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Memoirs as Cultural and Intellectual History: A Personal View

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In thinking of cultural and intellectual history, it may be easy to overlook memoirs in general and travel writing in particular. However, a moment's reflection should convince us that such an oversight is a mistake. To be sure, the most obvious faces of the memoir—confession, self-justification, inside information—may seem far removed from cultural and intellectual history. But memoirs usually try to describe past times, societies, neighbourhoods, institutions, and events, as well as the cultural and intellectual influences that shaped the memoirist's thoughts, beliefs, tastes, and preconceptions. One of the more potent of these influences is travel.

The memoir I wrote, published in 1997 by the University of Toronto Press under the title *Becoming Canadian: Memoirs of an Invisible Immigrant*, tried to identify the influences that were at work in my transformation from a Dutch child to a Canadian adult. Focusing on the years from 1952, when my family and I reached Canada, to the mid-1970s, the book was an attempt to examine the process of social, cultural, and intellectual change that accompanies migration.

A couple of reviewers faulted me for including material that in their opinion had little or nothing to do with my subject. I found myself conceding their point at least in part. The university politics that formed a significant part of one chapter might well have been reduced in length or even left out, to be replaced by an account of my travels in the 1970s.

While preparing the final version of the manuscript, I deleted a section on post-1970 travel in Europe, partly for reasons of space, partly because I lost my focus. Brief accounts of four holiday trips in 1968-70, three overseas (England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Greece) and one to Vancouver Island, did remain in the book, and I did discuss the way one of them influenced my thought about the Netherlands and Canada. As it happened, the troubles at York University in 1972-73, the year I chaired the local faculty association, loomed larger in my memory than my travels. So did my service, from 1973 to 1975, on the executive committee of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. But neither of these had much to do with the sort of Canadian I became. My travels in the 1970s did. By failing to include them, I distorted the process of acculturation into Canadian society. What follows seeks to set the record straight and to make a highly personal contribution to cultural and intellectual history.

* * *

A detailed account of my travels would bore readers to distraction. It should be more interesting to describe and discuss the usually serendipitous occurrences and discoveries that shaped my intellectual development. My travels in 1971 set a pattern. In early August, I joined my brother Jack, thirteen months my junior,

in Amsterdam. He had been there since June, working on his doctoral dissertation in art history for Yale University. His subject was the Tunis Cycle by the Dutch painter and court artist to the Emperor Charles V, Jan Cornelisz. Vermeyen (1500-59). The cycle consisted of twelve tapestries (two are lost), roughly five by nine metres each, that were woven in the southern Netherlands (now Belgium) to commemorate the victory of Charles V over the Moors at Tunis in 1535. Although the campaign had been directed against a Muslim chieftain, the tapestries assumed importance as propaganda: part of Charles's struggle against the Protestantism that was spreading in the Holy Roman Empire. "Think of it this way," Jack said: "How many Muslims did Luther ever kill?"

Before returning to New Haven, Jack wanted to visit Vienna, whose Kunsthistorisches Museum holds ten of the twelve cartoons—two have been lost, fortunately not the matches of the lost tapestries—that Vermeyen drew to depict Charles V's campaign. (Cartoons are full-size mirror images of the eventual tapestries.) Having never been in Vienna, I was keen to accompany my brother.

We had to get to Vienna economically. An assistant professor, I was not exactly flush with money, and Jack had less than I did. (All the same, in those dying days of the world of Bretton Woods, a Canadian dollar still bought us four Dutch guilders or four German marks. This state of affairs ended later that August when President Richard Nixon cut the link between the U.S. dollar and gold and augured in a regime of floating exchange rates between the dollar and the European currencies. When I was in Bavaria in the spring of 1995, the Deutschmark was approaching parity with the Canadian dollar. Fortunately, that tide has receded somewhat: in the summer of 2001, the mark hovered between 75 and 80 cents Canadian and the guilder about ten percent below the mark.) The solution to our problem arrived quite unexpectedly. Seated in a sidewalk café on the Leidseplein one evening a couple of days after my arrival, we discussed our options. Flying would cost too much; even the train was beyond Jack's means. A friend had tentatively offered him the use of a car, but it was not in good shape. Should we rent one? The alternative, he said half in jest, was to try our luck at hitch-hiking.

Suddenly, the younger of the two women who were with us spoke up: "If I can supply a car, can I come along? I need a holiday." Surely she was kidding? In her early twenties, a student in psychology at the University of Amsterdam, Annètje Huibregtse barely knew Jack and had only just met me. But she said she would phone her parents to ask whether she could borrow her mother's Fiat 128 for ten days or so. "Yeah, fat chance," I said to myself, and later to Jack. Nevertheless, two days later, the three of us were on a train to Brussels to collect the car.

Annètje's father, normally with the Dutch Department of Economic Affairs, was accredited to the European Community in connection with the negotiations for Britain's entry in the EC. If either Johan or Phien Huibregtse had misgivings about their daughter's wish to join us in our journey to Vienna, neither gave voice to them. The following morning, the three of us headed east. In Saarbrücken, where we stopped for a mid-afternoon coffee, I bought the Michelin *Guide rouge* for Germany, listing hotels and restaurants, and containing maps of many towns and cities. This was the first of my travel-related discoveries. To that point, I was familiar only with the green guides describing tourist attractions. Since then, the red guides, easily the best of their kind, have been my constant companions when travelling in countries for which they are available, i.e., most of western and southern Europe. That evening, we used my purchase to find a restaurant and an inexpensive hotel in Worms.

We continued east on secondary roads in the general direction of Passau and the Austrian border. In 1961-2, the year I spent at Freiburg University as a guest of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), my exposure to Germany had been limited to southwest Baden, Swabia, the Rhineland, and Berlin. Now I saw Bavaria for the first time, and I liked what I saw. In Rothenburg ob der Tauber, an attractive walled town on the so-called Romantic Road, I made the second of my discoveries. The Holy-Blood altarpiece by Tilman Riemenschneider (1480-1531) displayed in St. Jacob's Church, impressed me. It was

the first time I had seen the work of the master sculptor, who has become one of my favourite artists of the period. His work is well represented in museums in Munich, Nuremberg, and Würzburg; a particularly fine example is the tomb of St. Heinrich in the Dom in Bamberg.

In Nuremberg, the city of Albrecht Dürer and Hans Sachs but also the site of Nazi party rallies in the inter-war years, we visited Dürer's house and the nearby castle. My continuing interest in the history of Nazi Germany led me to insist that we also find the infamous parade grounds. This was not easy, but after a couple of wrong turns we did get there, joining a small handful of other sightseers. It was a vast, empty, almost eerie space, with a crumbling reviewing stand at one end. Little or nothing was being done to maintain it. Preserving a key part of Bavaria's Nazi past evidently did not rank high.

Between Nuremberg and Passau, we used the Autobahn for the first time. This, for me, was yet another discovery. The Fiat was over-matched by many of the cars that passed us, but we were able to move along fairly smoothly at 130 kph or thereabouts. Driving on a throughway without speed limits was demanding, constant use of the rear-view mirror essential. But after a while it became rather enjoyable. During the last two decades, I've driven a good deal in Germany, and I don't imagine I will ever get fully used to drivers overtaking me at 200 kph plus. Yet I feel safer driving on an Autobahn at 160 than I do on Ontario's 400 series of roads at considerably lower speed. German throughways are better designed, constructed, signposted, and maintained than Ontario's. As well, German drivers are more competent and better disciplined than their Ontario counterparts, not a few of whom seem to owe their licence to the happy chance of finding it as a prize in a box of Crackerjack. In Germany, slow drivers stay in the right lane, and passing on the right, a practice that makes driving in Canada hazardous, is prohibited. Whatever the reasons, throughway driving in Germany can be fun, while in Ontario it is usually a dangerous and disagreeable chore.

In Passau, a town originally founded by the Romans and scenically located at the confluence of the Danube, Inn, and Ilz rivers, I made yet another of my discoveries. I am almost certain that Passau's St. Stephan Dom was the first time I consciously saw South German Baroque architecture. (During later journeys, I found examples of the Baroque in Baden, but when I studied in Freiburg im Breisgau I had been oblivious to the style.) Its extravagant interior decoration startled and then delighted me: hundreds of stucco putti, caryiatids, angels, and prophets, surrounded by elaborate garlands of flowers and fruits, frescoes on the walls and ceilings, all adding to a general impression of lightness and airiness, a feast for the eyes. In time, I came to realize that the Passau Dom, originally a Gothic structure but converted to the Baroque – "barockisiert," as the Germans say – by Italian craftsmen in the late seventeenth century, was almost severe by the standard of later specimens of the style, such as the abbey churches at Aldersbach and Ottobeuren.

I remember Passau, too, because of an incident in 1989—Cornelia and I were visiting her aunt Centa Schuh—that is among my many happy memories. One Saturday morning, I was in the main post office, waiting in line to buy some stamps. The line was short: only two Englishmen stood between me and the wicket. But as I overheard them trying to communicate with the young woman behind the wicket, it dawned on me that the wait might be long. The Englishmen wanted to cash travellers' cheques. The clerk understood them but did not have enough English to tell them in their own language that, unless they could show their passports, they could cash only two cheques each. When she said "passport"—that word she knew—and showed two fingers, they informed her that their passports were in their hotel rooms. She repeated herself; they told her, more loudly this time, that their passports were in the care of their wives, still at the hotel. She spoke again; they raised their voices further. My wish to get my stamps led me to intervene. "Perhaps I can be of assistance," I said in English and then in German, and told the Englishmen what the clerk had been trying to tell them. "Thank you so much," one of the Brits said feelingly, "my friend and I don't speak the local jabberwocky!" "No kidding," I said to myself, and laughed. The two laughed merrily along, little caring, I imagine, that they had dismissed the language of Goethe, Schiller, Heine, and Brecht with the use of a Lewis Carroll nonsense word.

Crossing into Austria at Passau, we stopped not long afterwards to visit the abbey at St. Florian (the composer Anton Bruckner was a choirboy there; he is also buried there) mainly to admire its fourteen altar paintings by Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538). These were of particular interest to Jack as a specialist in the Northern Renaissance. The guided tour we had to take led us through the church, the library, and the imperial apartments. St. Florian is more characteristically German Baroque than the Passau Dom, and the riotous decoration, especially in the chapel, intrigued me: evidence of a very different religious sensibility from the ones I was familiar with.

We could stay only two full days in Vienna, just enough time to see a few of its attractions. Among them was the Kunsthistorisches Museum, of which that room full of works by Pieter Breughel the Elder (1525-69) alone makes the city worth a journey. And, in spite of being one of the major cities of Europe, Vienna is a relaxed, manageable sort of place, full of cafés with a bewildering choice of *Torten*, cakes, that cry out to be garnished with a mountain of *Schlag*, whipped cream.

In a wine pub near the Dom, I made another discovery, a piece of doggerel high up on a wall. *"Lieber Freund, merke wohl, / Der Menschen Feind ist Alkohol. / Doch in der Bibel steht geschrieben, / Du sollst auch deine Feinde lieben."* (Dear friend, take notice, / alcohol is mankind's enemy. / But it is written in the Bible / That you must love your enemies, too.) This amused attitude to drinking was some distance from the grimmer one that had only recently begun to fade in Canada. Certainly my girlfriend's parents, teetotallers both, seemed unimpressed when I recited the lines to them some weeks later!

A number of Viennese landmarks had been constructed in the Baroque style, among them the imperial summer palace of Schönbrunn, the Karlskirche, and Belvedere Palace. The latter had been built for Prince Eugene of Savoy, the Duke of Marlborough's ally during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13), the conflict that purportedly brought my paternal great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather from the Scottish Highlands to the Continent as a mercenary soldier. In the twentieth century, the Lower Belvedere had been turned into the Austrian Barockmuseum, while the Upper Belvedere had come to serve as a museum of modern Austrian art. Most memorable among the artists whose works are on display is the sometimes overripe but engaging Gustav Klimt (1862-1918). I knew his work from illustrations, but this may well have been the first time that I saw originals.

That 1971 vacation introduced me not only to Bavaria and Austria, but also to Belgium. By the time we reached the Netherlands, four days after leaving Vienna (we took the long way round, travelling west to Freiburg before heading north), Annètje's parents and her younger sister were holidaying in a farmhouse in Steenwijkerworld, in the province of Overijssel. The Huibregtses generously offered us the use of their villa in the Brussels suburb of Jezus-Eik, along with the Fiat, which was available after Annètje's brother had used it for a few days.

Travelling sometimes by train, sometimes by car, sometimes by myself, sometimes accompanied by Jack, Annètje, and others, I saw a good deal of Belgium, especially its Flemish-speaking cities and towns. I liked what I saw, and what I ate and drank. Someone said to me once that there are two countries in which it is hard to get a bad restaurant meal or a bad cup of coffee—Italy and Belgium. I don't know about Italy, but he may well have been right about Belgium. Certainly Belgian restaurants are, as a group, better than those in the Netherlands, especially north of the great rivers.

Some moments of sheer delight come to mind: in Brussels's main art gallery, for example, seeing Pieter Breughel the Elder's "Fall of Icarus" and remembering a few lines from W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts": "About suffering they were never wrong, / The old Masters: how well they understood / Its human position; how it takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along." Wandering through the Memling and Groeninge Museums in Bruges, it suddenly occurred to me: this is what Johan Huizinga was writing about in *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. A similar moment of delight came in 1972, when Jack and I, on our way back from southern Spain, stopped in Tournai to admire

the Notre Dame Cathedral. It is a curious but absolutely charming mixture of Romanesque and Gothic architecture, with an utterly marvellous quality of light in the nave.

My stay in Belgium also brought discoveries outside the realms of cookery, art, and architecture. Seeking a record to play at the Huibregtse home, I speculatively chose Gustav Mahler's Fourth Symphony. I'm not sure whether I had heard any of his works to that point. I owned no records by him, and he was not yet much performed in Canada. But I found this symphony, Mahler's most accessible, absolutely enchanting, especially the fourth movement, in which a soprano sings about life in heaven. Since that first exposure, Mahler has become one of my favourite symphonists and composers of songs.

Another discovery was the history, then still in its early stages, that Louis de Jong was writing about the Netherlands during the Second World War. Johan Huibregtse owned a copy of *Voorspel*, the volume introducing the series. It was a highly readable and insightful history of the country during the first forty years of the reign of Queen Wilhelmina, who had ascended the throne in 1898. I found it fascinating and bought the first three volumes before I returned to Canada. I also established an account with the publishers in order to get all volumes as they appeared. In time, there would be more than a score of them; I have read them all. In the process, I learned a great deal about my country of birth.

An incident comes to mind that sheds some light on the linguistic conflict in Belgium. At one point, Jack having had to go to Amsterdam, I shared the house with Annètje, her friend Inge Kerremans, and Inge's mother. One evening, we decided to dine in the city. Along the way, I pulled into a service station, ordering twenty litres, the volume in which the coupons issued to diplomats were denominated. As I had been speaking Dutch with my companions, I used that language without thinking. After a while, it seemed to me that the pump had been going long enough. I looked over my shoulder: we were at 23 litres and rising! "Twenty litres, I said," I told the gas jockey, again in Dutch. He looked at me blankly and kept on pumping. "Twenty litres, God help me!" No response. It occurred to me that using French might be more effective: "Je disait 'vingt litres' s'il vous plaît." He stopped the pump and said in a surly manner: "J'comprends pas Flamand, moi." Didn't *want* to understand seemed more likely. "But you do know that Brussels is a bilingual city," I said. He muttered something I didn't catch, which was probably just as well. I felt as a French Canadian visiting Ottawa might have upon being told to "speak white," something that reportedly still happened in the early 1970s. In short, I was ticked off.

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I was in Europe again in early June of 1972. Jack and Annètje were going to be married in Amsterdam on 4 July, but before the wedding, Jack wanted to make a research trip, this time to southern Spain and, time permitting, Tunisia. (Time did not permit.) Annètje was staying behind in Amsterdam to write an exam in a psychology course before her departure for Canada, Jack having been appointed in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Guelph. For my part, I was more than happy to accompany him.

Our first major objective was Madrid. Driving a rented Renault 10, we got there by way of Burgundy, the Ardèche (for which Jack, who had holidayed in the region, had a soft spot), the Provence , and Toulouse. Art and especially architecture figured prominently in our journey, notably the late medieval delights of Dijon and Beaune, the Roman remains in Arles and Nîmes and, of course, the Pont du Gard.

We reached Madrid on the fifth day and spent a couple of nights there. The Prado, with its many works by Velazquez and Goya among others, was an obvious attraction, but Jack was even keener to visit the National Armoury, where two of the ten surviving Tunis-Cycle tapestries are displayed on a rotating basis. Pointing out some of the details on their huge surfaces, Jack talked scornfully about those art historians who consigned tapestries to the realm of the minor arts. Aside from portraits, paintings in the sixteenth century were mostly bought by people who couldn't afford tapestries, Jack said, for these were vastly more

expensive. "Think of all the gold and silver thread, and all the silk, that got used in one of these," he said, as we contemplated one of Vermeyen's masterpieces. "These cost big bucks. A painting was dirt cheap by comparison." I had never considered the matter in that light and was reminded once again how instructive it is to visit a gallery in the company of an art historian.

After Madrid, our next major stop was Granada, where the Queen's apartments in the Alhambra contain murals depicting the 1535 Tunis expedition. These I photographed for Jack, in colour and in black and white. The palace was splendid, but I enjoyed the gardens even more. I also liked the gardens of the Réales Alcazares in Sevilla, but the Moorish buildings there had a rather regrettable sixteenth-century level superimposed on them.

Driving north via Caceres, Salamanca, Segovia and its superb Roman aquaduct, the art treasures of the Escorial, and Valladolid, we re-entered France at Biarritz. In the castle at Angers, we saw more tapestries, after which Bayeux was an obvious destination. The Bayeux Tapestry is actually an embroidery, but no less fascinating for that. The depiction of William the Conqueror's invasion of England—1066 and all that—was not really a discovery, for I had seen illustrations of it, but it was marvellous to see the real thing.

After several days in Jezus-Eik, where we were joined by Annètje and her parents, we returned to Amsterdam. While Jack and Annètje made the last preparations for the wedding, I wandered around Amsterdam, visiting familiar places and discovering others. I believe I had been in the Portuguese Synagogue before, but I had never entered the Moses and Aaronkerk nearby. Amsterdam was a magnet for hippies in the late Sixties and early Seventies, and a large part of the church had been turned into a drop-in centre that served up inexpensive drinks and snacks as well as helpful advice. I bought a coffee and wandered around the building. A Neil Young album was playing on a sound system, the music enhanced by the high ceiling. Whatever the reason, "Heart of Gold" never sounded so good before or since.

The wedding took place in a municipal building in the Vondelpark on 4 July; a jolly reception in the Apollohotel and an even jollier family dinner in a restaurant in Voorschoten, near Leiden, followed. A few days later, Annètje, Jack, and I were on a KLM flight to Toronto.

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Almost three years passed before I was in Europe again. In 1973, I took my parents into the interior of British Columbia and through the Rocky Mountains; in 1974, I joined Jack and Annètje in a three-weeks' visit to Washington, D.C., Johan having become First Secretary in the Dutch Embassy there. His posting kept Jack and Annètje in North America for several years. When I was overseas in the spring of 1975, it was in the company of my youngest brother Jan D(aniel). We had equipped ourselves with Eurail passes, the first time I used one. It was not to be the last, for the pass turned out to be another discovery. Its convenience proved to be immense, and it offered excellent value, especially when one travelled long distances, as Jan D. and I did that May.

Leaving Amsterdam, we headed into Germany, Munich being our first major objective. It was my first time there; it has assuredly not been my last. In the course of two days, we spent a lot of time in galleries, with the Alte Pinakothek my favourite. Its holdings are rich and varied, but three paintings in particular draw me like a magnet whenever I enter it, *Danae* by Jan Gossaert, known as Mabuse (c. 1478-1532), Pieter Breughel the Elder 's *The Land of Cockaigne (Das Schlaraffenland)* and, perhaps above all, Albrecht Altdorfer's *Alexander's Victory (Die Alexanderschlacht)*. The chief thing the three have in common is the period in which they were painted, the northern Renaissance, but each has some special appeal to me: the deliciously clueless look on Danae's face as the golden coins tumble into her lap; the air of contented indolence in Breughel's work, the incredible detail and lurid sky of the Altdorfer painting. In 1989, I took a photo of Cornelia leaning over Daniel's stroller, with *Alexander's Victory* as a backdrop: a nice memento of a happy moment.

Having reached Italy via the Brenner Pass, we visited Verona, Venice, Florence, Siena, Pisa, and Naples. The Uffizi gallery in Florence was particularly splendid, but there were many other gorgeous buildings and works of art to see. I also attended a fine performance of Verdi's *Macbeth,* with Gwyneth Jones as a convincingly evil Lady Macbeth, at the opera house (Jan D., who had never been at the opera, declined to accompany me.) Using the Michelin *Guide rouge*, we found our way to a starred restaurant specializing in steak, Florentine style. I'm no great fan of steak—give me lamb or pork anytime—but this cut was delicious: thick, rare, juicy, hot through and through.

The *Guide* did not help us in Naples. We had to deal in rapid succession with a hotel strike, a restaurant strike, and a museum strike. I proposed going on to Sicily, where the Greek and Roman ruins are said to be of great interest, but Jan D. argued for Spain. "It's a fascist country," he said, "they don't allow strikes there." He was worried that a rail strike might occur in Italy, leaving us stranded on Sicily while our Eurail passes expired. As well, having travelled in Mexico, he wanted to visit another Spanish-speaking country.

The only city we visited that I had not seen before was Barcelona. It turned out to be a delightful place that reminded me strongly of Paris (where I spent several days the following week on the way back to the Netherlands, Jan D. having preceded me). The buildings by Antonio Gaudi (1852-1926) were a real eye-opener. I had seen photos of the highly idiosyncratic (and incomplete) cathedral of Sagrada Familia, but they were no substitute for wandering through it.

I spoke a few words of Spanish, but as in Italy, linguistically I felt like a fish out of water. It was comforting, after also visiting Sevilla, Toledo, and Madrid, to cross the border into France. My French is no great shakes, but I can get by in it and could understand much of what was said to me. As time has passed, more and more I have limited my travel to countries whose languages I know: the Low Countries, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France.

Strangely, perhaps, I have spent little time in the British Isles. In the summer of 1976, I was there for a long week, mainly in London and Cambridge, and in 1983, when Cornelia and I spent our first holiday together, we took two weeks to explore England's famous cathedrals—Ely, Peterborough, Lincoln, York, Durham, Warwick, Worcester, Wells, Salisbury, Winchester, Canterbury, Norwich, and Westminster. We also made a brief foray into Scotland, and, finding I liked Edinburgh, I promised myself I would revisit that country soon. But I haven't been to Britain since 1983. I suppose it has something to do with my roots being on the Continent. Certainly I feel more at home there.

My 1976 visit to England was strictly for pleasure and included attending a performance of *Così fan tutte* at the Glyndebourne Festival, my Glendon colleague Ian Gentles having obtained tickets for himself, his wife Sandy, and me. The two weeks in the Netherlands that followed it were mostly business. I had begun work on a project that had great personal interest for me: the Canadian Army in the Netherlands in 1944 and 1945. Mostly staying in Baarn, my town of birth (40 kilometres southeast of Amsterdam), the guest of my former Sunday School teacher and her husband, Dora and Willem Cazant, I worked at Amsterdam's Institute for War Documentation and visited municipal archives in Groningen, Hilversum, and Nijmegen. These places featured prominently in the Army's own records, which are held in the National Archives in Ottawa.

While in the north, I made a detour to Leeuwarden, the birthplace of my maternal grandfather, Steven Anne Reitsma (Anne is a man's name in Friesland). With some delight, I noted that Leeuwarden was celebrating the centenary of the birth of my disreputable distant cousin Margaretha Zelle, better known as Mata Hari. Early in the century, my grandfather, who was some months older than she was, had prudently kept his relationship to his second cousin a secret from his wife's ultra-respectable family. Now, he was forgotten by all but his children and grandchildren, and she, the sometime exotic dancer, prostitute, and alleged spy, had posthumously become a celebrity. There was talk of opening a museum to her memory. When I visited Leeuwarden with Daniel in 2000, our cousin's tawdry but superficially glamorous life was celebrated in two locations in the city. Times *have* changed.

It was during this sojourn in the Netherlands that, reading the *NRC Handelsblad* (the best Dutch newspaper) one afternoon, I came across Rudy Kousbroek's column "Escaped from the Language Lab." Kousbroek is an erudite and intelligent commentator on culture and intellectual life, and a lucid writer besides. On this occasion, he had rendered the fairy tale of Tom Thumb into colloquial Dutch before translating it into English, the idioms and colloquialisms being translated literally. The screamingly funny result is comprehensible only to people who understand both languages, but that includes many Netherlanders. My hosts, the neuroradiologist Wilfred Müller and his wife Corinne—I had met her while skiing in Leysin, east of Lake Geneva, during the 1968 Christmas holidays—and I spent a very happy half hour with it.

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My 1977 summer vacation I spent in British Columbia and northern California, visiting relatives and friends. But the following summer I was in Europe again. The occasion was my *Barockbummel*, in which I made the South-German Baroque the focus of an entire holiday.

Travelling by train, I made Würzburg my first goal. Flattened by bombs in early 1945, the city has a lot of humdrum architecture, but the episcopal Residence, designed by that architectural genius Balthasar Neumann (1687-1753), makes up for that. Many of the outlying rooms were badly damaged in 1945, and in 1978 the restoration project was not yet complete (not until 2000 did I see all the rooms in their full glory). Fortunately, the huge Treppenhaus (staircase hall) and the even more gorgeous Kaisersaal, with their splendid ceilings by Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770), had escaped direct hits. Someday, I would like to hear a concert in the Kaisersaal, with baroque music by the likes of Vivaldi, Corelli, Geminiani, and Alessandro Marcello. Like many Baroque structures, the Residence is a standing reminder that in the early eighteenth century the German towns, wracked by war the century before, had become relatively safe places to inhabit. Representing the secular Baroque at its finest, Würzburg's Residence was the perfect place to begin my journey.

Bamberg and the Neumann-designed Vierzehnheiligen pilgrimage church northeast of Bamberg, were my next objectives. Then, after a night in Nuremberg, I took the train to Prague. I spent three days in the city, savouring its many beauties, among them an entire unreconstructed eighteenth-century neighbourhood. (It was used as a backdrop to the film version of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*.) The city escaped all but the most minor damage during the Second World War, and the Communist seizure of power in 1948 had more or less frozen the city in time. Very little post-war construction had taken place, thus leaving the cityscape, which is quite probably the finest in Europe, essentially unchanged.

After Prague came Vienna. My interest in Vienna was in its music as much as its art and architecture, though I spent hours in the Kunsthistorisches Museum and admired for the second time the Baroque splendours of Schönbrunn and the Belvedere. I was in the Staatsoper for performances of *La Bohème*, lavishly staged by Franco Zeffirelli, and Hans Werner Henze's *Der Junge Lord*. Although I knew that Henze (b.1926) was Germany's most important living composer, I was quite unfamiliar with his work. But I liked this amusing if cynical satire on bourgeois vanity and sensibilities.

At the Volksoper, I attended operettas by Léhar and Von Suppé: light and tuneful stuff. I also lucked into a gala concert by the Vienna Philharmonic, the occasion being the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Bösendorfer piano-manufacturing firm. The concert had been sold out for months, but someone had returned six tickets to the box office minutes before I turned up. I sat between an American and an Australian, fellow beneficiaries of the same lucky chance. Aside from a Schubert overture, the program consisted of a concerto by Beethoven (the Fourth, my favourite), and one by Mozart performed by Paul Badura-Skoda, who was also the recipient of the Bösendorfer ring, awarded every ten years to a prominent pianist.

On the final stretch of my *Barockbummel,* I stopped at the abbey at Melk on the Danube, then spent a

couple of days in Salzburg, a jewel of a town. Munich was next, and here I got my first exposure to the genius of the Asam brothers, Cosmas Damian (1686-1739) and Egid Quirin (1692-1750). The Church of St. Johann Nepomuk—in 1975 it had been closed for renovations—is also known as the Asam Church because both brothers worked on it. With a darker interior than most Baroque churches, it evinces great and rather fantastic imagination.

Did I keep the best until last? Hard to say, but the abbey at Ottobeuren, near Memmingen in western Bavaria, did seem like the *pièce de résistance*: a glorious confection of white and pastel stucco and frescoes, the collective work of several architects and artists. When I entered it, I inhaled deeply, then slowly exhaled. Ottobeuren is an artistic hymn of praise to an eminently cheerful God.

Since that 1978 journey, I have sought out additional examples of the Baroque, the work of Neumann, the Asams, Dominikus Zimmermann (1685-1766), and Michael Fischer (1692-1766) among others. The carefree airiness of the Baroque and Rococo makes them seem utterly charming. I did and do wonder whether all that rich decoration isn't more likely to distract worshipers than to focus their minds on heavenly things. Since 1984, I have seen many Baroque buildings in Cornelia's company. Born into a Roman Catholic milieu (though now an Anglican communicant), she prefers the secular Baroque, saying that she finds the lush decoration off-putting in a religious context.

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In 1979, I focussed on architecture of a very different kind: the Gothic in the Low Countries and northern France. After recovering from jet lag at the home of my cousin Tjitte Reitsma and his wife Ria in Zeist, near Utrecht, I went to Paris via Arras and Amiens, site of the first of the great cathedrals I visited during the next few days. The other major highlights were Chartres and Reims, as well as Notre Dame and Sainte Chapelle in Paris, and the cathedral in St. Denis just north of the city. No photograph can capture the height of the vaulted ceilings of these buildings, or the splendour of Chartres's stained glass windows. The effect of the Gothic is very different from that of the Baroque. The latter delights; the former imposes. Gothic makes people feel small and insignificant; Baroque art and architecture, lacking the severity of the Gothic, tends to make them (or me, at any rate) feel cheerful. But it is all but incapable of inspiring awe, which the Gothic does do!

In Paris, I quite unexpectedly ran across my friend and colleague Alain Baudot, a member of the Glendon College French department, who invited me to his parents' place in Bayeux a fews days later. I got there at dinnertime on June 4th and learned the meaning of "le trou normand," the shot of Calvados drunk after the main course in order to "make a hole" for the cheeses and dessert to follow. That evening, we went to a band concert by a Canadian regimental band, which was in the area in connection with the thirty-fifth-anniversary celebrations of the Allied landings in Normandy on June 6th, 1944. The following day, Alain and I were on our way to Brussels by automobile. He had a conference there, and I was heading north again in any case. We stopped for lunch in Amiens. Asked what he wanted to drink, Alain in turn asked whether they had Gueuze. "What's that?" I asked. Didn't I know Belgian beer? I knew Stella Artois, I replied; he dismissed it almost contemptuously. That evening, we sat in a brasserie on the Grand Place in Brussels while he introduced me to several specialty beers, among them Trappiste, Kriek (a cherry-flavoured beer) and Mort Subite, an appropriately named potent brew. Meanwhile, he lectured me on the Belgian custom of allowing beer to continue fermenting in the bottle. Their taste was certainly more complex than that of the ales and lagers I usually drink. After a while, though, my palate started to feel somewhat the way it does after a couple of glasses of Berliner Weiße (beer with a shot of raspberry juice, a Berlin specialty): slightly overcome by sugar.

I spent several days in and around Brussels, mostly looking at art and architecture. One evening, I heard

a concert of choral works by Krzysztof Penderecki, conducted by the great Polish composer himself. The music was gripping, and I noted with some surprise that roughly half the seats were empty. Apparently Brussels audiences were cautious in their musical tastes.

The next day, I took the train up to Antwerp, and, after a day spent rediscovering that city, went on to the Dutch town of Breda, made famous by Velasquez's depiction of its surrender to the Spanish army in 1626. I had been invited to stay by a neuroradiologist, Peter van Wiechen, whom I had met through Wilfred Müller (both had been attending a conference in Toronto at the time). Peter and his cellist wife, Monique Bartels, were too busy to spend much time with me, but I used the opportunity to explore Breda itself and several other places in the southern Netherlands, a part of the country to that point little known to me. In the southwestern province of Zeeland, I visited Veere, Middelburg, and Vlissingen (Flushing) on the former island of Walcheren. Vlissingen was the least attractive of the three, but I was eager to see the statue of the famous admiral Michiel Adriaansz. de Ruter (1607-76), whose birthplace Flushing was. I had always identified with him because we shared our given names. As I stood there, I thought of the naval battles whose names I remembered from the history I had learned as a boy.

A more recent battle also came to mind that day. In the fall of 1944, the area east and south of Walcheren had seen heavy fighting between Canadian and German forces. The Canadian objective was to clear the approach to Antwerp, whose harbour installations had fallen into Allied hands virtually undamaged. Of course, the port could not be used until the Germans had been cleared out and the Lower Scheldt swept free of mines. The weeks-long battle was the most important engagement of the Canadian army, and it ended in victory. Yet it gets largely ignored in Canada, while historians and journalists keep picking at the sores left by the failed raid on Dieppe in 1942, an action far smaller and less significant militarily than the battle of the Scheldt. Why is this?

Perhaps I am just not equipped to understand. At the 1983 meetings of the Canadian Historical Association at University of British Columbia, I attended a session on Dieppe. During the question period, I asked the participants to explain the obsession with that incident when other battles, far more important and ending in victory (I singled out the battle of the Scheldt) went very largely unnoticed. One of the participants (Brereton Greenhous of the Armed Forces Historical Directorate? I'm not sure) said: "Michiel, that you can ask that question merely proves you weren't born in Canada."

Using Breda as my base, I also visited 's Hertogenbosch and that least Dutch of Dutch cities, Maastricht, at the southwestern extreme of the province of Limburg. It is very attractive, but I found the dialect spoken there hard to understand. That evening Peter said: "Properly considered, the people from Maastricht are Belgians who speak bad German." In fact, the southern half of Limburg, of which Maastricht is the capital, has a more Belgian than Dutch feel to it, for the locals seem definitely more easy-going than Netherlanders generally, and they seem to eat better, too.

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The use of an architectural theme worked well for my holidays in 1978 and 1979, and I would use it again in 1983, studying the major churches of Normandy (Rouen, Caen, Bayeux) before setting out on my tour of English cathedrals. But in 1980 I abandoned it because two different sets of friends had invited me to visit them in Switzerland. Starting in the Netherlands as usual, I took the train via Liège and Luxemburg to Metz, Nancy, and Strasbourg. Especially Alsace, with its unique mixture of French and German characteristics, is enchanting, but I also recall with delight the gorgeous Baroque Place Stanislas in Nancy. In Strasbourg, I admired Notre Dame Cathedral and its remarkable stained-glass windows, as well as the half-timbered shops and dwellings of the area known as La Petite France. A day trip to Colmar exposed me to more half-timbered houses in La Petite Venise and to the Musée d'Unterlinden, whose

most famous possession is the Isenheim altarpiece, an early sixteenth-century masterpiece by Matthias Grünewald (1475-1528), yet another of the great painters of the northern Renaissance.

Crossing the Rhine into Germany to spend a nostalgic day in Freiburg, I travelled on to Basel, where a friend from Victoria, Michael Clark, was living with his wife Monique and their two children. I had worked with Michael in the Division of Examinations of the Department of Education in the summers of 1964 and 1965, and we had stayed in touch since. It was good to see him and his family; it was good, too, to revisit one of my favourite art galleries in Europe, the Kunstmuseum with its works by Hans Holbein the Younger(1497-1543), especially his portrait of Erasmus, as well as by twentieth-century artists such as Chagall, Klee, and Picasso.

Wilfred and Corinne Müller owned a cottage high above the Walensee, in Canton St. Gallen. The view was great, the weather not so great, and we managed only a couple of hikes. The weather forced us into several excursions. The one I enjoyed most took us to the town of St. Gallen, where I admired the splendid monastery library, yet another example of the south German Baroque. We also went to Luzern, where the Transportation Museum got the Müllers' two sons, Jan Willem and Allard, all excited. By myself, I visited Zürich and revisited Bern. It is, after Prague, the most beautiful capital city in Europe, at least among the ones I know. Like much of Switzerland, however, it is also rather dull.

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Having travelled by train since the mid-1970s, in the summer of 1981, I took two trips by automobile. I was accompanying Jack, who was spending a sabbatical in Holland, in his pursuit of paintings and drawings by Jan Vermeyen. Having defended his dissertation some years before, Jack was writing a book whose subject was not just the Tunis Cycle but the entire life and work of Vermeyen. Soon after my arrival in Holland, the two of us were on our way in his VW Rabbit, which he had picked up at the factory in Wolfsburf some months earlier.

The first and longest of our journeys took us through Germany and Austria to Budapest, then to northern Italy, and finally into France. The major galleries that we visited were Cologne's Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Frankfurt am Main's Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Munich's Alte Pinakothek, Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, Budapest's National Gallery, and Florence's Pitti Gallery; lesser museums included those in Bonn, Salzburg, and Innsbruck.

In Vienna, we were able to attend performances of that most Viennese of operettas, *Die Fledermau*s, at the Volksoper, and of Verdi's *Attila* at the Staatsoper. The Verdi work is little known, but the performances were excellent. One of Piero Cappuccilli's arias was applauded so enthusiastically that he sang it a second time! I have attended between two and three hundred opera performances in seven countries, but that experience is still unique.

Florence I enjoyed more than I had in 1975, Jack being a knowledgeable guide whereas Jan D. had known no more about Renaissance art and architecture than I. Jack saw what he had to see in the Pitti; we then visited the Uffizi and many other galleries and churches. The day before we left the area, we went into the Tuscan countryside, visiting San Gimignano with its towers, and dining with friends of Jack's—she Dutch; he American—in Vinci, the place that Leonardo hailed from. Half a millennium earlier, Tuscany had been one of the greatest centres of western, even world civilization. It was still a delightful area to roam around in.

On the way back from Italy, we stopped in Bourg-en-Bresse for an exhibition of sixteenth-century Netherlandish art that Jack was determined to see. Four days after leaving Florence, we reached Paris, at which point Jack, who missed Annètje and his two daughters Karin and Kirstin, dropped me off in St. Denis and drove on. I took the Métro to the Gare St. Lazare, found a hotel nearby, and settled in to spend

a week in Paris. I met several relatives on my mother's side who lived in or near the city; I also ran across two co-workers at Glendon College, Jennifer Waugh and Julie Pärna.

No one need ever be bored in Paris, especially if they are interested in art, architecture, theatre, or music. Among the performances I attended were one by the Paris Opera of *La forza del destino* at the Palais Garmier and one by the Orchestre de Paris. Zubin Mehta conducted works by Messiaen and Brahms, with Daniel Barenboim playing the Brahms D-minor Concerto. Afterwards, the audience demanded an encore, using the loud, rhythmic, in-unison clapping and stamping that Parisian concert goers can get into within seconds. Barenboim obliged us by playing Liszt's "Concert Paraphrase" from *Rigoletto*, based on the third-act quartet "Bella figlia di amore." This pleased me greatly. *Rigoletto* was the first opera I had ever seen performed, at the Palais Garnier in 1961.

Soon after my return to Wassenaar, the suburb of The Hague where Jack and his family were staying with Annètje's parents, Jack and I were on the road again, this time with Berlin as our first and most distant objective. Jack needed to see a work in the Museum in Berlin-Dahlem; he also wanted to track down a Vermeyen in one of the museums on the Museeninsel, the museum island, in East Berlin. This proved to be disappointing. The curator bemoaned the loss of that and many other works. Some had simply disappeared after the war. Others, having fallen into U.S. hands, had been assigned to the West German government, which had put them on display in Dahlem, even though, she complained, before the war they had been in her museum. All we could do was make sympathetic noises.

We did the same when we met my friend Margot Depiereux—she and I had met while skiing at Kandersteg in the Berner Oberland in 1962—who had her leg in a cast. Having banged up her knee in a ski accident during the winter, she had recently gone under the knife and had not yet returned to her job as a pharmacist. Her parents were visiting her, and the five of us had two very jolly meals together. At one point, we were looking for something in her study, which was more than a bit messy. Perhaps anticipating criticism, she said, half-apologetically, half-defiantly: "*Wer Ordnung hält, ist nur zu faul zum Suchen*: Tidy people are merely too lazy to look for things." It immediately became one of my favourite sayings—my office is usually in a mess, too.

We left Berlin by the northern route, direction Lübeck, a pretty town that reminded us a lot of smaller Dutch harbour towns. Boarding the ferry at nearby Travemünde, we ended up in Denmark after dark and promptly lost our way trying to find a hotel. Fortunately, we happened across a police station, where an officer set us on the right road. Copenhagen turned out to be an appealing if expensive city, and we resolved to leave it as soon as we could, but not before we had paid our respects to the Little Mermaid. In the course of the next thirty-six hours, Jack examined what he had come to see. I wandered somewhat further afield than he did, visiting Rosenborg Castle and the Carlsberg Museum, with its fine collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, as well as the National Gallery.

Hamburg, where the Kunsthalle holds several drawings by Vermeyen, was next on Jack's itinerary. I was more impressed by its holdings of German art, and particularly by another of my discoveries, the romantic landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). I must have seen his work before, since one of his larger and better-known canvases hangs in Munich's Neue Pinakothek, but his name was new to me. His works, often small, with fine detail, have an almost magical quality, and he may perhaps be seen as a forerunner of twentieth-century realism. Only I prefer his work to that of Alex Colville, Ken Danby, Andrew Wyeth, and their kind.

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The pattern set in the 1970s has proved durable. In 1982, I spent half a sabbatical in Grenoble, using the opportunity to ski at Alpe d'Huez, to visit Paris several times, and to travel into the Provence, the Côte

d'Azur, the Massif Central, Brittany, and the valley of the Loire. It will come as no surprise that art, architecture, and music occupied much of my time. Among my many memories, the most vivid is of Jon Vickers as Canio in *Pagliacci* at the Palais Garnier. Nearing the end of his long and distinguished career, the great Canadian tenor gave a riveting performance. I also journeyed into Italy (including a week in Rome and a performance of *La Cenerentola* at La Scala in Milan), Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands, where I joined Jack and his family in admiring the tulips at Keukenhof and also visited, with Jack, the Floriade, a huge flower show that is held every ten years. (Cornelia and I took the boys to the 1992 Floriade, and I fully intend to visit the show in 2002.)

By 1983, I had found in Cornelia a new and delightful travel companion, one who takes as much pleasure in art, architecture, and music as I do. After all, her parents were born in Germany, and she has many relatives there. As well, she did her Ontario Grade 13 at Neuchâtel Junior College in Switzerland. In June of 1985, she showed me around Neuchâtel; I returned the favour in Freiburg im Breisgau a few days later. In 1986, we divided our holiday time between Westphalia, in a small town near Münster, and Belgium.

We have travelled in North America together, and I have very happy memories of a holiday spent in northern California in 1984 and one in the Pacific Northwest (B.C., Washington, and Oregon) three years later. Centreed on a performance of Wagner's *Ring* (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) by the Seattle Opera, that holiday was particularly memorable. But Europe called us after Daniel, born in 1988, turned one, and in 1989 and 1991 we spent our holidays in Bavaria. European holidays became more difficult after Patrick was born in 1992, though we did spend three weeks in a cottage on the Dutch coast in the summer of that year and managed to visit many relatives and friends. For several years, Cornelia's family's cottage on Lake Huron became a sensible alternative. But in 1995, Cornelia and I managed to get to Bavaria for a week, and in 1997 Daniel and I travelled in Holland, Belgium, northern France, and Germany (including a week spent with Margot and her husband Siegfried Krüger, the first time I saw Berlin without the Wall) before Cornelia and Patrick joined us. Daniel was not much interested in cathedrals, art galleries, and museums (unless these focused on war), but I was keen to show him where I had spent my childhood, keen, too, to share treasured memories with him, such as a boat trip on the Rhine, and to make some new discoveries with him (I had never seen the battlefield at Verdun: a shattering experience). The almost-annual trip overseas is becoming the pattern once again.

But there is more to my craving for Europe than the wish to share and create memories with my immediate family. There is also the quite independent wish to see places again, the anticipation of familiar beauty or intellectual grace. It is this anticipation that leads me to attend yet another performance of a familiar opera, or concerto, or play, to reread a much-loved novel or a book like Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* which changed the way I thought about the world and its history. It is this anticipation that leads me into art galleries and museums, into churches and palaces, but also into city streets and village squares. "To see Paris for the first time is like first seeing the ocean," sings a character in Puccini's *La Rondine*. To see Paris for the second and third and fourth time is even better. And for Paris I can substitute many other places, among them Amsterdam, Bruges, Cambridge, Lyon, Munich, Prague, Vienna, Salzburg, Venice, Barcelona, Bern, and my beloved Freiburg, places whose streetscapes and amenities please me, places where I feel good.

Works of art or music, books and plays that give me continued pleasure, I can (within limits) see or hear or read in Canada, too. But the architecture and streetscapes of Europe cannot be replicated here. Few places in Canada or North America make my list of towns and cities that I am always eager to see again. Victoria is on it for purely personal reasons, and San Francisco because of its unexcelled scenic beauty, and Quebec, the most European of North American cities. And that's about it. I live in Toronto and don't mind it—if one is going to live anywhere in Canada it might as well be here—but if I didn't live in this city would I want to visit it again and again? Not likely!

By birth, I am Dutch; by adoption, I am Canadian. But the process of acculturation was modified by

repeated exposure to Europe and at times immersion in it. And my travels on that continent have reinforced my sense that in important ways I continue to be rooted in Europe, whose art, architecture, music, and history matter profoundly to me, even though I am Canadian and a historian of Canada. I have become Canadian, I wrote in *Becoming Canadian*, but I haven't ceased to be Dutch. But I realize better than I did a few years ago that this is not, as I suggested in my memoir, simply because I reached Canada too late in life—aged nearly thirteen—to change myself and be changed completely. I now see it is also because, beginning with that year in Germany (and the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland) forty years ago, and continuing with those European holidays that began in 1968, I have steadily nourished my Dutch and European roots. I enjoy doing so; being there regularly makes me feel better. Does it make me less Canadian? That is, in the end, not for me to judge.

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