

Title of piece: *The Black Holes of the Stavanger Transport System*

Assignment 1

IGCSE 0500

Student's name: Carolin Varley

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International School of Stavanger (ISS)

School code: NO005

Word count: 880

Date essay was written: 29.03.2008

Exam date: May 2008

Explanation of assignment: For this piece we were asked to write ■ about a travel experience, using what we had learned about travel writing style. I chose to describe a catastrophic memory I have of getting on a bus in Stavanger, late evening.

0020

Carolin Varley

The Black Holes of the Stavanger Transport System

I am writing this as a warning to you adventurous nomads who would ever consider taking a late night bus out of Stavanger on a Wednesday. Maybe my experience can prevent others from committing the same traumatic mistake of going to the cinema on a school night without any reliable means of getting home, and only the minimum amount of change remaining in your wallet, along with an expired bus card. Not only did curling up in my bed seem incredibly appealing at this point, but the temporarily suppressed thought of the neglected homework awaiting me at home kept forcefully resurfacing, leaving me in a state of nervous agitation to get back home as soon as possible. The fact that bus 11 was obediently awaiting me at the bus station should alone have been omen enough to send me into a frenzied panic. That the bus wasn't driving away at the very moment I crossed the road meant that the universe had a different cruel fate in store for me. *good start*

The driver welcomed me with a suspicious look as I came on the bus, as though any teenager who was out at 9 o'clock on a school night must be up to no good, and must have at least on parent in rehab. I could feel every person's eyes burning into my head with the laser intensity with which every public transport passenger is gifted, and in the short exchange that followed I held my breathe and counted, praying to be allowed to shuffle away to a nearby seat. After clawing desperately away at the bottom of my bag, as though trying to scrape out the last remnants at the bottom of a Ben and Jerry's carton, I managed to find the essential last kroner: 11 kroner exactly. Every traveller knows the satisfied relief that comes with finding precisely the right amount of change. The bus driver looked disdainfully down at the money, then up again at me.

0020
Carolyn Varley

"But you're not a kid," he said, for all the impatient ears on the bus to hear.

I blushed. In a travellers' universe coincidences don't just happen. Whether it's getting transferred to a plane that crashes between America and China, or paying the same amount of kroner as the bus number, the world is out to get anything trying to conquer its expanse, and at that very moment it had set its merciless eyes on me. This was just an omen, and at that moment it wouldn't have surprised me if the bus driver had asked for 666 kroner. Standing on an evening bus in the middle of town, with no more money, in front of all these people, was no time for compliments.

"That'll be 22 kroner." In my rough pigeon Norwegian I began to explain about how I didn't have enough money, and how I really was 15. Meanwhile the wave of impatience that had begun in the back was coming towards me until it crept up, as though to tap me impatiently on the shoulder. It made me shiver, and turn traffic light red, *good* appropriate since I was stopping the whole bus anyway. Suppressing the urge to run off the bus into the night and wallow in anonymity and inconspicuousness, I began to look desperately around, hoping for some strange act of kindness, a donation of 11 kroner perhaps to pay the adult fine. No such knight in shining armour met my eye, however. As I looked around the bus the givers of the death stares met my silent pleas with such iciness that if I had had a lightning shaped scar on my forehead I'm sure it would have burned with a ferocious hatred. Stuck in bus limbo of having unlikely mercy taken upon me by the bus driver or passengers, or being kicked off the bus altogether, I had one last heartless rummage in my pocket. The awkwardness of unzipping the stuck zip was excruciating, since I felt each clumsy move was being carefully noted and magnified. And then my fingers brushed against the rough lamination of my get out of jail free card.

0020

Carolin Varley

Grasping my school photo ID card that was only brought out in emergencies, because my 7th grade photo does not belong in the light of day, I suppressed a sigh of relief, not wanting to make any audible sound to attract more on lookers. He probably did not even look at my birth date, taking pity on seeing such a bad photo, and finally he yielded.

It was 20 minutes later when I finally, against all odds, made it to my stop. This resulted in my most traumatic bus experience to date, and considering the other stories I have to tell that is quite a feat. As I eagerly stepped off bus 11 and my foot touched the pavement I felt like Neil Armstrong setting foot on the moon, after a seemingly impossible journey and ordeal. And this is why, speaking as Neil Armstrong, I will tell any reader willing to listen that the moon isn't worth it. One year later I can safely say that since that fateful day I haven't left the house without a spare 50 nok stuffed in some dark corner of my wallet.

Very well written Carolin. Excellent use of humor and many effective metaphors + similes. Provide a bit more reflection at the end. What is one to learn from your ordeal?

Assignment 1: On a Wing and a Prayer

By

Andrew James Gordon

Candidate 0011

IGCSE English First Language 0500

International School of Stavanger NO005

31st March 2008

Exam Session May 2008

Teacher: Ms. Landis

Word Count: 875

This travel writing piece was inspired by the travel pieces we read in English class and my own experiences travelling in airplanes.

Many people have different hang-ups about traveling. Some people will just never get used to the frantic pace of airplane travel. Others find the sight of airline food deeply offensive and feel that they could find more nutrition in a cardboard box, which in many cases, they probably could. Even traveling at a more sedate pace has its problems. Sea travel is a pleasant idea at first glance, but it does carry the risk of spending the entire time locked in your surprisingly well furnished but fantastically miniscule cabin, feeling like your insides are dancing to a catchy flamenco beat every time the ship moves. Car rides get monotonous after the thirtieth game of "I Spy". But of course, anyone who has ever traveled through an airport will have experienced one of the universe's most frustrating incidents: airline delays.

Airline delays have become such a common occurrence these days that it is not whether or not you have been delayed that is the first thought but "By how much?" I'm sure this is a wonderful boon for the airlines. After all, how many other industries can regularly promise a service and just as regularly fail to deliver on that promise?

Naturally, the worst thing about delays is that they invariably happen when you are traveling on a connecting flight that had a short transfer time to begin with, and soon the delay begins to eat away at that. You find yourself spending your time at the *first* airport pacing and looking at your watch frustratedly. The whole flight is a tense battle against time, getting ready to storm out of the plane as soon as the wheels touch the ground. Even worse, when you begin to land, you begin to dream and hope that "Hey! We might just make it after all!" You begin to see light at the end of the tunnel. Unfortunately, it turns out the other end is on fire. Naturally, you have missed your connecting flight by five minutes. Alternately, your connecting flight has conveniently parked itself as far away from where you landed as is geographically possible. Soon you find yourself traipsing through hallways that don't look as if the cleaning lady, or indeed anyone else, has walked through since about 1971. There is the

inevitable rush through security, pushing your way through large swaths of angry people while making vaguely conciliatory noises. Finally you make it to your gate breathless and very possibly missing a family member or two, only to be told that you will have to wait for the next flight. On rare occasions you may even have the privilege of being able to watch your plane roll out onto the runway in a leisurely fashion while you stand there clutching various useless items with a look of absolute mental fatigue on your face.

One of the worst delays I have ever seen was at Bologna airport. We were all ready for a flight to Amsterdam and onwards to Norway. In a slightly confusing twist, half of the plane was loaded on early. Naturally, there was no reason to worry. Shortly, we too would be on the plane, happily winging our way across the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, we did not gamble on the complete and utter mental deficiency of the other passengers. The rest of the story was gleaned from the offloaded passengers who were in various emotional states, from confused to irate.

Basically the air hostess had been demonstrating how ^{one} you would open the emergency exit doors in case of an emergency. Quite simple, you suppose. It was at this point that said completely and utterly mentally deficient person exclaimed something along the lines of "Oh, like this?" and proceeded to open the emergency door. Then they found out that someone would have to be flown in from Amsterdam to close the emergency door and that it would take 8 hours to get him there. At this point, I assume the entire plane gave one hugely withering look to the person. You certainly hope so. Eventually, we arrived ten hours^e delayed, thanks to someone who had flown out in the middle of the night to fix the door. Of course we were hopefully [?] late for our connection.

At times like that, you begin to lose faith in any chance of getting onto a plane without a mishap, and in fact you begin to lose faith in mankind generally. Thankfully, minor miracles do still happen occasionally. One such miracle happened at London Heathrow. After a series

of impossibly long traffic jams we arrived with scant time left and hope fading of getting home that night. Even after getting our boarding passes, there was still the winding queue out of security. Shoving our way through the hordes of fellow travelers, we presented our passports at the desk breathlessly.

“Ooh. You haven’t got much time, have you?”

And with that, our amazingly wonderful passport checker ushered us through, past the throngs, through an empty security gate and out into the boarding area. Since then, I have never let a bad word be said about Heathrow passport checkers. Because occasionally, airlines will disappoint you and mechanics will fail, but people will come through for you, and small miracles do happen. Eventually.

*Some nice moments Andrew.
Written with humor and
authority. You need to
tighten up your organization
a bit, particularly developing
a stronger conclusion. Otherwise,
well done.*

Goldfish

Assignment 1 IGCSE English First Language 0500

Charlotte Graves

0012

Ms. Landis

International School of Stavanger NO005

Word Count: 835

01 April 2008

May 2008

Assignment: We were asked to write a piece in the style of a travel article describing situations in a place we called home, in transit or on holiday. This is a piece written about an incident that happened in a place I lived: Egypt.

Goldfish

Living in Egypt is undoubtedly an unforgettable experience. Indeed the wonderful climate, culture and inhabitants make it highly enjoyable. The Egyptian people are so anxious to please and willing to help that if you ask for directions, and they don't know the way, they will simply make up a route, so as not to let you down. Now, isn't that kindness? My incident with a goldfish also runs along these lines.

I was intending to buy a goldfish, as one does on an almost weekly basis (the life span of a goldfish is none to be admired), so I walked to the "Pet Shop" on Road 9 to purchase this creature of an orange disposition.

On my arrival, after inquiring about these fish in my best "English-Arabic", I was shown to the tanks and left to peruse at my leisure. The fish seemed happy enough, apart from the one floating on the top, which did not seem quite as animated as the others.

I made my choice (one of the more lively ones), and went to the counter to ask if the keeper would be so kind as to catch the fish and bag it for me to take home.

This he did, and kept the bag in his hand as I also chose my fish food and a very tasteful plastic castle to be its new home. I was informed of the price and handed over the money. He very graciously took it. And that was that. I stood there, in front of the counter, just staring at the fish that was dangling from his hand. I must admit it was quite hypnotic, and I suppose this was why some minutes passed before I realised that the shopkeeper was still holding the fish. Assuming the error was on my part, I asked for the fish in my politest, if basic, Arabic. That was when things became complicated.

I became quite alarmed as the shopkeeper moved silently over to the door and closed it. The bell tinkled ominously as my only means of escape was quickly cut off. Certain moves from six weeks of the taekwondo training I'd done the summer before came unbidden into my head. I clenched my fists, but thought that if I tried anything on this man, he might drop the fish and that, of course, would not be good for anyone.

I decided negotiation would be the best way to get myself and the fish out alive. "...Why did you close the door?" I inquired. He remained silent. "Can I have my fish now please?" I asked more assertively. He remained silent. Obviously this tactic would not work either.

good
☺

The situation was getting a little out of hand. I began to look around nervously, now more concerned for my own welfare than the fish's. The budgies behind me chirruped happily, blissfully unaware of the potentially fatal situation unfolding before them. At this thought I was transported to an imaginary scene, where my bloody body lay on the filthy floor of the pet shop, the parrot shrieking "Murder!" as the dastardly shopkeeper scurried away, laughing insanely with the fish bag still clutched between his grimy fingernails.

Snapping back from my gory fantasy, and giving the parrot a very strange look as I did so, I thought out my options once again. The awkward silence was getting too much to bear, and I felt quite uncomfortable under the shopkeeper's unwavering gaze.

I was really getting quite scared when another customer entered the shop. Immediately I breathed a sigh of relief. I attempted to explain the situation to him, desperately hoping that this man would become my saviour. All that came out was an incomprehensible babble. I tried again. Thankfully, he understood me this time and went

to talk to the shop keeper, who was still standing motionless with the fish in his hands. They had a long discussion in Arabic during which I could pick up only a few words such as “fish”, “crazy” and what I thought was “doughnut” and could only hope they were not talking about me.

Finally the conversation came to a conclusion. My Arabian knight came over and told me, in a roundabout way, that the fish was actually not for sale but the keeper had not liked to tell me so. Kindness I'm sure, but certainly not for the greater good.

I decided not to choose another, unsure if I would ever leave the shop, so I thanked my translator, asked for my money back and left. I was still determined to buy a new fish, however, so the next day I went to a different pet shop and purchased a goldfish from there – although unfortunately it died two weeks later.

I think that there is a lesson here about Egyptians in general; they can't say “La” (no). So, when in Egypt and asking for directions, good luck with getting to your destination and when buying a goldfish, remember to ask if it's for sale.

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This is an entertaining
and clearly written anecdote,
Charlotte. Excellent word
choice. Good job focusing
in on one moment that
was revealing about this
place.

El Prat Airport, Barcelona

Assignment 1

Louise Heavey

Candidate number: 0014

30th March, 2008

International School of Stavanger

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Ms. Landis

IGCSE English First Language 0500

May 2008

986 Words

For this piece we were asked to write about an overseas experience. I selected the time when I visited Barcelona as part of an exchange in the 8th grade, and received some rather unpleasant news directly after meeting my host family.

Before I begin, let me ask you one question. Do you feel at your best after a long plane journey? If the answer to this simple question is yes, I would prefer if you do not continue reading. It will only confuse you, and I would hate to do that unnecessarily. If, however, like me, you do not feel exhilarated after a lengthy flight, you will understand the point of this completely, and I will kindly allow you to carry on reading my story. That is, after all, what it was written for.

Picture the scene. Twenty ravenous adolescents step off a plane. We have been traveling for six hours, having set out at six o'clock that morning. This means that most of us have been up packing since four in typically disorganized teenage fashion. Some of us are already slightly homesick, this being the first time that we have been in a different country from our parents before. Very few have visited Spain before, and Spanish is the first language of precisely none of us. Neither has anyone met the families with whom he or she will be spending the next ten days. Add to this the usual dramas that take place on plane journeys in Middle School, and you have a fairly frazzled group.

We huddle together just in front of the Arrivals gate. A few of us are looking around and are intrigued by the diversity in the small crowd that flows past. In Stavanger, where our journey began, it is considered unusual to see punks in union jack trousers, businessmen in Armani suits, American families-of-four-or-more in matching Hawaiian print shirts, teenage backpackers in khaki shorts, pensioners in sandals and socks, and women who look as if they have stepped off the catwalk, all in one place. Separately, perhaps. But together? Such a conglomeration of humanity would surely draw more attention than the event which had attracted the odd crowd in the first place. In Barcelona, however...well. The words 'slight', 'culture', and 'shock' are brought to mind.

As we attempt to adjust to this bizarre new universe, questions are being asked. Important questions. Nothing silly like "Has everyone got all their bags?" or "Where do we go from here?" No, *important* questions, such as "Oh, are we *there*?", "Hey, is that a palm tree?" and "Can we go to the beach?" These promising signs of recovery are arrested when the Arrivals gate opens, and we spy an enormous throng of Spanish families just to the right of the barrier. It takes a while for it to sink in, but finally it becomes clear that *those* Spanish families are...*our* Spanish families. Collective thought at this point is running along parallel lines – the words 'Oh' and 'dear' (or something similar) flash like ticker tape through the communal brain.

The group surges forward. This is the first time that we have truly understood the phrase 'safety in numbers'. Unfortunately though, we already know that as soon as we reach the barrier we will be split up and sent home with a family whom we can only recognise on paper. For this reason, we creep forward, doing our very best nail impressions. Ultimately however, we reach the final barricade. We huddle together even more tightly as a list of our names is produced, but no closeness can disguise the fact that we will soon be alone. All right. Keep calm now. I still have a few minutes left – my name is halfway down the list...are we there already? Oh. Not alphabetical order. Fantastic.

I stagger over to my indicated family as if on stilts. I wish I could carry on, just totter straight past them. My knees won't bend. Odd. I reach my family. I look up and am pelted with loud exclamations of "¡Qué guapa!" and a barrage of kisses and names. I will never be able to remember all these names. Even now they are slipping away. Why can't Spanish names be easier to remember? Ohh dear...how can I tell them I can't remember who they are? Wait. Someone's talking. I suppose that must be...my 'dad'. Yes it must be. What's he on about? Come on, focus...

My drowsy brain clicks into motion. I can hear the cogs turning. Concentrate now. I've heard this somewhere before. I *can* figure this out. All my knowledge of the Spanish language trickles back. No...still not quite there. It's hanging just out of reach, too far away to grasp but close enough to sense. Ah. Now it's coming. Now I think I can just make out what...my face burns red. From my ears to my feet I can feel the scarlet spreading, creeping across plane-grimed skin. What right does he have to be speaking English to me? My reaction to the meaning of the words spoken in such an inconsiderate language...is more extreme. Anyone who has ever felt her stomach sink upon hearing bad news will have some small inkling of how I feel now. However, instead of merely sinking, my stomach does a back flip, listens briefly to the drum solo being performed by my heart and plummets into the depths of El Prat airport, with little hope of surfacing within the next fortnight.

This reaction was reasonable under the circumstances, although I *was* inconvenienced by this sudden disappearance of a rather vital organ. Six hours of sleep-deprived travel is not sufficient preparation for hearing the words "hello, nice to meet you," followed by an ominous pause before the shock of "okay, no more English, Spanish from now on". The lesson I learnt? To refuse to acknowledge bad news until at least a semi-conscious state has been reached.

Replacement stomachs are very hard to come by and hearts can only beat out a percussion equivalent to the 'Battle of the Banjos' for so long, no matter how lovable your host family turns out to be in the end.

Very well written and entertaining Louise. Explore a bit more deeply what you learned or gained from the experience. Excellent use of humor.