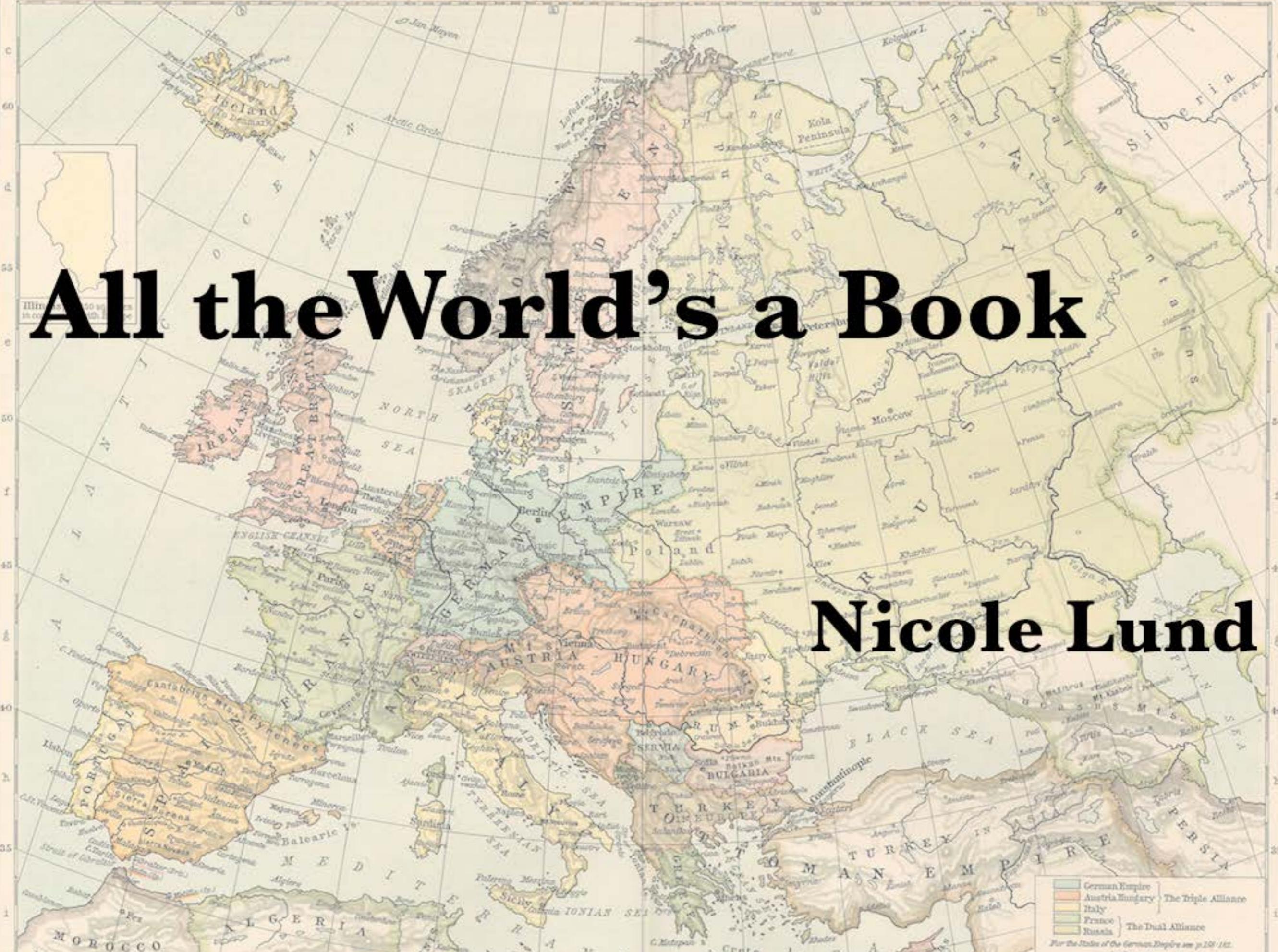


All the World's a Book

Nicole Lund



German Empire
Austria-Hungary } The Triple Alliance
Italy
France
Russia } The Dual Alliance

For the States of the German Empire see p. 151/152.
Scale 1:20,000,000.

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Introduction

During the spring of 2015 I set off for Copenhagen, Denmark for a semester abroad, leaving behind a comfortable suburban campus for the largest city in Scandinavia. In between studying cross-cultural communication and eating an ungodly number of pastries on a daily basis, I traveled as widely as I could on a student budget and limited time. Like most of my peers I kept a blog for my family and friends, updating them on my travels and rehashing my experiences and reflections of my day-to-day life.

This book isn't an exact replication of my blog posts, but rather an account of my favorite memories from the cities that I visited. You won't find a list of the Top 10 Attractions, or even recommendations for must-see places. I believe that a desire to travel does not come from these tourist guides, but rather from first-hand accounts that truly describe the place's atmosphere. In other words it is the emotional reaction, rather than the physical observation, that drives the best travel inspiration.



Copenhagen

Copenhagen, my home for four short months, isn't chock full of ruins or easily recognizable landmarks. Its language is impossible, and everyone more or less wears the same uniform of all black everything. But what the Danish capital lacks in attractions, it more than makes up for in Scandinavian charm. There are pastry shops and bakeries every few feet (it seems) and the older buildings are painted in vibrant colors. The Danes have a certain way of

living called *hygge*, an untranslatable word that can be compared to a certain coziness and warmth when in the company of close friends and family, especially in the bitter winter months.

One spring night when I was walking with friends back home from a bar, we stopped at the Caritas fountain in one of the city squares. Looking around I felt completely satisfied, certain that I could never be happier than at that moment when I was with friends in my favorite city and completely lacking in general worries. In short, I was as close to invincibility as I had ever been before, there by the fountain surrounded by slightly crooked old buildings and broken bottles. It was that *hygge* feeling, but on a much larger scale. Short-term visitors might miss the magic of this city, which grew on me over time, but the curious parks and distinctive neighborhoods will win you over if you let them.



Gothenburg

I arrived in Gothenburg Saturday afternoon in the rain, uncertain about this small Swedish city. With only a weekend to explore I ignored the dreariness and walked around all afternoon and evening, finally making it to the pristine Haga neighborhood. Chilled to the bone and growing frustrated, I realized I was lost and that my map was quickly disintegrating in the rain. An umbrella would have been useful, but tragically I had left it at the hostel and was doomed to wander the streets of Gothenburg until I could no longer feel my extremities.

Fed up and tired, I found a cozy cafe where I got introduced to the Swedish tradition of fika, which simply refers to a break in the day when one drinks coffee or tea and eats pastries, usually with friends. The Swedes will fika multiple times a day, and when I stepped in the cafe I understood why. How else can they possibly make it through the long winter? I sat down, asked for directions, and drank hot tea with chocolate pastries. As I observed the intimate tables and their occupants I became aware of my own dumb luck. Despite the stress of the day I was ultimately fed and comfortable, tucked away in a small corner of Gothenburg, laughing at the day's minor obstacles and reveling in the calm, Swedish way of life. Sometimes getting lost in the rain isn't bad after all, particularly when a slice of chocolate cake is waiting at the end.



Belfast

Belfast is a city of contrasts. There's the violent history against the backdrop of impossibly beautiful nature; the religious intolerance coupled with charming accents. After a full day of exploring the "heroic" murals and explicit segregation of parts of the city, I needed something to change my perspective of Northern Ireland. And that is how I ended up at Filthy McNasty's, a bar in the center city. I was immediately struck by how open and friendly and, yes, drunk everyone was, before being pulled into a group of excited girls, students at Queen's University.

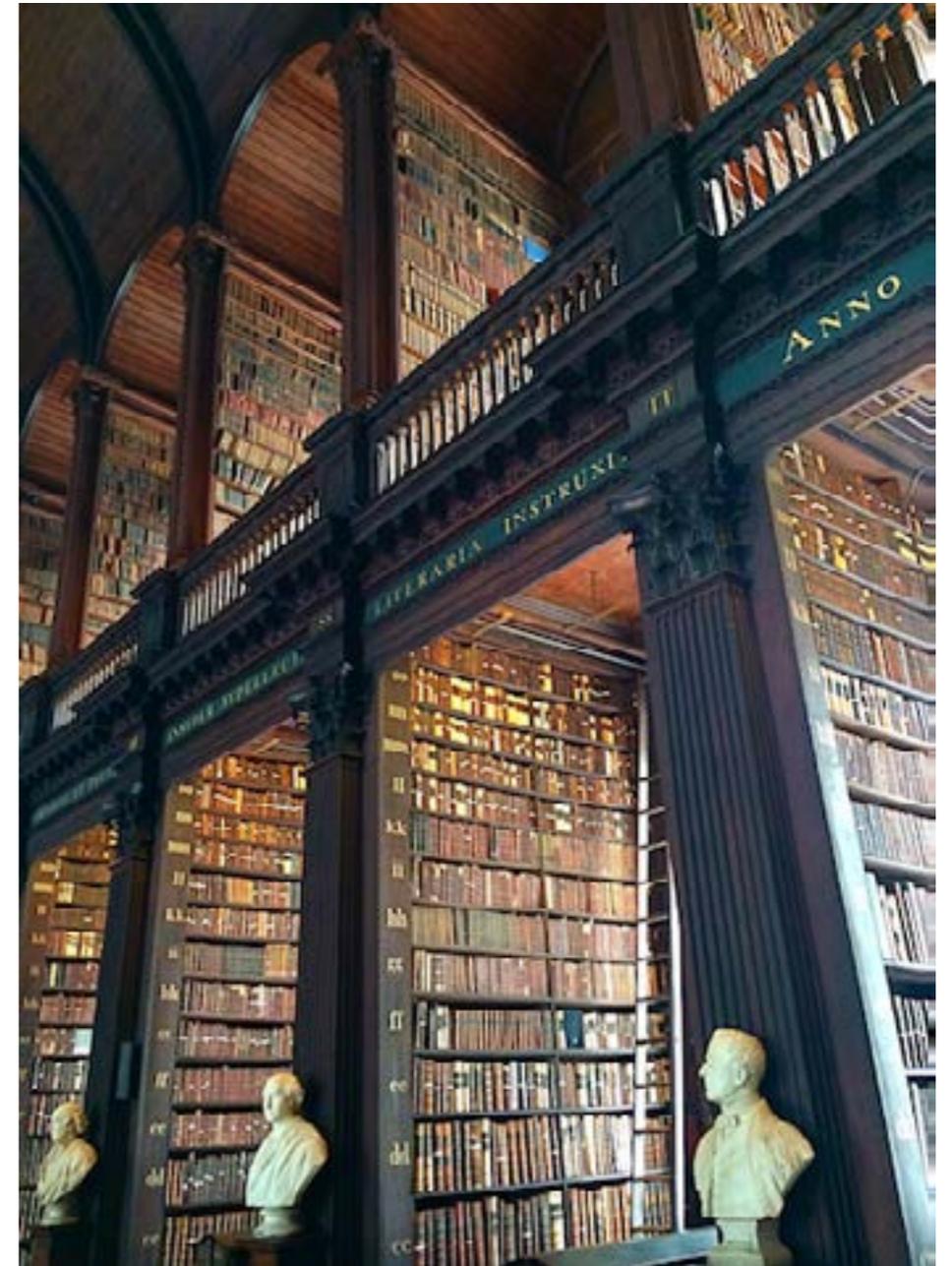


One of the girls and I eventually launched into a discussion about the conflict that stains the city, and she stressed that the conflict isn't as bad as it seems. Their group was a mix of Catholics and Protestants, and she made it clear that "it's the older generation's problem, not ours." There we were, sitting in a pub drinking Guinness and talking openly about something that I would have thought taboo. Our conversation alternated between this serious topic and different Northern Irish slang words, and I realized that moments like this were why I travel. You can walk around a city for hours or days or months to try and understand it, but it's those human connections across cultures that make it click.

Dublin

Dublin, the city of James Joyce and the Abbey Theater, is the perfect place for pretending that you're in a story much better than your actual reality. Walk around the cobble-stoned streets, listen to folk music, taste the Guinness. To get the full literary experience, I wandered over to Trinity College to check out the Book of Kells. While I was impressed with the ancient age of the text, what really entranced me was where I found myself afterwards: the cavernous Trinity College library. With its curved ceilings and esteemed corners, this library felt like a church for the religiously book-loving.

Being one of those literature fanatics myself, I felt completely in awe by the raw power of those books, which the public were not allowed to touch. Seeing all those books tucked away with no one to read them felt unjust, especially here in the birthplace of some of the greatest literary achievements in English. Books are not artifacts meant to be stored somewhere gathering dust, even if their home is in one of the most beautiful libraries in Europe. A better idea would be to spring the books out of their wooden cells and actually read them as they were intended out on the green Irish landscape.



Paris

It seems to me that everyone has his or her own impression of Paris before ever setting foot in the city. It's a destination with arguably the highest expectations surrounding it, and weirdly most people recognize its sights, often without ever having even been to Europe. Therefore it's impossible not to have a strange feeling of déjà vu when first arriving. My first morning there was spent simply marveling at things I just knew I had seen already. There was the woman smoking a cigarette and reading a novel outside a small cafe. There was the beret-clad man on a bike with a giant baguette in his basket. And then there was the Eiffel Tower.



All morning I kept catching glimpses of it, filled with a small rush of excitement everytime it caught my eye. Once my friend and I decided to make our way to it, we figured that we could just simply walk toward it and get there in no time. How foolish of us. The Tower eluded us, disappearing behind buildings every few moments. We could tell by our map that we were getting closer, yet we couldn't actually see it to know for sure. Growing more and more frustrated, we desperately rounded a corner and there it stood in all its expectant glory, just as I had always imagined it.

Stockholm

I arrived in Stockholm by train, which I recommend to anyone who can swing it. As the train wound its way through misty forests and quiet meadows, I realized that Sweden is in fact a dreamscape, unreal in its vast wilderness. Gray lakes and green trees surrounded the train, which felt like an unwelcome intrusion. Slowly the trees became less dense, evolving into homes and, finally, chaotic city.

The next morning I wanted to get a headstart and see a bit of Stockholm before the rest of the city woke up. Wandering around Gamla Stan (the Old Town) early on a damp Sunday morning only exacerbated the feeling of unrealness that I felt on the train, as my two friends and I were almost entirely alone. The darkly colorful buildings and wet cobblestone gave the impression of a fairy tale, and in our solitude it was not difficult to imagine that extraordinary things could be found around the corner. Soon enough the stores were opening and more people were emerging, but that feeling remained embedded in the narrow alleys and uneven streets.



Rome

With its innumerable ruins, ancient fountains, and winding streets, Rome visually brags about its old age (like a fine wine?). Here the old and the new are forced to mesh, but it appears that the old usually wins. The city is painted different shades of brown and relishes in the chaos of crumbling buildings and packed intersections; it's a place that

would make modern proponents of straight-edges and clean white spaces run in the other direction. Those who dive into this beautiful mess of a city are rewarded with incomparable views and pieces of ancient history.



A common thought I had while walking around Rome was: “How is it possible that this thing is still standing?” This observation was especially valid for the Colosseum, which looked unstable from afar but felt more than capable of holding its hordes of visitors from within. Standing inside of something so ancient made me think about all the scenes its walls had witnessed. Brutal deaths, religious proclamations, angry cheers; the whole range of human emotions laid out right there. It was humbling and horrifying, and completely worth the long lines and crowds --- perhaps that is how the Romans felt all those centuries ago when the Colosseum was for gladiator fights, not tourists.

**“To move, to breathe, to fly, to float,
To gain all while you give,
To roam the roads of lands remote,
To travel is to live.”**

– Hans Christian Andersen