

quality of our being because thinking is reflecting upon this more original way of discovering the world.

*Future Sense* is a stimulating read and the author is ambitious in his views about global impact and change; we can all, as he suggests, begin by scrutinizing our own lives. To achieve the intended and needed impact, this text needs to reach beyond those who are already convinced about the need for action involving wider explorations using whole intelligence to influence all levels of society, so that the message gets to the parts of the world that still refuse to wake up.

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### Take a hike: the trail as therapy

**Wild: a journey from lost to found**, by Cheryl Strayed, London, Atlantic Books, 2015, 236 pp., £6.29 (paperback), ISBN 978-1782394860

Reviewed by Nigel Armistead, writer on walking

I have done a lot of hiking and quite a bit of psychotherapy, and I much prefer the former to the latter as a way of dealing with any unhappiness in my life. This book shows why.

Cheryl begins with a short resumé of the mess she got herself into: absent father, beloved mother dying young, break-up of the remaining family, deceitful one-night stands, heroin abuse, divorce from a much-loved husband – unresolved issues, you might say. So she decides to hike part of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) from Southern California to the Oregon/Washington border over three months:

It was a world I'd never been to ... one I'd staggered to in sorrow and confusion and fear and hope. A world I thought would both make me into the woman I knew I could become and turn me back into the girl I'd once been. (p. 4)

Her struggles with cold, heat, dehydration, hunger, an outsize backpack and blisters from the chafing of boots and backpack are both painful and hilarious to read. Here is her account of how all this affected her:

I was amazed that what I needed to survive could be carried on my back. And, most surprising of all, that I could carry it. That I could bear the unbearable. These realizations about my physical, material life couldn't help but spill over into the emotional and spiritual realm. That my complicated life could be made so simple was astounding. It had begun to occur to me that perhaps it was okay that I hadn't spent my days on the trail pondering the sorrows of my life, that perhaps by being forced to focus on my physical suffering some of my emotional suffering would fade away. By the end of that second week, I realized that since I'd begun my hike, I hadn't shed a single tear. (p. 92)

Not only that; she was also alive to the healing power of her surroundings:

Walking along a path I carved myself ... was the opposite of using heroin. The trigger I'd pulled in stepping into the snow made me more alive to my senses than ever. Uncertain as I was as I pushed forward, I felt right in my pushing, as if the effort itself meant something. That perhaps being amidst the undesecrated beauty of the wilderness meant I too could be undesecrated, regardless of the regrettable things I'd done to others or myself or the regrettable things that had been done to me. Of all the things I'd been sceptical about, I didn't feel sceptical about this: the wilderness had a clarity that included me. (p. 143)

And how about this for a spot of spontaneous therapy:

It amazed me every time ... . Of all the wild things, (my father's) failure to love me the way he should have had always been the wildest thing of all. But on that night as I gazed out over the darkening land fifty-some nights out on the PCT, it occurred to me that I didn't have to be amazed by him anymore. There were so many other amazing things in this world. They opened up inside of me like a river ... . I laughed with the joy of it, and the next moment I was crying my first tears on the PCT ... (*not because I was happy or sad*) ... . I was crying because I was full. Of those fifty-some hard days on the trail and of the 9,760 days that had come before them too ... . I felt fierce and humble and gathered up inside, like I was safe in this world too. (p. 233)

You might think that these moments could have happened without the rigours of the trail, perhaps in psychotherapy, but from my own experience I don't think so. Nothing like that occurred during my times in psychotherapy, but plenty of similar healing realizations have occurred for me while hiking. I don't suppose this would be so for everybody, and I'm sure that hiking won't be putting psychotherapists out of business any time soon, but I do want to push hiking as a valid and effective alternative to psychotherapy for those with the guts and inclination to try it. But this book is not all *Sturm und Drang*. Most of it is an accurate and entertaining account of life on a long-distance trail: the people and animals Cheryl meets, the vagaries of the trail, the diversions to avoid impassable snow fields and to have a brief taste of civilization, but most of all the privations and obstacles overcome. Every word of it rings true from my own 31-day hike around the South-West Coast Path in England and numerous shorter hikes since then.

However, I have deliberately included the long quotations from her book as they give the flavour of her 'journey from lost to found' better than any précis of mine. I'll end with another quotation that again resonates with my own experience of healing and meditation in the wild. Cheryl has reached Crater Lake in Oregon, which lies in the caldera of an extinct volcano:

This was once a mountain that stood nearly 12,000 feet tall and then had its heart removed. This was once a wasteland of lava and pumice and ash. This was once an empty bowl that took hundreds of years to fill. But, hard as I tried, I couldn't see them in my mind's eye. Not the mountain or the wasteland or the empty bowl. They simply were not there anymore. There was only the stillness and the silence of that water: what a mountain and a wasteland and an empty bowl turned into after the healing began. (p. 273)

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### Joy of being

**A philosophy of walking**, by Frederic Gros, London, Verso, 2015, 288 pp., £12.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1781682708

Reviewed by Nigel Armistead, writer on walking

Frederic Gros has done a typical Gallic job on walking, combining his own ideas about walking with accounts of what walking meant to various philosophers. His own ideas hardly amount to a philosophy of walking – perhaps ‘notes towards a philosophy of walking’; but they are worthwhile, nevertheless. These ideas are couched in the usual continental language that we Brits (this one, anyway) find hard to swallow. For instance, if you like this quotation, I think you’ll like this book:

Walking reminds us constantly of our finiteness: bodies heavy with unmannerly needs, nailed to the definitive ground. Walking doesn't mean raising yourself, it doesn't mean getting the better of gravity, or letting speed and height delude you on your mortal condition; it means reconciling yourself to it through that exposure to the mass of the ground, the fragility of the body, the slow, remorseless sinking movement. Walking means precisely resigning yourself to being an ambulant, forward-leaning body. But the really astonishing thing is how that slow resignation, that immense lassitude give us the joy of being. Of being no more than that, of course, but in utter bliss. Our leaden bodies fall back to earth at every step, as if to take root there again. Walking is an invitation to die standing up. (p. 187)

Who would have thought it? Certainly not me.

By and large, the chapters that feature Gros's own musings on walking are the best: chapters with titles such as ‘Walking is Not a Sport’, ‘Freedoms’, ‘Slowness’, ‘Solitudes’, ‘Silences’, ‘Eternities’, ‘Energy’, ‘Regeneration and Presence’, ‘Strolls’, ‘Gravity’ and ‘Repetition’. You can see where he's going with titles such as these.

For me, the chapters on individual philosophers and their relation to walking are not so good, rather pedantic (pun intended) in many cases. For instance, the chapter on Rimbaud entitled ‘The Passion for Escape’ is little more than a potted biography, detailing how, whenever possible, he escaped from the boredom of provincial life by walking somewhere else. Similarly, the chapter on Nietzsche is mainly biographical,