



## Travels: Collected Writings, 1950-1993

*Paul Bowles*

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## **Travels: Collected Writings, 1950-1993** Paul Bowles

In more than forty essays and articles that range from Paris to Ceylon, Thailand to Kenya, and, of course, Morocco, the great twentieth-century American writer encapsulates his long and full life, and sheds light on his brilliant fiction. Whether he's recalling the cold-water artists' flats of Paris's Left Bank or the sun-worshipping eccentrics of Tangier, Paul Bowles imbues every piece with a deep intelligence and the acute perspective of his rich experience of the world. Woven throughout are photographs from the renowned author's private archive, which place him, his wife, the writer Jane Bowles, and their many friends and compatriots in the landscapes his essays bring so vividly to life.

With an introduction by Paul Theroux and a chronology by Daniel Halpern

## **Travels: Collected Writings, 1950-1993 Details**

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## From Reader Review *Travels: Collected Writings, 1950-1993* for online ebook

### metaphor says

What is a travel book? For me it is the story of what happened to one person in a particular place, and nothing more than that; it does not contain hotel and highway information, lists of useful phrases, statistics, or hints as to what kind of clothing is needed by the intending visitor. It may be that such books form a category which is doomed to extinction. I hope not, because there is nothing I enjoy more than reading an accurate account by an intelligent writer of what happened to him away from home. THE SUBJECT-MATTER of the best travel books is the conflict between writer and place. It is not important which of them carries the day, so long as the struggle is faithfully recorded.

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### Casee Marie says

In *Travels*, Paul Bowles's writings – all penned between 1950 and 1993 – actively document his revelations and unique understandings of art, culture and the world through Ceylon, Spain, India, France and beyond, to North Africa, where his writings about Tangier give gleaming evidence to his passion for the place where he spent the rest of his life. He writes at length on the characters that seasoned his experiences, as well as the nature that arrested his consciousness; from the sky of the Sahara, "compared to which all other skies seem faint-hearted efforts" (*Baptism of Solitude*, 1953) to a peasant in Madeira about whom Bowles wrote, "There was a definite difference between this face and the kind of faces I was used to seeing. It was as if this one had been made by hand, the others mass-produced." (*Madeira*, 1960)

...read the full review at my blog.

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### João says

Fico surpreendido sempre que leio sobre Bowles e reparo, como se fosse a primeira vez, que Bowles nasceu em Nova Iorque, que era americano. Sempre me parece que Bowles é um dos derradeiros súbditos do império britânico em decadência. A sutileza e erudição do pensamento, a abertura de espírito, a curiosidade, a ironia e o humor discretos, o comportamento contido, sem sentimentalismo, um certo sentimento de classe e o sentir que o mundo é a sua casa, tudo faz dele, para mim, um típico viajante britânico, a par de outros grandes viajantes britânicos do século XX, como E.M. Forster, Jan Morris ou Robert Byron.

"Viagens" é uma coletânea das crónicas sobre os lugares e as pessoas que Bowles foi visitando e conhecendo ao longo da sua vida. Escreveu-as para revistas de viagens e jornais, bem como para introduções ou prefácios a livros de fotografias. As suas crónicas não têm um tema agregador nem uma linha de argumentação específica - não foram escritas para serem publicadas em conjunto - mas não surgem desconexas: o cimento que as agrega é personalidade de Bowles, a fluência, articulação e elegância da sua escrita. Mais do que crónicas, lêem-se como contos ou pequenos romances.

Porque estão organizadas cronologicamente, à medida que a leitura das crónicas progride vamos sendo inundados pelo sentimento de que certos paraísos se perderam definitivamente. Os encantos e mistérios de

Marrocos, a Tânger dos tempos do estatuto internacional, a cultura berbere sendo diluída pela árabe, a música e os instrumentos tradicionais do Rife, o isolamento do deserto do Saara, uma ilha perdida no Ceilão, tudo parece esboroar-se inexoravelmente de crónica para crónica. Mas esta melancolia que se desprende das linhas de Bowles não é deprimente, sentimentalista ou conservadora. Parece-se mais com aquele sentimento morno e bom com que nos recordamos dos melhores anos da nossa juventude. E é esse sentimento morno e bom que resta depois de terminada a leitura destas "Viagens".

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### **John Reino says**

**I love travel books but this one is more history. Very well written, great adventure, I read 2 books at a time do I'm looking for a new trsve**

log. It's fun to read about distant places even in this day and age of comps and what not. Thanks

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### **JulieK says**

I liked the travel writing, but I think enjoyed even more his observations of African countries during their anti-colonial period and how the political changes were shaping them. Favorite quote:

"If I am faced with the decision of choosing between visiting a circus and a cathedral, a café and a public monument, or a fiesta and a museum, I'm afraid I shall normally take the circus, the café, and the fiesta, trusting to luck that I shall manage to see the others later."

His point is that the people currently living in a place make up its culture, not the famous monuments or relics of its past. I like this way of thinking about travel.

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### **Vicky Pinpin-Feinstein says**

**I wanted to know about Morocco before going there**

And Bowles's pieces on Morocco over many years gave me a Morocco in prose that I truly appreciated. Enjoyed his insight on music in particular.

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### **Tim C says**

Excellent. Understated observation at its best. Paul Bowles will always rank high up in my pantheon of favourite writers.

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### **Zia says**



visitor. It may be that such books form a category which is doomed to extinction. I hope not, because there is nothing I enjoy more than reading an accurate account by an intelligent writer of what happened to him away from home."

Bonus points also that one of my favorite curmudgeonly travel writers, Paul Theroux wrote the Introduction.

Here he is on meeting three Thai Buddhist monks, the leader of which remarked on Bowles's room:

"He glanced up at me and went on talking. 'Your room is beautiful. We are not accustomed to such luxury.' His voice was flat; he was trying to conceal his disapproval. The three conferred briefly in undertones. 'My friends say they have never seen such a luxurious room,' he reported, watching me closely through his steel-rimmed spectacles to see my reaction. I failed to hear."

Here is Bowles on culture:

"If I am faced with the decision of choosing between visiting a circus and a cathedral, a cafe or a public monument, or a fiesta or a museum, I'm afraid I shall normally take the circus, the cafe, and the fiesta, trusting to luck that I shall manage to see the others later. I suppose I'm simply not what today is called culture-minded. Perhaps that is because to me the culture of a land at any given moment is the people who live in it and the lives they lead in it, not the possessions they have inherited from those who came before."

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## **Patrick McCoy says**

I can say that Paul Bowles is one of my favorite writers and now having read *Travels: Collected Writings 1950-1993* (2010), I have finished reading all of his available writings. This collection is mostly made up of pieces that were, collected earlier in *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue* (1963). I think if there were that many pieces in a collection by another writer I might have not bothered with the collection or skipped those pieces. But I decided to re-read them and savor the familiarity and evocative scenes described by Bowles who has a gift of bringing the atmosphere of a place to life, for example the Sahara Desert in "Baptism of Solitude," as well as the people that populate those specific places, like in "Mustapha and his Friends." There are two excellent pieces about his travels into countryside and mountains of Morocco to record the traditional music there that is some of his best writing in "The Route to Tassemit" and "The Rif, to Music." In those pieces, in particular, he brings Morocco and the inhabitants to life. But he awakened an interest for me in his part-time home in Ceylon, that is the subject of "Fishtraps and Private Business." I plan to make a pilgrimage to his private island on my visit there next month. The book is arranged chronologically by editor Mark Ellingham and contains mostly travel pieces but also travel-oriented journals, introductions to photographic books, and even a glossary of *kif* terms for a 1960s book on cannabis. It includes an introduction by one of my favorite travel writers Paul Theroux as well. I suspect some of the material may have been cannibalized for Bowles' autobiography, *Without Stopping*, which I also recently read. The earliest pieces are from Bowles' early days as a teenager in France—among the 30 uncollected writings spread throughout the book. There were a number of pieces from the now defunct *Holiday* magazine that were among my favorites as well: "How to Live on a Part-Time Island" (another piece that inspired me to visit Ceylon), "Madeira" (on the isolated Portuguese island), "Window on the Past" (about Spain), as well as several pieces on Morocco and cities in Morocco. I was impressed with pieces about travel in Istanbul ("A Man Must Not Be Very Moslem"), India ("Notes Mailed at Nagercoil"), the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya ("Letter from Kenya") as well as a piece about the civil war in neighboring Algeria ("Sad for U.S., Sad for Algeria"). I think the following quote from "Windows on the Past" sums up Bowles' perspective on travel writing:

If I am faced with the decision of choosing between visiting a circus and a cathedral, a cafe and a public monument, or a fiesta and a museum, I'm afraid I shall normally take the circus, the cafe, and the fiesta, trusting to luck that I shall manage to see the other s later. I supposed I'm not what today is called culture-minded. Perhaps the that is because the culture of a land at any given moment is the people who live in it and the lives they lead in it, not the possessions they have inherited from those who came before. They may or may not profit by their legacy. If they do, so much the better for them; but whether they do or do not, their culture is represented by them and not by their history.

I feel a sort of kinship with Bowles and hope to see as much as he has seen. I can't help but note that he did it so much earlier than others and had to struggle and suffer in order to do so. Bowles was not a fan of progress and I suspect most travel today would have been too tame for his type of adventure lust-very much a trailblazer and original thinker.

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## **Don says**

(FROM MY BLOG) We often travel to seek the strange and the mysterious, which sometimes means simply seeing how other people in other cultures live their lives. American writer (and musician) Paul Bowles spent his life traveling and observing other peoples. His fiction evokes the strange, the mysterious, and even the frightening and bizarre.

His best known novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, follows an American couple into the Sahara, where they find more than they sought, in writing that casts an almost hypnotic spell on the reader. Bowles's best known short story, perhaps, *The Delicate Prey*, also set deep in the Sahara, is a horrifying tale of crime and punishment among residents of the desert, desert dwellers whose ideas of justice are untempered by mercy.

I was introduced to Bowles through his fiction, his stories of the Sahara and its effects on those who lived in, or visited the life of, the desert. I had also heard stories of Bowles's private life -- stories of a man who spent most of his life as an expatriate in Tangier, who lived for years in an interesting marriage to a lesbian writer, and who was a friend and confidante of many American writers including members of the Beat generation.

I was unprepared for the writing to which he evidently devoted much of his time -- travel writing for mainstream publications. His book, *Travels*, contains some 39 essays, most of them published in the late, lamented *Holiday* magazine during the 1950s and 60s -- a magazine that was to travel writing what the *New Yorker* is to general literature. His writing presents scenes and vignettes almost as strange as those in his fiction, but in a first-person narrative form that is far more accessible to the uninitiated first-time Bowles reader.

Tangier was his preferred residence, and Morocco his preferred country, and some of the best essays describe experiences in Moroccan cities, in the mountain areas (the Rif, the Atlas), and in the bleak (but always surprising) expanses of the Sahara. Bowles first moved to Tangier in the early 1930s as a youth. Tangier -- for many years an "international city" under French and Spanish administration -- has no major "tourist sites," he acknowledges, but, in a 1958 article, he found much to love.

In Europe, it seems to me, the past is largely fictitious; to be aware of it one must have previous knowledge of it. In Tangier, the past is a physical reality as perceptible as sunlight.

He saw both the city and the country evolve from a primitive residence of Berbers and Arabs, governed by French and Spanish colonial powers, to a far more modern and independent nation.

Bowles (who died in 1999) was no sympathizer with colonial rule. He was even less, perhaps, a sympathizer with the "modernizing" (read "Europeanizing and Americanizing") fervor of Moroccan nationalist leaders. Where Morocco's rulers saw progress, Bowles saw foundering attempts at globalization -- the gradual replacement of local crafts and foods with mass produced imported goods and services.

The last essays in this book were written in the early 1990s. I'm not sure to what extent Bowles's fears for the future have come true, although "McDonaldization" continues unabated in many parts of the world. In an article written in 1984, he wrote about the medieval medina in Fez:

Yet with the increasing poverty in the region, the city clearly cannot continue much longer in its present form. ... A house which formerly sheltered one family now contains ten or twelve families, living, it goes without saying, in unimaginable squalor. The ancient dwellings are falling rapidly into disrepair. And so at last, it is the people from outside the walls who have taken over the city, and their conquest, a natural and inevitable process, spells its doom. That Fez should still be there today, unchanged in its outward form, is the surprising phenomenon.

I visited Fez, for my first and, so far, only visit, in 2012. I have nothing earlier in my own experience with which to compare it. All I can say is that the city, when I visited it, was magical -- magical and apparently non-ersatz, thriving, and packed with local manufacturing (e.g., leather tanning) and shops, and local residents. (It also had its share of tourists, of course.) I would love to find a place to stay overnight within the medina on a future visit.

So the death and decay of Morocco is all relative, I suppose. The past was always better. I'm not being entirely ironical, because by Bowles's standards the past no doubt was better, more true to local culture -- even though the Moroccan residents probably had less money, less food, and worse housing.

Bowles's travel articles aren't limited in topic to Morocco. He writes about locales as disparate as Paris, Seville, Istanbul, Algeria, Central America, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Kenya, Madeira, and Thailand. He writes a series of articles about a project he undertook under a grant, recording tribal music throughout the mountainous areas of Morocco -- at a time when the Moroccan government was hoping to stamp out "folk music" as an indication of non-modern backwardness. Always, Bowles has an eye for the strange, an ear for the good story, an empathy for the people with whom he speaks, a sensitivity to their music and to their lives.

Reading the essays and articles in *Travels* is as close as most of us will get to obtaining a feel for many various cultures in the world, and especially for those cultures as they existed before and a decade or two after World War II. And learning about the world's hidden places and cultures from a gifted writer with a clear sense of perception renders them no less intriguing or mysterious. Intriguing and mysterious to us, as they were even to Bowles himself.

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## **Max Carmichael says**

I doubt Bowles would have approved of this posthumous compilation - there are several articles I wouldn't have included, and it doesn't all hang together thematically - but with its chronological development toward the poignant, unpublished autobiographical "journal" and the biographical material at the end, I now feel much closer to one of my very favorite writers, whose private life has always been something of a mystery.



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**Jimileek says**

A book to savor. At times dreamlike & contemplative, lovely with understated humor. (Much less judgmental than Paul Theroux whose writing I love but whose opinions I find abrasive and at times offensive.) Valuable for its mid-20th century descriptions of the destinations travel writers still visit and write about today. Lovers of literary travel writing should own this.

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