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BRITAIN THROUGH AMERICAN EYES

A comparative study of two traveller's accounts

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by

Anne Ikäheimo

Department of Languages

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Anne Ikäheimo
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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella englantilaisista esitettyjä stereotyyppioita kahden yhdysvaltalaisen matkakirjailijan Iso-Britanniaa käsittelevissä matkakirjoissa. Aineistoon kuuluu yksi kirja kummaltakin: Paul Theroux'n *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1983) (suom. Saarivaltakunta) ja Bill Brysonin *Notes from a Small Island* (1995) (suom. Muistiinmerkintöjä pieneltä saarelta). Koska teokset ovat ajallisesti melko lähellä toisiaan ja käsiteltävät stereotyyppiat paljolti samanlaisia, tutkielma on toteutettu laadullisena ja vertailevana tutkimuksena. Keskeisenä kysymyksenä on, toistavatko kirjoittajat olemassa olevia stereotyyppioita englantilaisista. Tutkielma pyrkii todistamaan, että tämä pitää paikkansa.

Tutkielman rakenne on kaksiosainen: ensimmäiset kolme lukua käsittelevät teoreettista taustaa, ja loput viisi stereotyyppien esiintymistä päälähteissä. Keskeisenä teoreettisena käsitteenä on kulttuurintutkimuksessa käytetty representaatio, jonka alueeseen kuuluu myös stereotyyppioiden tutkimus. Taustamateriaalina käytetään myös tutkimuksia matkakirjallisuudesta, sekä sen yhteyksistä etnografiaan, kulttuurin- ja kirjallisuudentutkimukseen. Varsinainen analyysi on jaettu neljään lukuun, joista kukin käsittelee yhtä matkakirjoissa yleisesti esiintyvää teemaa, kuten kulkuneuvoja ja asumista, ja näihin liittyviä stereotyyppioita. Luvut ovat seuraavassa järjestyksessä: Scenery, Transportation and Accommodation, Leisure ja People and Institutions. Järjestys noudattaa mielestäni linjaa yleisestä erityiseen: yleisestä maisemakuvauksesta ja matkustamisen käytännöistä teksti siirtyy vähitellen tarkastelemaan ihmisiä ja englantilaisesta ”kansanluonteesta” esitettyjä käsityksiä.

Paul Theroux ja Bill Bryson ovat molemmat tunnettuja matkakirjailijoita Iso-Britanniassa, ja molemmat ovat asuneet maassa pitkään. Tämän tutkielman näkemyksen mukaan kirjoittajat toistavat monin paikoin vallitsevia stereotyyppioita. Erityisesti tämä korostuu analyysin viimeisessä luvussa, joka käsittelee nimenomaan kirjoittajien representaatioita ihmisistä yleensä. Yleisimpiä esille nousseita piirteitä läpi koko tekstin olivat nostalgisuus ja yksityisyys. Matkakirjallisuus on perinteisesti käyttänyt paljon stereotyyppisiä aineksia, joten on vaikea määrittellä, missä määrin kirjoittajat ovat olleet realistisia tulkinnoissaan.

Asiasanat: Great Britain. representation. stereotypes. travel writing.

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1. Introduction

It is common knowledge that an average Briton spends his or her life “as dressing Harris tweed and Church’s shoes, driving a Jaguar around the lanes of rural England and living in a manor house. Come early evening, he [sic] likes nothing better than to relax in a Laura Ashley print armchair, knock back a beefeater gin and wonder if it’s cook’s night off” (Martin in Wadham-Smith 1995:77). The image other nationalities have of the English seems to rely on the stereotypical past. This image implies a wealthy idleness with definite style. Englishness is seen as backward and passive, immersed in nostalgia rather than a place for new ideas and fresh designs. One survey showed that “respondents summed up the English as proud, civilised, cultured, arrogant and cold. The five words which were thought to describe them least accurately were: emotional, temperamental, aggressive, adventurous and fun-loving (Martin in Wadham-Smith 1995:79).

It is doubtful that anyone who has lived in Britain would identify all the above as a reality nowadays. Apparently the English heritage industry that sells the image of the idyllic country-house Britain has succeeded above all expectations. It lives off the stereotypes set about the English (and by the English?) since the 19th century. And one medium that has particularly expanded stereotyped views is travel literature. (At this point I must deeply apologise for the use of “English” as a definition of all features below. Most of my sources deal with English characteristics only. Thus I have seen fit to lump them all together as such, even though Theroux and Bryson both travelled also outside England, and met people that are not English.)

This thesis is a comparative study of two American travel writers, both of who have written a travel book about Great Britain. Travel writers have traditionally used very stereotypical images in their works. Langford (2000:10, 22-24) explains that this is because writers follow the lead of earlier writers. Travel novelists may be keen to accommodate their views to those other people have noticed to be understood and perhaps to add plausibility. “The English character” came out in travel books, was copied to other books and became “ a

fact". However, Langford also acknowledges that foreign travel writers' views are important, since they also bring forth fresh, unbiased ideas and examine more closely matters that most natives would take for granted (2000:2). I chose travel books for my material because the prospect of being entertained as well as educated appealed to me, as it has done before. I was also charmed by the idea that travel writers write about commonplace things and real people and real events; they do not attempt to offer any systematic sociological analysis or a fantastic novel, but a starting point for anyone interested in English life and culture. Thus, Paul Theroux's *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1983, hereafter KS) and Bill Bryson's *Notes from a small Island* (1995, hereafter NI) came to me. I wanted to see if Theroux and Bryson followed the travel writers' traditions of stereotyping. From my preliminary reading, I came to the conclusion that to a remarkable extent they did.

Do Theroux and Bryson reinforce English stereotypes, and which ones? What is the image of Britain that they want to give? Since KS and NI are travel books, I also chose to examine the stereotypes through themes common in a traveller's life. These form the core of the thesis. The main chapters are Scenery, Transportation and Accommodation, Leisure, and People and Institutions, which are divided into subsections for clarification. Scenery focuses on the representations of landscape and townscape on the writers' respective routes; Transportation and Accommodation are placed together because individually they would have made short chapters. They also fit well together, as moving from place to place and staying nights and days somewhere else than at home are central to a traditional travelling ideal. Leisure touches upon the free time of the not-so-fun-loving English, and is also linked to the writers, since travel is also a popular leisure activity. The last section, People and Institutions, are one unit because individually Institutions would have made a disproportionately short chapter. However, I considered the themes in this section (media and the monarchy) of great import and was disinclined to delete them. It is people who make institutions and keep them in function, so the match is not at all unfitting. The main content of the chapter deals with people's character in general and in particular, which are the bread and butter of stereotypical imagery.

The context of travel literature, representation and stereotyping provide the theoretical framework for the thesis. Adams (1983) has provided a careful study of the structure and development of travel writing, and will help approach travel books as sources for study. The major definitions regarding one of the key terms in modern cultural study, representation, come from Hall (1997), whose work is a good general guide to interpretation, especially for the student of arts and media. The practical stereotypes used in the core are offered by Miall (1993) whose little book gives little in the way of the theory of stereotyping but is a hilarious read. It largely catches the ideas the English have of themselves and others have of the English. Naturally, all the other sources will support the thesis, as well.

However, the comparison is also to a small extent diachronic: Theroux wrote in 1982 and Bryson in 1994, had there been (m)any changes? Thus, some historical background is necessary to set a stage for our “protagonists” (as travel writers often are the main characters in their books). Theroux and Bryson both settled in Britain in the 1970s. From the social historian’s point of view, the years between 1970s and 1990s were a time of severe economic depression, violence, but also of change, and occasionally even growth. Through 1973-1974 there was a world oil crisis, which increased English import expenses, as oil prices quadrupled. However, the oil resources found in the North Sea helped the country and gave it almost self-sufficiency in energy supplies and helped exports. Inflation was running high at 24% in 1975, and fighting it became an essential policy. Nationally owned companies were in trouble during the 1970s, and as the Conservatives came to power in 1979, a scheme for privatisations was soon underway. The new Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher considered that privatisation would increase efficiency in companies. It would also bring new assets, as private citizens could now become stockholders and thus be more in control of their economies. And, of course, the state needed the money received from the selling of companies (Leinonen and Lyytinen, eds, 1995: 98,184). The situation then was crucial to what was to come of Britain.

From 1970s to 1990s, privatisation continued, the crime rate doubled and the following of the extreme Right and the extreme Left increased. In 1982, when Theroux travelled, unemployment was over three million. There had been serious striking in 1979, and there would be another in 1984-85. Urban rioting was becoming an annual event, as the unemployed, and especially immigrants whose situation was often the poorest, attacked the police and were attacked by the police in suburbs that were continually plagued by poor housing (Marwick 2000:264, 279, 293, 349). After 1985, things settled for a while and some industries experienced growth. Unfortunately, at the turn of the 1990s the country fell victim to another recession. Economies went down and unemployment went up during 1991-1994. John Major became a new Conservative Prime Minister in 1990. He followed the party's line, but was more a negotiator, as opposed to Thatcher, who had been accused of being dictatorial. The problems of housing still prevailed. Inflation was being kept under control (Marwick 2000:332-335). However, the reductions the Conservative Government had made on social policies induced Bryson to criticise his contemporary government as greedy politicians (in the worse sense of the word) to whom welfare always came second.

Financially, the situation during both journeys was not particularly prosperous. However, this is only the socio-economic portrayal of times, and a narrow one as such. In this environment, what stereotypical images come through in Theroux's and Bryson's writing? And how these images are conveyed to us will be looked into in the next chapter, representation.

2.Representation

This section comprises of the central approach of this thesis, representation. As mentioned, the main input will come from the work of Stuart Hall. A particular emphasis will be on the representational practice of stereotyping, as explained by Hall (1997) and Pickering (2001). There are many ways to write, and many purposes for doing so. Representation is a term that will come out throughout

this work. The term has many definitions, a few of which will be introduced here. Basically, representation is a way of conveying thoughts and feelings to others. Stuart Hall has a practical definition:

In part, we give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the way we classify and conceptualise them, the values we place on them. (Hall,ed., 1997:3)

Representation is a mental process that is realised via words, images and sounds. But also our mental images and our emotions are representations, and they in turn come out as signs and symbols (Hall,ed.,1997:1). In the case of travel writers these signs are the words chosen into a travel book. What I read in Paul Theroux's *The Kingdom by the Sea* are his mental concepts, attitudes and feelings represented through the words of the English language. The use of English is important because it is a human tongue common to both Theroux and, incidentally, me, and thus enables me to produce an interpretation of Theroux's message (Hall,ed.,1997:5). But here Hall is mostly concerned with language being the conveyor of ideas. To conclude, to represent is to describe something, or to symbolise for some concept (Hall,ed, 1997:16; Pickering 2001:xiii); the term representational is something "conveying or signifying thinking and experience" (Shi-xu 1997:240).

Representation is a layered process. First, there are the mental representations: objects, events and people are organised in clusters hierarchically, sequentially and in other ways that form complex relations between the different concepts and clusters. This system both allows us to create new expressions and concepts, since the relations are probably different in each individual, and yet are similar enough patterns to help us interpret each other, perhaps even to understand one another. However, as most people cannot read minds, another system of representation is needed. To represent and exchange our meanings, people need a common language; something, that will translate our brilliant concepts to a more or less fluent linguistic expression to be interpreted by our interlocutor (Hall,ed.,1997:17-18). There are three popular theories of representation, all of which deal with the relationship between these layers of construction. The first is the reflective approach: it presumes that objects,

events, people and such carry their own meaning in themselves, and that this meaning is the fixed truth about the world.

The second and the third theories look to language as a subjective agent of representation, and move the attention from the world outside to the world within, inside the human mind. The intentional approach claims that it is the speaker whose concepts of the world are definitive. He or she gives his or her unique meaning on the events of the world. Simply “words mean what the author intends they should mean. The third theory, the constructionist view, comes closest to representation. It claims that things do not mean in themselves (as in the reflective approach), but people construct meaning. And this construction is not random, but uses the concepts and signs in representational systems (Hall,ed.,1997:25). In the constructionist approach representation and meaning are realised through

...forging links between three different orders of things: what we might broadly call the world of people, events and experiences; the conceptual world – the mental concepts we carry around in our heads; and the signs, arranged into languages, which ‘stand for’ or communicate these concepts. (Hall,ed.,1997:61)

“The world of people...” is what e.g. Theroux and Bryson see, hear, feel; “the conceptual world” how they understand their perceptions; and “the signs” that “communicate” are how they express what they have understood. But interpreting another person’s meaning is harder than you might think. For instance, people coming from different cultures may misunderstand each other even though they are both fluent in the same language, for cultures are based on representations, as well.

Representation is an essential concept in the study of culture, and in the social sciences culture is nowadays extended to practically everywhere; the word has lost the meaning of referring to fine arts and the intellectual segment of society only, and has instead become to deal with everything involved in the way of life of people, communities and groups. The modern view of culture is very close to anthropological study (Hall,ed.,1997:2). Instead of going forth to study tribes in distant lands, cultural study can take place in our own lives, as well.

Stuart Hall sees culture as a process where meanings are exchanged between the members of a society. The members “interpret the world in roughly the same ways”, and can relate their thoughts and feelings in a way that they understand each other. It is the mutual understanding that makes a stable society and a functioning culture. But in any culture, there is variation in how each individual interprets and represents any topic, and intermixed with the rational thoughts and concepts are also feelings and affections (Hall,ed.,1997:2). Thus, understanding may take effort; and it demands even more when the speakers come from different cultures. When interpreting representations in that situation one must take into consideration “a degree of cultural relativism”, i.e. the practices of one culture do not necessarily translate directly to another. Different cultures require different “mind-sets” or “conceptual universes” to achieve a mutual understanding (Hall,ed.,1997:61). These universes are realised in the concept of discourse.

Discourses are central building blocks in forming cultures. Lidchi in Hall(ed.,1997:185) defines discourse as a framework that determines which statements can be used when a certain topic is discussed. Hall again formulates the meaning well:

Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. These discursive formations, as they are known, define what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular subject or site of social activity; what knowledge is considered useful, relevant and ‘true’ in that context; and what sorts of persons or ‘subjects’ embody its characteristics. (Hall,ed.,1997:6)

Discourses provide a framework for talking about things and they define what can be said in certain situations if one wants to be understood. One such framework is the use of types and stereotypes. Richard Dyer in Hall(ed.,1997:257) explains that types are necessary for understanding the world. They create a relatively simple mental model, which enables a person to make sense of the world. When referring to people or events, the speaker will resort to those classificatory models, which fit the speaker’s culture and make

their interpretation. People are typed e.g. according to their memberships in varied groups and to their personality types: What is a person's class, sex, ethnic background matter in this. As a personality, is a person humorous or serious, or perhaps both? The "typification" (Hall's term) happens within these set options. Stereotypes function in a largely similar way, but they

get hold of the few 'simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person, *reduce* everything about the person to those traits, *exaggerate* and *simplify* them, and *fix* them without change or development to eternity (Hall,ed.,1997:258).

In addition to giving a framework for interpretation, stereotypes also divide, or split between what is appropriate, normal and what is not. It excludes those features (perhaps even people?) that do not fit. Stereotypes usually do not allow for much variation. The splitting maintains the social order, and thus it can be used to control those who are in a lower position in society. That is, stereotypes are used to promote ethnocentrism – the idea that one's own cultural norms are applied to other cultures, as well (Hall,ed.,1997:258).

One study dealing widely with concepts outsiders may have about a certain culture is Shi-xu's work on cultural representations. Shi-xu defines discourse as "actual language use in the social context". His focus is on the representation of cultures and cultural groups via discursive representations (Shi-xu 1997:13-14). The research material was Dutch and (Dutch-speaking) Belgian travellers accounts of China and Chinese people. The material showed that many Western travellers interpret what they found only in Western terms, which clearly reflects ethnocentrism. And even though my project deals with Western travel writers writing about a Western culture, which is familiar to them, Shi-xu offers some basic concepts, which may prove useful. Shi-xu's perspective on discourse is of the functional-constructionist type. The discourse of cultural representation has the following characteristics: discourse is functional, it has social purposes and consequences; it is constructive, it creates (often value-laden) realities; discourse is communicative, containing messages; it is also pro-active, it executes actions; it is contextual, its meanings are verbally and situationally bound; in particular it seems to be reasoned, it is regulated by argumentative and explanatory activities; and it is resource-ful

[sic], discourse is filled with particular, recurrent themes and motifs (Shi-xu 1997:30).

Within cultural representations, the travel writer must often resort to argumentation and explanation to validate what they perceive on their journey. Argumentation is used when the purpose is to support some cultural claim or action, and explanation is used to deal with things that are unexpected and puzzling, and the writer feels matters must be clarified in some way. The usual reasons (for something puzzling) given are causal, situational or conditional factors (Shi-xu 1997:57-58). Argumentation and explanation make use of stereotypes.

Argumentation is linked to what Shi-xu calls “attributional discourse”, which represents the human understanding of why things happen. Argumentation serves to confirm the belief that X (e.g. some action performed by native inhabitants) occurs because of Y (e.g. because of the stereotyped politeness of the English national character, they say ‘sorry’ when you step on their toes instead of picking a fight). Argumentation comes through in discursive attitudes, as well: then an evaluative element is added, for instance when the social activity of the inhabitants is somehow unacceptable to the traveller. However, Shi-xu warns that people do not mean to convey attitudes all the time; thus the cultural analyst must look for supporting evidence before drawing conclusions (Shi-xu 1997:64, 96-99).

Discourse can of course be used to positive ends, as well. Personal characteristics can be given as the cause for a positive act witnessed by the writer. Explanation as “a reasoned strategy”, roughly being “since we are not X, and they are X, we appreciate them”, creates a positive discursive attitude towards the objects of study (Shi-xu 1997:100-106). Thus, the qualities of other nations may sometimes be seen as positive and even desirable. Bryson, for instance, applies this idea when he compliments the English on their politeness. It is a case of positive stereotyping.

Most travel writing involves the observing of people, and that, in Shi-xu's terms, takes place within perceptual discourse. Perceptual discourse in travel literature is "where people describe, imply, presuppose, refer to what they see or hear" (Shi-xu 1997:151). Discursive perceptions are the perceived constructions of the other, especially the kinds that have caused puzzlement in the observer. Discursive perceptions are used when there is need for a strong image to convince the reader of the massive importance of this or that event. This effect is particularly enhanced by presenting the scene via direct experience and I-narration: "I saw/heard...", and by using other verbs of perception. Indirectly, the writer may take a little distance from such boldness, and resort to opinion markers, such as "it seemed/sounded like..."(Shi-xu 1997:148,151-152). Generally perceptual constructions bring out contrasts in relation to the writer's view: they are used to express "the excessiveness of the perceived" and "lack of universal properties". And by "universal" Western travellers refer to the Western perspective (Shi-xu 1997: 157, 175).

Perceptions may lead to opinions. Shi-xu defines opinion as "a personal belief formulated through discourse". Opinions are clearly subjective and personal in the sense that they are the writer's own contributions to the text. Terms to express opinions are similar to terms of perception in structure, although not in content: "I think/find/suppose..." and indirectly: "it seems...". Opinion discourse takes advantage of "implicit signalling" in the form of metaphors and generalisation. Opinion discourse can be formulated as social fact, i.e. opinion discourse (and furthermore, opinionated discourse) can create realities, and is hence important. The traveller can offer an individual instance as proof for a cultural opinion, induce subjectively interpreted generalisations, apply the subjunctive mood (by using 'as if' constructions) and similes, and may and probably will resort to his or her own memory for evidence supporting the discourse (Shi-xu 1997:178,181-188). In particular, opinions are formed through generalisations (Both Theroux and Bryson begin sentences with "the English are/were..."), via describing the internal state of the perceived (i.e. making assumptions about what people are thinking), by making interpretations from the behaviour of the inhabitants, and by offering the traveller's own perceptions as "knowledge" to be provided for the reading

public. The opinions always come from the writer's own cultural stand, and his or her concepts and behaviour are the standard for comparison (Shi-xu 1997:192-194). Opinions can grow into ideologies. Shi-xu defines ideologies of discourse, or discursive ideologies, as "the covert and coercive dimension of discourse that is detrimental to the interests of other individuals or groups" (Shi-xu 1997:204). However, ideologies are not the focus of this thesis, and will not earn further notice here.

Stereotypes are also representations. Representations tend to follow certain types and categories to make sense of the world. Stereotypes are categories that are perceived as "natural" and fixed to all eternity. People are also judged by typing: if a person is e.g. gay or works as a cleaner, certain preconceptions are linked to them. But if the gay person or the cleaner deviates from the assumed mode, it is noticed. It is difference that matters. The "typical" gay has become a stereotype that does not allow for fluctuation. On however few examples a stereotypical image is based on (one has hardly managed to get to know all the gay people in the world), it is permanent. At least English stereotypes seem to have prevailed firm since the 18th century, and continued well into the 20th (see Langford (2000), Snowman (1977) and Miall (1993)). As mentioned in the introduction, travel literature has contributed greatly to the existence of stereotypes, both positive and negative. The following chapter will introduce some main features of that genre and also of my primary sources.

3.Travel Literature

Journeying through the island is a tradition. Every child learns the phrase 'from Land's End to John o'Groats'. There is a large library of books where the author has projected his personal knowledge on to the national screen and called it England (Halsey 1986:9).

This is where the primary sources start to come into the picture. In the following three sections I will introduce Paul Theroux and Bill Bryson and the primary works for this thesis. In the last section (3.3) will deal with the

relationship of travel literature to other scholarly fields involving the study of other cultures.

3.1 Travel literature in ethnography, cultural studies and literature

Travel literature and ethnography have many things in common, although most researchers claim they are not one and the same (Bassnett 1999; Borm 2000). And of course they are not. But the similarities are there. Ethnography, which the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary terms as 'the scientific description of different races and cultures' requires skills of writing and collecting valid data while the researcher is aware of his or her subjective interpretation, and, in a case of Western researcher studying an Eastern culture, of possible ideological echoes from the Western imperial past (Clifford 1988:13). An ethnographic description is always subjective, and Edward Said says that a part of an ethnographer's desire is to relate the whole story, piece by piece, 'as it is' (Said as quoted in Clifford 1988:11). This perhaps is one of the closest links between travel writing and ethnography: to relate a first-hand account of a reality different from 'ours'. But the travel writer may not be very scientific in his or her observations. However, as the world has become cartographically more familiar, it has also become more versatile, perhaps even fragmented, which in turn has led to seeing one's own environment as somehow 'new'. Clifford also mentions cultural fragmentation, which has begun to interest academic researchers: instead of studying one people as a whole, the interests have taken a turn to examining the world 'as a series of specific dialogues, impositions, and inventions' (Clifford 1988:14).

One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighbourhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth...(Clifford 1988:14)

The above fits perfectly to the present study. Both Paul Theroux and Bill Bryson have, in addition to their travel abroad (Bryson in the US, Europe and Australia, Theroux also in Asia, Africa and South America), also written a travel book (respectively) about a country and a culture that is somewhat

familiar to them. (It would be more appropriate to say ‘cultures’ but for convenience’s sake I shall pretend that a country can have one relatively homogeneous culture.) They both have written a travel book on Great Britain, where they both had lived for a considerable time before embarking on these writing works that now constitute my two primary sources, *The Kingdom by the Sea* and *Notes from a small Island*. Travel books, such as KS and NI, offer perhaps just passing references to cultural features, and are no match to a thorough anthropological or ethnographic study, where the researcher actually lives among those to be studied. Travel literature might offer some fresh views on people’s lives (since a lot of their material comes from interaction with ordinary people). When “official” (e.g. political) history is not the only valuable history anymore, travel books may offer insights to everyday events worth examining and be a valuable aid to social research.

The subjective “fieldwork account” rose from the more objective main genre of ethnography. Structurally it has a lot in common with travel writing: more and more the fieldwork account would consist of first-person narration, autobiographic elements and an ironic self-portrait (all prevailing in KS and NI): the ethnographer could now speak of e.g. “violence and desire, confusions and struggles and economic transactions with informants”, which topics had earlier been considered unimportant (Clifford et al.1986:14). Bryson and Theroux employ some philosophical considerations to their readers, and do not always spare their confusion and struggles with the violence and desire they witness. Economic transactions especially regarding the cost of accommodation are reported with a retort regardless of their importance to the actual travel “plot”.

Mary Louise Pratt considers the relationship between ethnography and travel literature. The combination of “personal narrative and objectified description” is also central to travel writing: travellers, such as Bryson and Theroux, habitually tell where they have travelled, describe the features of landscape – Theroux managed to find even rabbits annoying (KS:63) – and the manners of the people encountered in the regions. Pratt notes that it is narration that tends to dominate over description. The opening scenes of ethnographies could also

just as easily be found in travel literature. One such scene is when the ethnographer arrives in a strange land, and the natives come to welcome him or her, marvelling his or her strange features, but in a friendly way (Pratt in Clifford et al.1986:33,35). In a small way, Theroux's experiences reflect this scene: when arriving at a guesthouse he recalls at least one lady who would look at him in friendly way, just on the verge of asking him where he was from and saying she had always wanted to go there (KS:34). Another scene portrays the castaway: the ethnographer is left alone on a strange shore to manage on his or her own. The castaway is considered the ideal participant-observer: they do not have the option of the traveller to just move away, they have to stay with the natives. Bryson may have felt like a castaway when he arrived from Calais to Dover in 1973 late at night and could not find accommodation (NI:11-12).

Ethnographers employing these scenes often write in anecdotes to give insight to their ethnographic generalisations. This approach, familiar also in Bryson especially, gives way to personal irony, and is "richly perceptive, but terribly unsystematic", and in the case of Bryson, infinitely charming. But ethnographic description is not all about marvellous experiences (nor is it so in my primary works). Pratt introduces a couple of ethnographic classics where the opening scene reveals a frustrated and depressed ethnographer. Pratt sees this as "first contact in a fallen world where European colonialism is a given and native and white man approach each other with joyless suspicion"(Pratt in Clifford et al. 1986:38-40). Theroux and Bryson travel in Britain, a world with a colonial past in a sense of being "a mother country"; and, especially in areas of high unemployment, a touch of joylessness does creep into my primary sources, as well. Thus, links between travel literature and ethnography are noticeable.

Where ethnography goes, cultural studies cannot be far behind. Bassnett (1997) brings out some cautions in doing English cultural studies. She reminds the reader that all the facts that are presented to us, for instance in KS and NI, are still presentations; they are Bryson and Theroux's interpretations of previous representations. Bryson and Theroux's views are furthermore influenced by their respective points of view. Bassnett states:

Point of view, in particular, originates in the social experience, history and position of the speaker or writer and so in effect speaks, if in qualified or modulated ways, for specific cultural aspirations and interests. (Bassnett,ed, 1997:23-24)

The authors of my primary sources have their own arguments about English society, which they want to boost by producing interpretations that may be disputable from other points of view. Bryson and Theroux share a background as Americans who have become well acclimatised to Britain before writing a travel book on the country but still identify themselves as Americans. They were also about the same age when writing –Theroux was 41, Bryson 43. But they wrote during different times, and Theroux writing in the 1980s and Bryson in 1990s in another mental climate may bring differences to their respective viewpoints; also the different characters of these two men will ascertain that we have the pleasure of reading two distinctly different books.

Bassnett lists a set of resources for acquiring data for cultural study and these seem to coincide very well with the features of travel literature. One major source on her list is interaction with actual people (Bassnett,ed.,1997:24): talking with native inhabitants of the coast and of the inland towns, with the people met on trains, buses and on walking paths for Theroux and Bryson certainly qualifies for source material for cultural study. However, Bassnett remarks, even though these encounters are “authentic”, it is the question of the writer’s subjective experience that may cause problems of validity: “...because each person’s experience is unique and to some extent haphazard, it is risky to consider such experience representative.” That which one writer may present as typical may not be so to another. Another source linked to the first is the ‘personal recorded testimony of others’ (Bassnett,ed,1997:24-25); quite simply it refers to e.g. diaries and other stories of someone else’s experiences. Theroux and Bryson cite other travel books on Britain, novelists, newspapers and autobiographies. These stories bring out local and personal history but the open question here as well is how much these sources serve as generalisations; how much do they affect the interpretations of Bryson and Theroux?

Exposure to the media, already mentioned above, has proved a major source for English cultural studies. Magazines, videos and newspaper articles deal with then contemporary phenomena. When examining social institutions as part of cultural study, official records on e.g. religious, military and local history and development can prove a background for interpretations. Even these records are social constructions that reflect the assumptions about the elements and rules of English society. The “danger” of statistics and public records is that, for instance, church records and “official” histories tend to serve the interests of the conservative side of society (Bassnett,ed,1997:27-29) and often represent only the opinions of a majority. Local history is often discarded, and that deficit travel writers can fill in their small measure, by going to places where historians and ethnographers have not thought of going yet.

Alongside what a cultural researcher (and indeed, a travel writer, too) can pick from written sources, there is the actual “fieldwork”: people travel to broaden their views, and these excursions may reveal details and lines of development in society. Bassnett introduces a view on the significance of the “mundane”, which often finds its place in travel literature:

An incident such as buying a drink or finding a bus stop outside a museum *may* have as much cultural impact – and possibly offer as much insight – as the museum’s rooms full of exhibits, depending on how details or illustrative instances are construed. (Bassnett,ed,1997:26)

Theroux and Bryson give the impression that they try to see the special in the ordinary as they interact with “ordinary” people and restrict their descriptions to everyday things. Participating in the usual life of the people encountered on the journeys and observing social conventions provide, if not solid scholarly facts, at least intriguing images of contemporary life. These conventions include e.g. observing sport, shopping, and gatherings at pubs or entertainment performances, and how people behave in conventional addresses of politeness such as while queuing, perhaps. (Bassnett,ed,1997:27) The intrigue of these events to the reader (i.e. me) comes part from their strangeness to the reader’s own culture, but mostly from how they are represented. Travel literature can make even the commonest shopping trip an admirable and special experience

(of course, it can do the opposite, as well, for instance by bringing out the folly in something that the people observed consider important). Theroux and Bryson picture people in pubs, audiences in coastal entertainments and Bryson even relates a pleasant little encounter with a group of Scottish ladies who get up before dawn in their little Scottish town to take a train to Inverness for a day's shopping trip. It seems the high point of the week for these women, and they do not appear to think any less of their lives even though they never saw the dashing lights of London (NI 1995:337-338).

Sometimes a cultural student or travel writer does encounter unexpected things. The unexpectedness is perhaps due to the traveller's individual schemes, typical and stereotypical concepts that the traveller uses to make sense of the world. It is perhaps the gift of good travel writers to value both what is typical and what is not, and report both with similar interest. Often an interpretation is reached via binary oppositions: if something is not X, then it is Y. For instance, it is claimed that the English view themselves through contrast: the North of England is economically or characteristically nothing like the South of England, not to mention Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. And it is not only in people's everyday actions that the themes of conflict and change occur. 'Cultural indicators', as Bassnett calls them, are shown in the representation of e.g. architecture (Bryson and Theroux both criticise the dominant effect of concrete in much of post-war building construction, especially as the new is not made to harmonise with the old, say Georgian, building heritage). Change and conflict come through in different images of cultural features, such as media and monarchy, for instance (Bassnett,ed,1997:29-30).

Furthermore, a source for cultural study, any source, should be regarded as an analytical starting point, not necessarily as an authoritative, original source. For instance novels can provide us with a great deal of cultural knowledge whether they are fictional or less so. Travelling always happens in the present, but when the book reaches the shops, they have become representations of the then-concepts of the time (Bassnett,ed,1997:26). As travel books can be considered travel novels (some travel books actually are fictional; see Adams below), they provide fruitful knowledge to the cultural student.

The roots of travel literature are deep in the past. The purpose of travel writing was originally to provide a guide. The Greek Pausanias might be considered a “role model” to Theroux and Bryson: Pausanias wrote with accuracy and credibility, making very exact descriptions of his own trips. He also added his knowledge of other books on Greece and included plausible anecdotes, which livened up the route descriptions. Another such writer was the famous historian Herodotus who also based his work on his travels and interviews of the native inhabitants of several Mediterranean lands. He, too, took advantage of secondary sources, myths and anecdotes and emphasised that he wrote only what he saw himself or what he found to be reliable tales. As pilgrimages and missionary journeys began with the spread of Christianity, a wealth of travel writing began to be produced along with travel guides. The first guide on Britain (a chapter on English inns and public roads) was published in 1577(Adams 1983:39, 46).

Travel literature has as many forms as does the novel. As travel may require a swift pace, most of travel literature is first found as simple notes consisting of observations about flora and fauna, of people and again, arresting local anecdotes. Often these observations were given to someone else for relating to a wider public. However, when travel experiences were put into narrative form, there were three popular forms available. The first is the letter. Letters are still used today for instance when a traveller is writing for a newspaper, when the text is probably more focused on views and political events than in private letters, which may include more personal feelings. The second popular form is the journal. Journals may resemble letters except that they are originally meant for the writer’s private observations. Often, however, travel diaries were published, either edited or expanded beforehand. And that brings journals very close to the third popular form of travel writing: the simple narrative. Adams illustrates narrative as

By no means always written in the first person, it customarily gives dates and names of places, normally leaps and lingers while moving inexorably forward with the journey, and often includes an essay on the nature and advantages of travel. (Adams 1983:44)

This may come closest to Theroux and Bryson: they both employ first-person narration, faithfully relate the names of the places they visit, definitely linger on some points and places, and throughout both books there are observations about what it is to travel. Travel writing is of course not bound to these forms; it can appear as dialogue, part of an autobiography or a biography, and even in the form of poems (Adams 1983:43-44).

Travel writers come in many kinds, as well. Crusaders and pilgrims were eager to report their achievements, as were the Jesuits. Missionary work and trade moved people to strange lands, people explored and went to war, and wrote about it. And some people travelled for the sake of travel, simply for the love (and apparently opportunity) for it (Adams 1983:55, 57-68). Theroux and Bryson fall easily into this category. Perhaps living in Britain has spurred them on: the English are a travel-hungry nation; it is a tradition that they go out and see the world. Just the same, Bryson and Theroux went and saw what their country was like. Another kind of traveller was the observer who satisfied his or her curiosity not only by personal travel, but also through the travel tales of others, thus being able to “see” places he or she could not go to. The third kind left the writing to others: this type was the adventurer, the “man of action” (most travellers in earlier times were men) whose exploits were recorded by someone else. And finally, the type of the story teller, who either travelled him/herself or made use of works already published while sitting by the fireside; these writers created partly or entirely fictional travel stories that could have taken place for real (Adams 1983:68-73).

This truth-like quality of fictional travel stories has led to a truth-lie dichotomy regarding travel literature. Writers of travel literature have often been accused of lying or embellishing the truth. In the medieval times, travel writers vigorously tried to deny these accusations, but only managed to corroborate the prejudices. And not even the Renaissance, despite being a time for art, science and exploration, could change them (Adams 1983:84-85). Travelogues were a mixture of pleasure and profit, and since so much of travel literature involves the use of anecdotes and interpretations, an absolute truthfulness could not be achieved at any rate (Adams 1983:88-97). Theroux and Bryson do not defend

their integrity anywhere in the primary sources. Presumably, the question of plausibility is not relevant to them. I find them plausible, but only because the “facts” they relate fit with the cultural expectations I have of the English.

Realism and romanticism play important roles in travel literature. Travel writers attempt to make their stories interesting by combining the local setting, history and customs with their own experiences, adventures and reflections. “The traveller could be entertainingly personal, recounting his own exciting adventures, his love affairs, his opinions of religious customs or food, his judgments of national traits,…” (Adams 1983:108). Bryson embodies these qualities almost to a fault: his adventures frequently involve an element of the ridiculous. He writes about the pain of walking, about what he eats and he mentions his wife, for instance. Theroux is quieter about his personal life but gives judgment on individual and national traits as he finds them.

As Mary Pratt stated, narration was considered predominant over description. The journey must move forward, and there the travel novel had particular structural features, as well. Adams presents one of the most famous plots in history: the hero’s journey. The journey plot in general, real as well as fictional is practically a base form for the novel. The hero’s journey most commonly follows the pattern of Hero’s Departure, where the hero first receives the call to adventure, then is assisted by supernatural aid, and finally crosses the threshold to adventurous paths; then he or she undergoes the Initiation, which is the actual journey from one place to another; here the hero encounters many trials, and fights the allurements of temptresses or tempters, and reaches atonement with the father; finally, the hero returns home as master of the two worlds he or she is now acquainted with. The structure does offer some links to my primary sources. The hero’s call to adventure most commonly begins with either “the lure of the excitement in adventure, the fascination of travel”, or with rejection, to “take flight from an unbearable situation” (Adams 1983:150-152). Theroux had become sick with living in London and ached to see whether there was more to see in Britain; his motivation came out curiosity and the charm of travel –and perhaps out of escaping an unbearable living situation. Bryson was

shortly to leave Britain for America, so, although voluntarily, he was leaving home –and also wanted to see the country for himself.

The actual journey in the story plot usually involved a quest. Adams lists seven traditional ones: “quests involving religion, war, a golden or social utopia, exploration, monetary gain, a person, and knowledge of the world or oneself” (Adams 1983:153). During their journey, the heroes took part in difficult tasks, “descended into physical and mental hells” before achieving resurrection and returning home. Returning home, the traveller may be wiser, and sadder, but more knowledgeable about the worlds they have now visited and lived in (Adams 1983:160). Some scenes in *KS* and *NI* could indeed be called descents into physical hells, and in their final chapters both writers offer their philosophical insights about the island kingdom.

Despite its personal elements, travel literature does not need to be autobiographical any more than it needs to be geographic; many travelogues were written in the third person. But it is unquestionable that the first-person narration in the form of a journal or a letter is the model of travel literature. And the autobiographical elements came in via the personal experiences of the authors: their observations and adventures, even the “mingling of personal matters” deliver a great deal of “body” and charm to most travelogues (Adams 1983:162-166). Bryson is particularly delightful in this sense: his book entails a section on how he met his wife, how she acts on a shopping trip, and he even lets the reader into his domestic life in Yorkshire. Theroux, however, keeps to the topics of his journey, and rarely wanders to discuss e.g. food or even his hotel room.

Following the tradition set by Pausanias and Herodotus (see above), the travellers of past times were curious and inquisitive, they saw and they wrote (Adams 1983:185-188). When writing travel literature

The traveller has customarily gone beyond his or her adventures, reactions, and feelings to add descriptions, lists, historical background for spots visited, even pictures of plants and animals indigenous to those spots, and stories of encounters with natives who relate hearsay, tell tales, perhaps describe buildings or towns the traveller is unable to visit. In other words,

while it is the nature of travel literature for the protagonist to follow an itinerary, a main road, it is just as necessary for the traveller to pause and go aside, to leave the main road, interpolate, to digress. (Adams 1983:208)

Theroux did not digress much from the coastline paths, but time spent in different places sometimes deviated from what he had planned. Bryson travelled inland, and occasionally he just might find some place on the map he found interesting and go there, or step out on a strange platform and find some wonderful, forgotten little place. The results of these digressions found their way to KS and NI as reviewed and rewritten notes, accompanied by carefully considered background information looked up afterwards. Similarly discussions the traveller overhears can offer such digressions (Adams 1983:208-210), and Theroux in particular reports conversations he is not a participant in. Such reports add a touch of objectivity and provide a “true” account of the times, which has been Theroux’s intent. Yet again, a critical student should be aware that the author may have chosen to report this conversation at the expense of another to argue some point, and thus may not offer “to whole truth” (if that is ever possible for one person to do.) to his or her readers.

The places where these conversations could be held and participated in by the author as well, were “the coach” and “the inn”, i.e. places and means of accommodation and transportation. Pubs and hotels were good places to strike up a conversation with total stranger. Adams explained how coaches awarded the travel writer

a chance to note rules of travelling or the quality of coaches, coachmen or roads; of providing them an opportunity to break down or get stuck in the mud in order to see new people or have unexpected adventures; or of engaging them in conversation...(Adams 1983:223)

Theroux had many conversations on trains (Bryson was reading KS while travelling, and he was surprised that Theroux could find so many people willing to talk to him; apparently people in trains were more reserved in 1994 than they had been in 1982). Inns, hotels also provided a field for observing human behaviour. Bryson, who liked to talk about food, e.g. delivered a description of fat people eating at a restaurant: it seemed to him that to these people eating was just a “long-standing obligation to maintain their bulk”

(NI:88-89). Both Theroux and Bryson travelled alone, but having companions along has been a common feature in travel literature. Often in relation to companion, also national stereotypes were employed. For instance, in the 18th century an Englishman was described as “serious and morose”, the Scotchman “proud and overbearing” (Adams 1983:230-241).

Finally, Adams deals with travel writers as writers. The styles of individual writers were as unique in earlier travelogues as they are now, depending on the writer’s talent and training. Simplicity was seen to reflect honesty. Of course, artlessness was also the style of those less literally educated, and of those who had only time for brief note taking during their journey. But if there was a chance for rewriting (as Theroux and Bryson had) the language could be more complex. One linguistic aspect to provide “realism” was the introduction of local accents encountered on the journey to written form (Adams 1983:244-260). Bryson and Theroux do not offer deep linguistic analyses (not even though Bryson has written a couple of books regarding the English language), but have recorded a few passages of actual conversation heard on trains, taxis and pubs. Bryson, for instance, found it very hard to understand the Glasgow accent (NI:342).

Leech and Short (1981) offer some pointers for the study of style in a fictional narrative. KS and NI are not fiction in strict terms, but travel literature has been known to resort to the means and methods of fiction in the past; thus the following can be considered a useful approach. Theroux and Bryson use the first-person narration and the past tense, so the reader is almost always aware of their presence. The use of an I-narrator reveals that the story does not “tell itself”, but has a narrator whose interpretation the reader has to follow (Leech and Short 1981:266). The past tense implies that the events have taken place in an earlier time, and that this view of them may be an edited view, perhaps even a view that attempts to argue some point instead of being an innocent account of actual events. However, these kinds of value judgments can be attached to any narrative approach; the first-person narration and the past tense are common style features in the simple narrative and give no cause for mistrust.

Background knowledge is important in the interpretation of any fiction. Both authors surely write to a certain known audience. In Theroux and Bryson's cases, the audience may be the English reading public, or perhaps even a larger part of the English-speaking world. Incidentally, both KS and NI are available in Finnish, as well, although it is doubtful that the books were written with a Finnish public in mind –although Theroux does mention Sibelius in the book. (KS:199). (For more on Sibelius's popularity in Britain, see e.g. Kuusela (2001) and Särkkä (1999)). At any rate, the authors have in mind an implied reader, who they are writing to. Leech and Short explain that an implied reader has the same presuppositions, sympathies, standards and the same knowledge as the author. This is particularly important in the use of irony as a style feature (see below); this assumption saves the author from explaining everything from the start, which would make any novel hopelessly extensive, and allows for the writer's message to come through to the reader. Of course, the implied reader as the perfect recipient of a message is largely a myth but it offers a guideline not only for the author, but also for those attempting to interpret them. In literature, there is also a concept for an implied author. The implied author may not share the actual author's view of things, but be a sort of a role in a plot of a book (Leech and Short 1981:259-260). In Bryson and Theroux's cases it is unlikely that an implied author was used, i.e. the actual author and the implied author are one and the same.

A point of view gives out a value picture. It can be expressed directly, e.g. by saying that someone is "ill-disposed", or indirectly, e.g. by saying that someone was a little short of the better qualities of a well-natured person. The effect of a value picture depends on the presentation, i.e. the words chosen, their sequence and context (Leech and Short 1981:273-275). Value pictures can be introduced via irony: irony is based on the shared value between the reader and the writer; otherwise the irony would be lost. Ironic effect is born when a point of view expressed in the book by someone is contrasted with the point of view of the author (and the reader taking the author's view.) Irony can simply be "a combination of words which conflicts with our expectations" and much of irony comes from the conventions of politeness and euphemism. Also the sequencing of impressions can create an ironic effect. Bryson particularly

employs the sequencing and other ironic devices in his writing. Theroux's style seems more sarcastic, more intended to harm than to amuse; but only occasionally so. Both irony and sarcasm are employed when the writer states something opposite to his or her meaning. Irony focuses on marvelling the difference between expectations and reality. One instance of irony comes as Bryson begins chapter 11 with a list of three things, for which one should never be unhappy. After these quite marvellous reasons (being born, being alive and having enough peace and to eat) he points out: "If you bear these things in mind, you will never be truly unhappy – though in fairness I must point out that if you find yourself alone in Weston-super-Mare on a rainy Tuesday evening you may come close." (NI:143) Here the contrast between these happiness factors with the "reality" of Bryson's situation and the sequence of the happy-thought-turned-sad may evoke some mirth in a reader.

Distance is also a style feature. A text can be considered distant/intimate, formal/colloquial, or public/private. Distance is defined as "a function of the difference between the knowledge, sympathy, and values of the implied author, and those of the characters and society which he portrays" (Leech and Short 1981:281). Theroux gives the impression of being insightful about English society but unsympathetic towards many people and its other qualities. Bryson does offer insights, as well, but is definitely friendlier with the features he finds, really resorting more often to irony than to bland critique.

"...whenever a writer uses language, he [sic] seizes on some features of 'reality' which are crucial for his [sic] purpose and disregard others" (Leech and Short 1981:151). Language does not equal "extralinguistic" realities; intertextuality is the basis for most writing. What to say and what not to is based on the specification of detail (e.g. how much and what kind of detail is needed for the message) and the artistic criteria of relevance (e.g. a descriptive section may require an excess of adjectives). The reader's understanding of a text is based on drawing conclusions by using existing knowledge and understanding of the world, where there is always an assumption of shared values and plausibility (Leech and Short 1981:154-155).

The Kingdom by the Sea and *Notes from a small Island* are travel books. They follow quite faithfully the definitions Adams has given above. Adams depicts travelogues as sometimes containing lovely illustrations and text that has been polished through rewriting, containing political and social observations. Adams claims that travel literature is not a branch of history or geography, since travel writers are too subjective and lack the training of historians and geographers. The closest connection he sees is to the novelist who may employ a little from many scholarly fields, and is able to turn from the present journey to the past at will. As regards the artistic side of travel writing, Adams brings up an important point: the writer must be selective and consider what to record and to comment on (Adams 1983:280-281).

The travel-writing genre “entitles the individual writer to the status of a culture-beholder and culture-gatekeeper.” (Shi-xu 1997:180). Writing about one’s experiences in other cultures, where people act differently to what the writer expects will require much arguing or explaining when the cultural observer wishes to convey a foreign culture for the benefit of other outsiders (Shi-xu 1997: 42). Perceptual discourse, where people describe and refer to the things they see and hear, is central in cultural descriptions: it may create new socio-cultural realities. Eyewitness accounts give the cultural beholder a validity of views, plausibility, and authenticity in expressions (Shi-xu 1997: 151-152). These facts imply that a travel writer has a great responsibility for what they say; they should be aware of their own minds as well as the ideas and conventions of the lands they travel in. In travel guides (see Kuusela, for instance) the presentation may focus on only a partial view, and the writers’ attitude and own experiences may strongly colour their views. On the other hand, travel literature cannot be expected to be free from subjective opinions. Travel books are written for both public and for market reasons: they strive for objectivity, but perhaps also attempt to reinterpret scenes in a commercially alluring way. However, I do not think my primary sources have sold their integrity to market forces; their popularity can be easily explained by their respective talents for travel writing.

3.2 Paul Theroux & *The Kingdom by the Sea*

Paul Theroux was born in 1941 in Medford, Massachusetts in the United States of America. He graduated from university in 1963 and after that worked as an English teacher in Malawi, Uganda and then Singapore, before settling to Britain. His first travel book was *The Great Railway Bazaar* (published in 1975). He has two children, is now divorced and remarried, and works as a full-time novelist and travel writer.

Paul Theroux had grown weary of London, and wanted to know what Britain was really like. Thus he decided to make a journey throughout the island by following the coastline all around Britain, including Northern Ireland. (Northern Ireland is not mentioned in this work, since Bryson did not visit the area at all and could thus provide no comparison.) While travelling, Theroux makes note of the financial depression and its effect on people. But he also describes the view, whether lovely or ghastly that opens from the footpath that he follows. Theroux seems to find many talkative people – Bryson rarely found any conversations worth mentioning – and discuss many everyday issues. The popular topic at that time (in 1982) was the Falklands war. He makes generalisations about the English character and tries to mention every place he visits, even briefly. In the final chapter he ponders on the change and changelessness of Britain.

My source material has no record of KS, which puts Theroux in a somewhat unfair position compared to the material on Bryson, which contains an interview actually on NI. According to the introduction in my edition of KS, Paul Theroux had already travelled widely in Africa and had been an English teacher in Singapore before moving with his wife and two children to Dorset in the early seventies, where he wrote his novel *Saint Jack*. Later he moved to London and continued his novel and travel writing producing well-selling works, including the prize-winning book made to film, *The Mosquito Coast*. He lived in Britain for seventeen years, but now devotes his time between Hawaii and Cape Cod in the United States (KS 1983:front leaf), since they are

‘the antithesis of a wet Sunday afternoon in winter, in Clapham,’ Theroux notes with his usual wit (Blackburn 2003).

Paul Theroux finds change fascinating. It is one of the reasons why he writes. In KS Theroux explained that he was not travelling merely for the fun of travel, he was trying to see the future by observing the present. The time of travelling and writing was also well chosen for current affairs: in 1982 Prince William was born, there was a growing change in Britain’s economic structure and the war over the Falklands took place (The Falklands are a group of islands off the coast of Argentina. The Islands belonged to Britain, but an Argentine junta attempted to claim them. Their invasion led to war with Britain, and eventually the junta surrendered. The war greatly boosted the success of the Thatcher government.) Regarding the world outside Britain

Everyone seemed to be going to China that year, or else writing rude things about the Arabs, or being frank about Africa. I had other things on my mind. After eleven years in London I still had not seen much of Britain [...] What I knew of Britain I had got from books. Britain was the most written-about country in the world (KS 1983:13).

Theroux is a prolific writer. He has been writing short pieces for the *Atlantic* since the 1960s, and has written over forty books, travel books and novels. Grant described Theroux’s style of writing as embodying a “characteristically dry and acidic wit” which he freely showers upon the characters he encounters on his travels (Grant 1997). I share Grant’s view: this wit seems to come through in KS quite regularly; Theroux himself would probably call it a truthful description, and that it certainly is, only a very harsh one at times. Of course, this is only my opinion of his writing, and by no means a universal stance.

Theroux feels that a novel brings out more emotion in his characters than a travelogue (Grant 1997). This may be explained by the fact that travellers rarely have the chance to depict more than fleeting images of the people and places they encounter, since travellers are, though being more than tourists, really only passing through (as mentioned in relation to ethnography). A novel allows character building and thus can evoke more sympathy in the reader

towards the characters in the book. Theroux also considers himself more a novelist than a travel writer; he is ‘a novelist that travels – and who uses travel as a background for finding stories of places.’(Grant 1997) (Bill Bryson says the same thing about his role as a travel writer: he wants to get the stories out, to spread the word (Welch 2000)). As a writer, Theroux is attracted to both people and places. He feels these two cannot be separated from one another. However, Theroux seems to find pleasure in solitude and empty places: in KS, he describes his feelings in a remote spot in Scotland, and finds his view pleasurable. He enjoys being the ‘monarch of all [he surveys]’(Grant 1997). Remote spots are also a chance for getting away. Percy Adams (1983:152) notes that in most cases the start of a travel story is a flight from home, or a loss of one, and that travellers are somehow compelled to move on.

When travelling, Theroux likes to read, and what he is reading influences the content of his book. He is very interested in writers’ lives. A particular favourite during the writing of KS seems to have been the American novelist Henry James, whose descriptive sections on the English coast find their way to the pages of my primary source.

According to Theroux, travel is far from tourism. Travel is not wholly planned, comfortable or guaranteed to be satisfactory. A traveller is not necessarily constrained by time limits, and he or she can digress from the original route in order to follow an interesting story, or to find a place the existence of which was not even known to the writer before. A traveller must remain humble towards what and whom he meets for very often he or she is a stranger to the area, and is dependent on the local population for help and guidance; it pays to be polite (Mudge 2000). This appeared to be a working technique in KS, since Theroux reports many conversations with English people which he might not have had had he emphasised his “superiority” as a citizen of the United States with the notoriously suspicious-of-strangers kind of Britons.

In Theroux’s view, it is the obligation of a travel writer to tell the truth. But the truth will always be subjective for each journey is slightly different (Mudge 2000). Even if the route was the same, the means of transportation or the things

observed may differ considerably from writer to writer. That is perhaps why Theroux felt the need to add his travels to the archives of the ‘most written-about country in the world’ (KS 1983:13). As mentioned earlier, when telling the truth, reporting things as they are, Theroux is simultaneously describing the future. He sees a truthful travel book as a prophecy (Mudge 2000). Whatever the case, Theroux believed he would “see” the future. Has his prophecy (whatever it may be, it has not become clear to me yet) come true? Perhaps we shall find out when we turn our attention to Bill Bryson.

3.3 Bill Bryson & Notes from a small Island

Bill Bryson was born in Des Moines, Iowa in the United States in 1951. He went backpacking in Britain in 1973, where he met his wife. He first completed his education in the USA, and then settled in Britain in 1977. He wrote for *The Times* and for *The Independent* as a journalist. His first travel book, *The Lost Continent*, was published in 1989. In 1995, Bryson moved back to the USA, and returned back to Britain in 2003. He is married, has four children and is a full-time travel writer (NI: front leaf).

Bill Bryson starts his book from 1973, when he first set foot on English soil. Now, in 1994, he was taking those same steps again, from the ferry from Calais to Dover, to start a trip around Great Britain. He was doing that because he and his wife had decided, after living years in Britain, to move to Bryson’s native America for a while. Bryson wanted to make a “valedictory tour” of Britain, to examine her “public face and private parts” (NI: back cover). He visits the places where he used to work, but also gives random towns a chance: “I went to Retford. I can’t explain it. [...] ...as soon as I entered the station and spied a English Rail map on the wall, I had a strange, sudden hankering to go somewhere entirely new, and Retford jumped out at me” (NI:186). (Theroux also occasionally gave in to digressions.) Many times he found the connections to be bad, and having to double-back to get a train or a bus somewhere on the itinerary. At any rate, he managed to visit some of the south coast, a part of Wales, North England, Scotland and the middle and southern parts of the

kingdom. He does not visit Northern Ireland at all, which Theroux does. He provides the reader with descriptions of small, out-of-the-way places. He does not spare his criticism, either. Especially architectural follies and the destruction of rural landscape receive severe critique. He provides anecdotes of English celebrities, historical facts, and hilarious accounts of his thoughts and adventures during the journey. In the final chapter he talks about the people and scenery in Yorkshire where he had made his home.

As a travel writer, Bryson finds gratification in being on the spot when the amazing stories happen, for many would never be known outside their original area, which Bryson thinks is a shame. As said before, he wants people to know, he wants to spread the word. Interestingly, he became a travel writer almost accidentally. Having lived in Britain for a while, he returned to America, and wanted to see and note the changes that had occurred during his absence. (Just as Theroux, observing change holds great interest for these writers). The result was his first travel book, *The Lost Continent* (Welch 2000). NI was also largely written as a last look before departing. But the separation was not final, and Bryson is almost prophetic in the last phrase of NI: ‘And then I turned from the gate and got in the car and knew without doubt that I would be back.’ (NI 1995:352) And he did.

Several sources have depicted Bryson as possessing the views of both an insider and an outsider regarding his books on Britain and the United States (Schatz 2001; Bassnett 1999:9). In the seventies, he came to Britain as an American, as an outsider. Having become accustomed to life in Britain, he went back to America, and found himself again a stranger in his native land. But this viewpoint has probably given him his humorous way of seeing things. He notes particularly how Britons and Americans have a different stance to ironic humour. In America irony can go amiss. Bryson relates the following story:

I had also got used to the idea that here [in Britain] you can make quips all the time and in America that can be very dangerous. [...] Once I was going through customs and immigration in Boston, and the guy said as I went past ‘Any fruit or vegetables?’ and I said ‘OK, I’ll have four pounds of potatoes

if they are fresh' and it was like he was going to take me off and pin me to the floor. (Bryson in Schatz 2001)

In an interview regarding NI, Bill Bryson compliments the English for not taking themselves too seriously and thus allowing themselves to be good material for entertainment. He regards ordinary Americans a bit sensitive but Britons do not seem to have any problem of “taking the piss out” of anybody (NI - Interview with Bill Bryson 1998).

Bryson states in the interview, and in NI, that he wanted to go somewhere where tourists did not; he wanted to write about places that were not so written about. He does take a look at Stonehenge and he visits museums, but in smaller towns, which are out of the tourist's way. As he was an outsider writing about Britain, many people knew about the country more than he did, and by going to less known locations he could bring something new even to English readership. It shows throughout the book that it is directed at an English audience: Bryson mentions events and people in passing without elaborating his meaning and as a foreigner I cannot always know what he is talking about. But familiarity is a part of his style and we as foreigners just have to pick up some additional reading to fully appreciate it when he mentions the former Minister Michael Portillo as one the seven English reptiles (NI 1995:112).

Like Theroux, Bryson denies being an adventurer. But he does digress from his routes and his “adventures” are quite thrilling in an ironic sort of way. He wanted to let the English know that there is a lot to be proud of in their country since the general mood at the time in Britain (as it had been in Theroux's time over ten years before) was that the country was awful and about to self-destruct. Bryson boldly identifies himself as

a booster for the country...people who go to a place and settle there voluntarily do end up loving it because you don't have to be there, you're there because you're actually attracted to the place. (NI – Interview with Bill Bryson 1998)

Modern cultural study seems currently to be looking for to extend the range of sources further research. Travel books seem to answer some of these interests, and its links to various fields in the study of culture and society. In that respect

also travel writers, in addition to providing entertainment for masses, have gained appreciation in the academic world beyond literary studies. As experienced travel writers Theroux and Bryson have contributed to this development. Their paths to the present have been roughly alike: both are well educated (assumably), are interested in writing, and travel because they want to see things for themselves.

This concludes the theoretical part of this thesis. The following chapters will focus on representing stereotypes and images about Britain from the viewpoint of a traveller.

4.Scenery

According to Shi-xu, recurring topics in the Dutch travelogues on China included perceptions on trains and in hotels, encounters with natives, social and political systems, and the landscape (Shi-xu 1997:22). Those conveniently match the features also prominent in Theroux and Bryson, respectively. Trains and hotels come up in Transportation & Accommodation, and natives are encountered in both Leisure and People & Institutions, where also will be portrayed a few comments on social and political systems. In this section the attention is on landscape. First there will be some words on the presentation of landscape, then the examination of the primary sources. A rough division is made between rural and urban scenery, although the manner of representation seemed to be about similar in both surroundings.

Barnes and Duncan (eds.1992) deal with discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape. Their approach is quite theoretical but it provides knowledge of how writing about landscape (which is something both Theroux and Bryson do) fits into the concept of representation. The approach follows the constructionist way of representation (see above): it is people who decide on the representation, the scenic features do not carry some absolute meaning in themselves (Barnes and Duncan,eds,1992:2). Thus, writing does not mirror

the world. The interpretation of scenery and landscape is based on intertextuality, i.e. to earlier texts, which may be based on any kind of other text (is human creativity not wonderful?). "...writing is constitutive, not simply reflective; new worlds are made out of old texts, and old worlds are the basis of new texts" (Barnes and Duncan,eds,1992:3).

It is a fitting description for Theroux and Bryson have created another, an "unofficial" view on Britain, an old world, "the most written-about country in the world" as Theroux himself puts it; and while doing that they both quote other texts regarding the country and its people. Writing about scenery is a personal thing, which should reveal almost more about the writer than about anything else. Mike Crang has studied human geography. He says that people's images of many places come through different media. Therefore most people already have some expectations about a place even before they see (hear, smell, touch) it (Crang 1998:44). (Theroux and Bryson wanted to test if Scotland was breathtaking.) The same is true for Theroux and Bryson: as mentioned before, Theroux referred to Henry James's and Ralph Waldo Emerson's descriptions on Britain and Bryson to J.B. Priestley, H.V. Morton and to Paul Theroux, too. Regarding the descriptive differences and attitudes to the meanings of scenery, Crang also claims that

The city is not only a setting for action or stories; the depiction of the urban landscape also expresses beliefs about society and life. (Crang 1998:50)

I suppose an example of this could be suburbs of the high-rise concrete buildings: the suburbs were seen as little utopian worlds that would solve the problems of overcrowding in English towns in 1960s. Instead, those plans realised into concrete wastelands where living was dour, as both Theroux and Bryson state when they view the urban Britain. The Britain of early 1980s was mostly a grim place, and the landscape does seem to coincide with Theroux's pessimistic view of the future. Bryson, on the other hand, tends to see the architectural ugliness as thoughtlessness more than anything else.

Thus, the interpretation of writing requires certain preconceptions from the reader. James Clifford has offered a list of guiding considerations, which may

be helpful to remember when reading a representation of landscape. One of these is to consider the intended audience: who is the text for, and what does it aspire to argue? Another is the genre of the writing: the primary sources in this thesis are travel books and therefore may not dwell much on political details, for example. Yet another, connected to the social context, is the position of authority the writer may have in society and in the context of the writing: is he or she an expert on human geography, sociology or politics? Paul Theroux, for instance, is a journalist and a widely travelled novelist, Bill Bryson has worked for several newspapers, published books on the English language, and has also scampered around in the English-speaking world, at least; they are competent and acknowledged in the travel writing genre. And still, their interpretations are largely affected by the historical context, perhaps both that of the writer as well as the context. And finally, the reader should pay attention to the writer's personal expression, his or her rhetoric, as well as one's own to make possible interpretations. The articles in Barnes and Duncan's book are "the attempt at geographical representation: to represent respectively the economic world of profit and loss, the political world of ideology, the physical world of natural wonder, and the visual world of industrialization" (Barnes and Duncan, eds, 1992:3-4) and that, I think, is a rather fitting description for KS and NI, as well.

My impression of English scenery comes from the large parks and manor houses in the tradition of Jane Austen novels. English landscape always brings to mind green fields and groves, with peaceful ponds and a couple of deer and foxes wandering around. Cities hardly appear, and they, too, are peaceful and filled with elegant Georgian houses. It is an idyllic vision, which is certainly not the whole truth. However, this image seems to be the one that is systematically marketed to outsiders and to Britons alike. Colls (2002:2) remarks how "[amongst the British] Parliament and the rural landscape, for example, are part of the common round even if one has never been to Westminster or explored the countryside." Urry brings forth a view that "instead of manufacturing goods, Britain is manufacturing heritage" (Urry 1990:109). And people respond to this nostalgic image: between 1981-1994 1.25 million people moved from big cities to live in the countryside. People seem to "have a deep nostalgia for an idealised world of neat hedgerows,

cottages and great country houses” (McDowall 1999:188, 104). This “rural bliss” may well be a stereotypical idea and thus suited for analysis. How do Theroux and Bryson respond to this stereotypical vision?

Farmland covers for 77 per cent of land area in Britain, and agriculture employs 2.1 % of the workforce). And although land is being increasingly put aside for recreational purposes, farms still cater for two-thirds of the people’s food needs (Oakland 1998:23). A particular concern for Bryson is the grubbing up and away of hedgerows that grow around farm fields. They have become a hindrance to more efficient farming, but Bryson defends them with an appeal to the readers. When admiring the view Broadway, Bryson states: “It is easy to forget, in a landscape so timeless and fetching, so companionably rooted in an ancient past, how easily it is lost.” (NI:169) He reports how the government is willing to destroy these bushes and goes on to say that if hedgerows are indeed only a peace of nostalgia, should then also Stonehenge be dismantled? He protests how easily this ancient feature is bulldozed away and makes his argument:

Anyway, the reason for saving them isn’t because they have been there for ever and ever, but because they clearly and unequivocally enhance the landscape. They are a central part of what makes England England. Without them, it would just be Indiana with steeples. (NI: 170-171)

Bryson is clearly partial in this matter as he finishes his argument:

It gets me a little wild sometimes. You have in this country the most comely, the most parklike, the most flawlessly composed countryside the world has ever known, a product of centuries of tireless, instinctive improvement, and you are half a generation away of destroying most of it for ever. We’re not talking here about ‘nostalgia for a non-existent golden age’. We’re talking about something that is green and living and incomparably beautiful. (NI:170-171)

Bryson seems to want to preserve the rural imagery. He himself had lived in both London and in a smaller town in Yorkshire so he may have had a deeper appreciation for hedgerows than e.g. Theroux who was a city-dweller, although generally very interested in natural scenes. Theroux prefers to depict the wild scenery from his coastal paths. He also comes across the idyllic coastal towns. The poet William Wordsworth created a romantic image of landscape that depicted the ‘sublime’ magnificence of nature; Theroux may have agreed with

the poet, or then he was being sarcastic when describing the Cornish coastal scene:

All the great coastal towns of England were a mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. Here was the sublime climate and pearly light favoured by watercolourists, the sublime bay of St Ives and the sublime lighthouse that inspired Virginia Woolf to write one of her greatest novels, and the sublime charm of the twisty streets and cottages. And there was the ridiculous; the postcards with kittens in the foreground of harbour scenes, the candy shops with authentic local fudge, the bumper stickers, the sweatshirts with slogans printed on them, the souvenir pens and bookmarks and dish towels, and the shops full of bogus handicrafts, carved crosses and pendants. (KS:115)

The image created here brings to mind the nostalgic past and the rural happiness. Theroux, however, attacks this image by opposing the ‘sublime’ with the ‘ridiculous’, a theme visible in the following quotations, as well. He does seem to favour the nostalgic view, but dislikes the possibly middle-class commercialisation of it. One of the first sites on the English coast for both the travellers are the cliffs around Dover. Theroux comes into a scene of decay: the white cliffs had been vandalised by gangs and other misuse.

Many signs said DANGEROUS CLIFFS and warned walkers not to go too close to the edge. The chalk was collapsing, and I could see that large bluffs had toppled to the shore. [...] These chalk cliffs of Kent – so white and sturdy when seen from a distance – were frail and friable, and this coast made Britain seem like a country consisting of stale cake that softened and broke in the rain. (KS:29)

Theroux mentions how meadows and coastal paths fell into the sea. But Dover had its charms, as well: “The whiteness of the Dover cliffs, the soft blaze of bright chalk, was a bearable beautiful glare – white could seem immaculate in nature” (KS:40). The cliffs may well represent the ‘sublime’ in Britain, but Theroux may also have meant the cliffs as an analogy of Britain at that time: Britain’s “sturdy” past had crumbled in the rains of economic depression and the radical actions of the Thatcher government.

Bryson started his journey the way he first came to Britain, via Calais in France. While arriving in Dover, he noted how much the surroundings had changed since 1973. The town had been “pedestrianized” for shoppers and the cliffs had definitely become a tourist site:

The whole town centre seemed uncomfortably squeezed by busy, wide relief roads of which I had no recollection and there was now a big tourist edifice called the White Cliffs Experience, where, I presume from the name, you can discover what it feels like to be 800-million-year-old chalk. (NI:39)

Here the cliffs have definitely become the ‘ridiculous’. What had still been majestic in Theroux’s time, had now been turned into another commercial item selling the ‘rural England’. This is one of many critical comments Bryson makes about the commercialisation of British places. He mentions how corporate sponsorship would soon turn Oxford University into “University of Oxford (Sony UK) Ltd” and adds to irony by predicting that Britain would soon also have “Kellogg’s Pop Tart Queen Mother, the Mitsubishi Corporation Proudly Presents Regents Park, and Samsung City (Formerly Newcastle)” (NI:154). In 1994 the country had been going through the free market ideal for 15 years, and seen the privatisation of nearly as many large companies (see e.g. Marwick (2000)). And Dover, too, had been accommodated to tourists. However, economically the arrival of foreign investors to Britain, and especially in the North and in Scotland, was a reviving experience for the declining industrial life. Britain was considered a low-cost, relatively stable area for investment, and when foreign money came in, the English investors also became more interested in the domestic markets. Of course, most jobs went to the better educated, whereas the less so were still encouraged to join the service industries better accommodated to semi-skilled workers (McDowall 1999:19).

The following quotations were chosen to bring up the effect of the time gap between the writers and also a comparison of their views on a couple of coastal towns. Both Bryson and Theroux visit the two “pleasure sites” Blackpool and Morecambe. They both seem to find the famous Blackpool (which attracts a wide populace every year) disgusting, and the solitude of Morecambe far more pleasant. But to say that the travellers liked Morecambe, would be saying too much. Theroux describes his first image of Blackpool:

...but Blackpool was real clutter: the buildings that were not only ugly but also foolish and flimsy, the vacationers sitting under a dark sky with their shirts off, sleeping with their mouths open, emitting hog whimpers. They

were waiting for the sun to shine, but the forecast was rain for the next five months. (KS:212)

Despite Blackpool's reputation as a place of recreation, all there was to do were drinking and bingo. The representation of the vacationers seems to reflect Theroux's vision of the town: "foolish and flimsy". He is definitely not giving in to an idyllic image of the seaside resort. So Theroux went to Morecambe to find that

Morecambe was wrapped around the edge of a dirty sea, scowling, its blackened terraces and hotels reminiscent of certain fierce churches – all spikes and shadows. [...] And there were ponies, too, and heaps of pony shit, and on the front a joyless Pleasure Park and Fun City and Giftarama [...] But I liked Morecambe for its being sedate and dull and unapologetic. Its stateliness had eroded had been eroded by the blasts of wind, and it was the dampest place I had seen since Cornwall, but this lugubrious mood seemed to suit it. (KS:215)

Theroux's humour is quite sarcastic altogether, a feature occasionally portrayed by Bryson, as well. Bryson introduces Blackpool's tourist qualities with a slightly mean twist in 1994:

Blackpool – and I don't care how many times you hear this, it never stops being amazing – attracts more visitors every year than Greece and has more holiday beds than the whole of Portugal. It consumes more chips per capita than anywhere else on the planet. (It gets through 40 acres of potatoes a day.) It has the largest concentration of rollercoasters in Europe. It has the continent's second most popular tourist attraction, the 42-acre Pleasure Beach [...] And on Friday and Saturday nights it has more public toilets than anywhere else in Britain; elsewhere they call them doorways (NI:268).

Bryson seems to agree with Theroux about Blackpool's attractiveness, or rather the lack of it. The town has made tourism a profitable business for itself despite "the English climate, the fact that Blackpool is ugly, dirty and a long way from anywhere, that its sea is an open toilet, and its attractions nearly all cheap, provincial and dire" (NI:268-269). Yet it seems the town has not changed and is still popular. The English certainly appear to be creatures of habit, or then they really enjoy "cheap" pleasures. Bryson also went to Morecambe that had been a rival to Blackpool at one time, but was on the wane as a tourist attraction. Bryson liked the solitude offered by the beach at Morecambe. He describes the view as fetching (a popular word for Bryson) and ventures to offer the declining town a well-meaning advice:

But really its charm, and certainly its hope, lies in being *not* Blackpool. That is what I liked about it – that it is quiet and friendly and well behaved, that there is plenty of room in the pubs and cafés, that you aren't bowled off the kerb by swaggering youths and don't go sidewalk surfing on abandoned Styrofoam chip platters and vomit slicks. (NI:276)

Both Theroux and Bryson are describing the problems of sites that attract large numbers of people in search of popular fun. Some people come over for a weekend, and make as much mess of the place (and themselves) as they can. Little change seems to have taken place: What Theroux calls “sedate and dull and unapologetic” in Morecambe, Bryson calls “friendly and well behaved” over a decade later. That is one of the differences between the writers: Theroux clearly prefers deviance from the norm, whereas Bryson tries to conform to a positive reality. However, there is a scenic feature regarding which neither of them spares his reproach. That is modern town architecture.

In general Theroux finds towns ugly. He, like Bryson, is sorry for the loss of older architecture:

Five miles down the west bank of the River Mersey was Rock Ferry, a yellow and green ferry station made of wood and girders. It was the sort of grand Victorian structure the British were eager to demolish and replace with a building that did not need repainting – something made of corrugated plastic sheets bolted to iron pipes. (KS:199)

Repairing old buildings was costly and that very building had been destroyed by the city council. It seemed the idea of the early 1980s to renew Britain and get rid of anything that did not bring sufficient profit. However, the English zeal for nostalgia has undoubtedly risen to a backlash. There are organisations that repair and preserve the old building heritage, and Bryson salutes these efforts wholeheartedly.

Theroux found Liverpool (by the Irish Sea) to his liking. (It seems a habit of Theroux's to see positive things in something fretted and disliked by a majority. He likes to be pleasantly surprised and his expectations to be countered, perhaps; or maybe he just has a great taste for the macabre, as you might assume from some of the images he creates.)

Liverpool, it was obvious from the ferry, was full of elegant old buildings. They were heavy but graceful. The city had three cathedrals and many

church spires, and just as many open spaces from the blasts of German bombs. [...] Liverpool was not pleasant – no city was – but it was not bad. It was elderly, venerable, tough, somewhat neglected, and it had a very exposed look, because it was a city on the sea, one of the few large cities in Britain that was subjected to ocean gales. That was the Liverpool look: weatherbeaten. (KS:200)

But Theroux's dislike reaches quite a stage as he gazes upon Dundee (in South-East Scotland):

I chose to stop at Dundee because it had a reputation for dullness ('possesses little of interest for the tourist'). Such places were usually worth seeing. I had found that that in Britain less was revealed by the lovely old town than the ugly new one. Old Dundee had been destroyed and new Dundee was an interesting monstrosity. It was certainly an excellent example of a hard-edged horror – the prison-like city of stony-faced order – that I associated with the future. Just the word 'futuristic' brought to my mind the most depressing images of idle roads and ugly buildings, unfriendly streets, steel fences, barred windows and defoliation. (KS:301)

Theroux lives up his goal of not going to where a tourist would, and certainly attempts not to advertise these towns to his readers. Theroux associated the future with emptiness and a loss of freedom, and generally his descriptions of townscape were very grim, indeed. Bryson does not shy away from criticising the architectural choices made during the 1960s, either. For instance, the News International complex in London seemed to him "like the central air-conditioning unit for the planet [...] surrounded with sinister fencing and electronic gates, but there was a new maximum security reception centre that looked like something you'd expect to find at a plutonium depot at Sellafield" (NI:56). The same kind of prison atmosphere reigns in this description as with Theroux above, although this is not typical for Bryson. His criticism is mostly directed at how ill matched the new architecture is with the old. Bryson is particularly aggrieved for Oxford, which despite its reputation for being one of prettiest university cities in Britain, if not the world, has not been spared from folly. He describes the city as a mishmash of styles:

...Merton Street presents us with an unquestionably becoming prospect of gabled buildings, elaborate wrought-iron gates and fine seventeenth- and eighteenth-century townhouses. [...] But what is this inescapable intrusion at the bottom? Is it an electrical substation? A halfway house designed by the inmates? No, it is the Merton College Warden's Quarters, a little dash of mindless sixties excrescence foisted on an otherwise largely flawless street. (NI:154-155)

As with the hedgerows, Bryson makes a passionate argument against the choices of earlier decades, probably to waken appreciation for the little that is left. Bryson gives a long sarcastic account of how misguided (in his view) town planners could be in the 1960s and 1970s' Oxford.

What a remarkable series of improbabilities were necessary for [the construction of the Warden's Quarters]. First, some architect had to design it, had to wander through a city steeped in 800 years of architectural tradition, and with great care conceive of a structure that looked like a toaster with windows. Then a committee of finely educated minds at Merton had to show the most extraordinary indifference to their responsibilities to posterity and say to themselves, 'You know, we've been putting up handsome buildings since 1264; let's have an ugly one for a change.' Then the planning authorities had to say, 'Well, why not? Plenty worse in Basildon.' (NI:156-157)

But Bryson finds good things in Oxford, as well: charming streets, pubs and museums. "Above all, I like to drink in the pubs, where you can sit with a book and not be looked on as a social miscreant, and be among laughing, lively young people and lose yourself in reveries..."(NI:158) but adds in his distinct manner: "...of what it was like when you too had energy and a flat stomach and thought of sex as something more than a welcome chance for a lie-down."(NI:158) The above has actually little to do with scenery. Bryson is hinting that his sexual drive is on the wane. Interestingly, Theroux twelve years earlier made the observation that it was typical to hear middle-aged English men "boasting about their lack of sexual drive." (KS:50) Bryson has certainly acclimatised well to his role as an "Englishman".

McDowall suggests that the English opposition to the bare concrete buildings of the 1960s manifests a fear of the unknown future, and a fear of change altogether. The past was glorious (depending on the point of view, of course) for the English, at least, and that is why they are so keen to cling to nostalgia. Modern architecture is an art form in Britain but it is constantly under attack, as only the worst examples are remembered (McDowall 1999:106-107). It is a common view in my secondary sources, and seems a plausible idea. Perhaps Theroux's morbid views about the future are a manifestation of this fear of the future. Bryson may not fear what has come about but he certainly detests the

changes that have been made. It seems that Theroux is more interested in depicting rural landscape, preferably such with as little human involvement as possible, whereas Bryson is enthusiastic in describing the urban landscape. But of course their choice of routes may affect their reporting: Theroux moved along the coast, where there may be a lot of natural scenery available, and Bryson made his way zigzagging through various inland towns and cities. Luckily for the writer of this piece, they had enough views of both rural and urban landscape. When reading KS, a question that constantly comes up is ‘why is this here?’ Why e.g. pony shit had to be mentioned? Surely even honesty can look away from some things, or at least kindly enough not to relate them all to the readers? Perhaps Theroux –and Bryson, judging from the points raised in the description of Blackpool – are tired of the tourist guide image of the perfect nostalgia of Britain.

One definition of representation is description. Generally the writers find beauty in the wild, and are sad or aghast at the sight of towns. Theroux in particular criticises townscapes: he represents Blackpool, a popular tourist resort as ugly, foolish and flimsy. Bryson claims that the streets in Blackpool act as public toilets. Architectural change caused grievances to both. Old buildings were being replaced by something covered in “plastic sheets” and “iron pipes”. Bryson is particularly venomous in his representation: “sixties excrescence” that is “foisted” upon the viewer paints a clearly attitudinal picture. But the writers also find beauty. Theroux in particular is keen to use appreciative images about the natural scenes, and thus creates a very favourable representation as opposed to the “horrors” of the urban town.

5. Transportation & Accommodation

As mentioned above, public transport and hotels provide not only a means to move on the journey but also a rich scene for description and conversation. Shi-xu (1997:22) mentions that one of the recurring themes in Dutch travel accounts on China was the travellers observations on trains or in hotels and

Adams (1983) points out that “the coach and the inn” have through times provided interesting encounters for the travel writer. Theroux took trains whenever he could, whereas Bryson made use of busses, as well, and also rented a car at one point. British Rail was being privatised and public transportation was going through a major downsizing on Theroux’s time, and Bryson’s words reflect the results of this change, which largely meant that train and bus connections were quite dismal. The Conservative government had decreed that only commercially profitable lines should continue. Services were cut down and fares increased, thus sealing smaller towns from most of the world. The loss of public transport was also enhanced by the increased building of motorways since the 1970s, and the rise in the use of private cars (which is quite in accordance with the privacy of the English character mentioned by e.g. Snowman.) By the mid-1990s 86% of all passenger travel was done by car, and 6% by bus or coach, and the travel by train made for only 5% of all passenger trips (McDowall 1999:179-181). By 1994, when Bryson travelled, rail mileage was reduced to 16,542 km, the number of train stations cut down to half of what they were in 1962, and “the branchlines, the rural lines and lines in the extremities of the country had been closed” (Royle 1997:19); Theroux’s prediction had come true: when he was travelling, the plans had been drawn up to wipe out these lines. He was sure they would be gone soon, and later history and Bryson’s experiences confirm this. Resources for rail improvement were put to the replacement of steam with diesel-powered locomotives, and then to the electrification of the system in the 1990s. Some people had not forgotten the old ways (steam engines replaced by diesel engines), and bore a sentimental nostalgia towards the soon-to-be-obsolete system. In relation to this, both Theroux and Bryson encounter people called “railway buffs”: the ones who have made trains their hobby. This section does not touch upon ordinary people the writers on their transportation but some of them will appear in the people and institutions section.

5.1 About Trains and Buses

Train lines were still being finished off in 1994 as they had been in 1982. Theroux laments the loss of the charming branchline trains and writes about the joys of train travel. Despite seeing so much wrong with the country, trains do seem to reach Theroux's approval, and Bryson enjoyed some of his train experiences, a part of which was the admiration for the scenery. The sections below thus serve as a threshold from the scenery section to the transportation and accommodation section.

It was not just the sight of cliffs, and the sea breezes; it was also the engineering, all the iron embedded in rock, and the inevitable tunnel, the roar of engines and the crashing of the waves, the surf just below the tracks, the flecks of salt water on the train windows that faced the sea. [...] It was man's best machine traversing earth's best feature – the train tracking in the narrow angle between vertical rock and horizontal water. (KS:41)

Theroux has been a rather keen train traveller in his other books (he seems to take trains whenever possible in many of his travel books), so one cannot be surprised that he has chosen his favourite. In a very simple way he expresses how he feels:

There were few pleasures in England that could beat the small three-coach branch-line train, like this one from St Erth to St Ives. And there was never any question that I was on a branch-line train, for it was only on these trains that the windows were brushed by the branches of the trees that grew close to the tracks. Branch-line trains usually went through the woods. [...] You knew a branch line with your eyes shut. (KS:114)

Bryson shares some of this feeling in 1994:

The countryside roundabout was gorgeous and extravagantly green. You could be excused for thinking that the principal industry of Britain is the manufacture of chlorophyll. We chuntered along between wooded hills, scattered farms [...] I soon settled into that happy delirium that the motion of a train always induces in me, and only half noted the names of the little villages we passed through. (NI:139)

There seem to be a precious few things that please Theroux in Britain but the branchlines were one of them. Here, perhaps, he is taking part in the English love for nostalgia: by these descriptions train travel was an elevating experience filled with the peaceful satisfaction that a rest in a comfortable (?) seat while gazing at a calm rural landscape can provide. Bryson takes trains as

well but to him they do not provide such pleasure; they are more like inconveniences that arrive and depart at awkward times, and contain people who seem to annoy him. Bryson seems to prefer the bus, although the timetables proved challenging there, as well.

The destruction of railway lines had created a kind of train enthusiasts who still rode on the old lines. This seems a rather permanent hobby for some Britons, since both Theroux and Bryson encounter these people. And it also seems obvious that a time gap of twelve years has not changed anything. Theroux considers their interest on dying lines as a sort of necrophilia, and Bryson seems to find all interest to vehicles as something a trifle uncanny. Theroux describes these people at the few last months of the Exeter to Barnstaple line: The buffs would take photographs of ordinary station surroundings because they would soon be gone with the closing of the line.

They were on board getting their last looks at the old stations, photographing the fluting and floriation, the pediments and barge-boards and pilasters [...] every beautiful station would be sold to anyone who could raise a mortgage to turn it into a bungalow for a boasting family. (KS:132)

It had indeed become a fashion for middle-class families to purchase old station buildings and convert them into bungalows. Owning a piece of nostalgia, so to speak, was a status symbol, perhaps emblematic of the traditionally minded, nostalgic Britons (McDowall 1999:20). There were also those who were interested in trains in particular. Theroux met one himself, and a true enthusiast:

‘I love steam, don’t you?’ Stan Wigbeth said to me on the Ffestionog Railway, and then leaned out of the window. He was not interested in my answer, which was, ‘Up to a point.’ Mr Wigbeth smiled and ground his teeth in pleasure when the whistle blew. He said there was nothing to him more beautiful than the steam ‘loco’. (KS:186)

Mr Wigbeth seemed very knowledgeable about these particular trains and “like many other railway buffs, he detested our century” (KS:186). Theroux presents him as a typical enthusiast and ridicules the image of his travel companion by identifying him as an impetuous child, or at least giving an impression of the ‘ridiculous’ regarding Mr Wigbeth’s hobby. As times were changing in the

early 1980s, it also meant the loss of certain out-of-date technology, such as steam engines in trains, and the “social life” around them (Urry 1990:107). Railway buffs, however, had chosen to support the “steam engine team” and refused to acknowledge the newer technologies, which corresponds to the stereotype of the English being team players (Miall 1993:15). And wearing your team’s colours – in this case an engine driver’s and conductor’s clothing – goes without saying: in a definite role Mr Wigbeth can be just as passionate as he chooses. (Theroux argues elsewhere in the book that acting in plays liberates the English from their emotional constraints and class divisions, and that sounds plausible to me in this case, as well.)

‘It’s a diesel,’ he said, and made a sour face. [...] ‘I don’t call that a train,’ he said. ‘I call it a tin box!’ He was disgusted and angry. He put on his engine driver’s cap, and his jacket with the railway lapel pins, and after a last look at his conductor-type fob watch, he got into his Ford Cortina and drove twenty-seven stop-and-go miles back to Bangor. (KS:186-187)

Bryson encounters a train enthusiast in 1994, the time public transport was in a bad way, although the worst pressure of the Conservative free market era may have been lifted. Just having complained how he could never easily strike up a conversation on a train, Bryson meets an elderly chap who takes great interest in the book Bryson is reading, which, incidentally, is Theroux’s *The Kingdom by the Sea*.

‘Doesn’t know his trains, you know,’ he said. ‘Sorry?’ I answered warily. ‘Theroux.’ He nodded at my book. ‘Doesn’t know his trains at all. Or if he does he keeps it to himself.’ [...] ‘Do you know that book of his – Great Railway what’s-it? All across Asia. You know that one?’ I nodded. ‘Do you know that in that book he goes from Lahore to Islamabad on the Delhi Express and never once mentioned the make of engine. (NI:245)

The buff gives a lengthy account on trains. Bryson does not describe him fondly, partly because the man interrupted his reading in an intrusive way – highly un-English even in the 1990s. But Bryson does claim that old people are generally arrogant and intrusive – but he ends up feeling sorry for him for being a widow and having nothing to do but to adore trains. Bryson’s buff may just have an interest in engines but Theroux’s buff seems the type of Briton

who relies on the glorious past and is suspicious of everything new –both very stereotypical features.

A railway strike struck during a later part of Theroux's journey, and he offers some sarcasm to the situation. Bryson, 12 years later when facing a similar event, shares this feeling:

'The travelling public are coping magnificently with the strike...Many people have found they can do quite well without British Rail,' the Tory papers said. More lies. My guess was that most people were coping with the strike by not travelling at all. That was the English way: inaction was a form of coping. (KS:339)

Thus, Britons seemed to take on adversity with patience and without much complaint, as most stereotypes claim is characteristic to Britons. Inaction can mean laziness, as well, but tolerance to the state of things does spare people from making an embarrassing fuss over things. But this willingness to let things "slide" often results in that nothing is ever done to the matter. Below, Bryson again criticises the effects of privatisation but even then he does not suggest that people should do something about it; inaction seems to be implemented in the 1990s, as well.

I spent another day in Glasgow poking about, not so much because I wanted to be there, but because it was Sunday and I couldn't get a train beyond Carlisle. (The Settle-to-Carlisle service doesn't run on Sundays in winter because there is no demand for its services. That there may be no demand for its services because it doesn't run appears not to have occurred to British Rail.) (NI:346)

But, alas, the heavenly state of taking trains was not to last. The railway strike broke out during Theroux's journey, and he had to get a bus. And getting one proved challenging.

I went to the bus station: Was there a bus? 'Left an hour ago, squire' – 'squire' because the news was bad, a further turn on the screw, sarcasm, not politeness. There was not another bus to Southwold today. 'I have to get to Southwold,' I said. 'I'd hitch-hike, if I were you,' he said. 'That's the only sure way.' This was spoken to me in a town (pop. 52,000) on the coast of England in the summer of 1982. *Hitch-hike...that's the only sure way.* Good God. (KS:354)

I suppose Theroux considered it ridiculous that a Western welfare state had the public transportation system equal to that of a financially insecure third-world

country or some such thing. And even when trains were running, the common reply to route enquiries was “You can’t get there from here” (KS:327, 343). Things were hardly better during Bryson’s trip. He witnessed the loss of the train lines, and the problems of itineraries. When Bryson needed a bus to get out of Barnstaple (curiously, there was still a train connection from Exeter to Barnstaple in 1994, although Theroux mentioned it would be disconnected) he stumbles on an almost similar situation as Theroux:

I asked them about buses to Minehead, about 30 miles to the east along the coast. They looked at me as if I’d asked for connections to Tierra Del Fuego. ‘Oh, you won’t be gittin to Moinhead this toim of year, you won’t be,’ said one. ‘No buses to Moinhead arter firrrrst of Octobaaarrrr,’ chimed in the second one. ‘What about Lynton and Lynmouth?’ They snorted at my naivety. This was England. This was 1994. ‘Porlock?’ Snort. ‘Dunster?’ Snort. The best they could suggest was that I take a bus to Bideford and see if I could catch another bus on from there. (NI:139-140)

“The coast of England in the summer of 1982” and “This was England. This was 1994” seem very similar places. The situations and the objects of sarcasm are not the same, but the frustration with the way governments and free-market companies serve the public is undeniably similar. Miall wrote that it was tradition for buses (and trains) to be always late. And if they did arrive, then there were always several buses arriving at once and then nothing for hours (or days, in Theroux’s and Bryson’s cases) (Miall 1993:51). The car having become a status symbol, as well, the elimination of bus and train lines had continued.

5.2 About Hotels

Accommodation also suffered from the free-market policy. Due to lack of funds, many buildings cannot be fixed. This has led to a situation where people live more or less permanently in boarding houses for there is a government subsidy for that (McDowall 1999:192). Bryson may have touched upon that when he assumed that some of the guests in a boarding house were “long-term residents” (NI:23). On the other hand, this remark was made about a situation in 1973, and some of the people may have been family members. Irwin (1994:81) points out that 80 per cent of the English live in houses (not in

apartments, for instance). There are 20 million homes in the UK, most of them owner-occupied (not rented, that is). As there were fewer job opportunities and independent businesses were encouraged in the early 1980s, a house could serve as a hotel or a bed-and-breakfast place to create employment. Theroux points out later in the book (when staying at bed-and-breakfast places):

Usually I was treated with a mixture of shyness and suspicion; but that was traditional English hospitality – wary curiosity and frugal kindness. The English required guests to be uncomplaining, and most of the people who ran bed-and-breakfast places were intolerant of a guest’s moaning, and they thought – with some justification – that they had in their lives suffered more than the guest. (KS:126)

Theroux mentions how the hotels were always empty. ‘We’ll be packed in June’, they [the proprietors] said in May. But in June they said, ‘Things are quiet now, but it’ll be a madhouse in July when the school holidays start.’(KS:33-34) But all places always seemed to have plenty of vacancies. Surely every traveller has come across these parallel experiences of Bryson and Theroux, as they go in search of accommodation:

My method for finding a place to stay was to walk up and down the streets and look for a clean or well-shaped building that had a view of the sea. I avoided the new hotel (too expensive) or the place in which I heard music playing (too noisy) or the damp tumble-down inn with the sway-backed roof that was usually buried in a back lane (stinks and hard beds). The tall semi-hotel I found in Deal after roaming around for twenty minutes looked all right – it had lovely windows; but after I gained entrance I saw it was no good. It smelled of bacon and beer, it was run by a fat dirty woman named Mrs Sneath, who smoked in my face. (KS:34)

Bryson salutes his wife for always managing to pick “the one run by a white-haired widow with a kindly disposition and a fondness for children”. But Bryson himself more commonly comes across the following experience:

I selected a place that looked reasonable enough from the outside – its board promised a colour TV and coffee-making facilities, about all I require these days for a lively Saturday night – but from the moment I set foot in the door and drew in the mildewy pong of damp plaster and peeling wallpaper, I knew it was a bad choice (NI:250).

Both Bryson and Theroux encounter unpleasant landladies on the south coast. Arriving in Dover in 1973 Bryson takes a room at Mrs Smegma. After explaining the house rules, which were new to Bill since he was used to the

America do-what-you-like-with-your-hotel-room-and-never-mind-the-rest type of thing, she has yet another surprise for him.

This was like joining the Army. ‘The minimum stay,’ Mrs Smegma went on, ‘is five nights at one pound a night, including full English breakfast.’ ‘Five nights?’ I said in a small gasp. I’d only intended to stay the one. [...] She surveyed me critically, as she might a carpet stain, and considered if there was anything else she could do to make my life wretched. There was. ‘I’m going out shortly, so may I ask that you vacate your room within quarter of an hour?’ I was confused again. ‘I’m sorry, you want me to leave? I’ve just got here.’ ‘As per the house rules. You may return at four.’ (NI:16)

As the days go by, Bryson finds that everything he does is quite beyond the pale and he would “doubtless forever remain, friendless in Dover” (NI:25) But despite Mrs Smegma’s cold demeanour, her polite tones never seem to waver. Miall mentions how the English are always polite to your face, however they felt (although I do not share his view) about foreigners. Sticking to a routine is also quite English, it creates a sense of reliability (see Miall). Mrs Smegma would certainly fall into the category Theroux identified above: someone who has suffered more than the guest, and all carpet stains should be surveyed with utmost suspicion. This was Dover in 1973. Theroux visited the south coast in 1982. His image of his landlady, Mrs Sneath, is also not favourable:

‘Cheapest single room I have is ten pounds,’ Mrs Sneath said. ‘That’s bed and full breakfast.’ ‘Your sign says the room start at seven pounds.’ ‘I don’t have any left, do I,’ she said. [...] Breakfast’s at nine.’ ‘I wanted to be away at eight,’ I said. ‘Bloody crack of dawn,’ she said. [...] ‘Breakfast’s at nine,’ Mrs Sneath said and wrung the sweat from her palms by clutching her filthy shift. She blinked the smoke out of her eyes and gave me an Eskimo squint and said, ‘If I made exceptions I’d be doing breakfasts all the morning. It’s a proper cooked breakfast, see, that’s why I’m not cheap.’ (KS:34-35)

But she is “cheap”: Theroux’s impolite representation implies that. It turns out that her hotel is just as empty as other hotels on the coast (indicating that she lied), and Theroux sees her “principles” to refuse doing customer service as a mark of indifference and laziness. Like Mrs Smegma in Bryson’s case, Mrs Sneath prefers to stick to her ways, which are comparable to house rules. And the landlady is just as unmoved by requests as in 1973. However, aggressiveness had entered the picture in 1982. Oakland stated that also laziness and aggressiveness had become part of the national character (Oakland

1998:66), and challenging the positive stereotypes. In 1994, the English politeness has got thinner, as money seems to have become the only thing that matters. Although Bryson is not wholly reliable here: he argues that everything in Britain has got terribly expensive (which is likely to be true), and in a poor travel writer that may cause an unfavourable estimate...

I was about to turn and flee when the proprietor emerged from the back room and stayed my retreat with an unenthusiastic 'Yes?' A short conversation revealed that a single room with breakfast could be had for £19.50 – little short of a swindle. It was entirely out of the question that I would stay the night at such a dismal place at such a larcenous price, so I said, 'That sounds fine,' and signed in. Well, it's so hard to say no. (NI:250)

Bryson, however, is stereotypically turning a blind eye to the overpriced accommodation, presumably to avoid the tediousness of haggling or trying to find a cheaper place – and makes fun of his own situation. Very English, indeed.

The examples chosen to this chapter represent perhaps a little negative image of accommodation and transportation in Britain. That is due to routes and the general economic situation: both writers travelled between smaller towns and villages that had suffered from the retrenchment in public transportation throughout the 1980s. The smaller towns were also unlikely to be booming with employment, which creates a mood of indifference or even hostility, which Theroux and Bryson do not fail to notice. Theroux again represents the sublime with the branchlines and the ridiculous with the railway buffs; Bryson finds the ridiculous in himself and freely showers this upon the readers by depicting "bus hunts" and the army-like command of his landlady, as to bring a lighter shade to an otherwise grim image.

6. Leisure

Leisure is considered to be the opposite of work, a time free of duty and timetables; it is free time and it is holiday. Urry claims that tourism is “a leisure activity which presupposes is opposite, namely regulated and organised work” (Urry 1990:2). And although Theroux claims not to be a tourist and Bryson once defined himself as a tourist who writes books, their goals and experiences link at certain points with Urry’s view of tourism:

The journey and stay are to, and in, sites that are outside the normal places of residence and work. Periods of residence elsewhere are of short-term and temporary nature. There is a clear intention to return ‘home’ within a relatively short period of time.

According to Urry’s description, Theroux and Bryson could well be tourists. Many Britons also annually follow this guideline as they take their holidays. But underneath the quotation is such that our writers might well claim it to refer to them only:

Places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures, either on a different scale or involving different senses from those customarily encountered [...] The tourist gaze is directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience. (Urry 1990:3)

For “intense pleasure” or a powerful separation from everyday experiences do not seem to come into play with the English. This chapter is divided into two. First there will be a few samples of how the English are when they are having a holiday in the country; second I take a look at how leisure time is spent on ordinary days and weekends.

6.1 *On Holiday*

The traditional English holiday was going to the seaside. The Pleasure Beach at Blackpool, which had held an annual fair in the 19th century, was still the most popular attraction in Britain in 1995, with 7.3 million visitors (Royle 1997:252). Traditions seem to run deep, since Bryson notes that the sea around those beaches is quite polluted, and rain was more common than sun. On the

beach in Blackpool “...the vacationers...they were waiting for the sun to shine, but the forecast was rain for the next five months” (KS:212). Theroux remarks “mittens in May” (KS:25) when people insist on going to the beach on a cold day, apparently because it was tradition, and because the English seem to possess some dogged optimism. He also notes that hardly anybody swam. That is hardly surprising, even when the weather were better: the sea was very polluted in many places.

Some Britons have seemingly abandoned the traditional holiday. On many cases those who have money go abroad, mainly to Costa del Sol or some other Southern European tourist resort. Royle has made the observation that wealth and class also determined where you went for holidays, or if one spent holidays at all. Blackpool was the place of “the better-off members of the working class”. Theroux’s first stop, Margate, was a place for the London working-class people. The more well off went to Torquay or Tynemouth (Royle 1997:269). But the change in ways is only apparent for Miall claims that when abroad, the English behave just as if they were in e.g. Blackpool: they visit amusement arcades and eat fish and chips. “They stick together, ignoring the existence of the natives, stake out corners of the beach and spend most of the day lying in the sun” (Miall 1993:39). Neither of the writers comments on this but judging from one English reality TV series set in Ibiza or equivalent, Miall might have a point. Several sources state that Britons feel superior to foreigners and have no need to accommodate their ways –or to experiment with local culture or cuisine.

However, if a Brit chose to stay at home for the holidays, a part of the beach life was to have a chalet, or shally. They were tiny cottages, rented either for a day, or more permanently. Theroux and Bryson both observed shally life. Shallys were common on the coast and thus on Theroux’s route, and he both observed their appearance, and the nature of their inhabitants.

Hove’s shallys were the size of English garden sheds. I looked into them fully expecting to see rusty lawnmowers and rakes and watering cans. Sometimes they held bicycles, but more often these one-room shallys were furnished like doll-houses or toy bungalows. [...] They were painted, they had framed prints (cats, horses, sailboats) on the wall, and plastic roses in

jamjar vases. All had folding deck chairs inside, and a shelf at the rear on which there was a hotplate and a dented kettle and some china cups. They were fitted out for tea and naps – many had camp cots, plastic cushions and blankets; some had fishing tackle; a few held toys. It was not unusual to see half a fruitcake, an umbrella, and an Agatha Christie inside, and most held an old person, looking flustered. (KS:68-69)

The representation brings to mind a longing for a happy childhood and a peaceful leisurely time of the past. The shallys were probably favoured by elderly middle-class people who did not require an active adventure holiday.

The shallys were small and close together. “When it rained, their occupiers sat inside with their knees together, one person reading, the other knitting or snoozing, always bumping elbows. In better weather they did these things just outside, a foot or so from the front door.” Although the “toy bungalows” all looked the same, their individual nature came out in that they all the shallys had their own names. And despite apparent similarities, the people in the shallys were not a community: “The shallys were very close together, but paradoxically they were very private. In England, proximity creates invisible barriers. Each shally seemed to stand alone, no one taking any notice of the activity next door. [...] All conversation was in whispers” (KS:69). The people seemed very private; Theroux mentions that despite the shallys being open at the front, no passer-by ever looked in – looking would have been an intrusion.

The leisure of the shally people also appears stereotypically modest. Bryson, too, saw “a long crescent of beach huts, all of identical design but painted in varying bright hues”, shades that avoid excess. In his view, shally people characterise the idealised English spirit (This took place sometime in the autumn of 1994):

One [shally] stood open, rather in the manner of a magician’s box, with a little porch on which sat a man and a woman in garden chairs, huddled in arctic clothing with lap blankets, buffeted by wind that seemed constantly to threaten to tip them over backwards. The man was trying to read a newspaper, but the wind kept wrapping it around his face.

The scene appears as if from a classic comedy; there they are, having a day on the beach and dressed like polar bears. I was half expecting a witty

understatement, or a grumpy but humorous exchange of words over some trivial matter from “the actors”, but then Bryson continues:

They both looked very happy – or if not happy exactly, at least highly contented, as if this were the Seychelles and they were drinking gin fizzes under nodding palms rather than sitting half-perished in a stiff English gale. [...] They could make a cup of tea and, if they were feeling particularly rakish, have a chocolate digestive biscuit. [...] And this was all they required in the world to bring themselves to a state of near rapture. (NI:97)

Bryson creates an ironic scene, but I cannot tell if he is mocking or pitying these people. Or perhaps he is almost in awe because of the simplicity of their happiness. I will venture to say that based on what I have read of NI, this is Bryson’s way of gently confessing his love to the ways of this people. Stereotypically the English like to “revel in discomfort and self-denial” (Miall 1993:8) and let more joyful experiences pass them by: Theroux’s and Bryson’s observations seem to confirm the desire for modesty and privacy.

If the Britons would be more social, holiday camps provided a holiday for the masses, for “a public which wanted to be entertained, fed and told what to do in glorious irresponsibility for £1 a day, all in”(Royle 1997:269) The camps were designed to provide luxury with “on-site amusement, good-quality food, high-class entertainments and modern sanitation”. The first one was opened in 1936. In the 1950s the camps orientated towards “family holidays” and self-catering, and became known as ‘holiday worlds’. The appeal of holiday camps was on the wane during the 1980s: in 1983 two of the biggest camps closed (Urry 1990:36-37). In 1994, Bryson mentions pathetic “holiday worlds” that were often very modest and did not wake any thoughts of fun. Theroux actually visits a very English invention, a Butlin’s holiday camp. The first impression of the camp is discouraging:

Holiday camps were surrounded by prison fences, with coils of barbed wire at the top. There were dog patrols and *Beware* signs stencilled with skulls. The main entrances were guarded, and had turnstiles and a striped barrier that was raised to let certain vehicles through. Butlin’s guests had to show passes in order to enter. The whole affair reminded me a little of Jonestown. (KS:142)

Presumably Theroux is referring to a “utopian community” founded in Guyana by the religious leader Jim Jones. The community was closely guarded and

Jones was suspected of torturing the members of the community. Despite outside appearances, some people planned to defect, when authorities and concerned relatives came to visit. The visit ended in several murders, and in November 1978 Jones ordered a mass suicide. Nearly all members complied, and those who did not, were shot (Knapp 1998). Theroux does not shy away from grim images (although here I must question his taste. If he meant this as a joke, it was very poor indeed.). However destitute the surroundings, people at Butlin's were determined to have a holiday and were dressed accordingly, despite dreadful weather. The buildings were like barracks, but the area seemed to have "everything", even a chapel and a miniature railway. Butlin's was like an English town and that may have been the reason for its popularity: it was familiar, and thus comfortable.

It was also a permanent fun-fair. One of Butlin's's boasts was: 'No dirty dishes to wash.' [...] No dishwashing, no queuing – it came near to parody, like a vacation in a Polish joke. But these promises were a sort of timid hype; England was a country of modest expectations and no dishes and no queues were part of the English dream. (KS:143)

Theroux is ironic, of course. Describing such a scene as 'a fun-fair' seems a trifle overstated even to a dull and quiet Finn such as myself. But Theroux hits the mark when referring to modest expectations. This stereotype seems lasting: Bryson also confirms it many times.

Despite its many free recreations such as snooker and swimming, the main targets for fun were feeding coins into one-armed bandits, shopping for knick-knack, eating and drinking. (It sort of reminds me of the image I have of a Las Vegas holiday; a modest version of it. Maybe that is why Theroux sees it as futuristic –if America could represent the future and the Britain something following it.)

It was England without work. Leisure had been overtaken by fatigue and dull-wittedness: electronic games were easier than sports, and eating junk food had become another recreation. [...] If it had a futuristic feel it was the deadened imagination and the zombie-like attitude of the strolling people, condemned to a week or two of fun under cloudy skies." (KS:144-145)

Theroux seems to argue that the English do not really seek a change when they go on holiday: the only change in their day is the absence of work. The English

do not care for change (Miall 1993:56), holidays should be conducted with as little effort and expenses as possible. One reason people came to Butlin's was because it was cheap: people could pay the holiday with their dole money, i.e. the unemployment benefit. But as people's leisure time and activity have increased, leisure has become a matter of business and almost a duty to the consumer. Advertising tells people what they should want, and drinking and gambling have become the virtues of the consumer world (Royle 1997:265). Theroux mentioned how the adults in holiday camps spent most of the day drinking while the children were off somewhere.

But people took holidays by themselves, as well. With the help of the car, caravanning came to light (and wives, instead of relaxing in a boarding house or at a holiday camp, were forced to doing all the work they did in their everyday life, as well. (Royle 1997:270)). Theroux described those mobile homes by the Welsh shore.

Caravans – it soon became obvious – were the curse of the Welsh coast. They were technically mobile homes, but they were not mobile. At best they were tin boxes, the shape of shoe boxes including the lid – anchored in a field next to the sea, fifty or a hundred at a time, in various faded colours. [...] there was a fish-and-chip shop and a tin shower and another tin outhouse with a sign saying Conveniences. What fresh water there was came from a standpipe surrounded by squashy mud. The whole affair put me in mind of nomads or refugees...(KS:176)

And Bryson does not view the same sight with pleasure, either:

From the train, north Wales looked like a holiday hell – endless ranks of prison-camp caravan parks standing in fields in the middle of a lonely, windbeaten nowhere, on the wrong side of the railway line and a merciless dual carriageway, with views over a boundless estuary of moist sand dotted with treacherous-looking sinkholes and, far off, a distant smear of sea. It seemed an odd type of holiday option to me, the idea of sleeping in a tin box in a lonesome field miles from anywhere in a climate like Britain's...(NI:248)

Bryson's description is slightly ironic. He describes how people got up in the morning and crossed a very dismal area to have swim in a filthy sea. Forty per cent of English beaches do not meet EEC standards (Urry 1990:37). It may be safe to say that the caravans were almost as private as the shallys: however, having to share conveniences and staying overnight may have forged some

feeling of mutuality. The damp weather may affect the representation; on a clear and warm day, the image of refugee camp may not have come to light. Unfortunately, sun is very rare in the English summer. In that sense, the descriptions seem as truthful as they can be. But the people make do, they cannot help the weather. They muddle through, as they stereotypically would.

6.2 At Home

TV is a major competitor for leisure time, and for most Britons it is their only link to cultures other their own; particularly sports, soap operas, old films, news and discussions are popular (Miall 1993:49). Both Theroux's and Bryson's first guesthouse experiences involve making the mistake of going to the 'TV lounge'. They both fail to make friends over television viewing. Bryson happened to arrive first in the TV room and switching on the machine on the "wrong" channel. The Englishman coming in next was too reserved to say he wanted to watch something else. But since he had always been watching that programme, Bryson got the blame for ruining the experience (NI:24). Theroux was trying to watch news about the Falklands when an old man shoved his leg to his arm and cried that he could not see the TV, like a misbehaving child (KS:37). Crang, however, points out that TV programmes bring together people who are otherwise strangers to each other. Being the addressees of the same message can create temporary communities (Crang 1998:96) –even amongst the reserved Britons. In a boarding house, Theroux experiences the following occurrence: He happens upon a scene of a group of elderly ladies watching a contemporary horror film.

I looked around the room and saw that the Welsh ladies were squinting seriously at it. [...] Nothing in this plot made me regret that I had missed *Omen I*, but because I had missed it I had to ask questions of the Welsh ladies. I always got prompt replies. 'Who is that man?' 'One of the Devil's Disciples,' Miss Ellis said, with a slewed Welsh emphasis on the last syllable. [...] 'What's that statue?' 'Oh, that will be the Whore of Babylon, I expect,' Miss Thomas said in her sweet Welsh voice. (KS:147)

Theroux considers the film ridiculous and is astonished at the ladies' serious attention to the film. The scene strikes me as humorous: one would not expect

retired schoolteachers to give serious answers to such questions. But television viewing took up over 20 hours a week of an average family, and even more amongst the elderly (Royle 1997:288). Bryson records a visit to the sight in Manchester where *Coronation Street* (a popular TV series in Britain) is set. A miniature community is immediately formed:

Throng of people walked up and down the street in a kind of reverential hush, identifying front doors and peering through lace curtains. I latched on to a friendly little lady with blue-rinsed hair under a transparent rain hat she seemed to have made from a bread wrapper [...] Pretty soon I found myself surrounded by a whole flock of little blue-haired ladies answering my shocked questions ('Deirdre with a toy boy? Never.') and assuring me with solemn nods that it was so. (NI:229)

It seems that despite their independence and privacy, the English still enjoy sharing a common interest (perhaps despite class differences?). This interest may be related to the English zest for voyeurism. It is mostly related to reading about the exploits of politicians, celebrities or aristocrats (Miall 1993:21), but in my view, discussing the "lives" of soap opera characters (say, *the Bold and the Beautiful* in Finland) takes up voyeuristic features, such as gossip.

When people are not gathered in the pub, voluntary activities, such as community action, or an amateur music and theatre group, are also popular (McDowall 1999:118). Theroux in particular mentions the English amateur sense and their good spirit to going on, even though the audience were indifferent or indeed, non-existent. (as happened once or twice on Theroux's journey.) The English admire amateurism (Oakland 1998:66). Snowman claims this came about already during the Puritan days. Since work had been so central to the Puritans, those who could perform it effortlessly or voluntarily, were admired (Snowman 1977:110). Plays, in Theroux's view, were an escape from the stereotyped English way.

Plays in England were seen to be a suitable outlet for the emotions. The English liked dressing up, they liked the clubby community of amateur dramatics, they enjoyed the pressure and team-work of play production. For the duration of the play they were released from their lives and their work; they could shout and sing, they could express misery or joy; there was no such thing as a class system. They were free. (KS:108)

Theroux reveals that most of the players were amateurs. Working for one's own team (i.e. the cast), even across class divisions, and at the same time expressing one's usually concealed feelings with the skill of acting fit in with the traditional stereotypes. Theroux's representation is, however, a lovely tribute to the dominant state of affairs: He implies that the English do not care for "unsuitable" outlets for emotion. Even in extravagant plays the control is kept. The whole effort is done voluntarily; it is a labour of love and perhaps thus admired. Bryson, unfortunately, does not mention such performances much, but he was travelling in late summer and the autumn and was perhaps a little out of season.

A lot of volunteer work is dedicated to the love for animals. (My impression comes from the *Animal Hospital* shown on Finnish TV: the amount of voluntary activity seems considerable.) Theroux reports a case where a man was sued for giving his budgerigar a thorough bath (the animal survived). Theroux ridicules the idea of spending public money on matters like these, but takes them as a sign of the English love of pets and need of being a bit eccentric. But the love could turn "ugly": he also mentions the violence caused by organisations such as the Animal Liberation Front (KS: 102). Bryson seems to find somewhat dismaying that the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (the RSPCA) was formed before the national society for protecting children (and it as an offshoot of the RSPCA), and adds: "Did you know that in 1994 Britain voted *for* a European Union directive requiring statutory rest periods for transported animals, but *against* statutory rest periods for factory workers?" (NI:265) Miall depicts how the English refuse to see that their pets could do anything wrong: "So when dog bites man, it is always the man's fault, even if he is just a passer-by" (Miall 1993:24) Bryson confirms this stereotype by depicting a scene where a large dog attacks his ankles just because he was carrying a walking stick. The owner's only "apology" was that the dog did not like sticks (NI: 113).

Many Britons list walking as their leisure activity. Theroux and Bryson walked a large part of their journey, as well. Theroux encounters a couple of elderly ladies who hike with their belly buttons fully in sight, and wear as little

clothing as possible, so that they dry quicker after rain. Theroux himself was wearing a raincoat (KS: 121). But stereotypically to the English “the heavy weather is the ultimate adversary – a worthy and familiar opponent” (Miall 1993:35). Bryson, too, never tires to mention that the weather is rainy, again. Below he relates his own adventures on the Dorset footpaths:

The more I plunged on, the less defined did the footpaths become. By mid-afternoon, I found myself increasingly crawling under barbed wire, fording streams with my pack on my head, wrenching my leg from bear traps, falling down, and longing to be elsewhere. Occasionally, I would pause to rest and try to identify some small point of congruence between my map and the surrounding landscape. Eventually I would rise, peel a cowpat from my seat, purse my lips and strike off in an entirely new direction. (NI:116-117)

It seems a rough way of having fun, but fits in well with the stereotype of competitiveness either against others or oneself (Snowman 1978:113): the discomfort suffered on the walks brings them a greater pleasure when they “win” against the pouring rain. Afterwards they can modestly collect the honour of such deeds, or as in Bryson’s case: “The first rule of walking is, of course, to lie through your teeth” (NI:117).

Theroux and Bryson represent the English being very traditional in their holiday habits. Here their role as outsiders allows them to see the ridiculous in caravan parks and shallys, which the main population considers normal, and does not even imagine that there might be a better way to spend one’s holidays. And perhaps for them, there is not. These representations depict the English as maintaining their privacy and base character even when they are supposed to “let their hair down”. Perhaps that is why Theroux depicts the English as “free” only on the stage where they are in a role, as somebody else. This chapter already revealed much of what is to come in the following chapter. Chapter 7 will expand the focus on English character from leisure activities to all venues of life (although to a very limited extent).

7. People & Institutions

This section is most closely connected to stereotyping. Many national stereotypes relate to people's character, and I attempt to mirror Theroux's and Bryson's representations to existing English stereotypes. Furthermore, how are two institutional themes, media and monarchy, portrayed in these books? Here I will first relate some views on cultural representation and what mental characteristics the English are said to possess.

Daniel Snowman has observed British and American cultures between 1945 and 1975. The traditional English qualities included self-restraint, unflappability, insularity, centre-orientation, secretiveness and deference. The culture was based on hierarchies, the social and political systems were centralised and everybody "knew their place" (Snowman 1977:154, 259-260). During the 1980s and 1990s Britain suffered from self-doubt: people felt that the country was fairing badly, and the demands of the ever-faster changing world (Britain had e.g. given up some of her insularity by joining the EEC [now European Union] in 1973) encouraged the English to cling to the supposedly glorious past. (Both Theroux and Bryson make note of this.) Industry was not developed well enough to compete with other industrial states, which then caused this lack of entrepreneurial spirit. The imperial past was gone, and starting from the 1970s the English identity has given away once again to English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish identities (Kumar in Wadham-Smith 1995:89, 93). However, this thesis is not concerned with the four national identities of the UK. All people are here considered as 'English', and I assume all stereotypes to roughly apply to all of them.

Daniel Snowman has described the English character through certain themes since post-war decades to the mid-1970s. The aforementioned character of self-restraint manifested itself in the English expression via understatement, the double negative and the general calmness under pressure. Particularly this showed during the war years (1939-1945) and that has stereotypically been stuck to. Self-restraint realised itself in indifference, as well. For instance, when Theroux encountered a group of Skinheads on a train the other people in

the train car did not seem to react at all to this noisy group; Theroux notes that also the Skinheads behaved as if they were alone in the car, and took this as a sign of the English privacy –and, why not, of indifference (KS: 22-24). Privacy and one's own space was very much respected. People in Britain still prefer to live in detached houses (and detached chalets), and not to talk to strangers. This respect used to reach the class system, as well: every English person knew his or her place, and rarely associated with other classes. It was largely assumed that it was the educated, generally upper class people that were meant to govern others, that that was their place, and government secrecy was taken as a normal state (Snowman 1977:84-88). Thus, the trust in hierarchy seemed strong.

Close to self-restraint was the control of aggression, not only in oneself, but in others, too. In the English character tolerance, gentleness and patience were admired during the 1940s and 1950s. And the same seemed to apply in politics: during that time there were very few political or social extremists to stir up violent emotions (Snowman 1977:91). Abiding laws and respect for authorities was also popular. The avoidance of aggressive feelings turned into casualness, even laziness, as well as aloofness and indifference, and a willingness to compromise even when opposing someone: it was customary to begin an argument with "I might be wrong, but..." The control of aggression also showed in sportsmanship, where Britons often sided with the underdog. For instance, Theroux reports that some Britons felt sorry for the Argentine soldiers on the Falklands during the invasion:

The English seemed – in private – ashamed and confused, and regarded Argentina as pathetic, ramshackle and unlucky, with a conscript army of very young boys. They hated discussing it, but they could talk all night on the subject of how business was bad. (KS:135-136).

But, underdog or not, in sports team loyalty was in high esteem (and as the Falklands episode was represented like a sports event by a select press, it became "natural" to take the English side –although Theroux reports an exception, as well.) One charming feature to come out of the self-control was that of mastery: focusing on being a good gardener or pet owner (features often

used in stereotypes of English life) kept the unwanted passions under control (Snowman 1977:91-95).

Some of the traditional stereotypes date back for centuries to the age of the Puritan ethic. According to this, one should work hard – except the elite; all work was considered beneath them. They were born to privilege and to govern. To rise socially was an exception, because everyone “knew his or her place” in society: it was the position a person was born into; God might even have ordained it. (Neither Theroux nor Bryson dealt much with the upper classes, but generally everyone seemed reconciled to their lot in life, whether a better or a worse one.) Work was conducted in the spirit of amateurism: the ideal was to do something because you liked to do it, or you did it voluntarily, and you should certainly never be seen practicing for your job. (At Theroux’s and Bryson’s times amateurism was mostly connected with the arts. However, neither writer discusses the working life so this conclusion is incomplete.) In competitions one supported one’s team, not so much the individual competitors (Snowman 1977:107-113). The ideas of equality and liberty have had very different receptions in Britain. Everyone was born equal but moving up from one’s social class was deemed an exception. Liberty was seen as a passive, though self-evident right of the English: it was freedom from oppression and fear. To the English political freedom was freedom from foreign domination, something that could be seen today in the English reserve towards the European Union. Generally liberty was to be dealt with by using good sense and moderation. (Snowman 1977:121-122). Finally, Snowman characterises the English as

Reluctant to familiarize themselves with the languages, styles of food and clothing, or social customs of the foreigners with whom they came into contact. Instead, they would characteristically resort to the lazy way out and simply think of foreigners as poor benighted people who did not enjoy the benefits – and in particular, the freedom – that were the very birthright of the English. (Snowman 1977:125)

The representation above seems a very traditional one. Miall says that the English are very tolerant (as does Snowman) but are still assured about their own superiority as a people. But Miall also says that they are plagued by self-doubt: what if their conception of themselves is faulty? What if they are not up

to the task when it is their solemn duty to show the world how things should be? (Miall 1993:6,12) The English assurance of their might may still rest on their “successful” past, but nowadays the English probably think nothing of eating Chinese or Indian food, especially when it is provided by their local Asian restaurateur. John Oakland makes a difference between how the English see themselves and how others see them. The English list such qualities as calm, reasonable, patient and commonsensical (although the Celtic peoples were generally seen as more romantic and impulsive.) (Oakland 1998:66). It is hardly as surprise that other nationalities name these features a little differently: ‘calm’ and ‘reasonable’ could easily be interpreted as ‘unemotional’. However, Theroux and Bryson represent the outsider’s view of English characteristics; how do they react to what they have seen?

Both Theroux and Bryson occasionally make generalisations about English or (more generally) English characteristics. There are a couple of wonderful parallels on these lists. In the coastal town of Dover, Theroux notes the typical English “shyness”:

...the English made no concessions at all to other nationalities. They were neither hostile nor friendly. In any case, talk or chat was not in itself a friendly gesture in England as it was in the United States. Speaking to strangers was regarded as challenging in England; it meant entering a minefield of verbal and social distinctions. Better to remain silent, even on a path through a meadow with no one else around. (KS: 41)

As stated in the previous paragraph, some concessions are now made. Theroux does not discuss food much, but mentions rook pie as a delicious curiosity. Of course (Theroux’s style is to point out failures), the pleasure was short-lived: English bird-lovers had resorted to actual harassment to stop such cuisine. Bryson endorses Indian food openly, and relates a story where his prejudice against Greek food vanished once he had no choice but to dine at a Greek restaurant. (It becomes clearer and clearer that whereas Theroux is quite apt in stating English stereotypes, Bryson is equally capable of living by them.)

Theroux is probably right when he blames class-consciousness for the people’s quietness. Perhaps they do not wish to intrude upon someone and rather leave the decision of approaching to the other party. However, this is not always the

case, as my previous chapters suggest. Theroux also claims that the reason for tolerance was to avoid embarrassment:

The English were tolerant in the sense that they were willing to turn a blind eye to almost anything that might embarrass them. They were humane but they were also shy. After nine hundred years they still did not have strong views about the French, which surprised me, because after eleven years I thought of the French as the most unprincipled people in Europe. (KS:41)

I had lived under the idea that the English hate the French (as it sadly seems to be customary in the world to hate one's neighbour) but Theroux represents another picture. Perhaps even considering the French, the English are reluctant to state a direct view (Miall 1993:8). Bryson, while sitting in a train to Windsor, brings out another side to the shyness perhaps: the English politeness. He represents a scene where a rugby crowd is entering a train:

They boarded with patience and without pushing, and said sorry when they bumped or inadvertently impinged on someone else's space. I admired this instinctive consideration for others, and was struck by what a regular thing that is in Britain and how little it is noticed. [...] [They] formed a patient crush at the ticket barrier. [...] It was a little miracle of orderliness and goodwill. Anywhere else there'd have been someone on a box barking at people to form a line and not push. (NI:66-67)

Patience and commonsensical orderliness are both features the English like to see in themselves. Bryson does not appear to pay lip service but is genuinely pleased with what he witnesses. The two writers agree on the people being both humane and considerate, both tolerant and patient (tolerance here is referring to the mental stamina required for queuing.) and reinforce the positive stereotypes of Britons.

Another generalisation both authors make relates to the economic aptitude of Britons. In his characteristic manner Theroux offers the reader some positive things only to rebuff them in the following sentence. Bryson offers a whimsical option to channel the English working spirit: Britons might have done well under Communism. Theroux shares his ideas about the English both as individuals and as mass in economic life:

The English were great craftsmen but poor mass-producers of goods. They were brilliant at running corner shops, but were failures when they tried

their hands at supermarkets. Perhaps this had something to do with their sense of anonymity?

[...] It was hard to distinguish hotels in England from prisons or hospitals. Most of them were run with the same indifference or cruelty and were equally uncomfortable. The larger an English industry was, the more likely it was to go bankrupt, because the English were not naturally corporate people; they disliked working for others and they seemed to resent taking orders. On the whole, directors were treated absurdly well, and workers badly, and most industries were weakened by class suspicion and false economies and cynicism. (KS:219)

Theroux emphasises individuality and independence, which both have a long history in the English tradition of national traits (see *Snowman*, *Oakland*). A small corner shop run with a personal, loving touch (as portrayed in e.g. the film *Notting Hill*) does seem closer to the stereotypical ideal of a small comfortable community. The dislike of being told what to do coincides again with independence. And the echo of hierarchical thinking is strong in the different treatment workers get compared to bosses: perhaps *Snowman's* idea that some people just are more adapted to govern (earlier due to being born in the upper class, and being able to afford a long education) still held true in 1982.

But the same qualities that made English people seem stubborn and secretive made them, face to face, reliable and true to their word. I thought: The English do small things well and big things badly. (KS:219)

Here Theroux points out the difference in interpreting representations: their privacy might as first strike as lack of co-operation, but on a closer look these features are just the two sides of the same coin. "Person to person, I had found them truthful and efficient and humane. But anonymity made them lazy, dishonest and aggressive" (KS:219). Mrs Sneath in chapter 5 is an example of these lower qualities, and Theroux seems to run into either apathetic or grumpy people all around the coast, so his view has a point. But he is still fair in bringing forth the good with the bad. Bryson compares the English character to the ideal citizen in Communist society:

All those things that are necessary to the successful implementation of a rigorous socialist system are, after all, second nature to the English. For a start, they like going without. They are great at pulling together, particularly in the face of adversity, for a perceived common good. They will queue patiently for indefinite periods and accept with rare fortitude the imposition of rationing, bland diets and sudden inconvenient shortages of

staple goods as anyone who has ever looked for bread at a supermarket on a Saturday afternoon will know. (NI: 68-69)

The analogy between supermarkets on Saturdays (perhaps Theroux's anonymous aggressive people had forgotten to refill the shelves?) and the supply shortage experienced in, say, the former Communist Russia reveals that Bryson is being ironic. But here again the stereotypes of team spirit, patience and tolerance come out.

They are comfortable with faceless bureaucracies and, as Mrs Thatcher proved, tolerant of dictatorships.[...] They have a natural gift for making excellent jokes about authority without seriously challenging it, and they derive universal satisfaction from the sight of the rich and powerful brought low. Most of those above the age of twenty-five already dress like East Germans. The conditions, in a word, are right. (NI: 69)

Britons still seem willing to keep their traditional systems. "faceless bureaucracies" is a part of the secrecy that surrounded those who governed (Snowman 1977:88-89). The desire to "lower" the rich may refer to the popularity of tabloids, which people consume to learn about the follies some Cabinet Ministers or aristocrats are guilty of in their private lives. And at least Bryson seems to criticise the actions of his contemporary government without any real enthusiasm for change. But just to make sure that the dry sense of humour Britons stereotypically possess will not take in the above, Bryson adds:

Please understand I'm not saying that Britain would have been a happier, better place under Communism, merely that the English would have done it properly. They would have taken it in their stride, with good heart, and without excessive cheating. (NI: 69)

He confirms Theroux's idea that the English are honest in their endeavours, and enjoy every challenge, desirous to do their best, and even win.

Finally, Theroux and Bryson describe the English character in the face of adversity. Britain was facing a railway strike in a few days.

The event was not viewed with much passion by the general public. The sort of punishing strike that created misery in other countries was met in Britain with either excitement – a kind of community thrill at the drama of it – or else indifference. The English were fatalistic; it was the origin of their cynicism, but it also made them good sharers of misfortune. 'Oh, well, mustn't grumble!' (KS:311)

Miall claims that not grumbling is a national myth; he says that the English love to complain (Miall 1993:60). This sounds plausible, if Britons perceive the past as better than the present. Especially older people are more likely to complain; it is a form of small talk, perhaps. But in these passages above and below Theroux and Bryson prefer to represent the unemotional, tolerant people who find adversities entertaining. In fact, Bryson claims Britons to be “the happiest people on earth”. They are quick to smile in conversation (which sounds suspiciously unreserved for Britons; but perhaps these people are quick to recognise each other as equals). But mostly Bryson brings out their modesty and their positive attitude.

I used to be puzzled by the curious English attitude to pleasure, and that tireless, dogged optimism of theirs that allowed them to attach an upbeat turn of phrase to the direst inadequacies – ‘well, it makes a change’, ‘mustn’t grumble’, ‘you could do worse’, ‘it’s not much, but it’s cheap and cheerful’, ‘it was quite nice really’ – but gradually I came around to their way of thinking and my life has never been happier. (NI: 99)

Bryson admires the English for being “so easy to please...They actually like their pleasures small” (NI: 98). Bryson, always keen to comment on food, describes English puddings (desserts) as “cautiously flavourful”. It seems that the English avoid excess even in their dishes.

The reason why I have dwelled for so long in these long lists of generalisations is that general views are the food of stereotyping. A single individual’s behaviour surely cannot determine a stereotypical idea of the character of an entire nation, but these observations concerning several encounters and probably collected over a relative long period of time. Both writers had been living in Britain long before they wrote their respective works; it is unlikely that their observations were based only on what they saw during a couple of months of travel. These generalisations represent many such stereotypes that the English have of themselves as well as those that foreigners have about them. However, mass generalisations cannot take place without individual

encounters. The following two sections attempt to bring forth stereotypical (or not) behaviour on a personal level, through actual reported conversations.

7.1 Words and Appearances

One feature that I see reappearing in many passages is privacy. When the English are in their own company, they are unlikely to let anyone inside their minds, it seems. Of course, privacy was also safety; it was only reasonable not to get oneself into a mess by opening your mouth or being too ostentatious in one's actions. The following passage happens somewhere on a footpath where Theroux puts the privacy stereotype to a test:

I watched her come on, and I thought: I am not going to say hello until she does.

She did not look at me. She drew level and didn't notice me. [...] Now she was a fraction past me, and still stony-faced. 'Morning!' I said. 'Oh.' She twisted her head at me. 'Good morning!' She gave me a good smile, because I had spoken first. But if I hadn't, we would have passed each other, Hetta and I, in the clifftop meadow – not another soul around – five feet apart, in the vibrant silence that was taken for safety here, without a word. (KS:40)

Does Theroux feel that since there was no one else around, people should at least say hello? Privacy was one of the traits foreigners often note about the English (Oakland 1998:66). Talk was probably more commonplace in an American culture, but not so in the English. However, generally the traveller's gear was considered an invitation for talk. Walking is a popular hobby among the English. And perhaps the English are then braver in talking to passing wanderers, since there is little risk of ever meeting them again: thus, if they embarrass themselves or their speaking partner, the situation can be solved by the traveller moving on. Theroux also argues that people talked to him more easily, since he was an American and thus "classless". Another experience of Theroux's comes from a train, to which most travellers bring their own rations due to the expense and frugality of the food service in English trains:

Mr Mould, across the aisle, had turned away from me. Our conversation had ended, and now I saw why: he was eating. He had taken out a bag of sandwiches and a thermos jug and he and his wife had covered their laps with the newspaper (*English Convoy in War Readiness Off Falklands*) and

were sharing lunch. The English intensely private and rather silent when they ate; their gestures were guarded and economical and precise. They were tidy and self-conscious. Suddenly, eating, they were alone. (KS:22)

I imagine eating may easily lead to an embarrassing moment and thus people concentrate on what they are doing. One of Bryson's encounters was at a restaurant: "Why are the English so quiet in hotel dining rooms? There wasn't a sound in the room but for the quiet scrapings of cutlery and murmured two-second conversations like: 'Supposed to be fine again tomorrow.' 'Oh? That's good.' 'Mmm.' And then silence." (NI:118) However, there is one group of people that gains Bryson's attention: that is fat people eating.

It is a curious thing but even the greediest and most rapacious fat people – and the trio before me could clearly have won championships for rapacity – never look as if are enjoying themselves. It is as if they are merely fulfilling some kind of long-standing obligation to maintain their bulk. When there is food before them they lower their heads and Hoover it up, and in between times they sit with crossed arms staring uneasily at the room and acting as if they have never been introduced to the people sitting with them. (NI: 88-89)

Perhaps English fat people, too, try to avoid any excess: emotional, social, or physical one. This last kind might be difficult for overweight people, since they do tend to eat excessive amounts (or so I believe), and doing too much of anything is an embarrassment; perhaps especially since many people consider obesity to result from the lack of self-restraint – and thus they are not living up to the English national character (Miall 1993: 11). (Although I am a little doubtful whether "national character" could mean any obligation to most Britons today; according to current news, obesity is rapidly becoming a problem in Britain.) The only exception was the puddings. When it was their time, Bryson describes how obese people practically blossomed and became active and social. This is probably the only reference to body mass in Bryson's book, and he seems to offer his observations as a curiosity rather than a "discriminating" comment, although he does use some mean language when the fat family hog all of the best desserts –in which case some hard looks are in order; such impoliteness.

Despite Britain harbouring a few of the most famous universities in Europe (and the world?) and relying on a system with both private and state schools, as workers the English were the least educated in Europe (in 1982) (McDowall 1998: 86). This has little to do with the passage below. It was chosen here to represent young people and it only shows that English children are just like children everywhere.

Irby and Vitchitt, two schoolboys, were talking behind me in low, serious voices, on the train. They were both about fifteen years old.

Vitchitt said, 'If you could change any feature of your body,' and he paused, 'what would you change?' 'Me fice,' Irby said. He had not hesitated. Vitchitt said, 'Your *'ole fice?*' 'Yeah.' Vitchitt stared at him. Irby said, 'Me *'ole fice.*' 'What about your oys?' 'Me oys,' Irby said. 'I dunno.' 'What about your *'air?*' 'Me *'air.*' Irby looked stumped. 'I dunno.' 'What about ya rears?' 'Me years,' Irby said, 'Smaller anyway.' 'What about teef?' Vitchitt said. 'Dunno. I have to fink about vat,' Irby said.

And then, as they pushed through the door at Worthing, they began to talk about contraceptive devices. (KS:70-71)

(I wonder how Theroux could see what the boys did if they were sitting behind him? But he probably did an un-English thing –and looked.) This passage still confuses me. Why has Theroux chosen to report this conversation? He is making a joke, probably, but to me he is also making a comment on the aimlessness and indifference of people, which he sees everywhere on his trip. The talkers are saying one thing and contradicting themselves in the next, coming back to square one in the end. Boys of fifteen are in a school-leaving age by English standards, halfway between childhood and adult life. Perhaps that is why Theroux brings out the contrast between the childish pondering about facial features and then moving on to birth-control issues. But it is more likely that I am reading too much into this.

However private or shy the people are, there is one thing where one can still rely on a Brit: "...and more than anything it stirred the English passion for giving directions. Giving directions here was a form of conversation." (KS:149). And there is no shyness there. Pubs in particular seemed to have retained their liberal atmosphere in the 1990s. (Pubs had traditionally been forums for free discussion.) Bryson offers a passage on this feature of the English. They seem genuinely proud of knowing the 12,000 hectares of

motorways on their little island (Royle 1997:8). Although the English do not consider the island small at all:

If you mention in the pub that you intend to drive from, say, Surrey to Cornwall, a distance that most Americans would happily go to get a taco, your companions will puff their cheeks, look knowingly at each other, and blow out air as if to say, ‘Well, now *that’s* a bit of a tall order...’ (NI: 29)

However, they are keen to help a friend in need, and offer many options to the traveller. Bryson, who is not keen on driving, considers this interest in route choices – seasoned with place names familiar to everyone except him – a bit excessive. Perhaps this is a stereotypical echo of a time when the English were the forerunners of the world and showed the right way of doing things to those following (Miall 1993:9). But this openness in public houses challenges the stereotype of Britons being always quiet and reserved. Of course, the alcohol consumed in pubs may explain the difference between the quiet walker on a footpath and the helpful gentlemen at a local pub.

Eventually, when the intricacies of B-roads, contra-flow blackspots and good places to get a bacon sandwich have been discussed so thoroughly that your ears have begun to seep blood, one member of the party will turn to you and idly ask over a sip of beer when you were thinking of setting off. When this happens, you must never answer truthfully and say, in that kind of dopey way of yours, ‘Oh, I don’t know, about ten, I suppose,’ because they’ll all be off again. (NI: 31)

It is likely that many current affairs would also be discussed in pubs. Some of the sources for these talks will come from the media. Newspapers and television are also institutional tools in a state and mould the public image of English, and thus deserve a section in this thesis. The monarchy has historically represented the English state and reflected the current status of the country. Perhaps it is not so anymore, but out of interest a few passages regarding the royal family are included.

7.2 Media and the Monarchy

The media mentioned in my primary works are television and the papers. In Britain newspapers are categorised in two major classes: the ‘qualities’ and the

'populars'. The 'qualities' group includes the quite famous *The Times* and *The Guardian* among others. Roughly, these papers focus on political and social topics. The 'populars' focus more on human relationships between celebrities and especially on the scandalous side of them. This group includes e.g. the also quite famous *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* (Irwin 1994:140). The 'populars', also known as 'tabloids', were "intellectually capable of being read on a crowded bus, they were physically designed for the same purpose. Part picture-paper, part comic, part magazine, their news content was minimal, and even their sports pages dwelt more on scandals than games" (Royle 1997:276). As mentioned previously, voyeurism is stereotypically an English hobby: Brits love to read about sex, and enjoy the play of innuendo concerned with it (being so shy about it themselves, apparently) (Miall 1993: 21).

The press is a powerful tool in conveying images of others (see e.g. Särkkä (1999)) and thus defends its place. Stuart Hall quotes Karl Marx's ideas about how the press produces and reinforces society's conceptions, and how those in control of the media will also control this production (Marx in Hall, ed, 1997:347): their representations become the right state of matters, the base for all following popular discussions. During Theroux's journey Britain began and finished a war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands. The subject of the war pops up throughout the book, and Theroux seems careful to mention the media where the information comes from. In particular he mentions some wartime headlines of the *Sun*, which is a popular paper in Britain. Theroux, of course, is only reported to be reading *The Times*. Theroux points out how the papers represented the war in the style of sports reporting although gradually the seriousness of the situation became apparent. In May 1982 the war had not yet started. But as things progressed, people started to talk about the incident. There had been some preparations, but no action: "Most people assumed this was bluster, and bluff, and counter-bluff, and that after a period of time the Argentines would climb down." (KS:21)

But this bluff was about to become very real. And then there were the first casualties: the Argentine ship *General Belgrano* had been sunk.

No one said anything for a while, perhaps out of fear of saying the wrong thing. [...]

But Mrs Sneath was agitated. Her voice was guilty and defiant. ‘They say they’re going to eat the sheep.’ ‘Who’s going to eat the sheep?’ I asked. ‘The Argies –who else?’ she said. ‘When they run out of food. When they haven’t got anything left. That’s not fair, eating the sheep. They have no right. The Falklands may belong to Argentina, but they’re English sheep.’ (KS:37)

The quietness may well have been to avoid embarrassment. It may have been also disbelief that the peaceful island was once again in a war situation, although far away. As a sort of grotesque sidetrack, Mrs Sneath represents the English dedication to fairness: not “playing by the rules” made the situation unpredictable and thus uncomfortable to the calm and orderly Britons. Theroux’s representation reveals that some English felt guilty for the superiority of their military force. But then the English suffered casualties, as well: The *Sheffield* had been sunk.

As long as the Falklands war had been without English deaths it was an ingenious campaign, clever footwork, an adventure. That was admired here: a nimble reply, no blood, no deaths. But this was dreadful and incriminating; and it had to be answered. It committed Britain to a struggle that no one really seemed to want. (KS:50-51)

Kenneth Harris agrees with Theroux’s view: he interprets the war as “a national humiliation” to Britain (Harris 1988:125). That called most of the British under the same flag: to stand up against bullies – a very traditional English ideal, which eventually won Mrs Thatcher a huge popularity. However, privately people’s attitudes were both piteous and aggressive. Some kept pointing out that it was unfair to continue fighting the young Argentine soldiers, and others considered it Britain’s duty and right to take back what was theirs, and punish the wrongdoers. Both attitudes go well together with the stereotyped English characteristics of seeing ‘fairness’ as a central value, of rather siding with the underdog in their nearly hopeless attempt, or of seeking justice to an injured party (Miall 1993: 9).

Theroux mentions the *Sun*’s headlines briefly – but faithfully – throughout the book and seems to think them below his greater interest, since he calls them the creations of “gutter press”. Other papers get hardly any mention at all. But the

papers could evoke strong passions, as well: the political stances taken by the respective papers could cause a bit of havoc:

The bus driver said, 'That's a Tory paper.' 'I'm through with it,' Mr Lurley said. Dan, the bus driver, said, 'I don't want it.' 'Why not?' Mr Lurley said. 'Tory paper.' 'They're all the same,' Mr Lurley said, and left it on the little shelf under the windshield with Dan's lunch bag (two cheese and chutney sandwiches, a small over-ripe tomato, and a Club Biscuit).

Dan picked up the newspaper and threw it out of the bus door. 'They're not the bloody same,' he said. 'That's a Tory paper.'

This was up the road from Yawl on the way to Axminster, in the middle of the English countryside, the conservative passenger, and the socialist behind the wheel. (KS:106)

Perhaps Britain's long tradition in parliamentary policy still lives in some Britons. The state does not control the press, and they are "financially independent of political parties" and get no government funding. Yet many papers have political affiliations, and "the readership of the press closely reflected the social structure and voting behaviour of the population at large" (Oakland 1998: 276-277). In that respect, Dan's abhorrence relates to the team spirit of Britons: a supporter of a Socialist movement would not approve of a Conservative paper, again representing a stereotype.

Bryson worked for several newspapers and he mentioned some of them in passing, usually in a somewhat sarcastic manner. Apparently, there was not anything particular going on in the news world in 1994. Bryson, however, takes a stand several times to wonder about the English hereditary system. He laments that the ancestral homes of dukes and such have now been turned into some form of amusement parks without any consideration for tradition. He comments on the ongoing debate about the monarchy in his whimsical manner:

I must say, I can't begin to understand the attitudes of the English nation towards the royal family. For years – may I be candid here for a moment? – I thought they were insupportably boring and only marginally more attractive than Wallis Simpson, but everybody in England adored them. Then when, by a small miracle, they finally started doing arresting and erratic things and making the *News of the World* on merit – when, in a word, they finally became *interesting* – the whole nation was suddenly saying, 'Shocking. Let's get rid of them.' (NI: 72)

Traditionally the royal family was a part of the English identity: the family was idealised as the unifier of the nation and represented a “historic continuity”. However, in the 1990s the royal family has lost some of its aura, partly because the press no longer respect their privacy, and partly because the family members are no longer willing to keep up appearances, as it were (Szamosi in Wadham-Smith, ed, 1995:98). Miall claims the English to be very fond of traditions. Thus breaking from the ideal family model, a stereotype is challenged

...it seemed to me to miss the whole point. If you are going to have a system of hereditary privilege, then surely you have to take what comes your way no matter how ponderous the poor fellow may be or how curious his taste in mistresses. (NI: 73)

Bryson also mentions examples about some eccentric aristocrats of the past, and puts in a kind word for Lady Diana. Altogether he represents members of the upper class as a bit crazy and somewhat detached from “ordinary life”. But as such, they provide excellent material for the voyeuristic English: stories like these are part of a tradition for gossip that the royal family provide for their people. Earlier they may have been more revered, but today they are entertainment; but eccentrics were traditionally admired (as Bryson does in a few cases), provided they could afford to do build extravagant follies, such as underground ballrooms. (Miall 1993:25; see also NI: 189-190)

However, in 1982 the Monarchy was in high esteem. While travelling in Scotland, Theroux heard that the Queen was touring there. He went to “chase” after her through several towns, but never caught a glimpse of her. Theroux reported how people felt about the Queen in 1982. The people were enchanted by her visit. They had saluted her not for Britain’s success in the Falklands campaign, but because of her becoming a grandmother to prince William.

What was difficult for an alien to see was that this was essentially a middle-class monarchy. Decent philistines, the royal couple liked animals and country-house sports and variety shows. [...] Over the years the Queen had become shrewder-seeming, an even-tempered mother-in-law and a kindly gran. Prince Phillip was loved for being irascible. He was noted for his grouchy remarks. He used the word ‘bloody’ in public and after that it was hard for anyone to find fault with him. The Queen was his opposite,

growing smaller and squashier as he seemed to lengthen and grow spiky – the illusion had sprung out of his having become vocal. (KS:304, 306)

In their own opinion, the English were becoming more middle-class themselves. The royal couple fill the stereotypes by loving animals and the countryside. Prince Phillip was considered an eccentric, and perhaps also independent and individual in his demeanour, which lead to it being “hard for anyone to find fault with him”. Theroux has represented the sort of outside features that confirm a stereotypically English image.

Theroux and Bryson represent the English as private, but also talkative; polite and murderous when impatient; as greedy and as feeling guilty. The image Theroux creates is of a people who are aggressive and indifferent, and are not very intelligent. They read gutter press and adore middle-class aristocrats. Bryson’s representations reveal a people who despite their idiocy are often polite. They love to gossip about their eccentric aristocrats, and are occasionally serious about the monarchy. The representations coincide very well with the ones presented by Snowman at the start of this chapter, revealing that not even the harsh monetary policies of the Thatcher era have changed the ways of people so very much.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to learn what two American travel writers who had been living in Britain for a long time had to say about the country. The primary sources for this study were two travel books by these writers, Paul Theroux’s *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1983; hereafter KS) and Bill Bryson’s *Notes from a small Island* (1995; hereafter NI), which both deal with a journey through Great Britain. A primary interest was to learn about Britain. Travel literature provided a good starting point, as these novels are assumingly realistic representations about the country but are also written to entertain the reader. They were not particularly focused on any scholarly pursuit, so I hoped to receive as basic knowledge as possible about the lives of ordinary Britons. I

was interested in the representation of national stereotypes: the English, for instance, are renowned for their self-restraint and politeness. I became interested in if these stereotypes were still valid in the two travel novels written in 1982 and 1994. I chose to compare the two writers' representations, since there was time gap of 12 years between them and I was curious to find whether there had been any chronological development, as well as differences in representation. After preliminary reading, certain themes were chosen for comparison: they were themes quite typical in travel novels, and also appeared in both KS and NI.

The theory of representation provides my theoretical framework. But the application is quite shallow, for the main focus of the core is on prevailing stereotypes and how they are represented in KS and NI. To represent means to describe something, to give some idea or person, or group a suitable expression to discuss it. As representation is a popular concept in cultural study, it seemed fitting for this study, as well. Individual representations provide people means to think about and talk about e.g. certain groups of people, such as nationalities. Public representations can work stronger than this; they may emphasise certain assumptions and disregard others. This is the politics of representation: to 'speak of' and to 'speak for' others. This is where stereotyping comes in. Stereotypes are ways to define other groups, either positively or negatively. The key issue about stereotyping is the permanence of classification: once fixed, stereotypical images, however exaggerated, can be enduring. Pickering considers stereotypes as a key concept in cultural analysis. He claims that stereotyping is very regular and permanent in modern societies. They grow from a historical background. It reveals how stereotypes have come to mean what they mean today, and how they have survived both continuity and change. Generally, an image of a person or group is dependent on the historical context: ways to represent them change over time. This, however, is not the case with stereotypes. Usually, features are only added to them; they in themselves do not change quickly (Pickering 2001: x-xiv). This inflexibility is easy to demonstrate in the permanence of some English stereotypes. Langford's (2000) study of English characteristics between 1650-1850 bring forth about the same features as Snowman (1977) does in his study of Britain

between 1945-1975, and Miall (1993) in his recent collection of English features for the xenophobe.

The term ‘national character’ is considered a myth (which makes this thesis sort of obsolete already). It is a set of representations that are considered to embody the subject and abandon all other features (Langford 2000:14). Many national features were “discovered” during the 19th century national mood and there was a popular belief that these characteristics were racial, hereditary qualities. Especially positive stereotypes amongst the English flourished (Pickering 2001:94). Outsiders’ views about the English could serve “as intermediaries between the historian and his subject”. The English character became known in literature and in travel books, and it was repeated in further works until it became ‘a fact’ (Langford 2000: 2, 10), i.e. it was taken for something normal, and not in need of scrutiny. The English stereotypes were particularly affluent because during the 18th and 19th centuries Britain was a leading state in the world. People came to see Britain because it represented the future, whether desirable or not. These generalisations were further enhanced by the perceived universality of English behaviour and landscape: all the English behaved the same way, and all the country villages looked the same (Langford 2000: 4, 15). Langford’s observations are uncannily related to my primary sources, as well: Theroux set as his goal around the British coast to see the future; and Bryson complained many times how all the towns and villages had all the same buildings and facilities. He felt that he could have been anywhere, nothing stood out.

The goal was to examine if Theroux and Bryson confirmed and reinforced English stereotypes in their respective books on Britain. A comparative method was chosen because both the writers were Americans by birth but wrote in different periods and, in my opinion, in different tones. Some of the topics Theroux and Bryson dealt with were, however, similar. They form the core themes of this thesis: Scenery, Transportation and Accommodation, Leisure, and People and Institutions. The thesis suffers from “theme slippage”: it is not always clear how the chapters differ from one another. Scenery focused on the visual images of British landscape and townscape. The stereotype involved was

the image of rural, manor house countryside and the town brick buildings charmingly patinated by time, known to us through e.g. numerous Jane Austen adaptations. Here Theroux and Bryson both confirmed and challenged the stereotypical image. They both praised the countryside but towns received slightly different representations. Theroux found towns universally ugly and seemed to be sorry about the replacement of old buildings with plastic sheets that did not need painting. Bryson is very sarcastic towards the architectural choices of the 1960s where concrete blocks disrupted the townscape of older nostalgic houses.

Transportation and accommodation were treated the same way by the writers: it was very difficult to get from place to place, and the lodgings were often in a poor condition, and the proprietors occasionally rude. But here I must confess that the examples chosen only represent extreme cases. Mostly travelling went without incident (despite occasional problems with itineraries especially in Bryson's case). As regards accommodation, Theroux was more interested in describing his hosts in guesthouses and B&B's (regrettably not portrayed in this thesis). Bryson stayed more in hotels and often included a description of his room, perhaps because he met fewer people there. (Again, not in this thesis.) The stereotyped view of the polite host was challenged, and the assumption that the orderly English would insist upon functioning train connections was proved wrong. However, the sense of English fatalism and taking things as they come was confirmed. Even though the Thatcher policies had severely reduced the train and bus connections, the English did not rebel; they just said: 'you can't get there from here' and left it at that.

In the chapter for Leisure, both Theroux and Bryson described popular recreations, such as shallys, caravanning, and watching television. Theroux appeared to find all these habits as something ridiculous, or even repulsive: he describes shallys as "toy bungalows" as if grown-ups would use them to return to their childhood; caravan areas reminded him of refugee camps, and people watching television were watching silly things. Bryson offered a slightly more positive view. Bryson, too, criticised the choice of programmes, such as endless *Gagney and Lacey* reruns (not mentioned in this thesis). But he also

recognised the harmless silliness of soap opera fans and considered it amiable. The caravan parks on the Welsh coast receive little sympathy from him, either: to sleep in a tin box and wade in a filthy sea sounded like a ridiculous and repulsive holiday option. However, to him, shallys were like magician's boxes and the people occupying them, according to Bryson, had found true happiness –in the modest English fashion, at least. The manner of spending their free time revealed the English to be very private and restrained even on holiday, and despite increasingly spending their holidays abroad, the traditional seaside vacation in Britain was still popular, which I took as confirming the stereotype of the English being nostalgic, even to the point of being ridiculous.

The last chapter, *People and Institutions*, attempted to study further the stereotypes regarding the English people. There both the writers confirmed many stereotypes but generally so that Theroux brought forth negative as well as positive features, whereas Bryson tended to focus on positive stereotypes. The quotations of the chapter begin with generalisations Theroux and Bryson made about the English. Generalisations are linked to categorising, which in turn is close to stereotyping – although Pickering emphasises that categories and stereotypes are not synonyms. Categories provide ways to understand the world, and they are not fixed, but change over time; stereotypes carry ideological views and values that may thus distort perceptions and interpretations of the world. Stereotypes are not very flexible, and they are often used to maintain power structures (2001:3). Theroux represented the English as private, tolerant and impassive but also as self-centred, timid and indifferent. The negative features did not come up much in my sources but here applies the idea that most features can be interpreted in different ways. What to one person is 'impassive' can to another be 'indifferent'. Thus I think Theroux confirmed English character stereotypes. The positive features are all common to the English character in my sources on stereotypes. Bryson represented the polite English waiting to get to a rugby match, the team spirit of pulling together, the wry sense of humour and the uncomplaining satisfaction in small pleasures that concur with the stereotypes of politeness, team spirit and modesty.

The subsections of the chapter further confirmed these generalisations. Words and Appearances focused on the writers' representations of individual people. Theroux and Bryson agreed that the English were quiet eaters. But Bryson challenged the stereotype of modesty and politeness when he described the greed of fat people, who hogged all the best desserts without any consideration to other diners. Theroux represented the stereotype of privacy in his encounter with a lone walker, and Bryson adds that in the public house the English are talkative, suggesting that the quiet shyness is more a situationally bound code of behaviour than a fixed national characteristic. But of course, it was quite another matter to encounter someone alone than in a pub full of familiar people. The last subsection dealt with how the English reacted to two institutional figures, the media and the monarchy. Theroux focused more on newspaper reports, since during the time of his journey Great Britain was at war with Argentina over the Falklands Islands. Bryson's focus was on the monarchy, which at the time of Bryson's journey had lost some of its status as a paragon of Britishness and as symbol of the country. These representations were more a portrayal than stereotyped imagery. However, Theroux depicted people as rather indifferent to or otherwise feeling competitive. The press exulted in British successes, but occasionally people also took the side of the (presumed) underdog and pitied the Argentine soldiers, thus again confirming some traditional English stereotypes. Bryson himself openly admired the aristocratic eccentrics, but criticised the British attitude to sustaining the hereditary system.

I tried to show that English stereotypes are still present in modern travel literature. This thesis is an American view of Britain, and it does seem to allow an interpretation in favour of confirming many stereotyped views. The comparative method did not become a definitive feature in this work; perhaps it would work better in comparing authors that possess more different backgrounds.

During the course of this research, I have become more and more interested in how people themselves react to the stereotypes they are supposed to have. Do the English themselves consider themselves as polite, courageous and fair? Or

do they rather challenge these myths that may latently require them to act in a certain way? According to this study, it seems that at least outsiders are willing to see stereotypical images in the people of Great Britain. But of course, the travel-writing genre has traditionally relied on national stereotypes, and the writers may have been influenced by this tradition. Moreover, this is only my interpretation of what Theroux and Bryson have said, and considering my inexperience in cultural study it is likely to be a mistaken view. This approach would study people's self-images, and would link to cultural representations and perhaps to psychology, as well. Another course for study in the comparative field would be to compare e.g. Bryson's view with someone, who has not been living in Britain at all, and has written a travel book as a complete outsider. How much does a writer's background affect his or her interpretations? There the ideas of Shi-xu, for instance, might be applicable. As regards KS and NI, a particular focus on the portrayal of times (which is done very narrowly in this thesis) might reveal the writers' symbolic concept of the country: whether Theroux sees Britain as crumbling into the sea socially as well as physically, or whether Bryson uses his positive imagery to boost the country to new self-esteem.

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