

Introduction: The Background of Fiction

In the relation between travelling and literature, the former has always had the precedence as the space of authentic experience. Literature, in that view, can but try to represent what the traveller has seen or felt. This study inverts that view and unfolds the primacy of the text in shaping the desire and the experience of the traveller. That approach has been prepared in recent studies of tourism that uncovered the semiotic structure underlying the touristic sight: hence the title of this study refers to literature as the background of tourism rather than travelling.¹ In taking up the semiotic relation of the text “marking” the “sight”, this study advances beyond the structuralist underpinnings in MacCannell’s conception to point to the intertextual dynamics of the touristic desire. In close readings of James’s travel writings and fictions the texts offer configurations of place that activate the reader’s desire to complement the text by reality. What is at stake in tourism, then, is how the reader is constructed (as tourist) by the supplements the text requires. The relation between literature and tourism depends on their functional capacity in a functionally differentiated society: the constitution of individuality.

In one of his late novels, Henry James gets very explicit about the relations of the place in literature and its perception in reality: in *The Ambassadors* he stages his protagonist as literally walking through an imaginary place that has become real. The initial two sentences of that chapter address the heart of this study by referring to the place as “the background of fiction” – which I reflect by considering literature as “the background of tourism.”

He had taken the train a few days after this from a station – as well as to a station – selected almost at random; such days, whatever should happen, were numbered, and he had gone forth under the impulse – artless enough, no doubt – to give the whole of one of them to that French ruralism, with its cool special green, into which he had hitherto looked only through the little oblong window of the picture frame. It had been as yet for the most part but a land of fancy for him – the background of fiction, the medium of art, the nursery of letters; practically as distant as Greece, but practically also well-nigh as consecrated.²

Strether’s method of selecting the sight he intends to see is as remarkable as this whole chapter of *The Ambassadors*. Strether, like any tourist at the turn

1. DEAN MACCANNELL, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
2. HENRY JAMES, JR, *The Ambassadors*, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 452.

of the century, takes the train to get to his destination – only that he doesn't know what the destination is, at least not in terms of the transportation infrastructure. He selects the stations at random. However, considering the nature of the sight Strether hopes to see, that method is less extravagant than may initially seem: he looks out for a comparatively vaguely defined sight of “French ruralism”, specified by a color: its “cool special green”. That is a type of view rather than a specific sight locatable on the map as, for instance, the cathedral of Nôtre Dame de Paris.

The significance of the sight for Strether is described in terms of a previous aesthetic experience, as the view “through the little oblong window of the picture frame.” Strether obviously wants to find the view he has seen before in a landscape picture. But there is more: how are we to account for the extension of the significance to other media – the “land of fancy” is not only the medium of art (medium? not object?) but also the “background of fiction” and the “nursery of letters”? The answer that art, fiction, and letters all have to do with “fancy”, with the imagination, raises but more questions. Evidently, in the imagination, France and Greece may easily equal each other out in distance and sacredness, but which is the principle on which they do so? That question is particularly interesting with a view on the question of tourism.

The economy of tourism partakes of the economy of traveling as van den Abbeele has put it forward.³ In that account, tourism is characterized as a movement away from “home”, which is actually constituted by the return to it. Home, that is, becomes home with a difference: it is a self-reflexive home that knows about its other – traveling, touring, the world out there – and only by that knows itself. By that account, we can understand the relative homogeneity of “distance” that makes Greece and France equally abroad in James's piece of text. Can we assume, then, that the same differential definition applies to “sacredness”? The text, at least, suggests so.

However, what does James mean by sacredness? “Consecrated” implies that this particular place has been made sacred before, by fiction, art, and letters. As the predications of the media suggest, these latter are important not in their capacity to represent the place but to inform the imagination that leads to the expression in those media. Although in fiction the narrative action takes the foreground or center of attention, for James the background of fiction not only furnishes the necessary medium in which the characters act, but also provides the “note” that inspires the writing and makes the action aesthetically “right”.⁴ If the place is the medium of art, it is not just the object of representation but supplies an aesthetic potential, as in

3. GEORGES VAN DEN ABBEELE, ‘Introduction: The Economy of Travel’, in: *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. xiii–xxx.

4. In the preface to *The Ambassadors* James explains how he was inspired to write the novel by a story told by a friend in a setting similar to that described in the particular scene; “said as chance would have, and so easily might, in Paris, and in a charming old garden attached to a house of art, and on a Sunday afternoon of summer [...]. The observations there listened to and gathered up had contained part of the ‘note’ that I was to recognise on the spot as to my purpose [...]; the rest was in the place and the time and the scene they sketched: [...] to give me what I may call the note absolute.” HENRY JAMES, JR, ‘Preface to the New York Edition: *The Ambassadors*’, in: *Literary Criticism, Vol. 2*, New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984, p. 1305.

the bell the “cool special green” strikes in the artist’s imagination. Most clearly marked as an authorial category is the influence of the place in the expression “nursery of letters” which conveys the image of someone writing happily away in the consciousness of the sense of place and thus almost directly transmitting to the addressee and the reader that quality as the tenor of the message. The “sacred”, then, relates to the capacity for cultured expression. If the sacred signals the attractiveness of the place – is, then, every tourist an author?

If so, most probably not in the sense of James. The sacred, however, has been a central issue in anthropological approaches to tourism.⁵ It is as a keystone to the discussion of the background of tourism, which we take to be literature – or, more specifically, fiction – that we consider the sacred as the propedeutic point of departure for exploring the circular relationship between place, author, and reader in our first chapter.

If we turn from the imagination to the destination, we may wonder what sense it may make to travel to the “land of fancy”. In tourism, the sacred place is not primarily a means of getting inspired to write something but an object of veneration. The growing popularity of traveling since the middle of the 18th century and its commercialization have interfered with the function of experience of the tourist site/sight as a means of distinction,⁶ especially as that experience builds on the intimate communication of the traveller with the place in the romantic vein.⁷ The catchall term for the touristic status of the place has become “authentic”. That word signifies a value judgement on the place as much as it denotes an experience made by the tourist in the presence of the place.

As value judgement, authenticity has had a career in the critical assessments of tourism, mainly in culturally high-minded humanist criticism of the inauthenticity of the cultural practice. Wringing authenticity from the hands of a warrior against the “pseudo” like Boorstin,⁸ who used it like a weapon, in turning it into an object of analysis, Dean MacCannell redirects our attention to the experiential dimension of touristic authenticity.⁹ He does so in proposing different models of the construction of authenticity. One is the “authenticity effect” created through the spatial arrangement of front regions and back regions: access to the back is culturally coded as authentic.¹⁰ Examples for this are cooking spaces on display in Pizza

5. See, for instance, NELSON H. H. GRABURN, ‘Tourism: The Sacred Journey’, in: VALENE SMITH, editor, *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1977, pp. 17–32.
6. JAMES MICHAEL BUZARD, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800–1918*, New York, N.Y.; London: Oxford University Press, 1993 devotes his study of 19th century tourism to the uses of “culture” for social distinction.
7. Urry analyzes this romantic variety of tourism as an economics of positionality in JOHN URRY, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London: Sage, 1990.
8. DANIEL J. BOORSTIN, *The Image, Or, What Happened to the American Dream*, Frankfurt/Main: Athenaeum, 1962.
9. MACCANNELL, *The Tourist*.
10. Chapter 5 of *The Tourist*, also published in DEAN MACCANNELL, ‘Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 79 November (1973):3, pp. 589–603. His conception draws on Goffman’s notion of the spatial structuration of social intercourse in ERVING GOFFMAN, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Garden City/NY: Doubleday, 1959.

restaurants, or backstage tours in public or private institutions such as a stock exchange or casino.

In a different, more general conceptualization of tourism, MacCannell approaches the semantics of the tourist attraction. He describes tourism as a “ritual performed to the differentiations of society.”¹¹ That sounds as far as one can travel away from James’s aesthetic exposure to the land of fancy. The action, “ritual”, has strong collective overtones, and intentionally so, because for MacCannell, tourism to a large extent is a reaction or complement to the social fragmentation that individuals suffer in the everyday life of the modern world.¹² The “differentiations of society” are precisely what cause and define the scope of that fragmentation, i.e. the socioeconomic sphere in contrast to the cultural-spiritual. That latter, as providing symbols for making sense of life and the world, is excluded from the realm of alienated work.¹³ Tourism provides an antidote to that in that it is a collective practice, a ritual, bringing back symbols to their socially integrative force. And the point for MacCannell is – and he puts a lot of emphasis in the corresponding supportive descriptions of workplace attractions in a Paris *Baedeker* from 1900 – that in tourism the alienating differentiation finds a symbolic representation which produces cultural sense. The function of the symbolic to provide social “glue” is inherent in a Durkheimian sociology that MacCannell refers to in crucial passages of his theory.

In MacCannell’s account, then, the place or the sight is itself a symbol, a representation, and it is authentic because it represents to the tourist the unity of what he else perceives as only a fragmented part of an obscure reality. But doesn’t that sound like exactly the definition of the (epistemological) function of a realistic novel, to get a grip on a complex reality? Is the sight a text to be read? Even MacCannell cannot pretend that sight-seeing is exactly like reading. To the contrary, he takes the linguistic turn in tourism studies in a different direction: in another, yet more general model, he conceives of the sight as a semiotic construct, functioning like a (Saussurian) sign in the relation of a marker (signifier) and the sight (signified).¹⁴ In shifting the focus from the authentic, as a reified object representing a value, to the process of authentication, MacCannell gains analytical ground against those culturalist approaches that view tourism as a deficient cultural practice, as an inauthentic expression of a false conscious-

11. MACCANNELL, *The Tourist*, p. 13.

12. That notion of tourism as ritual has been influential in further anthropological accounts of tourism, e.g. NELSON H.H. GRABURN, ‘The Anthropology of Tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10 (1983), pp. 9–33.

13. The underlying organic conception of society against which the present is contrasted as disintegrated and *manqué* is revealed in MacCannell’s citation of the anthropologist Edward Sapir: “The great cultural fallacy of industrialism, as developed up to the present time, is that in harnessing machines to our uses it has not known how to avoid the harnessing the majority of mankind to its machines. The telephone girl who lends her capacities, during the greater part of the living day, to the manipulation of a technical routine that has an eventually high efficiency value but that answers to no *spiritual needs* of her own is an appalling sacrifice to civilization.” MACCANNELL, *The Tourist*, p. 35.

14. In fact, MacCannell prefers the triadic Peircean relation of the sign “represents/something/to someone”, which becomes homologized as the attraction that relates as “marker/the sight/to the tourist”, MACCANNELL, *The Tourist*, p. 110.

ness.¹⁵ The concept of marker and sight reintroduces the notion of “text” back into tourism, which in itself is a non-textual cultural performance. It thus points to the significance of meaning in the process of touristic authentication.

However, it is just how that meaning is effected in texts that remains unaccounted for in MacCannell’s analysis. A symptom of that insufficiency is the way he juxtaposes texts to sights in a way that literalizes his metaphorical notion of “marker” – markers identify sights by contiguous relation. That contiguousness also figures in his concept of the social function of the symbolic that “glues”. The immediate effects of tourism as ritual prevent the mediation of texts being considered. In fact, the way he uses texts employs a notion of mimetic representativity: his most effective illustrations are guide-books whose purpose is to stick to the facts; his interpretations of fictional texts view situations not in their narrative or rhetorical function but rather as transparent, factual, exemplary representations. Texts as markers are somehow void of the “fancy” so prevalent in James’s picture of the place. As useful MacCannell’s approach is and as productive it has proved,¹⁶ it fails in the analysis of the textual, iterative production of touristic attractiveness. The semiotic metaphor produces its own blind spot: it conceals what exactly is the “experience” in the “ritual” of tourism. It avoids the question of how the marker, a text and as a text, becomes associated with the sight – and accordingly fails to explain “authenticity”. Unlike the linguistic sign, in the touristic sign the signified is not arbitrarily linked to the signifier; the point of the marker is that it has a point, a direction. We can see that in the souvenir: some of the force which has been invested into the tourist attraction as a sign survives in the souvenir’s strong metonymical bond to the place.¹⁷ One might, within the game of the semiotic metaphors, ask: what is the “convention” that stabilizes the arbitrariness of the sight as signifier? And what is the energy behind the link of marker and place that can be displaced on the souvenir and, from there, on further narratives of the experience of the place?

The conceptualization of that energy furnishes the horizon of this study of the configuration of “place” in texts by Henry James. Since James has been an author not only of fiction but, like many of his contemporaries (Mark Twain, W.D. Howells), of literary travel essays for newspapers and magazines as well, we can benefit from the range of genres represented in his work. Moreover, as the late Henry James developed a highly reflective style both in fiction and in travel literature, we may profit from the contrast of generic uses of the place with more reflexively inflected uses in later travel

15. Apart from BOORSTIN, to whom MacCannell explicitly refers, one could point to marxist examples of the use of tourism as an instance of false consciousness such as HANS MAGNUS ENZENSBERGER, ‘Eine Theorie des Tourismus’, in: *Einzelheiten 1: Bewußtseins-Industrie*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1962, pp. 197–205.
16. It has been a source for reference and discussion during the past thirty years, see JONATHAN CULLER, ‘Semiotics of Tourism’, *American Journal of Semiotics*, 1 (1981):1–2, pp. 127–140; GEORGES VAN DEN ABEELE, ‘Sightseers: The Tourist as Theorist’, *Diacritics*, 10 (1980):4, pp. 2–14; JOHN FROW, ‘Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia’, *October*, 57 (1991), pp. 123–51.
17. SUSAN STEWART, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.

essays and fiction. These facts, I think, support our approach to James's work as instructive and representative "texts" to relate to the context of tourism.

Our interrogation of literature will derive its guiding concepts from the questions created by the deficiencies in MacCannell's analysis of tourism. Specifically, the status of the individual as reader, perceiver, and performer will take the focus of our interest. In close readings, we will thus introduce and make continuous reference to a concept of individuality that promises the most for our context of research. That is the systems-theoretical conception which views individuality as a kind of system external to the social system "proper" in its stage of functional differentiation. We will refer to the semantic history of the individual if the occasion requires and we will take the opportunity to further appropriate some space for the still only vaguely accounted for concept of "culture" in the systems theoretical framework.

In the first part of the study, comprising an analysis of James's late story "The Birthplace" and a more comprehensive look at his travel literature, tourism and travel are foregrounded as topics.

First, "The Birthplace" will serve as a kind of propedeutic introduction to tourism history and theory. Second, a close interpretation will focus on what the story can reveal about the cultural conditions of tourism. The implications of literary pilgrimage for the determination of the sense of "sacred" are questioned as is the role of the guide as mediator between sight and tourist. That role is the dramatic kernel of the story; it is the cause of the hero's conflict of having to tell to the tourists stories in whose truth value he himself cannot believe; but also provides the salutary aesthetic distance of the performance of a "tour guide" that tries to do justice to the spirit of Shakespeare. In that, he saves his sense of himself in linking a fictional, stereotypically biographical pattern to elements of the house without committing himself to telling truths about Shakespeare proper: the drama outcolors the need for truth. "The Birthplace" establishes, on a fictional level, the elusiveness of the touristic authenticity in Geddes's performance of a reality that exposes, for the knowing, its own fabricatedness.

James's inspiration for writing "The Birthplace" was a visit to Shakespeare's birthhouse in Stratford-upon-Avon, but that doesn't make the story a piece of travel writing. The relation of texts and place is differently configured in travel literature, as our second chapter explains. The Jamesian corpus of travel literature falls, like his fictional works, into an earlier and a later phase. The differences between these phases provide a key to the specific requirements of the genre which the later James pushed to a limit.

The early Jamesian travel essay keeps within the conventional line preferred by the readers of the magazines that made James's daily bread at the beginning of his career, and through which he built up his literary reputation. The convention of the genre can be phrased like this: the text gives an individual "view" of the place, poses as the report of an individual experience of the place. The place acquires one of two roles in this representation of its authentication by the narratorial eye-witness: it either serves as a "scene" which anchors a discourse or narrative which in turn can thus be authenticated in an imaginary "application", or it is a

“picture”, an object of direct aesthetic perception, which is phenomenally described by generic terms like “picturesque” but provides an occasion for a variety of subjective reactions. These two categories are developed by the later James into a borderline case of travel literature: in the register of the picture, the description of the sight becomes less tied to the immediate perception but is rather turned into a quasi lyrical display of the powers of literary description. In the register of the scene, the discursive content becomes more personal, autobiographical; the text about the place becomes more radically a text about its author’s life and laps into autobiography. I consider this a reflection of the founding parameters of the genre, which are reconceptualized in terms of second level observation.

In the second part of the study, I turn to the role of place in Henry Jamesian “fiction proper”. There, place constitutes rather a background, and we focus on the cases where it is significantly promoted to the foreground in the protagonists’ perceptions.

In the third chapter, I will consider two instances of the association of place with the theme of love. In both instances, the value associated with the romantic place and the personal aesthetic appreciation of it serves as the distinguishing mark of the two protagonists, marking them off from either their fellow tourists or the natives, as individuals eligible for a happy ending together. In “Travelling Companions”, the place is construed as an obstacle to true love. It generates a false idea of love in the protagonist who mistakes his romantic infatuation with Venice for love to his “travelling companion” – at least in the eyes of the young woman. However, later in the story, the place as touristic sight is put forward as a means of education for the hero, which involves experiencing the sublime and ends in the final acceptance of his marriage proposal. In *Confidence*, place inhabits the position of symbolizing the unconscious presence of place; the psychological conception of stifled love, repressed by social attention to loyalty and guilt, finds a metonymical symbol in the romantic and artistic experience of Siena. This place is a conversational taboo as long as another romantic place, the Norman beach at the sea, does not help the protagonist to acknowledge his love and Siena. The different strategic employments of places in the two texts point to specific conceptions of love and individuality.

In the fourth chapter of this study, I treat James’s *The Ambassadors* as a key reflection on the issues involving literature and the place. The place is made epistemologically significant in joining perception and cognitive type. Strether in his private role as tourist, in close communion with the place, unexpectedly encounters social constellations that pertain to his official business. The place is, moreover, Strether’s catalyst of individuality, which in his case resembles an autobiographically informed project of changing his life. What is reflected in the performativity of the place in its narrative placement, moreover, is reading and writing itself, and it is bound to the place’s presence its absence creates. The actual perception of the place is highlighted in the text in its axiological and epistemological value; but it is also marked by/as an absence: the absence of actual perception for the reader. The absence that has been “compensated” by the reality of the imaginary place for Strether in the quote with which we introduced our introduction above (on p. 1). We can detect the supplementarity of textuality

in the configuration of place in the novel, which creates an effect of presence in the epistemological register. That effect of presence is equalled to the *perceptual* impact of the place which cannot be textually represented and thus constitutes a lack. This lack is further reflected in the impossibility to draw an unambiguous meaning from the ambiguous ending of the novel.

In the conclusion I will re-conceptualize the supplementarity of literature and tourism in revision of the chapter on *The Ambassadors* and propose further venues for its contextualization. The insights gained in the course of the analysis are questioned against the framing of supplementarity in an ontological, phenomenological, and functional framework. The hypothesis put forward is that literature and tourism fulfill parallel tasks in reflecting individuality for itself in a functionally differentiated society as conceptualized by Luhmannian systems theory. But their cultural functions differ precisely to the extent that they operate as complements; their supplementary relation (reading experience → perceptual experience) is the structural coupling that engenders this complementarity.