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‘This book will trigger dreams’: The memoirs of lifestyle migrants in rural France - recounting, entertaining, promoting

‘This book will trigger dreams’: As memórias dos migrantes de estilo de vida na França rural - recontar, entreter, promover

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Abstract

The migration of British individuals in rural and coastal areas of Europe and beyond has received an outstanding attention in media, with TV programs, movies, news articles or news magazine entirely dedicated to it and with a plethora of entertainment literature of “travel writings” and memoirs. In this paper I will present a critical analysis of such a literature, which explores how it is participating to the fetishisation of lifestyle migration, producing commercial argumentation for a lifestyle change via positive narratives and depictions of the migration processes, of the French rural places and of autochthone populations, marked with the socioeconomic structural conditions of lifestyle migration.

Keywords: lifestyle migration; commodity fetishism; memoirs; British migrants; rural France.

Resumo

A migração de indivíduos britânicos para as zonas rurais e costeiras da Europa, e outros locais, tem recebido grande atenção dos *media*, com programas televisivos, filmes, notícias de imprensa e revistas totalmente dedicados a esta questão, para além de uma pletera de literatura de entretenimento de “escrita de viagens” e memórias. Neste artigo, apresento uma análise crítica deste tipo de literatura, explorando a forma como participa na fetichização da “lifestyle migration”, produzindo argumentos comerciais para uma mudança de estilo de vida através de narrativas positivas e de descrições dos processos migratórios, dos lugares da França rural e das populações locais, marcadas pelas condições estruturais socioeconómicas da “lifestyle migration”.

Palavras-chave: “lifestyle migration”; fetichismo comoditizado; memórias; migrantes britânicos; França rural.

1. Introduction: conceptualising *lifestyle* as a fetish

1.1. The critique of *lifestyle*

North-to-South and North-to-North migrations have been conceptualised as residential tourism (McWatters, 2009), retirement migration, amenity migration (Moss, 2006), privileged mobility (Amit, 2007; Croucher, 2012) or lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009), depending whether the perspectives taken were that of social geography, anthropology or sociology. Indeed, the broad and accurate definition of these migrations is challenged by the variety of their timespan, their locations of origins and destinations, their purpose and their connection to economic dynamics and tourism.¹

In the context of a critical sociolinguistic study of the interactions between British migrants and autochthones in rural Brittany, France, I have chosen to retain the critical and socioeconomic perspective integrated in the concept of *privileged mobility* (Croucher, 2012), and the focus on the narrative and reflective perspective of the migrants in the anthropological concept of *lifestyle migration* (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009).

The improvement of the *lifestyle*, in comparison with a hectic life in Britain, is indeed a goal shared by these migrants. However, the accuracy of the lifestyle migration framework has been discussed with the argument that any migration leads, if not to an improvement, at least to a change in the migrants' life. Therefore, Benson and Osbaldiston have lately refined the definition of lifestyle migration as linked to specific socioeconomic dynamics: "rather than a focus on production and the involuntary nature of many migrations, lifestyle migration appears to be driven by consumption and is optional and voluntary" (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014: 3).

This refined definition takes us away from Giddens' original proposal to understand lifestyle as a newly emerged ontological concern of modern society (Giddens, 1991). Indeed, even though Giddens links the concern for security and lifestyle improvement as one of the "consequence of the late-capitalism modernity",

¹ For an overview of the wide range of lifestyle migrations, see for instance the bibliography of on Lifestyle Migration Hub website: <http://www.uta.fi/yky/lifestylemigration/bibliography.html>

and as made possible by a consumption society, he does not consider the structural power relations that this consumerist quest for lifestyle fosters inherently. Paradoxically, Giddens also considers that the notion of lifestyle can exist outside consumerism, and is “corrupted” by advertising and commodification of social life (Giddens, 1991: 197). Besides, he considers this ontological change to have penetrated all layers of society. Yet, these two claims are not demonstrated. More recently Bauman has more concretely linked lifestyle to consumerism (Bauman, 2007; 2008). But, as Benson (2011: 43) remarks, Bauman’s main focus on the individual’s rational fails to be relevant to account for the structural aspects of lifestyle migration.

Therefore, there might be a need to develop a critique of the concept of lifestyle to explain why the mobility patterns in lifestyle migrations seems not to be as erratic as one could expect when the narrative is about stepping away from the ‘rat race’ and taking the ‘side track’. The sudden popularity of destinations until the saturation of the local real estate markets cannot be considered as a coincidence. In fact as recent researches have started to demonstrate the choice and representation of the places is hugely determined by mediated representations (Akerlund 2012; Eimermann 2013). Indeed, the Southern Europe rural idyll has long existed in the romantic British imaginary (Barou and Prado, 1995), but it does not explain the suddenness of the waves of part-time and full-time relocations in these areas from the last quarter of the 20th century. Benson (2010) underlines that the migrants explain their choice regarding their destination in terms of cultural preferences, but drawing on a Bourdieusian sociology, she also notes that these choices fuels class distinction narratives (Benson, 2011). Therefore, as Harvey argues the cultural argument has to be looked at in a critical perspective:

Cultural life is often held to be outside rather than within the embrace of this capitalist logic. People, it is said, make their own history in these realms in very specific and quite unpredictable ways, depending upon their values and aspirations, their traditions and norms. [...] while it is indeed possible that speculative development in these latter domains would not be reinforced or discarded according to the post hoc rationalizations of profit-making, profitability [...] has long been implicated in these activities, and with the passing of time, strength of this connection has increased rather than diminished. Precisely because capitalism is expansionary and imperialistic, cultural life in more and more areas gets brought within the grasp of the cash nexus and the logic of capital circulation. [...] Wherever capitalism goes, its illusory apparatus, its fetishisms, and its system of mirrors come not far behind. (Harvey, 1989: 344)

Harvey does not disqualify the cultural perspective on consumption practices and the emergence of new social practices, but encourages us to look where they meet, or blend into, market logics, in order to explore their impact in terms of social structuration.

Starting from the definition of Lifestyle Migration as a consumption practice, and strongly linked to the tourism economy, the choice of the historical materialist framework offers the possibility to develop a critique of Giddens's and Bauman's conception of *lifestyle*. Indeed, I have come to conceptualise "lifestyle" as a *fetish* —in a Marxist understanding of the word. Considering the concern for lifestyle as a fetish, and exclusively as a process of capitalism expansion, enables to explain the disparities between the populations that spend some time in search of a lifestyle, and those struggling for economic survival. It implies to think this quest as the privilege of individuals, with purchase power and some legal freedom in a capitalist economy, and as a consequence of the very process of social life's commodification.

In other words it is because some commodities had to be traded, and because some markets had to expand that the narrative of lifestyle was developed, as a way to trigger desire and goods consumption beyond material needs. As Guy Debord analysed in his critique of consumerism, the illusion of an infinite choice is the illusion of the individual's complete freedom (Debord, 1996), whose empowerment remains relative and contingent to the development of niche markets.

However, this argument is not denying the reflexivity and agency of the individuals that Giddens or Bauman, link to the concept of lifestyle. As Benson demonstrates, lifestyle migrants have elaborated their decision to migrate to specific places in connection with their personal history (Benson, 2011). But this reflexivity, as well as the cultural proportion to do certain consumption choices, has become instrumental in the current stage of capitalism, away from standardisation.

1.2 The principles of commodity fetishism

The fetishism of commodity is one of the fundamental aspects of the materialist theory that irrigates the theoretical framework of this research. It is the process by which Marx explains the concealment of social relationships operated through the economical exchange and, reversely, the organisation of society through trade in a way that is left unquestioned and considered as “natural” by the individuals (Marx, 1976: 163). Thus, fetishism consists in giving as well as hiding the social value of commodities, by concealing the production conditions, the human and material costs and the consequences of the consumption. *Lifestyle migration* can be defined as a fetish given that it implies the trade of commodities (*i.e.* entertainments, housings, local products, books, magazines and newspapers, touristic and administrative services) wherein social relations are constructed (attribution of the value and hierarchy of places, competitiveness, folklorisation, regionalisms and nationalisms, power etc.) and concealed by the production of myths (discourses defining cultures, identity of groups and places, or fictionalising the individual experience). Among these three consubstantial dimensions of the fetishisation process, this last discursive aspect will be my main concern in this paper.

Therefore, in the case of the lifestyle migration, what appears primarily as a philosophical, psychological, and maybe even ethical resolutions, are also choices made by consumers on an emerging market that generates and reproduces a social hierarchy in the globalised world. And, if commodities are indeed bought in the aim of increasing and changing the quality and style of life, and if on this consumption depends the meaning individuals make of their life, there has to be a *production* system of these commodities, a system that relies on and generates social order between the agents of the market, may they be producers, consumers, or both.

2. A critical reading of lifestyle migrants' memoirs

The purpose of this paper is to analyse some of the discursive production that contribute to the expansion of the lifestyle migration markets and its fetishisms by creating an imaginary of rural France.

Giddens underlines that advertising and mediated images play a central part in the concern for lifestyle:

[...] the mass media routinely present modes of life to which, it is implied, everyone should aspire; the lifestyles of the affluent are, in one form or another, made open to view and portrayed as worthy of emulation. More important, however, and more subtle, is the impact of the narratives the media convey. Here there is not necessarily the suggestion of a lifestyle to be aspired to; instead, stories are developed in such way as to create narrative coherence with which the reader or viewer can identify. (Giddens, 1991: 199).

In this paper I will argue that lifestyle migrants memoirs connects these two ideas that are not necessarily associate according to Giddens here: they portray modes of life to which the reader should aspire, in the form of a narrative that enables the readers' identification to the story. With the empirical observation that this literature is discussed among British migrants, I will start from the hypothesis that lifestyle migrants' memoirs are some of the commodities that participate to the lifestyle fetishism process, offering stories and myths that promote lifestyle migration, using and reproducing social constructions. Focusing on the discourse produced in this literature, this paper offers a different perspective from the works that have so far focused on the narrator's self-identity (re)construction (Mastellotto, 2013) and on the literary construction of spaces (Ross, 2010).

As I am not coming from the field of literary studies but from Interactional Studies, I will construct this analysis by drawing on Monica Heller's critical sociolinguistic analysis of discourse (Heller, 2001). This approach, in coherence with the materialist theoretical framework that was developed above, brings critical social theory into the analysis of the "linkage between local linguistic practices and processes of social structuration" (Heller, 2001: 117). Consequently, Heller insists on the necessity to connect discourse analysis to the interpretation of its socio-historical background, and to an analysis of social practices. This perspective implies to take the specific epistemological stand that discourse, and even more so media discourses, cannot be considered as the exact reproduction of actual social activity, but as one area of social practice, that is dialogically constructed with the others (Heller, 2001: 117). In other words, studying the imaginary broadcasted in the media does not enable to presume

that this identical imaginary will be found in actual social interactions, but it helps contextualise them and see the potential influences of these discourses of other social practices.

Illustration 1: From left to right, top to bottom, the book covers of *A Year in Provence*, *Home & Dry in Normandy: A Memoir of Eternal Optimism in Rural France*, *Bon Courage!: A French Renovation in Rural Limousin*, *C'est la Folie*, *Tout Sweet: Hanging up My High Heels for a New Life in France* and *Tout Allure: Falling in Love in Rural France*.



First contextualising this literature as both a product of, and a medium for, the promotion of lifestyle markets, the purpose will then be to outline the main themes and discursive strategies used in six lifestyle migrants' memoirs, in order to sketch out

the image of lifestyle migration and of the local populations that are thereby produced to the readers.

Carrying out an ethnographic research on the British migrants settling in rural Brittany (France), I was particularly interested in studying narratives of the relocation in rural France. Therefore, I chose to study the works of five British authors writing about their life in rural France: Richard Wiles (2003), *Bon Courage!: A French Renovation in Rural Limousin*, George East (2006), *Home & Dry in Normandy: A Memoir of Eternal Optimism in Rural France*, Michael Wright (2006), *C'est la Folie*, Karen Wheeler (2009), *Tout Sweet: Hanging up My High Heels for a New Life in France*, Karen Wheeler (2010), *Toute Allure*, and Peter Mayle (1991), *A Year in Provence*.

P. Mayle's book having inaugurated the migrant's memoir formula with great success logically found its place on the list. *Bon Courage!: A French Renovation in Rural Limousin* was also advertised as a bestseller of the genre by its publisher. I first came to K. Wheeler's and M. Wright's works through the popular blogs and articles they wrote, during one of my earliest online search on the topic of British migrants in rural France. Finally, the more confidential *Home & Dry in Normandy: A Memoir of Eternal Optimism in Rural France* raised my personal interests because of its setting in a region similar in many aspects to the place of my ethnographic research.

3. Situating the lifestyle migrants' memoirs in the media

Catalogued under "travel writings" these memoirs could probably be called a sub-genre, following the recipe of *A Year in Provence* (Mayle, 1991). This bestseller and its popular film adaptation by the BBC are known for having triggered the desire of many British to settle in the southern Europe countryside. But since the 2000s the publication of lifestyle migrants' memoirs have intensified to the point that constituting an exhaustive bibliography may prove difficult. Hence G. East ironic jest in his own book "thanks to Peter Mayle, there were now more British people trying to write and sell books about their adventures in France than actually live there" (East, 2006).

These books often published by independent publishers accepting first authors' works, are marketed as "summer readings", and focus on the entertainment rather than on producing a literary creative work. They mostly are first printed in a few thousand copies and reprinted according to their success.

This literature is entangled with other media coverage of lifestyle migration. Several authors are freelance journalists who also write blogs and article for British daily newspapers, about their 'expat' life. Some of the covers also indicate that the lifestyle migrants' memoirs are meeting the discourse of the lifestyle market and share its imaginary. The praise extracted from a review of the decoration and lifestyle magazine *Country Houses and Home* announces "This book will trigger dreams" on the back cover of *Bon Courage* (Wiles, 2003). On K. Wheeler's *Toute Allure*, extracts from reviews of the author's first book can also be read, and here again the theme of the dream is strongly emphasized: "prepare to daydream"; "Perfect summer reading for anyone who dreams of chucking away their blackberry and downshifting to France. *French Property News*". Indeed it is not hard to understand why these magazines specialized in selling properties or in advertising for second home decoration materials praise these "true" stories that make a perfect case for a migration in rural France. Likewise, multiple references to *lifestyle* press, books and TV shows can be found in the text of all of the memoirs, either as being "inaccurate" (East, 2006), or as being inspirational to the move, and sometimes as being the production of the authors (Wiles, 2003; Wright, 2006). In her books, K. Wheeler for instance appears to be particularly keen on watching *A place in the sun* and reading books about moving to France. Advertisings for books on similar subject can also be found at the end of the books published by Summerdale. And right after the last words of *Bon Courage* (Wiles 2003), the reader will even find an ad for "the UK's leading French holiday property directory" and for immersive French courses.

All the books are exclusively taking the perspective of one narrator, who is also the author.² P. Mayle, G. East and R. Wiles also report their wives thoughts and often write at the first person plural, but there no doubt that the stories have the readers follow only their actions.

² In the following sections I will therefore refer to the authors when addressing their literary choices, and to the narrators when analysing the heroes' perspective.

The books follow similar and mainly chronological plots, from finding ‘the’ *house* to the making of a *home*. From their work on similar literature in Italian settings, Mastellotto (2013: 9) and Ross (2010) rightly suggest that these productions are not so much “travel writings” than “settlement” and “relocation” narratives. The narrators are early retirees, or freelance workers, either moving with their partners (Mayle, 1991; Wiles 2003; East 2006), or single, and therefore potentially subject to live a romance in the French countryside (Wheeler 2009; 2010; Wright 2006). It might be worth stating that the works of R. Wiles and G. East also offer didactic descriptions of the different administrative processes they go through, with G. East even providing a humorous glossary of some of the French technical and common words.

4. The magical attraction of the house and its surroundings

As hinted by their constant presence on the front covers (illustration 1), the houses are the central characters of all these books. Personified from time to time, they all exercise a magnetic attraction on the narrators. This is a very interesting demonstration of the fetishisation process, when the economical rational behind the buying of a property is almost erased behind the emotional connection with the place. The first visit of the house is told as a first encounter. Until the completion of the buying process - often described as a never-ending bureaucratic process - the narrators feverishly dream and project into their new house.

R. Wiles describes how he and his partner have been looking for a house that has some kind of undefined attracting charm until they find it. In K. Wheeler’s case, it is “the House that found [her]”. For P. Mayle, “In the end, [moving to France] had happened quickly – almost impulsively – because of the house. We saw it one afternoon and had mentally moved in by dinner”. And M. Wright’s formulation captures the ‘magic’ behind the buying of his property: “What disarms me is that this place has everything I have been looking for, down to the smallest detail. It’s like something a genie might have created, with a spell”. G. East and his wife, entering for their first time in the house that would soon become theirs “experienced that magical moment of silent communion and confirmation that comes only when finding exactly

what you have been looking for... even though you hadn't realised it before". However, G. East's story differ slightly from the others, and there will be soon another occasion to fall in love with another property, an old mill with all the ideal characteristics of an authentic and idyllic rural property. G. East found this second property totally randomly, and M. Wright and K. Wheeler bought the first and only house they have visited during their very first trip to Limousin. For these narrators, it seems that destiny put the house on their way.

As the stories move on, the success of the move is contingent to the success of the renovation. The sense of achievement is acquired through the completion of the restoration, carefully detailed to the readers.

5. Misadventures, humour and optimism

The narrators are far from stating that settling in France is an easy process. In fact, along with idyllic description of the area, the misadventures provide the essential substance to the stories. *Bon Courage's* opening scene for instance describes a cold, damp and sleepless night as the couple is camping in their newly acquired barn in ruin (Wiles, 2003). And G. East's angle on his story is to insist on everything that did not go as planned (and in the event it did the author still provides the reader with anticipated nightmare scenarios). It transpires that following the relatively idyllic story of P. Mayle, later memoirs' agenda is to account for the moments of doubts as migrants sometimes fail to live the exact dream they had fantasied, facing precarious economic conditions, loneliness, past personal problems and the lack of comfort that the renovation process implies. This purposely induces a 'bittersweet' atmosphere and reinforces the reader's empathy with the migrants.

However, careful in crafting an entertaining uplifting story, all the authors use the same humoristic proceedings to recount the most 'larger-than-life' moments of their story. Comparisons, metaphors, antiphrasis, litotes, hyperboles and pleonasms fill in the text, leaving the reader to enjoy the moments of embarrassment and struggles. Besides, the emotions felt by the narrators are often overwhelming, such as the

'horror' of Karen Wheeler during her overdramatised first night in a French hotel close to the ferry terminal (Wheeler, 2009).³

Fictionalized as G. East and K. Wheeler admit in their acknowledgements, to prioritise the entertainment, and dramatized, the migration process itself is an attracting 'adventure' as M. Wright repeatedly calls his relocation, and the readers project themselves into the narrators' lives that have become heroic.⁴ This is particularly interesting in contrast with the primary corpus I have been working with, composed of interviews and forum posts, where migrants recount their migration process. The situations related as embarrassing (misunderstanding and lack of language knowledge) or uncomfortable (absence of water, electricity or central heating, never-ending renovation works, etc.) are rarely recounted for the entertainment of the others and more than often remain a painful memory and a subject of depression and reflection on the reasonability of such a project as the migration in the French rural countryside. But in their books the narrators seem to always find the resources to see a brighter future allowing a positive projection of the reader in this experience. The irony washes away the anxiety and discouragement the authors might have gone through. If bittersweet, they remain "feel-good readings". The authors seem to play with the myth of the relocation as a fun adventure without really scratching its surface.

6. Socialising in rural France

Despite the initial reluctance of some to get acquainted with other British migrants in an effort to blend with the local population, all the narrators owe the finding of the house or/and of the starting of their new social life, to other British people settled in the area. But they also all built successful relationships with the local populations.

³ As she hears someone walking up and down the corridor of her hotel, the narrator is seized by terror and call the police, only to find out the morning after that the person she was hearing was a local policeman guarding an illegal migrant's room.

⁴ Yet, the reader will also find a recurring self-depreciating and anti-heroic theme, as the narrators reflect on their own flaws, humorously in the case of East and Mayle, or as a reflexive exercise for Wiles, Wright and Wheeler. But even more so, this window on the narrators' emotions might prompt the empathy of the readers.

The socialisation processes offers the opportunity to exploit the cultural differences as another important humoristic material. With the exception of R. Wiles's and of M. Wright's careful characterisations that rarely rely on sociocultural features, many of the perceived different behaviours of the characters tend to be essentialised as typically French, rural, or British, generating or replicating positive and negative stereotypes that fuel humorous descriptions of both the French and British⁵ individuals met in rural France.

As for an example, we can find an extensive use of the word 'Gallic' when it comes to describe French men's behaviour ("ruthless Gallic determination" in Wheeler, 2009; "typical Gallic exaggeration" in Mayle, 1991; "Classic Gallic tolerance" in East, 2006), or lists of burlesque social rules that apply to the French way of driving (East, 2006) or of playing the French game of *boules* (Mayle, 1991). P. Mayle and G. East are particularly keen on parodying the ethnographic description of 'the French' in general, estranging them in the process. With a less satirical tone, but filled with irony, the authors more often describe the interaction rites they have observed or integrated to socialise with the locals in rural areas:

It had taken me some months to get used to the Provençal delight in physical contact. Like anyone brought up in England, I had absorbed certain social mannerisms. (...) To be engulfed in a Provençal welcome, as thorough and searching as being frisked by airport security guards, was at first, a startling experience. Now I enjoyed it, and I was fascinated by the niceties of the social ritual, and the sign language which is an essential part of any Provençal encounter. (Mayle, 1991).

Alone again, and without method or masterplan, I am doing my best to *m'intégrer avec les Français*. I have now conquered my fear of entering the smoky, all-males cafés in town, where leather-faced farmers stand over their ten a.m. beers at the bar. The secret, I discover after a series of botched visits and bottomless silences, is to stride in with a cheery '*Bonjour, Messieurs,*' and to shake hands with everything that moves. (Wright, 2006).

Given that Wright comes from an urban and wealthier environment than these 'leather-faced farmers', this extract exemplifies how strategies of condescension (Bourdieu, 1982) are regularly used in these memoirs, with often the paradoxical intention of the authors to praise their new social environments' simplicity and

⁵ Here I will only focus on cultural differentialism, but an interesting volume of heteronormative gender stereotypes can be found, particularly in G. East K. Wheeler and R. Wright's works.

authenticity. A class contrast between urban UK and rural can also be read in K. Wheeler's works:

But some days are not so good: queuing in the post office, for example, behind someone who is counting the contents of their piggy bank before the solitary cashier is never fun. And, although I did not expect life in the French countryside to be all pink champagne and Chanel suits, I do long for a little more glamour. The local Intermarché is a bit of a comedown after Planet Organic in Notting Hill or even Marks & Spencer food court in Kensington, where I bought chocolate ginger biscuits (...) alongside yummy mummies dressed more for clubbing than buying a pint of milk, in tight jeans and revealing tops. (Wheeler, 2010).

From time to time, some of the most simplifying stereotypes are deconstructed: for instance to K. Wheeler's surprise, the lady mayor of a nearby village is often stylishly dressed, and M. Wright mocks his own expectation to find his neighbours living in a ramshackle house, when they actually live with all the comfort modern life can provide.

Yet, the authors - M. Wright, P. Mayle and G. East especially - continue playing on other stereotypes all through the books:

The French have the reputation for taking all the light-bulb with them when they move house. Actually that's unfair. They don't just take the light-bulbs. They also take the door handles, radiators, kitchen sink, the works. (Wright, 2006).

As in pre-war Britain, the ladies of Contentin⁶ still let their men appear to be in charge when out and about, excepting certain obvious arenas such as the shop, church and, when the [lady] patron is pushed too far, the Bar Ghislaine. (East, 2006).

In addition to prompt the readers amusement, the essentialisation reinforces the exoticism of living in rural France, and as the stereotypes usually revolves around the rusticity of the place, and presents it as preserved from the modern evolutions. The explorations of the perceived cultural differences are rarely perceived as potential deep frustrations, and remain on the anecdotal level.

Beyond generalisations and categories, the authors seem mainly to resort to strong, if not caricatured, characterisation such as the haughty British (K. Wheeler's Annabelle; P. Mayle's Tony), the rustic French man (G. East's Georges and René; P.

⁶ A part of Normandy.

Mayle's Menucci; M. Wright's Gilles and R. Wiles's Mr André), the old and kind next door lady always offering her help (K. Wheeler's Colette and R. Wiles's Véronique). These personalities are usually constructed as radically different from the narrators, and will be either conflicting or bonding with them.

Strikingly, the status of the explorer puts the author in the powerful position of describing the others. A parallel can be made with the ethnographers' ethical and critical problematic lying in the unbalanced power they have to publically expose their analysis of their informants' social practices in a social field that the informants are unlikely to contribute (Heller, 2011). The authors, obviously, are not expected to develop such an ethical reflexivity. Yet, the some might understand the potential discomfort in being pictured and estranged in those books: "the townspeople have not felt the urge to drum me out of the region - though this may be because the book has not yet been translated into French" writes M. Wright in the note of the paperback edition of *C'est La Folie*.

Besides, the centration on the narrators' perspective and the access the readers have to the most complex feelings of the narrators contrast with the fact that the reader has no access to the other characters' inner thoughts. I would argue that this contrast tends to erase the other characters' agency and promote that of the narrator.

7. The linguistic landscape: Spotting the patois and speaking French

Interestingly, M. Wright and K. Wheeler are the only two authors who spoke French before their arrival in Limousin, and they are also the only ones not to mention a local linguistic variation, a *patois*. In Limousin, R. Wiles (2003) documents the variations as "unwritten regional dialects" and "rustic speech[es]", and he seems to have inquired about them as he rightly distinguishes the *langues d'oc* (towards the south), and *langues d'oïl* (towards the north). For G. East the variety of the Norman language he hears is a derivative form of the French standard, and is strategically used to exclude the outsiders (including the other Normans that speak a different *patois*). P. Mayle, seems not to distinguish between the Provençal languages and French spoken with a Provençal accent. He describes it as "a rich, soupy patois". The local language adds here again to the rusticity of the place. And with the exception of G. East who

seemingly focus his learning effort on the Norman variety spoken in his village, they tend not to be considered as the variety to be practiced.

R. Wiles, G. East and P. Mayle will all claim to be learning and progressing in French, but this learning process is rarely explicated. It seems to so happen without any specific studying strategy.

The resources and services in English that they benefit from is rarely questioned, with G. East even questioning with a sense of controversy “why the French insist on not speaking a perfectly acceptable language like English?” (East, 2006). Yet, apart from this chauvinistic provocation, a recurring humoristic pattern used by the author, they all seem to consider that speaking French with the local population is the norm to reach. M. Wright even makes a point to speak French only, and this transpires in his writing as French words or sentences can be read on most pages. R. Wiles describes a scene during which he is shamed of not talking any French, and he adds quickly that since then he “rapidly learned to understand and converse in French”. But it is not always explicit what language is spoken in the dialogs reported, which gives the readers the impression that the dominant language is English.

The recurring use of code switching contributes in giving a sense of authenticity to the stories and brings the readers into the French landscape. French is notably used to designate the house they are working on, by the name of origin of their property (*Le Mas Mauvis, le petit bijou, le Moulin de la Puce, La Folie*), a generic name (*la grange*), or by a newly attributed name (*Maison Coquelicot*). The specific vocabulary of construction and bureaucracy tends also not to be translated, especially if it has no equivalent, so as the basic greetings and titles.

8. Conclusions: Perpetuating the fetishisms of the lifestyle migration

With this outline of common features among six lifestyle migrants’ memoirs, I attempted to describe what expectations these accounts of French rural life can convey to the readers.

As products of the lifestyle market, they have to be engaging and have the readers positively projecting themselves into the narrators' choices. Some of these books' functions could be linked to those that Giddens find in the soap operas:

[...] a mixture of contingency, reflexivity and fate. The form is what matters rather than the content; in these stories one gains a sense of reflexive control over life circumstances, a feeling of a coherent narrative which is a reassuring balance to difficulties in sustaining the narrative of the self in actual social situations". (Giddens, 1991: 199).

Reading stories where individuals master they fear, unexpected misadventures and gain control on their life by making life-changing decision might indeed be reassuring. Meanwhile, the narrative structure of the books, centred on one character, encourages the empathy of the readers, seduces and entertains them. Indeed, I would argue that this focus on the narrator's self-identity help structure and "trigger" the desire for mobility by shifting the focus away from the most pragmatic aspects of the economic exchange that is behind the "dream". These accounts mainly produce images that are not conflicting with the development of the lifestyle markets. The last chapter of each book presented here leave the reader on the perspective of more good times to come in France, and with the resolution of the narrators to pursue their quest. M. Wright's introductory note is an invitation to follow his steps as he writes, "there are many other little towns, and many other incarnation of Jolibois, waiting to be explored".

Considering media as "a social relation among people" (Debord, 1996), it is apparent that the overall description of the places and local populations in these memoirs remains positive, but often stereotypical in a condescending way. This condescension is notably achieved by an insistence on describing the rusticity of the place, a token of the rural myth, rather than its modernity. This observation can be link to the structural socioeconomically aspects that condition lifestyle migration: the urban places the migrants come from may not offer a satisfying lifestyle, but they concentrate more economic resources, are considered as nexus of modernity, and have a higher economic value, which enables the migrants to have the economical means to relocate.⁷ Therefore, such social structural aspects as the privilege of the

⁷ Without presuming that they can actually afford the relocation on the long run.

migrants (Croucher, 2012) behind the possibilities of a voluntary migration, of buying properties or of benefiting from local welcoming strategies (Etrillard, forthcoming) transpire in this discursive construction of the idyll. It is also represented in the inequality of the self-centred perspective of the memoirs that only gives the floor to the local populations via the narrator's gaze, which estranges them in the process.

The relocation literature illustrates the discursive production of myths that is comprised in the fetishisms of lifestyle migration markets. These writings presented as memoirs, do not aim at producing the most accurate account of the British migrants' life in rural France, and to develop the readers' critical reflexivity about their potential relocation in rural France. Commodities themselves, they are part of the 'illusory apparatus' necessary to promote lifestyle markets.

To follow Heller on her insistence on linking public and media discourse to social practices, an interesting agenda might be opened here, to develop more thoroughly the linkage between discourse and actual social structuration, as Heller would argue, (Heller, 2001) to investigate the actual impact of this literature on the migrants' relocation processes and practices.

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