

Mainz, Germany
July 23, 2025

“What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wilderness? Let them be left,
Oh let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.”

— Inversnaid, by Gerard Manley Hopkins

(This post dedicated to my amazing mom)

Some spaces, both mental and physical, challenge.
Especially while traveling, but not only. It's not all sunshine
and roses!

Examples:

At the laundromat today, after buying a coffee (an unnecessary third) so I'd have correct change, I waited for the dryer to finish while a woman wearing two baseball caps shouted stories.

Due to storms, I missed my connection en route from France to Frankfurt, so I shuttled from Schiphol Airport and spent a bleary night at a hotel nearby—not enough time to catch the

Van Gogh or Rijksmuseum, I checked. Later, after the flight, which bobbed up and down like a cork through the clouds, I walked around and around Frankfurt Airport to find the correct train to Mainz, then pressed button after button to (hopefully) buy the ticket. I arrived home 50 minutes later, desperate to walk amongst trees.

Which I then did. And it was glorious!

If I hadn't changed flights, I would have missed the laughing child intent on hugging a pigeon, father close by, laughing too, as I waited on a sunny perch outside of Schiphol.

This past weekend, a spontaneous flight to Rennes, France, to Abbaye La Joie Notre Dame. Though at times a nervous driver, I arrived proud; my bright blue MG seemed to encourage me as I beetled down the quiet roads. My daughter and I shared two nights in the rooms of the Abbaye, ate simple meals with other visitors, and sang psalms in the tranquil chapel.

By the end of the two days, I felt very calm. And my brain had had a nice workout of my rusty French.

On to the western shores of Brittany, a region of France historically very much influenced by England. Along the way we saw a Neolithic stone circle, and sites from the legends of King Arthur such as the lake from whence Excalibur emerged. I remembered my grandfather reading the tales to me as a child before I fell asleep. He clearly loved them as much as I did.

As I trekked in Brittany I thought, stories make a place grand, magical. Stories and trees.

We stayed with a family near a small beach, and ate wonderful dinners with the other guests (again, French!) of veggies from the garden, plum and apricot tarts, and roasted chicken. They described living on a sailboat, one now docked at the Canary Islands. Not a rare lifestyle in Brittany, I gather. And it's a thing now, one person said, to sail across the Atlantic Ocean; if my French served me, our host had done it. She said, "It is not something you want to do. Yes, you might not die, but you will definitely have problems along the way." She had a delightful deadpan humor and eyed everyone steadily with easy amusement.

We swam in the salty sea along whose coast snakes the GR 34 trail, saw an actual snake—harmless—and many a backpacker's hunched silhouette. Rugged and tumultuous (apparently the sea there is harder to sail than most because of irrational currents and strong winds), this wild place spoke to me in harsh, epic tones. I loved it. For without difficulties, how do you know peace?