

# SECULAR RE-SYMBOLISATION OF THE SANTIAGO PILGRIMAGE IN SPANISH CINEMA: THE CASE OF *THE WAY AND ROAD TO SANTIAGO*\*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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Tourism on the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain follows Christian pilgrimage routes that date back to the 9th century. Although pilgrims and tourists differ in various ways, “doing the Camino” today means taking a physical trip that is generally associated with an inner journey. From a social perspective, both tourist and pilgrim experiences entail leaving behind the routine/profane to embrace the non-routine/sacred, while also involving contact with other travellers on the route and a final catharsis. Both pilgrims and tourists in general, and those doing the Camino in particular, are travellers caught up in very similar dynamics, especially if we consider the intense process of “touristification” that the Camino de Santiago has undergone in the past three decades. Today, it is very hard to do the Santiago pilgrimage without turning into a tourist along the way.

Among the various media tools used by the Galician regional government to boost the Camino’s international profile, audiovisual productions play a key role due to their extraordinary capacity to create powerful fictional imaginaries that endure in the memory of their viewers. This study offers a discursive analysis of two fiction films whose storylines revolve around the Santiago pilgrimage, a mode of tourist travel whose cinematic depictions, either religious or touristic, have received very little scholarly attention.

In *Road to Santiago* (*Al final del camino*, Roberto Santiago, 2009), two Spanish travellers—Nacho, a photographer, and Pilar, a journalist—hate each other, but the magazine they work for has asked them to pretend to be in a romantic relationship in order to put together a story on Olmo, a guru who helps couples in crisis by taking them on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. Under his direction, one Korean couple and three Spanish couples get caught up in various absurd and romantic



Road to Santiago poster

situations during the six days of the journey. In *The Way* (Emilio Estevez, 2010), a widowed American, a reputable ophthalmologist named Tom Avery, is informed that his son Daniel has died in a storm in the Pyrenees. Devastated, Tom travels to France to bring home his son's body. When he gets there, he learns that his son was travelling on the Camino de Santiago, and he decides to do the pilgrimage too, in Daniel's honour. On the way he meets Joost, Sarah, and Jack, three other pilgrims with whom he completes the journey.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Social perspective

Religious tourism, understood as travelling for spiritual reasons to a recognised place of devo-



The Way poster

tion, constitutes a relatively new subject in the field of tourist studies, although it has often been considered a variant of cultural tourism (Cànoves, Romagosa, Blanco & Priestley, 2012). However, journeys to places of worship can be traced back to ancient traditions around the world, from Mesopotamia to Teotihuacán, and of course including Mecca.

Anthropological, sociological, and historical studies of religions and tourism have highlighted the close links between pilgrimages and tourist travel, and not merely because of the difficulties associated with differentiating between them clearly due to the mixed motivations of both types of travellers (Badone & Roseman, 2004). Many studies adopt the sacred/profane dialectic developed by Émile Durkheim in his research on the

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## HUMANS HAVE USED TRAVEL, EVEN SIMPLE WALKING, TO REBALANCE THEMSELVES SINCE ANCIENT TIMES

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fundamental role of religion as a symbolic mechanism of social cohesion (Vera, Galindo & Vázquez Gutiérrez, 2012; Durkheim, 1968). For the French sociologist, a religion, in addition to being a system of dogmas, involves the practical application of collective beliefs that elevate the individual. Durkheim's approach makes a foundational distinction between two spheres of reality: the sacred and the profane. Access to the divine, the spiritual, or the sacred through the profane, which is associated with the body, materiality and everyday life, is only possible by means of ceremonies and rites of passage, which can include travelling or walking. The ultimate aim of Durkheim's research interest in the social function of religion is to understand how modern societies use secular substitutes in order to establish ties of social integration similar to those created by religion.

From this perspective, pilgrimage and tourism could be seen as forms of travel that facilitate this elevation from the profane to the sacred (MacCannell, 1999; Graburn, 1992): "Tourism is a modern equivalent or substitute for religious pilgrimages, and in this sense tourist attractions can be considered sanctuaries of the modern age" (Herrero, 2008: 124). The similarities between the two practices involve aspects of time and space, the changes occurring to the body and the spirit of the traveller, and a ritual structure founded on the concept of the journey. In the pilgrimage, walking is both a powerful metaphor for human life as a voyage and an essential element of its symbolic structure (Herrero, 2008). It entails the progression from a starting point to a destination for a higher purpose (to obtain forgiveness or divine favour), as well as a voluntary temporary deprivation of comforts and possessions associated

with the physical effort of walking. However, the difficulty of the journey is lightened by another essential feature of the pilgrimage: the hospitality that pilgrims receive at hostels, where they find food and accommodation, their feet are washed and wounds treated, and they have opportunities to meet other pilgrims. In fact, both hospitality and interaction with other pilgrims are closely associated with the process of inner transformation. This is what is known as *communitas*, the community spirit or sense of social equality, solidarity and interrelatedness (Turner & Turner, 1988), which is intended to compensate for the hardships of travelling dispossessed of one's worldly goods.

### 2.2. The tourism perspective

The Camino de Santiago constitutes a particularly significant case of pilgrimage tourism. It was founded on Christian routes that date back to the 9th century, which lead to the tomb of the apostle James the Great at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, in the autonomous community of Galicia, Spain. The pilgrimage takes on special importance in the Holy or Jacobean Years (when St. James Day, 25 July, falls on a Sunday), as in these years plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful who visit the apostle's grave and take communion in the Cathedral.

Over the course of its history, the Camino has been reinvented by institutions of various kinds for religious, economic, and even geopolitical reasons. There was a turning point in tourist promotion of the Camino in 1993, when the regional government of Galicia, led by Manuel Fraga Iribarne (former Minister of Information and Tourism in the dictatorship of Francisco Franco), turned the pilgrimage routes into a key feature of Galician identity (Cànoves, Romagosa, Blanco & Priestley, 2012; Santos, 2006). While in 1972 the Camino attracted 67 certified pilgrims, in 1993 it received close to 100,000 (Reboiras, 2018). To boost its international appeal, Fraga Iribarne's government developed a secularised image that

has since been firmly consolidated; it is an image that is not very popular with religious institutions, but that appeals to 21st-century travellers. The development of this image has been supported by other regional governments in Spain (Porcal, Díez & Junguitu, 2012) and by various “Friends of the Camino” associations. These associations are private organisations that are primarily—but not exclusively—religious, created with the aim of studying, restoring, and upholding the traditional meaning of the pilgrimage, an objective that of course conflicts with the aim of drawing massive numbers of visitors. The “touristification” of the Camino exposes the contradictions underpinning a product that straddles the line between religious ritual, leisure activity, ethnic reinvention, and commercial attraction (Afinoguenova, 2017; Martín-Duque, 2017; Herrero, 2008).

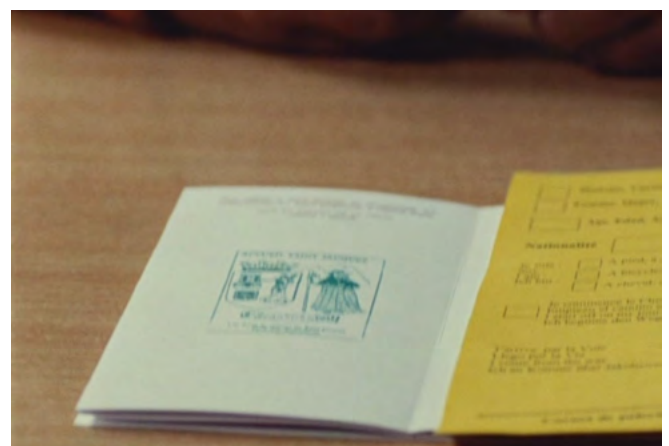
Although the Catholic church has lost its monopoly over the management of the Camino in this period, it still retains its power to act in two areas where it seeks to keep the Christian meaning of the pilgrimage alive. On the one hand, the Cathedral of Santiago is still the official destination of the route. In the Jacobean Holy Years, the traditional visit to the tomb of the Apostle is rewarded with plenary indulgence (remission of punishment for all confessed sins). Meanwhile, the Archdiocese of Santiago de Compostela’s Pilgrim’s Reception Office retains the privilege of granting the Compostela, a certificate issued to all those who can prove they have completed at least the last 100 kilometres of one of the official routes on foot (or 200 kilometres on bicycle or horseback). The required proof is obtained by collecting a stamp at each stage and responding to a survey about the reasons for making the journey, which only covers religious and cultural reasons.

Although the route normally ends at Santiago, there is documentary evidence of its extension to the Atlantic coast dating back to the Middle Ages. A key point on this extended route is Cape Finisterre (90 km west of Santiago de Compostela),

which marks the end of a pre-Roman route for sun worship that the Romans used for fertility rituals. Until the end of the Middle Ages, it symbolised “the end of the known world” (as indicated in its Latin name, *finis terrae*). Another possible end point for the journey is the town of Muxía, located on the rugged shores of Costa da Morte. Although both these points are excluded from the official Catholic route, they receive considerable government and community support because they expand secular interest in the region, and in doing so, increase tourism in areas whose agricultural economies are struggling. They are very popular routes today because of their origins in pre-Christian traditions that have been reclaimed (and not without controversy) by Galician nationalist movements, while also attracting the attention of various New Age spiritual groups (Herrero, 2008; Clavell, 2001; Mejía, 2000).

Based on the above, it is clear that in the contemporary image of the Camino de Santiago, the religious elements have been diluted by a multitude of predominantly cultural features whose potential as drivers of tourism development has been skilfully leveraged by the regional government. If the visit to the Santiago Cathedral attracted around 350,000 certified pilgrims in 2019, despite not being a Jacobean Year (Hosteltur, 2019), it is because the pilgrimage has turned

Compostela stamp in *The Way*





into a uniquely complex tourist product both for Spaniards and Europeans in general, appealing to a highly diverse profile of travellers. Its popularity is the product of a complex marketing strategy that has reinvented the Camino by combining religious tradition, ancient history, medieval art, multicultural Europeanism, solitary contemplation, interaction with others, hospitality, direct contact with nature, beautiful landscapes, physical exercise, a brand image (the yellow scallop shell over a blue background), institutional certification of the penitential ritual (the Compostela), a unique local identity, a non-religious spiritual experience, sea views, pre-Christian spirituality, etc. Very few tourist itineraries could offer such rich and diverse material and symbolic capital. And there are not many religious pilgrimages that effectively validate any personal construction of this kind of travel experience.

### 2.3. The cinematic perspective

Prominent among the numerous media strategies implemented to promote an attractive image of the Camino de Santiago (Mondelo & Rodríguez, 2011) is the use of stories set on the pilgrimage route (novels, comic books, television series, documentaries, and fiction films). Audiovisual productions of this type date back practically to the origins of cinema itself (Lalanda, 2014a), with *College Boarding House* (La Casa de la Troya, Alejandro Pérez Lugín & Manuel Noriega, 1925) being the first of

many fiction films to take Santiago as a subject for promotional purposes (Lalanda, 2014b). Fictional narratives are a particularly effective promotional tool due to the capacity of film and television to construct powerful imaginaries that often end up informing an audience's subjective perception of a place, a culture, or an era (Del Rey-Reguillo, 2007). "The body stores images transformed into icons," (Onfray, 2016: 27) and cinema is an exceptionally powerful image producer. The characters, storylines, and settings shown on screen can leave a lasting impression on the memories of spectators, and in some cases even induce them to travel to the locations represented. The ultimate motivation of such travellers is the desire to emulate or relive the kinds of sensations that the films triggered in their minds as spectators, or simply to experience the pleasure of personally visiting the locations where they were shot. These locations thus become destinations enhanced by an additional cultural heritage, the story on the screen, resulting in the phenomenon of the film tourist.

Out of the dozens of films that depict the Camino de Santiago (Lalanda, 2014b; Herrera, 2008), for this study I have selected two Spanish fiction productions, because their respective portraits of the pilgrimage route bear certain similarities, but also some marked differences. The first, *Road to Santiago* (Al final del camino, 2009), directed by the Spanish filmmaker Roberto Santiago, is targeted mainly at a Spanish audience. Its

Group in couples therapy in *Road to Santiago*



narrative ingredients chosen to attract its target audience hinge on comedy, parody, and sexuality. The second, *The Way* (2010), was directed by American filmmaker Emilio Estevez, son of the film's star, Martin Sheen (whose original name is Ramón Estevez), and grandson of Galician-born Emilio Estévez Martínez, to whose memory the film is dedicated. Although it is a Spanish production, *The Way* is a cultural product clearly aimed at promoting the image of the Camino de Santiago in the US market (and by extension, the English-speaking world) by highlighting the value of its historical, cultural, and religious significance.

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### THE WAY IS A CULTURAL PRODUCT CLEARLY AIMED AT PROMOTING THE IMAGE OF THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO IN THE US MARKET BY HIGHLIGHTING THE VALUE OF ITS HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

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The purpose of this article is to offer a textual analysis of these two films in order to study the modes of representation used by each one to construct two apparently quite disparate but in reality quite similar cinematic images of the Camino de Santiago. Their storylines and the prominence they give to the pilgrimage routes are quite different, as are their cinematographic approaches, character types, and depictions of the pilgrim experience. But what they have in common is more significant: the dissemination of the same message to promote the Santiago pilgrimage in a language adapted to their respective target audiences.

### 3. THE CAMINO IN CINEMATIC NARRATIVES: MODELS OF MEANING

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As Nieves Herrero Pérez (2008: 125) points out, “the contemporary version of the pilgrimage maintains a ritual structure and conditions of

performativity that link it to its religious meaning, but that at the same time connect it to models of meaning associated with secularised society (nature, history, tradition, the body, etc.), which can be redefined and experienced more intensely thanks to the ritual framework.” To analyse how the fictional tourists in the two films studied here redefine contemporary experiences of the Santiago pilgrimage, their journeys are explored here in three stages (in keeping with the three-act narrative structure). The first is the starting point, important for establishing the reason for embarking on the journey and the route chosen. Next, the Camino walk itself will be analysed in terms of the conceptual framework that informs it, as well as the constituent elements of the pilgrimage as a journey. Finally, the destination point will be examined in terms of the objectives achieved.

#### 3.1. Setting off

In both films, the trigger for embarking on the pilgrimage (or breaking away from the profane/routine) is a situation of personal crisis, understood in its etymological sense of separation from or abandonment of one state of affairs to begin another. The crises are predominantly family tragedies or relationship breakdowns; in no case is there an openly religious motivation. In *The Way*, Tom embarks on the Camino after the tragic loss of his only son. His pilgrimage could be understood as having a higher purpose, based on the transcendent element of paying tribute to the memory of a child through the sacrifice of an unplanned journey. Sarah is a Canadian who sets out on the Camino to recover from her difficult decision to have an abortion to prevent her abusive husband from becoming a father. Joost is a Dutchman who claims to be doing the pilgrimage for the more superficial reason of losing weight, although his real hope is that his wife will find him attractive again. His brother's upcoming wedding is the event that has inspired him to walk in order to slim down, while paradoxically seizing any opportunity along the

way to sample the local cuisine. Jack is a writer from Ireland who is suffering a professional crisis that perhaps also could be described as existential given its metadiscursive dimension, as he is faced with the challenge of writing a book about the Camino de Santiago “that feels contemporary yet pays homage to the ancient traditions of the Way and what it means to be a true pilgrim in the modern age,” as he puts it in the film. Jack occupies an interesting liminal position in the sacred-profane dichotomy, as he is not a “true” pilgrim but he needs to experience the journey as if he were one so that he can vest his literary creation with “truth”.

*Road to Santiago*, on the other hand, plays ambiguously at demythologising the sacred dimension of the pilgrimage, in keeping with the emptying of religious content that shapes the Camino’s modern image and the marginalised place that religion occupies in contemporary Spanish society. There is a certain element of personal introspection, however, represented by the psychological help provided by Olmo to his clients. Among the various therapeutic strategies he employs (games, outfits, group dynamics, etc.), walking the Camino as a group occupies a central place. Certain aspects of the story, however, push at the limits of credibility. The introverted personality of the guru and the disparate problems of the couples who sign up for the treatment raise serious doubts about the

effectiveness of the Santiago therapy from the outset. Added to this is the element of inauthenticity consisting in the fake relationship between the protagonists, Nacho and Pilar, whose professional motivation for doing the pilgrimage (to spy on Olmo and publish a news story that discredits him) belongs to the realm of the profane rather than the sacred. Their dishonesty transgresses the ethical principles both of the healing contract and of the pilgrimage itself. At the same time, the film’s secular reconstruction of the spiritual dimension borders on the banal thanks to the extreme sexualisation of the pilgrimage experience on the part of the group led by Olmo. One example of this is Jose and Fran’s real reason for joining the group: to find heterosexual partners more easily thanks to the social opportunities offered by the pilgrimage by pretending to Olmo’s group to be a homosexual couple in the middle of a relationship breakdown.

The geographical starting point for the journey in Emilio Estevez’s film is on the Camino Francés. This is the most popular route today, attracting 85% of all Santiago pilgrims, even though it takes at least 33 days to travel it on foot. Various shots display the unique character of the buildings in the French Pyrenees and the large crowds of pilgrims in the cold but attractive starting point of Saint Jean Pied de Port, where the friendly welcome Tom receives from the local gendarmerie is worth highlighting. In *Road to Santiago*, the geographical starting point of the journey is not explicitly identified. We are only shown a small Spanish farming town with a profusion of pilgrims in the streets, in a clear effort to humorously highlight the contrast between the lifestyle of the “peaceful invaders” (paraphrasing the term used by Sasha Pack in *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 2006, for tourists who visit Spain) and that of the local residents. There are also moments that parody the typical hospitality of a nation so intimately familiar with tourism (in 2010, Spain received 52 million visitors, according to Instituto de Estudios Turísticos, 2011).

Nacho with other pilgrims in *Road to Santiago*



One memorable example is the scene where Nacho, surrounded by tourists in their unmistakable hiking attire, asks an old woman wearing a traditional black dress, “which way is it to the Camino de Santiago?” Shortly afterwards, we are told that the next stop in the journey is Sarria. Spectators familiar with the Camino will at once infer that the group is taking a well-known route through inland Galicia that takes less than six days, a very popular option because it allows pilgrims to cover the minimum 100 kilometres that entitles them to a Compostela certificate.

### 3.2. Along the way

Apart from their personal motivations, one of the elements that most determines the type of pilgrimage experience is the cultural context of the characters in each film. In *The Way*, all of the characters come to the Camino with individual attitudes of self-sufficiency, because despite their lack of experience and physical preparation, they take on the challenge of the pilgrimage alone without a guide. All come from outside Spain, a fact that underscores the traditional image of Spain as a country where the tourist is a foreigner and the resident is a local. Leaving aside the outdated nature of this stereotype, such characters are very useful in narrative terms, as their lack of knowledge of the country makes the explicitly informative moments in the film more believable. A good example of this is Jack’s passion for sharing historical and cultural information he has compiled in his research for his book with his travel companions. On a few occasions, Jack initiates philosophical dialogues about the ultimate meaning that the pilgrimage has for each character or the inner transformations that it could give rise to. These reflections even go as far as openly raising doubts about the authenticity of a sacrificial ritual undertaken with a credit card in your wallet, or the dispensable nature of the religious ingredient in contemporary pilgrimages. This last question is directly or indirectly addressed on various occasions



Sarah and Joost in *The Way*

in the experience of the fictional pilgrims, always with an attitude of tolerance for any type of faith or the lack thereof. The Christian cultural context clearly predominates among the characters (explicitly Catholic in the case of Jack), but the absence of an overtly Catholic background in each character seems to suggest the incidental nature of that context, at least in the initial stage of the pilgrimage. I will not explore here the numerous references to Spanish culture evidently aimed at highlighting the country’s diversity or presumably updating some of the more traditional stereotypes (tapas, bullfighting, gypsy communities, etc.).

As a substitute for religion, there are other elements of greater interest to 21st-century travellers, such as social interaction and the physical and psychological benefits of walking. At different moments, *The Way* highlights the power of experiences shared with other pilgrims, a power that is enhanced in contexts where the natural environment poses challenges. The difficulties of the long journey on foot, the many moments of solitude, the replacement of everyday routine with a struggle to survive, and the physical pain and exhaustion, among other problems, forces them not only to face their own strengths and weaknesses, but also to understand the advantages of journeying as a group. Travelling together provokes



conflicts, essential to any dynamic narrative, but it also opens doors to their resolution through empathy and mutual understanding. The more than thirty days on the Camino foster the development of strong ties of friendship in an updated version of *communitas*, a version that is not necessarily religious, and that shapes the experiences of the pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, vesting the pilgrimage with contemporary relevance.

Another element painstakingly explored in *The Way* is the aesthetic-ecological dimension of the natural spaces. The camera revels in the landscape, offering compositions with an obvious appeal from a tourism perspective. As a lot of the journey is on country roads and rugged hiking trails (easily identifiable by the scallop shell and corporate colours of the Camino de Santiago brand), the enunciation gives way to the landscape in numerous shots. The pilgrims appear as tiny figures making their way across valleys, roads, or mountains in different weather conditions and at different times of day, underscoring the insignificance of the human individual in the face of the grandeur of untouched nature. Landscapes marked by human intervention are also present, often playing with attractive geometrical arrangements of the group as they cross an old

bridge, take a break on bales of grain in a harvested field, or stocking up in some “charming little town”. They are beautiful postcards that clearly contribute added value to the appeal of the region as a potential tourist destination.

In the aspects described above, the image of the Camino constructed in *The Way* could be described as standing in direct opposition to *Road to Santiago*. Roberto Santiago’s film is dominated by Spanish tourists (three of the four couples), and therefore the culture clash is not conveyed here in terms of foreigner vs. Spaniard, but of urban vs. rural. The visitors are characterised, and even caricatured, by their obviously urban lifestyles: dependence on mobile phones, difficulty walking on unpaved roads, “uniformed” in sporty hiking gear, etc. “The foreigner” is also present, but to a lesser degree, for the purpose of openly challenging certain clichés like those alluded to in Estevez’s film. The Korean couple, Sun and Kim, do not play a major role but contribute an exotic touch compared to European or American tourists. Olmo, on the other hand, is presented as a New Age version of the “typical” Argentine psychoanalyst, fulfilling the dual role of therapist and tour guide. As a tour guide, he represents a modern update of the traditional image of the services sector in Spain,

Tom walking in *The Way*





Nacho lying on the ground near the Cathedral

through an inversion of the most common stereotype: in this case, it is a foreigner guiding Spanish tourists along the Camino de Santiago.

The assumption that most of the characters (and spectators) are already somewhat familiar with the Camino, along with the central role played by relationship conflicts in the story and the secondary nature of the setting, effectively minimise the importance given in this film to providing information about the Camino and its history, cultural significance, or beautiful landscapes. Rather than explaining the performative nature of the pilgrimage, this film revels in it irreverently and comically, in scenes like Nacho's ridiculous accident when he is hit by a cyclist, the extravagant depiction of "true" pilgrims (cape, walking stick, pilgrim's hat, and scallop shell), or the sexual tension between Fran and a young female pilgrim when they are brushing their teeth in the communal toilets at a hostel. There is very little exploration of the transcendent interpretations of the Camino, largely because the interaction between pilgrims is depicted as mediated by matters of a very mundane nature, particularly their sexual-emotional issues. Other profane elements in-

clude Nacho and Pilar's deception of Olmo for the purposes of a news story; Jose and Fran's failure to pay for their therapy; the constant complaints about the inconveniences of the journey, and the doubts expressed about the effectiveness of the therapeutic experience. In this far from edifying portrait of a group of mediocre tourists, in the style of *Atasco en la nacional* [Traffic Jam] (Josetxo San Mateo, 2007) (Mestre, 2013), the eroticising of the Camino ultimately emerges as a contemporary version of secular *communitas*, with very little room left for introspection or transcendent experiences. The aim of the pilgrimage for these characters is a mind-body balance in sexual-emotional rather than spiritual terms.

### 3.3. End of the road

Like any rite of passage, a pilgrimage ends with a change from state "A" to state "B", from the geographical starting point to the final destination. Do the characters experience a final transformation? The answer to this question, intrinsic to any narrative structure, is at the same time the Gordian knot of all pilgrimage experiences and stories.



Botafumeiro pulled by tiraboleiros in *The Way*

In *Road to Santiago*, changes in the sex lives of the characters carry more narrative weight than any inner transformation, although the latter is not completely absent from the story. Pilar's relationship conflict is resolved by the sudden abandonment of both her love interests, whereby she effectively takes control of her own life, before finally choosing one of them. At the same time, the two men themselves give up their ambiguous way of expressing their feelings to compete actively—and ridiculously—for her love. It could be argued that Nacho and Pilar are the characters whose arc of transformation is the most marked, but the result is a kind of twist on the concept of the pilgrimage itself. The couple begin the walk under false pretences: they are not even a couple, let alone a couple in crisis. They spend part of the journey lying to the guru and their fellow pilgrims, and the other part lying to themselves, pretending that they are not attracted to each other. In the end, they undergo a transformation from hatred to love, after suffering a genuine relationship crisis. Fran and Jose, despite their initially high expectations, share just a single sexual experience with one young woman. As a result, the repressed homosexual tendencies of both rise to the surface, in what could be considered the most transcendent transformation in the group. The two couples that began the Camino with gen-

uine conflicts reach the end of the road without having made much effort to resolve them. However, their sexual partner swap on the final night, Antonio with Sun and Kim with Bea, proves such a satisfactory experience that they decide to make it a regular part of their holiday experience. Olmo himself attempts to get some sexual benefits out of the pilgrimage too, exploiting a moment of emotional confusion for Pilar to climb into her bed, on a journey in which he has shown as little concern with healing his clients as they have shown in being healed.

All these erotic-comedic transformations occur before they reach the Cathedral of Santiago, where none of the characters collect a Compostela certificate. We see them get in line to enter the church, but the attention it receives in the filmic enunciation is limited to a few shots of the façade. However, it is in the vicinity of the cathedral where the most spiritually transcendent moment for the two protagonists occurs, suggested by an aerial shot showing Nacho lying spreadeagle on the ground, staring up at the sky, resigned to the loss of his relationship with Pilar. Her entrance into the frame sanctions their union and allows them to conclude their sacrificial ritual with a happy ending.

In *The Way*, the journey along the Camino Francés also brings about changes for the characters, but none of them are sexual. The longer duration of the journey and the diverse nature of the encounters (and conflicts) with other pilgrims and (especially) with each other contribute to the healing of the emotional wounds that each character began the journey with. It is thus hardly surprising that a feeling of inner peace seems to overtake them all when they reach the end of the pilgrimage. The official ending culminates with a spectacular scene set inside the cathedral. Estevez makes the most out of the permission he received to film inside the Cathedral of Santiago—a privilege that few filmmakers have been granted. With an almost documentary tone, the camera focuses



on the swinging incense burner and the rich Catholic iconography surrounding it. All four characters seem affected by a sensation of epiphany, underscoring the intensity of the moment. Another important moment of introspection occurs when they go to collect their Compostela certificates and are asked about their reasons for making the journey. Tom fails to give a clear answer, but he fulfils his homage to his son when he asks that his certificate be issued in Daniel's name. Sarah declares for the first time that her pilgrimage has been a religious experience. Joost explains frankly that he has done the Camino because he wanted his wife to find him attractive again, while Jack announces that he has found his inspiration to write again. The second ending—the secular one—takes place beside the Virxe da Barca sanctuary, in Muxía, and is the one that truly brings the protagonist's mournful pilgrimage to its conclusion. In a moment of non-Christian communion with the choppy waters of the Atlantic, Tom scatters Daniel's ashes. His next journey, shown in the film's final scene, suggests a profound transformation in his life, as he appears to have acquired his son's love of travelling.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The Camino de Santiago constitutes a unique case of religious tourism resulting from a secular appropriation and reinterpretation of its symbolic language and rituals. This transformation is the consequence of the Catholic church's loss of control in the context of an increasingly secular society and the appropriation of the symbolic capital of Christianity by other agents, among whom Galicia's regional government and "friends of the Camino" associations play a key role. This inclusive and flexible construction of the Camino is the



Tom in Muxía (Costa da Morte)

result of an effective marketing strategy that has successfully seized on the social function of the sacred, in the *Durkheimian* sense of the term, in contemporary society. For most travellers today, doing the Camino is a secular ritual, a journey whose symbolic language is freely redefined by each pilgrim.

Many fictional narratives promote this image of the Camino and keep it alive. Prominent among these are films like the ones studied in this article. *The Way*, a film targeting the US market, draws spectators into the historical context of the Camino de Santiago through a group of pilgrims from outside Spain who travel alone and speak to each other in English. The main character is dealing with a tragedy that contributes some gravitas to the pilgrimage, while at the same time the mise-en-scène and the events of the story give considerable attention to the natural settings. The four tourists share a point of view that is external to the local culture, which at least partly justifies the abundance of information provided on the Camino: details of the history of the route, reflections on the contemporary meaning of the pilgrimage,





Group of leading characters in front of the Cathedral of Santiago in *Road to Santiago*

the Compostela certificate as a unique tourist souvenir, the appeal of the non-traditional end points for the pilgrimage, etc. All this has the effect of presenting the Camino as an attractive, high-quality tourist destination.

In *Road to Santiago*, which targets a local audience in a country with a strong tourist tradition, a degree of familiarity with (and perhaps relative enthusiasm for) the Camino de Santiago is taken as a given. This is evident in the fact that information about the Camino, the beauty of the landscape, and transcendent reflections on the pilgrim experience are all pushed into the background (or left out altogether). To engage a Spanish audience, the film offers a light-hearted comedy that satirises both the transcendent dimension of the Camino and the image of a region (and, by extension, a country) noted for its tourist appeal. The basic premise, about a pilgrimage therapist of questionable integrity, constitutes an ironic New Age version of traditional Catholic spirituality that makes room for various romantic and sexual entanglements. Most of the characters are Spanish urbanites, with minimal interest in culture and even less in history or tradition. “Foreigners” are also present, but in smaller numbers, and exhibit

no more interest in the cultural dimension of the Camino, or even the Camino itself, than the Spanish tourists. The Camino is presented as a unique setting, but although there are a few shots that display its appeal and the occasional emblematic location for a key scene, the Camino de Santiago does not hold a prominent place in the film’s mise-en-scène.

Despite their differences, both films convey basically the same message: doing the Camino “works”. The sacrificial ritual makes it harder than other tourist activities, but this is compensated for by elements that give the experience an added value, albeit of a different kind in each film. One way or another, the Santiago pilgrimage, revitalised

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**ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THE SANTIAGO PILGRIMAGE, REVITALISED BY MEANS OF A FLEXIBLE PROCESS OF SECULAR RE-SYMBOLISATION WHERE PRACTICALLY ANYTHING GOES, STRIPS OFF THE EMOTIONAL-SPIRITUAL BACKPACK WE ALL CARRY AND FACILITATES REGENERATIVE ACCESS TO THE SACRED**

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by means of a flexible process of secular re-symbolisation where practically anything goes, strips off the emotional-spiritual backpack we all carry and facilitates regenerative access to the sacred, as Durkheim defined it. Whatever the reasons, whatever the individual experience, and whatever life changes might occur, both films convey the message that doing the Camino de Santiago is “worth the trouble”. ■

## NOTES

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## SECULAR RE-SYMBOLISATION OF THE SANTIAGO PILGRIMAGE IN SPANISH CINEMA: THE CASE OF THE WAY AND ROAD TO SANTIAGO

### Abstract

Durkheim's study of the social function of religion interprets pilgrimage and tourism as forms of travel that involve a transition from the profane/routine to the sacred/religious. Tourism along the Camino de Santiago today is based on Christian pilgrimage routes dating back to the 9th century leading to the tomb of the Apostle Saint James the Great in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Since the late 20th century, institutional policies aimed at promoting the Camino de Santiago have fostered a secularised image of the Santiago pilgrimage that has resulted in a spectacular rise in tourism in recent decades. Thanks to the ability of cinema to create and disseminate powerful imaginaries related to a place or a culture, depictions of the Camino in film, among other media, have contributed to the development of this image. This article focuses on an aspect that has not received much attention in explorations of the Camino in either film studies or tourist studies, with a textual analysis of two films about the Santiago pilgrimage, Roberto de Santiago's *Road to Santiago* (*Al final del camino*, 2009), and *The Way* (2010), directed by American filmmaker Emilio Estevez. Although both are Spanish productions, these films target very different audiences. This textual analysis reveals the use of different discursive strategies in the representation of the Camino, while nevertheless maintaining a similar spiritual dimension of the religious pilgrimage through unique experiences of tourism of the sacred.

### Key words

Camino de Santiago; Spanish cinema; Religious tourism; Secular spirituality; Textual analysis; Sacred and profane.

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## RESIMBOLIZACIÓN LAICA DE LA PEREGRINACIÓN JACOBEA EN EL CINE ESPAÑOL: EL CASO DE THE WAY Y AL FINAL DEL CAMINO

### Resumen

El estudio durkheimiano sobre la función social de la religión interpreta la peregrinación y el turismo como formas de movilidad mediante las que se lleva a cabo el tránsito de lo profano-cotidiano a lo sagrado-religioso. El turismo que recorre el Camino de Santiago hoy se cimienta sobre las rutas cristianas de peregrinaje surgidas en el siglo IX que tenían como destino la tumba del apóstol Santiago el Mayor ubicada en la Catedral de Santiago de Compostela. Desde finales del siglo XX las políticas institucionales orientadas a la promoción del Camino de Santiago han promovido una imagen secularizada del peregrinaje jacobeo que ha dado como resultado un espectacular incremento del turismo en las últimas décadas. A la expansión de esta imagen han contribuido, entre otros, las representaciones audiovisuales del Camino gracias a la capacidad del cine para crear y difundir poderosos imaginarios sobre un lugar o una cultura. Este trabajo se centra en un aspecto poco frecuentado por los estudios del Camino, fílmicos o turísticos: el análisis textual de dos películas de temática jacobea, *Al final del camino* (2009) de Roberto de Santiago, y *The Way/El Camino* (2010), del estadounidense Emilio Estevez. Aun siendo ambas de producción española, están concebidas para públicos muy distintos. El análisis textual evidencia el uso de estrategias discursivas dispares en la representación del Camino que, sin embargo, coinciden en mantener vigente cierto sentido espiritual de la peregrinación religiosa mediante peculiares experiencias de sacralidad turística.

### Palabras clave

Camino de Santiago; cine español; turismo religioso; espiritualidad laica; análisis textual; sagrado y profano.

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