

## **Tourism and pilgrimage: paying homage to literary heroes**

## **ABSTRACT**

By exploring the experiences of visiting the grave of famous authors, this study highlights the place of literary tourism in the tourism pilgrimage literature. It is based on an observational study of visitors to the grave of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in Paris. Analysis reveals that visitors were motivated by a desire for closeness, a wish to pay their respects and to acknowledge the influence on their life of the two writers. The study notes a strong parallel between the religious and the literary pilgrim, and contributes to knowledge on the phenomenon of the secular pilgrimage.

## **KEY WORDS**

Literary pilgrim authors' graveside observation closeness devotion influence

## 1. Introduction

This paper uses data from an observational study of visits to the graveside of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in Paris to discuss motivations for and the experiences of visiting the graves of a famous author. Paris is a tourism destination well-known for its literary associations. It is a city where street plaques abound in honour of the celebrated authors who lived there and where tourists are drawn to the cafés, which were a meeting place for writers and artists (Baxter 2011). Two such cafés are the *Café Les Deux Magots* and the *Café Flore* in Paris' Latin Quarter, which were frequented by amongst others the writers who are the focus of this paper. As a plaque in their honour attests, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were '*philosophes et écrivains*', leaders of the existentialist philosophy movement, writers of fiction as well as philosophical texts, and political activists. Their influence on intellectual and cultural life in France and beyond was profound, as the paper will show.

This paper makes a contribution to an under-discussed area in the tourism literature, which features studies on visits to military cemeteries, but seldom reveals research on visits to the graves of authors. When researching the topic and reflecting on the data collected, it became clear that this particular tourism activity is somewhat complex to locate in one particular field of literature. On the one hand, it can be categorised as a form of literary tourism, which arises when authors or their literature become so popular that people are drawn to either those locations that the author was associated with or those that were featured within the writings of that particular author (Busby and Klug 2001). Literary tourism has grown into a commercially significant

phenomenon (Watson 2006) and as a result of this, places connected to literature are frequently used to promote destinations (Herbert 2001; Watson 2006).

Literary tourism is considered a niche, but increasingly important market within the field of cultural and heritage tourism, though there are no statistical data available on the scale or market size of literary tourism (Hoppen et al. 2014), and it is relatively under-researched (Busby and Shetlife 2013). In 1986, Butler produced a useful typology, featuring four types: the first involves homage to an actual location; the second refers to fiction-related literary tourism; the third concerns visits to areas that were appealing to literary figures; the last regards visits to an area that has become a tourist destination in its own right based on the popularity of an author. The type that fits the context of this study is the first one mentioned: homage to a location associated with the life of a writer, such as a birth place, place of residence or a graveside, the latter being the focus of this paper.

On the other hand, a study of graveyard visits can also be placed in the category of dark tourism, which is associated with travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the macabre (Stone 2006). In Seaton's typology (1996), visiting memorial sites is one of five possible categories of dark travel activity. As Stone (2012) notes, dark tourism has grown in popularity, and Biran et al. (2010) point to a growing fascination of tourists with sites of death, disaster and atrocities. It is only relatively recently that academic attention has been focused upon the topic (Stone and Sharpley 2008), and though many studies have been identified in the literature search, a gap is noted in the area of visitor motivations.

This study can also be positioned in the growing literature on secular as opposed to religious pilgrimage. Analysis of the data revealed that the motivations of the participants resonated with the language used to describe pilgrimage, and for this reason, the study will locate itself in the field of pilgrimage research. According to Herbert (1996, 2001) and Walton (2009), the idea of the literary pilgrim has existed for some time. The literary pilgrim is defined as a dedicated scholar prepared to travel to experience places linked with favourite writers; the pilgrim is well educated and has the cultural capital to enjoy literary places (Kim et al. 2007).

Watson (2006) identifies the desire to visit an author's burial place as an essential component of literary pilgrimage, as this provides the closest access to the author, although one could consider visits to houses where an author was born or where they lived to be equally affecting. Hyde and Harman (2011) argue that tourism researchers are obliged to explore the meaning attached by tourists to secular pilgrimages: 'to understand what drives a person to undertake a pilgrimage, we need a fuller explanation of pilgrims' motives' (p. 1345). It is here where this paper makes a contribution to knowledge, by exploring the experiences and motivations of visitors to the graveside of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

## **2. Literary Pilgrimage**

The religious pilgrimage is cast variously as a social obligation, a rite of passage, a way to gain religious merit, an attempt to find healing and a search for existential meaning (Cohen 1992; Digance 2003; Hyde and Harman 2011). However, Watson (2006, p. 33) argues that this form of pilgrimage has declined along with decreasing religious sensibility, 'the saint and his or her holy

and healing places' have been replaced by places associated with, amongst others, literary figures and battlefields (Cheal and Griffin 2013). As Hyde and Harman (2011) note, growing numbers of people are searching for meaning through trips to sites 'that embody deeply-held values or contribute to self-identity' (p. 1348). Geertz (1973) describes people as meaning-seeking animals who use religion to make sense of life. Perhaps understandably then, it is often claimed that as religious sensibility declines, so people will look elsewhere for connection and meaning (MacCannell 1976; Watson 2006).

The parallel between the tourist and the religious pilgrim was long ago drawn by MacCannell (1976) who stated that the pilgrim's desire to be in a place with religious meaning is similar to the attraction of tourists to a place embedded with social, cultural and historical meaning.

Graburn (2001) further argues that the tourist can often be likened to a pilgrim making a sacred journey in order to be close to their sacred object. As MacCannell (1976) notes, God has been replaced by cultural objects that are meaningful and symbolically loaded for tourists.

Hyde and Harman (2011) state that the secular pilgrimage, which has increasingly replaced the religious pilgrimage, is important to the core identity of the tourist: it is highly valued, and deeply meaningful. The site of pilgrimage is rich in imagery; it is mystical and deeply emotive for the traveller. Indeed, place is central to the tourist/pilgrim experience. As Buchmann et al. (2010) observe in their study of film tourism, the physical element in the tourist trip is crucial, allowing the creation of an embodied physical experience. They note that embodied knowledge is also a central part of the religious experience, furthering the parallel with pilgrimage (Barsalou et al. 2005).

Collins-Kreiner (2010) argues that the language used to describe the modern secular journey is often loaded with religious overtones. For example, MacCannell (1976) describes the tourist as a pilgrim who desires to be alone with a revered artifact. Meanwhile, Buchmann et al. (2006) claim that the tourist trip is a spiritual experience, characterized by the desire to be part of a community of people who share their reverence and passion. Finally, Herbert (2001) points to a sense of awe and reverence that comes from physical interaction with a tourist site.

Cohen (1979) claims that a person's spiritual centre is that which carries meaning. Indeed Brown's (2015) study acknowledges that religious vocabulary came easily when describing how she felt transported by her literary tourist experience. Wilson et al. (2013) point out, however, that though previous researchers have noted that tourist experiences may be imbued with spiritual meaning, very few have explored these experiences through the lens of spirituality.

It must also be noted that many tourists visit heritage sites without being pilgrims; they do not possess that 'single-minded sense of dedication' (Collins-Kreiner 2010, p. 313). Collins-Kreiner (2010) notes that the motivations of visitors range from curiosity to a search for meaning: 'differing market segments of visitors go to the various sites, holy and not holy, and coexist. This coexistence occurs despite the fact that the reasons for the visits vary considerably, as do the activities taking place at the site' (p. 451). Meanwhile, Busby and Shetlife's (2013) research into the attraction of Byron for visitors to Newstead Abbey (UK) found a low level of literary awareness among visitors, despite the claim by Macleod et al. (2009) that this is an important factor in the decision to visit a literary site. Clearly, there has to be a more nuanced

understanding of literary tourist motivations, and more research could be done on this phenomenon.

As noted earlier, the present study straddles the three areas of literary tourism, dark tourism and secular pilgrimage, and in all three areas, a lack of understanding of visitor motivations has been identified. As Stone (2006) notes, whilst the dark tourism literature remains supply-side focused, the fundamental motivational issue remains largely unanswered. Stone and Sharpley (2008) state that motives for visiting death-related sites have not yet been fully or systematically investigated, because those identified are often not based on empirical research but are largely drawn from theoretical research (Seaton and Lennon, 2004).

Collins-Kreiner (2010) argues that pilgrimage research must emphasise subjectivity rather than objective reality. Indeed, Herbert (2001) states that authenticity is subjectively experienced. As Brown (2012) notes, however, authenticity is a term that has long been debated in the tourism literature. Steiner and Reisinger (2006) distinguish between ‘authenticity as genuineness or realness of artifacts or events, and also as a human attribute signifying being one’s true self or being true to one’s essential nature.’ (p. 299). Wang (1999) distinguishes further between three approaches to defining authenticity: the objectivist approach concerns the extent to which toured objects are authentic and original; the constructivist approach views authenticity as a sociocultural projection; whilst the postmodernist approach deconstructs the notion of the original and blurs the line between the fake and the real. Indeed, Reisinger and Steiner (2006) argue that object authenticity should be abandoned as a term because of conflicting definitions by researchers, though this is contested by Belhassen and Caton (2006) who argue for its



continued relevance to tourists, residents and professionals. As Brown (2012) observes, this debate will continue, as reflected in further elaborations on the theme of object authenticity by Buchmann et al. (2010) and Mkono (2012).

More research is needed on the meaning tourists attribute to their visit in order to fully understand their motivations and experiences. This is also noted by Hyde and Harman (2011) who state that secular pilgrimage is an important yet under-researched sector of the tourism industry. Where the motives for religious pilgrimage are well documented, little is known of the motives for secular pilgrimages. Such knowledge will contribute to an understanding of this important modern day tourism phenomenon (Busby and Shetlife 2013). Meanwhile, notwithstanding the growth and potential of the literary tourism market, Hoppen et al. (2014) argue that still not enough is known about the motivations and experiences of literary tourists. It is in the area of motivation where the current study fills a gap by asking what motivates visitors to the graveside of a favoured author, and how they experienced their visit.

### **3. Methodology**

The primary data for this study were collected using the observation method, defined by Erlandson et al. (1993) as a systematic description of events and behaviour in the social setting under study, 'a written photograph'. The setting for this study was the *Le cimetiere Montparnasse* where Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir are buried. Research settings vary on a continuum from open to closed. Open settings are public and highly visible (Jones et

al. 2013), such as in this study: a graveyard. Observation ranges from spending limited time in a setting, to full and extended immersion (Spradley, 1980). Time sampling is important in observational research. In this study, observation took place over a six-week period between May and June 2013; daily visits of 4-5 hours duration were made to the graveyard. As advised by de Walt and de Walt (2010), different times of the day were chosen so that variations in activity might be captured.

Mason (2002) notes that it is important that the researcher is as unobtrusive as possible in observational research in order to avoid reactivity from those being observed (Jones et al. 2013). The researcher must try to fade into the setting and show sensitivity so that the observer effect is minimised (ibid). Thus good use of a bench located close by the grave was made, allowing the researcher to sit in relative comfort for hours at a time, and to take notes using her phone. As Spradley (1980) recommends, an expanded account of the research notes was made later in the day, after observation had been completed.

As DeWalt and DeWalt note (2010), observation is about more than just watching; it is also about listening, speaking and recording documentary evidence. It is for this reason that Strauss and Corbin (1998) see observation as qualitative research '*par excellence*', as it provides a holistic understanding of the setting. Furthermore triangulation through the use of different methods enhances validity (Jones et al. 2013).

Indeed, in this observational study, three data collection tools were used. The researcher observed the behaviour and listened where possible to the interactions of visitors to the grave,

taking notes using her mobile phone. As this gives the appearance of sending text messages, unobtrusiveness was preserved, leaving the scene as untainted as possible. The adoption of a covert stance in the observational stage of the research allowed the creation of a more trustworthy account, given the common assumption that participants behave more naturally when they are unaware of being observed. Obtaining consent from participants is an important ethical principle when doing research, however (Jones et al. 2013). As Lugosi (2006) points out that it is not always practicable in observational studies to obtain informed consent from everyone in the research setting. This poses an ethical dilemma for researchers, which will be considered shortly.

Secondly, the researcher spoke to visitors of varying nationalities about their motivations for and experiences of visiting the grave. By the end of the field research, 53 interviews had been conducted. These conversations lasted between 10 and 20 minutes, and were informal and unstructured in nature, requiring only one opening question, and one pre-planned follow-up question. There was no interview schedule, as is common in the unstructured interview approach. The interviewee was informed of the research study and its aim, and was then asked what had made them visit the grave that day, and secondly how the visit had affected them. As is typical in the unstructured interview, several prompt and probe questions were asked to encourage participants to expand on issues they raised.

Interviews were conducted in French or English depending on the language spoken by the participant. German was also the medium of communication on two occasions. No language barriers were experienced as the researcher is fluent in all three languages. However, it must be

acknowledged that it was not possible to interview all visitors to the site because there was sometimes no shared language in which to communicate.

When to approach the visitor was a consideration: as the findings will show, many visitors were seemingly lost in reverence at the graveside, and it was a delicate matter as to when to interrupt them. Squire (1994) states that the personal can become a public object when a site is developed, but the visit to a grave can nevertheless have intensely private meanings. The cemetery was thus one of the contested sites that Digance (2003, p. 144) refers to in her paper on modern pilgrimage, defined as ‘sacred locations where there is contest over access and usage by any number of groups or individuals who have an interest in being able to freely enter and move around the site’.

As Yelvington (2012) observes, an ordinary space such as a cemetery can be turned through tourism into a cultural place, ‘iconic and fetishised’ (p. 1). Out of respect for those visiting graves close to the one under observation, the researcher avoided taking photos and approaching potential participants. Though graveyards are visited by tourists, as acknowledged in the noticeboards displaying the location of graves of famous personalities at *Le cimetiere Montparnasse*, the cemetery is not *only* a tourist spot. Sensitivity must therefore be shown by the researcher.

Thirdly, using the technique of photodocumentation, defined by Rose (2012) as the documentation and analysis of a visual phenomenon, photographs were taken of and notes were made on the mementos left daily on the grave. This technique served as an *aide-memoire*,

allowing the researcher to recall the objects left behind by tourists. One such photograph is presented during the analysis as an illustration of the research setting. The researcher was careful not to take photographs when the grave was being visited, so as not to disturb the visitor's experience.

There are ethical considerations when adopting a covert stance in observational research. As Lugosi (2006) notes, there can often be a continuum between an overt and covert stance in such research. Indeed, in this study, a covert approach was taken for the aspect of the research that involved watching and listening to passers-by (depending on language and audibility), as well as reading notes left on the grave. This raises an ethical dilemma in that consent was not obtained from those being observed. Jones et al. (2013) state that a covert stance is acceptable when conducting research in a public setting, and indeed there is precedence in the literature for studies based on covert observational research. A graveyard can be considered a public space, yet nevertheless visitors to the site are not aware of being observed, nor are they aware that the mementoes they leave at the site will be read and used for research purposes. The researcher was uncomfortable about this, but after reflection, opted for a covert stance because it helped to preserve the integrity of the scene. To help offset her concerns, she was careful not to reveal in her research account any identifying information so that anonymity and confidentiality were preserved. Meanwhile, an overt stance was taken in the interviewing aspect of the research, which aimed to discover what prompts people to visit the grave of the writer in question. The aim of the research was presented to interviewees and informed consent was obtained.

Interviews and observations were transcribed, and when necessary translated into English. Data were then thematically analysed, involving the three steps of familiarisation, coding and categorising (see Braun and Clarke 2006). Analysis of photographs similarly involves coding and categorising (Rose 2012); thus, each image was printed out and carefully studied. As the findings section shows, a number of themes were generated from analysis. In keeping with the inductive approach associated with qualitative research (see Jones et al. 2013), the themes generated by analysis led to a further literature search. This permitted a dialogue with relevant studies that help to illuminate the findings.

## **Results**

### **Making a dedicated visit?**

Conversations with visitors revealed that many had visited the graveyard with the express purpose of finding the grave of Sartre and de Beauvoir. In the case of eight French people who did not have to travel far to visit Paris, they were motivated solely by the chance to visit the grave, as shown below:

*I had always wanted to see their grave, and I finally made time to come and visit.*

*We both love Sartre's work, and decided to come to Paris to see where he was buried.*

However, for most international tourists, visiting the cemetery was just one part of the itinerary during their tourist trip to Paris:

*I would be lying if I said visiting the grave was the sole purpose of coming to Paris but it was just as important as seeing the other sites like the Musée d'Orsay.*

*I was really excited about seeing where they were buried; it was one of my reasons for coming to Paris this time.*

*Le Cimetière Montparnasse* is not particularly close to any attraction, however, except the Montparnasse tower and the cafes frequented by writers such as Hemingway. In other words, a special journey had to be made to visit the cemetery. Thus the site was not serendipitously happened upon, but was a part of the trip itinerary.

It has to be acknowledged however that many visitors to the grave of Sartre and de Beauvoir were passers-by; they were not pilgrims seeking out the grave of their favourite author. Rather they were visitors to the cemetery, rather than to this particular grave, which houses many famous personalities whose resting place is signposted on large noticeboards at the entrances to the cemetery. Many visitors appeared to be walking past the grave, which they serendipitously stumbled across. This is indicated in such phrases heard as: *oh look!* or *I didn't know they were buried here* or even *Look, they must be important, I wonder who they are?* Many visitors to the grave had their photo taken including those whose primary purpose in coming to the cemetery was not to visit this grave. Such visitors were momentarily interested in the grave, standing for a few moments, if in company making one or two comments, and then walking on by. The fact

that visitors had various motivations for stopping by the grave meant that the graveside was seldom overcrowded: only occasionally did two groups of visitors congregate at the same time.

As Herbert (2001) observes, the literary place may be a stopping point. Collins-Kreiner (2010) notes that varying motivations of visitors coexist at a site: many tourists visit heritage sites without being pilgrims. McKercher and du Cros (2003) point out that, as with the rest of the tourism market, cultural tourists are motivated to travel for different reasons, and may participate in cultural tourism activities whilst on holiday without this being the primary motivator for their visit: ‘many shades of cultural tourists fall along a continuum’ (p. 56). In this study, the passer-by at the graveside of Sartre and de Beauvoir may have been drawn by another grave, or they may be visiting a cemetery for other reasons than to pay homage, such as enjoying the architecture on display.

## **Making offerings**

The figure below, taken on May 3 2013, reveals a simple gravestone bearing solely the names and years of birth and death of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. It also records an image that was replicated regularly during the study, featuring the gifts and mementos that were left by visitors. According to one of the cemetery attendants, the ‘offerings’ were cleared weekly, and disposed of. Whenever the scene changed, the researcher documented it by taking a photograph, and noting down the mementos that had been left behind. This helped in recording changes, and in keeping a record of data to aid further analysis.



On *May 3*, this included 19 stones, a packet of cigarettes, ten pots of flowers, two apples, eight metro tickets, several nuts, and one pen. On *17 May*, it included: 5 bunches of flowers, 9 pots of flowers, a book in Spanish, 5 tickets, 2 notes and 29 stones. On *7 June*, there were 90 tickets, 3 pieces of fruit, 7 roses, 2 plants, 5 cards, 5 notes, 10 stones and 58 pebbles. On *14 June*, there were 3 plants, 4 flowers, 5 business cards, 1 orange, 1 candle, 1 car key, 9 coins, 67 tickets and 22 stones. Finally, on *18 June*, there were 38 tickets, 9 single roses, 3 bunches flowers, 1 plant, 6 notes, 1 business card in Japanese, 36 stones, 1 heart shaped stone and 6 coins.

This is not a new phenomenon, as recognized in de Beauvoir's (1981, p. 126) final autobiography: 'everyday unknown hands lay bunches of fresh flowers on his grave'. Given that Paris was brought to a standstill during Sartre's funeral, which was attended by more than 50,000 people, who followed his hearse from the hospital to *Le Cimetière Montparnasse*. It is perhaps then unsurprising that visitors to his grave were numerous but a year later. However, as stated by one of the cemetery attendants, '*people visit all the time and they bring gifts nearly every day*', many years after Sartre's death in 1980 and de Beauvoir's death in 1986. The significance of the gifts left is revealed both in conversation and in analysis of the many notes left on the gravestone.

Swanson and Timothy (2012) refer to the purchase of pilgrimage souvenirs, but this study shows that objects were left behind rather than taken away as a reminder of the visit. Andriotis (2009) similarly refers to sacred objects bought by pilgrims at Mount Athos in Greece, but he also notes

(2011) the phenomenon of religious items being placed on saints' sacred bones in a search for blessing. Meanwhile Digance (2003) describes 'votive offerings' in the form of crystals, rice, flowers and crucifixes being left at Uluru in Australia. These were interpreted as an attempt to ensure tourists' safety on their climb. Cohen (1992) also observes the offerings of lotus flowers, gold leaf and candles at temples in Thailand, usually given to bring luck or to achieve merit. The practice of leaving objects at sacred sites seems therefore to have been borrowed by secular pilgrims, wishing to make an offering to their own secular god.



## Demonstrating closeness

An analysis of the mementos left at the graveside revealed a desire not only to pay homage but also to communicate a knowledge of and closeness to their hero/heroine. For example, packets of cigarettes were often left, showing awareness that both Sartre and de Beauvoir smoked (heavily). Furthermore, quotations from their work were left, sometimes on note paper, sometimes on a business card, revealing often the identity of the visitor. Examples are as follows:

*El infierno sin los otros* (hell is other people)

*L'homme n'est rien d'autre de ce qu'il se fait* (man is nothing other than what he makes of himself)

*Au delà du néant il y a l'espoir d'une nouvelle fleur* (beyond nothingness is the hope of a fresh start)

The following comments made during conversation with visitors also reveal a desire for intimacy with the writers:

*I needed to come to feel a little closer to Sartre. He died a long time ago now and this is a way of feeling he is still alive, still with me. Of course I know he isn't really here but I wanted to feel some closeness, some intimacy.*

*There are no places in Paris where you can go and pay your respects. I don't know why given how influential and popular they both were, so this is the place to come to feel a little closer to them. I feel like I'm with them, standing here. They're a bit closer to me, I feel.*

*It feels special being here, like I sense their presence, which is ridiculous I know, but it feels that way.*

Graburn's (2001) reference to tourism as a sacred journey involving the quest to be close to a sacred object is pertinent here. Furthermore, as Buchmann et al. (2010) note in their study of film tourists, place is important in achieving closeness. According to Hyde and Harman (2011), the pilgrim seeks to touch the sacred (p. 1345). Meanwhile, Wilson et al. (2013) state that one dimension of spirituality is a search for connectedness. The other two dimensions are transcendence and personal meaning. The findings from this study suggest that the literary pilgrim's journey is a spiritual one though this was not a word used by the participants.

## **Recognising influence**

It is clear from the notes left on the grave that visitors desired to recognise the influence that the two writers had had on their life. This echoes Brown's (2015) acknowledgement in her autoethnographic account of a literary pilgrimage to Paris of the deep impact made by her favourite authors on her intellectual development, which was the motivating force for her visit. Some notes expressed gratitude for Sartre's and de Beauvoir's philosophy in general, which had impacted on their own thinking, whilst others quoted from their works. These notes allude to the philosophy of existentialism, which was developed by Sartre and de Beauvoir in both literary

and philosophical works. As the notes attest, existentialism holds that life is inherently meaningless and can only be made meaningful by the individual and the choices s/he makes. Choice is a recurrent word in existentialist philosophy, as is responsibility for the choices an individual makes (Sartre 1943).

Notes ranged from the simple *Merci Madame* and *you changed my life* to the following comments left on notes:

*Thank you for your work. You inspired me to lead a better life.*

*You made me examine the meaning of life. You gave me alternatives that weren't offered by anyone else.*

*To Sartre and de Beauvoir, thank you for your existentialist philosophy, for Nausea and for the Second Sex, from Italy.*

In conversation, visitors pointed to the life-changing nature of the work of the two writers:

*First I read the novels, then I moved onto the plays and then the philosophy, I read everything.*

*It's hard to describe the effect it had. I had found something that made sense to me, that inspired me to be myself, or to try to be. And it's never diminished, it's never lost its significance; it's shaped my whole life. I sometimes wish I had communicated this with him while he was still alive, I could have, I dream about that sometimes. This is the best I can do, come here and pay my respects, express my gratitude.*

Other notes attest to the political dimension of the couple's life, acknowledging their role in left-wing politics and their influence on others. Indeed, in existentialism, the principle of social

commitment is important; the *engagé* individual makes choices that should benefit the wider community in some way (Sartre 1946; de Beauvoir 1944).

This was reflected in the life led by Sartre who took part in numerous political campaigns and demonstrations, including the Algerian fight for independence and the protests of May 1968, as well as the setting up of the left-wing newspapers *L'Humanité* and *La cause du peuple* (de Beauvoir 1963). The same could be said for de Beauvoir who complemented her philosophical and political writing with involvement in social causes. Indeed, de Beauvoir was inspirational for women in her championing of women's rights in *The Second Sex* (1949), which was recognised in notes left by visitors: *the fight goes on!* and *we women salute you!*

The couple's radical and for many shocking approach to their own relationship was also noted in conversation. Clearly for many visitors their unconventional attitudes had been inspirational:

*I'm not only an admirer of their work, both of them, but also of the way they led their lives privately, and the honest way that she wrote about it. It is truly an inspiration.*

*They were different, they tried a different way to live, to have a relationship. You don't find many relationships like that now, never mind in those days. They really seemed to live by their principles, even though it was hard to do that.*

In her first autobiography, de Beauvoir (1958) declared that as a young woman she was determined to preserve 'my love of personal freedom, my curiosity, my determination to be a writer' (p. 340). Equally, Sartre was unwilling to conform to social norms for relationships: 'he

couldn't reconcile himself to having to observe and impose rules; he would never be a family man and he would never marry (p. 341)...Sartre corresponded exactly to the dream companion I had longed for' (p. 345).

The personal is political says Hanisch (1970), and this was reflected in the way that de Beauvoir and Sartre lived as a couple: they met in 1929 at the Sorbonne in Paris, where they both studied philosophy (de Beauvoir 1958); they agreed to neither marry nor to live together; they had an open relationship (de Beauvoir 1963). De Beauvoir's judgement of the success of the relationship is clear: 'there has been one undoubted success in my life: my relationship with Sartre' (1963, p. 659); 'it is in itself splendid that we were able to live our lives in harmony for so long' (1981, p12).

Stone (2012) argues that one of the important functions of dark tourism is that it allows the individual the necessary cognitive space to reflect on life and mortality. This is pertinent to this study in that being at the graveside of writers who had made a great impact on their life allowed visitors time to reflect on that influence and on the need to live an authentic life. It must be noted, however, that the notes and mementoes appeared to be prepared before the visit, as the researcher didn't witness visitors writing notes at the scene. Having said that, the researcher wasn't present in the research setting at all times.

## **Seeking communion**



As well as showing respect and acknowledging influence, visitors were also keen to make a connection with the authors. This is illustrated in the manner adopted by many visitors, who, upon reaching the grave, fell silent and stayed this way for many minutes, often as long as half an hour. Even if in company, often visitors would break their silence to speak only a few words. They appeared reverential; the overlap with the language of religious devotion is clear.

Being in the place where the physical remains of the authors are buried appeared to bring the visitor closer to their hero or heroine. Visitors felt themselves to be in the presence of greatness; this left them feeling emotional, moved, choked.

*It feels really powerful. I sort of can't believe I'm here, where he's buried. I can imagine the funeral, the procession, the crowds, and it's like being here, I'm a part of that.*

*It's a strange feeling, I feel so emotional, like I could cry, I didn't expect it to be this strong. I feel like it will stay with me all day. I feel kind of reconnected. This is where my heroes are.*

Anderson and Robinson (2002) comment that literary tourists have emotional associations with literary places, and this is true of those who made a special trip to visit the grave, though it is possible that their emotions were further roused by their presence at the site. As Brown (2015) states, a sense of awe and reverence can come from physical interaction with a site associated with beloved writers. Furthermore, according to Hyde and Harman (2011) the site of pilgrimage is so meaningful and emotive because it is tied in with the identity of the tourist. This

interpretation is apt as the works of Sartre and de Beauvoir appeared to have a profound effect on the inner life of the ‘pilgrims’ spoken to in this research.

Collins-Kreiner (2010) and Jewell and Crotts (2001) observe that all tourists have expectations of the trips they make. Watson and Saunders (2004) state that literary tourists in particular are searching for cultural and literary authenticity, that is, they ‘want the reality of the place to be the same as the reality in their mind’. Furthermore, as Hyde and Harman note, tourists undertake a pilgrimage with the desire to have a life-changing experience. In this study, however, the influence of the authors on many participants’ lives was already pronounced, stimulating the desire to visit the grave in the first place. Many visitors were moved by their experience, which did not disappoint; the simplicity of the headstone and its engraving was poignant. By recording only the name and year of birth and death, the writers seemed beyond the grave to be communicating something of their character:

*It’s like they are saying ‘we are not that important; don’t hero worship us; make something of your own life not ours.’*

*It makes me only admire them more, like they refuse to be aggrandized.*

A record of the visit was usually made in the form of a photograph, taken of the grave and of the visitor standing next to the grave. This was something that took place regularly; indeed seldom did a visitor leave without documenting their visit by taking a photograph. It must be noted that this did not, in the researcher’s presence, include taking a ‘selfie’ when visitors were alone: perhaps this would not suit the somber context of a graveyard? Borrowing from Hyde and

Harman (2011) and Cheal and Griffin (2013), this study's findings show that the pilgrimage site is non-substitutable site, deeply meaningful and a source of core identity.

## 6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the tourism literature by exploring the varied motivations for visiting the grave of favoured authors and investigating the subjective meanings attached to the visit. The strength of the research approach used is revealed in the richness of data collected and in the themes generated from analysis. The table below outlines the motivations of visitors to the graveside of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

**Table 1 Visitor motivations**

A desire for closeness, connection and communion
A wish to pay homage and to acknowledge influence
A space for reflection
A desire to leave an offering

The study reveals that visitors were motivated by a desire to feel close to, to pay homage to and to meditate on the influence of their literary hero or heroine. For many it was not enough to simply spend time at the graveside, they also wanted to leave a physical reminder of their visit, a token of esteem, love or respect. In religious language, they wanted to leave an offering, a testament to their devotion.

The study reviewed the literature on tourism pilgrimage to illuminate the phenomenon of this particular tourism activity. It was found that in this area, as well as in the related areas of dark tourism and literary tourism, researchers have called for more research into the motivations of tourists. By focusing on the motivations and meanings of visitors to the grave of Sartre and de Beauvoir, this study therefore helps to fill a gap in knowledge. Aside from those visitors who were passing by the grave and showing a casual interest, the study notes a clear parallel between the religious and the secular pilgrim.

Collins-Kreiner (2010) and Hyde and Harman (2011) have called for research into the meaning attributed by secular pilgrims to their visit in order to fully understand their motivations and experiences. This study supports Collins-Kreiner's (2010) argument that pilgrimage research must emphasise subjectivity, as subjective meanings influenced the motivations to visit the site. Nevertheless the importance of place cannot be underestimated, and it is underlined in this study. Visitors appreciated not only the physical space in which to offer their respects but they also approved of the simplicity of the gravestone which served to underscore their admiration. Furthermore, the quietness offered by a cemetery whose touristic value has not been exploited is conducive to visitors taking time to reflect in a way that may not be available elsewhere, particularly in a busy capital city.

Qualitative researchers do not claim generalisability given their non-representative and usually small sample; however they can make claims of transferability whereby findings may be

transferable to similar contexts to the research setting under study (Jones et al. 2012). The themes generated from analysis could be applicable to and recognisable in other settings, with the caveat that, as in all qualitative research, there must be sensitivity to context. Furthermore, as Collins-Kreiner (2010) argues, pilgrimage research must emphasise subjectivity, therefore the meanings that tourists will bring to their activities will vary from site to site and across individuals.

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