

Inverting the Tourist Gaze

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Nearly every philosopher, at some point, reflects upon the concept of beauty. In the European tradition, the first serious and systematic formulations of a theory of beauty was tackled by Plato and Plotinus in the fourth century BCE and second century CE, respectively. In the Eastern tradition, it was the towering figure of the tenth-century Indian philosopher Abhinavagupta who provided an extensive theory of beauty and aesthetics. In more recent times, plenty of thought has been given to cultural discourses on the perception of beauty, where the most notable among them include Edward Said's work *Orientalism*,¹ and John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze*.² In *The Tourist Gaze*, Urry fleetingly mentions the "minimal characteristics"³ of travel, such as "the intense pleasures"⁴ of fantasy and dreaming, but leaves them largely untouched. Even in his afterthoughts on the "tourist gaze," Urry comments on the importance of visual experience and how its interpretation depends mostly on the viewer's perspective, but stresses that this is contingent on the "various social practices" of organised tourism,⁵ rather than the internal experiences of individuals. Indeed, very little has been written on the interiority of travel, and even less on beauty as a numinous, inner experience enriched by the act of travelling.

It is the intention of this article to explore how the act of travelling makes possible and enhances the perception of beauty. There will be a focus on the internalised experience of individual travellers, rather than the social processes associated with travel, especially large-scale travel. This discussion will employ the concept of beauty as an internal attitude of the perceiver, as theorised by Plotinus, Abhinavagupta, and Charles Baudelaire.

The first section discusses the possibility of commonalities between ideas of beauty as an internal experience posited by Plotinus, Abhinavagupta, and Baudelaire. The second section of this article applies the idea of beauty as

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¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

² John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

³ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 2.

⁴ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 2.

⁵ John Urry, 'The Tourist Gaze Revisited,' *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1992), p. 172.

an internalised experience, at the moment of departure, and when witnessing the “places chosen to be gazed upon,”⁶ through an analysis of excerpts from the works of Bruce Chatwin, Jan Morris, and Freya Stark. The third section investigates the experience of beauty in the face of danger, horror, and disgust, as described in selected works by Apsley Cherry-Garrard, Gustave Flaubert, Joanna Greenfield, and Luis Bunuel. These authors’ works on travel, I believe, contain a high degree of conscious philosophical reflection on the nature of travel, and beauty as the internalised experiences of travellers.

I would like to stress, however, that it is not my purpose to analyse the intricacies of the philosophical systems of Abhinavagupta, Plotinus, or Baudelaire. My purpose is merely to point out remarkable commonalities in their systems, particularly their emphasis on the interiority of the experience of beauty. This article builds on the multidisciplinary aspect of their works and points out existing similarities in the concepts of ‘inner delight’ described by Plotinus, *shanta rasa* (serenity) and *camatkara* (delight) as conveyed by Abhinavagupta, and their proximity to aspects of Baudelaire’s *flâneur*. However different their philosophies are in other respects, the underlying current in all is an emphasis on the interior nature of one’s experience of beauty and delight.

For Plotinus, for example, to fully perceive the beautiful is to contemplate it. In the *Enneads*, Plotinus follows Plato’s concept of the relationship between the tangible world and the World of Ideas from the *Symposium* and the *Republic*. In Plato’s World of Ideas, contemplation of the concepts of beauty and goodness is the goal of the “lover of wisdom,”⁷ and becomes the “foundation of aesthetic and moral value”⁸ as well as the means of judging it. As with Plato’s example of the cave from the *Republic*, the perception of external physical beauty is only a reflection of the intuitive knowledge of beauty that already exists within us. Plotinus’ philosophy of beauty is inexorably linked to the concept of the One,⁹ or beauty itself, through intellectual contemplation of beautiful physical objects. In this sense, Plotinus’ idea of beauty has mystical overtones, since the One is usually understood as the source of all reality. Physical or “visible” manifestations of beauty are only reflections of the “invisible” beauty which belongs to the One, and of which we have an intuitive understanding.¹⁰ The contemplation of beautiful physical

⁶ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 3.

⁷ John Neil Martin, ‘The Lover of the Beautiful and the Good: Platonic Foundations of Aesthetic and Moral Value,’ *Synthese*, vol. 165, no. 1 (2008), p. 31.

⁸ Martin, ‘The Lover of the Beautiful and the Good,’ p. 31.

⁹ Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 212.

¹⁰ Philippus Villiers Pistorius, *Plotinus and Neoplatonism* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952), p. 151.

and external objects brings a “resonance” of joy that is, by its nature, “pleasurable.”¹¹ This resonance creates an inner “delight,”¹² because it is an “eternal endowment of the intellect”¹³ which touches the innermost being of the perceiver.¹⁴ For Plotinus, no recognition of beauty is possible without evoking the eternal within us, our recognition of the One. Recognition of beauty is nothing else but recognition of “the immanence of the eternal” in the objects of our perception, whether in the contemplation of art or of a landscape.¹⁵

Similarly, Abhinavagupta’s elaborate aesthetics and his theory of *rasas* share common points with Plotinus’ philosophy of beauty, where aesthetics and metaphysics are closely intertwined.¹⁶ Firstly, as with Plotinus, beauty is one of the central elements of Abhinavagupta’s ontological system. There are eight basic *rasas* in his system, with each of them relating to mundane emotions associated with our reactions to external events.¹⁷ The *shanta rasa*, however, is a “buttress” that connects aesthetics and metaphysics¹⁸ as it represents the “state untroubled by any emotion”¹⁹ or, put differently, the highest contemplative state transcending common emotional and mental states. As for Plotinus, Abhinavagupta considered beauty as only a representation of the One, and *shanta rasa* opens the door to our innermost being, the contemplative state. Secondly, like Plotinus, Abhinavagupta emphasises contemplative pleasure as a core of aesthetic experience.²⁰ The *shanta rasa* in Abhinavagupta’s system is the nexus in which the individual experience of the external phenomenon links with the experience of the universal through the act of contemplation.²¹ It is the nature of things, according to Abhinavagupta, that something external can captivate our attention through “visual or auditory perception.”²² This brings about the “aesthetic sensitivity” of delight

¹¹ Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 215.

¹² Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 212.

¹³ Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 212.

¹⁴ Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 215.

¹⁵ Pistorius, *Plotinus and Neoplatonism*, p. 148.

¹⁶ Bettina Baumer, ‘The Lord of the Heart: Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics and Kashmir Saivism,’ *Religion and the Arts*, vol. 12, nos. 1-2 (2008), p. 214.

¹⁷ Edwin Gerow, ‘Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm,’ *The Journal of American Oriental Studies*, vol. 114, no. 2 (1994), p. 186.

¹⁸ Gerow, ‘Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm,’ p. 186.

¹⁹ Gerow, ‘Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm,’ p. 186.

²⁰ Gerow, ‘Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm,’ p. 187.

²¹ Gerow, ‘Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm,’ p. 189.

²² Baumer, ‘The Lord of the Heart,’ p. 224.

(*camatkara*), which leads to a contemplative state of expanded consciousness,²³ a predominantly inner experience.

In his essay, 'Beauty, Fashion and Happiness,' Charles Baudelaire develops his own theory of beauty; it is one surprisingly close to that of Abhinavagupta and Plotinus. For Baudelaire, like Abhinavagupta, the concept of beauty embraces all life experiences and is deeply imbued in metaphysics. The metaphysical element of beauty is "always and inevitably of double composition," as it consists of "an eternal, invariable element" and "a relative circumstantial element."²⁴ This duality is "a fatal consequence" of the metaphysical division within human beings: one part is "an eternally subsisting portion," while the other is "a variable element of the body."²⁵ The perfect *flâneur*, or "passionate spectator," however, is much more interested in seeing the eternal in the "circumstantial" than the circumstances themselves, and more interested in the eternal rather than the "relative" and "variable."

The inner experience is often prominent at the beginning of a journey. Each travel author discussed here points to a moment of inner knowing, of experiencing a strong desire to undertake their journey at a specific location. Urry refers to the "the notion of 'departure,' of a limited breaking with the established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one's senses to engage with a set of a stimuli that contrast with the everyday and mundane."²⁶ This concept is closely linked with the inner life of "dreaming and fantasy,"²⁷ which propels travellers to leave the familiar and seek out the exquisite pleasure of encountering the imagined in a place or a landscape. Bruce Chatwin is most explicit in his elucidation of the impulse to travel. In the second chapter of *The Songlines*, he states: "In my childhood I never heard the word 'Australia' without calling to mind the fumes of the eucalyptus inhaler and an incessant red country populated by sheep."²⁸ Chatwin's childhood fantasy about a mysterious place occupied by "the Upside-downers" was enhanced by a picture of an Aboriginal family that his aunt kept in her house. Here was a "family on the move" like his own, and Chatwin immediately identified with the Aboriginal boy walking next to his mother.²⁹ The picture

²³ Baumer, 'The Lord of the Heart,' p. 224.

²⁴ Charles Baudelaire, 'Beauty, Fashion and Happiness,' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leicht (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), p. 681.

²⁵ Baudelaire, 'Beauty, Fashion and Happiness,' p. 681.

²⁶ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 2.

²⁷ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 3.

²⁸ Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 5.

²⁹ Chatwin, *The Songlines*, p. 5.

reminded him of the “the fantastic homelessness of (his) first five years,”³⁰ and signalled the first awakening of his wanderlust.

Similarly, when reflecting on her desire to travel, Freya Stark returns to the childhood memories of “an imaginative” aunt,³¹ who gave her a copy of *The Arabian Nights* for her ninth birthday. This gesture had a powerful effect on the young Stark, who immediately felt “a blaze bright enough to light [her] way through labyrinths of Arabic” and create a “nebulous” desire to travel to the Middle East.³² Urry’s “intense pleasures” of dreaming about other places or gazing upon chosen landscapes³³ are playfully confirmed by Stark in her preface to *The Valley of the Assassins*, a book about her travels in Persia, where she writes, “I travelled single-mindedly for fun,” with a “purpose non-existent.”³⁴

Stark also refers to the same longing and fantasy for faraway places that far precedes the physical act of travel itself. In *The Valley of the Assassins* she writes, “This is a great moment, when you see, however distant, the goal of your wandering. The thing which had been living in your imagination suddenly becomes a part of a tangible world.”³⁵ The movement from imagination to the tangible world is intensely personal and fulfilling. Stark continues: “It matters not how many ranges, rivers or parching dusty ways may lie between you: it is yours now forever.”³⁶ This is an unmistakably inner movement towards a more subtle contentment rather than the straightforward arrival at an external destination. It is, as Stark says, “a delight” that is felt by “every adventurer and pilgrim, however humble.”³⁷

Joanna Greenfield is equally certain about her early desire to travel to a particular destination. In ‘Hyena,’ she writes, “I had wanted to go to Africa since my childhood” and “I had never wanted to work anywhere except in Africa.”³⁸ Born with an eye condition that did not allow her to see the details of her surroundings, Greenfield found comfort as a child by looking into natural landscapes, far on the horizon. She recalls, when riding on her school bus in a suburban town in Connecticut, how she was struck by the allure of

³⁰ Chatwin, *The Songlines*, p. 5.

³¹ Freya Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ in *The Norton Book of Travel*, ed. Paul Fussell (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), p. 553.

³² Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ p. 553.

³³ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 30.

³⁴ Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ p. 553.

³⁵ Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ p. 553.

³⁶ Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ p. 553.

³⁷ Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ p. 557.

³⁸ Joanna Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ in *Journeys*, ed. Robyn Davidson (London: Picador, 2001), p. 375.

“semi-translucent rushes” in a swamp, which were “the only masterpiece” she saw in her childhood.³⁹ The beauty of the “rushes ... bowed under the weightlessness of light” had a direct, if inexplicable, connection to her dreams about Africa. Greenfield says, “I don’t know why I needed to see those rushes so badly, or how I knew Africa would be the same, but it was.”⁴⁰

The theme of departure from the ordinary and mundane, with its especially strong element of “dreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasure,”⁴¹ is most prominent in Jan Morris’ time spent in Kashmir. As she herself mentions in *Places*, her trip to Kashmir took place during an important phase of her life, when she had moved away from reporting on the war in Vietnam and the Cold War and had made a choice to end her “lifelong sexual dilemma”⁴² by undergoing gender reassignment surgery and becoming a woman. She judges her essay on Kashmir as “hedonistic” in nature,⁴³ and Kashmir itself as “a paradigm of escape”⁴⁴ to which she fled “with a dream-like delight.”⁴⁵

Stark’s travel writing is also very personal, and effortlessly reflective and philosophical. She is not afraid to express how her travels affect her inner sensitivities. In *The Valley of the Assassins*, she muses, “Solitude, I reflected, is the one deep necessity of the human spirit to which adequate recognition is never given in our codes.”⁴⁶ She continues that “all the afflictions of the spirit” come from the “inability to lose oneself in the mystery and wonder.”⁴⁷ Stark attributes her ability to do so to her appreciation of landscapes while travelling in Persia. She states boldly to those who disagree with her on this topic: “People who know nothing of these things will tell you that there is no addition of pleasure in having a landscape to yourself. But this is not true.” Moreover, the pleasure has “the intensity of love,” a “communion which an intruder desecrates ... It is a pleasure exclusive, unreasoning and real.”⁴⁸ Abhinavagupta would have no argument with Stark here, as for him the very

³⁹ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ p. 375.

⁴⁰ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ p. 375.

⁴¹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 3.

⁴² Jan Morris, ‘Places,’ in *The Norton Book of Travel*, ed. Paul Fussell (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), p. 170.

⁴³ Morris, ‘Places,’ p. 171.

⁴⁴ Morris, ‘Places,’ p. 171.

⁴⁵ Morris, ‘Places,’ p. 171.

⁴⁶ Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ p. 555.

⁴⁷ Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ p. 555.

⁴⁸ Stark, ‘The Valley of the Assassins,’ p. 554.

definition of a *rasa* is that of inner pleasure and upliftment,⁴⁹ just as inner ‘delight’ is Plotinus’ definition of beauty.

Indeed, the inner experience of *shanta*, or peace, represents the ninth and highest *rasa* in Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic system mentioned earlier. For Abhinavagupta, the *rasa* of *shanta*, or the experience of serenity, is seldom encountered without some external stimuli. He describes *shanta* as the supreme feeling often experienced when contemplating art, during sexual experiences, or derived from other intensely stimulating feelings and is, as a result, something which produces the awakening of experiences of inner peace and serenity. In either case, to feel serenity one must have the ability to reflect upon one’s own experience, and this often requires some solitude.

Stark’s philosophical reflections on the inner experience, while travelling, is taken even further by Morris. In *Places*, Morris allows herself to explore the effect of travel on her inner life, her sense of self and place in life. Here, again, Morris like Stark indirectly refers to Abhinavagupta’s *shanta rasa* and *camatkara*, and Plotinus’ inner ‘resonance’ and ‘delight,’ triggered by perceptions of external objects of beauty. Coincidentally, it is during her travels in Kashmir, Abhinavagupta’s home, that Morris observes: “It was in Kashmir, late in travel and halfway through life, that I first went transcendental.”⁵⁰ In the austere beauty of Kashmir, set between the Himalayan ranges and lakes in the valleys, Morris “emancipates” herself and “soared unimpeded beyond actuality, seldom quite sure where I was, or when, or sometimes even who.”⁵¹ The effect Kashmir has on her, claims Morris, is not unique to her but common to all visitors to the region for centuries. Morris then gives a long and romantically embellished list of Kashmir’s past conquerors, as well as referring to modern tourists who have surrendered to its “transcendental” charm: the Moghul emperors, who “responded to the vale with a sensual passion”; the British colonialists, for whom Kashmir was the “ultimate retreat from the burdens of the empire”; and modern tourists, who “often feel the interlude to have been an unsubstantial dream.”⁵² The reason for this, Morris assures us, is that “Kashmir is more than a place. It is the quality of experience, or a state of mind, or perhaps an ideal.”⁵³ The inner experiences of travellers are mentioned repeatedly by Morris, with subtle references to mysticism and Hindu scriptures, and the idea of a ‘fourth dimension’ or ‘fourth state’ as the state of

⁴⁹ S. Shankarananda, *Consciousness Is Everything* (Melbourne: Shaktipat Press, 2003), p. 211.

⁵⁰ Morris, ‘Places,’ p. 176.

⁵¹ Morris, ‘Places,’ p. 176.

⁵² Morris, ‘Places,’ pp. 176-177.

⁵³ Morris, ‘Places,’ p. 177.

pure self. In the closing part of her essay, Morris states that the region is “like a fourth dimension – outside the ordinary state of things,” and opens us up to “disembodied quality” and “mystic detachment.”⁵⁴ Both the pleasure of dreamy fantasy and inner perception is hinted again in her closing sentences: “The fascination with Kashmir is essentially introspective, a mirror-pleasure in which the visitor may see his [sic] own self ... Paradise, here and everywhere, is in the mind.”⁵⁵

The inner contemplative experience of *shanta* is possible under all conditions, even in the most unlikely circumstances, and this is where Abhinavagupta expands his theory of aesthetics beyond the limits of Plotinus’ delight. The difference between Plotinus and Abhinavagupta’s aesthetics lies in Abhinavagupta’s statement that *shanta rasa* (the highest experience of aesthetic perception) is also possible while experiencing pain or horror.⁵⁶ For Plotinus, ugliness and beauty are different from each other in proportion to their distance from the World of Ideas.⁵⁷ That which is beautiful has a higher degree of participation in the World of Ideas, and that which is ugly has a lower degree. For Abhinavagupta, horror, pain, and that which is normally considered perverse, can also lead to the expansion of consciousness, and thus can become the highest *rasa* (*shanta*).

In his book *The Worst Journey in the World*, Apsley Cherry-Garrard provides excellent examples of how experiences of danger and horror can prompt an inner sense of peace and trigger exquisite, if unexpected, aesthetic perceptions. *The Worst Journey in the World* is the memoir of a disastrous expedition to the Antarctic led by British explorer Robert Falcon Scott between 1910 and 1913. Cherry-Garrard was the youngest and least experienced of the explorers, who, enticed by the prospect of the adventure, paid a fee to participate in the adventure. He vividly describes the horror of the journey, in which many of his companions died (including Scott). The book was highly praised as a literary achievement, and for its subtle, but apparent, anti-imperial irony. The horror of the expedition, and perhaps even the sheer futility of it, is repeated throughout the book. Cherry-Garrard, with characteristic irony, states: “The temperature that night was -75.8°C, and I will not pretend that it did not convince me that Dante was right when he placed the circles of ice below the

⁵⁴ Morris, ‘Places,’ p. 176.

⁵⁵ Morris, ‘Places,’ p. 177.

⁵⁶ Baumer, ‘The Lord of the Heart,’ p. 224; Shankarananda, *Consciousness Is Everything*, p. 215.

⁵⁷ Pistorius, *Plotinus and Neoplatonism*, p. 149.

circles of fire,”⁵⁸ going on to describe the expedition as “the wildest lunacy,”⁵⁹ and reiterating that “[s]uch extremity of suffering cannot be measured: madness or death might give relief.”⁶⁰ Studies of the journey have always focused on the horror experienced, but mention has seldom been made of how flashes of beauty and inner peace are closely interwoven in Cherry-Garrard’s narrative. If anyone could see beauty in hell, it was Cherry-Garrard. The feeling of inner stillness or serenity came from the constant pressure of the dangerous environment: “Our conditions forced themselves upon us without a pause: it was impossible to think of anything else ... of the past or the future ... to live only for the job of the moment.”⁶¹ And as he continues to describe the frozen hell outside and how much he hates it, he interrupts himself:

Well no. Not always. For there was one halt when we just lay on our backs and gazed up into the sky ... where there was blazing the most wonderful aurora they had ever seen ... The aurora was always before us as we travelled east, more beautiful than any seen in previous expeditions ... Now most of the sky was covered with swinging, swaying curtains which met in a great whirl overhead: lemon, yellow, green and orange.⁶²

Similarly, in her recollection of being attacked by a young hyena on a reserve for biblical animals in Israel, Joanna Greenfield comments on feelings of peace and distance. In those most horrifying moments of her life, when the young hyena ripped off and ate a part of her arm and calf, Greenfield’s descriptions of the animal are surprisingly compassionate, as if she were experiencing oneness with the animal during the attack. The hyena in question was called Efa, who “had been taken from his parents as a cub because his mother rejected him ... He was a beautiful animal.”⁶³ There then follows an affectionate, almost maternal, description of the young hyena, which to anyone else would appear repulsive. Greenfield, however, focuses on the youthfulness (“left over baby hair”) and seeming helplessness and loneliness of the animal, who was “strangely helpless ... an adorable cub crying Maaaaa” when fed.⁶⁴ Efa attacks Greenfield during feeding time and, again, Greenfield feels nothing but compassion for the animal, admiring his beauty: “He crouched like a baby,

⁵⁸ Apsley Cherry-Garrard, ‘The Worst Journey in the World,’ in *Journeys*, ed. Robyn Davidson (London: Picador, 2001), p. 263.

⁵⁹ Cherry-Garrard, ‘The Worst Journey in the World,’ p. 263.

⁶⁰ Cherry-Garrard, ‘The Worst Journey in the World,’ p. 277.

⁶¹ Cherry-Garrard, ‘The Worst Journey in the World,’ p. 260.

⁶² Cherry-Garrard, ‘The Worst Journey in the World,’ p. 261.

⁶³ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ p. 376.

⁶⁴ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ p. 377.

begging for something ... Mmmmmaaaaaa.”⁶⁵ Greenfield prefaces her description of the attack with an explanation of her state of mind at that moment: “The mind, I found, is strange. It shut off during the attack ... I saw at a remove, the hyena inside my right arm ... My mind was so calm and remote that I frightened myself.”⁶⁶ From that strange peacefulness in the midst of the horror, she observes the hyena eating her arm: “By this time my arm was a mangled mess of flesh ... He moved up the arm, and all the time those blank, black eyes evaluated me, like a shark’s, calm and almost friendly,”⁶⁷ and “He cowered and whimpered and essentially apologised, still with those blank unmoving eyes, and I stood still for a second ... It felt almost good, as if the whole thing were nearer to being over ... he took most of the calf.”⁶⁸ Then reflection follows, not unlike Cherry-Garrard’s: “Events like that teach you yourself ... For the first time, I realised how my life had changed. There is, after all, no simple dichotomy: intact and alive, versus torn and dead.”⁶⁹

The theme of death and its mystical overtones are also present in the closing lines of Chatwin’s *The Songlines*. The three protagonists, Bruce (supposedly Bruce Chatwin), his guide Arkady, and Arkady’s companion Marian, come across three dying Aboriginal men. The description of the three men is poetic and idealised. They are lying on the ground as if it was their “hospital bedsteads,”⁷⁰ yet they could not be further away from a sterile hospital environment. The men are with their land and nature because, as Chatwin notes, they, “like the ideal man[,] walk(ed) themselves to a right death,” returning to where they belonged.⁷¹ When the three dying men learn they have visitors, “all three smiled, spontaneously, the same toothless grin.”⁷² The visitors watch them in awe: “Aren’t they wonderful? ... Smiling at death.”⁷³ The last lines of *The Songlines* are particularly poignant, as by then Chatwin already knew that he was dying of AIDS. The fictionalised, possibly idealised, description of the moment of death reflects beautifully Abhinavagupta’s *shanta rasa* and the Plotinian union with oneness, here represented through a oneness with nature. The state of mind of the three dying

⁶⁵ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ p. 377.

⁶⁶ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ p. 377.

⁶⁷ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ p. 378.

⁶⁸ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ p. 379.

⁶⁹ Greenfield, ‘Hyena,’ pp. 383-384.

⁷⁰ Chatwin, *The Songlines*, p. 292.

⁷¹ Chatwin, *The Songlines*, p. 292.

⁷² Chatwin, *The Songlines*, p. 293.

⁷³ Chatwin, *The Songlines*, p. 293.

men is peaceful and accepting: “They are all right. They knew where they were going.”⁷⁴

If Cherry-Garrard, Greenfield, and Chatwin describe peace in the midst of danger or normally threatening situations, Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Louis Bunuel rejoice in the ‘forbidden’ and ‘perverse.’ In Plotinus’ vocabulary, they have moved away from the idea of beauty (and thus the connection with the One). In Abhinavagupta’s system of aesthetics, however, they are still in the realm of *shanta rasa* and *camatkara*, as their activities (however questionable, according to the moral standards of their times) still bring them the desired effect of peace and expansion of consciousness, and are thus valid and desirable tools for achieving a higher sense of consciousness.

For experiencing beauty in what is often treated with disgust, Baudelaire’s *flâneur* is a master. The *flâneur* is a perceiver of beauty in every circumstance of life, especially those thrown upon us by the classics and social morals,⁷⁵ and is more a reflection of Abhinavagupta’s theory, where every experience can ultimately lead to the expansion of consciousness and the perception of beauty. The perfect *flâneur* is “a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness” of all of life’s experiences,⁷⁶ including the immoral and perverse. He is also a “passionate lover of crowds and incognitos,” a truly “cosmopolitan traveller,” who is an explorer of the “modern” city, and an observer of all its secrets.⁷⁷ In this sense, Gustave Flaubert and Louis Bunuel are perfect *flâneurs*.

In his ‘Letter to Louis Bouilhet,’ Flaubert describes a trip to Egypt, focusing precisely on the perverse and immoral. He claims that this is where he perceives beauty most intensely. What is beautiful in his eyes is not in any way conventionally pretty or traditionally accepted as beautiful. He makes a conscious gap between the moral and aesthetic conventions of beauty, and the connection between the beautiful and ‘pure.’ He is overwhelmed by the sight of North African prostitutes and the wretchedness of their conditions, yet he marvels at “their white teeth gleaming between their red and black lips, their metallic eyes rolling like wheels.”⁷⁸ At the end of a lengthy description of his street dealings with them, he concludes: “There is nothing more beautiful than these women calling you.”⁷⁹ Later, he again delights in detailed and graphic

⁷⁴ Chatwin, *The Songlines*, p. 293.

⁷⁵ Baudelaire, ‘Beauty, Fashion and Happiness,’ p. 680.

⁷⁶ Baudelaire, ‘Beauty, Fashion and Happiness,’ p. 683.

⁷⁷ Baudelaire, ‘Beauty, Fashion and Happiness,’ p. 682.

⁷⁸ Gustave Flaubert, ‘Letter to Luis Bouilhet,’ in *Journeys*, ed. Robyn Davidson (London: Picador, 2001), p. 356.

⁷⁹ Flaubert, ‘Letter to Louis Bouilhet,’ p. 356.

descriptions of his sexual encounter with Kuchuk Hanem, “a famous courtesan.”⁸⁰ This time, he watches “the beautiful creature asleep” as she snores on his arm after he “sucked her furiously.” He adds that the night, its “lewd” enjoyments and “the whore,” brought him “infinitely intense reverie” and gave him peace in the same way as did his trips to Parisian brothels.⁸¹

As prostitutes and brothels re-intensify Flaubert’s sense of beauty, so too did alcohol and tobacco for Bunuel. Bars, Bunuel claims in ‘Earthly Delights,’ are “perfect places for meditation and contemplation” necessary for an artist’s life.⁸² Among his favourites are the bars in Madrid, which allow for “an exercise in solitude” as they are “quiet, dark, very comfortable.”⁸³ It is in those bars that he would meet with his script writers, and after they left he would meditate on art, beauty, and life. Nothing else but the “sacrosanct cocktail hour” had “the excellent effects” on his creative imagination.⁸⁴ According to Bunuel, the next best thing for aesthetic contemplations is tobacco, because “if alcohol is queen, then tobacco is her consort” in bringing about meditative states.⁸⁵

The common thread of the diverse examples presented in this paper is an emphasis on the interior nature of the experience of beauty. Although plenty of academic research has been done on the experiences of travel, this work often focuses on the social structures and practices of tourism which construct the perceptions of the traveller. This paper has set out to explore, in contrast, the interiority of individual travel experiences as expressed by a range of travel writers with philosophical inclinations. In order to closely examine the internal aspects of perceptions of beauty in travel, similarities were drawn between Plotinus’, Abhinavagupta’s, and Baudelaire’s ideas of beauty. Regardless of how culturally different these concepts might be, or how complex the philosophical frameworks of Plotinus, Abhinavagupta, and Baudelaire are, the notion of beauty as an internal experience is a shared one, for the witness is the link connecting them all. Whether they be Plotinus’ delight at the intuitive recognition of beauty already residing in the subject as itself the idea of beauty,⁸⁶ Abhinavagupta’s *shanta rasa* as the peak experience of peace under even the most unusual circumstances, or Baudelaire’s “eternal, invariable

⁸⁰ Flaubert, ‘Letter to Louis Bouilhet,’ p. 356.

⁸¹ Flaubert, ‘Letter to Louis Bouilhet,’ p. 357.

⁸² Luis Bunuel, ‘Earthly Delights,’ in *Journeys*, ed. Robyn Davidson (London: Picador, 2001), p. 79.

⁸³ Bunuel, ‘Earthly Delights,’ p. 80.

⁸⁴ Bunuel, ‘Earthly Delights,’ p. 79.

⁸⁵ Bunuel, ‘Earthly Delights,’ p. 85.

⁸⁶ Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 212.

element”⁸⁷ that resides within the *flâneur*, all are part of every internal experience of beauty. They exist in the dreaminess of the traveller before departure, the moments of serenity experienced when witnessing natural beauty, or unexpected stillness in the face of danger or when experiencing horror or disgust.

⁸⁷ Baudelaire, ‘Beauty, Fashion and Happiness,’ p. 681.