

**An individual's perception of landscape is intrinsically linked to the past. To what extent is this view represented in your prescribed text and ONE other related text of your own choosing?**

Alain de Botton's philosophical memoir "The Art of Travel" explores one's understanding of landscapes and how they are connected to the past through consideration of the reason and desire to travel. William Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" also deals with one's perception of a landscape and how it links to the past through idealizing the values of past societies while relying on landscape. Both of these texts reveal the links between the past and our perceptions of a landscape today.

De Botton's initial belief in the need to escape the dreariness of the London winter he is seduced by the unexpected arrival of a travel brochure. Enchanted by the white beaches and palm trees he arrives in Barbados, which lives up to its exotic promise. But as the memoir progresses he realises that travel cannot hold all the answers. Throughout his travel memoir, de Botton consistently tests his perceptions against those of philosophical guides. In Chapter four, On Curiosity, he refers to guides such as Alexander von Humboldt's extraordinary achievements from exploration of South America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Not only did he 'travel 15,000 kilometres', he identified '1600 new plant species' and 'redrew the map of South America' based on his reading of 'chronometers and sextants'. In stark contrast de Botton compares his own experience in a hotel room in Madrid. Von Humboldt's tenacity is contrasted to de Botton's indolence as he is almost paralysed by a sense of inertia. While Humboldt was motivated by the desire to discover, de Botton's motivation came from the "a maid who was ultimately responsible for [his] voyage of exploration around Madrid." What de Botton is hyperbolically commenting on here is the motivation for travel, which for Humboldt was partially inspired, by the King of Spain and his underwriting of fact finding expedition.

For de Botton a sense of stasis arose from his feeling that Madrid had already been documented in a number of commercial travel guides leaving nothing left for him to discover "but in Madrid everything was already, known, everything had already been measured". On a sunny day, caught amongst a crowd of tourists, listening to guides, de Botton "wondered, with mounting anxiety, what [he] was to do here, what [he] was to think" this is in direct contrast to Humboldt who had not been plagued by such questions "everywhere he went, his mission was unambiguous; to discover facts and to carry out experiments." While admiring of Humboldt past exploits, de Botton ultimately concludes, based on his own past experience of travel that sometimes being a tourist in a strange city can incite "a strong wish to remain in bed and take the next flight home." This realisation changes de Botton's perception on travel and the exotic as he concludes that sometimes home is sometimes a preferable option.

William Yeats was an Irish poet whose hostility towards modernity, which he saw as plunging into moral decay, saw him return to Renaissance ideals and to the Antiquity, the city of Byzantium. Similarly to de Botton's realisation of the representation of landscapes created from artwork, Yeats believed that through

only art transcendence can be instigated. The title of Yeats work "Sailing to Byzantium" initially suggest that in order to defeat his perceptions of the deterioration of modern life and societies values, society must revert to the order and growth of the ancient Christian city of Byzantium. In stanza one, Yeats describes his representation of the modern age through alliterative listing "The salmon falls, the mackerel crowded seas/ Fish, flesh or fowl commend all summer long. This suggests that the young are preoccupied with sexual gratification, which effectively decays all things natural, the beauty of society. This idea is furthered with the rhyming couplet "caught in that sensual music all neglect/Monuments of un-ageing intellect." The rhyming couplet metaphorically indents how the young are occupied with the vices of society, neglecting the past lessons of Antiquity. Therefore Yeats sees a conflict between the modern world and the ancient causing him to travel back to Byzantium for enlightenment.

On travel to Provence, France in chapter seven, On Eye-opening Art, de Botton's perception of the natural landscape is shaped by the representation of artist Vincent van Gogh. De Botton once again set out on his journey to France with intentions of experiencing the landscapes that "[were] generally held by sensible people to be very beautiful." Except his journey came to an abrupt pause as he took the wrong exit out of Marseille and ended up in the liminal space of an industrial area where an oil refinery had "tangles of pipes and cooling towers." However de Botton's discovery of a different side of Provence predominantly known for its beauty relates to his earlier representation of the beauty in his travels of liminal spaces at the airport in Amsterdam or similarly in the industrial areas of Barbados. In addition, shortly after de Botton has arrived at his accommodation, he reads a large book on Vincent van Gogh as he perceives "the most effective way in which our sense of what to look for in a scene can be enriched is through visual art." Thus de Botton refers to van Gogh as a guide of visual arts, soaking in his visual representation of the region of Provence, viewing his paintings on the cypress trees native to the area, painted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The next day it was notable the effect that van Gogh's visual representation of the trees had on de Botton's perception of the vast, natural landscape in front of him at breakfast. Van Gogh's representation of the natural landscape made it remarkable and worthy of de Botton's recognition "my own eyes grew attuned to see around me the colours that dominated Van Gogh's canvases". This is solidified by a comparison of van Gogh's painting of the cypress trees to a real photograph. His painting highlights the notability of the Provence landscape as the space devoted to the trees is dominant, the real tree looks uninspiring next to Gogh's and even with a black and white filter the painting is still beautiful. Therefore de Botton concludes that tourist destinations are denoted by art, the audience of these artworks, which represent the landscape in a remarkable way feel a desire to travel there. Thus it is historical artworks, which represent landscapes certain ways that change an individual's perception.

'Sailing to Byzantium' also addresses Yeats concern with the ordinal changes in life such as the transformation of life into death, youth into age. Frustrated by this circle of life the persona in Yeat's poem tries to combat this by intentionally leaving his homeland in search of a spiritual awakening, thus sailing to a new

land, Byzantium. Yeat's reveals the unpleasant transformation into death that all creatures are blissfully unaware of by using the caesura "birds and trees – those dying generations – at their song," suggesting birds keep singing regardless of whether they're about to die. However the persona's lust for spiritual revelation is revealed by begging for his heart to be re-crafted "Consume my heart." This closely relates to the tenets of Christianity, a dominant religion in Byzantium, which articulates the need to surrender to a divine being. The persona's intentions are displayed as they seek rebirth in Byzantium's old society structure and order, "And therefore I have sailed the seas and come to the holy city of Byzantium." It is clear that Yeats portrays the solution to the distressing transformation of nature into death by finding spiritual enlightenment in travelling back to a time where he can live again as spiritual art, in Byzantium.

