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Wandering with Wi-Fi: The wandering trend in women's travel blogs

Abstract:

Despite the continued popularity of travel blogs, there is a lack of contemporary criticism concerning the literal and figurative meanings of 'wandering' in the genre of online travel writing. One only has to trawl through the blogosphere to notice the number of female travellers who refer to themselves as 'wandering' women. However, female wandering has received little to no study in travel writing scholarship. In other words, what a 'wandering woman' is exactly – for example, why she wanders and how, as well as what constitutes an act of wandering – is yet to be widely theorised. Furthermore, the subversive tendency of female wandering to disrupt not only circular journeys but also stable conceptualisations of home has not been deeply explored. This paper argues that female wandering is a complex mode of travel that is characterised by the coupling of literal and figurative movement, and therefore it cannot be conceptualised through canonical understandings of departure and return. In the travel blogs presented for analysis, the authors construct non-linear narratives that are marked by boundlessness, continuity, and self-reflexivity. In this way, the blogs themselves are 'wandering' texts that marry the physical wandering of the body with the abstract wondering of the mind. As a result, wandering is not only the content of the blog but the defining characteristic of the text itself. When female bloggers cast themselves as wandering women, they resist the Romantic equation of wandering with suffering, and instead construct wandering as a shared reprieve rather than an individual burden. This representation of female wandering as a positive and productive endeavour is interesting given literary representations of male wandering as a curse or punishment.

Biographical note:

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Keywords:

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Setting out

One only has to trawl through the blogosphere to notice the number of female travellers who refer to themselves as 'wandering' women. At the time of writing, a Google search with the words 'wandering woman' yields over 81 million results. These sites, though varied in format and style, are similar in content and purpose. Most sites are travel communities and forums that promote 'safe' and 'authentic' travel experiences for self-identified 'wandering' women who are travelling either solo or in a group. The online communities are marketed as special travel clubs that offer organisational belonging through knowledge sharing and networking, while the forums are constructed as collaborative spaces that rely on user-generated content, such as travel reviews and advice. The Wander Girls (2019), for example, is a travel company based in Mumbai that organises women-only trips and events for 'wander girls' who wish to travel to India. In Maine, the female-owned and operated travel agency, WanderWoman Tours (2019), offers international trips and wellness retreats for female wanderers who are seeking an 'alternative' travel experience that is 'exciting yet hassle-free'.

Interestingly, a significant number of search results are travel blogs that are authored by self-described wandering women and consequently titled accordingly; for example, 'A Wandering Woman Writes' (2013), 'I Wander to Wonder' (2016), 'The Wondering Wandering Woman' (2018), 'Wandering Hart' (2019), and 'The Wandering [Ex]-Housewife' (2019). These blogs are usually published on blog hosting sites such as Blogspot and Wordpress; however, a small number are independently hosted. The blogs typically have a single author who positions herself as an 'everyday' woman who has given up her humdrum life – sometimes on a whim – in order to wander abroad. Often, the life that has been abandoned is presented to readers as being marked by an unfulfilling marriage or career, or an unrewarding domestic routine. Wandering is never explicitly defined, but it is usually depicted as either the remedy to the problem or a welcome distraction. The wandering described can be literal; however, more often than not, the physical movement is coupled with, or prompted by, an internal musing or reflection. This coupling results in a playful and highly self-reflexive text that frequently conflates and manipulates both semantic and linguistic meanings of wandering and wondering. In this way, the blog itself is a boundless text in which wandering, as an unbounded phenomenon, is not only the content of the blog but the defining characteristic of the text itself. In other words, wandering doubles as the blog's content (that is, *what* is shared) and the blog's form (that is, *how* it is shared).

This phenomenon, which I have called the 'wandering' trend, also extends to social media. On Instagram, the hashtag #wanderingwomen returns over 26,000 results, while a parallel search with the hashtag #wanderingmen returns just 67 hits. On Instagram, the filtered images for #wanderingwomen include heavily curated and edited photos of mostly young Caucasian women, posing for the camera in remote locations such as Dos Ojos and North Karelia. The captions attached to these images are usually autobiographical meditations on life and travel that promote wandering as a redemptive and enlightening endeavour that leads to personal discovery. One user, who regularly posts travel photos with the wandering

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hashtag, writes in her bio, '8 days before my 40th birthday, my husband boarded a plane out of my life. 5 months later, I boarded my own plane' (Lina the Explorer 2019). This discourse of self-discovery, which derives from the genre's established trope of self-transformation through travel, is also reflected in the handful of 'quote' posts that reappropriate popular travel platitudes, such as 'Not all those who wander are lost'. Female wandering, therefore, is depicted in a similar way to how it is represented online: as a positive and productive endeavour that is solitary yet also voluntary or self-prescribed. On Instagram, the hashtag #wanderingmen produces similar images with male subjects; however, 51 of the 67 posts (76%) belong to a single user: a young Filipino man who posts photos of himself 'looking for a soulmate' (McRyan 2019).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to map representations of wandering on social media, the gendered use of the wandering hashtag supports the idea that contemporary wandering may still be a gendered practice or at least a mode of travel that is infused with gendered meaning. Karen Lawrence (1994) and Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson (2004) have already argued that wandering is a risky endeavour for women due to the historical connections between wandering and promiscuity. The idea of the promiscuous woman who wanders from home and either endangers herself or tempts and corrupts others, and who is ultimately punished for her trespasses, is a common archetype in Western literature. From fairy tales, such as *Little Red Riding Hood* to Romantic texts such as Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1792) and Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), the promiscuous woman is often a wandering woman whose sins are cast in sexual terms. Like Eve, who wanders around the Garden of Eden and tempts Adam with the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3), the female wanderer is usually a fallen woman whose transgressions are attributable to, or exacerbated by, her wandering disposition. In other words, she is easily led and susceptible to coercion; she is sexually voracious; and she is morally weak or flawed. In this way, the sociocultural taboos surrounding women's travel have frequently confused issues of mobility with issues of morality, which in turn has led to the dismissal of female wanderers as 'wild' or 'wayward' women, and to the denouncement of female wandering as a deviant practice.

To unpack this historical baggage, it is necessary to conduct a closer inspection of wandering for two interconnected reasons: first, wandering comes to discourse imbued with gendered meaning, and second, it has received little to no study in travel writing scholarship. In other words, what a 'wandering woman' is exactly – for example, why she wanders and how, as well as what constitutes an act of wandering – is yet to be adequately theorised. In fact, until the recent publication of Ingrid Horrocks' *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility* (2017), considerations of the complexities of female wandering in literature were relatively slim, while studies of wandering as a mode of travel are limited to broad and dated studies in travel behaviour (Vogt 1976, Dichter 1967). The latter tend to efface gender-specific differences by either focussing on the phenomenon of wandering youth or generalising wandering as a non-gendered mode of travel that is based on spontaneity and risk. These studies are interesting, however, because they recognise that wandering is a particular type of travel and consequently attempt to situate the wanderer

amongst other non-institutionalised travellers such as the backpacker and its various subtypes.

Something to declare: Wandering as a complex mode of travel

In their recent study of tourist cultures, Stephen Waring et al. (2010: 101) describe modern backpackers as 'contemporary global wanderers'. According to Waring et al (2010), these wanderers are predominantly young, middle-class, and well educated. Their travels are usually undertaken as a self-imposed rite of passage or at an important life juncture, such as the transition between school and university, or university and employment (Matthews 2008, O'Reilly 2006). The resulting travel offers opportunities for personal growth, a connection with counter-culture, and the formation of a social identity that is based on cross-cultural exchange. Waring et al. explain, 'Travel can be a way of demonstrating independence, and as a result of their experiences and interactions with travelled places, people, and cultures, backpackers can emerge from their travels feeling more knowledgeable and "worldly"' (2010: 102). For this reason, backpacking is popularly conceived as a form of travel that may assist with self-development. Due to its temporary nature, however, backpacking is commonly viewed as a transitory experience rather than a mobile lifestyle. In other words, backpackers negotiate a self-elected liminal phase, such as a break from work or a moratorium from study, before returning to 'everyday' life. The implications of this view are two-fold: first, backpackers share a collective identity, and second, backpacking is a momentary state of existence.

More recently, however, Cohen (2010) and Maxwell (2008) have suggested that backpackers are not a homogenous entity but a composite and multifaceted group that can be classified into subtypes, such as the greypacker (the older backpacker) and the flashpacker (the backpacker without a budget). This conceptual division, coupled with the modernist tendency to view travel not as an interruption to normality but as normality itself, has resulted in the reconceptualisation of serial backpackers as 'lifestyle travellers' (Cohen 2010), 'contemporary drifters' (Cohen 2004), and 'lifelong wanderers' (Noy and Cohen 2005). This complex subtype, regardless of labelling, is distinguished from the tourist by a commitment to backpacking as a way of life: that is, backpacking is a mode of travel that when made sustainable becomes a mobile lifestyle rather than a simple transition or temporary break (Cohen 2010). While this taxonomy certainly accounts for extended experiences of travel, one of the definitional issues that arises with this clustering is that lifestyle travellers are viewed interchangeably with both contemporary drifters and lifelong wanderers, without any consideration of what constitutes 'drifting' or 'wandering', and whether, by extension, lifestyle travelling and wandering are in fact synonymous. As a result, wandering is either defined in relation to other types of non-institutionalised travel or it is defined by what it is not.

Further, definitions of wandering tend to be gender-neutral and limited to the phenomenon of wandering youth. For example, in one of the earliest critical interrogations of wandering, Jay Vogt defines the wanderer as a 'youthful adventurer on a tight budget' (1976: 27).

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These young adventurers are typically on 'a quest of personal growth'; often, they are students who come from affluent backgrounds, and their personal values include novelty, freedom, and independence (Vogt 1976: 28). For Vogt, the wanderer is a flexible and resourceful traveller who can easily adapt to new situations and surroundings:

> For the wanderer travelling with few limitations except the financial, the range of choices on even simple tasks is tremendous. The variety of travel modes is great: biking, hiking, canoeing, motorcycling, hitchhiking, riding freights, student flights. So is the range of lodgings: sleeping in a field, pitching a tent in a campground, asking a resident for lodging, trying a youth hostel, renting a student hotel room, or splurging on a regular one. Each of the above choices is within the wanderer's grasp… Rather than delegate these decisions to another, the wanderer rejoices in them. (Vogt 1976: 29)

Here, Vogt likens the wanderer to the backpacker and in doing so insists that the wanderer is 'an individual familiar to most of us' (1976: 27). His work, though groundbreaking at the time, is problematised by a feminist reading, since his scholarship does not take into consideration the notion that men and women may wander differently and for dissimilar reasons. Specifically, Vogt attempts to efface gender-specific differences by generalising wandering as the behaviour of a Western middle-class youth (Vogt 1976: 27). Yet at the same time, Vogt consistently refers to the wanderer as a male figure; his use of the gendered pronouns 'he' and 'his' restores the canonical formations that inscribe the male as 'adventurer or quester', and the female as 'the one who is left behind' (Slettedahl Macpherson 2004: 193). While Vogt's work is grounded in tourist practice rather than travel writing scholarship, the tensions and contradictions that emerge in his work reflect contemporary questions about representations of wandering, not only in literary explorations but in broader cultural contexts too.

Interestingly, both Vogt (1976) and Dichter (1967) espouse wandering as a mode of travel that is based on spontaneity and risk. In Vogt's work, the 'great risk' that wandering elicits is never explicitly defined, but it seems to issue from cultural immersion and consequent self-realisation, or what Vogt calls 'the sometimes frightening exposures to unknown aspects of the self' (1976: 33). Dichter (1967) extends Vogt's work by suggesting that travel always involves movement from a familiar territory into the unknown. Curiously, Dichter likens the experience of undertaking a trip to the experience of having a 'trip' on LSD. He writes:

> In a way, travelling is like getting drunk or using drugs. When you're drunk, you are often pleasantly or unpleasantly surprised (in almost a schizophrenic fashion) to discover that you have another side – that in your sober state you never suspected within yourself. Modern youth has become much more curious than before in its desire to discover such new uncharted worlds. (Dichter 1967: 5)

Dichter's point is that a trip – in both senses of the word – is an expedition into the self: one that can alter an individual's spatial and temporal awareness, and evoke a different state of consciousness. As Dichter explains, 'Any form of travel, particularly to a foreign

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country, results psychologically in opening up new insights, in making the individual see himself in a different light' (1967: 5). Like Vogt, however, Dichter defines wandering through its close proximity to risk, and in doing so, he reduces wandering to an age-related phenomenon by relegating the activity to a past-time of youth. In other words, young wanderers come to learn about themselves and the world by taking risks or by engaging in a dangerous activity akin to drinking or taking drugs. Certainly, there is a history of established research on the transformative nature of travel; however, reading wandering as a perilous mode of travel is risky terrain for women due to the deep-rooted sociocultural fear of 'wayward' women or women 'on the loose' (Siegel 2004: 4).

Off course and dangerous: Literary representations of male and female wandering

While the male wanderer is a familiar Romantic figure whose wandering is usually administered as a curse or punishment, the female wanderer is a transgressive character whose wandering is punishable. In other words, male wandering is frequently imposed by a supreme or more authoritative being, while female wandering is often voluntary or self-prescribed. A tale that clearly depicts the connection between male wandering and penitence is the medieval legend of *The Wandering Jew*. Although both the identity of the wanderer and the exact nature of his indiscretion varies, the tale is usually told as the story of Ahasuerus, a Jewish shoemaker who ridicules Christ on the day of the Crucifixion and is consequently condemned to wander the earth alone (Martin 1990: 53). In one anonymous version of the legend, the afflictions of Ahasuerus are captured in a poetic lament:

> Time flies by wasting all living,
> I have, of life, grown weary,
> But for me there is no relieving,
> I walk the earth eternally.
>
> My punishment, forever undelivered,
> Is all the world to wander, short of breath;
> My journey's been unending; onward steered,
> I am exhausted and I wish my death.   (Oişteanu 2009: 336)

While some critics read Ahasuerus as a non-conformist who refuses to condone Christ's extreme humility (Gur-Ze'ev 2010; Light et al 1995), most critics view the Wandering Jew as a pitiable character rather than a dissident. Condemned to wander in a world where 'centuries pass like days', Ahasuerus is charged with taunting and assaulting the Son of God, for which the only suitable punishment is wandering (Oişteanu 2009: 336).

> There is no water, no wild place,
> No mountain that I've left uncross'd
> I trek eternally apace,
> And the whole earth I have crossed.

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> Through elements, I go light-footed,
> Be it day or night, untouchable,
> Or rest deprived, unhalted,
> I am on the road unstoppable.   (Oişteanu 2009: 337)

Ahasuerus' rootlessness is a source of cyclical suffering, as well as a regulatory device for creating fear, since the message of *The Wandering Jew* is clear: perpetual wandering is an enforceable curse without opportunity for redemption or release.

Similarly, for the restless wanderer in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), wandering is a curse that haunts the Mariner and takes it shape as a longing that he can never satisfy or fulfil. Like the biblical figure of Cain, Coleridge's figure is a wretched soul who is cursed to wander the earth alone and tell his story as penance for his sins. The Mariner's crime parallels Cain's murder of his brother, Abel, because both offences can be read as a form of fratricide. In the Mariner's case, he shoots and kills a harmless albatross that is 'hailed in God's name' and therefore believed to be 'a bird of good omen' (Coleridge 1970: 30-31). Wracked with guilt for the 'hellish thing' (1970: 33) he has done, the Mariner is sentenced to a living death by a Spectre-Woman, 'The Nightmare Life-in-Death' (1970: 45). Specifically, the Mariner is condemned to wander endlessly from land to land, reciting his tale again and again to temporarily absolve himself of guilt:

> Since then, at an uncertain hour,
> That agony returns:
> And till my ghastly tale is told,
> This heart within me burns.
>
> I pass, like night, from land to land;
> I have strange power of speech;
> That moment that his face I see,
> I know the man that must hear me:
> To him my tale I teach.   (Coleridge 1970: 84-85)

Coleridge presents wandering as a sentence worse than death because immortality is a curse that sets the 'soul in agony' (1970: 50) and 'thicks man's blood with cold' (1970: 45). As immortality is a non-human endowment, it must be imposed by a higher power. In the Old Testament, Cain, too, receives his punishment in the form of a curse from God when God declares, 'You will be a restless wanderer on the earth' (Genesis 4: 10). Cain's exile to the land of Nod (the Hebrew word for *wandering*) also represents a fate worse than death, since Cain is condemned to a life without stability or community, or the chance of rest. His appeal to God for mercy reveals his despair: 'My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth' (Genesis 4: 13-14). In both texts, the male wanderer is a lonely ghoulish figure who represents the ghost of modernity: he is uprooted from home; he is alienated socially; and he is perpetually displaced in space and time.

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In contrast, female wandering is usually constructed as a transgressive act that is undertaken willingly and even eagerly by the female wanderer. Often, wandering is punished on account of it posing some perceived social or cultural threat; however, wandering itself is rarely administered as penance. For example, in Perrault's version of *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697), Little Red decides to take 'a roundabout way' to Grandmother's house, meandering as she does to collect nuts, chase butterflies, and gather flowers (Perrault 2009: 99). The wolf, on the other hand, does not loiter and opts instead for the shortest possible path. As a result, he arrives first at Grandmother's house, while Little Red, on account of her wandering, arrives some time later. In *Little Red-Cap* (1857), the Grimm brothers' version, Little Red disobeys her mother's order to 'walk nicely and quietly' and 'not run off the path' (Grimm 2014: 181). As the wolf devours Grandmother, Little Red is not only busy wandering but also *wondering*. Her memories and other musings are inextricable from her movement: 'Little Red-Cap had been running about picking flowers, and when she had gathered so many that she could carry no more, she remembered her grandmother' (Grimm 2014: 120). At the end of both versions, the authors provide a clear moral lesson about the dangerous terrain that women brave when they stray from the recommended path. For Perrault, the tale is cautionary: 'From this story one learns that children, especially young lasses, pretty, courteous, and well-bred, do very wrong to listen to strangers, and it is not an unheard thing if the wolf is thereby provided with his dinner' (2009: 103). In the Grimm rendition, Little Red critically reflects on her trespasses and vows to never wander again: 'As long as I live, I will never by myself leave the path, to run into the wood, when my mother has forbidden me to do so' (2014: 123). In both accounts, wandering is a punishable offence rather than a punishment that is dispensed.

Similarly, in the biblical story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), Eve's wandering is presented as a straying behaviour that is linked to promiscuity and to the contamination of both the body and the home. As the archetype of the fallen woman, 'adventurous Eve' is a temptress who wanders around Eden and consumes the forbidden fruit (Milton 2005: 191). In *Paradise Lost* (1667), Milton casts Eve's sins in sexual terms that are linked to her wandering disposition; she succumbs, first of all, to the temptation of the serpent, and then she proceeds to tempt her partner, Adam. In doing so, she is deemed responsible not only for her own sins but for the sins of her mate and their descendants as well. In fact, Amy Kalmanofsky (2016) suggests that Eve is punished, not because she takes the fruit, but because she challenges patriarchal authority: that is, she disobeys God and corrupts Adam in the process. As a result, her punishment must restore the patriarchal agenda. This restitution is immediately achieved when God reprimands her: 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you' (Genesis 3: 16). In the same vein, Adam is punished, not because he shares the fruit, but because in doing so, he disobeys God and obeys his wife instead (Kalmanofsky 2016: 34). Therefore, Adam and Eve break the Bible's conventional gender norms by undermining the theological hierarchy in which God rules man, and man rules woman. As Kalmanofsky (2016: 43) explains, 'Adam and Eve's story teaches that in the hierarchal world constructed by the Bible, women must obey men, and

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men must obey God'. In Genesis, as in the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood,* social corrosion begins with a 'wayward' woman who wilfully sins by wandering beyond the bounds imposed upon her by a more powerful authority.

A final critical difference in gendered accounts of wandering is the conception of home. As a relational rather than homogenous phenomenon, home is the realm that is spatialised as the opposite of 'away' or 'abroad'. This dichotomous spatialisation creates a problematic demarcation between the domestic space (that is, the 'home' space) and the touristic space (that is, the 'away' space) in accounts of travel in which 'home' and 'away' spaces are not physically separate or operationally independent (Hui 2008). Diasporic journeys, for example, may not be based on circular movements that originate from and terminate at a fixed conception of 'home'. For female subjects, the cyclical journey is especially problematic if it invokes restorative rather than reflective nostalgia for the past. Giuliana Bruno explains:

> Conceived as a circular structure, the metaphor of travel locks gender into a frozen, binary opposition and offers the same static view of identity. Travel as metaphor involves a voyage of the self, a search for identity through a series of cultural identifications. If such travel is simply conceived as a return to sameness, or nostalgia for the loss of that sameness – the home of identity or the identity of the home – *domus,* domesticity, and domestication continue to be confused and gendered feminine. (Bruno 2002: 85-86)

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that contemporary representations of female wandering tend to be less foreboding than male accounts, since female wanderers may have a vested interest in leaving home and therefore a looser nostalgic connection to home than their male counterparts. This detachment from domesticity may also explain why some female subjects embrace rather than resist wandering, and why the 'negative' aspects of male wandering (displacement, isolation, and restlessness) are often read against the 'positive' attributes of home (safety, comfort, and repose). If men and women wander for different reasons or with different motives, then they may have different experiences of home. As Anna Sigg, in her work on female wandering in the Romantic period concludes, 'Whereas the Byronic Hero wanders so restlessly because of his *own* wretchedness, the female subject wanders because she is born into a wretched world' (2009: 95). Often, it is the domestic realm, as a historical site of danger and entrapment, that represents all that the female wanderer wishes to escape (Sigg 2009).

Representations of wandering in women's travel blogs

In the travel blogs presented for analysis, female wandering is constructed as a complex mode of travel that is characterised by non-linearity, continuity, and self-reflexivity. As a result, the blogs themselves are 'wandering' texts that create strong reciprocity between form and meaning. To phrase it another way, the blog is about wandering, and wandering or boundlessness is the defining characteristic of the text itself. This dialogical relationship

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between content and form gives rise to a self-referential narrative that not only marries the physical movement of the body with the abstract wondering of the mind but that also supports the embrace of wandering as a positive and productive endeavour rather than a source of despair. In other words, the blogs do not subscribe to canonical masculinist understandings of wandering as an individual burden; instead, they emphasise wandering as a shared reprieve or a welcome interruption. Further, while the blogs are organised in varying formats and styles, they share commonalities at the discoursal level. The bloggers, for example, refer to themselves as 'wanderers' rather than 'travellers', and their movements, whether literal or metaphorical, are usually described as 'wanders' or 'wanderings' rather than 'travels'. In fact, at times, the blogs even include overt considerations of the act of wandering and what distinguishes it from travel:

> Recently, my family has had many discussions over the difference between someone who has wanderlust and someone who just loves to travel. My cousins have this theory that wanderlust has become a popular word lately, but that no one truly knows what it means… What is the difference? What is a traveller and what is a wanderer?... A traveller is someone who loves to see the world. They have set destinations they want to visit and they have goals. Set goals. They have an endpoint…The wanderer wants to see the world just like the traveller does, but they have other ambitions... They want to find something new. Something different. (Feigin 2015)

In Janet Doré's blog, *The Wandering [Ex]-Housewife*, wandering is presented as an 'authentic' endeavour that is closely tied to the blogger's diaristic style and to her self-representation as an honest and reliable autobiographer. The subjective and deeply personal nature of her blog confers her authority as both a self-proclaimed 'wandering ex-housewife' and 'a recovered suburbanite who found herself while wandering' (Doré 2019b). Doré writes:

> Dramatically speaking, wandering saved me. At first, my trips were simply gasps of fresh air during my time as a full-time at-home mom. But then something began to happen … I started finding *me* – and I began to write down my discoveries so I would never lose me again… I wander to explore, to expand, to unwind, to connect, and to live a full and passionate life. (Doré 2019b)

Doré presents wandering as a form of personal freedom and liberation, a construction that is closely tied to her online identity as a wandering rather than waiting woman and to her insistence that wandering is a life*line* that turned into a life*style*. Her compulsion to wander, 'to check EVERY item off [her] Wander List' is inextricable from her desire to 'no longer be a housewife' and to find instead 'undiscovered parts' of herself (Doré 2019b). She explains, 'After my divorce, I reclaimed the self I lost while pleasing and caring for others… Today, I work from my living room or wherever I happen to be in the world and keep my empty nest filled with international exchange students' (Doré 2019b). Doré's 'personal mission', as outlined on her blog, is 'to be unapologetically authentic' and 'to never stop exploring' (Doré 2019b). This performance of authenticity is not unlike what

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Crystal Abidin (2017) calls 'calibrated amateurism', an online practice in which bloggers purposefully curate 'raw' or 'authentic' experiences to create and maintain 'an impression of relatability' (Abidin 2017: 6).

Certainly, Doré presents herself as an 'everyday' woman whose patterns of movement are instinctive, spontaneous, and perhaps most importantly, easily imitated by her readers. Her various social media channels are embedded under the directive, 'Wander with me!', while the greeting on her 'Contact' page reads, 'Are you wandering somewhere I've been and have questions?... I'll eagerly bestow upon you my wisdom (valued at 2½ cents)' (Doré 2019b). This performance of a 'real' and 'authentic' self is a conscious self-curation that is designed to enhance audience engagement and intimacy, and is closely tied to the blog's commercial interests. Doré is a member of the Amazon Associates program: an affiliate marketing scheme that allows bloggers to monetise their blogs by linking to Amazon listings and earning a referral fee on qualifying purchases. Doré discloses her blog's affiliate status but maintains her authority as an independent wanderer whose 'dot-to-dot journey' allowed her to 'excavate [her] authentic self' (Doré 2019a). In this way, her blog reveals 'the collision of experience and commerce', which not only defines many 'wandering' blogs but also the online travel industry itself (Cardell & Douglas 2016: 301). As Kylie Cardell and Kate Douglas explain: 'There is a tension between travel blogs that are primarily the personal narrative of independent travellers and travel blogs by freelance writers/travellers for whom blogging is a professional pursuit' (2016: 301).

In the anonymous blog, *a wandering woman writes*, the amateur status of the author simultaneously confers and undermines the blog's credibility as a first-hand account of wandering. Interestingly, the Wandering-Woman, like Doré, constructs the act of wandering as a release or reprieve from domestic duty rather than an individual burden. Specifically, she presents wandering as a solitary endeavour; however, her community of followers share in her journey and see themselves as 'insiders' who are not only privy to her intimate thoughts but a part of her wandering adventure. In her first post, 'Getting Started', the blogger explains how, at the age of forty-two, she left downtown Chicago and 'a nice fat VP job' to move to Salamanca in the hope of figuring out 'what [she] wanted to be when [she] grew up' (Wandering-Woman 2013). She writes:

> Just about a year ago, I left a high rise tucked behind the Wrigley Building in downtown Chicago and moved myself and a couple of suitcases to Spain… By blogging I plan to catch my adventures in words for myself and for faraway friends, but hey, maybe I'll pay it forward. Maybe I'll make just one person question if it's worth taking a crazy dream off the back burner, just to see what happens. (Wandering-Woman 2013)

In the comments section, readers respond to the post with enthusiasm and with their own tales of wandering, many of which are vicarious. One reader, for example, simply responds, 'I love your blog and feel kinship', while another replies, 'I myself am moving to Spain in order to live life the way I know it can be lived... I'm so proud of you for taking the leap, hopefully my journey will be as wonderful as yours' (Wandering-Woman 2013). Another

reader, who eloquently captures the affordances of digital travel, writes, 'I'm also wandering the world, even if it's just online' (Wandering-Woman 2013). This embrace of wandering as a shared experience or a common desire that issues from a struggle with duty or constraint reinforces the idea that wandering may be a gendered practice that women have a vested interest in. The specific affordances of the travel blog, as both a tool for documentation and a form of social exchange, are what allow the Wandering Woman to record her movements and at the same time encourage budding wanderers to 'take the leap'. The irony, of course, is that wandering, as a generally elusive and abstracted practice, is packaged into a narrative form that can be easily accessed and shared. That is, wandering is captured, if only for a moment, through the blogging platform itself, as one reader remarks, 'I just wanted to say to you not all who wander are lost. That was the sentence I wrote last week on my blog, so I was really surprised when I saw yours' (Wandering-Woman 2013).

Interestingly, in many of these wandering blogs, wandering, though never defined, is coupled with and even prompted by the cognitive act of *wondering*. This pairing creates a kind of allegorical travel that does not always necessitate movement of the physical sense. In fact, when wandering is used metaphorically to describe imaginative wondering, it is sometimes presented as independent of a causal link. For example, Becky Feigin, in her blog *whahnderlust,* writes, 'I believe I am a wanderer although I rarely get the chance to wander' (Feigin 2015). Similarly, the Whittaker Woman identifies as a wanderer despite the fact she is 'a stay at home mom with no home'. She writes:

> I have a friend who's [sic] blog is called The Wondering Woman. It has made my mind begin to spin and I think I can now officially call myself The Wandering Woman. Here I am a stay at home mom with no home. I have three kids...one who should be in kindergarten but because I have no home or no idea where my home may be I have no school to put her in. I am a wife with no husband around...I am wandering...All my identities right now are up in the air unknown. (*Whittaker Woman* 2007).

In eliciting and intersecting this hybrid space between wandering and wondering, the Whittaker Woman disperses the spatial dichotomies of 'home' and 'abroad', and creates instead an interactive and embodied text that is marked by boundlessness: an open and expansive state in which everything is 'up in the air unknown'. Naturally, this disruption of fixity and stability inscribes the narrative with a non-linear temporality that is rhythmic and repetitious rather than chronological or sequential. In this way, wandering doubles as both the content of the blog and the blog's form; in other words, wandering is the subject of the text, and it is through wandering or wondering that the text is structured. For the Whittaker Woman, this spontaneity and continuity are not only reflective of wandering but are also characteristic of her writing style. Often, she leaves entries open or unfinished, and occasionally she abandons a post mid-sentence. Sometimes, she returns to a point a few days later, prefacing her entry with a brief apology, but more often than not, her whimsical and irregular writings, like the life she describes, have no discernible order. In lacking these

formalities, her blog reworks the dichotomised spatialisation of 'home' and 'abroad' as well as canonical understandings of travel as a circular movement with a single point of departure and return. As Allison Hui (2008: 7) explains, 'Premising touristic activities upon the recognition of one home is a simplification that erases the operation of complex mobilities and multiplicities of home'.

Evidentially, these wandering blogs depict the 'wandering' woman as a transgressive character who passes between the physical world that is able to be mapped and the imaginary world that is suspended outside any kind of border. In this liminal space, the compulsion to wander, however impulsive, seems to be triggered by an internal crisis that leads to either physical change, such as relocation, or intangible change, such as a change in attitude or perspective. Yet despite this often radical alteration to identity or location, there is no sense of wandering as an undertaking that is burdensome or dangerous. Doré (2019b), for example, asserts that 'Every wander I've taken has been followed by some level of spiritual awakening', a striking claim that, as Jerome Bruner says of turning points, is 'drenched in affect – certainly in the telling and presumably in the living' (1994: 50). Noticeably absent, however, is any mention of the 'troubling' nature of these significant changes in selfhood. Turning points, according to Bruner, are not only unexpected and irreversible but pre-empted by moments where agency is usually lost or disrupted. Even the Whittaker Woman, who is literally and metaphorically homeless, writes, 'I just want everyone to know I am actually doing well. Even though I am wandering, I am content' (Whittaker Woman 2007).

The female wanderer, then, constantly oscillates between what she perceives as her 'old' or stationary self and what she sees as her 'new' identity as a wanderer. The narrative that emerges captures this transition and configures itself into a text that is marked by non-linear patterns of movement, playful self-reflexivity, and writings that are arranged as a continuous series of discontinuities. The infinite array of narrative possibilities that arise simultaneously reflect and facilitate both physical wandering and abstract wondering. While it is unclear if this narrative structuring is intentional or incidental, it seems that the blogger's attempt to move beyond the boundaries of both genre and gender is in fact deliberate. As the Wandering Woman (2013) writes, 'I have done most of my wandering solo, to avoid rules and structure and the distraction a companion provides. I'd travel alone to increase the chances I'd get lost, and to ensure I'd be free to soak in the joy of being somewhere new and unexpected, *sin querer*'.

Venturing Forward

The 'wandering' trend in women's travel blogs raises a number of questions about gendered experience in a genre that lends itself to personal address and disclosure. At the same time, the wandering blog is a site where women cast themselves as wandering rather than waiting women, and where gendered representations of wandering are dismantled. As a result, literary representations of both male and female wandering provide an interesting framework for understanding the way that wandering women mobilise themselves online.

When female bloggers present themselves as wanderers, they resist the Romantic equation of wandering with suffering and instead construct wandering as a shared reprieve rather than an individual burden. This representation of female wandering as a positive and productive endeavour is interesting because it supports literary representations of female wandering as a voluntary and transgressive act rather than a curse or punishment that is enforced by a more powerful or authoritative being. In the future, it will be interesting to see if the employment of wandering as both a mode of travel and a register for experience will continue to subvert the expectations of what has historically been a masculinist genre. Indeed, it would seem that many women are choosing not only to wander but to write about it too.

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