

The Power of Babel

MARTHA WALKER, EDITOR

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An MBC Alumna as Gulliver? Another View of Traveling and Living Abroad

Desiree Byker '99

Near the end of my six years in Asia, a mere 281 years after Jonathan Swift published *Gulliver's Travels*, I ran across a copy in a Sri Lankan bookstore. An illustration of Gulliver wrapped in Lilliputian threads came back to me from a simplified version I read in childhood, and I wondered about the story's relationship to my own questions about travel. Over the next few weeks, I read the original, and it turns out that, like me, Gulliver read travel books "with great delight in (his) younger days," but he grew up to go around "the globe ... contradict(ing) many fabulous accounts from his own observations." On the other hand, I went around the world thinking I was missing something.

After his escape from Lilliput, Gulliver undertook his subsequent voy-

ages reluctantly; he needed money to support his commitments at home, and seafaring was what he knew. At the end of a my post-baccalaureate year of teaching in Japan, I came back for graduate school. Two years later, no more enlightened and in need of money, I left again. I led something like a life in a bare apartment in Seoul for several years, a limbo where few things were familiar and nothing was engagingly strange. Having visited 10 countries on four continents, I was disappointed with my findings: the Sistine Chapel is small and scaffolded, a bus route winds up Mount Fuji, and the ancient palaces of Korea are late-20th-century reconstructions.

Established in South Korea, bereft of my hopes for the transformative power of travel, I envied Gulliver's contemporaries and their inheritance of incomplete maps



One of the many sights Byker encountered in India were Bollywood signs such as this.

PHOTO BY DESIREE BYKER '99

and undocumented experiences.

Apparently, there were no more revelations to be had in modern travel, so I turned to everyday pleasures. The small satisfactions available were more than I had guessed, in number and in kind: a couch, a dog, kitchen utensils, and some close friends. The paralyzing sense that life had been lived by others too many times before with the same inevitable result was replaced by a desire for all the attachments of home. Eventually I intend to settle on the same continent as my family (North America), but first I wanted to experiment.

Gulliver's attention to detail during his time abroad made the worst situations bearable and the best of them fascinating. His attention was grounded in a comparison of what he saw with the society that yielded him. Now, cultural output is too much and too intermingled to provide a reliable foundation, so on my way home, traveling through Mongolia, India, and Sri Lanka, I decided to rely on myself.



PHOTO BY DESIREE BYKER '99

Byker and a friend at a market. Byker traveled through Sri Lanka, India, and Mongolia on her way back to the U.S. after living for several years in Seoul, South Korea.

Departmental NEWS

Sabbatical Research: Cultural Trends at Home

Carrie Douglass, professor of Spanish and anthropology is on sabbatical in 2007–08 to continue work on her latest book that delves into a little-known aspect of the life of former president Thomas Jefferson. Douglass' research turns from a focus on Europe — and Spain in particular — to cultural and historical contexts closer to her Charlottesville, Virginia home. She is investigating Jefferson, his horses, and the role of riding in his life in Albemarle at Monticello. Douglass is planning a lavishly illustrated book that connects Jefferson's personal and intellectual passions with his 18th-century world through the narrative of his horses. Trade, travel, and agriculture the world over came together in Jefferson's stables, Douglass said.

World Languages, Literature, and Cultures Looks Ahead to Spencer Center Connections

The department of world languages, literature, and cultures looks forward to having information on education in international context in one location at the Samuel and Ava Spencer Center for Civic and Global Engagement, dedicated October 11. Students at Mary Baldwin College from other countries and those from the US interested in study and service abroad will find information and services at the new center, located in Consuelo Slaughter Wenger Hall.

New Director of International Programs Heather Ward has been at work since August 1, welcoming new international students and Fulbright visitors, and planning the most effective ways to highlight MBC's focus on global awareness. Ward's experience in international development — including leading a Ford Foundation-sponsored project to strengthen police accountability in 10 emerging democracies on five continents and coordinating the resettlement of thousands of Cuban migrants to the US and other countries from refugee camps at Guantanamo Bay as an employee of

the US Department of Justice — makes her an asset to the college community. Faculty and students in the department are excited that someone of her caliber is advocating international involvement at MBC.

Ward is joined by new Director of Civic Engagement Julie Shepherd, a faculty-in-residence, a faculty and staff fellow, and two artists-in-residence at the Center that represent several nationalities and diverse backgrounds. The mission of the center is to advance and serve as a

major resource for community service and international opportunities, and it is named in honor of esteemed MBC President Emeritus Samuel R. Spencer Jr. and his wife, Ava. The hope is to also blend the concepts of service learning and international travel in ways that encourage students to engage in overseas volunteerism and aid. Read more about the people and events associated with the Spencer Center online at www.mbc.edu/news, click on "Spencer Center Takes Shape."



The Arc d'Triumph is one of many landmarks students will see during May Term in Paris.

Paris *Encore Une Fois*

Students with an intermediate background in French will once again have the opportunity to travel to Paris for three weeks during May Term 2008 for a theater course. They will experience the benefits of language and cultural immersion during home stays with host families in the city. Attending performances, visiting landmarks, and learning about life in Paris from host families will offer adventurous students an exceptional opportunity for engagement in a community unlike their own.

Contact: Martha Walker, associate professor of French at mwalker@mbc.edu

Jaunt to Japan

Students also have the chance to spend May Term in Japan again this year under the direction of professors Daniel Métraux and Jim McCrory. They will be based in Tokyo, one of the world's most exciting cities, relish beautiful mountain and seaside scenery, tour ancient historical Kamakura and Nikko, get an inside tour of Japanese Parliament (Diet), and visit Japanese schools. There will also be lots of free time to explore.

Contact: Daniel Métraux, professor of Asian studies at dmetraux@mbc.edu

All Aboard for May Term Abroad

Six international venues are offered for May Term 2008. More details on page 6.

Fulbright Scholars Continue to Enrich MBC Landscape

'Access to the Muslim World' Brings Noted Indian Art Historian to Campus

In March 2007, Mary Baldwin College welcomed Dr. Geeti Sen, a senior visiting specialist through the Fulbright Program "Access to the Muslim World." Sen was formerly chief editor at the India International Centre in New Delhi and has authored 10 books. Her most recent is titled *Feminine Fables: Imaging the Indian Woman through Painting, Photography and Cinema*. Her awards include a Smithsonian Fellowship, a Homi Bhabha Fellowship, and a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship.

Sen gave presentations at several community venues and spoke in connection with Women's History Month with a talk titled, "Reclaiming the Body: Contemporary Women Artists in India." During her final week at Mary Baldwin, she spoke at a dinner symposium in Hunt Gallery with invited guests from the community where she presented "Mughal Gardens of Paradise."

Sen also offered a workshop-seminar on campus titled "Aspects of Muslim Culture in India: A Changing Ethos" that analyzed art history and women's roles as seen through art and film in the Muslim and Indian world. Students with strong backgrounds and specific interest in the field were invited to participate, and 33 signed up for the academic workshop, which met each afternoon for two weeks. Sen consulted with them outside of class as well and encouraged their interest in India and the Muslim world. Students reflected enthusiastically about the special workshop in the following excerpts from their course evaluations, which are completed anonymously:

- Dr. Sen has made me interested in taking a more in-depth look at art traditions of a non-Western nature. Even though I am not an art major, I found her talks on Moghul art to be fascinating and, as a result, [I] am planning on looking more into the traditions and culture of India and its growth as a nation.
- Dr. Sen brought parts of India's history to life, not only through the art-

work she showed us, but in the anecdotes that she provided from having met some of the artists, [visiting] the different mosques, and the respectful way that she addressed the Muslim religion.

- I sincerely enjoyed the classes taught by Dr. Sen and learned a great deal about Islam in a cultural context in India. I think classes of these sorts are of great importance to students as insight into other cultures. Also, Dr. Sen was good enough to let me interview her for my senior thesis/documentary project, and it proved to be an extremely valuable contribution. I've benefited greatly from her visit.
- I found Dr. Sen's teaching to be extremely interesting, and the subject matter fascinating. The topics were well chosen, and her personal relationship with so many of the modern, contemporary artists gave depth to her lectures.
- After taking the colloquium with Dr. Sen, many of the mysteries of the Muslim people and the culture of India have been revealed. The beautiful artwork and the insightful perspectives she had on the artwork she showed were illuminating. It is amazing to think that she had such a close relationship with many of the modern artists of India whose works she displayed; it gave her talks an obvious depth, making the artists and their art more real to me.
- I thought Dr. Sen's presentations were wonderfully informative and a truly new experience for me. I most enjoyed her three lectures on contemporary artists. It was in these lectures that Dr. Sen's passion for her work truly came out to me. Her personal knowledge of the artists allowed her to share with us far beyond any survey of art and to really convey to us both the beauty and significance of the art to which she has devoted her life's studies. A wonderful experience overall!



PHOTO BY DAWN MEDLEY

Fulbright Visiting Specialist Geeti Sen worked intensely with students during her time at MBC.

New Fulbright Visitors Share Scholarship from Egypt, Oman

MBC welcomes two scholars under the auspices of Fulbright programs this year. Ibtihaj Al-Araimi serves as Fulbright foreign language teaching assistant. She comes from Oman to continue her graduate work in English and to serve as teaching assistant in beginning and intermediate language classes with Professor Yusri Zaro, adjunct instructor of Arabic.

Egyptian Fulbright scholar Heba Abdel-Naby also joined the MBC faculty for the entire academic year, offering two courses in art history. The first, in session this fall, Art and Architecture in Egypt, quickly reached full enrollment during pre-registration last spring. In spring 2008, Abdel-Naby will teach a course focusing on the city of Cairo. She serves as lecturer on Islamic civilization at Egypt's Alexandria University, where she earned her doctorate in 2004. Her scholarly fields of expertise include Islamic art, civilization, and history.

These appointments enable the college to strengthen its commitment to expanding study of the Middle East and Islamic culture and promise to afford rich intellectual opportunities for the Mary Baldwin community.

Yasukuni Shrine in
Tokyo, Japan

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Asian WWII Museums Present Conflicting Accounts

Daniel Métraux,
PROFESSOR OF ASIAN STUDIES

Japan and China have emerged as major world powers in recent years. They trade extensively with each other and one finds many Japanese tourists in China and even more Chinese in Tokyo. Below this amicable surface, however, deep hostile feelings remain, dating back to Japan's invasion of China in the 1930s and early 1940s. One can witness this ever-present hostility at both nations' primary WWII memorials: Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo and Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing

Historical memories play a key role in the sour relations that exist today between China and Japan. If one visits Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo or the Museum for the War of Resistance Against Japan (next to the Marco Polo Bridge), one sees very different interpretations of World War II in China. We know the outcome of the war: Japan was defeated and driven out of China, but not before its army of six million men brought incredible destruction to that nation. Japanese casualties were high, but it was much worse for the Chinese. Estimates of Chinese war dead vary greatly, from 15 million to 30 million, mainly civilians. There were many atrocities, none so famous as the Nanjing (Nanking) Massacre of 1937.

A visit to Yasukuni Shrine in the Kudanshita area of downtown Tokyo gives the Japanese view of the war. The theme of the museum next to the shrine is

that the Japanese were the good guys and that the Allied Powers were the bad guys. We are told that Japan's unselfish goal was the liberation of Asia from Western imperialists. Japanese soldiers fought hard for this liberation, but Japan did suffer a horrible defeat. Ultimately, though, Japan claims victory because some of its war goals were achieved. Western powers made a futile attempt to recover their colonies and their influence in Asia, museum-goers are told, but Japanese victories in the early stages of the war had unleashed the forces of nationalism in many Asian countries, which ultimately led to their liberation.

There were no displays or mention of Nanjing or any other massacres in China, and a prominently displayed book I purchased in the museum bookstore went to great lengths to deny that the Nanjing massacre occurred. According to their exhibits, the pictures were fakes, doctored as Allied propaganda to humiliate the Japanese. A colorful film running continuously in the museum's theatre, "Lest We Forget," is a tribute to Japan's WWII heroes who died liberating Asia from the West.

The Chinese version of the war on display at Marco Polo Bridge is quite different. Fighting that led to Japan's massive invasion of the Chinese mainland broke out at Marco Polo Bridge during summer

1937. The bridge itself, which dates back nearly a 1,000 years, is beautifully preserved, although one can still see bullet holes. The Museum for the War of Resistance Against Japan sits next to the bridge and is a very modern structure full of exhibits commemorating China's historic resistance against Japanese invaders. One sees many exhibits of Japanese forces cheering "Banzai" as they shoot Chinese civilians, while other photos show piles of corpses of Chinese soldiers and civilians murdered by the Japanese. The destruction at Nanjing is shown in a range of pictures of the efforts of Chinese people's stand against Japanese aggressors. The real heroes, visitors to this museum are instructed, were Chinese Communists led by Mao Tse-Tung, although there are also pictures of Nationalist troops and Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, who also fought the Japanese. Statues and memorials to foreigners who fought the Japanese on behalf of the Chinese join the Chinese leaders. A statue of American General Claire Chenault greets visitors at the front door.

Books on sale in this gift shop resemble those at Yasukuni Shrine, except, of course, the Chinese are the heroes and the Japanese are villains. One finds endless discussions of massacres by Japanese troops, especially the Nanjing massacre. The Chinese interpretation of World War II history is the exact antithesis of what one learns in Tokyo.

Both sides have become captives of history. Those who fought in World War II have now almost died out, but daily the Chinese press contains articles denouncing Japan, forever reminding readers what Japanese forces did three generations ago. Many rightist politicians in Tokyo are just as negative in their attacks on China. It is sad to read these comments, but visits to these two museums are an even more disheartening commentary on what these two great powers think of each other.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing, China

Basques in Spain and France

Russell Prize Research on a Personal Level

As reported in last summer's Power of Babel, Jessie Labadie '07, who graduated summa cum laude with distinction in both French and Spanish, won the 2006 Margaret Kable Russell Scholarship to support her research on the political differences between Basques in Spain and France. In December 2006, she traveled to the Basque region to conduct interviews in both countries. To document her project formally for the MBC community, Labadie gave a presentation in May and created a multimedia presentation for the MBC archives. In the short essay below she highlights some of the personal stories that informed her scholarly pursuits.

At the weekly open air market in Gernika, 75-year-old Bettan Torres recounted with surprising detail his experience at age six when he began attending school in a small pueblo in the Bizcaia province of Spanish Basque country. The eldest child of parents born in the same village, Torres only spoke the Basque language, Euskera, until he started school. Under dictator Francisco Franco, the Spanish national school system required that lessons be given in Castilian Spanish and that any student (or teacher, for that matter) found speaking a regional language be punished. Torres' teacher gave a stick to the first child he heard speaking Euskera each day; the stick was passed around the class as the teacher heard other students breaking the language law. At the end of the day, the child holding the stick would be beaten with it. For Torres, his experiences growing up during Franco's dictatorship were formative in his idea of what it means to be Basque. When I asked him if he now considers himself to be Spanish or Basque, he replied that he had never been Spanish.

Philippe Peytieu, a bartender in a quiet restaurant in Bayonne, France had a very

different response when I asked him if he considers himself French or Basque. "I pay French taxes; I must be French," he said. For Peytieu and all three of his Sunday afternoon patrons, being from Basque country isn't much different from being from Provence; the cultural differences are greatly outweighed by national similarities. On some level, this difference of opinion is what I was looking for when I set out to find the discrepancy between French and Spanish Basques (or — as they insist south of the Pyrenees — Northern and Southern Basques). I wanted clear-cut answers to the questions I initially posed: Why are the Spanish Basques more militant in their demands for independence than their French counterparts? Why does there seem to be a lack of a fight for autonomy on the French side when other French regions (Corsica, Brittany) seek that very situation? If they are the same people, why the discrepancy?

As I was preparing for the trip, most people I spoke to stateside were not even aware that there was a Northern Basque country in the southwest of France. It is not surprising, considering that most

in this lifetime. Everything else — from ancient Greece to the evening news — had no inherent claim to my attention. My life is strung together with whatever catches my eye.

At the end of his journey, Gulliver's foundation, being external, crumbled. After a few years on an island of rational horses, he departed unwillingly, an exile from their utopian herd because of his nature, and lived out his days with the inhabitants of the stable, unable to tolerate the futile passions of his own species. I make these observations from my last stop, at the end of six months in India.

GULLIVER, Cont. from page 1

Without worrying how my attractions squared with the countless accounts of others who had gone before me, it was much easier to pay attention. The Taj Mahal still wasn't much more than a heavily guarded, chillingly austere structure, but the social interactions of the people in line were fascinating. I found myself absorbed in the thousands of small variances in everyday life. Spending as much time as I liked with whatever little thing would yield a host of relations and questions, more than I expected to get to



Jessie Labadie was honored for her Russell Scholar project and academic honors at Commencement 2007.

MBC FILE PHOTO

media attention devoted to this region by the international press concerns ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), a terrorist group that finds its roots and members in Spain. The peoples of País Vasco (Spain) and Pays Basque (France) are supposedly united by language and culture. Indeed, the elderly men I spoke to in Gernika claim there is no difference between the two politically separate regions. Maybe it is this vision itself of a united, independent Basque country held by many Spaniards that accounts for the difference in political views.

For Pedro Auillre, a bartender in a small pinxtos bar that is home to what is heralded as the best cod in the Casco Viejo neighborhood of Bilbao, Spain, it depends on to whom you're speaking. In his opinion, being Basque is just as much about food as it is history.

Through a chain of events that began with a conversation 10 years ago in the basement print shop of Deming Hall [at Mary Baldwin College], I'm in Auroville, India, a place conceived in 1968 to embody "human unity" by a woman called The Mother. It is a living experiment, and I'm lodging at a place called Pony Farm, surrounded by — in Gulliver's words — *Houyhnhnms* (horses) and *Yahoos* (people), who practice "horse communication." This is where I stop thinking Gulliver has anything on me, because I return gladly to thrive among my familiars. ▲

MAY TERM TRIPS 2008



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COSTA RICA	ENGLAND/WALES	PARIS	ITALY	CENTRAL EUROPE	JAPAN
Field Ornithology <i>Learn to identify birds and their biology and conservation.</i>	Celtic Britain <i>View Britain's multicultural side at historic and literary sites.</i>	Theater Study <i>Experience language and cultural immersion.</i>	Renaissance Studies <i>Study art on site in Rome, Florence, Venice, and other cities.</i>	Science in Cultural Context <i>See where significant scientific discoveries were made.</i>	Asian Studies <i>Tour historical, political, and educational sites in and around Tokyo</i>
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