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Place-Soul: The Sensory Perception of Modern Travel Writing

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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Pilar G. DiPietro entitled Place-Soul: The Sensory Perception of Modern Travel Writing.

We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

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PLACE-SOUL: THE SENSORY PERCEPTION OF MODERN TRAVEL WRITING

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

Of the

College of Arts and Sciences

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of

Master of Arts

In English

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May, 2019

By

Pilar G. DiPietro

Abstract for “Place-Soul”: The Sensory Perception of Travel Writing

Place is theorized through many lenses: geographical, sociological, political, and architectural, to name a few, and travel theorists study the economics and production of place. Yet sensory perception of places travelled are understudied. My thesis offers the determination of “place-soul” as an experiment in sensory perception of place, and the accompanying South Carolina travelogues exemplify case studies of place-soul’s revealing. By successfully ascertaining the essence of place by marrying objective and subjective lenses, and accurately describing the belongingness and connections uncovered, the reader will identify with me through words, and travel may be inspired by a shared sense of belonging. I submit that by authentically determining and articulating place-soul, a bridge of connection and belonging is built between place and writer, and, in turn, writer and reader, which will propel future travel.

Keywords: Authenticity; Belonging; Connectivity; Essence; Farm-to-Fork; Perception; Place; Place-ful-ness, Placelessness; Senses; South Carolina; Travel

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A Note on the Text

Adventure Awaits! So goes the slogan for every travel advertisement ever. But how much adventure is one experiencing glued behind the camera, recording only an instant of the wondrous, magnificent place you find yourself in? What is so fascinating about place? Is it the monuments, the history, the people, the food? All of these? What draws any one person to any one place?

Ironically, although we may travel to someplace out of the ordinary, it is unnecessary to do so to detect place. Place can exist in your own backyard, in your own town and in your own state. Although “sights” may propel us to place, and differing cultures may intrigue us upon our arrival, it is the sense of belonging we perceive from place that connects us. Often, we feel an immediate connection, or we don’t. But we can’t determine the authentic essence of place unless we sensuously immerse ourselves.

This is where place-soul comes in. Immersing yourself in place requires you to come out from behind the camera. It requires you to be there, present in place, and not viewing from a computer screen. Place-soul requires you to fully experience place using all five senses, in addition to instantaneous reaction. The melding of sensory perceptions with unconscious, reflexive, or primal intuitions allows for the unearthing of the authentic nature of place. Travel, too, becomes more meaningful when you experience place’s odor, its sounds, its taste and textures, along with its sights.

Many travel writers direct you where to go and suggest things to do. Others have specific message intents. Still others are recording their humanitarian efforts. My purpose is to show readers how to fully immerse themselves in place. My expectation is to authentically bridge

connectivity between place and myself, and from myself to the reader, through sensory perceptions and distinctive and descriptive language. My recipe for success is driven by sensuously determining place-soul and authentically sharing the properties discovered, revealing the essence of place and giving measure to belonging, and by connecting with the reader, through language, on intrinsic levels.

Discovering place-soul demands digging in, often literally. Allowing your senses to reveal place in this manner takes awareness and training. Even if instant perception is arbitrary, and recognition of feelings and connections inherent, describing the physical begs for authenticity. If place-soul is portrayed properly, then any place may be irresistible if it exudes belonging.

My strategy is simple. In each of my excursions, I aim to establish place-soul and relate my findings in travelogue form. It is my intent to uncover the true connections of place and offer up these slices of recognition to the reader. I propose to discover place's essence—what drives and what differentiates it from other places. Beyond viewing place through any lens, it is my objective to truly reveal place; to discover it viscerally, to touch and breathe it, to live it. And to perhaps find surprises along the way.

Armed with minimal research—in most cases simply a local place to stay, a local farm-to-table restaurant, and an ecological point of interest, it is my wish to drop myself into place and, quite literally, see what happens. I hope to arrive with an open slate and leave knowing place-soul.

Chapter One: Place Theory and Introduction to Place-soul

Open to any given travel article, in any given publication, at any given time of year, and you'll be treated to the amazing sights of a particular place that evoke feelings of grandeur or nostalgia or concern. Indeed, the sights a travel writer experiences are often the most readily conveyed to the reader and perhaps the most expected and available way to demonstrate, along with photos, what the potential traveler may miss if they do not visit.

To capture the essence of a place a writer must not only have an awareness of how their senses react to a place's stimuli, but must describe their impressions naturally, fittingly and authentically. Before the travel writer describes any subjective reactions, whether pleasant or unpleasant, the sensory perceptions of all six senses must be employed. In order to understand any particular place completely, to discover a place's "place-soul," you must explore it fully by using sensory awareness that will in every way reveal the individuality or specialness of any place. These sensuously-immersed perceptions convey meanings that reach beyond the text on the page. Only armed with this knowledge can descriptive words emerge and be employed to portray specific meanings that will resonate with the perspective traveler, or arm-chair traveler.

Before sensory immersion may happen, place must be defined. Place means different things to the different people who exist in and out of any particular place. This paper will examine the manners in which defining the place-soul enriches understanding of place. My six-sense determination and evaluation of place will not only uncover what a place feels, looks, or smells like, but will use perceptions to illicit common evocations in the reader. This study will attempt to answer questions like: What does it mean to

describe the place-soul and how will prospective travelers benefit from these descriptions? What connotations can the travel writer use to introduce place-soul to the reader and how will the writer relate meaning from their perceptions with enough accuracy to convince the reader of a place's "worthiness" to travel? How does a writer bond with the reader through their description of place-soul and what level of trust can the reader obtain through the writer's authentic descriptions? It becomes my aim to present not a how-to or where-you-must-go, -see, -do laundry list of place, but by summoning and sharpening perception, determining place-soul, and sharing authentic, intuitive and accurate descriptions, the inherent value, or deep-rootedness of place will emerge and connect the writer with the reader. If writer and reader meet aesthetically through the sensory perceptions that uncover thought, remembrance, or like-mindedness, then certain visitation to that place would necessarily follow.

To summarize, in this theoretical examination, I will demonstrate and cite scholarly theories of place study as they apply to my own theory of place-soul. Further, I will explore the formation of place-soul connectivity and sense of belongingness that should be used in the travel writing genre, overview why authentic description of place is important, and finally, present three case studies which test my place-soul theory in real time.

Place Theory

Any outsider's sense of place, including the travel writer's, cannot easily be pinpointed or defined and this slender viewpoint is understudied among the vast amounts of space and place theories. If we use the generalization that "places" are perhaps rooted and

deeply felt in one's psyche and that "spaces" are vast and more abstract, then it behooves the travel writer to speak to the place specifically and the way it makes one feel to be in that place. In this way, it is the place in the space that has the tangible quality that may be able to be felt, or smelt, or tasted, or heard. In fact, notable human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes:

An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind. Long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience.

Another place may lack the weight of reality because we know it only from the outside—through the eyes as tourists, and from reading about it in guidebooks.

(18)

Although a travel writer cannot be anything but an outsider, a place's identity, and especially the portion of it that promotes "belongingness," comes into play. Sense of place begins with the instinctual, gut reaction that presents itself the moment you enter an establishment, a town or city, or even the instant that you meet a person in a particular place. In these cases, the place acts as "a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not as valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell" (Tuan 12). This "dwelling" prompts you, as a visitor, to question whether the setting itself is pleasant and safe or if you could eat and sleep comfortably in that particular place at that particular time. You may even ask if you might live in this place or further query how you see yourself "by" this place; whether you like yourself there. You may ask if you like *others* who "dwell" there and whether they are people

with whom you are able to relate. When an objective lens of place is meshed with the sensuously subjective, the true nature or essence of place can be determined. If one appreciates and connects with a photograph, which focuses the eye on a particular subject in a particular place for example, then American writer Lucy R. Lippard's idea is substantiated. She writes: "Family connections and memory draw us into the photographed spaces rather than leaving us gawking at the window. We 'read into' those spaces with vocabularies of our own lives" (58). Even more telling of place could be "read," then, by the descriptions fashioned by the total combination of the senses, rather than a solitary image seen or photographed. By using all available senses, the place-soul uncovered is a more well-rounded indication of place.

Places often remind us of what may be called the fabric of our lives, what we long for, or indeed even what we shy away from. By writing about the sensitive responses to subjective viewpoints, reflexive meanings can bring about conscious feelings of comfort and sense of belonging. Tuan writes: "Experience is compounded of feeling and thought...It is a common tendency to regard feeling and thought as opposed, the one registering subjective states, the other reporting an objective reality. In fact, they lie near the ends of an experiential continuum, and are both ways of knowing" (10). To this end, place-soul exists within the fabric of the experience in and of Tuan's "dwelling." More so, it then becomes the perceptivity of belongingness in tandem with the readers' own desires that will determine the authenticity or inauthenticity of any place that a travel writer describes.

In an effort to consider specific politics and geography of places while embracing the place-soul, the travel writer's concern most aptly takes a sociological standpoint.

Tuan's study of place asks these questions:

How do we describe "familiarity," that quality of "at homeness" we feel toward a person or a place? Are space and place the environmental equivalents of the human need for adventure and safety, openness and definition? How long does it take to form an attachment to place? Is the sense of place a quality of awareness poised between being rooted in place, which is unconscious, and being alienated, which goes with exacerbated consciousness—and exacerbated because it is only or largely mental? How do we promote the visibility of rooted communities that lack striking visual symbols? What is the loss or gain of such promotion? (202)

By utilizing sensory awareness to determine place-soul, this meshing of objective and subjective knowing of place can begin answering Tuan's questions and the conscious knowing that is revealed can be realistically and authentically portrayed by the writer. This knowing can set aside the alienation of exacerbated consciousness. Along with a particular level of belongingness, place-soul can connect the traveler with the reader by promoting all sensuous impressions, not just those seen, but felt.

Travel-wise, promoting place is not an inherently bad or inauthentic endeavor. If a geographical monument, for example, is the common denominator that encourages familiarity and travel, then real-time sensory perception adds to the image and understanding of the monument and its truth can be promoted and authentically demonstrated through the writer's words. Skewed facts, slanted pictorials or text, however, undermines the travelers' trust and may alter all immediate visceral perceptions

of place. Similarly, any activity that “lives” in the place should be portrayed realistically and accurately. The travel writer should not be viewed as the stereotypical used-car salesman, nor should their writing be utilized as a marketing ploy, rallying the easily-led toward places purported to exhibit any false sense of belonging. Determining belonging by sensory perception and disclosing the place-soul is keenly necessary for travel writing integrity. It separates the chaff from the grain.

If a traveler succumbs to marketing ploys meaning to “play up” a sense of belongingness and instead inverts his or her value or belief systems as a whole, the duping becomes not so much a useful angle utilized by the promoted or promoter, but in fact identifies the traveler’s susceptibility to cliché. Conversely, a trustworthy promotional travel writing article should authentically describe place. Whether doing so tickles feelings of nostalgia or portrays “home-ness,” these values come from within the place-soul. Tuan states: “We are in the habit of denying or forgetting the real nature of our experience in favor of the clichés of speech” (203), and this mantra should be remembered when dealing with an article that uses false values to infer connection or foster sense of community. Sadly, our capitalistic-driven promotional tactics often vilify contemporary travel writing. Suggesting that place may hold something intimate for the traveler is not concretely wrong, but only authentic perceptions determine place-soul.

Tuan writes:

Blindness to experience is in fact a common human condition. We rarely attend to what we know about; we are aware of a certain kind of reality because it is the kind that we can easily show and tell. We know far more than what we can tell, yet we almost come to believe what we can tell is all we know...with tiered

phrases our personal and subtle experiences are misrepresented time and again.

(201)

The identification of place-soul, and its authentic conveyance, alludes misrepresentation. Similarly, the travel writer as artist has a duty to not only inform authentically, but to gather sensuously-perceived experiences with integrity, allowing for the organic movement of emotions to drive place. For example, travel writer Stephanie Elizondo Griest writes, “The landscapes of Bhutan are a knock-out: rivers saturated with rainbow trout, terraced rice fields, dense forests, cloud-kissing mountains” (186). In this passage, Griest authentically illustrates place. Not only does she portray what is seen, the sentence itself triggers deeper emotions. Recording the landscape of place is paramount for attraction and enticement, but exaggeration of landscape is inauthentic. Lippard writes:

Any place is diminished when it becomes merely a backdrop...It has not escaped the definition of object art as a view, a spectacle, a picture. Land becomes the raw material or the space around the art, a kind of mat within the frame of the photograph. In fact, most of us envision rather than visit...our impressions mediated by the glamorous aerial views we've seen in publications. As tourists, or pilgrims...our expectations determine to a large extent what we see out there in the great unfamiliar, and what we overlook. (189)

A travel writer's job is to glorify the sights *and* entwine *all* the sensory perceptions to allow a sense of connected belongingness to develop organically; to *not* overlook the great familiar; to push against homogenized spaces. The kernels of sensory perceptions, grown and fertilized by the wordsmith's account of the six senses, promotes a healthy offshoot of inauthentic means of promotion. The resulting descriptions spare the reader

any miscommunication or alienation of place. What may be seen can also be heard, tasted, and felt, both sensuously and perceptively. It is from these senses that authenticity bears fruit of the conceptual understanding of place discovery.

Sights and Sounds

The sights and sounds of the cityscape and of the countryside evoke different emotions and by various means can be equated with senses of belongingness to place. Yet, place-soul can reveal “hominess” from even the most bustling of cities. Indeed, ecological architect Christopher Day posits: “Part of the individualities of countries, towns, and places depend on the unique soundscapes. How rooms sound—whether they echo, resonate or absorb—makes all the difference to their mood” (68), and mood effects one’s sense of belonging. Personal belongingness ranges from one perspective to the next, from one somebody to the next, and the travel writer must claim the responsibility to accurately and intensively hear, as well as see. This awareness does not come easily, therefore active sensory perceptions must be “turned on” and the writer “tuned in” for the most inclusive results. Utilizing all of the senses is a skill that takes practice.

By marrying objective and subjective sensory perceptions, a sensitiveness to the impressions of wholeness and belonging can be cultivated. While we are used to seeing place, sounding-out place is more difficult. Tuan writes: “Visual space tends to be focused and structured around an object or a succession of objects, aural space is less focused. Forest sounds are not precisely located; they yield an ambience rather than a coordinated special system...it signifies the heart of things, the ‘inner’ aspect of experience” (119). Similarly, German philosopher Martin Heidegger suggests that, “In

order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, i.e., listen abstractly” (25). Often, one must stop and actively listen to what the surroundings are saying. Tuan further observes, “Sounds, though vaguely located, can convey a strong sense of size (volume) and of distance. For example, in an empty cathedral the sound of footsteps tapping sharply on the stone floor creates an impression of cavernous vastness’ (14), and “forest sounds [while] not precisely located...yield an ambience rather than a coordinated special system” (119). Therefore, while the combination of both sights and sounds help in appropriately determining the place-soul, sounds are more problematic and subjective when determining cause or relation of distance.

Both man-made structures and natural monuments may evoke personalized meanings or senses of belonging. Sights and images (and their related evocations), spark “a selective and creative process in which the environmental stimuli are organized into flowing structures that provide signs meaningful to the purposive organism” (Tuan 10). These stimulated meanings signify that even if “place is where we stand to look around at landscape or look out to the (less familiar) ‘view’” (Lippard 9), an unfamiliar place can inherently be familiar. In this manner, descriptive accuracy of any sight may connote differing attractions for each travel reader. The connectivity the writer attempts to form, through his or her sensuously-perceived responses, must be conveyed in language palpable enough to cause the reader to feel the same sense of belonging. It becomes the responsibility of the travel writer, then, to ferret out the place-soul from “no place” in order to correctly describe the “someplace” that presents itself. Additionally, the marrying of sights with sounds becomes of paramount importance when defining a place’s visibility, its familiarity, and its sense of identity. Akin to this notion, Day writes:

Most people...don't normally look at [their] surroundings. We *breathe* them in.

Views on postcards or through windscreens can be interesting, even dramatic. But they only touch our hearts when they become a multi-sensory ambience we can breathe. Mostly, however, we barely notice our surroundings. (5)

And indeed, this is true, but mostly when we are looking with objectivity alone. We do not realize that even a trip to a local store can produce new sights and sounds that either promote inclusion and belongingness or estrange us from place. Therefore, an outsider's perspective, by contrast, *must* be reliant on *all* of the senses. Whether the image of roosters ruling the streets in Key West differs from the sound of the train whistle that blows in Rock Hill, SC, both may produce similar effects on the perspective traveler; both may procure happy remembrances that may unfold through the language of the travel writer.

Taste and Smell

I am constantly and consistently amazed at the "foodies" that abound in our American society. Many will travel miles out of their way in an effort to locate an eatery with the best "Yelp" reviews, for example. In our age of technology, we often must sift through inauthentic advertising and inaccurate ratings, all supplied with the best intentions, but may pull the unwary traveler off course in their search of a fabulous meal. The use of the senses for accurate determination of place becomes all-important for the travel writer in this regard. While a writer may not be necessarily a gourmand, simply describing the place-soul of an establishment should give the reader an idea of whether they may feel a belonging or kinship with the place and its gastro-offerings. Tuan writes:

“Taste, smell, and touch are capable of exquisite refinement. They discriminate among the wealth of sensations and articulate gustatory, olfactory, and textural world,” and “It would seem that our nose, no less than our eyes, seeks to enlarge and comprehend the world” (10). In fact, the smell, rather before any taste, can propel a visitor in to or out of an establishment, whether restaurant or residence, forest or field. As a result, any inconsistency in regards to the taste or smell in a travel writer’s description could prove detrimental to the integrity of both the writer and of the place-soul itself.

Since both taste and odor may bring back fond memories of childhood or past times, of grandma’s house or mother’s perfume, clear descriptions of taste and smell are necessary for accuracy and connectivity. Tuan writes:

Odors lend character to objects and places, making them distinctive, easier to identify and remember. Odors are important to human beings...it is possible to argue that taste, odor, and even hearing cannot in themselves give us a sense of space. The question is largely academic, for most people function with the five senses, and these constantly reinforce each other to provide the intricately ordered and emotionally-charged world in which we live. (11)

The “world” in which a travel writer hopes to portray through their writing, then, must include taste and smell sensory stimuli, accurately and persistently presented, in forms that promote belongingness and inclusivity. Notating tastes and smells takes practice. Indeed, Tuan writes: “Like the intellectual acts of seeing and hearing, the senses of smell and touch can be improved with practice so as to discern significant worlds...It would seem that our nose, no less than our eyes, seeks to enlarge and comprehend the world...” (10). In order to comprehend the place-soul, odors contribute greatly when they resurrect

nostalgia, particularly. When the travel writer's descriptions of tastes and smells bridge the potential traveler's innate feelings of home or longing for the past, a sense of connectivity is cultivated.

Touch and Feel

The cutting edge of a crisp breeze on your cheek or the slapping sting that makes you squeal as your body hits an icy mountain lake are sensations that jar you and make you feel vibrant and alive. The reflexive responses that emanate from the sensory perceptions of the skin are immediately palpable and these perceptions add to the character of place, may adjust visitors' moods and feelings, and give a sense of what the rhythm of life may be in a place. Motor response, therefore, incites passion, which in turn adds a new dimension when determining place-soul. Tuan writes: "Touch articulates another kind of complex world. The human hand is peerless in its strength, agility, and sensitivity" (10) and, correspondingly, by running your hand on the craggy cliffs of Dover or lightly sliding the tips of your fingers across a slick stingray as it swims underhand, proves touch's sensitivity. These sensations may recall the wonderment of childhood and momentarily bring us back in time. Immediately, we may feel youthful and timid, or brave and powerful. Tuan states that "the skin registers sensations. It reports on its own state and at the same time that of the object pressing against it" (14), and our reaction added to the reaction of the object reveals place-soul.

Touch and feel give important insight to place-soul. Day writes: "We notice warmth when we come into a room from the cold, move closer to a fire or step into sunlight" (83) and "The texture we walk on or feel with our hands (and eyes) make all the

difference between places which are approachable and which aren't" (68). Therefore, the accurate descriptions of warmth or texture are instrumental to a travel writer's purpose of authenticity and accuracy.

Intuition

Lastly, the sixth sense of intuition emerges the moment we enter a place. Although this sense cannot be as easily measured, explained, or notated as the other five, I believe that it has much to do when determining place-soul. The immediate and inexplicable nature of intuition can elicit a sense of connectivity or belongingness with any particular place, but just as easily may repel you. Again, as with the other senses, practice aids in the awareness of intuition. And while this sense may be debatable by some, the gut reaction that each of us feels upon entering any place is undeniable and holds for each of us our own personal understandings; understandings that are also inexplicable and unmeasurable.

The use of intuitive perception allows for the instant recognition of place's ambience, essence, and authentic nature. This immediate perception is further enhanced by the other senses. Day writes,

We meet the material world through our senses. Our sense perceptions enable us to form concepts: the basis of all thinking, consciousness and attitudes—hence spirit values. The more multiple our sense perceptions, the deeper our understanding of the reality around us. The richer they are, the more deeply they nourish the soul. (69)

To this end, by utilizing the senses to determine place-soul, the travel writer is sensitized and consciously present.

Responsibilities

As a travel writer, I see my responsibility a bit differently than others who practice this craft. Rather than simply directing the prospective traveler to certain destinations, it is my intention to allow readers to decide, based upon their own connectivity with the place-soul I describe, whether my sense of belonging corresponds with theirs. It is my belief that readers will be propelled to take my recommendations for travel if their idea of place is consistent with the place-soul that I describe. Because the modern life we lead is often affected by global capitalism, industrialization, and technological globalization, many individuals may be exempt from experiencing the pleasures of travel. The time restraints produced by our modern society presses the travel writer to not only accurately impart the sensory images of place, but to accurately describe how their own senses have reacted to place-soul. By doing so, perhaps the reader can experience both place and belonging without ever having to leave their armchair.

Above and apart from a sense of place that evokes “a feeling that we the reader/viewer know what it’s like to ‘be there’” (Cresswell 7), the travel writer must be reminded also that “culture and experience strongly influence the interpretation of environment” (Tuan 55). Bearing these two statements in mind, the travel writer must consciously understand where the essence of place may stem from and, in turn, how their own authentic identity and past experiences, combined with the feedback of their senses, can enable the place-soul “reveal.” Since, as Lippard writes, “most often place applies to

our own ‘local’—entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories... it is temporal, personal and political. A layered location is replete with human histories and memories, a place has width as well as depth” (7), and place should be described with this diversity in mind, authentic representation of place begs to be recreated. Justifiably, the travel writer’s “imparting the reveal” of place-soul becomes key to the readers’ understanding of the writer’s intent *and* of the reader’s own personal connection with both writer and place. In fact, Day writes, “The senses—all together—give a picture of reality never adequately described by any *one* sense, a reality which we call spirit, the spirit of a person, event or place. More than just appearance or comfort, it is the spirit which affects us deeply” (20). This intuitive and sensuous “spirit” can be connected to the reader by the language of the travel writer.

The responsibility of utilizing descriptive language to properly portray place-soul is a daunting, yet titillating, task. By practicing the identification of sights, sounds, tastes, and the sensations of touch, and focusing on imparting the essence, nature or evocations of place with authenticity, the connectivity between writer and reader is achieved.

Chapter Two: Place-soul and Belonging

One of the fabulous things about place-soul is that you don't have to travel around the globe to encounter it. Place-soul exists everywhere you go: in your day-to-day travels to the store, the gas station, the library, or in your own backyard. This is one reason I decided to limit my travel itinerary to my home state of South Carolina. There are so many places to see in South Carolina: places drenched in history, romantic places; places where like minds congregate; natural places where you feel closest to the sublime or at one with the earth, or, conversely, those that make you feel as though you are separated from place. South Carolina's travel possibilities are far-reaching.

Place Soul

Place-soul, the way any particular space, place or person makes you feel, can be intrinsically perceived and sensuously fortified, but comes alive in its description. When the travel writer makes the effort to genuinely discern the essence or nature of any place by utilizing the senses, the concrete impressions entwine with visceral insight and are apt to trigger nostalgia or kindle a sense of belonging. When place-soul stimulates these responses the place itself nourishes the soul; completes you in some way, compels you to act in some way, or makes you think either better or worse of yourself for being in that place. Martin Heidegger posits that essence or nature is "what something is, as it is," and that the origin of any one thing "is the source of its nature" (17). This is true of place, as well. He furthers that in order to find this essence, or a thing's "truth," you must sense it. Heidegger asks, "What in truth is the thing, so far as it is the thing?" and answers, "When we inquire in this way, our aim is to come to know the thing-being (thingness) of the

thing. The point is to discover the thingly character of the thing” (20). If we consider that any thing may be a person, place, or situation, then Heidegger’s theory meshes with the discovery of place-soul. If a travel writer senses place-soul and successfully intuits essence, then describes it authentically, others will want to join in the discovery. Or, perhaps they will not. If the nature or essence of any place, like Heidegger’s thing-being, then becomes its truth, then how each person reacts to place’s truth, its place-soul, depends on nostalgia for past experiences or even what is wished or imagined for the future. Interestingly, Graham Dann, in his essay “The Green Green Grass of Home,” posits that although nostalgia can be related to a separation from place, it also “harbours the unexamined belief that yesterday is always better than today, [and] undoubtedly turns on the issue of personal identity, where the question ‘Who am I?’ is answered with the reference to ‘Who was I?’” (Wahab 258). While Dann’s hypothesis of nostalgia surmises that “we filter out negative experiences and imbue the rest with special qualities,” rather than seeking “lost childhood” (Wahab 259), place-soul’s “truth” enables the travel writer, and in turn the travel reader, to experience a sense of belonging.

Yet, embedded in place-soul are feelings that *are* uncontrollable and it is precisely in this lack of control, in the freeing of the senses, that allows an experience of place’s truth. For example, when Leslie Jamison describes her accommodations in her travel story, entitled “The Big Leap,” she offers the reader a sense of how she feels about staying in a villa that “represented everything I loathed about travel.” She writes:

For me, the manicured feature of our resort challenged my sense of self, or angered the hosts of prior selves: the self who mixed concrete (poorly), the self who taught second-graders (with a hang-over), the versions of me that slept in

beds skittering with cockroaches and ate tamales by candlelight when the power went out (91).

Jamison's feelings are conveyed by the exacting use of "manicured" and "skittering." The reader inherently understands that this place is radically juxtaposed with the climate of the country and with the writer herself. This deeply colors the reader's vision of the beach and of the "abandoned shack that had a half-built solar panel lying on its defunct stove" she describes on the previous page. Jamison's feelings of remorse, and the place's "truth," rise above the surface of her words.

Although the chapters of this thesis focus on place and intentionally do not discuss persons but in a very general way, it is worth mentioning that an initial perception or reaction to any person can be attributed to that person's "truth." Intuiting a person's place-soul can frame an essence and may ultimately determine whether you'd like to encounter this person again. Yet, if it is supposed that all people have a true nature, then their essence can be felt both intuitively and sensuously. Persons are similar to place, then, or to Heidegger's point, things. Places have souls, just as Heidegger indicates that things have "beings." When discovering a "thing's thingly character," he suggests that we un-conceal its being. As an example, he specifically examines an artist's rendering of a shoe. Heidegger asks "what is the work in the work?" and suggests that by viewing any particular work of art its essence is revealed. He further contends that the work's nature catapults the viewer to be "suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be" (35). Heidegger writes:

This entity emerges into the unconcealedness of its being. The Greeks called the unconcealedness of beings *aletheia*. We say "truth" and think little enough in

using this word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth at work. (35)

It is specifically this truth that I wish to uncover, or unconceal. By discovering the place-soul of each place, and imparting the sensuously-derived conclusions of place with descriptive and accurate language, readers may determine whether they feel a sense of belonging with, to, or in that place. If this connection is revealed, the travel reader is propelled to visit.

The desire for a sense of belonging is global and far-reaching. Every language has at least one word for an essence of pleasant connection or belonging. By determining a place's truth and sensing its essence, and by imparting its nature descriptively, others may have a chance to feel similarly. Consider this passage from Stephanie Elizondo Griest's book *Mexican Enough*. She writes:

A thirty-something man in glasses approaches us with a small green bottle, dabbles its oil onto our wrists, and blows, emitting a tingly heat. "Lick it," he instructs. It tastes like a Granny Smith apple. He laughs at our animated response. (126)

Here, Griest's description not only imparts sensory response by her use of "dabbles," "tingly," and "Granny Smith," but also indicates an inherent judgement call to trust this stranger. Her senses capture the place-soul of the entire experience: both the person in the place and the thing he offers are understood by the reader as positive, and inclusive. Griest's sense of belonging contributes to the reader's sense of connectivity with place.

Indeed, place-soul affects us on many levels and one may sense place's truth, anyplace or anywhere—in your own backyard, in your own state or country—just as easily as a place far from you. In fact, human ecologist Dean MacCannell notes that “anything is potentially an attraction. It simply awaits one person to take the trouble to point it out to another as something noteworthy, or worth seeing” (*Gaze* 12). Although many place and tourism theorists suggest the reason we travel far away is to experience the exotic, it is more often your local place-soul which has the most effect on your life. Or, as Christopher Day suggests, your soul. He writes:

Places affect us at many levels: how they function and how they make us feel.

Our responses therefore intertwine thinking and feeling. But thinking overrides feeling: we think what we should feel. (And, anyway, computers do feelingless-thinking better than we can.) I therefore always start with what *I* feel. Not what I *think* about places, but what I *feel* before I start to think. Where our thoughts stimulate us to think, feelings nourish—or assault—the soul (60).

This idea harkens the nostalgia or the sense of belongingness felt when we first encounter a place, a person, or Heidegger's “thing.” But my job as a travel writer, as I see it, is to correctly interpret and describe feelings that can be utilized in order to convey places' truth. Day shares my idea of utilizing the senses to discover place. He writes: “These outer senses are our contact with outer reality, what in India is called *Maya*—illusion—though through them we can see beyond it. But we also have finer senses with which we perceive the invisible reality that lies behind this crystallized ‘mirage.’ This spiritual essence is *very* real” (68). The six senses that I intend to integrate on my journeys are intended to uncover place-soul, the essence, nature, or truth of any place. If truth, then, is

deeply embedded and interwoven with nostalgia and belonging, it is precisely nostalgia or belonging that colors our perception of any place.

This unconscious sense of belonging indicates whether we connect with a place. In fact, Tuan writes “that culture and experience strongly influence the interpretation of environment” (55). But place-soul embraces these connections all the time. Everywhere. Everywhere. We become part of place when we determine its place-soul. We become a part of its inside and not simply an outsider looking in. Lippard writes, “Each time we enter a new place, we become one of the ingredients of an existing hybridity, which is really what all “local places” consist of” (6), and this hybridity fosters the sense of belonging. Consider Erika Connor’s passage in her story “Winter with Dogs.” She writes:

Hidden between the Aravalli Mountains of Rajasthan, behind long stone walls and thistle, is a shelter for street dogs. It looked unremarkable when I first saw it from the road: just a few flat white buildings that housed the kennels, surgery rooms, and office, and some out-lying mud-brick sheds. Hundreds of dogs were baying, calling me in, as the desert wind swept across the yellow dust. (96)

Connor’s language describes the way she is being drawn in from outsider to insider. Additionally, Connor utilizes sensory depictions in her story as she herself transitions from outsider to insider. She writes, “Anjou’s soft bells tinkled in the evening as she met us at the gate” (98), and “The night smelled of roses” (98). From these descriptions the reader senses that Connor’s gaze is undergoing a transition. She becomes increasingly immersed as evidenced by her sensuous descriptions. She writes: “Even in my exhaustion I was softened by the smell of milk on my hands, their warm bodies, white-tipped tails, and white paws, beige and black, pink noses, little white needle claws that scratched

across my raw chapped skin” (98). Connor’s words describing her visit to Rajasthan convey that she no longer feels like a tourist. Her sensuous descriptions: the “smell of milk,” “warm,” and “needle,” draw the reader in as well. Connor’s authentic portrayal of place-soul demonstrates her newly-found sense of belongingness and engages the reader’s sense of belonging, as well. Contrary to this sense of belongingness in travel experience, tourism researchers Urry and Larsen write:

It is necessary to consider just what produces a distinct tourist gaze. Minimally, there must be certain aspects of the place to be visited which distinguish it from what is conventionally encountered in everyday life. Tourism results from a basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and the extraordinary. Tourist experiences involve some aspect or element that induces pleasurable experiences which, by comparison with the everyday, are out of the ordinary. This is not to say that other elements of the production of the tourist experience will not make the typical tourist feel that he or she is ‘home from home’ not too much ‘out of place’ (15).

Yet, Connor’s passage relates her travel to Rajasthan through an ordinary situational lens—puppies can be found in many places. Additionally, her connectivity with the puppies contributes to her sense of place-belonging. In this sense, no form of tourism production is needed in Connor’s travel. Although I basically agree with Urry and Larsen’s premise that a “tourist” must be away from home and must encounter out of the ordinary experiences, my argument suggests place-soul as being everywhere and its detection, when combined with tourism, forms a means of helpful and necessary service for others seeking like-minded connections. Tourism production becomes unnecessary.

Place-soul exists without production, whether the traveler is there or not, and it is up to the travel writer to unearth it and to convey its message.

The determination of place-soul, accurately documented, has the capability of inducing thought and propelling action from others: *I have to* go to Charleston to feel the soil underneath the Angel Tree or *I have to* visit Greer to taste their delicious peaches. These places, not that far from the ordinary, can be sensually experienced without going too far from home, and without costing an arm and a leg. Ecotourism expert Jeremy Smith writes,

Using tourism to bring people closer to the biodiversity or culture on their own doorstep enriches their everyday life. It makes them more excited about what is happening around them. Because they are nearby, they are more likely to return. And as people gain greater awareness of their own local environments and their specific conservation issues, they are more likely to engage in efforts to protect and restore them...it helps us to ‘know our place in the world.’ (90)

So, place-soul *can* be found in your own back yard, and can aid in local preservation. Determining place-soul is free and when you hone your senses properly, easy.

But honing the senses is difficult at first. Practice helps sharpen each sense individually, then the combination of perceptions leads to place-soul discovery. Day writes that “all the senses have a part to play—in ugliness or in beauty—but all too often each is considered in isolation. When together, giving the same message, they start to speak of the underlying essence of a place” (18), and goes on to state that “the senses—all together—give a picture of a reality never adequately described by any *one* sense, a reality which we call spirit, the spirit of a person, event or place. More than just the

appearance or comfort, it is this spirit which affects us deeply” (20). Thus, place-soul helps to determine the level of our sense of comfort and belonging. Day proclaims:

All of us from time to time experience boredom, insecurity, loneliness or stress—states of mind which need something outside themselves to provide a balance. Where our environment can offer intriguing interest and activity, timeless durability and a sense of roots, connection with the natural world and its renewing rhythms, sociable and relaxing places, and harmony, tranquility and quiet soothing spaciousness, it can provide soul support—. (32)

Although Christopher Day speaks of architecture specifically, it becomes easy to transition these views to travel and tourism, or arm-chair travel, or backyard or to the store travel. Developing the senses and truly feeling place allows you to step outside of yourself for a while. Introspection may be enhanced depending on place-soul. Logically, it becomes my job as a travel writer to transport you to the place you most want to be, the space you most want to occupy; the environment you would most like to experience.

Language

It is at this point that I would like to offer examples of sensory language. In Stephanie Elizondo Griest’s book *100 Places Every Woman Should Go*, she “speaks” to the reader sensuously. Whether her sentences depict sounds heard, odors smelt, or sights seen, all express her sense of connection to place.

- “If you have an extra \$50 to burn, sign up for the fifteen-minute airplane ride over [Victoria] falls—you’ll swear you hear angels singing.” (65)
- “Oak trees draped with Spanish moss; gardens perfumed by wild jasmine.” (30)

- “At certain points of the day, the entire temple glimmers pink from the red sandstone.” (162)
- “After the blessing, three cups are poured for each guest over the course of an hour (or two); if any is spilled, it means that spirits have joined you.” (186)
- “Despite the hardships, smiles are vibrant in Cuba. Gaits are fluid. Movements are rhythmic. There is a sensuality that transcends physical appearance.” (137)
- “Cherry is particularly flavorful, but as any Arab will tell you: it’s not what’s in the pipe but who you share it with that counts.” (170)
- “‘Dancing,’ as Rumi aptly described it, ‘is not rising to your feet painlessly like a speck of dust blown around the wind. Dancing is when you rise above both worlds, tearing your heart to pieces and giving up your soul’.” (208)
- “Rise early in the morning to watch young monks in saffron robes flood into the streets, rattling their alms bowls.” (222)

Griest’s details can be felt. Place is understood particularly because of accurate descriptions, and these enable the reader to intuit their own sense of belonging with Griest’s places. The sensuous language Griest immerses in her sentences is nearly palpable and can be contrasted effectively with a passage from Louise Purwin Zobel’s *The Travel Writer’s Handbook*. I found that while this handbook teaches the nuts and bolts of travel writing, Zobel fails to connect with or interpret place-soul. In the following passage, although she is encouraging the “show, don’t tell, lesson” of writing, her sight-only descriptions “show” less than Griest’s. Zobel writes:

But at first sight the buffet table was worth a little elbowing. The artists of the galley had even sculptured the meat into the shape of a lamb, kneeling on a bed of

rice that had been browned to simulate the desert. Roasted pheasants and game hens climbed an ornamental super-structure and a half-dozen varieties of fresh fish surrounded the “desert.” Purple half-shells of savory eggplant alternated with stuffed green peppers and tomato-topped Oriental salads. Dishes of black olives and plates of yellow cheeses adjoined the platters of grape leaves rolled into dolmas, which encircled a huge bowl of yogurt. Steam rose from the couscous and the kabobs. Melons, grapes, oranges, and a dozen unfamiliar but delicious fruits and a garden of miniature decorated cakes accompanied the baklava and grape pudding, and were followed by demitasses of strong, sweet coffee. (217)

Zobel’s sight-only descriptions seem flat when compared to Griest’s more sensuously-depicted expressions. Although the reader can appreciate Zobel’s words “savory” and “sweet,” the place-soul of the meal is not meaningfully felt. While her written “sights” are certainly a form of “showing,” Zobel’s isolated sight-only perceptions stymie her descriptions. The passage lacks the sense of belonging and connectivity that more inclusive, sensuously-experienced values would convey.

Belonging

It may be argued that living in the new frontier of technological and artificial intelligence will and is bringing people closer together. And there may be some truth in this. We certainly can communicate with those around the globe in ways that were unforeseen just thirty years ago. But this generation of technological advances: the blurring of time and spacial differences, the understanding and merging of cultures, the industrialization and capitalism that is made easier by technology, are the very things that

isolate us, that enable hermitage: to never have to leave our own home or interact interpersonally with others. Although it can be asserted that computer-generated interaction *is* interpersonal, this is a larger argument for a later time. However, it is worth mentioning that many people feel that being plugged-in to their computers constitutes a type of community in itself. But, while I maintain that computer technology provides information, inspires creative thought, and stirs political activism, among other useful forms of connecting, these communities are enabled by the use of algorithms, automatons, hardware, and electricity. They do not necessarily promote physical gatherings. Therefore, I am hard pressed to conclude that technology can constitute community or place. To this end, human geographer Tim Creswell argues, “It is commonplace in Western societies in the twenty-first century to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalization have eroded local cultures and produced homogenized global spaces” (8), but certainly technology’s use, not only in the West but world-wide, effects community and alters the user’s sense of connectivity. But, again, this argument is much larger than my thesis itself and accordingly technology must be set aside, for now. Most assuredly, however, we are spending less time with others than we ever have before and sense of belonging wanes along with interpersonal relations and intimate involvement with place because of computer usage. Consider Rebecca Solnit’s thoughts on coffee, in her chapter entitled “The World in A Cup,” from her book *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, as an example of how places and things *can* produce a sense of connectivity and belonging. She writes:

For me, a cup of coffee is an ingathering of worlds: coffee growing in tropical highlands, dairy farming in the surrounding countryside, and hydraulic

engineering that gets the water from the mountains to the plumbing and then cleans it for the sea. For Bob Dawson, the photographer for this map, the same cup of coffee, bought and drunk in a neighboring café, is a sort of communion with the people and place around you. Of course, a cup of coffee is both. (124)

In this example, although Solnit and Dawson have different perspectives, they both have a sense of connectivity by being in the café and drinking the coffee served there. Solnit furthers: “Perhaps the golden age of cafes has passed, for everyone now complains about the people who come into San Francisco’s coffee emporium latched as if by magnetic force to their electronics, talking or typing to someone who’s anywhere but here, a little oblivious to the people around them, though proximity was once the point” (125). This passage indicates how connectivity through place is changing and how belonging is thwarted by internet and artificial means. Connectivity is experienced, then, by “everyone [who] now complains,” and interestingly here, it is the complainers that feel the most sense of belonging.

Tourism, according to Urry and Larsen, “is not only a way of consuming (new) places, but also an emotional geography of sociability of being together with close friends and family members from home” (194). Although this is true when traveling with families, travel can ultimately be just as social experiencing place on one’s own aided by the senses. Describing place-soul is necessary for those seeking parallel levels of belonging and connection, and even when we travel to the other side of the world we often seek places that make us feel “at home.” This sentiment is unrelentingly marketed and capitalized upon, even by *Smithsonian Journey’s* most recent land travel catalog—in which the first page screams “At Home in the World,” in large, bold font. Home, a word

that describes a place that is often safe and surrounds you with positive recollections, is now marketed for the purpose that subliminally reminds you that you *may* belong and *may* be cared-for in a particular foreign place. One has to ask whether this unconscious sense of belonging is best utilized for branding or if it is more authentic when it springs from the “realness” rooted in place-soul.

It is my contention that the most “real” reality come from the world of the senses. If the most “real” perceptions stem from memory and past experiences, then our immediate perceptions are colored by foundations of suppressed recollections and/or senses of nostalgia, defined, as Anne Buttimer suggests, as a “real or imagined state of harmony and centeredness once experienced” (166). Place is defined by the connection between oneself and one’s experiences. Lippard writes:

Inherent in the local is the concept of place—a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar. Most often place applies to our own ‘local’—entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provide and evoke. Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and special, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there. (7)

The instinctual, gut reaction of place perception revolves around Lippard’s idea of the local place, but may just as easily be applied to the connections that are made in *every* place. Although Lippard describes her theory of the local as “the external world mediated

through human subjective experience” (7), and this cannot be argued too vociferously, the objectiveness of added sensory perception can temper deep-seated instincts.

Similarly, Solnit writes:

Bob found the cafes moving, vital, places where people mediated being strangers and being at home. He speculates that this is because so many people have come here from elsewhere that they are trying to finish the job of arriving. Maybe home can be found at the bottom of a cup of coffee. And so can the faraway, traveling across a sea of questions. (126)

Maybe home *can* be discovered at the bottom of a cup, or in a café, or in San Francisco. But without the accurate descriptions of sensual discovery, the reader cannot understand either the writer’s or their own preconceptions of that place or thing. The best depiction of any place happens when the senses are utilized. While subconscious memory or nostalgia may guide and alert us immediately, and reaction differs from person to person based on their experiences, community and belonging may be authentically formed by this melding of the subjective with the objective. This, I believe, is the best way for travelers to intentionally “develop their [own] interior landscape” (Emmett and Nye 27). By bringing recollections and memories to the surface, the traveler begins to make their own memories by being in the present and perceiving place in real time.

Travelogue Objectives

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, it is my intention to illustrate the aforementioned perspectives in travelogue form. I intend to visit and uncover place-soul in my home state of South Carolina. A long-time resident, since 1990, I judge myself to have pre-

conceived notions of place dependent on my state's history, or what I thought I knew about the history of "Southern" place. Born and raised in New York, the Mason/Dixon line is a place both real and imagined, and for me South Carolina's state history was guided by its relation to the Civil War and by the state's efforts to circumvent and opt-out of national concerns. Yet, it is my thought that by using senses in determining each travel destination's place-soul, I am more likely to mesh subjective and predisposed ideas *after* experiencing the objective smells, tastes, sounds, sights, and feels that encapsulate South Carolina's genuine place-soul. Then, by utilizing authentic descriptions, my sentiments will promote the reader's own sense of connectivity.

While it is my intention to research locations beforehand (and not just drive-and-go), I am inclined to allow place to speak to me. While I may have a specific destination in mind to explore, I will concentrate on authentic experience with ecology in mind. Since I am greatly concerned with the disappearance of nature and the remorseless urbanization of the "wild," I will initially select an ecological place to visit. Ultimately, I will immerse myself in the experience and investigate place-soul, eat at a local farm-to-fork establishment, and visit an historical site or museum. In these ways, my visits will incorporate several aspects of what is of most interest to travel readers, ecologically, gastronomically, and historically. It is my hope that the creative insight and physical, sensory perceptions that I impart may transport the reader in a manner out of the norm, enabling a broader vision of place and a greater incidence of connectivity and belonging.

Chapter Three: Farm-to-Fork: The Search for “Place-ful-ness”

While technological advances seemingly unite us by enabling communication with those from across the globe and artificial intelligence and virtual technology transport us so that one is able to don a simulator which places them atop Everest or in the Amazon (without ever leaving your home), it summarily divides us. With this division, authentic place-soul and sensory perception is causally eliminated. While some may deem actual travel unnecessary owing to these advancements, most should agree that physically visiting place: feeling place under your feet, hearing place as the wind whistles through treetops, tasting and smelling place in the air as you approach the ocean’s shore—places awash the senses unlike any technological experience.

Similar to what the western world experienced at the turn of the 20th century, the advent of industrialization and the persistent urbanization which forced and continues the migratory purge from rural to urban lifestyle, the advent of technology reveals more frightening and problematic considerations. With these, we have surpassed the era of modern and postmodern considerations of tourism and now an alternate line of study must be formulated to encompass these founding technological advances and their sociological and geographical victims. This chapter tiptoes around this new formulation in an effort to narrow the scope of the time-space compression that is of current global consideration.

The use of technology is taking center stage in our lives. Technology, in fact, makes us more mobile than ever before. We can access data from anywhere using multiple and diverse linking methods and some may not find it necessary to leave their homes at all, let alone ever interact personally. These vulnerabilities make it all the more

necessary to keep the utilization of the senses active. Avoiding the slow-movement of placelessness that is being created by technology becomes of paramount concern. The independence that technology affords may be considered the most alienating and destructive force, thriving on isolation and creating chasms between interpersonal communication. This movement stymies the belongingness that each of us desire.

So begins tourism's 21st century slow technology movement.

Dean MacCannell, author of *The Tourist*, *The Tourist Papers*, and *The Tourist Gaze*, among others, writes that "interaction itself [is] a naturally collective effort to understand, or at least to cope with, everyday life" (Tourist 4), and his comprehensive and far-reaching tourism studies often blur the lines between traditional sociological, geographical, economic and political boundaries of postmodern tourism theory. He believes "expansion of modern society to be intimately linked in diverse ways to modern mass leisure" (Tourist 3), and his postmodernist theories are interestingly the foundation for the justification of the burgeoning farm-to-fork movement. MacCannell writes:

The community meeting ground for creative thought, expression, and political action is a powerful base because community can still be *total social fact*. The power of the community as an alternative base for political action does not come from it being 'total' in the sense of autonomous, closed, and self-sufficient.

Rather, it is a total matrix for every possible human relationship. (*Empty* 11, emphasis in original)

Today, modern society's expansion is technological rather than migratory and it fosters exclusivity of physical being rather than mass inclusivity to centralized cities. What is

missing in ecofriendly travel generally, and eco-dining specifically, is the matrix to which MacCannell alludes.

The modern age of industry stimulated the drifting from homes and families in search of employment. This drifting separated us from traditional values and divided efforts that promoted the well-being of family and extended-family units. A farming family, for example, worked together to make the farm a success, and the family strived to husband the land, intentionally caring for it and the sustainability of the crops and, reciprocally, the land sustained the family and the community. Therefore, successful farms sustained the family, the family sustained the health of the land, and both sustained the town and townspeople. Lippard writes,

In 1860, six out of ten Americans lived by farming; now it's two out of one hundred—even though farming remains the nation's biggest business. Since the '40s, "get big or get out" has been the message from Washington. Only six percent of the nation's farms make over \$100,000 per year, yet they account for half of all farm earnings. The large farmer's mechanized, specialized, chemically intensive methods developed over the last fifty years have proven disastrous for the environment. (150)

Not only was the ecology of the land effected but towns began shuttering. Lippard states, "Small towns were decentralized and individual scopes were broadened as communities were weakened and dependence on corporate power structures increased" (151). To add insult to injury, more food was needed and less farmers were available to grow it. Environmental activist Wendell Berry sardonically writes, "Millions are threatened with starvation—so the argument runs—therefore [America] must continue to farm in

monocultures on larger holdings with fewer farmers, larger and more expensive machines, more chemicals” (63). Then, as small farmers were overrun by corporations in an effort to monopolize and experiment, genetic modification and engineering techniques became prevalent. Even the farmers that did survive began to shop at the supermarket rather than live off their land. Since then, in fact, Priscilla Ferguson argues that “our twenty-first-century palates have been formed—or deformed, according to your alimentary persuasion—by a great number of foodstuffs that did not exist fifty, one hundred, or even twenty years ago. For better or worse, fast foods as well as once-exotic fare have shaped our tastes no less than our foodways” (686). With this migration, multi-generational farmers were divorced from their agricultural roots and this separation affected consumers as drastically. Communities that once depended on the local farmers’ success were further removed from where their food came from and the animals that were raised in order to nourish them. This division not only separated the community from food sources but from one another. The technological advances that were intended to make lives better also “reduce us to insignificance” (Berry 104). Berry argues:

We have learned to be fascinated by the statistics of magnitude and power. There is apparently no limit in sight, no end, and so it is no wonder that our minds, dizzy with numbers, take refuge in a yearning for infinitudes of energy and materials. And yet these works that so magnify us also dwarf us, reduce us to insignificance. They magnify us because we are capable of them. They diminish us, say what we will, once we build beyond a human scale, once we conceive ourselves as Titans or as gods, we are lost in magnitude; we cannot control or limit what we do...If people are grass before God, they are as nothing before their machines. (105)

But it is through this insignificance that now begs the question: what is more powerful than human interaction? Should technology be allowed to dwarf our sense of belonging?

Logically, the danger of separation from one another and from our food sources is compounded exponentially with the shift from rural to urban living and is further problematized by the isolation introduced by technology. Agribusiness is not going away, and food sources continue to be shielded from the consumer. The food process has “passed from a farm-based, family-based, independent agriculture abjectly dependent upon many kinds of industrial ‘inputs’ ...producing [what amounts to] ...an incalculable waste of topsoil and of human life and energy, and at the cost of destroying communities and poisoning the land and the streams” (Berry 171). As a result of these losses, I argue that the Ecoconscious, including ecotourists, should consider farm-to-fork food choice a high priority and should support these grassroots, sustainable agricultural concerns so they may continue to grow in popularity. Brad Weiss, in his article entitled “Configuring the Authentic Value of Real Food” writes:

Opposition to industrial agriculture decries the damage wrought by food conglomerates but nonetheless embraces integration as an esteemed dimension of sociality and action. This embrace can be seen quite clearly in the way that advocates for local food highly value, at the most abstract level, a range of what are deemed “connections” forged between elements and actors, producers and consumers, terrain and technique, seasonality and sustenance. (615)

Contemporary ethical food consumption has inadvertently produced a sense of belonging for the traveler in search of culinary place-soul. By patronizing farm-to-fork eateries, the eco-traveler connects with the community and becomes a “local,” supporting the small

farmers and thus creating and inhabiting an authentic “place-ful-ness.” Belonging to a group culture interested in the preservation of small farm life becomes the “someplace” that Lippard describes when she questions “placelessness.” The travel writer interested in ecotravel, or with readers that are Ecoconscious, must embrace this authentic food system, one in which a degree of separation exists from the mighty food conglomerates. The commitment to consuming local foods will help to cement a sound foundation on which to educate and provide information on the sense of belonging one feels with the connections that this food movement embraces.

The owners and chefs of the restaurants, too, have a stake in the revitalization of the local farmers and their success once again depends reciprocally on the success of the farmers. Weiss writes that the chef he interviewed for his article stated “he wants people ‘to see that connection [between the animal and themselves] and to make [patrons] think about how they use that animal, and what can be wasted and what isn’t wasted—and so, how every piece of that life that was sacrificed for us needs to be made use of” (618). Quite distinctly, the chef not only promotes the husbandry of the farmer with his livestock, but consideration of the animal itself. This grass roots philosophy parallels the authenticity of the meal and links each participant to place-ful-ness. The framework for the relationship between all parties is built around the authenticity of the meal itself—bridging a connection and forging belongingness to those who value living a life with greater agricultural roots and authenticity.

Authenticity indeed begins with the farmers themselves, and this authenticity, a word that Weiss writes “is widely and regularly used by farmers, breeders, chefs, and consumers” (623) unites everyone involved in the food process. However, once again the

local farmer that supplies the farm-to-fork restaurant often must defend his authenticity as both producer and consumer in that his concerns marry sustaining the vitality of farm operations with enhancing the quality of life for the farmers themselves. And, indeed, for society as a whole. This relationship between the agricultural process and the environment is dependent upon its valued authenticity. Weiss writes:

When I asked Eliza [his interviewed farmer] what she thinks most moves her customers to buy the un-car-battery-like pigs she raises, she tells me, 'I'm authentic. I control the entire process from genetic to slaughter.' The seamless connection among all dimensions of production, one not generated by an industrial division of specialized, repetitive tasks but carried out by the direct application of unmediated, skilled labor, is critical to confirming the authenticity of this process. (623)

The authenticity of farms such as Weiss describes, in conjunction with the tourist's perceived authenticity, forms the place-ful-ness- the sense of belonging that the entire enterprise forges. This connection is part of the vital process that promotes the slow movement recognizing the importance of both the food sources and the land husbandry. This authenticity harkens a time before the technological modification of foods became the norm, once again placing the community's vitality within the hands of the farmer's viability and embodies the true essence or nature of agricultural authenticity.

The sense of belonging that is the natural by-product of this return to process is appropriately formed and exacerbated by the indignation felt by the ecotourist when imagining the "battery-like pigs," and propels the solidarity with those of common sensibilities, and these common sensibilities constitute Ecoconscious communities.

These feelings, and the type of community fostered by farm-to-fork place-soul, cannot be authentically connected through technology but must depend on the sensory cues portrayed through the honest and descriptive words of the travel writer. While the erosion of the food process continues its slow march toward total tastelessness or modified plasticity, the regard for the animal and the land is reawakened by the farm-to-fork movement. It is amidst this reawakening and redefinition of food sustainability that paves the way toward place-ful-ness and the necessity for determining place-soul in farm-to-fork establishments.

Chapter Four: Greer Is Peachy

To get there, we sped down Interstate 85—the quickest route, according to our GPS. The nearer we got to the heart of the Cherokee foothills, the more prevalent the peach farm signs became. On both sides of the highway you are assaulted by the vying advertisements of the local farms: Abbot Peaches, Black’s Peaches, Lemmon Farms.

Approaching Gaffney, the giant peach water tower welcomed us to the official peach county of South Carolina. The commercialism and progress of Gaffney indicated a boon of progress as it crept around the dotted mill houses that still fight for their right of place, their grandfathered space. Stores, road names and advertising cry “Orchard Clearance” or “Peach Salsa Cider.” Such larger-than-life advertising for such a small site was Abbott Farm—boasting two convenient locations—easy on/off from the highway.

Taking exit 68 to Greer was a knee jerk reaction to a highway sign and a rejection to the GPS. We decided to fly by the seat of our pants—to wing it—the old-fashioned way. Inconspicuous street markers guided us to the fork, the right tine indicated that Greer was ten miles. Appropriately, Supertramp’s “Goodbye Stranger” played on the radio as we trundled toward town. Tractors were leisurely parked on corners and along the cracked and oft-traveled byway, the crossroad at 292 presented a boat repair station—gee, were we near water? Rolling up to Bi-Lo for a quick pit stop, it was quite telling that one of the aisle indicators stated *Organic Cereal* and the next offered *New Age Drinks*.

The folks that we approached in the store didn’t know about the Peach Jam, an open-air community farmer’s market located in downtown Greer’s City Park. Although the Jam ran each Saturday from May through November, the folks proudly informed us that we were in Lyman, and not Greer. Bopping past Tootertown Livestock Auction we

finally had Greer in our sites. The colorful tents of City Park were as welcoming as coquettes to a suitor, a wink that promises the sweet peach.

The revitalization of the downtown area was fully apparent, yet parking this Saturday morning was easy-peasy. Bypassing the orange barrels and piled rock of change, we shimmied into a parallel parking spot just around the corner from the Jam. My hope of peachiness was on-point...this seemed just the place for a peach lover to be on a sunny September morning.

City Park's entrance invited the pedestrians that entered with open arms. Declaring *Peach Jam 2018*, the entrance banner design replicated each stall's banner that proclaimed each vendor by name. Tranquiltea Company and Joyful Sounds Farm boated fresh peach beverages and all-natural body products- fresh from the farm. The "All Natural" product campaign was in full swing here--no chemicals or preservatives was the chorus, fresh peaches, the bridge. Stopping by each booth we were treated to a taste of the wares, and to some local information to boot. Do you use fresh peaches? Are you the owner, the baker, the artist? Peach soaps and peach brittle, peach salsa and peach pastries.

The center of City Park boasts a two-tiered fountain, resplendent with gurgling blue water surrounded by a grassy stadium-seating arena--a welcoming community platform for small, intimate performances. This sense of place-soul shone through the glimmering water, the calming sounds of the spray, the effervescent bubbles that captured the reflection spectrum of color, was a calming respite, an escape from the rebirth of its surrounding city. Sweet peachy aromas wafted in the slight breeze created by the fountain sprays.

Drawn by the sumptuous aroma to the Satterfield Farms table, which offered a fresh tasty tidbit of sausage and burger samples, a promise and the delivery of mouth-watering succulence lead us to the smiling face of Tommy Satterfield. Tommy confidently and proudly explains that his farm uses no antibiotics or hormones. Tommy boasts that he slaughters at 30 months and under, and not the 10-year-old toughies that the supermarkets carry. His farm is small, only about 50-75 head on leased acreage. Most of his workers, Tommy proclaims, are native to Greer, and most used to be customers, some from his family's original farm beside 85. He casually, yet tellingly, mentions the industrialization boon in the mid-90s, and how the airport and BMW displaced more than ten families from their farms—all in the name of progress. After our conversation, loyalty and empathy encourage me to take a menu, and I vow to order his prime rib at Christmas.

Strolling by the high school musical performers, Sally the dancer grasps me for a quick do-si-do. Her calloused hands grip mine tightly as she shakes her hips to the music. While the audience sings along with the local budding pop star, I notice that the performance lacks nothing but a jarful of dollar bills. Sally sashays away into the crowd as we turn back toward the exhibitors. So far, the sights, smells, and sounds are in keeping with my perception of South Carolina's birthplace of peaches.

Peppered amongst the local products are the imposters—the baked goods made from canned peaches, the as-seen-on-TV gadgets, the franchised pseudo-natural dip mixes, that are disturbingly hawked under the guise of natural products. Pushing past these pretenders with nary a glance, I'm luckier to happen upon a jar of freshly canned peach jam and a rustic peach galette, along with the directions to the Greer Heritage

Museum and the Campbell's Covered Bridge—two Greer must-sees...you know... where the police department is and just down the road a piece, past the Indian boundary line.

We found a shady parking spot behind the museum, underneath the protective limbs of the centennial oaks, we stride to the concrete steps, and as though on cue Sally the dancer sashays towards us. Did I know that last month a 150-year-old pecan tree had to be cut down? Sally says that she cried when she saw them topple the magnificent beauty.

Opening the massive wooden door, the hinges squeak with time-worn pleasure at our entrance. I approach the desk and a hand-written sign attached to a jar proclaims “Free Admission—Donations Appreciated.” Digging deep for a couple of dollars, “Ed the Docent” approached— “It’s a fancy way to say I work for free,” Ed snickers, as he leads us toward the library. Originally built in 1935, the brick building was first a post office, then the city hall. The current library was once occupied by the post master, then the mayor, Ed tells us. He also confirms what I’d heard snippets of at the Peach Jam: in the early 1900s this area grew more peaches than the *whole* state of Georgia. Smiling, I recall a couple of others at the Jam mentioning “Georgia peaches” with a sneer—who knew there was such a contentious rivalry going on between one small county in SC and the entire state of GA?

The same story of old-meets-new is the atmosphere as we watched historical presentations on DVD, accompanied by a 40-choice menu, regarding the entire peach history of Greer, from its peaches to its forefathers. Beginning as a 5-acre orchard in 1898, by 1913 James Taylor, “The Father of Peach Growers,” exported his first boxcar of peaches. Additionally, cotton, as well as cottonseed oil, and fertilizer were major crops in

the 20th century. Grist mills ground corn and wheat and for generations the original 1890 mill turned out white corn meal and grits.

The museum covers generations and depicts what the old movie theater looked like, the military uniforms worn, the women's garments of the early 1900s, and even a wicker transport basket—slightly used. Notably missing are the African-American and migrant workers' presence from the museum's displays. More prevalent is the weaving machine with an invitation to try your skill.

A small breeze welcomed us as we left the museum and the hair-whipping wind lashed through our open windows as we sped toward the bridge. The secondary road we traveled was winding and allowed us to pass single family dwellings peppered with farmland. Approaching quickly on our right, as if it were dropped from Zeus' Olympus, emerged a Greek revival mansion the likes we hadn't seen. At the last moment, after glancing the painted sign Carolina Carriage Horse and Tack, I cut the wheel to the right, and we found ourselves in the gravel parking lot of the largest carriage house I have ever seen. We wandered up and down the many aisles of carriages, marveling at the restorations and originals, hearses to wedding carriages, pleasure buggies and fire carts. Sold nation-wide to buggy owners and enthusiasts, Carolina Carriage offers over 125 selections, priced into the tens of thousands. The plush velvet of the fancier models contrasted with the rustic wooden models, but all invited you to step up and see yourself in yesteryear. Up the narrow outdoor metal stairway we climbed, leading us to a hay loft full of leather tack. The aroma of tanning, inviting and heady, drew us in as we passed through the door. Wandering up and down the aisle, we each picked out our favorite saddle and made our way to the octagonal window at the end of the massive room. As we

looked out, we were greeted by the sight of a worker on his way back from lunch—driving a horse and buggy! A shiny stallion galloping alongside matched the harnessed horse in stride. Mouths agape, we reminded ourselves of the time and turned away from the joyous sight of healthy horses. We clambered back into our own gasoline buggy and trundled down highway 101 toward the covered bridge. Gurgling water sounds welcomed us as we pulled into a parking spot at the top of a gently sloping hill. The rippling of the stream and its iridescence enticed us to the hills edge and it is here that the magnificence of the covered bridge sweetly hits you like eye candy. Beneath it children are splashing, couples are canoodling. Wading in, the clean, cool water cleanses your soul as the green, flowing moss tickles your toes.

The carriage path harkens how things used to be and fleetingly I think of the farmer and his horse and buggy. I take a moment to refresh and to ponder how far we've come and how far we have yet to go. Hand in hand we walk up to the car and pledge to drive home on the back roads—longing for more time and dreaming of a time long past.

Chapter Five: Charleston's Soul Is in Its Soil

As I approached the Angel Oak, a live oak tree that has grown resplendently on John's Island in South Carolina for over 400 years, I was feeling the rush, the weightiness of deadlines, the lostness when you're not truly "present;" when your feet don't feel firmly planted on the ground.

In anticipation of my visit, I researched articles about oak trees and live oaks in general, and the Angel Oak's history in particular. Learning a bit about its heritage: owned by an African-American slave-owner in the antebellum South, the ghosts stories of the lynched that ramble amongst the oak's hollowed branches, the canopy that shades over a half an acre, I tried to free myself of any preconceived notions of injustice in order to recognize the true essence of the tree, its place-soul. I then remembered that it was Martin Luther King weekend and thought how apropos, and an interesting and unexpected frame emerged for my short visit to Charleston.

The drive from the piedmont to the coast took only three hours, and I was pleasantly surprised. The owners of the bed and breakfast that I reserved for the night, located on bricked Church Street just steps from the battery, were kind enough to allow me to check in early, and the caretaker suggested I go to the tree directly in order to avoid the crowds that cluster under the Angel's evergreen branches throughout the day. On the way to John's Island, what amounted to a mere 12 miles from downtown Charleston, I drove past so much construction that I mourned Charleston's gentrification. I traversed the drawbridges that connect John's Island to the mainland, the thrumming of the tires on the steel grating allowed me to take a step or two back in time as I imagined ships passing beneath. As the bustling avenue narrowed and the car dealerships and restaurants were

seen in the rearview mirror, bungalows and churches replaced the corporations. I turned left onto a nearly single-lane, pot-holed dirt road, and found it difficult to believe that hundreds of cars drove it daily in order to catch a glimpse of the infamous oak.

I squeezed my jalopy into a compact spot in front of the gift shop and unfolded myself, breathing in the fresh morning air as I stretched. It wasn't until I rounded the corner that I spotted her. Upon first sight, I fell in love with her stature, her lofty, majestic limbs, and the lower branches that kissed the sandy soil, their outlines looking like a Scottish depiction of Nessie in the Loch. The tree's welcome sign, its crudity reminding that there is no charge to see the Angel, informs the public in rhyming verse, that the Angel needs protecting:

I am old, as old can be,
 I'm estimated to be 400 years old you see;
 I've got to be very attractive;
 Because the surveillance on me is active;
My limbs are hollowed but you can't tell,
Because my bark is what keeps me looking well;
 I don't like when you lean, pull, sit, stand or
 Climb on me, also your purses, cameras or
 Anything that would danger me;
I ask that you just admire and let me be!

Posted signs dot Angel's underneath, warning visitors that they may rub, hug and kiss, but anything else is restricted. The signs proclaim: "I've got someone who will tell me" and sure enough, periodically, a startling, reprimanding voice rung out into the crowd.

The baritone chastised: “Please don’t stand on the branches,” or “Please get the children off the tree.”

The Angel Oak is enormous and you don’t realize her breadth until you step under her and the temperature drops ten degrees. On this occasion, my early arrival merited whispered gusts that sent dew droplets down onto my awed, upturned face. Carolina blue skies peeked through as the sun’s rays, dappled by the tree’s winter leaves, created fanciful shadows. Friendly ferns, moss, and algae grow on the Angel’s enormous branches as they arch downward, bending like tremendous arms reaching toward the visitors who are momentarily allowed a touch of her bark’s cragginess, the crinkly ferns and the petal-softness of the forest green algae. The Spanish moss is just out of reach, but seem soft, gray-tinted elven rope ladders swaying in the breeze. The smoothness of the knots and weathered bark limbs harken a memory just out of reach, and the pruned limbs remind visitors of the care that is necessary to preserve her history. The Angel’s heavy limbs are also aided by posts, cables and poles lest they break off when the coastal storms lash and ravage the area.

Although I surreptitiously sought oak druids or unsettled ghosts, what I actually experienced was a certain peace, the Angel’s calming reassurance that life goes on amidst troubles encountered. I dipped my fingers into the compacted sandy soil and felt the vast number and density of the miniscule grains. The sand’s softness made me question how the Angel’s roots sustained in its texture. It was at this moment that I felt the place-soul; it was not in the massive trunk or the swooping, hollowed branches. The Angel’s essence was not in the harrowing supposed history of the oak. The Angel’s place-soul is in its roots.

The roots, only four feet deep, have offshoots called taproots which delve another 90 feet down. Whatever hangs from her branches overshadows the taproots' subterranean journey, a place concealed by the enriching sand and moistened by her own self-made mulch—the scent earthy and heady when brought to the nostril. The compact nature of the soft soil blankets, safely rejuvenates, and sustains by the regeneration process of the Angel's bark and foliage, which then again fortifies the roots. I perceived the Angel's welcoming essence as coming from below and sustaining what is seen from above.

I wandered out from beneath the tree and saw an artist as he worked on a painting of the Angel, commemorating and honoring her by the use of the soil as texture for his oils. I popped into the gift shop and dropped what I could into the donation box that hangs unobtrusively on the wall, in the hope that my meager offering may help retain this place in some small measure.

I intentionally turned the opposite direction out of the driveway and a quick mile or so drive brought me, much to my delight, to an authentic farmer's market. This large open-air affair was a congregation of twenty-five or so tents filled with local produce and crafts. Organic vegetables, canned and baked goods allowed for a wafting sweetness to fill the air, tempting the senses. Free samples were offered: the chutneys, jams, and cakes acted as their own mouth-watering enticements to buy. The friendliness of the vendors added to the market's place-soul. Conversations were encouraged, and I spent many minutes speaking with a cattle and pig farmer who moved his farming-family from central Indiana to Charleston. His enthusiasm, anticipation for a better life, and hope for the future were sentiments that were uplifting and contagious. After viewing, smelling,

feeling, and tasting my way around the circle of tents, I felt a deep satisfaction when I chose a glorious bunch of dirty beets, drawn that morning from the grainy ground, to bring home with me. I looked forward to re-creating my mother's beloved beet soup recipe. As I explored, the lilting tones of a lone singer-guitarist tinkled through the air and the warm breeze ruffled my hair and massaged my exposed pores. I left wishing that I had more money to spend in order to sustain the hard-working farmers and craftspeople that joined together in this community space.

The drive back to Charleston allowed me time to contemplate the Angel Oak's age, its preservation up to this point, and the irreverence of some who find themselves underneath the blissful shade of her branches. It also recalled the history of the city: both the good and the worrisome. I once again noticed the construction that encroached the historical district where I was staying. I turned onto Church Street for the second time and my eyes drank in the narrow brick street, the gas streetlamps, flowered porticos and boxes; my ears were attuned to the thump of the tires, my teeth chattered in time with the staccato of the brick.

15 Church Bed and Breakfast, also known as the Phillips-Yates-Snowden House, is a privately-owned colonial residence belonging, like many other residences in historical Charleston, to house-poor owners struggling to keep afloat amidst Charleston's skyrocketing property taxes. Although the owners were not in town to meet me, I immediately felt a sense of their lives and perceived the family's history walking up the steps to the traditionally built Charleston historical home. Complete with four stories, courtyard garden and carriage house, side-yard facing, storied porches and wrought iron fencing, I imagined a life two centuries ago.

The marvelous 18-foot ceilings were trimmed with original moldings and the wood floor, although remodeled and sleek, was reminiscent of what used-to-be. My room, situated on the ground floor, felt humid from the recent rains, but a gas fireplace stood sentinel to ward off chills. The upstairs rooms perhaps would have been a better choice, allowing the sunrise to be viewed from within, but with such a short couple of blocks to the ocean and the private entrance the lower room afforded, I was not awfully disappointed with my room selection.

The antique furnishings were what you may envision in a southern colonial home, and added were the comforts for those who live there year-round. Pets roamed freely, but owing to some visitor's allergies were not allowed in the rooms. The linens were weaved of soft cotton, the beds firm and quilts cozy. Private bathrooms in each room aided in the understanding of the scope and grace of the mansion. Private parking, a must for downtown stays, was included.

I headed out to explore the myriad streets that wended around my accommodation, and a couple short blocks away I turned the corner onto a cobbled stone street. The name Chalmers seemed familiar, and I soon learned that this block was the location of The Old Slave Mart Museum. Located in the middle of the block, I crossed the rocky, uneven street and nearly tripped toward the entrance. The archway, a typically inviting architectural structure, belied the nature of the mart within. This building housed the first location for indoor slave sales. When a town ordinance was passed in 1856 restricting outdoor trade, due to the upheaval that often transpired around the auction, trading was required to be moved inside rather than on the streets or docks. This building was the first of forty in a four-block radius that housed the slave auctions. "Ryan's Mart"

was located here for seven years and boasted “packaged,” “marketed,” and categorically-sorted men and women for auction. Although renovated, the small, cramped enclosure still possesses the jagged brick walls that many hands clutched in agony. Informational displays pepper the original walls and describe the pens and stalls that were used to hold the “goods” while awaiting their sale. It was the trader’s job to prepare the slaves and match the enslaved with labor that suited their skills.

Graphs and charts display the costs of slaves and their modern equivalents. Depictions and voice-overs tell visitors how the slaves were made to look lively on the auction block and were often forced to dance for the buyers. These often-deceptive performances were used to market those souls once considered no better than livestock. Articles describing slaves who protested and fought their capture and sale are posted in heart-wrenching text. The stories of African families, often broken up in order to pull in more money or separated later to raise capital to purchase more slaves, are displayed. Cries and wails are broadcasted from hidden speakers. Documented bills of sale are exposed, as if there were any doubt to these atrocities. Framed photos of the “death house,” since torn down, and the layout of the yard is posted. Auction chants and bid-calling amplify the clip-clop of horse’s hooves as they reverberate on the cobbled streets.

A creaky staircase wends its way to the top floor and to additional informational displays and a lecture area. Scholars and researchers utilize the space to educate and inform the public. Displayed shackles and chains permeate the building as grave reminders of its horrific and oppressive past. Freedom never felt as fresh as when I emerged through the doors back onto the smooth stones of Chalmers Street. I realized, upon my re-emergence, that I had been holding my breath. When I looked behind me, I

saw each visitor who followed exhale. As the sun peeked through the clouds, I reached for my hat to shield my shame. My despair lingered even as I sought to hide my heartache.

Shifting emotional gears was difficult, but dinner time approached. One of the highlights of travel stems from my interest in the farm-to-table restaurant movement and I always look forward to choosing and dining at a small restaurant that boasts local fare. Sometimes I get lucky and run across an authentic farmer- and community-sustaining restaurant, but often it is difficult to tell from a website and my emails to these establishments frequently remain unanswered. So, I usually resort to flying by the seat of my pants when choosing where to eat.

I chose Angel Oak Restaurant not only for its décor and menu, but for its proximity to and namesake of the Oak. I was pleased to encounter the one-room restaurant, its quaint furnishings, and local offerings. The rustic tables and chairs were arranged in a friendly open-conversational manner around the square room, covered with sheets of butcher wrap. The water glasses were mason jars and fresh, sweet-smelling roses adorned the tables in small glass vases. The plates were mix and match, and the vibe of the restaurant befitted its ecologically-friendly intent.

The menu offered locally brewed beers, local teas, and a smattering of decidedly un-local wines. The server hastily indicated, when asked which dishes were local, that they all were. I still have my doubts about the Wild-caught Dill Salmon...but who am I to argue? The server was brusque and seemed rushed although the restaurant was not that busy for 7:30 on a Saturday night. I ordered the honey drizzled Fried Chicken and the Shrimp & Grits and was satisfied, but not blown-away, with my selections. Budgeting, of

course, limits me, and there were more expensive dishes offered that may have been more flavorful. While the salad greens were fresh and crispy and the vinaigrette tart and savory, the honeyed-chicken was the stand-out. Although the shrimp were meaty and firm, they were quite tasteless and I left the restaurant wishing that the owners had answered my email and that my server had been more informative and friendly. All in all, I was moderately pleased with my method of roll-the-dice, spin-the-wheel choosing, but vowed to get local input next time I was in the region. While I thought that this particular restaurant was lacking in great service, compared to its sustainable intention and local namesake, I felt gratified to have encountered a community hub with hearty food—even though they sent my leftovers home in Styrofoam.

While the breakfast served at 15 Church was ordinary and quickly prepared, the cook and housekeeper were locals who had a lot of information about the town, and themselves, that they readily shared. The two women had weathered illness, changes in hospitality careers due to tourist development and demands, as well as the growth and unpredictability of the area, yet still clung to their personal values and exuded southern hospitality. We chatted in the kitchen while they prepared breakfast and this was equally as enjoyable as the fancy place-settings of the ornate and opulent dining room. Kindly, they directed me to the churches in the area, as I am always keen on the personages and dates that dwell in any one place for eternity.

I idly strolled through St. Michael's and St. Philip's Anglican Churches, off Meeting Street, and this was a treat for the historian in me. Very old memorials and tombstones mixed in with the newer force the visitor to tiptoe over the graves of Charleston's ancestors in order to view, and in most cases feel, the writing that

encapsulates the lives of the departed. Narrow walkways allow you to wend your way around the yards. The larger, bolder gravestones loom and demand to be seen, while the smaller lean and are forgotten in the darkest of corners. Obelisks and monuments of national import are adorned with picketed signs suggesting valor and statesmanship, but the grave markers are overshadowed by the live oaks whose soil seems mixed with coldness and desolation. As I touched and compared the hard and unforgiving soil with the Angel Oak's sandiness, I began to comprehend the difference between a six foot and a ninety-foot depth. As I stepped along the paths in the graveyards, and on the sidewalks of the city itself, I began to understand the cement cracks and ruptures that threaten to trip Charleston's visitors. It is the reaction to the city's live oaks' roots grasping for freedom, only to be thwarted and repressed by the city's fettering.

The Church bells pealed, welcoming their congregations to worship on a Sunday morning, and their harmonizing dongs and chimes lingered in the air well beyond their last strike. This Sunday morning was blustery and the wind whipped my hair, slapping at the sides of my face as I wandered slowly back to my car to head north-west toward home. The chimes that rang melodiously for Charleston's living or their dead, in my mind echoed to produce a din, and confused me as to whether they sounded for those who were freed by death or those who are free only because of death.

Chapter Six: Breeches and Boots in Aiken

One of the greatest things about living in South Carolina is that wherever you live there's always less than a three-hour drive to wherever in the state you want to go. So, the drizzly rain, while a nuisance, did not hinder my timetable in any way. Whether I left at 6 or 7 was of no import, the wet weather seemed here for the duration.

On the drive down 77, the droplets on the windshield made the evergreens we passed seem kissed by snowflakes. On some, the drops resembled Christmas tree bulbs. But still, traffic sped down the highway. About halfway, I was able to turn off the intermittent wipers, yet the gray day lingered. Luckily it was balmy.

This southwestern part of the state boasts flat, smooth roadways, and the town of Aiken separated their double boulevards with tree-lined medians. A bit confusing though, was the manner in which a U-turn was necessary to change direction. Almost made the mistake, several times, of u-turning on the first one-way instead of the second right-way. The city grid was cross-hatched in a way that was unfamiliar, yet exciting.

The downtown area is a vibrant mix of shops, services and restaurants. This particular rainy Saturday didn't stop many from exploring. Clothing stores ran the gamut from high-end menswear to English riding gear. Who knew breeches had become so high-tech? Breeches used to have patches of real suede on the knees; now integrated silicone ribbing takes its place.

Annie's Inn is situated just five miles from the heart of Aiken, in Montmorenci, SC. Annie's consumes the entire corner, and even in February you can imagine how the flowerbeds and pots adorn the brick walkways when spring has sprung. The cottages in the rear surround a pool area and the ivy carelessly creeps up the structures. The main

house is a stately manor, a remnant of an 1830s, 1800-acre cotton plantation. Not knowing in which door to enter, I chose the back. A large mud room has that “grandma’s” smell: a strange mixture of cookie dough, Vicks VapoRub, and must; this long-forgotten odor welcomed me as much as the proprietor’s smile. As she shows us up the stairs, Annie, aka Scottie, proudly explains the layout of the home and mentions the cannonball that destroyed the third story during the Civil War while pointing to the shadowed line of the long-gone second staircase. Even though she’s probably repeated this information thousands of times in her thirty-five years of operation, I felt as though she views it through her lodgers’ eyes each time—with awe and reverence.

The pine plank floors glisten and creak authentically. Each of the four bedrooms offers its own reconstructed-from-closets bathroom and open fireplace. The larger rooms boast sofas and king-sized four-poster beds. The furniture is country antique, solid and handsome. All the bedrooms are lovingly decorated with the softest cotton bed linens and quilts. The towels are fluffy bits of cotton paradise! You know what sort of place you’re in when the natural fibers and feather pillows beckon you early and hold you late. Nevertheless, I had places to explore on this day and no time for napping. Excusing myself, I hopped back in the car and headed for the Aiken Farmer’s Market.

Back-tracking toward town, I found the market easily on its outskirts. The large, covered, open-market was partially filled on this soggy Saturday. Although warm, the cutting wind whistled through the structure and the farmers held their layers around themselves tightly, their smiling faces mocking the elements. An array of fresh offerings from baked goods, February’s typical chard and kale varieties, potatoes and root vegetables, hand dipped candles, honey, fresh eggs, goat’s and cow milk, to local grass-

fed beef and pork seemed an outlandish array for the day's uncooperative weather. I always wish that I had gobs of money when I walk into places such as these—authentic farmers with authentic goods. Freshly-picked, no-nonsense sustenance. Not a tube sock or plastic gadget in sight. Struggling sales on this oppressive and dank morning prompted me to select several sweet potatoes and a homegrown rose wax melt. I left with a heavy heart hoping that the rain would hold off a bit longer.

The Hopelands Gardens and Rye Patch is the home of the Aiken Citywide Arboretum and the Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame and Museum. Stationing the car on the grassy parking area, I opened the door and immediately noticed how a scent of citrusy spice filled the air. The “rose of winter,” or *camellia japonicas*, adorned the welcome garden, their fuzzy yellow stamens reaching out of their crimson and fuchsia petals were a vibrant opposition to the stark day. Wandering down the brick walk, live oaks stood as sentinels and every so often their forks cradled painted rocks, much to our delight. The oaks gave way to other trees, some but not all, conveniently labelled for identification. Eventually, I deduced that the lemony zest scent was emanating from the Witch Hazel trees, their brilliant, spidery blooms ranging in color from amber to flaxen filled the air as if the visitor needed any proof of their “Queens of Winter” reputation. Mrs. Oliver Iselin, the garden's developer, seemed to have preferred oriental varieties of flora when she began planting at the turn of the 20th century. Although there are deodar cedars and Southern Sugarberry, their bark buttoned with fungus-friends, in the main park and cat-o-nine-tails and cypress congregate in the wetlands area, most of the trees and plants are imported and seem displaced in both time and locale. But the beauty of the garden, along with the visitors who walk their dogs on leashes (and cats in strollers!),

smiles and speaks to you. The surroundings are tranquil, the fountains mesmerizing, and the Aiken Community Labyrinth meditative.

Meandering past the reflecting pool, the performing arts stage and the rose garden, all slumbering deeply on this dim day, you arrive at the Thoroughbred Hall of Fame. From the early 1900s, Aiken has played a vital role in the training of champion thoroughbreds and forty have been inducted into the Hall of Fame and immortalized by their photos, trophies and displayed silks that hang in veneration, spotlighting the careers of these famous racehorses. The large Hall of Fame Room features each champion, and the adjoining and upstairs rooms feature the important “humans” that helped fashion the reputation of this racing town. The museum smells of the polish that keeps the silver platters, boxes, trophies and pitchers sparkling in their smooth, lighted glass cabinets. The reflective glow of the museum’s soft lighting mirrors the gleam seen in the eyes of each owner, trainer and horse pictured in the victory photographs. This museum was especially poignant for me because my grandmother, who died much too young of an embolism, owned and raced thoroughbreds. I was a “track kid” at the now defunct Green Mountain racetrack in Pownal, Vermont for about a year when I was eight, and the memories of her pride and hard work came flooding back to me as I wandered among the many exhibits. Outside of the main museum, old box stalls, complete with original Dutch doors, contain more displays. My melancholy was relieved as I attempted to ride the mechanical thoroughbred, complete with the itty-bitty saddle and stirrups that force your knees to your chin. This distraction was a welcome respite from the nostalgia of the museum, and I unconsciously burst into laughter as I attempted to dismount the spirited contraption.

A quick couple of blocks brought us to Hitchcock Woods, the largest privately-owned urban forest in the United States. Founded in the early 1800s and measuring 2,100 acres with over 70 miles of bridle paths, Hitchcock Woods has long been a haven for equestrians. Fortunately, they also allow two-footed species to wander the sandy trails. After walking a bit, you begin to notice that the stillness of the woods is deceiving and its remoteness belies the fact that you are in the middle of a city. The sassy birdcalls echo through the tall pines and if you are still you can detect the vast variety of utterances: chirp, chirrup, tststs, trills, winka-winka-winka, that welcome or chastise you amongst the sound of a random raindrop as it falls from the needles far above your head. The breeze caresses my forehead and lovingly draws me deeper into the woods. The serenity makes you feel as though you're in a different time and place. Since then, I've heard about the many people who get lost among these pines and I believe it. Trails that snake from the main path are an option, and the pines' gnarled roots are like arthritic fingers breaking free from the soil forming nature's steps, leading you further from your course. The pinecones that have fallen are as large as two hands and are smooth rather than prickly. The holly bushes' spiked leaves can't hide their ruby-red berries and these sporadic bushes offer a break from the endless pine trunks. As you creep deeper into the endless forest, a heady vapor engulfs your lungs and invigorates you. Back on the bridle path you begin to understand why Aiken is exceptional for horse racing, cross-country eventing, or fox-hunting, the latter which is held in the woods each Tuesday and Saturday. The paths' soft, sandy soil allows for quick absorption of rain and the traction is a wonderment. As you sink your foot into the soil, it naturally propels you forward

from the heel and you notice a feeling that the land is helping you along. You feel present. You feel confident. You feel solid. This soil was meant for horses.

Back downtown, the organic restaurant that I had researched, unbeknownst to me, had closed down a month prior to my visit. Well, little wonder why the phone was not answered nor the email returned. Luckily, I stumbled across The New Moon Café. The café is colorful and eclectic, decorated with neighborhood artist' works and offers local, healthy fare. The restaurant roasts their own coffees in small batches, bakes their own breads, and embraces their community by purchasing locally sourced and produced ingredients. About half of the menu is labelled LL, which stands for "Local Lover," and from this selection of sandwiches and salads I chose to order the Fiona Panini—a veggie and melted cheddar on a wheat wrap with an iced vanilla chai. Although a bit pricey, as local often is, the sandwich was delicious and the drink refreshing. The bustling café would fill with horse-people in breeches and boots and then empty leaving the students on their computers sponging the free Wi-Fi. The patrons were decidedly upper middle class. Nearby, one couple shared their table with a stranger and invited conversation. The space felt welcoming, and the staff was efficient and friendly. Although you ordered at the counter, your food was carried, freshly-made, from the kitchen in back and was piping hot. Next time I vow to try their artisan toast, which by far seemed the most popular dish.

The night at Annie's was restful and quiet, although perhaps I secretly wished to hear the ghost of the little girl calling for her mama. Yet, I choose not to stay in room 2, for this reason, so I can't complain. Historically, after the war, the home had been used as a county doctor's residence and hospital. The cottages, Scottie informed me at breakfast,

were rented to “horse people” who came for longer periods during winter for thoroughbred racing or polo training. Although Scottie does not provide breakfast to these lodgers, I suppose their ability to stay in a quaint, inviting place is reminiscent of a home away from home. Scottie also mentioned that the adjacent acreage was purchased by the Prince of Dubai for the training and care of his thoroughbreds but that he has since vacated, leaving his beautiful farm up for sale. Similarly, Scottie wishes to sell. After 35 years in business, she is the longest person on South Carolina record to continuously run an inn. She is ready to retire and priced at 1.2 million, the historical inn seems a steal for the right person.

Like Aiken’s 1920s “Whiskey Road” mansions that were built and fled from by the “Robber Barons,” and the Prince of Dubai’s absconding, Scottie seems intent on escaping. Thoroughbred racing, polo and fox hunting interests are waning, and a certain sorrow touches my heart as I exit the town. I reflect on the fate of these beautiful horses as the rain pounds on the windshield. The small, independent tracks where my grandma’s horses raced have shuttered, and only the major tracks still survive. Hopefully, the farmers and trainers, the grooms and owners, and the horse lovers, can find a way to resurrect the sport of kings back from its steady decline to its former glory.

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