The Winning Narrative: The Social Genesis of Pilgrimage Sites

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While pilgrimage sites may be sparked by historical events, their meaning is created by their accompanying narratives. A pilgrimage site becomes sacred to visitors not merely because of scripture, or supposed religious facts, but also because of social and psychological contexts. It is their winning narrative that supplies meaning and a framework for understanding. Without such narratives, it is conceivable that some pilgrimage sites would not have gained their enduring popularity and international appeal. This article not only describes a few instances of such sites rising to fame, but also the philosophy behind a winning narrative.

The idea that narrative can construct the Identity of a place is based on the notion that a story can supply meaning by unifying discrete, and otherwise disjointed events, into a coherent account (McAdams, 2013). While the concept of narrative identity is most often associated with personal psychology (Hammack, 2011; Nussbaum, 1990), the authors of this paper find analogies between the function of narrative in personal psychology, and in pilgrimage. These analogies are applied to pilgrimage to illustrate how narratives function at pilgrimage sites to unite events with historical, religious, personal, cultural and political contexts. A pilgrimage narrative forms the framework for how people and institutions understand their roles and motivations, and thus how they will act, respond, and experience things.

The authors identify five features that make some narratives more successful than others, claiming that 'winning narratives' are so powerful that a sacred site or shrine's establishment and development could not have done without it, or at least, would not have enjoyed the rate of success in visitor numbers in comparison to similar sites that lacked a winning narrative and enjoyed therefore less popularity and visitors. The five features of a winning narrative are here illustrated with examples.

Key Words: narrative, narrative identity, pilgrimage, shrines, meaning, five narrative features

Introductory Note to the Reader: on the scope of winning narratives in this paper

Historically and traditionally, in the Western Christian context, pilgrimages were driven by religious narratives. However, the authors of this paper have a wider scope that includes alternative contexts. This paper will discuss winning narratives from other sources, written by eyewitnesses and constructed as travel guidebooks or works of literary fiction about a pilgrimage, while others were recorded as historical accounts of a pilgrimage, or even as a journalistic report.

In this article, samples of various kinds of pilgrimages will be provided, among others, traditional religious, religious in the sense of the New Religious Movements, secular, spiritual, literary and fictional forms of pilgrimage. Also, to be precise, although the winning narrative is usually measured quantitatively through accessibility to the shrine and large visitor numbers over the long term, the phenomenon of the winning narrative does not measure the different levels of intensity of each pilgrim's experience.

As a methodology, historical and literary research has been engaged in, as well as fieldwork over many years as the authors themselves were pilgrims.

Narrative Identity: how narrative supplies meaning through selective description

'Pilgrimage' in this article is to be understood in its broadest sense, including non-religious pilgrimage. A working definition of pilgrimage is taken from Phil Cousineau, *'a transformative journey to a sacred center'* (2012: xxv). Transformation can be anything from learning something new, to getting an insight, confirming an old thought, a spiritual experience or a religious one at a place that is meaningful to the recipient. A sacred centre is then, for all intents and purposes of this paper, anything from a shrine where a pilgrim has an epiphany to an eight-year old girl who believes she is a fairy during her stay in Disneyland.

The idea that narrative can supply meaning to a story, a life, a place or a pilgrimage, is based on the notion that a story unifies disjointed events into a coherent account (McAdams, 2013). This unity is achieved by the process of *selecting* which events have significance, and which are irrelevant to a story. Selection is necessary because any attempt to *fully* describe an event is met with the problem of choosing from amongst infinite details. A complete description would, by definition, include the entire history of events—both significant and insignificant—and result in 'a tale … of sound and fury, signifying nothing' (Shakespeare, Macbeth). Narratives, through selecting and interpreting matters worthy to remember, and by joining seemingly unrelated events, may supply meaning where otherwise there was none. A narrative tries to avoid the swamp of completeness and is therefore, by design, a result of choice rather than merely a descriptive report of the facts.

By selecting some things to emphasise, and relegating others to insignificance, a narrative *constructs* a story with a beginning, middle, and end, in order to make sense of events (Sartre, 2007). Explaining this idea from Sartre's *Nausea*, Detmer writes that

> *meanings can emerge only by means of a focusing activity which would highlight some features … for otherwise meaning would be drowned out in a cacophony of the infinite* (Detmer, 2008:56).

This selectivity means, of course, that narratives can never be taken for objective truths, but rather, as 'contingent' creations that are a product of historical circumstances (Rorty, 1989). Since narratives are constructions, rather than simply reports, it follows that one can choose between narratives with different meanings. Narratives, then, are not merely a collection of chronological events, but choices as to which events are important, and which are inessential, and these choices are what organise events into an intelligible sequence. However, these choices are constrained by historical facts, something which Schechtman refers to as the 'reality constraint' (2015:14). Thus, one can never be more than a 'co-author' of a narrative (MacIntyre, 2007:213).

MacIntyre's book *After Virtue* has been very influential in reviving narrative as a way of understanding *personal* identity, and in it he tries to 'show how natural it is to think of the self in a narrative mode' (MacIntyre, 2007:206). The uniting of events is what makes a life intelligible as 'more than a sequence of individual actions and episodes' (MacIntrye, 2007:204). MacIntyre's strong thesis on narrative is that what makes any particular behaviour *understandable, at all*, is the narrative in which it is situated. For example, an action that takes places inside the narrative of a marriage, or in 'the third act' of life, or in the context of following a recipe, or in a narrative of natural cycles, has a different meaning than outside these framing narratives. The narrative provides a 'setting' and 'history' which is *essential* for understanding an individual's activity, because without it, it would actually be 'unintelligible' (206-207). Actions, as well as conversations, require context for understanding.

The Use of Narrative in Personal Psychology

The concept of narrative identity is most often associated with personal psychology (Hammack, 2011; Nussbaum, 1990). The seventeenth century philosopher John Locke argued that personal identity through time was not a matter of *physical* continuity of the same body, but a matter of continuity of *consciousness* supplied by overlapping memories (Locke, 1694). Thus, one understands their own personal identity as united by a series of life events—such as childhood, school graduations, romances, and old age—that are causally linked in memory. However, since there is a selection process involved in recalling these experiences, we are, in effect, creating ourselves through this narrative description (Rorty, 1989:7). In personal psychology, one tries to understand their life by finding a narrative that makes sense of it. Connecting this storytelling activity to Locke's thesis of personal identity, Rudd writes that

To lack such a narrative structure in one's life is to lack any stable sense of personal identity, any sense of oneself as enduring through time as the same person (Rudd, 2001:138-9).

Tourists and Pilgrims

Travellers often use narratives that supply them with an Identity and transform their adventures into a meaningful activity. The adoption of a backpacker identity, for instance, will be guided by an ethos of independence, a deliberate shunning of luxury, and a practice of travelling light. The backpacker finds meaning this way, because they believe that adopting such practices will allow them to achieve the goal of more authentic travel. Other tourists might identify with the project of being a 'foodie'; or a 'jet-setter'; or the 'hero-on-a-quest' popularised by Joseph Campbell (Campbell, 1949). These narratives will organise otherwise random experiences into a larger, coherent story, and thus supply a purpose and meaning to their travels. For example, when travellers relate misadventures, they sometimes create a narrative that assigns 'significance to what looked like hopeless boredom at the time,' or that creates 'a resolution of anxiety, indifference, fear' (Fraser, 1991:xvi).

Pilgrims know what to do because they know their *place in the story* of which they are a part. Pilgrimage narratives *define the space* as well as *the roles* of the pilgrims acting in that space. They describe historical and religious events, and they also provide goals and a framework for how pilgrims will understand how to react, respond, and experience things. Philosopher and neurobiologist Owen Flanagan describes 'spaces of meaning,' as 'places where we go to make meaning and sense of things, including ourselves' (Flanagan, 2009:11). These spaces shape one's personal narrative by providing vocabularies, ideas, and direction.

> *It is* [he writes]*, to some significant degree, by living in these spaces that we make sense of things, orient our lives, find our way and live meaningfully* (Flanagan, 2009 :12).

Winning Narratives: Five Common Features

To be effective, narratives should tell good stories that are constrained by plausible facts but are still open to revision and to interpretation. Five features are proposed that seem to make up successful pilgrim narratives (Figure 1). *Winning* narratives provide a compelling story; they represent a 'live option'; they are able to link

Fig 1: Schematic representation of the five features of winning narratives

Source: Authors.

the present to the past; they provide goals; and they define a sense of closure that resolves the relevant questions. Examples are provided to illustrate one or more of these features, not with the intention of being comprehensive or exhaustive, but to exemplify each feature in context. This supports the thesis that the meaning of pilgrimage comes from a narrative context, and not merely from supposed 'facts' of history. Of course, there might be further features which contribute to a winning narrative that have not been identified in this article. For example, 'accessibility' is extremely important for having many visitors; however, it is not, as such, a 'narrative' feature. Below follows an analysis of each feature.

Winning Narratives: Feature #1 A compelling story

Nussbaum argues that good narratives work because they absorb the participants in a *compelling story*, without attempting to teach a lesson by way of 'schematic examples' (Nussbaum, 1990). Narratives are not arguments with premises and conclusions. Rather, they evoke a response from the pilgrim by supplying them with a place in the sweep of events—even if only through sympathetic imagination.

There is some scientific evidence of the efficacy of compelling narratives. Caulfield, while arguing that narratives can be misused to propagate fake science, cites evidence to show that narratives that are emotive and entertaining are more successful in gaining sympathy, for instance in crowdfunding and in public solicitation of organ donation (Caulfield, 2019:54). A necessary feature of a winning narrative for a pilgrimage is that it taps into this psychological disposition to believe in compelling narratives.

Winning Narratives: Feature #2 'live options'

Winning narratives should be grounded in what William James refers to as a 'live option' (James, 1927:22). A live option is simply one which is *conceivably true*, *given one's historical place and context*—even if that option is difficult to believe factually.

Monbiot uses a similar idea while discussing the narratives behind different *economic* theories. Monbiot concludes that

> *When we encounter a complex issue and try to understand it, what we look for is not consistent and reliable facts but a **consistent and comprehensible** story* (emphasis added) (Mobiot, 2018: 2).

The narrative must present things as following intelligibly *within accepted constraints of a particular environment*. So, certain activities will make sense for one to do—given that person's history and traditions, while others will not.

As mentioned above, the inescapable selectivity of narratives means that they can never be taken for objective truths, but rather, as a product of historical circumstances (Rorty, 1989). Wietzke, for example, explains how one's self is shaped by one's history, and how a commitment to a particular tradition is what allows a person to make sense of their life. He writes that an individual's narrative is 'nested within the practices and institutions of a particular community,' and that actions are intelligible—because they are seen as responses to this history (Wietzke, 2015:97). For example, James suggests that the choice of being a Christian or an agnostic is within the grasp of a New Englander of the late nineteenth century. However, the option of being a theosophist or a Mohammedan was apparently not a live option, says James, because the concepts were alien to that particular time and culture, and thus too unfamiliar to be considered a real possibility. Analogously, walking on a pilgrimage to Shinto shrines in Japan would not be a live option, but an empty gesture for a pilgrim of another faith. Echoing James' idea, Plummer notes that

> *Most stories that 'take off' in a culture do so because they slot easily into the most accepted narratives of that society* (Plummer 1995:115).

Winning Narratives: Feature #3 Connecting Past and Present

Pilgrimage narratives may be incited by events in the historical past, yet to provide a meaningful story, they must *unify that past with the present*. If the narrative connects the present-day modern pilgrim with past events, then it provides direction for the future.

The meaning of a pilgrimage is created by the accompanying narrative that provides a *framework* for

uniting historical events, religious and political contexts, and personal responses, into a coherent story. Just as narrative functions in personal psychology to provide integration and direction by uniting one's past with one's future goals, so too can narrative provide purpose and meaning in pilgrimage by organising the historical past with one's present experience and aims.

Narratives not only describe historical events but also shape future ones. A pilgrim comes to see how their personal actions are embedded in a narrative that connects them with historical events and religious meanings. Thus, we understand, express and experience things dependent on our narrative structures. The narrative thus supplies an individual pilgrim with an understanding of their role in the story, and this in turn will condition how they will act, respond, and experience things. It is for this reason that walking on a pilgrimage will have a different meaning than walking on the Appalachian Trail; and visiting Lourdes will not be the same as visiting the Eiffel Tower.

To perform its *unifying function*, a winning narrative provides a link between the modern-day pilgrim from the twenty-first century world, and the precipitating historical events.

This links with Mahoney's comments on the important role of relics and specific locations of historical events:

> It seemed to be that pilgrimage was an effort to see and touch things that were part of a story that had lodged in the mind, a story that explained the purpose of life. If you could go someplace and touch one of those things, you could be part of the story (Mahoney, 2003: 274).

Winning Narratives: Feature #4 Goals

Key to constructing a *meaningful* narrative is to frame the story in terms of reaching a goal. For example, actual lives-lived have no order, but are merely a collection of life-fragments in no intelligent sequence. MacIntyre sums this up succinctly: 'Human life is composed of discrete actions which lead nowhere, which have no order' (MacIntyre, 1981:214). Stories are able to supply coherence to these events by imposing upon them a sense of direction and purpose.

As Kierkegaard once remarked, we live life forwards, but understand it backwards (Kierkegaard, 1958:89). One never knows what will happen next, nor appreciate the significance of some events at the moment they are experiences, but an understanding of one's self as embedded in a narrative will supply goals that move one in a certain direction. When looking back on one's life, one can construct a narrative that explains the significance of past events and how they led to the place one is now, and how they influence how one will move forward. Thus, the way we understand and experience things as intelligible, rather than as accidental occurrences, is through the narratives that we supply them with. Existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir actually defines a meaningful human existence in terms of a 'constant reaching out for goals' (Arp, 2001:23); and MacIntyre reminds us of the central importance of ends, and that lives that lack 'any point' are often unintelligible to those living them, and can end in depression or suicide (MacIntryre, 2007:217).

Winning narratives are stories with a point. They provide goals, and thus supply a purpose for the pilgrimage. Taylor notes that narratives are not merely descriptions of events, but are normative (Taylor, 2010: 2); that is, they create expectations of what *one should do* next to reach a desired end. The goal might be to develop humility; a quest for truth; physical hardship; redemption; community spirit; service to others; an acceptance of one's fate as part of a divine plan; or to get in touch with creation. These goals can be hindered, but the goal provides a direction for someone to revise plans.

Winning Narratives: Feature #5 Closure (or Completion)

Lastly, winning narratives supply closure. Closure is a sense of finality and conclusion to a story, or a piece of music (Carrol 2007:2). Narratives define, more or less, what it means to reach 'successful' or 'appropriate' conclusion or fulfilment.

Finding meaning through narrative construction is useful in personal therapy; psychologists report that one's mental health can be improved if one can find structure in one's life, and closure on stressful past events. J. Haidt, in his book *The Happiness Hypothesis*, for example, argues

that one way to deal with painful, adverse life events is to 'reappraise' them by writing a meaningful narrative from which one can 'draw constructive lessons' and understand *why* things have happened (Haidt, 2006:147-148).

Closure serves an analogous function in tourism and pilgrimage. Fussell notes that the role of closure in British literary narratives of travel between the two world wars was measured by how close one came to the fantasy:

> *Even for mass tourists… the success of the holiday is proportionate to the degree that the myth is realized* (Fussell, 1980: 209).

Technically speaking, closure of a story is experienced, argues Carroll, 'when all the questions… are answered' (Carroll, 2007:1). Narratives raise questions. In the case of pilgrimage, the questions might be: Will the pilgrim be frustrated? or side-tracked? or abandon the experience? Will they feel the miracle of Lourdes? or discover the answers they were seeking while walking to Rome? There are master narratives, at the 'macro level' that 'organize large parts of the tale,' and at the 'micro level' of daily routines required to reach the larger goals (Carroll, 2007:5). These narratives 'intersect' with many other narratives, including the personal narratives of the individuals involved (MacIntyre, 2007: 207). Narratives arrive at a sense of completion, argues Carroll, when all the micro questions are answered. In the case of individuals, the questions answered may be whether pilgrims reached their daily goals; and whether they performed the prescribed ceremonies in the proper order, with the right attitude.

A brief example of a natural endpoint that can be provided by narrative is the pilgrimage in Ireland known as Saint Patrick's Purgatory. The narrative of this pilgrimage involves a detailed list of activities including fasting, and thousands of repetitive prayers, that must be done in a prescribed order over three days (Mahoney, 1999:335-404). These pilgrims feel their sense of finality after they have progressed to the end of the prescribed rituals, and after that they are expected to leave on the next boat along with others who arrived at the same time, their obligations fulfilled.

Case Studies

In this section, various brief case studies are provided in order to illustrate the 'five winning narrative features theory' proposed in this article.

Case study #1 Marian Shrines

Consider the winning narrative of Lourdes, constructed by Lasserre in 1869 (Harris, 2000). It is clear that there were alternative pathways along which the narrative of Lourdes could have developed. Many Marian apparitions have been recorded in the world, especially during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Yet, from all the many cases, it is Lourdes which rose to the apex of Roman Catholic Marian devotion, and now attracts annually five million visitors from over 140 countries (Anon, uk.franceguide.com, 2019). The witness of the apparitions, Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes, was canonised in 1930.

It was the combination of winning features that turned Lourdes into one of the world's most popular places of pilgrimage. In this case, it is the feature of being a 'live option' that seems most important. In addition to the compelling story of the sympathetic Bernadette Soubirous, it was the power of the particular historical context and political rivalries in France that drove this winning narrative.

Journalist Henri Lasserre wrote the winning narrative of Lourdes and without his work *Notre-Dame de Lourdes* (1869), the site would not have become Lourdes as we know it today (Harris, 2000). While the sanctuary was under construction, a spiritual, political and intellectual tussle ran parallel. This struggle was about whose version of the apparition and its aftermath was the true one. Lasserre claimed that his work contained the only truth about Lourdes and he forcefully sought to repress any other competitors.

The influence of the Romantic movement was discernible in Lasserre's writings, which describes the way the Lourdais lived unchanging in a medieval world of custom and piety. Although they had a knowledge of the modern world, they nonetheless preferred their age-old traditions. He romanticized the Lourdais from the beginning, by means of an idealized vision of *Catholic*

Figure 2: Photograph of Henri Lassere and His Winning Narrative
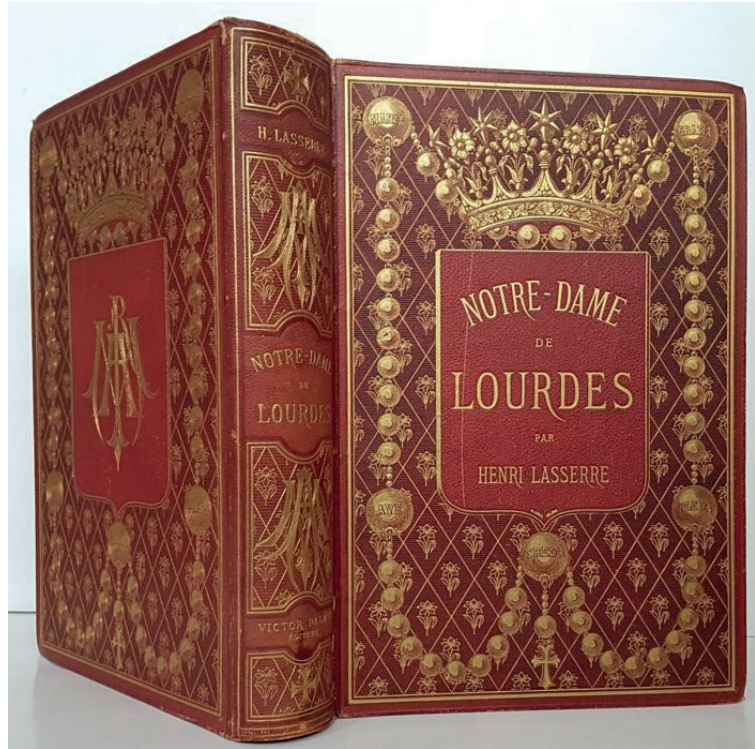
Source: Wikipedia & Catawiki

populism, describing Bernadette as innocent and defenceless against all the forces against her.

Lasserre addressed the Vatican Council of 1870, showering himself with gratitude because, thanks to his work, many conversions were affected and had attracted innumerable pilgrims and donations to Lourdes. It had also moved many people to write letters of praise, including bishops and even the Pope, the latter stating that Lasserre's book, along with miracles, was part of Our Lady's plans, the Mother of God after all. Lasserre agreed, of course, and did not deny that the same Virgin appearing before Bernadette chose him not only to tell the truth but also make it known to humankind.

Harris reminds her readership that Lasserre's book made Lourdes internationally unforgettable. Although it was the time of scientific explanation, this could not change the image created of Lourdes. Although the pages of Lasserre are filled with narratives of healing, there was not yet the idea which gave birth to a national pilgrimage to France. Harris asks herself why Lourdes became so popular. The answer seems to be embedded in the history of France.

'Spiritual longings, … *are never politically or socially neutral*', writes B. King, because they are 'conditioned' by history (King, 2017:13, emphasis added). The politics in this case included the 'Catholic Revival' in France of the late nineteenth century, which found an ally in the politically conservative movement aiming to usurp the newfound 'broadly materialist, anti-clerical' Republic, and restore the monarchy. Harris details the many other historical, cultural, and political influences that shaped the narrative of Bernadette's vision during this time, including recent wars, and the popular reactionary movement against the perceived decrease of faith among the general society.

> *Pilgrimage became a public, even a theatrical manifestation of Catholic piety in the face of godlessness* (Harris, 2000: 222).

In 1870, a war broke out between France and Germany, whereby Bismarck defeated the French Emperor Louis Napoleon at Sedan and laid siege to Paris. France was forced to pay huge sums to make the German Reich go back behind the old border. To make matters worse, working-class artisans staged a coup and the army killed about 25,000 people before the revolt was quenched.

Large-scale pilgrimages to Lourdes emerged as reaction to these terrible events, initiated by the Assumptionist Order, part of a larger exercise to bring back the Bourbon monarchy and to release the Pope from his 'Vatican prison,' trying to undo the separation of church and state (Harris 2000:177-210). The canonisation of the witnesses of the apparitions was also a very strong pull and push factor for sites, the impoverished shepherd girl Bernadette becoming St Bernadette. Writers with a social conscience, such as Émile Zola would have had some understanding of her poverty. Her father owned a water-powered grain mill and went bankrupt when steam-engine driven mills could produce much more and cheaper than he ever could, capitalism shattering the medieval world of custom of the Lourdais, as described by Lasserre.

Lourdes has been under siege many times but managed to survive with its reputation intact. Émile Zola, when writing about Lourdes (Zola, 1894 [2000]) is absolutely critical and cannot be convinced about the miracles, although he witnessed supposedly miraculous events happening to pilgrims on two occasions. Lourdes, and its continuous success, angered many political-minded people too. Under pressure of a very strong current of socialism in France, it seemed that it was not allowable for people to believe in miracles any longer. All the artefacts left behind by people healed by miracles, especially the hundreds of crutches hanging in the rock face of the cave, were removed. In their zeal and spirit of convinced atheism, they overlooked that measuring the natural world in a scientific way is not the same as seizing the supernatural world in a religious manner. Edith Turner remarks about people who witnessed apparitions or experienced healing by grace of Our Lady, that their experiences of such an event 'would make rationalists embarrassed or angry' (Turner, 2011:121). Lourdes, at present, receives more than 5 million pilgrims annually and is an example of a pilgrimage that owes its popularity to a winning narrative; in this way, the site is in good company with others, such as Fatima (recently *c.* 6 million visitors), or Guadalupe (*c.* 20 million visitors).

Among the goals of pilgrims at Lourdes is a hopeful expectation of miraculous healing, or at least a sign of grace concerning the acceptance of one's lot. Other, more moderate goals might include development of character through humility and service to others. Closure

of the pilgrimage at Lourdes is provided by the setting for organised rituals. Most organised group pilgrimages are structured and rather regimental in nature. There are a number of highlights included in the schedule, building up tension and expectation. A visit to the baths, submerging in the blessed water from the holy spring, after having prepared themselves with a repetitive mantra of the Ave Maria while waiting in line for hours, is often an experience of revelatory quality. Lourdes pilgrims participate in a candlelight vigil by night, the *Procession aux Flambeaux*, another absolute emotional highlight, with a joyous, tangible energy rippling through the crowds. All the activities lead to a crescendo, whereby people indulge themselves in their religion and the various aspects of Lourdes, including food, drink and souvenirs. Creating closure without the souvenirs is improbable, as the souvenirs keep the cheerful memories alive for a long time.

Case Study #2 The Camino de Santiago de Compostela

The narrative of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela follows the hero-on-a-quest structure. Pilgrims set out on a journey to unfamiliar places, and in the process of overcoming obstacles are transformed. If successful, they arrive and achieve redemption, after which they return home and reintegrate into normal life. The goal is to be transformed and redeemed through hardship and endurance; or at least an adventure of self-conquest and self-improvement within such transformative travels to sacred sites (Cousineau, 2012). This narrative can be secularised by replacing redemption with personal growth.

In the case of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, very influential books have been written that provide compelling travel accounts which have likely spurred hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. Amongst the most popular are those authored by Paulo Coelho (1987), Shirley MacLaine (2000) and Hape Kerkeling (2007). The *camino* to Santiago de Compostela had an ancient winning narrative too, the *Codex Calixtinus* (1138-45) (Figure 3). This Pilgrim's Guide is regarded as the oldest and best-informed pilgrim and tourist guide of Europe. It provides a list of routes through France and Spain; discusses the stages of the *camino*, and descriptions of the route. Chapter VI warns of dangerous obstacles and perils such as poisonous drinking water. Most importantly, it

Figure 3: The opening letter of the Codex Calixtinus purporting to be from Pope Calixtus II
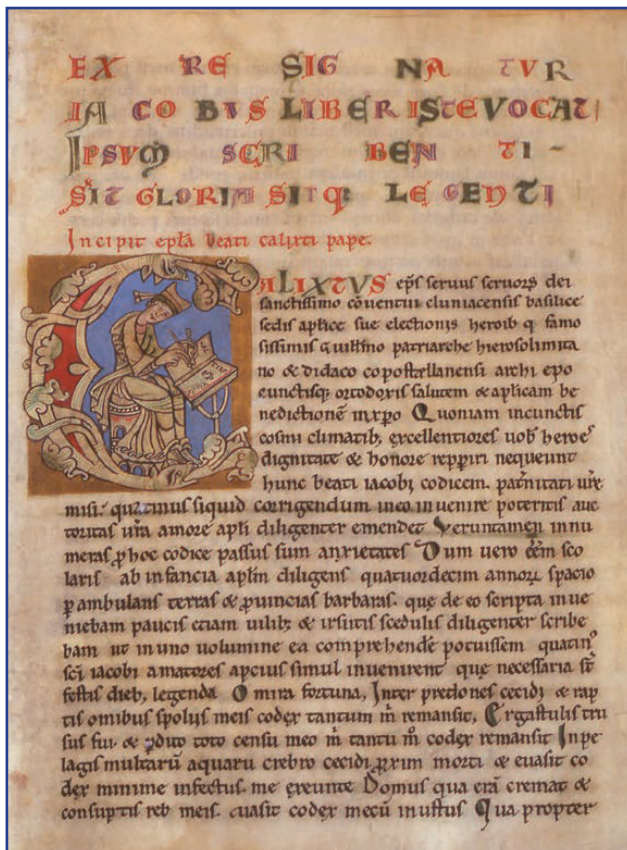
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Codex_
Calixtinus._Inicio_del_pr%C3%B3logo.jpg

provides goals on route, by relating the stories of Camino miracles that happened along the way.

A recent hero-on-a-quest narrative is supplied by Kerkeling (2007), who finds his peace with God and his homosexuality on the way to Santiago. He describes his pilgrimage experience on the *camino* as being continuously tossed in the air by the Creator who, in the end, saves him again from falling. His message is to have trust in whom tosses you in the air and whom will catch you, even if you are not expecting it (Kerkeling 2007:345).

Narratives must *select* an ending from the never-ending stream of events, but closure is achieved when the choice of the ending seems *natural*. It is the narrative that makes the ending the right place to stop. When the tasks are done, the pilgrim knows that they have reached the end at 'the precisely appropriate place' (Carroll, 2007:3).

For example, the dominant narrative of the Camino de Santiago ends with the pilgrim's arrival in Santiago de Compostela, after many days on the road trying to obtain daily mileage goals. After arrival in Santiago, realising there is no point in continuing further, several rituals are performed. Traditional closure on the Camino is manifold: entering the Cathedral, pilgrims will hug the statue of St James and, of course, collect their certificate, the *Compostela.* Attending mass at the cathedral and experiencing the spectacle of the *Botafumeiro,* its famous thurible or swinging gigantic incense burner is also a closing experience. For those who wish, they may go to confession and receive a blessing.

Because of these traditions, supplied by the narrative of the pilgrimage, one knows their pilgrimage has come to an appropriate end. As Carroll writes about a natural closure of a story, or a piece of music:

> To have gone beyond that point would have been an error ... But to have stopped before that point would also be to have committed a mistake (Carroll, 2007:2).

The cathedral in Santiago de Compostela is quite the natural place to stop for a person when on a Catholic pilgrimage. Of course, many pilgrims continue on to the ocean, but they are then following a different narrative. They might be following a pagan narrative that chooses a natural endpoint at the continent's edge; or they might simply not want their pilgrimage to be over.

The completion of all these micro-goals naturally supplies an ending to the master narrative in which they serve as steps. Further questions can now be asked when it is recognised that the pilgrimage is now over. Did the pilgrim receive redemption? Has the pilgrim been transformed and humbled by the observance of faith? Has the pilgrim been instilled with compassion for others? We may see these questions in the light of Frey's observations, who argues that the most important part of completing a pilgrimage, such as the Camino, is to transition from pilgrim life back to normal life by integrating the pilgrim state of mind into one's life back home (Frey, 1998).

Cases 3 & 4 Fictional Narratives: The Da Vinci Code and The Fisherman's Tomb

These two cases show the power of a compelling story. Even though largely fictional, these stories have sparked successful pilgrimages. The compelling story alone seems to have been enough to support these winning narratives, although the other features are also present.

A) The Da Vinci Code

Dan Brown's popular novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) sparked great interest in the phenomenon of the sacred mystery, and it was such a compelling story, even though a fictional one, that it motivated masses of people, both religious and secular, to go and explore those places he described. This curiosity presents an historic lens through which the narrative of the sacred mystery can be viewed as being treated in a hostile situation, akin to some forms of Dark Tourism, connecting the life and times of Christ with the present *(this connection is another winning feature; namely that of being a 'live option')*. Moreover, the narrative also presents a threat to that mystery and the lives of the protagonists in the same narrative, heightening the tension and expectation. The search for meaning and relevance remain topics of debate at present (Stone *et al.* 2018). For many people, such narratives engage in sacred or magical mystery, giving this kind of travel, *i.e.* tracing the narrative or an in-the-footsteps-of pilgrimage, an experiential and spiritual edge to it, hopefully nurturing

Figure 4: Da Vinci Code Tours at The Louvre

https://parismuse.com/tours/cracking-the-da-vinci-code-at-the-louvre/

one's soul in the process. These 'footstep' pilgrimages may also be regarded as invented routes, or *constructed narratives*, because they quite often blend in with tourism interests (Greenia, 2014). In this respect, Johnson and Ruhl (2009) maintain that we must have some trust in mystery and open ourselves to wonder and reverence in view of those powers outside the conscious control of humans.

Winning narratives, therefore, come in many different sizes and effects. Interpretation is crucial and the Louvre Museum's version of the events in the *Da Vinci Code* came in the form of an audio-visual guide, leading the Louvre visitors along a touristic route through Paris, following the footsteps of the narrative. This audio-visual guide had a good ten year run before it was discontinued by the Louvre itself, while the book continues to enjoy impressive sales figures. However, private companies have jumped into the gap and still offer a variation of Da Vinci Code Tours, including access to the Louvre and walking tours through Paris with a live professional tourist guide (this beats any audio-guide or app).

B) The Vatican underground archaeological areas

A recent novel has been published on the underground area of the Vatican, *The Fisherman's Tomb: The True Story of the Vatican's Secret Search* by John O'Neill (2018). For many, this is *a compelling story*, fast becoming a motivational factor for American religious tourists to visit the underground archaeological areas of the Vatican to visit the (alleged) tomb of St Peter, according to a source at the Vatican Museum.

This book discusses the search for St Peter's tomb beneath the Vatican. According to an interview with O'Neill, he states,

> *tradition holds that St Peter stayed in Rome and was crucified upside down around the year 65. Tradition further relates that the Roman executioners discarded Peter's body on the ground on a nearby, vacant hill used as a dumping ground for waste, but that Christians secretly recovered and buried Peter's body on that hill. The traditions claimed that the site became almost immediately a secret place of worship for the Christians. The name of that place was Vatican Hill* (Hyrkas, 2019).

O'Neill has created a gripping story, although critics say not very accurately, about a search for the tomb of St Peter. According to O'Neill, St Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, asked her son to build a church, St. Peter's Basilica, over the assumed burial site of St Peter, near the top of the Vatican Hill. As a result of the construction, a vast underground necropolis was created and prevented St Peter's and many other tombs from being discovered. Proper excavations started in 1939, at the initiative of Pope Pius XII, and appointed archaeologist Margherita Guarducci, who then reportedly found the incomplete skeleton of a male, consequently identified as St Peter. As a further result, kept quiet to the public, this underground area was recently opened for visiting for a few carefully selected persons each day, to join the highly exclusive *Scavi Tour* (Ruscio, personal communication, 2019). The whole affair, shrouded in mystery, attracts a certain kind of visitors to the Vatican Museum, which are hoped to be more pilgrim than tourist. The power of this winning narrative is clearly evident.

The narrative feature of being a compelling story is clearly illustrated in these two examples of winning narratives; O'Neill's book, debatable as it may be in the truth department, nonetheless supplies a narrative that gives meaning and purpose. It is arguably selective regarding historical perspective and has a bias towards the conclusion that the remains found are indeed of St Peter, but all narratives are selective. Since the locality is the Vatican Hill, there is an automatic assumption of authenticity, authority and sacred mystery. Although it remains conjecture, it does provide enough stimulus for Roman Catholics to go on a pilgrimage to Rome, paying a hefty price for an underground religious tour in order to be close to St Peter and the genesis of the Vatican. The chance of realistically being within touching distance of the body of an apostolic saint, a relic of the same magnitude of St James in Santiago, is formidable and provides both a *live option* and *closure* (two winning features).

Underpinned by MacIntyre's theory, the narrative frames an 'understandability' that makes the urge for such a tour intelligible: the fulfilment of pilgrimages lies in the hope to connect to the mystery of its symbolic origin or purpose. Pilgrims are empowered by potency of the mystery, hoping the catch a lingering of the vestige of the divine (Reader, 2015).

Case #5 New Religious Movements (NRM)

By far the most important overview of the development of modern witchcraft in the UK and the USA, a.k.a. *Wicca,* was written by Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon. A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (1999), a winning narrative in its own right, sparking an avalanche of other winning narratives in this research area. Hutton says that although goddesses existed from Palaeolithic times onwards, the creating of the modern pagan Goddess is a phenomenon of fairly recent times, starting with artists and writers in the Romantic Period, or Romanticism (*c.* 1750 to 1850) and has resulted in numerous pilgrimages to ancient cultures. This exciting new spiritual development within a strict Anglican society led to curiosity, and travel to ancient shrines and places of worship, such as Stonehenge and the many megalithic singular stones and stone circles in the British Isles. The work of Rountree (2002, 2010a, 2010b) gives greater depth to these New Religious Movements, hereinafter referred to as NRM, and provides an international perspective. According to Rountree, NRM pilgrim groups regularly visit Neolithic sites in Britain (Cornwall, England, Wales and Scotland), the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hawaii, the Himalayas, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Malta, Mexico, Peru, Sicily, Turkey, Russia and southwestern USA. Tate (2006) lists 108 global pilgrimage destinations where followers of the Goddess of Spirituality go, *i.e.* the adherents of the Mother Goddess movement. A unifying factor for the NRM groups may be the potency of the mystery which is empowered by the lingering vestige of the alleged divine in such ancient edifices. Rountree says that NRM are not looking for the truth in the archaeological sense but are solely interested in a credible interpretation and affiliation with that idealised past in order to achieve a sense of fulfilment with the religious emotion of that imagined past. The NRM experience is very much about a reliving of a religious experience at ancient sites, hoping to connect to the mystery and magic of the distant past— one of the five winning features. In the case of Malta, the Neolithic sites are real, but the religion is not grounded in historic reality, one reason why Rountree (2002) labelled the NRM as designer religions. An overriding motivation for the adherents is to heal themselves and the world. Reader (2015) argues that when new religions develop, they also look for places to go to for their pilgrimages or spiritual travels.

All of the five features of the winning narrative are very prominently present in NRM, not so much in each site, but in the overall ideology of these modern religions. In other words, these pilgrims bring with them their winning narratives irrespective of the sites they visit. Such pilgrimages provide goals; for instance, Wicca aims for the recognition of female empowerment. Opportunities for closure and fulfilment are provided related to *e.g.* health, birth, death or healing caused by the traumas of their previous religion (Riley, 2015). These compelling stories are created in total freedom, and not controlled by higher authorities, neither by the institutionalised religions nor by academia (Christ, 2004). The live option is closely related through linking past and present, as their truth is in recreating a modern religion based on a past performance which parameters are largely unknown, but are recreated to fit in with their ideology, with sacred space and according to the spirit of place (Shackley 1998, 2001).

Conclusions

Genuine winning narratives seemingly have no shelf life or time limit to their success, and the narrative continues successfully *ad eternum*, although some winning narratives of present and past, purposely or incidentally causes for pilgrimages, may have a definite sell-by-date.

A winning narrative, with some, or all, of the five identified features included, is what makes a pilgrimage narrative successful, either over a short or long period. For instance, Lourdes became popular though *historical circumstances* and the large ego of Henri Lassare, relentlessly promoting his book and himself. Dan Brown's Paris trail had great success, because of its *compelling story*, but it lasted only ten years, presumably because there was no sequel and historical back up to the claims. It was just a popular read, and people flocked to the Louvre to follow the route, but it lacked substance for the *longe durée* O'Neill's work stands a chance for a longer lifespan, because it is linked to a tangible religious mystery, and the Vatican Museum has agreed to special tours. There are millions of people who would like to see the tomb of St Peter, even if the proportion of fictional content is as high as in Brown's work. With regard to the Camino, there is a great diversity in winning narratives. There seem to be religious, secular, adventurous,

sportive, historical, Scriptural, social, gender-specific and sexual orientation narratives, and other narratives are probably serving many more niches. In academia, the Camino is probably the most researched pilgrimage phenomenon ever, and one wonders how long this super-popularity will last. In the realm of the NRM, the narratives are fluid, boundless and ultimately adaptable. Fussell's (1980: 209) observation, that the perception of 'success' is proportionate to the 'degree that the myth is realized,' seems to be relevant and applicable to the winning narratives theory we are proposing here.

The five features of a winning narrative that have been identified are what makes them successful. It is possible, and likely, that these features are not all necessary conditions, and thus not always present. There may also be other features yet to be identified. However, a few of these features together seem to be jointly sufficient to result in a winning narrative. One wonders whether it is purely chance that some narratives are winning; or whether they can be deliberately chosen. We have argued that winning narratives do not come about merely by accident—as they are seemingly planned, curated, competitive and marketed.

The authors do hope that other researchers' interests are kindled, and that this new theory will be carried forward in backpacks, fieldnotes and digital media along the pilgrims' way.

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