

On Reading Jerry Ellis' Travel Diaries — A Comparison of *Walking the Trail* and *Walking to Canterbury* —

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ジェリーエリスによる旅行記について

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要 旨

この論文では、アメリカ・インディアンとイギリス人を先祖に持つジェリーエリスの作品の中で、「トレール・オブ・ティアーズを歩く」と「カンタベリーへ行く」という二編のノンフィクション小説を考察し、比較する。

第一章では、「トレール・オブ・ティアーズを歩く」を取り上げ、作者が、先祖が受けた迫害の道を実際に歩くことで、その現代の様子を知るだけではなく、その道の持つ歴史的な価値を読者に知らせようとする姿を、作品を通して考察する。

第二章では、「カンタベリーへ行く」を取り上げ、作者が英語の中世文学の傑作であるチョーサーの「カンタベリー物語」に描かれた道を書くことで、その現代的意義を読者に知らせようとする姿を考察する。

第三章では、この二つの作品の文体的な違いを考察する。特に、二つの作品には、事実や出来事の描写に関して大きな違いがあることをしめす。

第四章では、この二つの作品が、歴史的な事実や出来事を、現在の読者が敏感に感じ取れるものとして作品を提示し、現代社会に生きる我々が、著者の考え方に共鳴できるという点で、作品の持つ現代的な価値があることを主張する。

キーワード：紀行文学，チェロキー，カンタベリー，ウォーキングツアー

Jerry Ellis (born 1974) is the author of a number of plays and books, including four travel books which depict how he walked historically famous trails in both the United States and England. At present, he runs a writers' retreat in Alabama.

This paper will compare his first work, *Walking the Trail—One Man's Journey along the Cherokee Trail of Tears (WTT)* which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Prize, and his

fourth book, *Walking to Canterbury—A Modern Journey Through Chaucer’s Medieval England* (*WTC*), which was published 12 years later. Both are said to have been produced with respect to his ancestors: his Cherokee blood on his father’s side, and his British blood on his mother’s side.

I . Along the Trail of Tears

Walking the Trail—One Man’s Journey along the Cherokee Trail of Tears was published in 1993, and covered the two months (Sept. 4–Oct. 30, 1989) that Ellis spent working along the original Trail of Tears, which was so named because of the four thousand people, including children and elderly, who died when they and some fourteen thousand others Cherokee were forced to walk from Alabama and nearby states to Oklahoma in the middle of winter, 1838. Ellis, the first person to do the trip on foot in the modern era, walked from the historical, so-called “Indian Territory” finish to the trail’s historical beginning at Fort Payne. In the prologue to *Walking to Canterbury*, Ellis explains how he was inspired to do the reverse route from a play he had written describing how a young Cherokee descendant was led by a vision to “bring home the spirits of those who had died on the forced march.” (*WTC* 5–6) The book includes many details about the original walk as well as information about the Cherokee life style.

Walking the Trail opens with the writer already into his sixth day of the walk. He has completed approximately one hundred miles and has some eight hundred more to go. Although he is walking out in the open during a violent storm, he cannot accept the ride offered by a passerby. His only reply is “I can’t. I’m walking the Trail of Tears.” This opening chapter is very well written and transports the reader immediately into the aloneness and trepidation of the walk that the author is about to relate to us.

The second chapter slips back in time to introduce some of the preparations Ellis took prior to departure on such a memorable adventure. He then carefully gives us scenes, like clips of film, of the people he meets prior to actually leaving Tahlequah in Cherokee County, Oklahoma, the start of his journey and the destination of many of the ancestors of its present residents. Overnighing with a Dr. Noble of the Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Ellis remarks on the duality of his situation. “... as I fall asleep the Ancient World and the Modern World marry in my dreams: I am a hunter seeking new depths of the soul along a Trail marked by telephone poles.” (*WTT* 39)

With Chapter Nine, one fourth of the way into the book, we start on the Trail of Tears proper with Ellis. The first day, however excited we may feel as readers, was not easy for Ellis. By the time he arrived in Proctor, some 24 kms east of Tahlequah, Ellis is out of water and has blisters; not unusual for someone new to walking like ourselves, but not expected from a seasoned hitchhiker. Further on in the Ozark Mountains which straddle Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri, Ellis finds a spring by the road that was undoubtedly used by the Cherokee who had passed there. As with other landmarks big and small, Ellis gives us a look into the history and significance of the area along with a short report on the meaning of the phenomenon before bringing us back to the modern era. In this case: “I want to drink from the spring, but I’m afraid to. I can’t be sure it’s free of pesticides and bacteria. I walk on.” (*WTT* 82)

The storm Ellis speaks of in his first chapter comes in the day or two before he reaches Pea Ridge

National Military Park, some 144 kms distance from the starting point. At this point we are given a brief account of the Civil War, and learn that Ellis' great-grandfather fought in that war. We also learn that one thousand Cherokee also fought here against the Union forces. In this way, Ellis intertwines immediate experiences with his own or the Cherokees' past.

At intervals during the book, Ellis describes how important birds are to the Cherokee people. He walks with a crow feather in his cap. At night, he seeks trees that host owls. He enjoys the flutter of hummingbirds and the call of blue jays. Cranes, we are told, are very spiritual birds, and the sighting of one makes Ellis feel that the Spirits are looking after him while he is on such an intrepid journey. (*WTT* 108) He also tells the folktale of a crane and a hummingbird who fell in love with the same Indian maiden. (*WTT* 145–6) The crane's thwarted love is said to have become the beauty and gracefulness of its flight.

After some 350 kms, Ellis feels that the public should know a little about what he is trying to accomplish. After an interview, Ellis gets onto the evening news. The strange looks from passersby change to innumerable waves and peace signs. People praise his initiative. The journey so far would probably take but four hours by car. On foot, the season has changed from a hot summer to a crisp autumn. In Mansfield, Missouri, Ellis meets two women who are also following a trail. They are following the life of Laura Ingalls Wilder. Each chapter introduces a new character: some for just a brief conversation, some for an in-depth exchange of life experiences.

The chapters continue to move on slowly. Ellis makes Van Buren, on the Current River, by Chapter Twenty-Two. In terms of mileage, this is nearly half way. In terms of book chapters, it is approximately two-thirds of the book. Van Buren, too, became the home of several Indians, we are told, who hid themselves in the forest rather than be part of the great Indian Removal that was forced on the Natives by the then president, Andrew Jackson. With each name on the map, there comes a story; an anecdote of history. As Ellis moves from Missouri into Illinois, and accounts of how badly the Cherokee were handled increases. Even reports by the soldiers who attended them tell of the mournful sight which continued to haunt them. (*WTT* 171) A description of a beautiful sunset is clouded with the words that follow immediately after: "Hundreds died here, where a picnic table now sits." (*WTT* 174) In Kentucky, Ellis visits the grave of Chief White Path, who had gone to Washington to appeal the plight of the Indians. (*WTT* 223) As one reads, one realizes that there are still a great many people living in the Confederate States who are descendants of Indians. In other words, although Jackson ordered the removal of all Indians, including Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Creek tribes, he was not able to eradicate them completely. The book ends with Ellis partaking in special cleansing rituals, another lesson in Cherokee customs for the reader.

II. Pilgrimage to Canterbury

This book begins with a prologue describing briefly who Thomas Becket was and why people should want to go to Canterbury. The first chapter opens with Ellis telling us that he arrived in Heathrow on

June 18, 1999, and that he plans to travel the road to Canterbury just as pilgrims in Chaucer's day would have done. He is on a tight schedule: seven days. Unlike his first book which has thirty-six chapters, this book has just twelve chapters. Each is full of historical information, extracts from ancient manuscripts, and small pictures depicting life in Chaucer's era. It also details Ellis' experience from Chaucer's Tabard Inn until his destination of Canterbury Cathedral.

Nearly each chapter is designated to a day spent on Chaucer's Pilgrim's Way, and a great many of the scenes he encounters and the people he meets inspire some mention of chapters from *Canterbury Tales*, or information gleaned from scholarly works on medieval history and lifestyle. For example, on his first day out from Southwark and the plaque that commemorates the location of Tabard Inn, Ellis meets a man called Frank who is a war hero. This leads Ellis to talk about medieval knights. On the second day, in Chapter Two, while walking towards Gravesend, Ellis explains burial rituals, and love and death in the Middle Ages, while on the fifth day, in Chapter Seven, a monastery leads Ellis to talk about the life of monks in medieval England. Extracts from Chaucer's work appear at various intervals, and include original lines from works such as the Nun's Priest's Tale (in Chapter 3), The Summoner's Tale (in Chapter 6), and The Wife of Bath's Tale (in Chapter 9).

Unlike Ellis' first walk along desolate roads and forest trails, this journey is mostly through towns and villages. Although he carries a large pack, complete with cooking utensils, tent and sleeping bag, Ellis sleeps outdoors only twice, favoring the companionship to be found at Bed & Breakfasts and rooms above pubs. After Southwark, Ellis walks south-easterly through Gravesend, and Rochester. At Rochester he tours the castle and meets a small group of teenagers who, when asked if they could introduce him to the King, answer, "A king has no use for our kind. We're the Rochester outcasts." (*WTC* 104) However, although their outward looks portray that of a modern vagabond, Ellis shows that they are educated and willing to learn more (*WTC* 132-41).

Ellis then turns south to Aylesford, where he stays two nights at The Friars, a large religious complex dating from the 13th century. Here he meets with monks both traditional and modern, hears stories of escape from political oppression (*WTC* 160-61), and attends the consecration of a Sister Elizabeth (*WTC* 171, 180-81). Brother Lawrence, who loved to watch Steve McQueen movies, admits that "God's not in fashion for some right now. But that doesn't change their need for him." (*WTC* 168). When leaving the monastery, which used to be a stop-over point for pilgrims who came by boat along the river Medway, Ellis walks to Maidstone, and then goes north-easterly to Sittingbourne. Along the way he meets a lonely wife whose husband is out of town, and some cheery women who talk about their wishes and dreams. Ellis, then, just like the knight in the Wife of Bath's Tale, continues his walk asking woman what they want most in the world. Later, after stopping off at an antique shop, Ellis considers the business of cult relics, exorcism and fortune-telling. Grant, the antique shop owner, advises him to stay at the Faversham Stone Chapel, a stone church of Roman and Saxon origin.

Chapter Eleven begins with Ellis waking shortly after dawn. He again extols the tranquil countryside of England and tells how much he wishes not to leave this place of which he has grown so fond. After a pleasant night under the stars, Ellis walks on cheerily on, quoting verse from the Parson's Tale. He also

gives details of Chaucer's death as well as his abode before passing and his tomb at Poets' Corner. After refilling his canteen at a pub in Harbledown (written as Habletown), Ellis continues his pilgrimage to Canterbury. Almost there, he stops for lunch, and locates a B&B for his last night in England. His taking a shower there seems almost like a final purification before entering the holy cathedral. The closer Ellis gets to his destination, the more information he gives us about Thomas Becket, later known as Saint Thomas, the once Archbishop of Canterbury. One long extract relates an episode between King Henry II and Becket who were good friends from childhood. Another long extract recalls how Becket, after a dispute following a decree that the English Church would hold supremacy, was adamant that the king return power to the Catholic Church.

The final chapter does tell us a little about the inside of the massive awe-inspiring cathedral, but mainly describes Ellis, the pilgrim. Ellis dutifully lights a candle for the ailing husband of one woman he had met along Pilgrim's Way. He then goes on to where Becket was murdered. After telling us that he kneels and will mount the stairs, as Henry II did to show reverence to his old friend, Ellis fills five pages with descriptions of previous pilgrims and some of the many miracles that lead to Becket becoming a saint. Ellis ends his pilgrimage on a light note by joining some cub scouts in a tour of a Canterbury Tales amusement center. As a final symbol of reverence, Ellis places a feather and a candle in a tiny, hand-carved, bark boat and sets it afloat on the river Stour.

III. Writing Style and Text Format

Although Jerry Ellis is a very eloquent writer, and both books portray his experiences walking a trail of some historical and religious significance, there are a number of differences between the style and format of *Walking the Trail* and *Walking to Canterbury*. Firstly, although both books include maps of the walk taken, one notices immediately the inclusion of many small illustrations into *Walking to Canterbury*. These illustrations serve to supplement the vast amount of information on Chaucer and life in the middle ages.

These illustrations, although hindering the reader from partaking in a modern pilgrimage, do help the reader glean a better understanding of the information which Ellis wishes to give us. They also assist in marking the past and the present. Unlike *Walking the Trail* which separates the present and the past with a blank line, the break is negligible in *Walking to Canterbury*. One example gives a man named Herbert asking: "What's all this plague of violence in the United States, anyway?" Herbert's question leads Ellis to mention the murder of various presidents, the shooting of a close friend by a teenager, personal fear while living in the mountains in Alabama, and three pages of talk about weapons in the middle ages. Ellis brings us back into modern times by concluding that "Medieval weaponry was a child's slingshot compared to today's threat of nuclear and biochemical warfare" and leads us back to his pilgrimage by saying: "But that Sunday morning, as locals came and went from the cozy store, weapons and violence in any form seemed a million miles away." (*WTC* 62-6) While the seamlessness of this style would attract many readers, it could very well confuse others.

Not quite as noticeable is the lack of inverted commas to indicate speech in Ellis' first book, *Walking the Trail*. This loss, however, does not hinder the readability of the book as the following extract shows:

The driver motions for me to hop inside, but I hesitate. A little girl with a candy bar is propped against his shoulder. The driver rolls down the window.

Get in, he shouts.

The little girl smiles and it's so cozy and dry inside. Water runs down my nose.

I can't, I say. I'm walking the Trail of Tears. (*WTT* 2-3)

The above lack of inverted commas is not a common practice, and, as an e-mail interview with the author proved, was initially corrected by the copy-editor. It was later returned to the original by his editor. *Walking to Canterbury*, on the other hand, is set out in a very orthodox format.

Both books make use of the senses, and birds play an important role here, both in terms of visual vignettes as well as auditory ones. The following is an example of Ellis' excellent command of language: "Swallowing the slippery meal, [the crane] lifted its wings and wobbled into flight across the river and over the treetops. Passing the sun, it was consumed by golden rays before reappearing over a distant hill." (*WTC* 198) Always seen as a good omen, birds chirp at an entrance, and crows caw and doves coo wake-up calls. The sense of touch is most pronounced in descriptions of handshakes and other bodily contact, and appears more often in his initial work. Some scenes can be considered quite sensual which some readers would prefer not to appear in a general travelogue. That said, it is generally accepted that travel literature is as much a narration of the trip being undertaken, as it is a sketch of finding oneself within the greater journey of life.

IV. Importance as a Work of Non-fiction

In order to consider these as worthy works of non-fiction, one needs to verify their contents. Indeed, readers who find a travel book interesting may very well try to imitate the route taken by the author. In *Walking the Trail*, Ellis does not always give very explicit place names. For example, on one particularly hot day, his shirt is soaked with sweat, and he looks for a place to rest. Then, just by the road, there is a spring; "the very spot where thousands of Cherokee also did the religious ritual of *going to water*." (*WTT* 80) A diligent search for the location of the spring on a map of the area and in internet homepages did not solve the query. Indeed, it seems that the Ozark Mountains have a great many springs, the most famous being Big Spring which is mentioned much later in the book. This does not lessen the accuracy of Ellis' account. Indeed, the book is now required reading at some institutions. It does, however, make it difficult for readers to follow in Ellis' footsteps.

In *Walking to Canterbury*, on the other hand, Ellis notes the towns he passes through, and places where he stays overnight. He even tells us the names of the restaurants and pubs in which he partakes of lunch and dinner. These places nearly all carry the atmosphere of taverns of yesteryear, many with outward facades as well as inward décor, and should we wish to, we could certainly visit the same.

Unfortunately, the names of two towns are spelt incorrectly. One is Bexleyheath (written as

Besleyheath), and the aforementioned Harbledown. (*WTC* 46, 257) These inaccuracies could deter the reader, especially if they are familiar with the area being written about, or have a strong wish to duplicate the journey. Conversely, outsiders might be misled by the term “Pilgrims Way.” The official Pilgrims Way, known now as North Downs Way runs from Winchester in the east to Canterbury in the west. Ellis walked from London diagonally south, which is the path Chaucer’s protagonists took. It is but one alternative.

One thing important for researchers in literature is a reference of works cited or unusual information procured. Ellis concludes his first book with a short bibliography of the four books that helped him learn about his ancestors and their tear-filled trail. His fourth book is even more helpful with detailed notes and a four-page bibliography. Considering that the latter journey was by far much shorter than his first, the reader may find the latter work saturated with excessive information on Chaucer, Becket and life in the middle-ages. This is, indeed, what a reviewer at Kirkus Reviews feels. Another reviewer, however, writes that these clips enhance what otherwise might not have been a very engaging book.

In conclusion, these two travelogues narrate the journeys of Jerry Ellis who walked for two months along the Trail of Tears on one occasion, and for nine days along Pilgrims Way on the other occasion.

Both journeys are of historical and cultural importance, and both works share valuable background information in order to enhance the reader’s experience. In terms of style, the author shows great agility in expression, and readability, even for speakers of other languages. Extracts and explanations of history aside, the author shows great sympathy towards the people he meets, and it is very likely that this kindness allows him to extract such intriguing stories from the many acquaintances he makes.

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