They Lie Now In Small Packets Upon The Desk, A Position Hardly...

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"They lie now in small packets upon the desk, a position hardly appropriate for what they contain. In the clutter and waste that surround them they appear to be almost another pile of insignificant odds and ends. Occasionally will be extracted from this wasteland and examined but these brief glances hardly do justice to the memories they evoke."

Cover Page Footnote
Simmer Plume

Only knowing coarse adjustment
And forever doubtful to the fine
She surfaces in her plume of foam
Hair as black as crow wings
And slick as Indian ink
Sliding down her back and breasts.

She strumpets onto the tambourine shore
Of cymbal shells and brass sand
Orchestrating sounds with her footfalls
Each toe a new note.
She kicks and sprockets forward
Alarming Newton with quantum leaps.
Sea washed hands merge behind her back
Clasping a delicate sea sprig of green sparkling.

She explodes into a wild dance
Dictated by the Muses.
Oh! Memories of Eve.
Her hair a drape of dark water
Whips and slaps stringing a black mask
Through which altricial eyes simmer.

Grooving and sliding, her body begins to purr
In tune with the sea’s vibrations
Then with a swithy shrill
She bursts into speckles of silvery light
All rushing to the bleeding western sun
Trailed by an inky black ribbon.

Peter J. Duffy

They lie now in small packets upon the desk, a position hardly appropriate for what they contain. In the clutter and waste that surround them they appear to be almost another pile of insignificant odds and ends. Occasionally will be extracted from this wasteland and examined but these brief glances hardly do justice to the memories they evoke.

These small photographs tell the story of another time and place from which my present world seems far removed. They tell the story of students placing the traditional books and papers into the background and learning to make a classroom out of life itself. They record the incidents and events of this situation with remarkable ease but they cannot even begin to fathom the true enrichment which four months abroad has impressed upon my mind.

It is late August and a group of tired students emerges from London’s Gatwick Airport. We have come from all parts of this land we call America to experience life in a far different land. We have temporarily left behind all those dear to us and at the moment we are not at all sure we have made the right decision. We know that there will be letters and calls from our families and sweethearts but we also know that for four months we will still be separated from them. Even all our advanced technology and all our sophisticated communications systems have not found a way to completely bridge the space which now exists between us and those that we have left behind.

The small colored rectangles record me and those around me during these first few days and show our somewhat awkward smiles and frowns as we learn to cope with this new life. But they cannot show the thoughts that race through my mind: my fears, my doubts, and ultimately my joy at the wonder of my new environment. This they will never be able to do and these memories will live only in my mind.

In the first week, I am constantly reminded that, even in England, schools and academics must go on. I wrestle with decisions about what courses to take. To guide me, I consider what material I will be able to gain a new perspective on by studying it abroad. At the same time, I blush to admit that I am trying to make my weekends as long as possible in order to have time to explore my new surroundings.

Now, there are places to go and things to do. I must see a play; it would be sinful to come to London, and not do so, I must test the city’s pubs and see how their lager measures up to American beer. Buckingham Palace,
the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, and day trips around England are all put on the agenda. The attractions are all so overwhelming I hardly know where to begin.

It is now late September and a trip to Scotland gives me an even broader perspective of the United Kingdom. The city of Edinburg sits upon a cliff in all the splendor that Scotland is famous for. A bagpiper plays upon the streets as if he has popped out of some fairy tale or story book. I ask myself if I am dreaming. Am I really here in a world that once seemed to only exist in folk songs and in the depths of my imagination?

In October, a short trip to Barcelona brings still another aspect of European culture to life. The days upon the beach and the nights along the busy streets are strangely reminiscent of a trip to Ft. Lauderdale. Only the transactions which service people remind me that this is not so, as I learn that my Spanish is not as good as I had hoped it would be. Then, there are those funny pieces of money called pesos. There are so many in a dollar yet the prices seem comparable when converted. Is there some universal standard that makes a steak cost the same the world over?

Later in October comes mid-semester break which allows a week for travelling. For this occasion, I have no hesitation about where to go. I leave for Ireland, the land of my forefathers. As I walk along the streets of Dublin and the cliffs outside of Galway, I am filled with a strange sense of belonging. This is the land where nearly all my ancestors, and hence my very being came from. As I experience the kindness of strangers I meet, I see something of myself in them: not so much of the way I am but of the way I long to be. At the same time I see the bitterness of those who are dissatisfied with the politics and economics of the country and I feel that this is not a problem only of strangers but one that seems to reside within myself as well. Never have I felt more at peace with myself or secure of my place in the world and I vow to make this serenity last.

This week’s respite seems to be over almost before it began and I return to London, which has now become almost a second home to me. Time passes quickly as I begin to visit all the important sites that I have put off for too long. I feel the weeks of my stay rapidly winding down and I wonder in amazement at where the time has gone. Wasn’t it yesterday when I said goodbye to my friends and family as I embarked on this adventure? That was in August and now it is November.

Thanksgiving comes and goes almost without notice. A meal of sliced turkey and cranberries in the dormitory dining room is one of the only reminders the English give of this American institution. I wonder about the parades and the family gatherings back home. Will they still go on as usual without me there to enjoy them?

The weeks continue to pass and final exams are soon upon us. I find it harder than ever to concentrate upon my studies when there is so much I feel I have left to do in such a short time. The Christmas season has begun and I try to fit my last minute shopping in between my exams. I long to be home for this season yet I dread leaving this city which is so full of life and activity. As I walk along the streets and through the shops, I am already planning the day when I will return.

And suddenly, it is over. The day of my flight home materializes as if out of nowhere. On this melancholy Saturday morning I say my last goodbyes and ride the subway for the last time to Victoria Station. From there a train takes me back to Gatwick, where it all began four months earlier. Soon I am in flight home.

The months have since passed and the stacks of photographs upon my desk are all that link me to the world I left behind there. At times I must use them to convince even myself that I was really there. I have returned to a place that I have long called home but my travels have led me to question even that title. I wonder about the places that I have left behind. Do the theater lights in Leicester Square still shine brightly? Do the members of Parliament still rant and rave within the House of Commons? Do the guards at Buckingham Palace still march in oblivion to everything around them? Are the Irish pubs still filled with laughter and merriment?

Soon the photographs will be labeled with names and places to provide for the day when memory will not be enough to identify them. They will be filed in albums and placed in a shelf to spend most of the rest of their existence gathering dust. But occasionally, on the insistence of a visiting relative or simply on a yearning of my own for this lost world, they will be brought out and examined once again. They cannot take the place of my experience, which now lives only within my memory. But they serve as proof that the worlds I left behind really do exist and as a reminder that someday, I can and must return to them.

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Published by Fisher Digital Publications, 1987