

# **PATAGONIAN CASES: TRAVEL WRITING, FICTION, HISTORY**

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This paper addresses two interrelated issues concerning travel writing. The first is the question of the connection between travel writing and fiction, a question partly about genre, partly about ethics; a question which might be said to have dogged travel writing since its inception, whenever you take that inception to have been. The second issue concerns how, as critics, we might begin to read travel writing with more critical distance; might move away from that position on the writer’s shoulder which travel writing tends to create for its readers.

It is suggested that the history of the genre of travel writing (yet to be written) might be important for understanding that fraught relationship with fiction – a suggestion which moves the discussion back to the early eighteenth century. Travel writing is closely related to a number of other non-fiction genres: autobiography, testimony, investigative journalism, ethnography, memoir. But it is travel writing’s association with the novel which brings it into that difficult area where truth and fiction meet – to use a neutral verb, at least to start with; and the relationship between travel writing and the novel took its modern disposition in the early eighteenth century. It is also suggested that intertextuality can help provide that necessary critical distance, but that since travel writing is often so *explicitly* intertextual, ‘history’ in its more general meaning is most effectively introduced through an analysis of partially denied or unacknowledged intertexts.

These issues are addressed via a reading of Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* and its intertexts. There are several reasons for this procedure. If you asked most people, critics and readers, which was the most important travel book of the second half of the twentieth century, the consensus would probably be *In Patagonia*: not necessarily the best, but the travel book which did most to encourage other young writers of talent to travel and write; which raised the intellectual and popular profile of the genre; and which continues to be one of the most widely read and taught travel books. So the paper asks just what it might tell us about the genre of travel writing that *In Patagonia* became, and to a large extent remains, its archetypal text. As I write, it is exactly a quarter of a century since Chatwin went to Patagonia, and twenty-three years since his book was published, which gives just enough of a further historical dimension to enable, in the final part of the paper, the gauging of a shift within the discussions of the relationship between travel writing and fiction which has taken place since the late 1970s. *In Patagonia* was central to that earlier stage of the debate because Chatwin made such a point of denying that *In Patagonia* was a travel book at all, a denial which must at least complicate any attempt to situate the book at the centre of the genre of travel writing, but which also – less obviously – provides a useful connection back to the early eighteenth century. Chatwin emphasised his own debts to writers like Mandelstam, Hemingway, and Robert Byron, all genuine enough influences, but I focus here on his more particularly Patagonian predecessors in an attempt to gauge something of the historical resonance of Patagonia as a destination.

## 1

So, why Patagonia? Why *this* place, which at roughly the same time as it extracted Chatwin from London was also drawing Paul Theroux from Medford, Massachusetts? What map of the world does travel to this place imply? Part of the answer must have to do with distance. There is no minimum distance laid down for travel in the travel writer's handbook, but the late twentieth century demanded a good deal of distance, a demand Patagonia had responded to in the previous century by getting itself called the 'uttermost part of the earth', a phrase which will need revisiting. Along with distance goes what is factored into competitive diving as 'degree of difficulty'. Pottering around the Andes or island-hopping in the Pacific was in the 1970s simply not

difficult enough; but, equally, confronting real danger in the Antarctic or Himalayas was rather too serious: extreme travel (and its writing) was not yet as popular as it would later become. The archetype demanded something like 4.3 on a five point scale of difficulty: enough in the way of long solitary walks and flooded rivers to induce admiration for endurance, but not the surfeit of risk which might overwhelm the ultimately *social* nature of the travelling experience. As a “zone of travel” for the late twentieth century, Patagonia rated alongside places like Central Asia, or the highlands of New Guinea, or the deserts of Australia, as being the right distance away from the metropolitan centres, and with a climate and terrain which promised some difficulty without real danger.<sup>1</sup>

So in the choice of Patagonia – as one would expect of an archetype – Chatwin’s book charts something of a middle course within the genre. That is true also of its index of sociability. On one side are the kinds of travellers who seek the essence of travel in solitude and hardship; on the other side those, like Naipaul say, for whom the only point in travelling is to talk to other people and hear how they view the world. Chatwin’s middle course consists, typically, of a long solitary walk which ends with his unexpected arrival at an isolated house where he imposes himself on the owners and extracts a meal and a bed and some material for his book, leaving bright and early the next morning.

This method of travel and collection of material has a particular limitation which again makes Patagonia a prime destination: it can only be successful if the host families speak English. Naipaul is perfectly happy, but untypical, in his use of local translators in Islamic countries. Chatwin, the archetype, demands the immediacy of personal contact; and Patagonia offers that very particular kind of colonial history which drew English-speaking settlers in the nineteenth century, and where even the local Argentine and Chilean ruling classes are frequently still bi-lingual; so he could have a measure of exoticism while still conversing in English.<sup>2</sup>

The final attraction that Patagonia offers is a set of intertexts and literary associations. In *Patagonia Revisited*, Chatwin and Theroux have a fine time trying to outdo each other in their learned references to Patagonia – Shakespeare, Melville, Dante, Coleridge, Poe, etc.<sup>3</sup> It is one of the paradoxes of travel writing that the ideology of the integrity of the traveller’s experience, that supposedly unmediated

interface between the traveller and ‘otherness’, is these days almost always mediated in practice by references to earlier travellers, to such an extent that books ‘in the wake of’, or ‘in the footsteps of’ constitute a whole sub-genre in themselves: the ‘ambulant gloss’ as Charles Nicholl calls it.<sup>4</sup>

## 2

Chatwin’s most clearly acknowledged intertext to *In Patagonia*, which he draws on freely, is the writings of his grandmother’s cousin, Charley Milward, a sailor shipwrecked on the Patagonian coast in 1898, who never went home. So important was Milward to Chatwin that he apparently copied material from Milward’s journals surreptitiously and against the explicit request of his cousin in Santiago, who owns Milward’s papers. Milward offers Chatwin the three e’s: eccentricity, exile, and Englishness, all key elements in Chatwin’s travel writing – and arguably in *most* contemporary English travel writing.<sup>5</sup> Milward also offers a personal connection with Patagonia made concrete through the famous piece of ‘brontosaurus skin’, immediately revealed in the book as the skin of a giant sloth or mylodon, which Chatwin had admired in his grandmother’s cabinet in Birmingham. The search for a replacement for this skin provides the quest narrative that seems to organise *In Patagonia* – inasmuch as the book has an organisation. Chatwin would later be very elusive about questions of truth and fiction, but in this instance – early in *In Patagonia* – he is happy for the brontosaurus story to be replaced by the “less romantic” giant sloth version which, he says, “had the merit of being true”.<sup>6</sup>

Charley Milward dominates the last quarter of *In Patagonia*, displacing his better-known contemporary, Lucas Bridges, author of *Uttermost Part of the Earth*, one of Chatwin’s favourite books as a boy; even though the first person Chatwin actually met on his way south from Buenos Aires was Lucas Bridges’ son, David, who appears in *In Patagonia* as Bill Philips.<sup>7</sup> The Bridges family story certainly offered an example of English virtues to which Chatwin was drawn. One of the very few passages actually describing Chatwin’s physical travelling in Patagonia is the walk from Harberton, the Bridges’ English house, named after a village in Devon, to Viamonte, their huge estate on the Atlantic coast of Patagonia, along a road built by Lucas Bridges and walked by him and his family in several epic passages in *Uttermost Part*

*of the Earth*. Here, for once, Chatwin is happy to quite literally follow footsteps in homage to another writer.<sup>8</sup>

There may be a number of reasons why Milward displaces Bridges. Lucas Bridges was born in Patagonia and was an Argentine citizen: he may have been just too *rooted* for Chatwin to adopt as an ancestor, despite the childhood fascination with his book. As an unpublished writer and English eccentric abroad, Milward perhaps offered Chatwin an image of how he thinks he might have ended up if he had lived two generations earlier: Milward's brand of comic eccentricity might have been ultimately more amenable. But, I want to argue, the displacement also suggests something more important to the structure and theme of *In Patagonia*, as Chatwin struggles with just what Englishness might mean in this Patagonian context.

Because the narrative structure of *In Patagonia* is so attenuated, the interpretative focus tends to fall on how seriously to read that quest for the mylodon skin. In his description of the end of the quest, Chatwin talks about what he calls his "ridiculous journey" to find a few red hairs embedded in mylodon dung – not exactly the Golden Fleece, as Chatwin himself said, in a tone of defensive bathos which is itself not exactly uncommon in English travel writing.<sup>9</sup> And yet he also admits to being "immensely pleased" at the find, and he did carry the trophy in triumph to his cousin's house in Santiago: as her husband later reported, the dung was odourless but Bruce was somewhat whiffy.<sup>10</sup> This authorial ambivalence suggests that the sloth needs to be brought in for further questioning.

### 3

Lucas Bridges' title phrase comes from missionary discourse – the Biblical injunction "And you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem... and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). But the phrase 'uttermost part of the earth' also gained a different kind of resonance in the late nineteenth century. The imperial science of biogeography, developed out of the work of Darwin and Wallace, viewed those people who were perceived to live in the realms furthest away from Europe as also furthest away in behaviour, representing the very lowest form of humanity, the very earliest stages of human development, in effect human fossils that had survived only because no more advanced human society had been interested in the lands they

occupied. ‘Uttermost parts of the earth’ reappears in this discourse as a sign of expulsion: only the weakest could be forced to live in such places, of which Patagonia and Tasmania became the two archetypes.<sup>11</sup> Chatwin’s giant sloth offers ‘truth’ in the form of science replacing the myth of the brontosaurus, but the particular science guaranteeing that truth was a deeply imperial project for which that sloth stood as a crucial symbol. For John Lubbock, writing about ‘prehistoric times’ in 1865, the unspeakable South American native, offering a living vision of stone-age savagery, was for the prehistorian exactly what the fossil sloth was for the geologist.<sup>12</sup> The sloth was *the* emblem of Patagonia, congruent with its surviving indigenous population in that both offered keys to the prehistoric past, but also symbolic of that population’s lumbering slowness: behind the times, at the back of history, the last in the human race. That population’s subsequent genocide owed much to the scientific picture of Patagonia which had that sloth as its central image.

Chatwin’s route through Patagonia was rarely straightforward, but the book’s narrative leads him generally south towards Tierra del Fuego before the final swerve up the Pacific coast to the cave on Last Hope Sound where he finds the mylodon dung. The book’s central section – 49 out of 97 – goes out of its way to associate the first European accounts of Patagonians with Shakespeare’s creation of the figure of Caliban, a genuinely postcolonial moment in the book, which predates almost all postcolonial commentary on *The Tempest*.<sup>13</sup> To travel south, as Chatwin later noted with reference to Dante, is to travel towards death, and that invocation of Caliban marks an increasing concern, throughout the third quarter of *In Patagonia*, with the genocide of the region’s indigenous population.<sup>14</sup>

But to travel south is not only to travel towards scenes of death: “As you go south down the coast,” Chatwin writes, “the grass gets greener, the sheepfarms richer and the British more numerous”.<sup>15</sup> There is an unresolved tension here. The walk from Harberton to Viamonte is Chatwin’s connection with the heroic Englishness he remembers from his childhood reading of Bridges. Thomas Bridges’ miraculously surviving Yamana dictionary is a welcome sign of the initial possibility of mutual understanding between colonists and native population.<sup>16</sup> But the other kind of connection soon becomes unavoidable. As one old man fondly remembers, with no wasted words: “Manager always English. Indian kill sheep. English kill Indian”.<sup>17</sup>

Ushuaia was the first English settlement on Tierra del Fuego: perhaps the most resonantly gravid sentence in *In Patagonia* is “I left Ushuaia as from an unwanted tomb”.<sup>18</sup>

The resonances here are complex. Chatwin visited Patagonia just after the military coup in Chile and just before the one in Argentina, too soon to get much of a sense of what was to follow – though he talks of the “concentration camp” on Dawson Island where Allende’s ministers are being held, and where he is not allowed to land.<sup>19</sup> After Chatwin left South America, many of Pinochet’s victims were tortured and killed on this island, previously a missionary concentration camp where thousands of Patagonian Indians had died earlier in the century. As the Argentine writer, David Viñas said some years later, making the connection explicit: the indigenous people were the region’s first “desaparecidos”.<sup>20</sup>

I have been arguing that there is a case to be made for Chatwin’s book to be read as postcolonial in an exemplary sense of that word – struggling with deeply embedded colonial attitudes, gesturing towards an understanding of histories of resistance, partially translating a journey of cultural and historical discovery into a mythological voyage, and finally turning with perhaps rather desperate relief to the stories of his English cousin, a comic figure for what often – perhaps against its best instincts – usually reads like a comic genre. Ultimately, the sloth is allowed to retain its symbolic Englishness as an eccentric exile, repressing the glimpse we get of its place within imperial science and the genocidal practices authorised by that science.

#### 4

If Milward is Chatwin’s most clearly acknowledged intertext, with Bridges partially acknowledged, the most interesting of the *unacknowledged* intertexts to *In Patagonia* might well be Daniel Defoe’s *A New Voyage Round the World*. For most of his adult life Defoe was obsessed by his South Sea project, a scheme to establish an English colony somewhere in South America. The actual location changed, but by the 1720s he had settled on southern South America, Patagonia, as the ideal region; and in 1725 he wrote *A New Voyage Round the World* as a piece of fictional propaganda for this scheme.<sup>21</sup>

*A New Voyage* is written as a factual travel account, difficult of contradiction because its circumnavigation is, as the full title spells out, “by a course never sailed before”, including a land traverse from Pacific to Atlantic across the Andes never before attempted, so there are no competing witnesses. The book also interweaves itself with genuine travel accounts, borrowing liberally from the writers Defoe at the same time discredits as boring and unreliable. However, *A New Voyage* reads to us today as a strange book because it is almost devoid of interest in character, which became so fundamental an aspect of the novel genre later in the eighteenth century; so *A New Voyage* has usually been read either as a fraud, sometimes linked with Defoe’s supposed authorship of Robert Drury’s book about his fifteen years’ captivity on Madagascar, or ignored completely, as it is in many critical studies of Defoe.

*A New Voyage* could be contextualised in the following shorthand manner. Travel writing entered a new phase in 1697, with the publication of William Dampier’s *A New Voyage Round the World* – where Defoe got his title – which was followed by several other accounts of circumnavigations.<sup>22</sup> In part Dampier’s success was due to a keen ethnographic eye coupled with a plain but descriptively detailed prose style, a model of the superiority of experience and witness over book-learning, precisely the elements which Ian Watt once emphasised as crucial for the development of the novel.<sup>23</sup> Travel writing is given some credit, though probably not enough, and certainly not by Watt, for its implication in the development of novelistic conventions. Roughly speaking, the more central Defoe is seen to the establishment of the novel, the more highly is rated the importance of travel writing to that genre. Between 1719 and 1725 Defoe produced a sustained burst of literary experimentation, much of which borrowed material from travel writing and, more to the point, aped its form.<sup>24</sup> Many of those experiments raised the issues of authority and veracity then, and still, at the heart of travel writing, and perhaps never entirely absent from at least realist forms of prose fiction.<sup>25</sup>

Even more clearly than *Robinson Crusoe*, *A New Voyage* draws on travel accounts, particularly, of course, accounts of circumnavigations such as Dampier’s. Circumnavigations are arguably very special achievements and accounts of them make up a sub-genre within travel writing. In the context of the globalisation of capitalism, circumnavigations have a particularly obvious symbolic import; in terms



of travel writing they almost always, at least during the eighteenth century, have the cachet of genuine exploration associated with them. Defoe was blasé about circumnavigations for his own purposes – as always he wanted to stress how easy the flow of trade could be almost anywhere in the world, whatever the seeming difficulty of the conditions – but it was not long before Anson’s major circumnavigatory expedition proved again for the eighteenth century how dangerous such voyages actually were, and how few men – if any at all – tended to return from them.<sup>26</sup> Chatwin, incidentally, claims that the first adult book he read was Joshua Slocum’s account of his circumnavigation, the first solo one.

Within the narratives of circumnavigation, Patagonia was traditionally the hellish place to be passed through on the way to the paradise of the South Seas. With engaging perversity, Defoe wanted to reverse the imagery and therefore he had to reverse the direction of the journey. His ship heads from England to Patagonia but contrary winds constantly force it back across the Atlantic and it eventually sails round the Cape of Good Hope, enters the Pacific from the east, and approaches Patagonia, as it were, from the rear, which enables the description of the region’s colonial possibilities to occupy the narratively necessary place at the book’s climax, immediately prior to the rapidly described return to England. In a familiar trope, what Defoe’s sailors find in Patagonia is exactly what they had left behind in England. Right in the middle of the Patagonian coast, they find a cross erected by an earlier English explorer, with an inscription saying that he had taken possession of that country in the name of Charles the Second: “indeed,” says Defoe’s narrator, “excepting that it was not inhabited by Englishmen, and cultivated, planted, and enclosed after the English manner, I never saw a country so much like England”.<sup>27</sup> What it reminds them of, in particular, is Salisbury Plain, an area Defoe was particularly enthusiastic about, once calling it superior to Arcadia in its number of sheep and shepherds;<sup>28</sup> and this was precisely his image of what Patagonia could become. It took a while, but Defoe’s vision of a British settlement in southern Patagonia eventually came to pass, partially through the efforts of the Bridges’ family; and the sheep and shepherds followed, some of them British, many of them employed by Argentinian and Chilean entrepreneurs. Whether they knew it or not – and I doubt

if they did – it was Defoe’s vision of Patagonia that Bridges brought into being and for which Chatwin wrote his double-edged elegy.

## 5

With its 97 sections averaging less than two pages, something of *In Patagonia*’s attraction as a new kind of travel book for the late twentieth century seemed to be that it did not contain a great deal about travelling. Reviewers used terms such as “mosaic”, “tapestry”, “jigsaw”, “collage”, suggesting that the travel book had finally dragged itself into the early twentieth century by learning the techniques of the modernist novel.<sup>29</sup> Chatwin himself was clear that what he was doing was applying techniques borrowed from fiction to “actual bits of travel”.<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Cape marketed *In Patagonia* as a travel book, but soon after publication Chatwin asked that the book be taken out of the travel category, and that the US edition convey various points which he felt had been misunderstood: one of these was that the book was a traditional story of a “hunt for a strange animal in a remote land” – or what a contemporary letter calls a “modern wonder voyage”; while another expressed a preference for leaving the reader with a choice between two journeys – the actual journey to Patagonia in 1975 and what Chatwin called “a symbolic voyage which is a meditation on restlessness and exile”.<sup>31</sup>

This is a particularly telling set of complaints and requests. The idea of the “hunt for a strange animal” carries the kind of mythical and literary precedent which would lend ballast to *In Patagonia* (and suggests that Chatwin did not always regard his journey as “ridiculous”). But if *In Patagonia* recounts a voyage, then it is a travel book, however much the word “wonder” wants to blur the edges of that term: nobody was suggesting, least of all Chatwin himself, that he had not been to Patagonia at all or seen the things he said he had seen. The so-called reader’s choice between journey and voyage – between the literally quotidian and something more resonantly metaphorical – is not really a choice. That combination exists to some degree in almost all travel writing: all narrative tends to turn journey into voyage just as it turns chronicle into history. However, Chatwin’s retreat to the symbolic is uncannily similar to the defence that Defoe offered to the rather sophisticated attack on *Robinson Crusoe* delivered soon after its publication by the hack writer Charles

Gildon.<sup>32</sup> In response to Gildon pressing Defoe on his claim about the veracity of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe muddied the waters in his usual fashion by having his fictional character then swear a legal deposition to the truth of his story; but at the same time Defoe moved back to one of the traditional defences of fiction by claiming that the falseness of Crusoe's adventures is excusable when the book is read as parable or allegory, the equivalent to Chatwin's recourse to the "symbolic voyage".

As with Defoe's works, Chatwin's *In Patagonia* seems to have hit a critical nerve pertaining to the relationship between fiction and non-fiction, though Chatwin responded to the debate with an uncertainty and self-contradiction that contrasted sharply with Defoe's confidence and audacity. In some ways, of course, the two cases are mirror-images: Defoe wrote fiction which passed – or seemed to pass – as non-fiction, at a moment before imaginative prose fiction had become a respectable literary genre; while Chatwin wrote non-fiction which he seemed on reflection to want to pass as fiction, partly to bypass the ethical considerations of veracity, which he found limiting, and partly to gain access to the category of 'literature' to which – partly thanks to Defoe – prose fiction now comfortably belongs.

Those ethical considerations have swelled considerably in the years after Chatwin's death, with various parties offended at what they see as Chatwin's deceit in not telling them that he was a writer or at the way in which *Patagonia* and its history is portrayed. Several people who Chatwin spoke with, and scores who he did not, have seemed very keen to speak with writers who have come after, often to bury Chatwin rather than to praise him.<sup>33</sup> None of this, interestingly enough, and perhaps surprisingly, seems actually to have done much damage to the fundamental credibility of *In Patagonia*. I suggested earlier that despite its tone of disengagement and its obsession with eccentricity, *In Patagonia* is a rather more serious book than it pretends to be. Perhaps, in what would be another interesting twist, it might turn out that Chatwin invented rather less than he suggested he did during those years following the book's publication.

The matter of fiction remains fraught, as our vocabulary suggests, with words like 'invention' and 'imagination' and 'fiction' itself capable of such radically different connotations in different circumstances; and 'fiction' registering as a term in fields as diverse as epistemology and rhetoric as well as in literature. Fiction and non-fiction

are not in themselves genres: they are better described as metagenres, which establish their relationship with readers largely through explicit or implicit reading contracts.<sup>34</sup> That division has remained fundamental to Western practices of reading and writing since the mid eighteenth century. Within those terms, travel writing is a non-fictional genre. Part of the underlying problem in studying travel writing is that non-fictional genres, with the possible exception of autobiography, have never been afforded detailed analysis of their rhetorical techniques, but, like all non-fictional genres, travel writing uses the rhetorical resources of writing and narration to *make* its text through techniques of condensation, plotting, selection, and paraphrase. At one end of the genre's wide spectrum of mode and tone, comic exaggeration flourishes, without ever confusing readers as to its status and claims<sup>35</sup> but, however much fiction travel writing may contain, the overarching contract with the reader remains non-fictional.

Chatwin's own views on these matters were fluid. When saying he did not want to be called a travel writer, he claimed that the borderline between fiction and non-fiction is "extremely arbitrary" and "invented by publishers".<sup>36</sup> Then in one of his interviews, Chatwin offered an unconvincingly arithmetical definition: *In Patagonia* does not have too many lies, so its status is unclear, but if you added up all the inventions in *The Songlines* then that work is clearly fictional. But when pressed as to where the *actual* dividing line lies between fiction and non-fiction in his work, his response was: "I don't think there *is* one. There definitely should be, but I don't know where it is"; which comes close to admitting that the ethical imperative of non-fiction has been obscured in his work: there *should* be a dividing line but he has lost a sense of where it is.<sup>37</sup> To embrace fiction, as Chatwin did in *The Songlines*, must have seemed a safer option, but he trailed enough débris of his "actual bits of travel" into the final pages of *The Songlines* to trouble his identification of it as a novel: not, I think, an identification that many readers feel comfortable with.

Finally, Chatwin's own confusion about the status of *In Patagonia* seems to belong to a particular moment. The US novelist E. L. Doctorow was ploughing a similar furrow when he claimed in 1977, the year of *In Patagonia*'s publication, that "There is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction: there is only narrative".<sup>38</sup> Bill Buford, introducing *Granta*'s first travel writing special in 1984, with Chatwin as a prime example, celebrated what he called travel writing's

“wonderful ambiguity, somewhere between fact and fiction”.<sup>39</sup> It is telling that Ian Jack, introducing a reprint of the same volume in 1998, could suggest that none of the writers in the anthology would be very happy with Buford’s description. “[W]hen I first read writers such as Chatwin and Theroux”, Jack says, “I needed to believe that the account was as honest a description of what had happened to the writer, of what he or she had seen and heard, as the writer could manage”. And he still does, he says: we need to believe that the travel writer “*did not make it up*”.<sup>40</sup>

There was a moment – call it the postmodern moment if you like – when Buford’s ambiguity between fact and fiction seemed “wonderful”, at least to some people. Less so, these days, I think, at least in part because of the powerful assaults on fact made by David Irving and other holocaust deniers. Last year, when Benjamin Wilkomirski defended his invented memoir of wartime childhood, which had been originally awarded the *Jewish Quarterly*’s non-fiction prize, he tried to argue that it had always been the free choice of the reader to read his book as “literature” or to take it as a “personal document”; an argument which did not wash with those who felt deceived (which included those who had awarded him the prize).<sup>41</sup> David Stoll’s recent charges against Rigoberta Menchú’s memoir have created even more controversy, although that case raises cross-cultural issues about the nature of testimony and witness which are much less easily settled.<sup>42</sup> The point is that this dividing line between fiction and non-fiction – however difficult to negotiate – does still matter to us, perhaps even more than it used to.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For ‘zones of travel’, see Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998, pp. 67-110.

<sup>2</sup> On this issue, see Michael Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, Cork: Cork UP, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Chatwin and Paul Theroux, *Patagonia Revisited*, London: Picador and Jonathan Cape, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> See Charles Nicholl, *The Creature in the Map: Sir Walter Raleigh’s Quest for El Dorado*, London: Vintage, 1996, p. 8; cf. Peter Hulme, “In the Wake of Columbus: Frederick Ober’s Ambulant Gloss”, *Literature and History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 6:2 (1997), 18-36.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Chatwin, *In Patagonia*, London: Picador, 1979, p. 6. For analyses of *In Patagonia*, I am indebted to Manfred Pfister, “Bruce Chatwin and the Postmodernization of the Travelogue”, *Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, 7: 3-4 (1996): 253-67; and David Taylor, “Bruce Chatwin: Connoisseur of Exile, Exile as Connoisseur”, in *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, ed. Steve Clark, London: Zed Books, 1999, pp. 195-211; and **David C. Estes, “Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonia*: Traveling in Textualized Terrain”, *New Orleans Review*, 18 (1991), 67-77.**

<sup>7</sup> E. Lucas Bridges, *Uttermost Part of the Earth*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951. For Chatwin on Bridges: *In Patagonia*, p. 131; for the meeting with David Bridges: Nicholas Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, London: The Harvill Press, 1999, p. 291.

<sup>8</sup> *In Patagonia*, p. 131. See, for example, Bridges, *Uttermost Part of the Earth*, pp. 505-10.

<sup>9</sup> *In Patagonia*, p. 182; *Patagonia Revisited*, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> *In Patagonia*, p. 131; Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, p. 303.

<sup>11</sup> I draw for this section on Clive Gamble, “Ancestors and Agendas”, in *Archaeological Theory: Who Sets the Agenda?*, ed. Norman Yoffee and Andrew Sherratt, Cambridge: CUP, 1993, pp. 39-52; Clive Gamble, *Timewalkers: The Prehistory of Global Colonization*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1994; the essays in *Patagonia: Natural History, Prehistory and Ethnography at the Uttermost End of the Earth*, ed. Colin McEwan, Luis A. Borrero and Alfredo hPrieto, London: The British Museum Press, 1997; and the essays in the special section, “Uttermost Ends of the Earth”, in *Antiquity*, 66 (1992), pp. 710-83.

<sup>12</sup> John Lubbock (Lord Avebury), *Prehistoric Times, as Illustrated by Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* [1865], 7<sup>th</sup> ed., London: Williams and Norgate, 1913, p. 430.

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<sup>13</sup> See Pfister, “Bruce Chatwin”, pp. 258-9. Chatwin’s reading of the link between Patagonia and Caliban is original and persuasive, although his etymological point about the origin of the word ‘Patagonia’ is silently based on María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, “Para la toponimia argentina: Patagonia”, *Hispanic Review*, XX (1952), 321-3.

<sup>14</sup> See Chatwin’s discussion of Dante in *Patagonia Revisited*, pp. 52-4, 56-7. On the indigenous genocide Chatwin references Martin Gusinde’s work, now more fully available as *Los indios de Tierra del Fuego: resultado de mis cuatro expediciones en los años 1918 hasta 1924, organizadas bajo los auspicios de Ministerio de Instrucción Pública de Chile*, trans. Werner Hoffmann and Olaf Blixen, Buenos Aires : Centro Argentino de Etnología Americana, 4 vols., 1986-1991. See also Anne Chapman, *El Fin de un Mundo: Los Selk’nam de Tierra del Fuego*, Buenos Aires: Vazquez Mazzini, 1989.

<sup>15</sup> *In Patagonia*, p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> *In Patagonia*, pp. 128-30; and cf. Thomas Bridges, *Yámana-English: A Dictionary of the Speech of Tierra del Fuego*, ed. Ferdinand Hestermann and Martin Gusinde, Buenos Aires: Zagier y Urruty, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> *In Patagonia*, p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> *In Patagonia*, p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> *In Patagonia*, p. 165.

<sup>20</sup> David Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera*, Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1982, p. 00. **p. 12**

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Defoe, *A New Voyage Round the World* [1725], in *The Novels and Miscellaneous Works of Daniel Defoe*, vol. VI, London, George Bell & Sons, 1893, pp. 191-460. On Defoe’s South Sea project, see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, London: Methuen, 1986, pp. 181-4. On *A New Voyage*, see Jane H. Jack, “A New Voyage Round the World: Defoe’s Roman à Thèse”, *Huntington Librry Quarterly*, 24 (1960-1): 323-36; and Neil Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of The South Seas*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 75.

<sup>22</sup> On Dampier, see Philip Edwards, *The Story of the Voyage: Sea-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, Cambridge: CUP, 1994, pp. 20-36; and Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts*, pp. 59-64.

<sup>23</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963. The extent to which Watt’s work has shaped the study of eighteenth-century prose can be seen in “Reconsidering the Rise of the Novel”, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 12: 2-3, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> See Max Novak, “Defoe as an Innovator of Fictional Form”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti, Cambridge: CUP, 1996, pp. 41-71; and J.A. Downie,

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“Defoe, Imperialism, and the Travel Books Reconsidered”, *Yearbook of English Studies*, XIII (1983), 66-83.

<sup>25</sup> Of all the claims to truth, the story of a man travelling alone in a distant part of the world was the most difficult to disprove, which must be at least part of the significance of Robinson Crusoe’s isolation, which is otherwise a very odd condition for one of the founding figures of a genre so deeply social in its concerns.

<sup>26</sup> See Edwards, *The Story of the Voyage*, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> Defoe, *A New Voyage*, p. 421.

<sup>28</sup> Defoe, *Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain*, ed. G.D.H. Cole, London, 1918, I, p. 218, quoted in Jack, “A New Voyage”, 336.

<sup>29</sup> These are terms Chatwin himself quoted from reviews: Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, p. 310.

<sup>30</sup> *reference missing*

<sup>31</sup> Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, p. 310-11.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Gildon, *Robinson Crusoe Examin’d and Criticis’d* [1719], ed. Paul Dottin, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1923: see the discussion in Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*, New York: Columbia UP, 1983, pp. 154-73.

<sup>33</sup> Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, pp. 313-7. The ones who come after include John Pilkington, *An Englishman in Patagonia*, London: Century, 1991; Luís Sepúlveda, *Full Circle: A South American Journey*, trans. Chris Andrews, Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications, 1996; and Adrián Gimenez Hutton, *La Patagonia de Chatwin*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999. Cf. Jean-Didier Urbain, “Chatwin, le guide déroutant”, *Libération*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2000 (Livres, II-III).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Barbara Foley, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986; and Peter Lamarque, “Narrative and Invention: The Limits of Fictionality”, in Christopher Nash, ed., *Narrative in Culture: The Uses of Storytelling in the Sciences, Philosophy, and Literature*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 131-53.

<sup>35</sup> See Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> In Michael Ignatieff, “An Interview with Bruce Chatwin”, *Granta*, 21 (1987), 23-37, at 27; Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, p. 487.

<sup>37</sup> In Ignatieff, “An Interview”, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Foley, *Telling the Truth*, p. 9. In his obituary Hans Magnus Enzensberger spoke of Chatwin’s “sublime disregard for the categories of fiction and non-fiction” (*TLS* 16.6.89); quoted in Patrick Meanor, *Bruce Chatwin*, New York: Twayne, 1997, p. 17.



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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Ian Jack, "Introduction", to *The Granta Book of Travel*, London: Granta Books, 1998, pp. vii-xii, at x.

<sup>40</sup> Jack, "Introduction", p. xi.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Wilkominski, *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948*, London: Picador, 1996: see Fiachra Gibbons and Stephen Moss, "Fragments of a Fraud" (15 October 1999): <http://www.guardianinlimited.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,259546,00.html>

<sup>42</sup> David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1999; cf. the discussion in a special issue of *Latin American Perspectives*, 26:6 (1999).

Bruce Chatwin became a renowned travel and fiction writer, but his journey began when he was a child. While staying at his grandparents' house, Chatwin came across a piece of fossilized bone that belonged to a giant sloth found in Patagonia. Since then, the wish to visit this part of the world never left him, until he finally made it there and wrote a masterpiece about his experiences. Nicholas Shakespeare, who wrote Chatwin's biography, explains the next chapter of his life. The following year Chatwin decided to resign from Sotheby's. Peter Wilson, the chairman of the auction house at the time, often used Chatwin and his charm to persuade rich customers to spend vast amounts of money at the house. Abject in Patagonia: stories from the Wager. In: Patagonia: myths and realities. Editors: Peñaloza, F., Wilson, J. and Canaparo, C., . Peter Lang. 27- 56. Hulme, P., (2009). Expanding the Caribbean. In: Perspectives on the 'Other America': Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture. Patagonian cases: travel writing, fiction, history. In: Seuil & Traverses: Enjeux de l'écriture du voyage, vol. II. Editors: Borm, J., . Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique / Presses Universitaires de Rennes. 223- 237. 2901737552. Show all. PATAGONIAN CASES: TRAVEL WRITING, FICTION, HISTORY Peter Hulme University of Essex published as 'Patagonian cases: travel writing, fiction, history', in Seuil & Traverses: Enjeux de l'écriture du voyage, vol. II, ed. This paper addresses two interrelated issues concerning travel writing. The first is the question of the connection between travel writing and fiction, a question partly about genre, partly about ethics; a question which might be said to have dogged travel writing since its inception, whenever you take that inception to have been. The second issue concerns how, as critics, we might begin to read travel writing with more critical distance; might move away from that position on the writer's shoulder which travel writing tends to create for its readers.