

The cat on the TGV. Reflections of a Queenslander.

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Introduction:

What I find interesting in travel is not the view but the interaction between the viewer and what is viewed. For every viewer, there is a different view. This piece is my reaction to the unfolding vista from my seat on the fast train on this occasion from Paris to Lyon in October 2005. The French call it "le Train Grande Vitesse" and the Japanese, the bullet train.

Shaved fields of brown stubble,

Rush by...an unfolding Kodachrome of autumn's greens and browns to a sky of light blue blotched with white powder-puffs here and there as if contrived on a great canvas by some Dutch master of light and shadow.

White, muscular cattle like those bulls once slaughtered to Greek gods and white horses, white geese, white swans and white sheep- white, white, white, white, pole, pole, pole, pole go by.

Tree and pole shoot by violent in their frequency- confronting my windowed world. Another train explodes past-a sudden punch of air, a shockwave. That scenes gone- off to another world falling like spent celluloid on an editor's floor.

A young woman sleeps curled up on a vacant seat in the yellow warmth of blue velour sunning her white French loins bared between white blouse and blue jeans

I look up startled.....a French feline sits statuesque, nonchalant on the folding table across the aisle, collar and leash fettered to a young girl whose ears have snuggled her safe into her secret silent world of song. The smug cat winks. I think of transport laws back home.

Stone farmhouses, their west sides warm and bright like something out of one of those paint-by-numbers books we had as kids as we shoot south to the steady beat of pole, pole, pole, pole.

Green fields endless and as neat as my front lawn dried fields ripe with wheat and corn, poplars at attention still in their green livery of summer and those endless hedgerows a bit like those of Normandy, of apple juice and the heady cider-nose of calvados.

Trees touched up with yellow and more greens, reds and browns, an aqueduct with tight arches balance the next brief frame; physics and maths manifest in stone -gone in an instant- pole, pole, pole, pole..

Tessellated tiles tickled by the mellow autumn light and neat rows of sloping vines, light-yellows and greens like rows of pearl and plain emerging to the rhythmic wooden click, click of my wife's knitting needles.

We slow down again...A station sign comes on the stage, "Le Creusot-Montceau Les Mines, Mont Chanin"...That dammed French penchant for hyphens and long names. "Messieurs. Mesdames" A blur of French over muffled speakers..... I sit and stare outside as people alight.

Then I feel the surge of power. The G force in my back, like a pilot in a centrifuge, as the train strains forward, pulling forth like the taught, white sheets and fulsome sails on my wooden cutter reaching home to the setting sun, surfing down this wave of wind, and space and time to Lyon and the Rhône.