place and travel in historical time, and pushing the reader to do so as well, without either pretending to be exempt from tourism or passively submitting to its consumerist proclivities."[8] Although writing about the visual art of another country could be read as the consumption of a foreign culture, the commemorative and dialogic nature of ekphrasis offers a means of generative cross-cultural engagement.

Poets who pretend ekphrasis forms a mirror or window to their object merely project themselves, but poets who foreground their role as a refracting force productively trouble the audience's assumptions. Ekphrasis visibly stages the moment of encounter between the poet and the work of art, since ekphrasis *self-consciously* interprets and translates visual art into the poet's own words. However, the poetry of tourism introduces

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[7] Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988), 18-19.

[8] Ramazani, 475.

unique ethical difficulties to this process of translation, since the poet must act as an interpreter of the art or culture of another person or place from a privileged position. Poets can easily abuse or misuse their positions as interpreters by performing acts of flattening or erasure. Ekphrastic poetry can trouble the perceived role of "poet as ethnographer" by emphasizing that the work of art is being interpreted *by* the poet.

Because ekphrastic poetry is the product of the poet's gaze, it also risks turning the ekphrastic object into a mirror. The title of John Hollander's book, *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art,* seems to characterize ekphrastic poetry as a one-sided conversation, in which the work of art remains "silent." Yet Hollander also points out the agency of the work of art's gaze: "the moment of gazing at, and being somehow gazed at, by any work of art becomes an authentic poetic occasion, as enabling…as any epiphanic flash of transcendence."[9] Hollander's move to connect the poet's encounter with authenticity echoes the language surrounding the tourist gaze, which searches for an authentic sight, culture, or experience. The existence of an authentic indigenous culture and the totalizing power of the outsider's gaze have been challenged by theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, who observes the power of the colonized to "shatter the unity of [the colonizer's] being through which he extends his sovereignty."[10] Faced with the destabilizing artistic object, poet-tourists must wrestle with their own subjectivity. By

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[9] John Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 90.

[10] Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 126-127.

"shattering" the subjectivity of the tourist, art transforms the observer into the observed.[11]

Rather than hopelessly subsuming ekphrastic poetry into a discourse of appropriation, recognizing the dialogic nature of the poet-painting relationship creates space for ekphrastic poetry to engage a work of art without silencing or erasing its subject. The work of art's reciprocal gaze facilitates "an encounter with the presence of… otherness" that can lead the poet to "an awareness of the problematic nature of its own mode of existence, of its own consciousness."[12] Rather than simply providing a mirror on which poet-tourists can project a cohesive self, art can engage poets in a dialogue. However, because the work of art does not actually "speak," the level of exchange that takes place is ultimately determined by the poet. By describing the work of art as gazing back at the poet, Hollander restores a sense of agency to art and lays the groundwork for a discursive exchange.

Homer's famous description of the shield of Achilles established the power of ekphrasis, but its flexibility to move across genres has maintained its popularity through the centuries. In epic poetry ekphrastic moments often occur when a hero arrives at a new location in order to convey histories, commemorate the dead, or articulate a worldview. Virgil's Aeneas strangely encounters depictions of himself on the Temple of Juno in Carthage, where his heroic deeds at Troy have already been glorified. The temple's art primarily functions to relate the history of the Trojan War, but it also works as a location

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[11] Ibid., 127.

[12] Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit,* 90-91.

of self-reflection for "pious Aeneas," who is still coming to terms with his role as an epic hero and future father of the Roman people. This instance of ekphrasis contains a number of strange reversals: the content of the carvings is taken directly from the *Iliad,* which results in a kind of ekphrastic cycle (poetry turned into art turned into poetry). This encounter becomes further complicated when Aeneas recognizes himself in the temple's art: "'Where on this earth is there a land, a place / that does not know our sorrows? Look!' / … / With many tears and sighs he feeds / his soul on what is nothing but a picture."[13] For Aeneas, the trope of "seeing oneself" in art has become literal. The depiction of his story comforts Aeneas because it marks an overlap in values between his people and the Carthaginians: "Here, too, the honourable finds its due / and there are tears for passing things; here, too / things mortal touch the mind. Forget your fears."[14] By illustrating the events of Troy, the Carthaginians have demonstrated their capacity for empathy. Both the artist and the audience participate in this process of imaginative affiliation, laying the groundwork for Dido's favorable reception of the work of art's living referent, Aeneas.

I linger on this example, not because Aeneas is a proto-tourist – he is a refugee – but because it reveals a few of the primary ways ekphrasis engenders empathetic cross-cultural interaction. Ekphrastic poetry can lay the groundwork for a brand of tourism that generates empathy and artistic exchange, rather than hostility or exploitation. Ekphrasis's

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[13] Virgil, *The Aeneid of Virgil,* translated by Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), I.652-653, 658-659.

[14] Ibid., I.654-656.

rhetorical power to engender pathos can influence human interactions, such as Aeneas'

decision to expose himself in an unfamiliar land after encountering a thoughtful

commemoration of his own lost loved ones. In addition to creating an empathetic scene

of reading, ekphrasis foregrounds the process of circulation by creating a mobile marker

(the poem) for a typically stationary subject (the Temple of Juno). Aeneas' shock that the

battles of Troy are "famous now through all the world" reinforces the fact that stories,

and the art they inspire, can move more quickly than people: rumors and stories about the

Trojan War arrive on the shores of Carthage before Aeneas and his men.[15] In the age of

globalization (and mechanical reproduction), visual art is disseminated and literature is

translated more quickly than ever before. This movement both creates and requires

conversions from one art form to another; the poetry of tourism demands ekphrasis.

Homer and Virgil establish ekphrasis as a forum for considering ontological and

teleological questions, a tradition that continues in many forms, including medieval

dream visions, metaphysical conceits, and Romantic notional ekphrasis, such as Keats's

"Ode on a Grecian Urn." Virgil also anticipates, without fully incarnating, ekphrasis's

ability to facilitate introspection and self-knowledge. James A. W. Heffernan explains,

"While the scenes on the shield of Achilles are unmediated by the viewpoint or feelings

of any character in [Homer's] poem, we repeatedly see the temple paintings…through the

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[15] Allegories of Rumor and/or Fame (*Fama*) in the works of Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Chaucer, Spencer, Shakespeare, and others further explore the mobility and instability of narrative. Poets also frequently participate in architectural ekphrasis describing the House of Fame, imagining the physical space of language.

tear-filled eyes of Virgil's hero."[16] Although Aeneas is not the speaker in Virgil's

ekphrastic passages, his narrativized emotions are a prototype for the combination of

ekphrasis and lyric that would appear in later centuries and directly address questions of

identity. Once lyric and ekphrasis intersect, the genre gains new horizons of possibility:

rather than merely conveying the history of a people, ekphrasis becomes a discursive site

for individual reflection.

Dialectic Ode: Richard Wilbur's Fountains

On-site poems of tourism construct narratives that take place at the actual site

they describe. They are often characterized by the present tense, deictic words, and

apostrophe. The immediacy of this presence lends itself well to the ode, which finds its

roots in the performative and present medium of ancient Greek drama. The poet-tourist

moves back and forth before the ekphrastic object contemplating the nature of both the

object and himself, just as a dramatic chorus might comment on the play's events. Even

the words *strophe* and *antistrophe*, turn and counterturn, point to the etymology of the

word "tourism," which comes from the Greek τόρνος (Latin *tornus*), meaning lathe. A

lathe "turns" to mark the path of a circle.[17] Richard Wilbur's poem "A Baroque Wall-

Fountain in the Villa Sciarra" combines the turning, tripartite thematic structure of

ancient Greek ode with the regular stanza length and rhyme scheme of the English ode.

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[16] James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: the Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 24.

[17] Jahan Ramazani has also pointed out that "We make a turn in a poem or with a tour, as suggested by the roots of the words "verse" and "tour"—*versus* from *vertere,* to turn, and *tornus*, a circle, or a tool for describing a circle—and we may find our world and ourselves defamiliarized upon return" (459).

Located on one end of the spatial spectrum, Richard Wilbur's on-site poem demonstrates

the productive, though somewhat limited, possibilities the dialectic ode offers the poetry

of tourism for engaging the other and constructing a self.

Richard Wilbur began composing the ekphrastic poem "A Baroque Wall-Fountain

in the Villa Sciarra" during his 1954–1955 fellowship with the American Academy in

Rome. Wilbur, his wife Charlotte, and their three children crossed the ocean in tourist

class, spending sun-soaked days by the pool and dancing the evenings away.[18] This trip

marked Wilbur's first return to Rome since he had been part of the American army that

liberated the city in 1944. The Wilburs rented an apartment in Monteverde and spent

many of their meals mingling with the other fellows at the Academy. Wilbur's life in

Rome combined tourist expeditions and "Puritanical industry." He admits that "even in

the city of Rome, [he had] a tendency to work eight hours a day when [he] could."[19]

Wilbur's tunnel-vision is interrupted on his commute to work when he senses he is being

observed by the architecture of the city itself: "when I lived in Rome and walked past that

fountain every day on my way to work, I always felt tempted by it, tempted to linger; and

reproached by it, I suppose, because I was driving myself so humorlessly to go and get an

eight-hour day done."[20] Wilbur's encounter with the fountain in the Villa Sciarra was not

site-driven, but sight-driven. Rather than seeking out a source of inspiration for his

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[18] Robert Bagg, "The Poet in Rome: Richard Wilbur in Postwar Italy," *The Common* 4 (2012), Web. 11 November 2015.

[19] Richard Wilbur, "Interview with Irv Broughton," *Conversations with Richard Wilbur,* ed. William Butts (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 140.

[20] Ibid.

poetry, Wilbur is taken by surprise by the architectural landscape. Wilbur immediately establishes the potential for dialogue in the poem's genesis by attributing a voice to the fountain: its *genius loci* both tempts and reproaches him.

Rome's fountains have become a feature of the city's landscape, and they engender a strange variation of the typical ekphrastic poem. While most works of art – like poems – are portable, capable of being moved to new locations throughout the city or exhibited in museums abroad, architectural art is distinctly stationary. Like buildings, gardens, frescoes, and mosaics, fountains are designed for a specific context, which limits their ability to "travel." Yet, unlike many art forms, fountains contain *actual* movement: they are sculptures that come to life as water surges over them. In addition, their former role as a water source for the community emphasizes the functional nature of fountains and establishes them as social centers. This fountain's construction as part of a wall further highlights its embeddedness in the city.

In spite of their deeply local position in the community, fountains also draw tourists and tend to be located in heavily trafficked areas. John Hollander claims, "Roman fountains…have provided easily accessible mental souvenirs for tourists."[21] While most tourists keep an image of a fountain in their minds or their scrapbooks, Wilbur translates his memory into a poem. The process of writing a poem is analogous to the way tourists package anecdotes, souvenirs, and pictures for consumption and dissemination upon their return home. Just as souvenirs and snapshots are a distilled, portable, and mediated form

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[21] Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit,* 270.

of the site they commemorate, the ekphrastic poetry of tourism is produced when the poet

creates a "copy" of a cultural artifact that will be a reminder of his time traveling. In

addition, both souvenirs and ekphrastic poems are designed to "travel." The descriptive

function of each implies that they are meant to be used or read out of sight of the original:

there is no need to look at a postcard of Michelangelo's *David* when you are in Florence

and can see it in person. Souvenirs and poems are also not meant to be substitutions for

the original; their resemblance is intended to stir memories of the original or invite one to

visit and see it in person.

While the similarities between poems and souvenirs are an important aspect of the

poetry of tourism, they cannot be collapsed into one another entirely. Souvenirs often

purport to be exact (albeit smaller) replicas of the sites they commemorate, but poetry's

mimetic function is thwarted by the two-dimensional space of a page. John Hollander

claims that poems "are more like each other than they are like reality, and it may even be

true that they are more *about* each other in this way as well. A full reading of a poem will

depend upon recognition of its genre, and of its version of that genre."[22] In the case of

Wilbur's poem, the alternating indented lines, regular rhyme scheme (ABBA), and

consistent heterometric stanzas (quatrains with a line of trimeter, pentameter, tetrameter,

then pentameter) visually recall the tradition of the ode.

Ekphrastic poems have always contained description *by way of* interpretation.

Homer depicts a worldview on Achilles' shield, Virgil demonstrates Aeneas' sorrow

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[22] Hollander, "The Poem in the Eye," *Vision and Resonance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 247.

through the Temple of Juno, and Keats explores the relationship of beauty, truth, art, and

mortality in his description of the Grecian Urn.[23] Furthermore, the objects in each of

these instances of ekphrasis are fictional creations of the poets (notional ekphrasis),

confirming that the mimetic goals of ekphrastic poetry are utterly secondary to the

themes propounded by the poet. Jonathan Culler also recognizes the ability of a signifier

(the poem's initial relationship to the ekphrastic object) to become a new signified:

"Buildings constructed to mark and preserve sights often become the sights

themselves."[24] Like buildings, ekphrastic poems move beyond description and

commemoration of their subject by becoming an artistic object themselves.[25] In fact, the

fame of the ekphrastic poem often surpasses the fame of the poem's object (such is the

case with Wilbur and the fountain in the Villa Sciarra).

The poem gains a life of its own through the process of meditation *on* and

dialogue *with* the ekphrastic object. Hollander points out that, in addition to providing

"mental souvenirs," fountains "have also served as meditative loci for poets, as if in some

spectral memory of Greek mythological fountains like the actual Pierian spring or the

fabled Hippocrene."[26] However, the fountain is not merely a passive site for the poet's

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[23] "Ode on a Grecian Urn" was influenced by the Greek art (including the Elgin Marbles) Keats saw on his visit to the British Museum. However, the poem is at best a composite of several Greek urns; no single urn fits his description. Thus, the poem retains its label as notional ekphrasis.

[24] Jonathan Culler, "The Semiotics of Tourism," *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 167.

[25] Jahan Ramazani also identifies the power of the poetry of tourism to create something new, claiming, "Poetry also tests one's abilities to transmit or transform, to copy or remake inherited arrangements" (461).

[26] Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit,* 270.

mind to roam; like any other muse, it can converse with and place demands on the poet. In the tradition of the Romantic loco-descriptive poem, "A Baroque Wall-Fountain" functions as a site of introspection for Wilbur. His ekphrastic description of the fountain itself serves as *la fonte* for a contemplation on the nature of man; it is an origination, rather than a destination.

Like many loco-descriptive poems, "A Baroque Wall-Fountain" is arranged spatially, following the gaze of the poet and the movement of the fountain's water from top to bottom: "Under the bronze crown… / Sweet water brims a cockle and braids down."[27] Just as the fountain in the Villa Sciarra has three levels, Wilbur's description is divided into three periodic sentences: the first and second briefly describe the water's progress, but the third, which shifts the subject to "the stocky god" and his faun-menage, is the longest syntactic unit of the poem (16 lines). These syntactic proportions reflect both the shape of the fountain and the dialectic structure of the poem. Although there is no "I" in the ekphrastic depiction of the Villa Sciarra fountain, the effusion of value-laden adjectives like "loose," "saecular," "blinded," and "addling" conveys Wilbur's association of the fountain with earthly pleasures. The frozen fauns recall the "wild ecstasy" of Keats's "Cold Pastoral." Yet rather than displaying a desire that is never fulfilled, Wilbur's fauns are "at rest in fulness of desire / for what is given" (126). They are content in their earthly realm of pleasure.

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[27] Richard Wilbur, "A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra," *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry,* ed. J.D. McClatchy (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 124.

After Wilbur expounds on the themes represented by the wall-fountain, he introduces a contrapuntal melody, an antistrophe, in a *second* baroque fountain: Carlo Maderno's fountain in St. Peter's Square. Although the fountains share some Baroque features, Maderno's fountain is free-standing, simpler in design, and located at a touristic and religious center of the city. "Struggling aloft until it seems at rest / in the act of rising," the fountain is Wilbur's image for "the pattern of our areté" (125). The word "rest" occurs at the end of a stanza, a visual pause in the cascading lines occurring at the critical moment of the fountain's highest achievement. The strangeness of the word becomes especially clear when the phrase "in the act of rising" follows it, since rest typically denotes a cessation of movement or activity. Yet Wilbur connects the fountain's rest with the classical notion of areté, which describes an individual (or object) attaining its full potential, a fountain achieving true fountain-ness. Maderno's fountain displays a "fine / Illumined version of itself" even in its "decline," but the fountain's focus is heavenward and its existence is pure striving, without any contentment. It is a spiritual existence that spurns the material world.

By beginning with the wall-fountain and moving to Maderno's fountain, the poem inverts the Hegelian dialectic. Wilbur is moved to meditate on the fountain in the Villa Sciarra precisely because it "reproves" him (126). Rather than structuring his poem in the typical dialectical order (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), he appears to present a "thesis" in the first fountain, but the description is interrupted by the speaker's questioning of the fountain's message:

> Yet since this all
> Is pleasure, flash, and waterfall,
> Must it not be too simple? Are we not
>
> More intricately expressed
> In the plain fountains that Maderna set
> Before St. Peter's … ? (125)

Thus, the fountain in the Villa Sciarra is revealed to be antithetical to the speaker's

current worldview, and the fountain in St. Peter's Square becomes the poem's "thesis."

Wilbur's decision to begin with an antithesis points to ekphrasis's dialectical method: the

poet's encounter with otherness destabilizes both his understanding of the world and his

own subjectivity. The meditative ekphrastic poem is generated when a poet's attempt to

"read" a work of art is confounded by the work itself. The wall-fountain resists

conscription into Wilbur's symbolic network of meaning.

The destabilizing force of the fountain interrupts the formation of a clear

subjectivity. Although there is no "I" in the poem, a speaker is implicitly introduced with

the string of questions that make up the middle third of the poem, as well as by the use of

the first-person plural pronoun "we" in line 28. Rather than framing the poem as a clash

between his own beliefs and those performed in the wall-fountain, Wilbur places two

fountains in opposition to one another in order to determine which is the ideal signifier

for the signified humanity ("we"). This opposition creates a tone of uncertainty

throughout the poem, which is not entirely dispelled even by the synthesis proposed in

the final third of the poem. Unable to reconcile the sensual materiality of the wall-

fountain with the spiritual transcendence of the Maderno fountain, Wilbur turns to yet

another Italian symbol — St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of Italy — in his epode. He suggests that perhaps St. Francis,

> Freezing and praising, might have seen in this
>   No trifle, but a shade of bliss—
> That land of tolerable flowers, that state
>
>   As near and far as grass
> Where eyes become the sunlight, and the hand
>   Is worthy of water: the dreamt land
> Toward which all hungers leap, all pleasures pass. (126)

As Wilbur moves to conclude what he calls his "ironic meditative lyric,"[28] he mediates his suggested synthesis through the figure of St. Francis and accompanied by a host of qualifying words: "perhaps," "might," "shade," and "dreamt" all convey the tentative nature of Wilbur's assertion in defense of both fountains. In addition to his role as the patron saint of Italy, Francis is a natural choice for addressing this problem because he is a spiritual figure known for his love of animals and nature. Wilbur, who also explores the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds in his poem "Love Calls Us to the Things of this World," hopes to reconcile the seeming opposition of "pleasure and joy, of acceptance and transcendence."[29] In the final lines of "A Baroque Wall-Fountain," he achieves reconciliation by exchanging the fountain with humanity (the signified becomes the signifier): our eyes are sunlight, our hands are the fountain, and the water is our desire for both pleasure and areté.

"A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra" demonstrates the power of

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[28] Richard Wilbur, "On My Own Work," *Aquila Essays* 20 (1983).

[29] Ibid.

ekphrasis to engender a dialectical relationship between the poet's expectations and the reality he encounters at a touristic site. Wilbur's on-site poem creates a sense of proximity through its present-tense performance of the speaker's changing thread of thought. The triadic structure of the ode and its history as a dramatic form also contribute to the atmosphere of presence throughout the poem. The cognitive dissonance that results from an encounter with the other through art inspires a process of introspection in the poet while retaining the agency of the work of art. However, the process of synthesis can be difficult, and often problematic, if the poet insists on viewing the ekphrastic object as merely an extension of his own thought. Wilbur attempts to resist this by distancing himself from the dialectical process of the poem: the interlocutors are fountains and the synthesis "might" come from St. Francis's theology of the material and spiritual worlds. Although there are problems inherent in the dialectical method, *performing* the process of disagreement prevents the total erasure of the other that could occur. In "A Baroque Wall-Fountain," ekphrasis performs its role of interpretation and mediation as the poet-tourist engages another culture and reflects on his own identity.

Ekphrastic Elegy: Marking Sight in Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas" and Ali's "Postcard from Kashmir"

Wilbur distances himself from the subject of his on-site poem by ventriloquizing two fountains. The off-site poetry of tourism, however, is far more likely to be voiced directly by the poet-speaker, since a level of mediation is already built-in. The off-site poetry of tourism constructs a narrative that places the speaker far removed from the

ekphrastic subject. Often, the poem is even further mediated by the introduction of a

second-order representation, such as a picture of the landscape or a souvenir of the site.

The loss that separation from the site introduces into the poem's narrative often results in

the poem's form taking on features of elegy. Both William Wordsworth and Agha Shahid

Ali deploy ekphrastic elegy as an oblique means of addressing personal sorrow. The

posture of the poet remains dominant compared to the ekphrastic object, and the lost

object has limited agency in the poem, ultimately serving as a vehicle for the poet's

personal grief. The narrative "turn" of elegy is represented by the poet's need to perform

their loss for an audience, resulting in the construction of a hypothetical or counterfactual

scenario that often renders the dead alive, if only temporarily. These impossible scenarios

display the peace, unity, and joy the poem's subject provided before it was lost.

Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas" and Ali's "Postcard from Kashmir" both demonstrate the

poet-tourist's willingness to alter his perspective, but they also convey a sense of despair.

The rhetorical roots of elegy compel the form to be primarily monologic and often

display the mind of the poet more clearly than his elegiac subject.

William Wordsworth dedicates his 1815 collection of poetry to patron of the arts

and amateur painter, Sir George Beaumont: "Wishing and hoping that this Work with the

embellishments it has received from your Pencil, may survive as a lasting memorial of a

friendship."[30] Attributing "embellishments" to Beaumont's pencil, the dedication

encapsulates some of the major themes of "Elegiac Stanzas," which was inspired by one

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[30] William Wordsworth, "Dedication," *Poems by William Wordsworth Vol. 1* (London: 1815), v. E-book.

of Beaumont's paintings. This image of collaborative composition both echoes and reverses the hypothetical painting that Wordsworth describes in "Elegiac Stanzas," which suggests an alternate setting for Beaumont's storm-beleaguered castle with the conditional statement "if mine had been the artist's hand." Wordsworth's hope that his poetry "may survive as a lasting memorial" is also an apt summary of "Elegiac Stanzas," because it points to the poet's increased awareness of mortality and posits a textual "memorial" as a means of outlasting the forces of death and decay.

Inscription and memorials are metonymic for the poetic genres Wordsworth invokes in "Elegiac Stanzas": ekphrasis and elegy, respectively. Drawing from the epideictic rhetorical tradition, Wordsworth deploys both of these genres to create an "occasion" for the poet's own processes of intellection. Geoffrey Hartman argues that Wordsworth "was able to liberate the genre [inscription] from its dependent status of tourist guide and antiquarian signpost: he made nature-inscription into a free-standing poem, able to commemorate any feeling for nature or the spot that had aroused this feeling."[31] Wordsworth achieved similar effects by combining the descriptive power of ekphrasis with the meditative style of elegy. Elegy traditionally facilitates an act of mourning, while ekphrasis addresses the cognitive dissonance created by conflicting images presented by art and memory. In "Elegiac Stanzas" Wordsworth describes his own shift in perspective: "A power is gone, which nothing can restore; / A deep distress hath

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[31] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry," *Unremarkable Wordsworth* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 32.

humanized my soul."[32] As Wordsworth comes to terms with this loss, he foregrounds the

poet's role as a mediator among nature, art, and the dead by combining ekphrasis with

elegy. Although describing a work of art and mourning a lost loved one might seem like

unrelated tasks, their shared roots in epideictic rhetoric and positioning of the poet as an

observer make ekphrasis and elegy a natural pairing. The word "observe" captures the

overlapping natures of ekphrasis and elegy. It can mean both to see ("to watch attentively

or carefully") and to speak ("to remark or mention in speech or writing"). Both of these

meanings are represented in the act of ekphrasis, which "observes" the work of art as well

as "makes observations about" what is seen. A third valence of meaning relates

specifically to elegy: "to perform or celebrate duly, or in a prescribed manner (a rite,

ceremony, etc.); to mark or acknowledge (a festival, anniversary, etc.)" All three

meanings apply to epideictic rhetoric, which must see the deeds of another in order to

judge their quality, then speak out in order to praise or censure its subject, and finally to

celebrate its subject duly.[33]

In ancient Greece, epideictic rhetoric was the ceremonial branch of oratory that

either "praises or censures somebody."[34] Elegy easily aligns with this kind of rhetoric, as

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[32] William Wordsworth, "Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peel Castle, in a Storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont," *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014), 430.

[33] "observe, n." *OED Online,* Oxford University Press, September 2015. Web. 9 March 2016.

[34] Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* translated by W. Rhys Roberts (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 13. Etymologically, the Greek word *epideictic,* "to show," is formed by combining the prefix *epi-* (upon a point of space or time, on the occasion of) with *deixis* (point out or show directly). Thus, the epideictic rhetor uses the oratorial occasion to point out the deeds of his subject (either good or bad) to the audience.

it generally praises the deceased, but ekphrasis seems more remote without a historical understanding of the genre. Although ekphrasis is now almost exclusively used to describe the creative depiction of a piece of visual art in writing, in ancient Greece ekphrasis merely denoted "description" of any kind. Cicero and Quintilian both suggest students of rhetoric include ekphrasis in their oratory in order "to focus and amplify emotions, with the rhetor lingering over key aspects of an image in order to persuade his audience."[35] The ability to slow down time and elicit pathos also characterizes elegy, which often spends time describing the deeds of the deceased, textually extending his or her existence within the poem (just as the "memorial" extends the existence of Wordsworth and Beaumont's friendship), and always works to convey the depth and immediacy[36] of the sorrow incited by his or her death: "the feeling of my loss will ne'er be old" (431).

Wordsworth's encounter with Beaumont's painting also illuminates the rhetorical connections between ekphrasis and elegy along the axis of tourism. The shared goal of commemoration unites both genres and parallels the obsessive processes of site-marking and certification that characterizes tourism. Now legendary, Wordsworth's touristic travels in the Lake District inspired many of his poems, as well as the illustrated guidebook *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes* (1810, 1835). Wordsworth's

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[35] G.G. Starr, "ekphrasis," *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* edited by Roland Greene, et al., 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 393.

[36] Aristotle also claims that epideictic rhetoric is "concerned with the present, since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things at the time, though they often find it useful also to recall the past and to make guesses at the future" (13). He contrasts this immediacy with judicial and legislative rhetoric, which deal with the past and the future, respectively.

experience as a tourist in Rampside established memories that are excited twelve years later by the sight of Beaumont's painting of Peele Castle.[37] Located on Piel Island, the castle overlooks Barrow-in-Furness harbor near the Lake District in modern-day Cumbria. Built by an abbot in the 14th century to guard the harbor, the castle was already in ruins by the 16th century and remained in a state of disrepair until the late 19th century.[38] Wordsworth begins his poem by reminiscing about his trip to visit cousins in August and September of 1794: "I was thy Neighbor once, thou rugged Pile! / Four summer weeks I dwelt in sight of thee."[39] However, Wordsworth was only inspired to write about the castle after encountering Beaumont's depiction of it, emphasizing the role of memory in this ekphrastic elegy.[40] The memory of his touristic impressions is also intermingled with personal tragedy: the image of the ship tossed on the waves would have brought to mind the recent tragic death of Wordsworth's brother, Captain John Wordsworth, in February 1805. John's ship sank near the shore in Weymouth, killing two-thirds of the crew and inciting scandalous rumors about John's character and skill as a captain.[41] John's death may have spurred Wordsworth to title the poem "Elegiac

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[37] Wordsworth may have seen the painting at at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in May 1806. His poem was completed by June 29th, when Beaumont acknowledged having read it in a letter to Wordsworth (Halmi 430).

[38] R. Newman, "Piel Castle Survey and Excavations 1983-1985," *Contrebis* 12: 64-67 (1986), *Council for British Archaeology*. Web. Accessed 13 December 2015.

[39] Nicholas Halmi, *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014), 430.

[40] Classical rhetors used ekphrasis to spatially memorize their speeches by associating certain sections of their speech with a corresponding part in the scene or work of art.

[41] Richard Matlak, "Captain John Wordsworth's Death at Sea," *Wordsworth Circle* 31.3 (2000), 127.

Stanzas," but it is only mentioned in passing. The poem relies on the contrast between

Wordsworth's memory and Beaumont's painting to convey the poet's sense of loss.

Ekphrasis sets up a contrast between subject and object that brings the "subjective

experience into play, so that the emotions of a character emerge through description of

the external world."[42] Ekphrastic poems often prioritize the poet's thoughts concerning a

work of art over descriptions of the art itself. Elegy also prioritizes the mental work of

mourning for the poet over the subject of the poem; Samuel Taylor Coleridge defines

elegy as "a form of poetry natural to the reflective mind. It *may* treat of any subject, but it

must treat of no subject *for itself*; but always and exclusively with reference to the

poet."[43] Making the poet the nucleus of elegiac thought does not require the poet to treat

every death (or every painting) like a mirror for his or her mortality, but it positions the

poet as a rhetorical mediator between both images and ideas.

The mediated genesis of the "Elegiac Stanzas" – writing about the memory of a

landscape after seeing an artistic depiction of that landscape – mirrors the process of

mediation that Wordsworth undertakes within the poem itself. He begins by describing

his memory of the castle, then, rather than setting up a direct contrast between his

memory and the painting, Wordsworth intervenes with a hypothetical painting:

> Ah! THEN, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
> To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,

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[42] Starr, "ekphrasis," *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 394. Perhaps the most famous example of this is Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," which combines ekphrasis with dramatic monologue in order to embody a fictional speaker.

[43] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Routledge and Sons, 1884), E-book, 242.

> The light that never was, on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the Poet's dream;
>
> I would have planted thee, thou hoary Pile!
> Amid a world how different from this! (430)

The stanza opens with a counterfactual condition, signaled by the perfect-tense protasis (condition) followed by a past-tense subjunctive apodosis (result). Although this creates an occasion for the poet to describe his former, idealized view of nature, the grammatical structure of the condition communicates its non-existence even before the poet declares that this peaceful picture was a "fond delusion" that "nothing can restore" (431). Wordsworth's revisionary attempt to create a *new* painting within a poem purporting to describe an *actual* painting parallels the process of ekphrasis, which may claim to mimetically depict a piece of visual art, but always ultimately creates something new in the act of copying.

The counterfactual scenario Wordsworth creates is not meant to be sincere advice to the painter, since the rest of the poem reveals that the poet affirms Beaumont's version of the castle:

> Oh 'tis a passionate Work!—yet wise and well;
> Well chosen in the spirit that is here;
> That Hulk which labours in the deadly swell,
> This rueful sky, this pageantry of fear! (431)

The first line's caesura visually demonstrates the balance between passion and wisdom that Wordsworth values in the painting, while the dark sublimity of the scene resonates with his new, darkened vision of life. Geoffrey Hartman claims that what has been lost

for Wordsworth is "definitely not his faith in nature,"[44] a common theory since John's

drowning might have converted the image of the "glassy sea" into a "deadly swell."

Rather, what has been lost is "this kind of potentiality, this capacity for generous error

and noble illusion, which made life correspond to the heart's desire."[45]

    If we accept that Wordsworth's counterfactual ekphrasis is merely performing the

prefatory rhetorical work required in order to convey the tragedy of loss, the question

remains: why does Wordsworth spend the majority of the poem describing his "fond

delusion" and relatively little time on what he now deems "reality"? One way of

explaining Wordsworth's extended treatment of his hypothetical painting is by examining

the intersection of elegy and tourism. In *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary

Marketplace* Sarah Brouillette expands upon the idea of post-tourism made popular by

the sociologist John Urry in order to account for the strange relationship between the

modern tourist and the quest for authenticity:

> The phenomenon of 'post-tourism' involves an admission, acceptance, and
> sometimes glorification of the lack of authenticity in tourism
> experiences…to put on the guise of the tourist as a role, in a kind of
> outsider's game or strategy. While this process can sometimes entail a
> kind of ecstatic play, it can also involve a more somber detachment that
> results from the recognition that no experience is fully authentic or
> meaningful…'There is no going back, no essence to redeem.' Post-tourism
> is a kind of elegiac performance.[46]

Wordsworth's attempt to both rehearse and reject his naïve perspective as a tourist in

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[44] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787 – 1814* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1971), 284.

[45] Ibid., 285.

[46] Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2011), 40-41.

Rampside provides an excellent example of the proclivity of the post-tourist to "put on a guise" of naïveté. Brouillette's summary of this phenomenon as an "elegiac performance" stems from the post-tourist's self-awareness about his participation in a fictional world created by the tourism industry. By playfully appearing to buy into these practices, the post-tourist distances himself from the other sincere, but "deluded" tourists who take the sight at face-value. Though Wordsworth is not interested in literally distinguishing himself from other tourists, he reveals his own shift in perspective about nature and mortality by contrasting his new, enlightened perspective with his former "fond delusion." The counterfactual construction of the beginning of "Elegiac Stanzas" presents the speaker as a tourist with an idyllic view of the world, while the subjunctive mood immediately reveals that the poet (like his audience) is aware that this "mine of peaceful years" is a fiction.

Elegy follows a similar pattern, since it must "perform" the process of loss in the poem itself in order to equip the audience to feel with the poet. An elegiac poem often begins by dramatizing the joy of life with the deceased in order to throw the awful pain of his or her absence into sharp relief. Thus, ekphrastic description within an elegy serves to amplify emotion by manifesting the image before lamenting its absence. The work of commending, of speaking out, is necessary for the poet to process his own emotions, but also in order to perform the act of commemoration that his brother's death demands. If the audience is to commemorate (*cum* + *memorare*, "remember with") John alongside the poet, Wordsworth must provide the material. Yet, "Elegiac Stanzas" gives no information

about John's death; it doesn't even mention his name. The only thing we learn about him is by another counterfactual statement, designed to parallel the counterfactual painting presented earlier in the poem: "[Beaumont] would have been the Friend, / If he had lived, of Him whom I deplore" (431). The only image of John's life we receive is a hypothetical projection of the life that might have been if he had not died, but he did.

Thus, it becomes clear that Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas" mourns his lost "potentiality…for noble illusion"[47] even more than his lost brother. The speaker somberly plays the "game" of naïveté by dedicating so much of the poem to his hypothetical painting. The poet's altered subjectivity is reflected in the poem's narrative structure, which moves from delusion to truth. Like the "fundamentally self-negating" gaze of the post-tourist,[48] Wordsworth establishes the myth he now rejects by juxtaposing the visual analog of his hypothetical painting with Beaumont's real one, and privileging both of these images over any description of his brother.

In addition to manifesting an elegiac performance, the prominence of the hypothetical painting in "Elegiac Stanzas" represents the desire of the poet to inscribe his own meaning on the object of his poem. As I have already pointed out, the word "observe" encompasses several divergent, but related, meanings that map onto the functions of elegy, ekphrasis, epideictic rhetoric, and even tourism: to see, to speak, and

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[47] Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry*, 284.

[48] Graham Huggan describes calls the post-tourist gaze "self-negating" because "it searches for an authenticity it prevents itself from finding, and for another time and place produced by its own self-justifying myths." Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 198.

to celebrate duly. This matrix of meaning reveals the tensions of power in each of these genres between subject and object, observer and observed: who will speak? what will be seen? will it be celebrated? Elegy may purport to speak "on behalf" of the deceased but, as we saw in Coleridge's definition, often results in a poem in which the poet's mind eclipses his subject. Though many Romantic poems are structured discursively, the internalized dialogue of the poems often becomes a solipsistic self-projection, since "Romantic writers, though nature poets, were humanists above all, for they dealt with the non-human only insofar as it is the occasion for the activity which defines man: thought, the process of intellection."[49] Tourism is also organized around man: even natural sights only become tourist sites after they are labeled as worthwhile by humans and treated as spaces for tourists to "find themselves." Questions of authenticity run through the discourses surrounding tourism and lyric poetry, which both aim to construct a self.

Heffernan claims that even though the object may destabilize the poet's gaze, "the gazer's place remains…the site of power."[50] This disparity in power is manifested in the gazer's ability to reproduce or alter the object before him. In "The Semiotics of Tourism" Jonathan Culler identifies the tourist's desire to participate in the process of marking a sight as sight-worthy by reproducing it: "one may engage in the production of further markers by writing about the sight or photographing it; and one may explicitly compare

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[49] M.H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle,* edited by Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 202.

[50] Heffernan, 99.

the original with its reproductions."[51] Ekphrasis exemplifies this process by "writing about the sight"; while the urge to "compare" confirms that the reproduction is never exactly the same as the original. In both touristic and ekphrastic contexts, "The desire to gaze—takes the form of the desire to depict."[52]

Culler also describes the ways in which tourism depends on site-markers: "Nothing is more boring than an unnamed landscape…to be truly satisfying the sight needs to be certified, marked as authentic."[53] The title of Wordsworth's poem, "Elegiac Stanzas," is the first site-marker that one encounters in the poem. By labeling his poem an elegy in stanzas, Wordsworth points to the history of elegy in general, but also of elegiac stanzas in particular. The most important ancestor of this form is Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," which is made up of iambic quatrains, rhymed ABAB. Gray's speaker describes his iterative visits to a graveyard (on-site) to mourn and consider the lost potential of those buried there: "Some inglorious Milton may here rest."[54] The speaker presents counterfactual scenarios as way of securing sympathy for the unknown and unmourned who "implor[e] the passing tribute of a sigh. / Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse, / the place of fame and elegy supply." Gray thus points to the dead's desire for commemoration, marking the site of eternal rest, and his poem does just

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[51] Culler, 160.

[52] Heffernan, 100.

[53] Culler, 161, 164.

[54] Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," *The Poetry Foundation,* Web. Accessed 10 March 2016.

that: the graves in his poem may have already been marked by "th' unletter'd muse," but now they are also the subject of a famous elegy. Wordsworth's title is a site-marker signaling that he is working in the tradition established by Gray, mourning his unnamed brother, specifically, but exploring the possibilities within the genre of elegy in general.

Wordsworth's poem serves to mark the occasion of his brother's death, while simultaneously remarking on the relationship between his expectation and the reality he encounters in Beaumont's painting. Wordsworth's initial attempt to revise Beaumont's painting also works as a kind of "marking," altering the original to conform it to his own vision of Peele Castle. If it had been realized, his hypothetical painting would have been a site-marker certifying the authenticity of the castle as "a mine / Of peaceful years; a chronicle of heaven" (431). Wordsworth even uses the language of certification when he describes his desire to "express what then I saw; and add the gleam, / The light that never was, on sea or land, / The consecration, and the Poet's dream" (430). Wordsworth adds an uncertified "gleam" in order to consecrate his own vision of Peele. Even though Wordsworth ultimately accepts Beaumont's depiction of the castle, he only does so after his own life experiences have demonstrated its truth and not because of any genuine engagement with the work of art.

Despite his clear awareness of the poet's desire to overlay the painting or tourist-site with his own image, Heffernan insists on a dialogic relationship between Wordsworth and Beaumont's painting: "What distinguishes the *Peele Castle* frontispiece is that each of the others was based on a picture painted to illustrate a Wordsworth poem. Only *Peele*

Castle suggested a poem, reversing the direction of stimulus from poet to painter."[55]

Heffernan is correct to credit Beaumont with stimulating Wordsworth's creative

production – Wordsworth also does so in his dedication – but the dialogic exchange that

occurs between the two "productions" is far from democratic. First, Beaumont's painting

is transformed from a site-marker of Peele Castle into a sight in its own right by its

placement in the Royal Academy of Arts. Wordsworth's poem, which began as a site-

marker for Beaumont's painting, later surpasses the fame of its source.[56] Furthermore, an

engraving is made of Beaumont's painting (yet another reproduction) in order for it to

serve as the frontispiece to Wordsworth's own collection of poetry. This act reverses the

sight/site-marker relationship and makes Beaumont's painting appear to be an illustration

for Wordsworth's poem, rather than its source of inspiration. In this way, Wordsworth's

poem embodies what Jonathan Culler describes as "the interchangeability of the signifier

and signified."[57] This shifting chain of signification establishes the precarious sight/site-

marker relationship and challenges Heffernan's assertion that *Peele Castle* maintains any

kind of power over "Elegiac Stanzas" by being the impetus for its composition.

The interchangeability of the observer and the observed, the site-marker and the

sight, extends beyond the creation of "Elegiac Stanzas" to the language of the poem

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[55] Heffernan, 95.

[56] For example, the Wikipedia page for Piel Castle (the place) mentions Wordsworth but not Beaumont. It also incorrectly states that Wordsworth's poem was composed on-site during an 1811 visit, which provides a fascinating current example of the (fallacious) cult of authenticity in the tourism industry.

[57] Culler, 166. Culler gives the example of the Statue of Liberty: "originally a marker – a sign welcoming travelers to New York – has become a sight; but then as a celebrated tourist attraction it has become at another level a marker…for the United States as a country for tourism."

itself:

> I was thy neighbour once, thou rugged Pile!
> Four summer weeks I dwelt in sight of thee:
> I saw thee every day; and all the while
> Thy Form was sleeping on a glassy sea …
>
> Whene'er I look'd, thy Image still was there;
> It trembled, but it never pass'd away.

Although Beaumont's painting possesses very little agency in the the poem, the "real" (or rather, remembered) castle acts as an interlocutor for the poet that stands on more equal footing. In the first line of the poem, Wordsworth apostrophizes the castle, momentarily confusing the reader who has just learned from the title that this is an elegy suggested by a painting, neither of which makes an appearance until much later in the poem. This instability continues with the ambiguous construction of the second line: "I dwelt in sight of thee." Whose sight? Was Wordsworth able to see the castle? Or is the castle "looking" at Wordsworth? This lack of clarity actually implies a reciprocal relationship between the poet and the landscape. In addition, the first reproduction we see of the castle is one "produced" by the castle, not by the poet or the painter: "Thy Form was sleeping on a glassy sea /… / thy Image still was there; / It trembled, but it never pass'd away." The castle's visible self-projection (reflection) contrasts with the counterfactual painting proposed by the poet later in the poem.

Sight continues to dominate the rest of the poem, even after Wordsworth reveals he has changed his mind about the nature of the world and given up his picture of "lasting ease, / Elysian quiet without toil or strife" (431). He characterizes his former conviction

about the world as seeing "the soul of truth," then claims he "not for a moment could

behold" a calm sea and continue thinking his old thoughts. Now he looks ahead to "sights

of what is to be borne" with a new understanding of the world as a place full of hardship

and hope. Sight metaphors are ubiquitous in Wordsworth's work, but it is worth

mentioning that just a few pages after the closing lines of "Elegiac Stanzas" in *Poems

(1815),* Wordsworth opens the Intimations Ode with a similar lament for lost vision,

though he no longer calls the former sight a "fond delusion":

> There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream
> The earth, and every common sight,
>   To me did seem
>   Appareled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream.
> It is not now as it has been of yore; –
>   Turn whereso'er I may,
>   By night or day,
> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.[58]

This reverses the movement from blindness to sight in "Elegiac Stanzas" and replaces it

with a claim, resting on a belief in "preexistence," that man begins by seeing clearly and

loses the capability for sight. Thus, although Wordsworth locates the source of true

knowledge in a (pre-lapsarian) state of preexistence he still seeks an authentic vision.

Since Wordsworth can see the "celestial light," "the light that never was," no more, he

appears to have turned to visual and narrative forms of mediation in order to express his

feelings of alienation.

Culler would challenge Wordsworth's desire for a permanent, authentic sight by

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[58] Wordsworth, *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, 434.

arguing that "Every 'original' is a further representation" and suggesting that "a semiotic

perspective advances the study of tourism by preventing one from thinking of signs and

sign relations as corruptions of what ought to be a direct experience of reality."[59]

Wordsworth seems to be making a similar move in his off-site poem by standing

"behind" Beaumont and his own hypothetical painting, filtering the pain of his lost vision

and the tragedy of his brother's death. The visual mediation of ekphrasis is a necessary

evil for Wordsworth, who reminisces about his youthful unity with nature: "I was often

unable to think of external things as having external existence & I communed with all

that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in my own immaterial nature."[60] For

Wordsworth, ekphrasis offers a post-lapsarian way of viewing the world, rather than a

means of engaging the other. Wordsworth's position off-site, from the castle and from his

brother, reinforces this split between the internal and the external and leads Wordsworth

to the genre of elegy.

Agha Shahid Ali's poem "Postcard from Kashmir" parallels "Elegiac Stanzas" in

its juxtaposition of a nostalgic image of a remembered landscape with the present reality.

Ali shares Wordsworth's interests in memory and the mental processes of perceiving and

losing a landscape. Ali, too, laments that "The things which [he has] seen [he] now can

see no more" as he compares memories of his homeland to its current state. A native of

Kashmir, Ali was studying in the United States as instability and violence intensified

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[59] Culler, 165.

[60] Wordsworth's letter to Isabella Fenwick in 1843, qtd in Halmi, 433.

between India and Pakistan over Kashmir in the late 1980s. After receiving a postcard

from Kashmir, the speaker of the poem nostalgically recalls the Kashmiri landscape and

realizes that political violence will have changed it forever:

> Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,
> my home a neat four by six inches.
>
> I always loved neatness. Now I hold
> the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.
>
> This is home. And this is the closest
> I'll ever be to home. When I return,
> the colors won't be so brilliant.
> The Jhelum's waters so clean,
> so ultramarine. My love
> so overexposed.
>
> And my memory will be a little
> out of focus, in it
> a giant negative, black
> and white, still undeveloped.[61]

Although Ali is not a tourist in "Postcard from Kashmir," the postcard is the

quintessential object for considering the relationships among art, tourism, and poetry: it

contains all three in a "neat four by six inches." As souvenirs, postcards contribute to the

process of sight-sacralization, to borrow Dean MacCannell's term, which requires the

production of portable, keepsake copies of the attraction in order to authenticate the sight.

Unlike the ambitions of more traditional ekphraseis, the souvenir does not aim to replace

or surpass the sight, since it is, at its heart, a marketing strategy meant to encourage travel

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[61] Agha Shahid Ali, *The Half-Inch Himalayas* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 1.

to the depicted sight. The souvenir's defined role as a form of paratext for a site parallels one of ekphrasis's related genres, inscription. Geoffrey Hartman explains in his chapter "Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry" that inscription "was in theory, and often in fact, a dependent form of poetry, in the same sense in which the statues of churches are dependent on their architectural setting or partly conceived in function of it. The inscription was any verse conscious of the place on which it was written."[62] Souvenirs depend on the site for signification and intentionally offer a partial experience that can only be made complete by a pilgrimage to the "original" sight. Souvenirs have no pretensions of mimesis, but rather celebrate their own mimetic failures: they are fragments, miniatures, and caricatures.

The postcard performs many of the same marketing and memory functions as the typical souvenir, but it differs in that it is designed to be sent from an on-site tourist to an off-site recipient. In addition, the tourist inscribes the site-marker with his or her impressions of the sight or an (often hypothetical) exhortation to the receiver to join them: *"Wish you were here!"* The combination of an image with a written description models the process of ekphrastic poetry in general, and Wordsworth's own experience writing "Elegiac Stanzas" in particular. A second-order representation of a sight (the postcard) becomes the site for a verbal, rather than visual, representation of the tourist experience through an act of inscription. Susan Stewart's book *On Longing* contains a helpful explanation of postcards as a medium of self-fashioning:

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[62] Hartman, "Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry," 32.

> That remarkable souvenir, the postcard, is characterized by a complex process of captioning and display which repeats this transformation of public into private. First, as a mass-produced view of a culturally articulated site, the postcard is purchased. Yet this purchase, taking place within an "authentic" context of the site itself, appears as a kind of private experience as the self recovers the object, inscribing the handwriting of the personal beneath the more uniform caption of the social. Then in a gesture which recapitulates the social's articulation of the self–that is, the gesture of the *gift* by which the subject is positioned as place of production and reception of obligation–the postcard is surrendered to a significant other. The other's reception of the postcard is the receipt, the ticket stub, that validates the experience of the site, which we now can name as the site of the subject himself or herself.[63]

The speaker in "Postcard from Kashmir" may be the recipient of the imagined postcard, but the process has been doubled by the composition of the poem; the poem itself becomes another postcard, sent from the poet to the reader. Ekphrastic poetry follows this same structure, ostensibly presenting a "double" of the sight it describes, but ultimately presenting an image of the speaker's thought. Elegy, too, displays the mental processes of the poet more prominently than the elegiac subject. Ali's poem unites the generic goals of ekphrasis and elegy in the literal space of the postcard – a photograph that mimetically captures a moment in time that is already gone.

Like Wordsworth's hypothetical painting, the postcard depicts a pleasant landscape that is reflected in the poet's personal memory (Wordsworth's 1794 trip to Rampside, Ali's childhood in Kashmir). Faced with the inaccuracy of their former impressions, both poets turn to consider what changes are wrought on their mental

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[63] Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire," *On Longing* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 138.

processes by the change in the landscape. Ali must exchange the literal image of Kashmir on the postcard for the image of Kashmir's war-torn state, which he can only imagine. Such a shift proves to be impossible and leaves the speaker with "a giant negative, black / and white, still undeveloped." Replacing his mental image would require a return to Kashmir, which Ali presents as a syntactic certainty – "When I return." However, the poem's movement from clarity to uncertainty suggests that this return has not, and may not, occur. Or perhaps, if it does occur, the speaker will be unable to voice the traumatic scenes he witnesses there. The poem seems to work backwards, erasing the "neat" inscription established in the first two couplets and moving towards an image that is "out of focus" as the poem's lines also decrease in length. The series of negative statements following the declaration "When I return" also establishes that, while a physical return to Kashmir may be possible, a return to the nostalgic landscape of his memory is impossible. These negative constructions parallel Wordsworth's counterfactual conditions and provide yet another example of the "self-negating" gaze of the post-tourist, which "searches for an authenticity it prevents itself from finding, and for another time and place produced by its own self-justifying myths."[64]

"I see everything in a very elegiac way. It's not something morbid, but it's part of my emotional coloring,"[65] Ali explained in a 1998 interview following the publication of his collection *Country Without a Post Office*. Unlike Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas,"

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[64] Huggan, 198.

[65] Deborah Klenotic, "Waiting for Word in the Paradise that was Kashmir," *UMass Magazine* (Amherst, MA: Spring 1998). Web. Accessed 9 March 2016.

which immediately signals its generic identity by its eponymous title, indented quatrains, and abab rhyme scheme, the genre of "Postcard from Kashmir" is less clear. The opening couplets initially suggest the poem could be a ghazal, one of Ali's preferred forms, but the poem's compact 14 lines visually suggest a sonnet. However, the poem does not follow the typical question/answer structure of the sonnet, as it produces more questions than answers. Furthermore, the meditation on love that both of these forms facilitate quickly becomes eclipsed by the elegiac act of public mourning – "My love / so overexposed." The slant rhymes, "mailbox"/"inches" and "hold"/"hand," as well as the combination of iambic and dactylic meter of the first two couplets evoke elegiac couplets – an elegiac tradition that extends all the way back to ancient Greece and incorporates themes of both love and mourning.

Ali's elegiac vision conveys a sense of both personal and public loss in "Postcard from Kashmir." The "half-inch Himalayas" and the "clean" and "ultramarine" water of the Jhelum are presented in the same way as the deeds of the deceased in an elegy; the speech act of the poem displays the "brilliance" of Kashmir for the reader, while the grammatical structures reveal that the beauty has already been lost. The lost landscape is both a physical reality and the product of a shift in the poet's own perspective, since the changes will only take place "when [he] return[s]." The camera metaphors that run through the poem are an analog for individualized vision and provide yet another link to the culture of tourism. Ali's use of the word "negative" first appears to continue the list of negations he begins in the previous verse paragraph: "the colors won't be so brilliant. /

The Jhelum's waters so clean, / so ultramarine." Yet the word "negative," when referring

to film, does not denote an absence or a contradiction, but a yet-to-be-realized presence.

A negative is "a developed image made on film or another medium (originally specially

prepared glass) showing the lights and shades, and colour values, reversed from those of

the original, and from which positive prints may be made."[66] By depicting his future, yet-

to-be-realized memory as a film negative, Ali affirms that the new image of Kashmir is

not a cancellation of his former, nostalgic memory; it is a "reverse impression."

By projecting a future state of looking back, "my memory will be," Ali establishes

a predictive conditional of cause and effect: If/When he returns to Kashmir, his memory

will be "a giant negative, black / and white, still undeveloped." The potentiality contained

in his mind offers a positive alternative to the unreal excess of the Kashmir in his

memory that was "so brilliant," "so ultramarine," "overexposed." The new image of

Kashmir, while "a little / out of focus," is posited as a private, post-lapsarian, and perhaps

more authentic Kashmir. The "negative" of the speaker's nascent memory remains

unexposed, temporarily constructing an unsullied and private landscape, which is the

desire of every local and every post-tourist. The speaker conveys his desire for possession

through the use of personal pronouns: "my home," "my hand," "my love," and "my

memory." Of course, Ali is participating in the same process of self-fashioning and

validation that Susan Stewart identifies in her description of the postcard as a site-marker.

Yet the elegiac performance in "Postcard from Kashmir" also catalyzes memory to

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[66] "negative, n. 7a," *OED Online,* Oxford University Press, September 2015. Web. 9 March 2016.

produce a new reality, rather than merely mark the death of the familiar. Ali reluctantly

rejects the flat, nostalgic vision of Kashmir that the mass-produced image of the postcard

(and even his own memory) suggests, and with it, his own position as recipient of the

postcard (local-turned-tourist). Instead, he imagines himself as a local once again and

expresses a desire to present a new image of his home, one that is too complex to be

conveyed through language.

Jahan Ramazani argues that Jamaica Kincaid's invective against tourism in

Antigua, *A Small Place*, actually offers an alternative approach to tourism: "Kincaid

nevertheless implicitly carves out a rhetorical space for another kind of tourist experience

—historically and politically savvy, literary and self-aware, ironic and imaginatively

probing, and open to the cultural differences and awed by the natural beauty she attempts

to convey in her lyrical prose."[67] Like Ali's poem, Kincaid's book is peppered with

conditional statements ("If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see") and

descriptions of the intense unreality of the Antiguan landscape ("Antigua is beautiful.

Antigua is too beautiful. Sometimes the beauty of it seems unreal").[68] Ali describes

Kashmir as excessively beautiful, an *over*exposed image of *ultra*marine water. Ali and

Kincaid both characterize their distant homelands as a tourist would see them: landscapes

that overwhelm the senses and ultimately cannot be depicted. Stewart's thoughts on the

souvenir's incompleteness parallels this experience of both excess and lack: "The

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[67] Ramazani, 461.

[68] Kincaid, 3, 77.

possession of the metonymic object [souvenir] is a kind of dispossession in that the

presence of the object all the more radically speaks to its status as a mere substitution and

to its subsequent distance from the self. This distance is not simply experienced as a loss;

it is also experienced as a surplus of signification."[69] In response to this loss and excess,

both Kincaid and Ali continue to participate in the process of site-marking and

representation that caricatured their homelands in the first place. Their insistence on

mourning a lost, inaccessible home, combined with their willingness to offer a corrective

to harmful rhetoric by way of their own writing suggests a provisional path forward for

poets with a touristic readership. Ali admits the postcard's failure to represent Kashmir,

but the fact that his mind still contains the seeds of a picture implies that, while he has

acknowledged its limitations, he has not given up on the medium of photography entirely.

The acceptance of language's failure and the determination to use language

anyway frequently characterizes modern poetry, but elegy seems especially engaged with

loss and language as it performs the verbal work of mourning. The ode's direct address

creates a sense of immediacy and presence ideal for on-site poems, but elegy has become

the conventional genre for off-site poems. The temporally specific encounter of the

tourist with the sight and/or site-marker can never be recreated, and the act of composing

a poem about a remembered landscape or moment in time results in nostalgia. The

generic roots of ekphrasis in inscription and of elegy in epitaph further strengthen the link

between the poetry of tourism and ekphrastic elegy. Appearing as an epigraph to Ali's

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[69] Stewart, 135.

1987 collection *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, "Postcard from Kashmir" acts a site-marker for the collection as a whole, marking a beginning by describing an ending – a lost vision. Like the publicly available text of a postcard, the poem is "overexposed" in its position as an epigraph. In fact, the final word of the poem, "undeveloped," reverberates with the poem's lack of closure or enclosure: it is un-enveloped.

The potentiality of Ali's elegiac lyric carries over into the first poem of the collection, "Lost Memory of New Delhi," which begins with the narratologically bold statement: "I am not born / it is 1948 and the bus turns / onto a road without a name."[70] The nascent, undeveloped image of Kashmir becomes an analog for the yet-to-be-born poet. Thus, just as we have seen in Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas," the lost landscape stands in for a lost self. However, Ali's poem goes a step further than Wordsworth's by including the "undeveloped" film, which introduces the possibility of a future self. The unborn speaker of "Lost Memory of New Delhi" longs to be heard by his parents, but "They don't they won't // hear me they won't hear" (6). Ali's poems demonstrate ekphrastic elegy's continued concern with the themes of speaking and seeing; voicing what one sees and being heard by others are both necessary elements in constructing the self for Ali and Wordsworth.

The voice of the poet dominates "Elegiac Stanzas," speaking to and about the silent castle, painting, painter, and brother. The silence of "Elegiac Stanzas" becomes

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[70] Ali, 5.

more meaningful alongside the ardent vocalization of the poet and persistent silence[71] of

his brother in yet another elegy: "To the Daisy." Composed in 1805 and appearing

directly after "Elegiac Stanzas" in the 1815 *Poems,* "To the Daisy" apostrophizes a

flower in order to work through John's recent death. Unlike "Elegiac Stanzas," the poem

is full of images and details from John's life, filling in the mysterious gap left by the

collection's preceding poem:

> Sweet flower! belike one day to have
> A place upon thy Poet's grave,
> I welcome thee once more:
> But He, who was on land, at sea,
> My brother, too, in loving thee,
> Although he loved more silently,
> Sleeps by his native shore.
> …
> The birds shall sing and ocean make
> A mournful murmur for his sake;
> And Thou, sweet Flower, shalt sleep and wake
> Upon his senseless grave![72]

Here we finally encounter the most common site-marker of all: the grave stone. Again

Wordsworth follows Gray's lead in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," since the

speaker describes the graves of others, but the poem ultimately ends with an epitaph for

the speaker himself. Wordsworth mediates our access to the elegy's subject by also

pointing first to his own grave, reminding us that elegy's true function is that of a

memento mori. Wordsworth gladly takes on the role of speaking "for" the deceased and

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[71] In fact, John does speak once in the poem, but he ironically utters the word "silence": "'Silence!' the brave Commander cried: / to that calm word a shriek replied, / it was the last death-shriek" (344).

[72] Wordsworth, *Poems by William Wordsworth (1815),* 341, 344.

hastens to assure the daisy that his brother "loved more silently." Not only does the poet

speak on behalf of the deceased, but he also promises that nature will join in the

mourning. This more traditional, even pastoral, approach to elegy could be read as the

"next step" in the mourning process because of its placement directly after "Elegiac

Stanzas."[73] While Wordsworth may have wanted to convey this meaning to the readers of

Poems (1815), composition history suggests that "Elegiac Stanzas" may have been

written after "To the Daisy" and implies the "Elegiac Stanzas," though an unusual

interpretation of the elegiac form, represented a maturation of the poet's thought.

Regardless of the order, it is clear that the questions of mediated vision and speaking *for,*

through, or *to* the subject of ekphrasis or elegy continue haunting Wordsworth's later

poetry, especially the Intimations Ode. Each of these tasks, ekphrastic seeing and elegiac

speaking, is united in the epideictic project of ceremonially "pointing out."

The parallels with tourism and site-marking help delineate methods of marking

and remarking upon a sight and their role in constructing the subjectivity of the poet.

Combining ekphrasis and elegy enables both Ali and Wordsworth to consider how

tourism and self-construction are related. Both poets anchor their poems on second-order

representations of a tourist destination, highlighting the mediated relationships between

tourists and sites, mourners and graves, readers and poems. By incorporating conditional

statements, both poets attempt to balance the possible and impossible in their work. Ali

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[73] For more on the intended structure of the 1815 *Poems,* see Wordsworth's 1815 "Preface," which explains that the poems follow the mental development of the poet from youthful ignorance to the present as a "prelude to" the *Excursion.*

and Wordsworth both rely on the ekphrastic and elegiac "occasion" to work through their lost vision and point to a new way of viewing the world. Their awareness of what has been lost and desire to continue finding new modes of expression establish a model of touristic vision and site-commemoration that resists flattening either landscapes or loss. However, the off-site ekphrastic or elegiac object is rarely given a chance to speak for itself in ekphrastic elegy, ultimately limiting the power of ekphrastic elegy to facilitate a dialogue between the poet and the touristic site.

"Wanting to be a monument": Notional Ekphrasis and Bishop's Dialogic Imagination

From Wilbur's on-site dialectic ode to Wordsworth and Ali's off-site ekphrastic elegy, most of the poetry of tourism is anchored in a real location and addresses the gap between expectations and reality. However, the spatial relationship between the poet and the ekphrastic object cannot simply be described as either presence or absence. The long tradition of notional ekphrasis establishes the imagination as a third, abstract location for the ekphrastic object. The imaginary could be seen as the opposite of presence on a spatial spectrum, with absence falling in between them. The imagined ekphrastic object is not merely absent; it has never existed. Alternatively, the imaginary could be described as a kind of internal presence, since the object is contained within the mind of the poet. Perhaps then, the imaginary adds a new dimension to the spectrum of presence – absence, as the imaginary and absence both describe objects no longer accessible to the poet, while presence, objects that are. Thus, notional ekphrastic poems would describe internally

present objects and on-site ekphrastic poems would describe externally present objects.

Elizabeth Bishop, whose collections titled *North & South, Questions of Travel,* and *Geography III*[74] reveal her own sustained interest in the subject of travel and spatial arrangement, offers a particularly insightful meditation on tourism in a poem unmoored from any real location. Her poem "The Monument" constructs a fictional work of art[75] and stages a dialogue between a tour-guide figure and a dissatisfied tourist. This triangulation facilitates a dialogue foregrounding the complex interrelation of inside and outside, self and other, tourist and post-tourist.

All the poets I have considered so far respond to the contradiction between their worldviews and the reality of their experiences as tourists. Wilbur turns to the dialectic process to find synthesis, while Wordsworth and Ali mourn their lost vision and plant the seeds of a new one. Bishop rejects the tidiness of an ode's argument and resists elegy as a response to distance and loss, observing in her villanelle "One Art,"

> The art of losing isn't hard to master.
>
> I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
> some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
> I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.[76]

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[74] For readings of several of Bishop's other poems related to tourism – including "Arrival at Santos," "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," and "In the Waiting Room" – see Jahan Ramazani's 2015 article "Poetry and Tourism in the Global Age" in *New Literary History* 46.3.

[75] Like Keats's composite urn, Bishop's imaginary object resembles aspects of real works of art, but does not describe any single work in particular. "The Monument" evokes the surrealist *frottages* of Max Ernst. Bishop claimed she disliked Ernst's art, but she also admitted to Anne Stevenson that his "wood rubbing…inspired the poem" (Stevenson 68).

[76] Elizabeth Bishop, *Poems, Prose, and Letters,* edited by Robert Giroux and Lloyd Schwartz, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2008), 167.

The speaker's insistence on her resilience after losing the landscapes of her memory, whether exaggerated or sincere, orients her poetry toward interpretation and signification rather than possession. Through notional ekphrasis, Bishop stages a scene of reading in which her interlocutor is tourism and interpretation itself. "The Monument" is "self-consciously entwined with tourism as [its] discursive 'other'" and demonstrates the "self-interruptive paratourism" that Ramazani claims can serve as "an ethical and intellectual model" for the poetry of tourism.[77]

"The Monument" opens with an apostrophic, deictic question – "Now can you see the monument?" – immediately placing the speaker and auditor in the presence of a commemorative site. As the speaker goes on to give an ekphrastic description of the monument, however, the reader concludes that the "you" must be himself. A fictional, homodiegetic auditor would not need a physical description of the object, because he would be able to see it for himself. However, after forty-one lines of description, the speaker is interrupted by the very same homodiegetic auditor that we have already dismissed, who asks,

> "Why does that strange sea make no sound?
> Is it because we're far away?
> Where are we? Are we in Asia Minor,
> or in Mongolia?"[78]

The auditor's series of questions are contained in quotation marks, while the speaker's narrativized descriptions and answers resemble free indirect discourse. Because the

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[77] Ramazani, 459-460, 475.

[78] Bishop, 18.

speaker's words are not set off by quotation marks, her position and point of view are

privileged over those of the tourist-figure. This privileging results in the reader

disassociating himself from the second-person addressee and aligning himself with the

speaker: "you" becomes the other, and I becomes "we." However, since the monument

being described has no actual referent in the world, both interlocutors can also be seen as

representing the various perspectives of a single mind. Like any other division of "us"

and "them," the "we" sees a version of himself in the "them" that he wishes to reject.[79]

I have shown that the distance between the speaker and the ekphrastic object is

often directly related to genre in the poetry of tourism, and Bishop's imaginary ekphrasis

is no exception. Although both Wilbur and Wordsworth engage with an "other" in their

poems, neither of them provides space for the "you" to respond. "The Monument" is

composed of stichic lines, rather than stanzas, which are conducive to both internal

meditation and external dialogue. Bishop's split lines visually represent the dialogic

exchange between the speaker and the auditor:

> "Where are we? Are we in Asia Minor,
> or in Mongolia?"
>   An ancient promontory,
> an ancient principality whose artist-prince
> might have wanted to build a monument
> …
> "Those clouds are full of glistening splinters!
> What is that?"
>   It is the monument.
> "It's piled up boxes,
> outlined with shoddy fret-work, half-fallen off,

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[79] See Homi K. Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Men" for more on this phenomenon.

cracked and unpainted. It looks old." (18-19)

The interruption of the line and the gap between the questions and answers quicken the pace of the dialogue and depict the impatience of the exchange. By alternating questions and answers, Bishop voices both sides of touristic vision: the impatient and impertinent tourist figure alongside the meditative and ironic post-tourist. Unlike the careful order of the dialectic ode (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) and the ekphrastic elegy (clarity to uncertainty), Bishop's poem alternates back and forth between the tourist and post-tourist's points-of-view throughout. As a structuring force, dialogue does not inherently privilege one view over another, but ostensibly leaves any act of synthesis up to the reader. Even the content of their conversation resists closure and finality, as it is full of questions, suggestions, and self-corrections.

"The Monument's" stichic verse, split lines, and even title recall earlier meditative and conversation poems, such as "Tintern Abbey," which reveal the mind of the poet as it contemplates a landscape. "Tintern Abbey" also introduces a belated homodiegetic auditor in the form of Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy. Wordsworth desires to make her his second self and "behold in thee what [he] was once."[80] Though "Tintern Abbey" refers to a real landscape, Wordsworth points to the power of notional ekphrasis by claiming the mind of man is a "dwelling" for "a sense sublime," just like "the round ocean and the living air" (68). Both poems palimpsest expectation and reality, past and present, by revealing the contrast between two different human minds. While Wordsworth maintains

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[80] Wordsworth, *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, 69.

his rhetorical dominance as the only speaker in the poem, Bishop considers the nature of touristic interpretation by placing the perspectives of the tourist and the post-tourist in direct conversation with one another.

The speaker/tour-guide's open-mindedness about the meaning of the monument and acceptance of its dilapidated appearance are correlated with the attitudes of the post-tourist who prefers inaccessibility and/or nonexistence of "the authentic" over easy access or comprehension. John Urry explains that post-tourists "almost delight in the inauthenticity of the normal tourist experience. …They know that there is no authentic tourist experience, that there are merely a series of games or texts that can be played."[81] Bishop's speaker participates in similar games as she excuses the untidiness of the monument, "all the conditions of its existence, / may have flaked off the paint," and admits to her own uncertainty about the monument's past, "if ever it was painted" (19). Conversely, the auditor verbalizes all the typical insensitivities of the modern tourist through a series of agitated questions: "Where are we?… / Why did you bring me here to see it? … / what can it prove?" (18-19). The tourist still believes that true meaning can be found and is disappointed, but the post-tourist accepts that the site does not *mean* anything at all, and instead merely "want[s] to be a monument, to cherish something" (19). epanorthosis

The speaker also admits to the limitations of her own vision and language by frequently interrupting and correcting herself as she attempts to describe the monument:

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[81] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze,* 2nd ed., (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009), 12.

> Now can you see the monument? It is of wood
> built *somewhat like* a box. *No.* Built
> *like* several boxes in descending sizes
>   … An ancient *promontory,*
> an ancient *principality* whose artist-prince
> *might have* wanted to build a monument
> to mark a tomb *or* boundary, *or* make
> a melancholy *or* romantic scene of it . . . (18-19, emphases my own)

These instances of epanorthosis prevent the speaker from making mimetic claims about the monument. Instead she proposes multiple possibilities for the monument's appearance, location, and even meaning. This hesitation might be surprising, since the monument is a fiction of the poet's imagination, and therefore the responsibility to a living referent is a non-issue. How could you "fail" to describe something you've made up? However, by depicting the difficulty of describing a fictional artifact, Bishop shines a light on the fissures in language itself and its ability to convey meaning. By opening with a direct question about vision, "Now can you see the monument?", and ending with a command to "Watch it closely" (18, 20), she extends the poem's role from the ubiquitous *ars poetica* to its less common cousin, the *ars lectionis.*

    The parallels between reading and tourism are many, but Bishop seems particularly interested in perspective in this poem. The speaker begins by describing the monument as if she is standing in the same landscape:

> The monument is one-third set against
> a sea; two-thirds against a sky.
> The view is geared
> (that is, the view's perspective)
> so low there is no "far away,"
> and we are far away within the view. (18)

She borrows vocabulary from the visual arts to describe the position of the monument in the landscape, as well as the relationship of the viewer to the monument. Because it is set "one-third…against a sea" and "two-thirds against a sky," the speaker's view of the monument follows what is called the "rule of thirds." The rule of thirds suggests that an artist create a sense of depth in a picture's composition by aligning horizons or other lines with the imaginary lines that divide the area of the picture into horizontal and vertical thirds. Bishop's monument appears to be centered in front of a landscape captured in this way: one-third sea and two-thirds sky. She also relies on words from cinematography to convey the viewer's position within the landscape. The angle from which the monument is seen is "geared low," which creates an illusion of height and proximity, just like a "low-angle" camera shot might in film. However, the viewer is in fact "far away within the view" (18), and it is only a trick of perspective that gives the initial impression that "there is no 'far away.'" The emphasis on the view's subjective appearance provides a foundation for Bishop's *ars lectionis* by suggesting that a reader's position utterly changes his interpretation of a text.

The tourist-auditor, who also wants to "read" the monument, recognizes the importance of identifying his perspective before this work can commence. First, the auditor expresses a desire to locate himself by naming the location, asking, "'Where are we? Are we in Asia Minor, / or in Mongolia?'" (18). The tourist immediately places the monument in an exotic locale, evinced by his use of an older geographic term for Anatolia, "Asia Minor," which has more ancient and literary associations than

contemporary ones.[82] Yet again we see that tourists consider "nothing…more boring than an unnamed landscape."[83] When there is nothing to read, they immediately seek to inscribe. If the monument is going to provide a site for self-reflection and identity construction, it must be clearly identified, and the tourist's distance and relationship to the object must be measured. That nature of the monument is explained in terms of its relationship to the viewer: "Why does that strange sea make no sound? / Is it because we're far away?" These questions reflect the tourist's role in the semiotic structure as an interpretant.

According to C.S. Peirce's semiotic theory, the relationship between sign and signifier is not dyadic like Ferdinand de Saussure's model, but triadic, consisting of the signified, signifier, and interpretant. Peirce's theory is more appropriate for discussing tourism than Saussure's because it "not only treats explicitly the way in which meaning is educed from objects…but also moves us beyond simply talking about symbolic meaning and thinking to understand the way in which interpretation compels us to action."[84] Bishop's tourist theorizes that the "sea," which he fully expects to be similar to other seas he has encountered, should have a sound and faults his own position for not being able to comprehend (hear) the sound of the sea. By taking the position of the viewer into

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[82] Asia Minor, now generally referred to as Anatolia or Asian Turkey, has been part of the Republic of Turkey since 1923, but there are many common ancient associations with the term, like Homer's Troy and the apostle Paul's missionary journeys.

[83] Culler, 161.

[84] Michelle M. Metro-Roland, *Tourists, Signs and the City* (Farnahm, GB: Routledge, 2016), 5. *ProQuest.*

account, the ekphrastic poetry of tourism can more effectively explore the multi-faceted aspects of both the self and the other. Misreadings, like Bishop's tourist's, can be more easily identified because there are multiple perspectives provided of the original object.

The speaker pushes back against the tourist's assumptions about the nature of the landscape and challenges the definitiveness of spatial measures. After providing a concrete description of the landscape, the speaker slowly discloses that the monument is not contained in an actual landscape at all: the monument and landscape are two-dimensional. The sea is composed of "narrow, horizontal boards" and the sky "is palings, coarser than the sea's" (18). This revelation causes the reader to join the shocked tourist's exclamation: "it is all so flat!" (19). Yet the association between tourist and audience is brief, for the tourist continues in the belief that he is contained *within* the flattened picture, since he is "tired of breathing this eroded air, / this dryness in which the monument is cracking" (19). The surreal movement in and out and back into the painting disorients the audience and prepares them for the speaker's suggestion that the image is the beginning, rather than the end, of a painting. Bishop transports us inside, outside, near, and far – all ways of relating to a text – as the poem builds and tears down hypothetical worlds.

In the final verse paragraph, the speaker contemplates the meaning of the monument and suggests that it might commemorate something sacred, entomb its creator, or inspire new artistic productions. The distance between the speaker and the monument established in the preceding dialogue seems to collapse, and we are once again viewing

the monument in close proximity, as she points out its detailed scrollwork and

decorations. However, we remain on the outside of its mysterious boxes and can only

imagine what may be contained within. In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Michel de

Certeau suggests that "there is no spatiality that is not organized by the determination of

frontiers."[85] The speaker in Bishop's poem recognizes the frontiers of her own

knowledge, while simultaneously seeking to cross these boundaries:

> It may be solid, may be hollow.
> the bones of the artist prince may be inside
> or far away on even drier soil.
> But roughly but adequately it can shelter
> what is within (which after all
> cannot have been intended to be seen). (19-20)

Because this poem is an example of notional ekphrasis, the unknown interior of the

monument is especially strange. The speaker acknowledges the inaccessibility of this

inner sanctum and argues that is not meant to be accessed at all, reinforcing the imagery

earlier in the poem that evoked the Ark of the Covenant with its "long petals of board,

pierced with odd holes, / four-sided, stiff, ecclesiastical. / From it four thin, warped poles

spring out" (18). Self-knowledge remains limited even in an internal landscape, retaining

the same layers and boundaries found at a traditional tourist site. Bachelard describes this

phenomenon when he observes, "Thus, the spiraled being who, from outside, appears to

be a well-invested center, will never reach his center. The being of man is an unsettled

being which all expression unsettles. In the reign of the imagination, an expression is

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[85] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 123.

hardly *proposed,* before being needs another expression."[86] The project of constructing an identity must be continuous and propositional; it must be a dialogue.

The "being" proposed in "The Monument" is actually a triangulation of the speaker, the auditor, and the monument. The speaker and the auditor exhibit the contrasting urges of the tourist and the post-tourist, which both dwell in the same mind. Furthermore, the monument's desire "to be a monument, to cherish something" (18) parallels the poet's desire to create and be known, which we saw in both Wordsworth and Ali's poems. Ultimately, the final verse paragraph establishes that the monument is a symbol for the poem itself, for it contains "the bones of the artist-prince." The stacked, misshapen boxes recall stanzas arranged on a page, while the woodgrain peeking through the paint of the frottage-like image parallels the mimetic limitations of language. The poet's anxiety about the presentation of her work, while evident, is surpassed by the humble confidence that "But roughly but adequately it can shelter / what is within" (19). Although the monument seems to contain some kind of self, the speaker also asserts that her poem is just one step in a chain of copies: "It is the beginning of a painting, / a piece of sculpture, or poem, or monument, / and all of wood. Watch it closely" (20).

The direct command to the reader to "Watch it closely," echoes an earlier notional ekphrastic poem that orders the reader to "Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"[87] Percy Shelley's famous sonnet also describes a monument that "says

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[86] Bachelard, 214.

[87] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias," *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 109-110.

'commemorate'" (Bishop 19), but fails to convince the viewer of its authority, since its

dilapidated appearance contradicts its claims to eternal glory:

> I met a traveller from an antique land,
> Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
> Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
> Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
> And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
> Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
> Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
> The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
> And on the pedestal, these words appear:
> My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
> Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
> Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
> Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
> The lone and level sands stretch far away."

"The Monument" and "Ozymandias" share a number of similarities beyond their generic

distinction as notional ekphraseis: both contain physical descriptions of a monument and

speculate about their creators, both monuments announce their importance by way of

inscriptions, both poems triangulate the auditor, speaker, and monument, and both contain

obsessive references to the spatial arrangement of the monument and its surrounding

landscape. Most important for my reading of the ekphrastic poetry of tourism, though, is

the structure of the poem as a dialogue. While Bishop uses dialogue to reveal the self-

contradictory state of the tourist mind, Shelley sets up an embedded narrative to add a

sheen of authenticity to his description of this fictional statue. However, this dialogue

also introduces the voice of the monument itself, both troubling the assumptions of the

reader and eliciting empathy for its fallen state. Like Bishop, Shelley invites the reader to

"read" the monument and, in the process, provides crucial guidance about how to read the poem. The latent irony in each poem, Ozymandias's obvious defeat and the tourist's obvious shallowness, point the poem's reader to probe more deeply into the site as a text.

By focalizing the poems through an "I" that is not placed in quotation marks, Bishop and Shelley perform a touristic scene of reading as a means of instructing the readers of their poems. However, rather than asserting that her preferred *ars lectionis* privileges a single perspective, Bishop gives us a constantly moving, self-questioning, and self-aware example of how to interact with a landscape. She refuses to let her reading be subordinated to spatial hierarchies (proximity or distance) like the other on- and off-site poems we have observed. Bishop's notional ekphrasis provides a forum where movement is both possible and unlimited. The flexibility of notional ekphrasis points to the potential of on- and off-site touristic poems to construct a nuanced lyric identity by allowing the site to speak.

Conclusion

The importance of "ruins" to both tourism and self-construction cannot be overstated. As we saw in the introduction, Emerson argues that the tourist in Europe merely "carries ruins to ruins." Yet Wordsworth, Ali, Bishop, and Shelley all find ruins an incredibly generative site for contemplating their craft and identity. Similarly, Wilbur finds the downward-moving disorder of the pastoral fountain evocative when compared with the upward-reaching areté of Maderno's fountain. Ruins' connection to history, responsiveness to time, and reminder of mortality all speak to the poet and offer a

location for introspection that points to the fissures and transitory nature of all beings. Each of the poets I have considered attempts to balance this knowledge of finite nature with an inner-propulsion for eternity, which he or she hopes to achieve through poetry.

The spectrum of spatial arrangement between poet-tourists and their ekphrastic objects provides a microcosm for studying the problems and potential represented by the poetry of tourism. Richard Wilbur's on-site poem begins to trouble the process of flattening and erasure that tourists are famous for by performing a dialectic process in his ode. Wordsworth and Ali also demonstrate a shift in perspective through their ekphrastic elegies, as they mourn their former world views and landscapes lost forever. However, these generic approaches to the poetry of tourism ultimately only display the very process of expectation and disappointment that Emerson derides: "At home I dream that at Naples, at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. … at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from." Only Bishop's dialogue pushes beyond the moment of disillusionment in a material way. Her poem foregrounds perspective and pushes readers to see both tourist destinations and themselves as flexible, propositional, and multi-dimensional beings. A monument's dilapidation does not prevent it from speaking, and losing a landscape "isn't a disaster." Disappointment can be followed by discovery.

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