

Seen in Bunbury on a park bench by the sea
the wooden statue and inscription dedicated to JB O'Reilly

“John Boyle O'Reilly was transported to Australia arriving on the ‘Hongoumont’ on January the tenth, eighteen sixty eight

He was a ‘Fenian’ or Irish political convict

During the long sea voyage he wrote poetry and articles for the paper ‘The Wild Goose’ ”

Just Passing Through

1 Salamanca

Passing through Portugal, not yet
You sit in the Grande place at Salamanca
and watch the world go by
There are no cars here in the center of town
It's a big paved square with street café tables and chairs
laid out and shaded balcony arcades

In the Grande place at Salamanca,
there are two sorts of people, the moving and the still,
and each lot are watching the other
Birds chirp, the day's heat fades,
three weary pilgrim cyclists push their loaded bikes
through the main square, just to show it can be done

Later in the small adjacent square where I sit near a water
fountain,
there are needle pine trees
Friends come here to meet and talk
Others going to the theater are all dressed up
Everyone is cool, there's no ambient aggression
A shop across the way called Raquel Szalay,
so Raquel may be a Spanish name
and Raquel Welch a Hispanic beauty of yesterday

You empty your skull and let the world move in...
and that's it for this pen

2 Aveiro

Aveiro, but I kinda cheated,
caught a train straight from Guarda on arriving there at
five thirty yesterday afternoon

The beach at Burra is still there and the camping ground of
which I remembered so little
Just being tightly squashed into a small space with a lot of
families and big tents
and the beach somewhere nearby, but where?

Well eventually I found it, way out of Aveiro,
by asking directions, answered in German, and followed a
long meandering road,
nothing like the one I took in eighty-five
I remembered this long straight unmade track leading out
to a village beside the sea

Burra, with its beach, lighthouse, and breakwater,
long and filled-in to form a pier
I get there after ten at night riding the bike without a light,
but no cyclists have lights in Portugal

The main roads are banned to cyclists
So heading out of Vila Formosa, at the Spanish border
I took the old road up and down and around the rocky
countryside with steep falls and climbs and a head wind
Then on reaching Guarda, forty kilometers from the
border,
I hit the paved streets and went straight to the nearest
railway station to check out the trains

— Aveiro? I ask at the counter,
with a bicycle registered as luggage it costs two thousand
seven hundred Escudos
Train in a quarter of an hour

Panic scene in getting on board with luggage bags taken
off the bike
and running down the platform
But in the end it was all okay

The change of trains at Pamphilosa near Coimbra went off
like a charm
The man with the red flag takes my bicycle across the
platforms and tracks
and I just have to follow him, walking quickly with five
bags and jump into the train,
an immediate connection with no waiting
So within about four hours I'm standing in Aveiro station

Now I just have to find that camping ground,
having saved at least two days of cycling on an impossible
road around the hills from Guarda to the coast on the old
national sixteen

3 A cool breeze

A cool breeze is blowing on this hot summer's day
No doubt this place is nothing special,
though full of canals like Amsterdam, Brugge, or Venice
But it's where I wanted to be right now
"Aveiro or bust"

It's about midday, the morning haze has lifted,
the people on the beach at Burra will be well into the heat
of the day

Now if I had a small retirement fund and was ten years
further down the line

I might buy one of these small tumbled down fisherman's
cottages set beside the canals in Aveiro,
with ropes laid out to hang the washing along the lanes
beside the water
Many of the houses have tiled facades

I would settle down in this place and write another book,
or some such
like Lawrence Durrell in Corfu, was it really?
or Jack Kerouac in Mexico city, was it really?
I wouldn't bother about smart fancy places like Nice or
Cannes
Would have to learn a few more words of Portuguese,
though
"Obligado" so far that's all I know

4 The road to Portugal (cycling song)

It's the high road to Portugal
It's the low road to Portugal
Goin' through Spain to Portugal
Goin' through Spain to Portugal

Well it's all in the sense of reality
And it's all on account of what you see

Well it's my way and it's your way
It's the long way it's the short way
It's the right road it's the wrong road
It's the short road it's the long road

It's the high road to Portugal
It's the low road to Portugal
It's the wide road to Portugal
It's the slow road to Portugal

Gonna get there to Portugal
Gonna get there to Portugal
Goin' through Spain to Portugal
Goin' through Spain to Portugal

It's the right road it's the wrong road
It's the short road it's the long road

5 Ciudad Rodrigo

It doesn't matter what you say
Things just kinda happen, anyway

Three days ago I'm at this place called Ciudad Rodrigo
about thirty kilometers from the Portuguese border
It's the end of the day's ride out of Salamanca
and I've still got some energy left after ninety kilometers,
but there's no camping ground at the border
So I decide to stay, to find the camping ground
had been intending to go further on but the road is
blocked,
so I just turn around and end up near the castle with a
panoramic view all around

I buy food and ask the shopkeeper the way,
then a stray girl waiting beside a bridge who answers in
good French
I work here, she says
I am wondering what kind of work she does because she
looks half drugged,
sitting beside the stoned bridge over the broad river just
outside the town
She wants to take me to the camping ground but I say I'll
find it from her directions
and wish her well

At the camping ground, just beside the river,
I hear the noise of kids swimming and go to have a swim
myself
Get talking with three young people Juan, Manuel, and
Maria
“We’re all in it together” as Kerouac says
I speak a mixture of French, English, and Spanish to
explain where I’m going and where I’ve come from
And they ask questions
so I’ve made three friends in Ciudad Rodrigo

Maria likes Salamanca
Coimbra is the city of small people, she says
When I go off an hour later, Juan, who had asked me
‘What’s your name?’
calls out “Ricardo” as I go by,
and waves
You can choose between Adios and A stal huego
I just say Bonsoir in French

6 Burra (1)

In the local café at Burra on a television screen there’s a
video clip of Shania Twain all vamped up in a leopard
skin,
says her name Shonia means On my way in Indian
She has been singing country music since the age of ten
and now mixing country versions with international pop
backings
But the song behind her clip is from the latest compact
disk That don’t impress me much
You wonder if the top model they’re showing you is really
Shania Twain