

GOING TOO FAR: TRAVEL LYING IN BRUCE CHATWIN'S
IN PATAGONIA AND THE SONGLINES

by

NICHOLAS TRAVERS

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2002

© Nicholas Travers, 2002

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date April 17, 2002

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at two travel books by Bruce Chatwin, *In Patagonia* (1977) and *The Songlines* (1987). Both occupy an ambiguous generic ground between fiction and non-fiction, yet critics have tended to oversimplify this key issue when discussing Chatwin's work.

Responses to Chatwin's narratives have been unproductively polarized: some critics sweepingly accuse the author of "lying"; others over-intellectualize Chatwin's narrative strategies and celebrate the artistic achievement of his boundary-crossing "fictions." These two perspectives unsatisfactorily limit the debate about Chatwin's lies, and about travel writing generally.

This thesis takes a middle ground, refusing the premise that Chatwin is a neo-colonial liar, and the proposition that he is an artist fictionalizing his experience to better express its complex truth. By attempting to understand Chatwin's lying/fictions more broadly, the thesis reads Chatwin's two major tracts closely – *The Songlines* in Chapter One and *In Patagonia* in Chapter Two – with an eye for narrative techniques and the author's preoccupations.

Drawing on the biographical work of Nicholas Shakespeare, Susannah Clapp, and Nicholas Murray, travel literature theory and criticism, autobiography theory, ethnography, historiography, interviews, and memoirs, this thesis demonstrates that a single theoretical perspective cannot account for Chatwin's lies, but that a different kind of reading strategy will do so. Successive questions ask: What does Chatwin's lying consist of? What motivates those lies? What are the implications of his lies? This mode of critical reading acknowledges the problematics of lying within a non-fictional framework; it also elucidates the way Chatwin's fictionalizing contributes to a larger narrative design.

The thesis concludes by addressing Chatwin's belated position in the history of European travel writing. A balanced critical approach, that seeks and interrogates the motivations underpinning Chatwin's lies, reveals him to be unwilling to move beyond a neo-colonialist practice of imposing fantasies upon foreign cultures. Unlike other belated travellers, Chatwin,

through his self-representation as well as his representations of other characters and places, claims possession of his experience by exuberantly heightening its features. To a large extent Chatwin does not conceal his pleasure in fictionalizing, but rather displays a Camp delight in excess. Ultimately, however, Chatwin's overt playfulness cannot disguise his desire to conform characters to a naive fantasy of finding freedom elsewhere.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract | ii |
| Table of Contents | iv |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| Introduction | 1 |
| CHAPTER I <u>At a Distance in Patagonia</u> | 6 |
| CHAPTER II <u>More Chatwin than Chatwin Himself</u> | 38 |
| Conclusion | 68 |
| Bibliography | 74 |

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my thanks to Margaret Rawicz for taking time to read a draft of this thesis, and for offering a fresh and helpful critique of what I had written up to that point. I also wish to offer heartfelt thanks to Professor Eva-Marie Kröller for kindling my enthusiasm in travel writing, and for offering endless encouragement to me as a writer. I wish to show my appreciation equally to Professor Susannah Egan, and to Dr. Katherine Sirluck for lending their time and expertise to this project, and for their interest and helpful suggestions..

Most of all, I wish to thank Professor Bill New for his limitless patience, for teaching me a great deal as a writer, and generally for squashing any doubts I had about the validity of this project.

Introduction

This work attempts to complicate the question of Bruce Chatwin's lying. Whether or not, and where Chatwin lies in his texts has been taken up by several excellent biographies, particularly Nicholas Shakespeare's recent *Bruce Chatwin* (2000). Shakespeare incorporates in his biography a broad survey of responses to Chatwin's travel books, including accusations of lying from local residents and academics. This thesis attempts to distance the debate about Chatwin's lies from the question of whether he lied, in large part because I do not want to take the moral high ground and substitute my own truth claims for those that Chatwin advances. The most useful avenue of inquiry, and the one I have chosen to pursue, is to examine aspects of Chatwin's travel books which have aroused accusations of lying, as critical starting points for a more general assessment of *In Patagonia* and *The Songlines*. In adopting this approach, I follow Timothy Dow Adams' lead in his recent study of lying in American autobiography. In the interest of a broader understanding of how lying might serve an autobiographical process, Adams takes as a guiding principle that "literal accuracy" is less important than the fact that a given writer chooses to fictionalise his or her experience. As he puts it: "the complicated series of strategies behind an author's conscious or unconscious misrepresentations is not beside the point" (Adams 16). In writing these essays I have attempted to discover, or at least illuminate, the strategies behind Chatwin's fictionalisation of his experience, with the aim of better understanding the preoccupations and obsessions that moved him as a writer. At the same time, I have tried to remain open to an awareness that, although travel books are autobiographical documents as well as contributions to other fields, most writers and readers consider them to be truthful documents about foreign places. Consequently I have also tried to acknowledge the implications of writing fictional truths about real places and the real inhabitants of those places.

From all accounts Chatwin frequently did lie, and acknowledged his own propensity to exaggerate, downplay, omit, and otherwise manipulate the facts. Reading Chatwin's works, it becomes clear that, like so many travellers, he was both unable and unwilling to forego the myths and cultural expectations inspired, in this case, by "Patagonia" and "Walkabout," not to mention the cosmos of ideas and desires he associated with travel. Of *In Patagonia*, one of the texts I will address, he claimed: "I once made the experiment of counting up the lies in the book I wrote about Patagonia. . . . It wasn't, in fact, too bad." (Clapp 34). His comments partly defend his lying, but the fact that he admits to lying at all also suggests his ambivalence about the practice. Of *The Songlines*, the second text this thesis deals with, Chatwin asserted: "A lot of this is fiction, a lot of this is made up. . . . But it's made up in order to make a story real" (Shakespeare 487). It seems a commonplace now that narratives formerly accepted without question as truthful, including ethnography, manipulate experience using fictional techniques in order to produce a more effective narrative. Indeed, Paul Fussell insists that travel books *must* fictionalise experience, if only by creating narrative tension, in order to be at all interesting to their readers ("Introduction" 16). Yet underlying these concessions to fiction is a reader's faith that, after all, the travel writer is only lying more effectively to tell the truth of his or her journey. With Chatwin, despite his comments above, even this basic pact of truthfulness between writer and reader is brought into question.

What motivates Chatwin's fictions? This question guides the directions this thesis takes. In other words, the following chapters represent an enquiry into the nature of Chatwin's narrative designs. Within *In Patagonia*, Chatwin models his style and interests on the hyperbolic wonder tale. And in *The Songlines*, although Chatwin's persona is slippery, I nonetheless read an autobiographical story in the author's determination to be the storyteller, and to tell his own stories, rather than pursuing a more self-effacing search for Aboriginal songlines. In both cases,

perceiving the wonder tale and an autobiography as models greatly illuminates the question of how and why Chatwin lied. Ironically, both *The Songlines*' autobiographical aspects and *In Patagonia*'s fantastic tales lead back to Chatwin's elusiveness. He consistently demonstrates his unwillingness to present a stable persona; he likewise refuses a single theoretical frame of reference for his travels. Instead, he *performs* both identities and ideas, and in the process blurs the boundaries between his own narrative and other writers' texts, and indeed between his identity and those whom he encounters on his travels, literary and real.

Salman Rushdie summarized his sense of Chatwin's *modus operandi* as follows: "He was looking for stories the world could give him and that he could embellish" (Shakespeare 10). Rushdie's comments point to a storyteller's pleasure in performing, and in the process making stories his own. Friends of Chatwin recognized in his writings the same performative pleasure that was obvious when the author told stories in person. Paul Theroux, for example, described Chatwin exulting in his own "brilliance" when they gave a lecture together on Patagonia ("Chatwin" 403). There is a sense in all Chatwin's writings that he sought to recreate, through a different medium, the immediacy of the wonder and pleasure he could stimulate in listeners during conversations.

Rushdie's remark also suggests that Chatwin's lineage is in tall tale tellers, collecting and retelling stories without feeling bound to tell the truth. He has been called a "fireside storyteller" (Shakespeare 11), and other titles that identify his writings with fabulous travellers' tales. Oddities feature prominently in his writings, and his style is characterized by hyperbole, paradox, and juxtaposition. Generally he finds excess irresistible. He describes, and is drawn to, people's and places' most exceptional features. However, documenting remarkable facts only partly satisfies Chatwin's taste for exaggeration. His texts offer numerous examples of *gusto*, "the artistic pleasure of going too far" (Fussell, *Abroad* 165). As with Adams' assessment of the

American writer Sherwood Anderson, Chatwin indulges in his own inability to avoid storytelling, leaving the reader to separate truth from fiction. Adams calls Anderson an unabashed “confidence man,” as well as a “poseur” (Adams 45), labels that are ideally suited to Chatwin as well. Chatwin’s travel narratives never seem as interested in factual accuracy as in artistic design. His “lies” point to places where fictionalising has shaped these texts in accordance with designs other than straight reportage. At the same time, as generically indeterminate as travel literature is, Chatwin’s two texts importantly masquerade as non-fiction, making significant truth claims. He writes highly problematic fictions within a tacitly non-fictional genre, and shaped from real places, real people and real events.

Postcolonial critics often deconstruct the assumptions of Western travellers in defense of colonized peoples silenced by those travellers’ writings. Such a project is both politically and critically valuable. My stated intention of *complicating* Chatwin’s lies, however, reflects a concern that, in this author’s case, it would be all too easy to dismiss his writings as indefensibly neo-colonial. At times, in order to expose a given writer’s ethnocentrism, critics oversimplify that writer’s idiosyncracies, their particular preoccupations and influences. Every travel book represents “a valuable medium of estrangement” (Holland and Huggan xiii). It provides significant insights into the traveller’s culture, but also challenge language to conform to the strangeness and uniqueness of the travel experience. On the one hand, I do not want to avoid the implications surrounding Chatwin producing art at others’ expense. As has been frequently reiterated in postcolonial critiques of travel writing, the freedom and pleasure so often attributed to travel comes by means of an act of possession, or at least of controlling representations of foreign places. Stephen Greenblatt insists that reducing travel books to innocuous literary texts, to be analyzed as though their narratives were closed worlds, is both “misleading and sentimental. . . . It detaches the work from its truth claims and from the history of its reception, a history based

not upon a willing suspension of disbelief but upon trust" (Greenblatt 33). Correspondingly, this thesis identifies Chatwin's "belatedness;" the author demonstrates a sense of cultural superiority, and reinforces many of the stereotypes prized by colonial-era English travellers. On the other hand, I appreciate Chatwin's particular and personal investment in his fictions. In contrast with Greenblatt's comments above, I also perceive, in the popularity of his writings, countless readers' complicity in his fictions. I have tried to write a measured analysis, one which recognizes these texts as unique productions, as well as considering their part in more general assumptions about the places they describe. Chatwin fictionalises his experience, but does so out of a powerful belief in the imagination as a positive, revitalising force. Adams, recalling Georges Gusdorf's reading of another notorious travel liar, Chateaubriand, notes that an artistic value emerges out of the lies, in the mutual "enchantment" of both writer and reader; at the writer "realizing himself" somewhere between truth and fiction (Adams 16). This thesis seeks to illuminate Chatwin's self-realization through travel lying; it also attempts to assess the degree to which these texts produce dangerous fictions, often posing as truth claims, and often blind to the cultural prejudices that underpin them.

At a Distance in Patagonia

A teacher's report on his pupil, Bruce Chatwin (1958): "He finds difficulty in remembering facts and only the bizarre or trifling really appeals to him. His historical approach is far too free as yet and he must try to control it more carefully. . . . Too often in school and, it seems, in preparation, he is led astray and his mind goes off at a tangent, usually interesting but usually irrelevant".¹

Bruce Chatwin exists in the minds of many readers as a heroic writer/adventurer, a symbol of creative and personal freedom who was able to disengage himself from a web of professional, social and domestic responsibilities in order to do exactly what he wanted to do, namely travelling and writing. Chatwin's writings also display this dedication to freedom, teasingly refusing easy definition, to the extent that the line between fiction and non-fiction becomes problematically blurred. Factual errors and misrepresentations within *In Patagonia* (1977), Chatwin's account of his travels in southern Argentina and Chile in late 1974 and early 1975, incensed many readers. For the most part these critics are Argentinians whom Chatwin visited and interviewed; they are also scientists specializing in aspects of Patagonian history and culture, as well as writers sensitive to strategies of representation. Overall, these criticisms point to the fact that *In Patagonia* exaggerates in its many "portraits" of Patagonians; it also modifies events and stories. Anecdotes abound in the text, some of which are factually inaccurate. Chatwin may be lying, but what is the nature of those lies? And what strategic function does this practice illuminate? With these questions in mind, this chapter explores Chatwin's relation, within *In Patagonia*, to the past, to other texts, other characters, and to the notion of wonder, all of which have contributed to the text's reception as untruthful.

Most problematically, truth claims in this text cannot be readily ascribed to a stable authorial figure. Accustomed to travel books that organize themselves around an autobiographical presence, readers must readjust themselves to a narrative from which Chatwin largely disappears

¹ Clapp (52).

as a character. Chatwin avoids narrating what he does and what he thinks *en route*, focusing instead on vivid descriptions, and on retelling the most sensational stories he acquired about Patagonia. These descriptions illuminate Chatwin's preoccupation with surfaces, and with aestheticizing his experience. It is a mode that reflects Chatwin's dedication to artistic design; it also exposes the author's unwillingness to commit, emotionally, to his experience. But as a consequence of this approach, readers perceive a self-reflexive style that obscures Chatwin's "real" journey. It is difficult to conceive, from such a self-reflexive text, what the Patagonian journey was like for the author,² provoking a sense among readers that Chatwin omits significant truths. However, Chatwin does more than simply avoid talking about himself. By destabilizing himself as a central character, Chatwin also removes a key reference point of authenticity. His evasiveness represents a strategy that permits the author to blend his voice with other characters' voices, as well as the voices of his secondary sources. Consequently, he confuses distinctions between past and present, as well as between truth and fiction. By doing so, while chronicling numerous regional "wonder tales" (by which I mean a travel account that trades heavily in fabulous stories), Chatwin slyly adopts the conventions of that genre and produces a metatextual wonder tale of his own.

One of the areas where *In Patagonia* appears to lie involves Chatwin idealizing the past. Though the text ostensibly describes Chatwin's travels in the present, *In Patagonia* nostalgically evokes the past as a more adventurous and compelling time. This project aligns *In Patagonia*

² Biographical information regarding the author's time in South America ironically increases rather than decreases a sense of discordance between that journey and the narrative it produced. A telegram that allegedly read "Gone to Patagonia for six months" has acquired a mythical status and appears ubiquitously in stories that celebrate Bruce Chatwin as a kind of preternatural world traveller. And yet the story also seems to be untrue, or at least greatly exaggerated: Chatwin's boss at the *Sunday Times* has no recollection of a dramatic telegram, though an unexceptional letter from Chatwin did announce his intention to travel to South America (Shakespeare 286). The telegram story is compelling since at the earliest stage of Chatwin's Patagonian journey the issue of lying comes up, establishing a pattern of good stories that turn out to be at least partially untrue.

with other contemporary travel texts nostalgic for a “golden age” of travelling: “when there were still large chunks of *Terra Incognita*’ to be explored, when, in short, difficulties and hardships conferred on a journey the appropriate aura of ‘adventure’” (Matos 215). The narrative continuously turns from the present to the past, often employing present-time encounters with people and places as vehicles through which it can tell stories of historical events. Many places Chatwin visits function in the text as monuments to particular events in the past that interest the author. Historical events and characters determine the author’s itinerary. And this project of “revisiting” the past through the present often renders present-time events strangely incidental.

The text represents certain places in terms that juxtapose an impoverished and stultified present with dramatic and dynamic events that once took place there. An example of this contrast occurs when Chatwin visits the cabin once inhabited by the outlaw Butch Cassidy, but which is now dilapidated. Its owner says: “‘The house is rotten, Señor, old and rotten. I would sell it tomorrow’” (53). The description of the cabin introduces a story of Butch Cassidy in Patagonia, which contrasts in its adventurousness with the story’s material reminder in the present, the worn-down cabin. A second example involves Chatwin’s retelling of a search for a lake monster in the 1920s. The text focuses on the excitement generated by the search for the monster, in sharp contrast with Chatwin’s present-time visit to the lake in question, which turns out to be a disappointing body of water, “little bigger than a pond and not more than a metre deep” (50). Revolutions, journeys, struggles, murders and love affairs animate the past but not the present. Furthermore, a series of key stories form the narrative backbone of the text, all of them set far enough in the past that only the oldest characters Chatwin encounters recollect them. His past stories are heroic. Their protagonists take dramatic action, even if consistently Chatwin describes the ill-fated consequences of their endeavors. By contrast, little sustained action drives his own travel account; Chatwin downplays his personal adventures in favour of retelling Butch Cassidy’s

and others' heroics. Chatwin "backgrounds" himself, preserving for himself the roles of observer and storyteller rather than that of an active participant. Consequently the persona-hero that unifies and drives the picaresque events of so many other travel narratives is absent. And yet ultimately, this strategy further permits Chatwin to shift the narrative fluidly from the present to the past, accentuating a reader's sense of the past tangibly affecting the present.

The text's backward orientation is heightened by Chatwin's representation of present-day Patagonians as compulsively nostalgic. Many of them pine for a Europe either faintly remembered or never seen. Chatwin's Patagonians sweepingly identify themselves with a "lost" Europe. The text describes a young piano prodigy's desire for proximity with European culture, as well as his geographical and intellectual isolation from that culture (32). In another case Chatwin encounters a "Scotsman" with only a vague notion of Scotland, who speaks only Spanish, yet identifies more with Chatwin than with other Patagonians (102). Another woman

was dreaming of Italy, and of Venice in particular. She had once seen Venice and the Bridge of Sighs. And when she said the word *sospiri*, she said it so loudly and insistently that you knew she was pining for Italy. Chubut was so very far from Venice and Venice was far more beautiful than anything else she knew (36).

The text also focuses on Patagonians' collections of European objects, and describes them in shrine-like terms. In these instances and others Chatwin characterizes Patagonians as exiles, hopelessly yet determinedly identifying with their idealized vision of Europe. However, as Ann Colley points out, nostalgia "remembers" an unreal past which synthesizes the past and the present (210), and Chatwin emphasizes the strangeness of the places his Patagonians remember. Chatwin represents his interlocutors as members of discrete European colonies who have attempted, unsuccessfully, to transplant "home" onto Patagonia. This is not to say, however, that these figures lack intensity, or interest for the author. Chatwin delights in, as well as heightens the strangeness, to him, of Patagonia's displaced Europeans. And yet Chatwin's ephemeral presence is with few exceptions the only character in motion; he travels rapidly (often instantly)

from one still character to another, staying with them, listening to and recording their stories and then moving on again. A sense of stultification characterizes both Chatwin's interlocutors and the narrative itself until Chatwin or the person he is visiting begins to tell stories about the past or abroad. Moreover, Chatwin's persona possesses all that he perceives the Patagonians lack: confidence in his status as "European," as well as total freedom of movement. Chatwin represents his interlocutors as backward-looking, but one wonders how nostalgic they actually were. After all, this nostalgic attitude conforms only too well with the author's nostalgic representation of Patagonia as a place of memory.

Chatwin's interest in specific places within Patagonia, as seen with the monster's lake and with Butch Cassidy's cabin, tends to relate to that place's association with a famous personality or with a remarkable historical event. In this regard, what Chatwin "knows" and what he desires about Patagonia merge in the narrative with what he actually finds. In other words, *In Patagonia* moves between a textual and an experienced Patagonia, and in a remarkable number of places Chatwin's relation to Patagonia is as much a textual one as an experiential one. Chatwin's Patagonia is saturated by past events, to the extent that he apprehends the country through a screen of his readings about the region. In the absence of a dominant autobiographical narrative as its basic structure, however, *In Patagonia's* focus is textual. Chatwin does not privilege his personal experiences over stories he has encountered. And hence readers accustomed to first-person travel accounts find themselves at a remove from Chatwin's journey, reading accounts of accounts of Patagonia. While contemporary travel writers generally disguise the influence of other texts on their impressions, Chatwin often unashamedly travels among stories within *In Patagonia* rather than representing his physical journey.

In Patagonia's patchwork form involves a variety of texts, including diaries, letters, fiction, travelogues and academic works, and its use of these texts shifts constantly: they are

quoted, referred to, alluded to and directly transcribed. The author also cites many of these texts in a bibliography that at least superficially lends an aura of legitimacy to *In Patagonia*'s truth claims. In some cases recognizing other texts within *In Patagonia* is straightforward; the most notable example is the diary of Chatwin's "cousin," Charles Milward, which Chatwin transcribes more or less directly into his book. Elsewhere chapters retell or paraphrase stories the author takes from particular texts, as for example a story about "a sect of male witches" which Chatwin draws from a cited book, *Tesoro Mitológico de Chiloé*, and unambiguously sets off from the rest of the narrative (139-42). However, despite the bibliography, and despite many texts informing the narrative, Chatwin's style subsumes all supporting texts and voices. His use of source material destroys their integrity, as distinct from his own narrative. Listening to one man's story, Chatwin writes: "The lecture melted into a dream voyage" (97). The comment is complementary. Language of disintegrating, and of losing realistic dimensions, usefully metaphorizes Chatwin's practice of undermining a reader's ability to determine a story's source, as well as its relative truthfulness. Appropriately, Chatwin writes much of the narrative in free indirect style, conflating his own voice with his sources to the point where his own ideas and his sources' voices become impossible to differentiate. Moreover, characteristically for Chatwin, the sources he does cite are for the most part highly esoteric texts, making the task of validating his references extremely difficult. Indeed, his archly confident readings of secondary texts are at least partly designed to discourage scepticism. The attitude this mode expects from its readers is enraptured passivity. Moreover, the books he acknowledges in his bibliography by no means represent full "coverage" of *In Patagonia*'s various topics. The impression Chatwin's secondary reading leaves is that he sought out books either that confirm his own unorthodox views on a particular topic, or that advance iconoclastic arguments themselves. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Chatwin was (in)famous for carefully eliminating all traces of his research (Clapp 20). And in

defense of his “borrowing” from other texts without acknowledgement, he insisted that all writers constantly plagiarize (Clapp 20). The presence of a bibliography at all, in a text that makes little attempt to distinguish the author’s ideas from those from other books, is audacious. And indeed, the bibliography only superficially represents a means of verifying his ideas. More importantly the bibliography serves as a kind of book-in-miniature, a compact index to the eccentric stories he included in the text, their eccentricity accentuated by their juxtaposition in a concise list.³

Claiming others’ narratives, in order to retell them in an idiosyncratic way, results in a more seamless narrative, but at the expense of recognizing the limits of the author’s voice. Direct references to other texts and authors, as with the bibliography, constitutes snobbish name-dropping much more than an attempt to differentiate original ideas from borrowed ones. Plagiarism clearly matters less to Chatwin than the pleasure of retelling stories in a lively manner. Chatwin’s style asserts an equally intimate relationship with stories derived from his own experience, and with stories read, or heard third-hand, and often hundreds of years old (Shakespeare 318). Tone, diction, and other elements of Chatwin’s style draw an eclectic collection of stories together. Chatwin does more than simply personalize his materials, and thus smooth out transitions between them, however. His approach blurs distinctions between present-day and historical events, as well as between real and fabulous stories. He makes little attempt to conceal his pleasure in the wonder tale, regardless of the form’s ambivalence to truthfulness. Indeed, the label “trickster” that Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan give to Chatwin nicely captures the author’s two-facedness (9). He appears playfully aware that his audience is far less gullible than sixteenth or seventeenth century readers would have been. At the same time he persists in retelling possibly fabulous stories, as well as camouflaging any means by which

³ The bibliography represents a celebration of original tastes, aligning Chatwin with a tradition of English “Gentleman Travellers” declaring their allegiance to irreverence and iconoclasm by listing the usually esoteric books they read while travelling. Chatwin’s reading list, in the *diversity* of his own interests that it asserts, also self-

readers might determine their authenticity.

A key moment in *In Patagonia*'s blurring of literature and experience occurs in the following passage, as Chatwin first enters the desert:

Unlike the deserts of Arabia [the Patagonia desert] has not produced any dramatic excess of the spirit, but it does have a place in the record of human experience. Charles Darwin found its negative qualities irresistible. In summing up *The Voyage of the Beagle* he tried, unsuccessfully, to explain why, more than any of the wonders he had seen, these 'arid wastes' had taken such firm possession of his mind. (19)

In a fairly conventional move, Chatwin uses Darwin here to confirm his first impressions of the region. This strategy points to an important contradiction in travellers' narratives: a travel account supposedly gains validity because of its claim of first-hand experience, yet constant references to other texts remind us how much literary "guides" represent the true measure of an "authentic" experience. His representation gains relevance by its relation to a previous representation by an English writer, though Chatwin inflates the influence of English travel writing with the phrase: "a place in the record of *human* experience." To a crucial extent the desert signifies for Chatwin because of the power ascribed to it by previous travellers. *The Voyage of the Beagle*'s datedness is unproblematic: in this textual realm Chatwin leaps over almost 150 years to contextualize his own representation of the desert. Chatwin sidesteps the radical cultural differences that separate his Patagonia from the place Darwin visited. From an English, *literary* perspective, Darwin's enormous influence maintains him as the measure of all other accounts of the region. As such, Chatwin represents a literary traveller, seeking to retrace at least partly the footsteps of his literary ancestors. However, other literary travel books generally involve an attempt to recreate the spirit of the original work. And while this project often distorts the literary pilgrim's sense of place (Henderson 230), their relation to the original work respects its integrity. A sense of Chatwin's literary tourism needs to acknowledge his interested, appropriating mode of reading.

Blurring the lines between his own and others' voices, Chatwin introduces another mediating layer. He frequently reads Patagonia through other authors' representations, but individualizes his readings to such an extent that no authentic voice appears discernable. The effect is that of reading texts which are, to borrow Stephen Greenblatt's phrase, "translations of fragments that are themselves translations" (48-9). But at the same time we perceive Chatwin's fantasy of travelling beyond possible boundaries. In describing Magellan's account as though he were Magellan himself, Chatwin enacts a fantasy of discovering South America alongside the explorer, and caters to every reader's fantasy of travelling in the imaginative realms of their books. This practice is less an attempt to plagiarise than it is an attempt to inject his second-hand stories with the fantastic realism of fables.

It seems ironic, then, that Chatwin includes Darwin in order to "empty" Patagonia, or rather to confirm its emptiness, both geographically and in terms of previous representations. The passage both elevates Patagonia and reinscribes its mystery. Darwin "unsuccessfully" tried to explain this inscrutable region, leaving room for other accounts. And yet here and in *The Songlines* Chatwin finds deserts irresistibly alluring. Within *In Patagonia*, quoting Darwin's particular reflections on the desert provides Chatwin with a happy confirmation of Patagonia's timeless desolation, combined with its essential otherness, its resistance to definition and thus reduction. These features define the region, in Chatwin's imagination, as a natural producer of wondrous stories, but also as an eternally renewing theatre in which these stories enact themselves for him. As Richard Bevis writes, of the desert's "aura" in the European imagination, vast empty spaces promised a spiritual ecstasy, because of their clarity, but they also defied explanation (236). Chatwin's reading of Darwin strategically frees literary space for that "excess of the spirit" (perhaps he has Richard Burton's translation of *Arabian Nights* in mind) which he endeavors to produce for his readers. What seems most important in this passage is that Patagonia

represents, for Chatwin, a space from which (and about which) he can write originally. Its muse-like qualities derive from its "remoteness," geographically, from England, as well as its relative underappreciation as a literary subject. Patagonia successfully poses in this text as the latest "last place on earth," for which travellers are always searching. For Chatwin, however, this label appeals to him because of such places' connotations as places of wonder. The texts Chatwin evokes serve to confirm the fertility of Patagonia for the imagination. Rather than determine what can be said about Patagonia these texts express the emptiness, and therefore the imaginative possibilities of the desert. Chatwin refers to Darwin tacitly to lend authority to his own representation of the desert, yet here and elsewhere *In Patagonia* uses these authorities to support a thesis that Patagonia is in fact a realm of imaginative license. These ideas, at their heart, are contemporary reinscriptions of familiar tropes. He evokes Patagonia's geographical distance from a perceived centre of normalcy and order (i.e. Europe), playing on traditions that this physical distance only increases the likelihood that what is normal will not be found there. Chatwin recalls Mandeville, and many other Medieval and Renaissance travellers' othering of places that were unknown to Europeans. Such places signified *terra incognita* in the European imagination, where normal rules did not apply -- which could (and indeed were expected to) stage wondrous sights and activities (Greenblatt 30).

It is unclear the degree to which Chatwin recognizes, and thus plays with, his own belatedness in imagining Patagonia as a place of wonders. Knowingly or not, wherever possible Chatwin appeals to authority in order to "remystify" rather than demystify Patagonia. Although he clearly read extensively about Patagonia before and after arriving there, his secondary readings appear carefully selected to confirm his fantastic expectations. A general impression of Chatwin's sources describe a country that was extreme, savage, and located at the end of the Earth (Murray 42). It would be presumptuous to assume that Chatwin is only *ironically*

reinstating a myth of Patagonia as wild and uncivilized. The portraits and stories he writes seek to invest present-day Patagonia with the same wonder-inspiring power that Darwin and other sources emphasize. He reinstates and adds to Patagonia's mythic reputation. Accordingly, Chatwin expressed delight in perceiving that his expectations of wonder seemed to be confirmed by the unusual people he encountered (Shakespeare 292).

By contrast, where the reality of his journey interferes with this program, Chatwin expresses dismay that sometimes borders on contempt. Chatwin stresses that the Araucanian Indians he sees in Argentina were, at one time, "incredibly fierce and brave. They painted their bodies red and flayed their enemies alive and sucked at the hearts of the dead" (18). His source for these ethnographic details is unclear, but Chatwin alludes to a sixteenth-century Spanish epic, and to Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) as support for this view of the Amerindians. Does he mention them because they confirm a Renaissance view of these Indians, or do these texts *provide* Chatwin with his facts? Chatwin's representation of the present-day circumstances of the Auracanians sympathizes with their poverty but ends with a dismissive line that laments the disappointment of his expectations: "The Araucanians are still very tough and would be a lot tougher if they gave up drink" (18). In this utterance Chatwin gives away his desire for this group to conform to the romanticized stereotypes he brings to his journey.

A second area where Chatwin fictionalizes involves his characterization of the Patagonians he encountered. In one case of misrepresentation, Chatwin describes an exiled Ukrainian nurse who is apparently familiar with what were then the little-known writings of Russians Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova. In fact the nurse had never heard of these authors and read only Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie mysteries (Shakespeare 294). Not surprisingly, perhaps, the Russian authors were two of Chatwin's favourites. The moment typifies Chatwin's idealization of, and thus his expectation of finding certain character types

within *In Patagonia*. In Chatwin's text, characters on the printed page are amalgams of an individual encountered and a romanticized figure whom the author admires.

The ideals that Chatwin seeks out and toward which *In Patagonia*'s characters tend (and the same is true of all Chatwin's texts), can be divided into two categories: eccentrics and ascetic tough guys. As archetypes these figures explain factual lies such as the book substitution described above, and generally help to understand Chatwin's mediated characters. The first of these figures is the eccentric. André Malraux, the French writer/politician/intellectual/war hero whom Chatwin interviewed for the *Sunday Times* (1974), is the prototype for this category.

Chatwin asserts about Malraux: "They consult him as an oracle; and if his replies bewilder, none will deny him one of the most original minds of our time" (*What* 114). He adds:

Malraux is alone. He can have no followers. He never allowed himself the luxury of a final political or religious creed, and is too restless for the discipline of academic life. He is unclassifiable, which in a world of -isms and -ologisms is also unforgivable." 119

This passage contains all of the requisite elements for Chatwin's eccentrics: originality, restlessness, and an unacademic intellectualism. Author Murray Bail notes that Chatwin's most endearing term for someone was 'mad': "'It was a description of honour. He didn't like ordinary people. He wanted them extraordinary'" (Shakespeare 9). But perhaps most importantly, because of these virtues, he represents his eccentrics as unappreciated, or even better, persecuted. Within *In Patagonia* Chatwin romanticizes alienated artists and intellectuals. Collectively, Chatwin's writings from the *Sunday Times* through *In Patagonia* to *The Songlines* reiterate that the less the person in question has been endorsed by wide public acclaim, the more Chatwin admires him or her. Self-induced, or forced isolation, and self-education also frequently describe this figure. Hermits and exiles appeal to Chatwin more than people immersed in an intellectual or social community. Chatwin focuses on the unexpectedness and variety of their interests. Implicitly Chatwin suggests that his eccentrics' genius cannot be appreciated because they produce art and

ideas that confound conventional categories and expectations. An example of an eccentric in this text is a young pianist whose talent Chatwin represents as isolating him from the rest of the community. Another example is "The Maestro," a poet he represents living as a hermit in a small hut outside an already small Patagonian town: "The scope of his verse was cosmic; technically it was astonishing" (38). The text's most enthusiastic portrait Chatwin reserves for an almost unimaginably multi-disciplined thinker:

Father Palacios was Doctor of Theology, of Anthropological Theory and Archaeology. He was a marine biologist, zoologist, engineer, physicist, geologist, agronomist, mathematician, geneticist, and taxidermist. He spoke four European languages and six Indian ones. He was writing a general history of the Salesian Order and a treatise on biblical prophecies of the New World. (95)

It is hard not to compare this virtuosity across disciplines to Chatwin's text as a whole, in which we find so many vari-talented figures. *In Patagonia's* bibliography, as mentioned, exhibits in compact form the diverse interests that preoccupy its author. Chatwin takes on witchcraft, anthropology, archaeology, palaeontology, linguistics, political and social history, and several other fields, all with equal confidence and enthusiasm.

In large part this confidence derives from an extensive tradition of "amateurism" in English travel writing. This tradition lends so much approbation to "generalists" like Chatwin that they feel capable, as Chatwin does, of claiming groundbreaking work in a number of fields. At the same time, in ironic acts of self-aggrandizement, Chatwin and other amateurs also proudly proclaim their *lack* of knowledge in these fields before they tackle them with apparent virtuosity (Holland and Huggan 33). By emphasizing his own wide-ranging interests Chatwin celebrates his own amateurism; he also aligns himself with the eccentrics on whom he lavishes so much praise. Perhaps wary of Timothy Dow Adams' assertion that, in autobiographical narratives, the worst sin is self-aggrandizement (168), Chatwin projects qualities he would like to claim for himself onto the characters he most admires. Chatwin makes an indirect claim for his own eccentric

greatness by asserting a deep understanding between himself and these intellectual heroes. Often the eccentric in question expresses appreciation at his interviewer's sensitivity and knowledge. This may be a case of Chatwin inserting flatteries into his characters' mouths; or they may have genuinely admired him. In any case he pointedly includes these flattering exchanges in his narratives. A repeated scenario involves local inhabitants warning Chatwin that the village madman does not like visitors, or is incomprehensible, only for the author to win his trust and admiration. The "lie" about a given character, in other words, needs to be read for its self-reflexive fantasy.

Chatwin represents his eccentrics as cut off from artistic or intellectual legitimacy, either because of bad luck or because their "genius" has not been understood or appreciated by a wider audience. Often Chatwin celebrates the eccentrics' ideas specifically for their discredited status within academic circles. Their exiled position denies them fame or credibility, but Chatwin also represents their exile as the source of their brilliance. In many cases the eccentrics' origins are unexceptional, yet as Chatwin perceives them, they "reinvent themselves royally in the sticks" (Shakespeare 6). He equates travel and isolation with artistic or intellectual fulfillment in a formula that echoes the artistic value of exile to modernism. Indeed, these characterizations reveal Chatwin's modernist influences, since he clearly shares the myth championed by many inter-war artists that foreign places held the key to their creative fulfillment. Furthermore, Patagonia's desert, after the earlier *fin de siècle* generation of writers, represents a mirror for the artist's soul, an "objective correlative" for their disaffection and sense of emotional exile (Bevis 263). As Caren Kaplan points out, however, concerning self-absorbed modernist "exiles," these writers actually behaved like the tourists they were, while their writings explored their desire to feel like exiles (47). Likewise, Chatwin described his travels as pathologically imperative and unavoidable; the first entry in the notebooks section of *The Songlines* is from Pascal: "'Our

nature lies in movement; complete calm is death” (163). He also insisted in an interview that he was unable to write unless he was travelling (Ignatieff 25). He projects his representation of Patagonia as a muse onto Patagonians themselves; his descriptions naively imagine what appear to be largely unhappy, politically and economically exiled Europeans as romantics who travelled to Patagonia compulsively, driven by a quasi-mystical, nomadic imperative.

An ironic tension exists between Chatwin describing an entirely original figure ("Malraux is alone. He can have no followers") and readers beholding enough "mad" geniuses in Chatwin's texts that we begin to wonder just how singular these individuals really are. Eccentrics are so pervasive that Chatwin's project of isolating and exaggerating their most unusual features becomes clear. He "eccentricizes" at every opportunity within *In Patagonia*. In the chapter outlining Chatwin's visit to Father Palacios, "the comprehensive genius of the South," Chatwin overwhelms the reader with arcane and eclectic details, presumably in order to illustrate the originality and brilliance of his subject. At the same time the portrait of Father Palacios resembles other meetings with such figures, stylistically and in terms of how Chatwin organizes these chapters. The text heightens or even exaggerates what is esoteric and arcane without rendering what is human about the figure. Consequently Chatwin's portraits of eccentrics come across as hyperbolic, closer to a tall tale than to reportage. Obscure vocabulary and references serve to exaggerate these characters' inscrutability for the reader, shifting their portraits into a kind of nebulous place between tall tale, or fable, and reality.

Moments of extravagance draw the reader's attention to the style of a passage rather than what that passage relates. Chatwin's sweeping claims and arcane vocabulary, and his taste for dropping obscure names, are often strategies simply to impress the reader with the author's brilliance. Most readers are not meant to recognize these names, nor meant to keep up with Chatwin and his interlocutors in their esoteric conversations. Indeed, his statements tend to be

idiosyncratic enough to bewilder the reader into silence. In an aside in one of Chatwin's essays, for example, he proclaims: "What distinguishes African music from European is its unawareness of proportion" (*What* 67). How does one begin to respond to such outrageous statements? Characteristically he provides no research, no argument, or any other structure by which readers could begin to assess his ideas. By keeping his readers off-balance in this way, he provides them with their role: not to be skeptical, but through suspending their disbelief, to be a captivated audience.

A sense of inconsequence and artificiality thus characterize Chatwin's style, features that have led critics to question the author's moral investment in his writings, and thus question his interest in truthfulness. In a short story about a West African coup, Chatwin nonchalantly describes being lined up by what might have been a firing squad:

"'Merde!' said Jacques. 'Now what?'"

What indeed? I was not frightened. I was tired and hot. My arms ached, my knees sagged, my tongue felt like leather, and my temples throbbed. But this was not frightening. It was too like a B-grade movie to be frightening" ("A Coup" 116)

His use of short sentences and descriptive language here suggest Chatwin's desire to control the situation. Rather than express his fear, Chatwin simply describes his sensual experience of the situation. The effect is of the author stepping outside of himself in order to produce an aesthetic of fear. Thus even a near-death experience is evaluated in terms of its aesthetic effectiveness. Chatwin is disappointed that the moment does not resemble a more dramatically "elevated" spectacle. Chatwin avoids responding emotionally to his own experience, or to the experiences of others that he witnesses. His afore-mentioned assessment of the Araucanian Indians' socioeconomic plight in a single sentence, "The Araucanians are still very tough and would be a lot tougher if they gave up drink" typifies his disinterested approach, which often results in remarkably callous dismissals of personal suffering. He produces, as Nicholas Murray describes

it, "a savage divorce between fact and feeling" (Murray 121). An abstract, textually-mediated position characterizes *In Patagonia*'s narration, rather than the voice of a traveller deeply affected by his own experience. A particular model for Chatwin's aestheticism is the German writer Ernst Jünger, though numerous other writers influenced him as well. Jünger's war diaries impressed Chatwin because of Jünger's ability, through style, to express a cool detachment, and thus remain emotionally removed from the war and write objectively about it. An example that Chatwin admired involves Jünger describing a bullet hole in his body with the disinterest of someone "describing their nipple" (*What* 301). Chatwin's surprisingly harsh assessment of Jünger's style is remarkable in that it could second as a critique of his own writing:

He writes a hard, lucid prose. Much of it leaves the reader with an impression of the author's imperturbable self-regard, of dandyism, of cold-bloodedness, and finally, of banality. . . . The diary is the perfect form for a man who combines such acute powers of observation with an aestheticized sensibility" (*What* 300).

Similarly, Chatwin's style controls experience by rendering it elegant (Shakespeare 348). It circumscribes experience within a realm of aestheticism, fragmenting that experience by heightening its component parts; nor do these passages seem to gesture towards a greater significance than the experience's relative similarity to formulaic genres such as B-movies, fables, or wonder tales. A reader's perception that Chatwin is lying actually expresses frustration at his style's self-reflexivity, and consequently at the author's indifference to representational accuracy.

The author remains a detached observer, rendering emotionally charged moments with the same cool meticulousness that he renders the day's weather. In the process his descriptions attempt to capture, or encapsulate, his object's "essence." His attitude towards his subjects one observer described as photographic, and indeed Chatwin himself employed the metaphor of a "snapshot" to explain his descriptions (Shakespeare 292). This comparison has more unsettling implications, however, when we consider the camera's "unevaluative" objectivity, suggesting a

mechanical detachment from the objects he describes (Humm 30). Many of Chatwin's Argentinian hosts expressed a feeling of being stolen after reading their representations within *In Patagonia* (Shakespeare 292). This response speaks to Chatwin's generalizing yet detailed caricatures of people. Chatwin summarily "defines" people. In a few paragraphs he summarizes a subject's appearance, politics, history and ambitions. Moreover, the intimate details he provides suggests an intimacy between interviewer and interviewee that was, in fact, absent from Chatwin's brief visits. Interlocutors who met Chatwin only briefly (and, in general, unremarkably) were surprised to find themselves represented in the pages of *In Patagonia*. Perhaps expecting a narrative featuring the author as a central character, Chatwin's interlocutors find themselves not simply providers of accommodation or information but scrutinized objects of study. And while the author's gaze is penetrating, it is also in one direction only: no correspondingly detailed self-analysis matches the vividness of Chatwin's portraits of others, establishing a relation of power and subordination between narrator's gaze and its object's passivity. Chatwin says, above, that the diary represents an ideal form for aestheticism's "intensely personal, audaciously independent" ideals (Ellis xii). What about the travel book? Chatwin's style implicitly resists immersion in the cultures he describes, an unspoken fear of losing himself in his travel experience. It also avoids direct self-assessment, looking outward from a privileged position. At the same time, ironically, his style is self-absorbed, valuing his own originality over questions of authenticity. And in this stylistic quest for substance, despite his pretensions to stylistic self-referentiality, the independent integrity of the represented object tends to be overlooked, or repressed altogether (Kaplan 45). In an age when tourists are finding it more and more difficult to elide their engagement with the cultures they visit, despite the veneer of unaccountability that has traditionally accompanied their travels, Chatwin's style has understandably angered the Patagonians he profited from.

Eccentrics constitute one recurrent character type; the ascetic tough guy represents a second archetypal figure that informs Chatwin's often distorted characterizations. Chatwin's tough guys are young and physical, though the author almost inevitably endows them with an ennobling though mysterious restlessness. As with the eccentrics, variations on this figure appear ubiquitously in his texts: Afghan tribesmen (*What* 287), American cowboys and South American *gauchos* within *In Patagonia*, Australian and African nomads (*The Songlines*), the slave trader in Chatwin's novel *The Viceroy of Ouidah*, and many others. *In Patagonia*'s tough guys, like the eccentrics, represent embellished versions of people Chatwin has met, or historical figures whom the author reshapes in accordance with particular qualities, particularly an irresistible compulsion to travel. Although *The Songlines* more explicitly tackles the question of nomadism, all of Chatwin's texts in various ways represent forays in his quest to discover "the secret of [nomads'] irreverent and timeless vitality" (Ignatieff 24). Examples of tough guys within *In Patagonia* include his adventurous "cousin" Charles Milward, the outlaw Butch Cassidy, the anarchist revolutionary Antonio Soto, virtually all of the Amerindians he represents, and the ubiquitous *gauchos*. Chatwin fictionalizes notably in his representation of Milward, however, whose adventures Chatwin chronicles in more detail than any other character in his narrative. As Milward's daughter relates, "[Chatwin] described my father as tall, having startling blue eyes and black mutton chops, with a sailor's hat at a rakish angle. He was short and red-headed and bald by the time he was 30, and always wore a black tie" (Shakespeare 317). The example nicely illustrates Chatwin's preoccupation with surfaces, and particularly with clothes. Many of *In Patagonia*'s tough guys, but its *gauchos* especially, come to us as intense, *visual* objects. Clearly for Chatwin their evocative power derives from their appearance. Moreover, his *gauchos* rarely speak, and this silence restricts their presence to provocative but momentary spectacles (of

drinking, of shearing, etc.); as such, Chatwin preserves their desirability, for him, as aesthetic figures. In part, by adapting their appearances in his narrative he conforms them to conventional, romanticized figures. This “look,” then, symbolizes a kind of freedom. Clothing is a sign of travel’s transformative potential. Paul Fussell doesn’t idly choose clothing as a metaphor when he writes, about travel’s appeal: “The escape is also from the traveler’s domestic identity, and among strangers a new sense of selfhood can be tried on, like a costume” (“Introduction” 13). For Chatwin, the *gauchos* represent the South American equivalent of “the desert Arab,” whose costumes numerous English travellers changed into, as disguises, as military uniforms, or as a vaguely articulated exoticism. Their romantic appeal for Chatwin derives from the fact that, as Mark Cocker points out, English travellers’ ability to change *back* to English clothes (and thus to an English way of life) was by no means guaranteed (45). Thus foreign costumes also represent a liminal site, an exciting and dangerous border; Chatwin’s preoccupation with *gauchos*’ uniforms indicates that they offer him the possibility to indulge at least superficially in a fantasy of transformation.

But what does that transformation signify? Chatwin emphasizes in all of his tough guys a kind of ascetic freedom: they are characteristically solitary, self-reliant men without social obligations, who also conspicuously lack possessions. They are also wanderers, and in Chatwin’s imagination this “nomadism” marks them as free. All of the nomadic groups he depicts in various texts share this quality of happiness, implicitly because they are not burdened by restrictive societies and material goods. In his tough guys, then, Chatwin embodies a fantasy of escape from Fussell’s “domestic identity.” They also signify heroic action, as with Butch Cassidy and the other tough guys he describes. In this regard André Malraux, already an ideal eccentric, even more impressively displays his capacity to put aside his thoughts and take action. Chatwin writes, regarding Malraux’s participation in the Spanish Civil War: “Before he had been a tourist on the

fringe of revolution, now he courted death, mastered his fear of fear and survived, exchanging a cold cerebral world for *la fraternité virile*" (What 116). As the following chapter will demonstrate, Chatwin's model traveller ultimately must incorporate the eccentric's brilliance with the tough guy's physical hardness. Even the two broadly delineated categories I describe cannot contain Chatwin's most admired characters, whose finest quality seems to be their undefinability.

Typically Chatwin's tough guys are also violent, though *In Patagonia* tends to represent these figures only as *potentially* violent -- a sense of imminent violence characterizes many scenes, though fights never materialize. The tough guys' brutality exists on a superficial level, as an aestheticized spectacle rather than a legitimate threat to Chatwin. In close relation to his tough guys' violence is their sexuality. Indeed, he describes their eroticism in violent terms, and their brutality in sexual terms. He conflates the two in an attempt to create wholly sensual characters, unabashedly sexual and showing obvious pleasure in, for example, the bloody activity of slicing up a sheep's carcass (75). Unlike the eccentrics, Chatwin perceives the tough guys, and particularly the *gauchos*, as objects of desire. Chatwin obsessively details the *gauchos'* physicality, though his pleasure remains voyeuristic throughout. He suggests both the threat of violence and the possibility of an erotic encounter, but inevitably maintains an observer's distance. The first *gaucho* image, appropriately, involves several layers of removal, as Chatwin describes a painting in Buenos Aires: "He lay swathed in a blood-red poncho, a male odalisque, cat-like and passively erotic" (5). Susannah Clapp, who edited *In Patagonia*, points out in her biography of Chatwin that he omitted certain explicitly sexual moments from the Patagonian journey (Clapp 42); his desire satisfies itself only in the language of his descriptions: "He filled the hot brown gourds and the green liquid frothed to the neck. The men fondled the gourds and sucked at the bitter drink, talking about maté the way other men talked about women" (101). Displacing his desire onto voyeuristic spectacles, Chatwin provocatively reminds readers of his

unwillingness to take action. Juxtaposing overtly sexual verbs with the innocuous activity of drinking tea also teasingly invites readers into the author's desires, yet reminds them that he controls their access to the emotional experience of his journey.

Chatwin describes another Argentine cowboy as follows: "He had a few long, sharp, brown teeth and a shark's fin of a nose. He moved with the grace of a well-oiled piece of machinery and leered at Naitane with a teasing smile" (49). Again, Chatwin describes the *gaucho* as both virile and dangerous, his sexual confidence matched by his potential for violence. The description suggests the potential danger involved in direct encounters with the *gauchos*, proposing their almost automaton capacity for violence. Thus readers are able to recognize Chatwin's sense of the fragility of his observer's security. Both within *In Patagonia*, as well as in *The Songlines*, Chatwin emphasizes his insecurity as a solitary stranger in enclosed spaces (barns, bars, etc.) where he is the object of a collective gaze by groups of men. Chatwin's objective, outward-looking point of view, in this context of fear and desire, suggests a means of avoiding the object position, yet the author persona's presence, alone, within groups of strange and potentially violent men indicates to me a more ambivalent position of wanting something to happen *to* him. A friend of Chatwin's asserted:

"I think Bruce had a lot to hide. I think he liked danger. I always assumed he liked being violated in some way and preferably by brigands, gypsies, South American cowboys. It was part of his nomad pattern, to go off into the desert and get raped by Afghan brigands. . . . It wasn't so much the sex as the sauce it came in, some Afghan chieftain draped in a cartridge belt." (Shakespeare 351).

This commentary seems accurate to me in many ways, particularly in identifying Chatwin's ambivalence vis-à-vis reality and desire. As with the eccentrics, the author is drawn to certain people, but only as they resemble figures drawn from the author's textual, or visual imagination. In terms of desire, this dialectic between reality and fiction repeats itself with the figure of the *gaucho*, whom Chatwin desires because this figure resembles the author's romanticized ideal of

an ascetic tough guy. Recalling his journey from a distance, and as a writer controlling his character's relations to others within the narrative, Chatwin is removed from any physical danger. However, by representing his tough guys' striking physical presence, as well as their potential violence, he reminds us that this fantasy looks forward to a direct encounter with them. Fictionalizing men as romanticized tough guys speaks to Chatwin's desire to control experience, as does his spectator's distance. Even his desire, as the quotation above suggests, is directed towards an aestheticized figure rather than towards the actual men he encountered.

Even the broader structural features of the book call attention to Chatwin's fictionalizing strategies. *In Patagonia* begins with a story of a strange piece of skin Chatwin's grandmother possessed, and which she told her grandson was "a piece of brontosaurus" from Patagonia. Chatwin claims he desperately wanted the skin, but when, later, he asked for it, his mother told him she had thrown it away. Chatwin posits going to Patagonia to obtain a replacement piece of skin as the motivation for the journey. This opening identifies the narrative as a quest; however, the frivolousness of the quest-object in *In Patagonia* (a piece of skin) effectively makes the journey an anti-quest, or a parody of the quest form often utilized in nineteenth-century exploration literature. Chatwin claims he intended *In Patagonia* as "a spoof" of the Quest form (Shakespeare 290); certainly, as the narrative unfolds Chatwin largely abandons the search for the replacement skin in favour of describing contemporary Patagonians, and retelling various improbable stories about the region. The anecdote of the skin more represents a statement of intent than a sincere marker of a quest narrative. In other words, the anecdote celebrates the dated genre of fabulous tales it resembles, while by parodying that genre *In Patagonia* at least superficially acknowledges its own belatedness. The text's opening chapters establish a pattern of Chatwin intermixing fantastic narratives with ostensibly truthful ones. *In Patagonia*'s beginning identifies the text as a kind of wonder tale. Chatwin self-consciously makes it difficult to

determine the extent to which he considers himself, three or four hundred years removed from the form's heyday, a practitioner of the genre, or instead a poseur retelling such tales with a critic's knowing detachment.

Two passages expand on the story of the brontosaurus skin, one from *In Patagonia*, and one that Chatwin included in an earlier draft: "I pictured a shaggy lumbering creature with claws and fangs and a malicious green light in its eyes. Sometimes the brontosaurus would crash through the bedroom wall and wake me from my sleep" (1). And again: "'Every boy constructs legendary geographies in far-off lands. By the time I was ten, I had composed my version of the brontosaurus story, based on misinformation, fantasy, and scraps of knowledge from encyclopaedias, atlases and charts of evolution'" (Clapp 49). Chatwin establishes a mode, slipping between fact and imagination which the text maintains throughout. The persuasiveness of a good story, which in *In Patagonia* implies a fabulous story, outweighs an allegiance to truthfulness. The teacher's anecdote, given above, serves to increase a sense of wonder, as the apparent resolution to the mystery turns out to be another wonderful fiction. When the text gives us the final version, that the skin belonged to a Giant Sloth frozen in Patagonia, Chatwin concludes by saying: "This version was less romantic but had the merit of being true" (3). The comment functions ironically, considering how little "the merit of being true" acts as a determining influence in the narrative. For Chatwin, factual details serve as catalysts for stories. In this sense the sloth skin symbolically informs Chatwin's mode through *In Patagonia*. The skin's imaginative potential is its value. Seeking information about the skin, he appropriately tells the story of another eccentric, whose scientific credentials are dubious, but whom Chatwin celebrates because "he had wonderful powers of imagination and would reconstruct a colossal beast from the least scrap of tooth or claw" (8). Indeed, for Chatwin, contrary to what we might expect, the less information he possesses the more delighted he appears to be, since the function

of facts in this narrative is to inspire the imagination, providing storytellers with the opportunity to perform without constraints. Salman Rushdie perfectly captures Chatwin's attitude in an essay about his own attempts to render his childhood:

It was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities. . . .
("Imaginary" 12)

Rushdie's comments greatly illuminates Chatwin's pleasure in the past, which as mentioned is aligned with storytelling within *In Patagonia*. At a greater remove from his own travel experience, and thus more *doubtful*, the past provides far more flexibility for Chatwin's imagination. The same logic applies to Patagonia as a whole. Consistently insisting upon Patagonia's indeterminacy permits Chatwin more scope with which to fictionalize his travels.

Chatwin says, in an interview: "The whole of this journey was like a pursuit -- not only for this ridiculous piece of skin, which was a sort of fantastical enough quest anyway, but then as it developed it became chasing one story or one set of characters after another" (Shakespeare 291). Once the author exhausts one fantastic mystery, another one takes its place in his imagination, and in the narrative. The bizarre Patagonians whom Chatwin ostensibly encounters represent contemporary oddities not dissimilar to the giants and monsters explorer tales traded in. In addition, Chatwin's text includes tales of unicorns, lake monsters, "protohomonid" creatures called *Yoshils*, and male witches, as well as Patagonia's famous giants. Chatwin's "sources," moreover, at least imply, and at times insist that these beings remain active in the present-day. In the same context as Magellan and other explorers' tales of strange beasts and "savages," as well as myths of "rivers of gold" that fascinated early European explorers in the region, Chatwin makes a claim, however playfully, for Patagonia's continuing status as a marvellous place. Indeed, the anachronistic unlikelihood of the present-day wonder tales he hears only adds to their

desirability for Chatwin, due to their association with a past he perceives as more fabulous than the present. Chatwin's fictionalization of present-day events and people derives largely from the energizing idea that Patagonia remains intrinsically strange. In order to preserve this myth, he skillfully evades the question of truthfulness, anathema to his project, by refusing to take a position himself, and by limiting a reader's ability to determine how truthful his stories really are.

A proliferation of far-fetched stories accompanied Europeans' first contact with the New World, the popularity of which encouraged even more to be produced (Dickason 6). Significantly, exaggerated accounts of Amerindians' cannibalism and ferocity, part of a tenacious European myth of the "savage," as well as other accounts of strange monsters, did not lessen with increased knowledge of indigenous cultures (Dickason 10). Indeed, many of the exaggerated characteristics reported by explorer-writers drew on a "Wild Man" figure which had existed in European representations long before the first journeys to the New World. Moreover, many writers composed fabulous accounts of the New World without ever leaving Europe (Dickason 78). These earliest travel writings established a model of reporting wonders, if not of lying outright. They also established a readership that associated travel tales with wonders, and whose expectations of travel narratives involved reading about bizarre creatures and customs in little-known places. Nor has this propensity to write about wonders disappeared. Though the material has changed, travel writing's consistent popularity is to a large extent based on a tenacious interest in reading about bizarre sights in foreign places (Fussell 166). Thus the basic prerequisite of the wonder tale, that it relate strange sights, remains in some form a fundamental imperative of every travel book. Just as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers expected explorers' accounts to include strange tales, a parallel tradition of readers' credulity and/or expectations of far-fetched tales persists. By extension, a writer shaping a travel account, inevitably at a remove (sometimes of several years) from the travel experience, is influenced by desires to render that

journey extraordinary in a way that pulls it in line with previously-written fabulous accounts (Fussell 168). *In Patagonia* is partly a book *about* this tradition, though Chatwin cagily transforms a survey of Patagonia's wonder tales into a wonder tale of his own.

The persistence of the wonder tale's influence on travel writing seems to confirm that writers and readers alike have always associated travel and tourism with freedom, and that this freedom extends to an imaginative freedom as well. This literary freedom, both in terms of both creative inspiration and a felt license to exaggerate, seems to accompany a sense of personal freedom from perceived social constraints. It is an attitude that necessarily encompasses the reader, who experiences a sense of freedom vicariously, through the travel writer-hero (Fussell 203). While the reader needs to believe the writer has stayed as close to "what really happened" as possible (Jack xi), a pact of credulity seems to exist between a travel writer and a travel reader. This ambiguous conspiracy indicates that readers of travel literature desire to know "what really happened" only if the factual truth leaves the reader marveling. Travel writing, then, considered more broadly as a pact of adventure between writer and reader, and as opposed to the unpredictable and often traumatic experience of travelling itself, promises a romantic escape from a more mundane existence. While Chatwin's physical journey may not have conformed to fantastical expectations, its writing, removed temporally and spatially from the primary experience, provides Chatwin with the opportunity to fictionalize his journey in accordance with heightened expectations. In Chatwin's case, as we have seen with his idealized ascetics, this freedom more specifically implies a freedom from material goods, responsibilities, as well as relationships. It also translates into his indifference to the day-to-day details of his experience. As Paul Theroux writes about Chatwin: "Travel is also ordinary, monotonous, exasperating, but Bruce never wrote about that. Nothing of meals or hotels, tickets or money, only the Ariel-like comings and goings, and the dazzling summaries" ("Chatwin" 404). Chatwin's omissions, then,

derive in large part from his determination not to include ordinary details, but instead to focus on, and amplify, what for him were the most exceptional features of his journey.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, along with eliding train times and hotel rates, *In Patagonia* as a whole is uncluttered by people or objects. He limits the number of objects he describes in order, paradoxically, to exaggerate their presence in the imaginary world of his journey. His preferred landscapes, here and in his other texts, are deserts. The narrator of Chatwin's subsequent novel, *The Viceroy of Ouidah*, expresses this fantasy succinctly, in reference to the novel's hero: "Believing any set of four walls to be a tomb or a trap, he preferred to float over the most barren of open spaces" (41). Chatwin's editorial style reflects his attraction to deserts. His imaginative worlds tend towards emptiness: the author attempts "'an aesthetic of removal'" (Shakespeare 443). Describing cities, people, houses, and other complex objects, Chatwin inevitably selects a few metonymic details to stand for the whole. *In Patagonia*'s structure as a whole, comprising ninety-seven compact, self-contained chapters, expresses Chatwin's determination to distill his images, stories and characters to a polished minimum, and conversely to expel any details that he regards as superfluous to that project. However, this observation should not contradict my earlier point that Chatwin delights in excess. His descriptions seek an electric tension between economy and visual intensity. As with *fin de siècle* writers, such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud, whom Chatwin greatly admired, his style seeks a precision of the everyday. As with his "snapshots" of Patagonians that attempt to capture their essence in a frozen moment, he seeks stylistic perfection with every detail. The result is indeed an excessive acuity, akin to J.K. Huysman's "high-strung idealism" (Ellis ix). This quest for the exquisite produces an effect of excessive stylization, or a sense of discontinuity between the ordinariness of the subjects of Chatwin's descriptions and the vividness of the description itself. Consequently, objects do not blend into the larger narrative but stand out, individually, as powerful images. Despite their

vivacity, these images remain discrete, isolated by the same aestheticizing eye that perceives their exuberance. They exist very much in relief, standing out against the desert's undefinable expanse. Indeed, as with medieval maps populating empty spaces with monsters, Chatwin seeks to produce "larger-than-life" figures to juxtapose with the desert's emptiness. The referentiality of his Patagonians is less important to Chatwin than their significance to him as contemporary incarnations of the fabulous beings earlier travellers reported seeing.

Patagonia appeals to Chatwin as a massive conceptual space, uncluttered by previous representations, or at least confirmed and reconfirmed as ineffable. Drawn to that indeterminacy, and its assurance of wonders, Chatwin celebrates Patagonia as an imaginative utopia, an anachronistic place where writers' imaginations can still run wild. Particularly with *In Patagonia*, however, an inveterate tale-teller such as Chatwin has found a place that seems, ideally, to suit his propensity to exaggerate. Patagonia is difficult to locate or define precisely; assertions about its borders seem always to contradict each other. It maintained its status as *terra incognita* long after other disputed regions had been familiarized by European discourses. Patagonia's harsh climate and geography, two of its identifying markers, meant that agriculture was unsustainable; in addition, fierce resistance by Amerindians prevented European settlement until late in the nineteenth century (Williamson 33, 246). Up to the present day, representations of the region wilfully propagate a myth of Patagonia as a place where unusual people live and unusual things happen. Chatwin's biographer, for example, insists that its emptiness and its desolation *do*, as Chatwin claims, have the strange effect of exaggerating what is present (Shakespeare 289-90). It is difficult to determine how much Chatwin's expectations of wonder, fueled by childhood imaginings and generations of writers, determined what he perceived on his journey. However, as Susannah Clapp notes, "Chatwin had a way of turning his fantasies and fairy-tales into projects" (71). He undoubtedly travelled to Patagonia enamored by the

extravagant myths surrounding the region, and anticipating that these expectations would be confirmed by his experience (Shakespeare 292). His “fantastical quest” determines his attitude towards the region if not his itinerary.

As the childhood reminiscences above indicate, despite his openness to adjusting details of the stories he had collected about Patagonia, Chatwin determinedly seeks to preserve the “wonder-effect” those stories provoked in him as a child. Heather Henderson describes a phenomenon she calls “mediated desire,” in which the pleasure in experiencing a place is determined not by any intrinsic value in that site but by the proximity of the *experience* of the place to its literary representation(s) in the beholder's mind (232). “Mediated desire” usefully describes Chatwin's relation to place, since for him “Patagonia” signifies a textual/imaginary place of wonder that subsumes the one he experienced on his journey. Chatwin constantly evokes a child's fantasy world, both in the course of *In Patagonia* and in the author's other texts, drawing central parallels between travel and childhood. His books typically recall a childhood moment when the allure of a foreign place first takes root. In *The Songlines* Chatwin identifies this moment with a photograph of an Aboriginal family walking in the desert (5). In Chatwin's novel *Utz*, the title character's obsession with Meissen porcelain stems from a statuette he admired in his grandmother's collection. Framing his narratives with childhood memories, and specifically by a remarkable object, is a strategy that characterizes most of Chatwin's writings.

This technique aligns Chatwin with many travel writers, who justify their journeys by reference to a formative childhood inspiration (Fussell, *Abroad* 115). Susannah Clapp notes with some regret that, while editing *In Patagonia*, she removed large sections of childhood reminiscences in order to shorten the text (49). Chatwin's intention to include an even larger section on his childhood, and even in the published version using his childhood to frame the narrative, point to the importance of his boyhood dreams to his later travels. They also suggest his

desire to integrate his childhood fantasies with the physical journey he makes as an adult. Reading Chatwin, therefore, one also has to carefully read the trope of childhood itself. The significance of childhood to Chatwin, seems to be similar to the significance to the author of wide-open spaces, and travel itself. Chatwin associates all of these realms with freedom, but also, significantly, with a lack of consequence. Travel for Chatwin offers the potential of a second childhood of imaginative freedom, as well as a lack of accountability for his own behaviour. In this sense his narratives are nostalgic: Chatwin equates travel with a childhood past, and imagines that past as a redeeming, unifying, simplifying utopia (Colley 2). His fictionalizations result from his patchwork synthesis of past and present, reading his own travel experience through the blurry-edged lens of nostalgia. Nostalgia's effects rely on us not having all of the "facts" of the past (Colley 210); Chatwin's fragmentary knowledge of Patagonia liberates him to retell old stories in ways that confirm Patagonia as the numinous place of his childhood dreams.

By evoking his childhood, and by equating his childhood fantasies with wonder tales, Chatwin seeks to establish a generic template for the subsequent stories that he tells. This strategy serves to justify his fictions, since they consequently appear as formulaic conventions rather than harmful deceptions. Attempting in this way to recreate for his readers a child's experience of wonder also suggests that Chatwin desires an accompanying freedom from accountability. As such, this strategy exposes a more insidious blind spot. Chatwin's playfulness cannot in itself separate exploration-era wonder tales from the Imperial discourses to which they were inextricably connected. In the case of Amerindians, tales that transformed them into giants and ferocious savages provided easy justification for discourses that dehumanized them. Denying Amerindians status as humans, Europeans then felt conveniently able to deny their claims to their land, and later to enslave or exterminate them (Dickason 274). The fantasies of freedom and adventure he attempts to salvage posed as the positive aspect of Imperial conquest, and *In*

Patagonia ultimately does not tell a set of lies so much as it retells a tired story of repressing the undesirable political and economic implications of that conquest.

More Chatwin Than Chatwin Himself

"The borderline between fiction and non-fiction is to my mind extremely arbitrary, and invented by publishers" -- Bruce Chatwin⁴

Bruce Chatwin's second travel book, *The Songlines* (1987), became a bestseller and generated, again, a large number of complaints of lying. As with *In Patagonia*, Chatwin distorted facts in his characterizations, to the surprise and dismay of many of his interlocutors. Unlike the figures within *In Patagonia*, however, the character who seems most unreal in *The Songlines* is Chatwin himself (Shakespeare 417). In addition, Chatwin's interpretation of Aboriginal songlines produced and continues to produce drastically different responses⁵. For some, his representation of the songlines appears to be reasonably accurate, though oversimplified. For others, Chatwin's songlines differ so radically from their real-life equivalent that they are, at best, valueless, and at worst extremely damaging to anthropological attempts to describe Aboriginal cultures in as culturally sensitive a manner as possible. Chatwin's biographies, although they survey a wide range of responses to *The Songlines*, fail to provide a sense of how Aboriginal groups responded to the text.

As Chatwin describes them, the songlines are an invisible network of paths crisscrossing Australia, infinitely complex to an outsider, but intimately understood by Aboriginals themselves. Chatwin's text describes how Dreamtime totemic ancestors created the songlines by travelling and "singing out the name of everything that crossed their path"(2). Chatwin also insists upon the issue of ownership. At a time (the early 1980s) when land rights were being violently debated, Chatwin posits the direct connection, for a member of a totemic group, between knowing one's ancestor's song and owning the land it describes. He asserts an exact referentiality between song

⁴ Chatwin made the comment in defense of *The Songlines*' fictional elements. In the same conversation Chatwin admitted that "a lot of this is made up" (Shakespeare 487).

⁵ I have chosen to use Chatwin's term "songlines" in this text, in accordance with my belief that what is at question here is the author's version of the songlines, which bears at best a metaphorical relation to its real equivalent. The song-routes here have also been called, as Chatwin writes, "dreaming-tracks," and to the Aboriginals, "Footprints of

lyrics and successions of sacred sites, illustrated in *The Songlines* by descriptions of contemporary singers repeating word-for-word their ancestors' lyrics as they move across the land (292). As dramatically appealing as this spectacle seems, it oversimplifies songs whose lyrics tend to be "opaque" and also (considering their sacred relevance) remarkably flexible (Merlan 143-44). In addition, anthropological studies emphasize that Aboriginal songs are integrated into traditional cultures for many reasons; the songs Chatwin refers to represent only a portion of the kinds and functions of songs in Aboriginal cultures. At the same time, the "commemorative" songs Chatwin focuses on have been variously recorded and studied, and do seem to represent the "monologues" of Dreamtime totems as they travelled across the land (Clunies Ross 5). It is important to keep in mind what initially drew Chatwin to study the songlines, however. His major fascination with the songlines stems from his long-term interest in nomadism, and he enthusiastically perceives in the songlines an originary travel narrative. His atavism, to an extent, forgets the literal malleability of these songs; at the same time, for Aboriginals these songs necessarily *are/were* the songs of Dreamtime ancestors. Despite their flexibility, thematic or musical structures remain constant, signatures which allow for continuity and thus justify ownership of the songs, as well as the land they describe (Clunies Ross 8). Chatwin's lack of research and expertise lead to problematic simplifications, but on many points his account agrees with academic descriptions of Aboriginal songs. His version of the songlines "lies," for many readers, more because of his attitude towards them than because of factual inaccuracies. Staying only briefly among Aboriginals, not understanding Aboriginal languages, relying on white informants, exploiting fiction and non-specific sources for information, as well as incorporating personal anecdotes, flout anthropological methods of acquiring and interpreting knowledge. The resulting question seems to be: given these limitations, does Chatwin's version

the Ancestors" or the "Way of the Law" (*Songlines* 2).

have any value at all? Factual details seem tainted by the style and form which convey them. Yet particular readers insisted its personal vision did not compromise its truth value (Shakespeare 541); and that Chatwin's presentation of an alternative conception of space and property justified his unconventional, "polyphonic" narrative (Huggan 59).

The complexity (for outsiders like himself) of the songs he describes derives in part from their status as "restricted knowledge," forcing appointed learners to rely on their sources, whose role it is to interpret the songs for them. Importantly, the validity of a learner's knowledge seems to depend greatly upon the cultural legitimacy of that individual's source (Merlan 146). Consequently, it appears Chatwin was never in a position to speak authoritatively about the songlines; from an Aboriginal point of view (mediated by my anthropological sources), he only ever had access to a metaphorical reflection of the songlines. However, his "version" of the songlines should not be dismissed, critically, simply because it is non-anthropological, nor because it is spoken by a non-Aboriginal. This text's popularity forces us to take its conclusions seriously, largely because it has the power to shape large numbers of readers' impressions of Aboriginal cultures. Neither can we naively accept his representation of the songlines, removed from the assumptions and preoccupations that govern the text as a whole, as roughly accurate and, after all, basically harmless. A literary analysis of this text accepts that Chatwin did not presume to write an authoritative anthropological study of the songlines, but a travel book that incorporates several discursive fields, including ethnography, within itself. Enquiring into what he *has* produced, this chapter seeks to appreciate the text's literary design, consequently providing a more knowledgeable base from which to consider Chatwin's "lies." An analysis of Chatwin's songlines must therefore not stall on the issue of authenticity, but take into account the author's style, his characterizations of others, the context within which he presents the songlines, and the way they serve a more broadly ambitious narrative.

Like many travel books, this text exists in a generic no-man's land between fiction and non-fiction. Generically it rests somewhere between a pseudo-scientific study, a travelogue, and an autobiographical narrative. Chatwin pragmatically described *The Songlines* as fiction (*What* 64), yet his disclaimer fails to acknowledge how closely the text accords with real events and real people. Chatwin *did* travel among Aboriginals in Central Australia during two trips in 1983 and 1984, and despite claims to the contrary *did* speak to numerous insiders about the songlines (Shakespeare 413). In addition, at least superficially, he has not distanced himself from the narrative, but tells *The Songlines* in the first person and retains his name. He based his key informant and guide in *The Songlines*, "Arkady," on Toly Sawenko, a land rights worker who travelled with the author. Many other characters have easily identifiable real-life referents. Yet these and other details, which conventionally signal a truthful text, and thus validate a pact of truthfulness between reader and writer, only add to this text's doubtfulness. If the text is truthful, it is not truthful in expected ways, since Chatwin fictionalizes most obviously when representing himself and his closest guides and informants. The text appears to lie because, as my epigraph might suggest, it flaunts rather than conceals its borderline position. It is neither interested in abandoning its retelling of real events, nor willing to forego the pleasure of shaping the narrative in accordance with Chatwin's desires and preoccupations.

As with *In Patagonia*, Chatwin characterizes many people in *The Songlines* in heroic terms, conforming them to the archetypal figures of the eccentric and the ascetic tough guy that I described in the previous chapter. Also similar is the way Chatwin isolates his representations of these figures, producing numerous intense portraits rather than extended characterizations. In *The Songlines*, heroic figures combine the physicality and eccentricity that are kept separate among *In Patagonia*'s heroic men. One example is Father Flynn, whom Chatwin introduces at length and

then meets in a key conversation about the songlines. Chatwin describes him as a foundling, an aboriginal raised by missionaries and later ordained by the Catholic church, only to reject the missionaries' values and become a leader in the land-rights movement. Flynn embodies many of the characteristics familiar to Chatwin heroes: unorthodoxy, physical toughness, and iconoclastic self-belief. More obviously than with *In Patagonia's* heroes, because of Chatwin's apparently more concrete self-characterization in *The Songlines*, we recognize that these figures embody characteristics Chatwin desires for himself. Although he frequently emphasizes his own qualities as a traveller, Chatwin also perceives those same qualities in characters he admires. Yet I suggest that Chatwin does not simply narcissistically project his own perceived virtues onto admired figures, but in writing about them to some extent Chatwin inhabits their representations. Chatwin admitted that one structural model he developed for explaining the songlines was a conversation (Rushdie, "Travelling" 233). In his conversation with Chatwin, Flynn's explanations of the songlines involve him making short proclamations, recorded as direct speech; these are followed by longer explanations, initially marked as indirect speech, but that subsequently become more ambiguously voiced, and are in fact so compact and concise that it appears the narrator's voice has taken over the explanation. In many cases, then, other characters dramatize through dialogue Chatwin's process of thinking through the songlines, a notion that problematizes the boundary between these figures' referentiality, and their function as mouthpieces for the author's own ideas.

A second remarkable character is Father Terence, represented as a hermit who has isolated himself from society in order to meditate and write "a manual of poverty" (64). As with Flynn, Chatwin emphasizes Terence's unusual background, in addition to an ascetic simplicity: he lives in a crude shack, wears few clothes, eats simply, and has isolated himself from a wider intellectual community. Unlike other physically powerful and sensual Chatwin ascetics, such as

In Patagonia's gauchos, Terence appears as a wholly spiritual figure, physically disciplined to the point of aphysicality. Indeed, Chatwin represents him as sickly, and covered in a long, white "soutane," producing altogether a fragile impression. Yet the chapter in which he appears functions for Chatwin as a desert fantasy of disappearing, after having destroyed or abandoned one's material goods, in order to renew oneself. Indeed, Chatwin gives voice to this utopic vision when he empathizes with Terence's sense of the desert as a place of spiritual revelations: "I believe something similar about the desert. . . . Man was born in the desert, in Africa. By returning to the desert he rediscovers himself" (65). Influenced by generations of desert adventurer-writers such as T.E. Lawrence and Richard Burton, Chatwin nostalgically associates the desert with freedom, regeneration, and also revelation. One of the mythical stories surrounding Chatwin, and which he mentions in *The Songlines*, involves him going blind while working in London, only to miraculously recover his sight when he reaches the Sahara (16-17). As Richard Bevis points out, the Bedu peoples provided a powerful foil for the English imagination. They appeared to be "free from the cares of city dwellers." They apparently possessed limitless space, freedom of movement, as well as freedom from English society's rigid class structure and its industrial "progress" (227). Chatwin's personal fascination with deserts, then, owes much to his saturation in the myths propagated by earlier desert travellers. However, this personal connection to the desert is based on a long tradition in English travel writing, as indeed is the anecdote's spiritual quality.

For his literary desert idols, and in Chatwin's own texts, the desert, as a liminal space, signifies transformation, both dangerous and hopeful. As with *In Patagonia*, former travellers have pervasively determined Chatwin's fascination with the desert. Late Victorian and early twentieth-century English travel writers found the desert's allure irresistible. This attraction, a combination of many deserts constituting still unknown spaces on maps, as well as their reality as

dangerous and physically challenging places, Mark Cocker thoroughly surveys in his book *Loneliness and Time*. Because desert interiors were unknown and dangerous they promised both adventure and fame (Cocker 48). Chatwin's fantasy also speaks to deserts' associations with religious mystics, driven there by unorthodox beliefs as a last sanctuary, but also expecting that the desert's emptiness and harshness would provide a spiritual revelation (Bevis 236). An image of Father Terence snorkelling naked, a bubbling spring on the beach, and a wallaby that comes up and feeds out of his hands, infuse the chapter with an edenic quality, which is only heightened by the fragility of Terence's situation. The ascetic announces that he must have cancers removed from his skin, and adds that he is abandoning his shack on the beach to engage in more charitable work in Sydney. The scene's status as an aside within the narrative identifies it as a momentary digression into fantasy, a status confirmed by Chatwin as he ends his relation of the encounter by *waking up* in his dirty hotel room.

Sandwiched between a story of an irritating hotel companion and the next morning's grey weather, the Terence scene comes across as an escape from the dullness and pettiness Chatwin often encounters in Central Australia. Indeed, in a book full of visits through which Chatwin hopefully seeks a vision of a utopic existence, the Terence chapter stands out as *the* ideal situation. Chatwin identifies Terence as a fellow European as well as a writer: when Chatwin arrives he hears the sound of Terence's typewriter, suggesting in the man and his circumstances an ideal creative situation -- for Chatwin a vision of a perfect writing environment, free from any distractions, where mental clarity is possible.⁶ The chapter represents an actual meeting but also tends towards myth, in its symbolic evocation of the desert as a site of spiritual renewal. In a text where Chatwin consistently perceives "signs" that confirm his mythical desert associations, he has undoubtedly exaggerated elements of his meeting with Terence, in order to heighten its

⁶ Chatwin's initial motivation for this writing project was, in fact, to seek out the remotest place he could find in the

mythical resonance. The chapter's ambiguous truthfulness also suggests that Chatwin's response to his belatedness, of no longer being able to enact suitably exotic desert adventures, involves him fictionalizing his experience to align it with myths generated by previous travellers.

The character of Arkady is unusual for Chatwin's travel book characters in that he remains a central figure throughout the text. Based on Toly Sawenko, with whom Chatwin spent only a few days, Arkady appears in *The Songlines* as a Russian raised in Australia, working for Aboriginal people to protect their land. His character functions as a guide within *The Songlines*, introducing Chatwin to people, places and political debates, as well as usefully filling in gaps of information about Aboriginal culture. Chatwin's choice of the name "Arkady" suggests Arcadia, the eden of the Pastoral.⁷ Similar to Terence, he provides Chatwin with a glimpse into a world ideally free from the crowds, bureaucracy, mechanization, and spiritual vacancy that so many of his travel writing forebears associated with England. Arkady is also a spotless Chatwin hero, desired and admired by everyone, not least by the author himself. His character combines ascetic with intellectual qualities:

He was a tireless bushwalker. He thought nothing of setting out, with a water flask and a few bites of food, for a hundred-mile walk along the Ranges. Then he would come home, out of the heat and light, and draw the curtains, and play the music of Buxtehude and Bach on the harpsichord. (2)

Most impressive, within Chatwin's valuation of personal attributes, is Arkady's balance of physical toughness with cultural sophistication and originality. He plays rather than listens to music, and plays Buxtehude -- a testament to his impeccable, and importantly, *unusual* taste, since the composer almost certainly was one of Chatwin's favourites. Nor does he play on a piano, but rather, in the middle of the desert, on a *harpsichord*. The author, a lifelong advocate of

outback, and there go through his collections of notes (Shakespeare 408-9).

⁷ Eva-Marie Kröller pointed out this connection to me. Arkady's role in *The Songlines*, as the name suggests, is as a guide into an eden, an insider figure who assists and instructs the hero.

what he perceived as an underappreciated, embattled Russian culture, imagines Arkady as a lonely repository of European culture in a far-away place that is implicitly, given the bigoted white Australians he describes, lacking in refinement. As such, Arkady resembles many other Chatwin heroes, whom the author values for their intimacy with the “great” works of European culture, and with the ease with which they adapt to “remote” places. Arkady functions as a translator in the text, ideally placed between two disparate cultures. He is an insider in terms of his knowledge, but, for Chatwin, has the virtue of an outsider’s perspective on his experience. It is no coincidence that Arkady is *not* Australian yet is immersed in Australian culture, and is *not* Aboriginal yet equally is immersed in Aboriginal culture, neither an insider nor an outsider, but in both cases a proxy member of societies which he is in a position to translate to Chatwin.

As with many of Chatwin’s heroes, toughness is equated with the ability to walk long distances. Moreover, Chatwin represents Arkady as being predisposed to live and travel in wide-open spaces -- an inevitable traveller rather than simply a traveller by choice: “he moved through the bright Australian spaces with the ease of his footloose forebears” (1). In a book ostensibly about *Aboriginal* travels this description of a European’s nomadic ancestry seems out of place. Yet Chatwin is carefully setting up his text to consider Aboriginal nomadism simply as one example of a universal phenomenon of nomadism. He establishes Arkady as equally nomadic as the Aboriginals he works for, an identification Chatwin, in many places, also makes for himself. Arkady’s representation is an example of mythopoeia, as Chatwin exaggerates his restlessness in order to make a claim for Arkady’s essential nomadism. In the character of Arkady, Chatwin imagines an ideal traveller, whose love of walking, whose intellectual preoccupations and even artistic tastes also align him with the author himself. Central to this projected idealization is the suggestion of primordialism, in a text preoccupied with confirming the primal nature of travel. If Aboriginals are “natural” travellers, Arkady is too, apparently due to his nomadic roots on the

Russian steppe. Soon after, Chatwin offers a genealogy of his own *wanderlust*, tracing it back, as a trait, to various ancestors (6). He points out that the Anglo-Saxon derivation of "Chatwin" was "Chettewynde," meaning "the winding path." He goes on to insist that, since travelling a great deal at a formative stage of his childhood, his sense of self has been intimately connected to "the road" (9). Similarities between the two men continue: like Chatwin, Arkady no longer lives with his wife, "preferring solitude to domestic chaos" (1). Subsequent points of connection include music, books, and other interests. However, their quick intimacy implies one traveller's immediate, Whitmanesque recognition of a kindred spirit. The author implies that Chatwin and Arkady automatically identify with one another as *travellers*, mutually responding to a basic call to movement that the author also eagerly describes as fundamental to Aboriginal culture.

Along with those he interviews and travels with, Chatwin also fictionalizes his representation of himself. The author inhabits the narrative, as a character, to a far greater extent than he does within *In Patagonia*. Yet his self-representation is inconsistent and remarkably ephemeral, despite Chatwin's dominating *stylistic* presence. His idealized characterization takes different forms, which means that describing Chatwin in this text becomes a process of identifying his various guises. Chatwin's response to Paul Theroux's criticisms regarding his practice of omitting "ordinary" details, "I don't believe in coming clean" (Clapp 40), attests to his evasiveness, but also suggests his desire, unlike Theroux, to render himself in as positive a light as possible, regardless of how closely the portrait resembles others' impressions of him.

Unwilling to present a consistent, heroic persona in *The Songlines*, Chatwin nonetheless consistently appears in a flattering light. However, his self-aggrandizing cameos in this text often verge on self-parody. In one case, the author recounts accompanying a group of Aboriginal men on a land-surveying excursion. As the men set up camp for the night, Chatwin notes the danger of snakes, then describes himself confidently laying down only a slightly raised groundsheet (104).

In fact snakes terrified the author, making the scene highly unlikely (Shakespeare 419). Chatwin also includes descriptions of himself fixing flat tires, repairing the roof of a building, lighting campfires and cooking over them; these and other details emphasize Chatwin's boy scout know-how, as well as his toughness. *The Songlines* serves both as a celebration of nomadism as well as a celebration of the author as an ideal traveller: tough, capable, adaptable, well-liked by those he meets, and brilliant in his response to unexpected events. Indeed, in terms of disparities between biographical information and Chatwin's self-representation, the most striking theme is the author's remarkable adaptability in *The Songlines*. Perhaps the aspect of *The Songlines* that most fails to "ring true" for readers, to use Timothy Dow Adams' term (9), is the ease with which a well-informed and defensive land-rights community accepts the author. And indeed, as Salman Rushdie notes, this community was much more skeptical of Chatwin's motivation as a writer than *The Songlines* intimates ("Travelling" 233). Chatwin represents himself as he would like to see himself, or as he would like others to see him. But this portrait should not suggest that his fictionalized self appears singular, or well-delineated. His self-representation, chameleon-like, adapts to the circumstances he imagines for himself. One moment he comfortably travels with Aborigines across the desert; the next moment he engages in an intellectual discussion of the songlines with an authority on the subject; and the next moment he coyly chats with white rednecks in a local bar. If, as previously mentioned, the worst autobiographical sin is self-aggrandizement (Adams, *Lying* 168), Chatwin lies for many readers because he relentlessly appears brilliant, regardless of his circumstances.

Chatwin's preoccupation with being accepted by his interlocutors points to a desire to be admired, both intellectually and as a capable traveller. At times this preoccupation shows itself negatively: the text ignores or too easily smoothes over obstacles to information which, in fact, greatly restricted Chatwin's acquisition of knowledge. As mentioned, Chatwin imagines a close

relationship between himself and Arkady, though in reality the author and Toly Sawenko spent only three days together (Shakespeare 414). In the text, Arkady's characterization as a guide establishes him as Chatwin's principal access to information, not only by taking him to significant sites and introducing him to influential people, but also by assuring suspicious informants of Chatwin's integrity. Moreover, just as Chatwin emphasizes his own efforts at winning over resistance to his enquiries, he also describes Arkady's process of gaining

Aboriginals' trust:

At first, the Walbiri Elders mistrusted him, and their answers to his questions were evasive. With time, once he had won their confidence, they invited him to witness their most secret ceremonies and encouraged him to learn their songs. (2)

Arkady's guide role, positioned usefully between Chatwin and Aboriginal culture, allows for understanding between him and the author, but also reinforces Chatwin's inability (or unwillingness) to seek out first-hand information. Indeed, presenting a conversation over a cappuccino, between two Europeans, as a key information chapter, unintentionally parodies his own goal of learning about the songlines *directly*.

An underlying rhythm of pursuit and frustration characterizes *The Songlines*. In part, this is due to the fact that the understanding of the songlines that Chatwin seeks eludes him. Despite several represented conversations with Arkady and another with an Aboriginal leader, the text strays often and at length from Chatwin's songlines quest. What is remarkable, given his limited resources, is that this is not a story of frustration and dead ends. The various challenges the songlines present to the author -- intellectually, practically, and in terms of political opposition -- provoke rather than deter him. Indeed, Chatwin insists from the beginning: "Obviously, I was not going to get to the heart of the matter, nor would I want to" (12). His bluff confidence in his ability to produce a narrative about the songlines, without fully understanding them, and without significant research typifies his character's attitude. Chatwin represents himself convincing

Arkady and others of the legitimacy of his project in successive intellectual coups. Indeed, Chatwin's successful interview with Father Flynn appears all the more remarkable since it directly follows an activist's description to him of the virtual impossibility of acquiring the knowledge he seeks. Chatwin may or may not have acquired his information from such conversations, but he emphasizes his virtuosity in these cases. He stresses the difficulty of this task, as well as attempts to dissuade him. These challenges allow him to position himself as the brilliant yet harassed intellectual figure he idealizes within *In Patagonia*, and in many other texts. Moreover, though the question of accountability undoubtedly preoccupies Chatwin, he clearly delights in speculating -- suggesting unlikely, unsubstantiated, and often outrageous connections between ideas. In the disjunction between Chatwin's wild speculations and his representation of the politically pragmatic land-rights community he interacts with, Chatwin's easy intimacies seem dubious. Furthermore, rather than employing conflict scenes as means of integrating important political questions into his text, these moments -- almost always conversations -- provide a forum for Chatwin to present his own ideas.

He begins his conversation with Flynn with a tableau describing his interlocutor enthroned at a party, surrounded by admirers, with a woman kneeling at his side. In this scene he has Arkady play the role of court secretary, using his influence to gain Chatwin a hearing with the "royal" figure. At first Flynn dismisses Chatwin, disdainful of the author's attempts to prove his intellectual worth. Eventually a comment interests him enough to test Chatwin's understanding of Aboriginal culture:

'Gipsies,' I said, 'also see themselves as hunters. The world is their hunting ground. Settlers are "sitting game." The Gipsy word for 'settler' is the same as the word for "meat."'

Flynn turned to face me.

'You know what our people call the white man?' he asked.

'Meat,' I suggested.

'And you know what they call a welfare cheque?'

'Also meat.'

‘Bring a chair,’ he said. ‘I want to talk to you.’
I fetched the chair I had been sitting on and sat down beside
him.
‘Sorry I was a bit sharp,’ he said. ‘You should see the
nutters I have to deal with. What are you drinking?’ (56)

By elevating Flynn to a quasi-royal figure, and emphasizing his contempt for most people who interview him, Chatwin strategically enhances the legitimacy of his own enquiries. He also amplifies the value of Flynn’s information, who significantly represents his sole Aboriginal informant. The exchange also enacts a kind of initiation, which further legitimates the information he presents in their subsequent conversation.

A similar exchange precedes Chatwin’s other major manoeuvre, to acquire Arkady’s support. After already revealing a great deal about the songlines, Arkady turns on Chatwin and challenges him to explain his purpose. The author writes: “His sudden shift of mood made me nervous. I began to explain how I had once tried, unsuccessfully, to write a book about nomads” (16). The explanation, characteristically for Chatwin, quickly becomes a story, describing a formative experience travelling with nomadic tribes in Africa. As the story progresses, we become aware of a shift in speaker and audience. Chatwin’s character ceases to speak, and a storytelling voice takes over, reminiscent and imaginative. The speaker “forgets” Arkady as he tells his story, in favour of a more generalized reader, or listener, lending an ear to a tale full of exotic details. Arkady’s question does not provoke self-examination: its role is rhetorical, providing a bridge from the songlines narrative to the subtext of Chatwin’s more abstract exploration of nomadism. Eventually the story ends with a generalization, based on the author’s experiences in Africa and elsewhere, “that nomads had been the crankhandle of history” (19). Formally, however, the story trails off with an ellipsis, suggesting Chatwin’s inability to draw more specific parallels between these events and his presence in Australia. The ellipsis also indicates a waking-up from the reverie of story, and a shift back to Arkady as Chatwin’s listener,

who had at some point stopped paying attention: "Arkady was looking out the window" (19). The moment betrays the speaker's split allegiance, as a writer to his imagined readers, and as a character to Arkady within the narrative structure. It also indicates that Chatwin recognizes the personal nature of his narrative -- that his *use* of his Australian experience is unimportant to the activists he nonetheless depends on as guides and informants. Arkady, in this case, both character and conscience, stands for a reader or listener demanding accountability: *what good is your story to me?* His initial challenge, and ultimately his lack of interest in Chatwin's attempt to justify his project, point to Chatwin's anxieties related to trying to integrate years of thinking about travel's origins with the specifics of Aboriginal nomadism. By pointing out Arkady's indifference to his story, Chatwin also self-reflexively reminds us of his power to shift modes when he desires. As Paul Carter points out, the division of power between reader and writer in written acts of communication is not equal. The writer sets the rules by which the reader must participate (328). Chatwin explicitly, and playfully, asserts his ability, writing retrospectively, to adapt conversations to his own ends.

Ironically, given Chatwin's preoccupation with convincing doubters, the author expresses a strange indifference to voices opposing his project. Although he describes himself convincing influential interlocutors of the soundness of his project, one of the many contradictions of this text is that he is also dismissive of claims opposed to his own. Chatwin's tone, and his tendency to only tacitly recognize opposing voices, demonstrates an ambivalent attitude towards others' claims and opinions. Rather than tackling the problematics of his own project through confrontation scenes, Chatwin self-assuredly dismisses such issues. To a large extent, Chatwin winning over Arkady, Flynn and other doubters suggests that these moments are conquests rather than sincere attempts to legitimate an intellectual position. These scenes uncomfortably illustrate, despite Chatwin's status as a neophyte, that the author remains convinced of his ideas' authority.

These scenes also resemble seductions. The brevity of his interviews; his hyperbolic elevation of his informant, both physically and intellectually; his focus on the intensity and danger of the situation; and the transition from suspicion to intimacy all contribute to an impression that Chatwin's pursuit of knowledge, in foreign places, under unpredictable circumstances, represents for him an exciting, pseudo-erotic challenge. Chatwin seduces rather than addresses the alternative and problematic viewpoints that confront him. However, given the degree to which his interlocutors embody mixtures of an actual character and the author's fantasies, these seductions appear decidedly narcissistic.

The Songlines merges several narratives within itself. A great deal of generic confusion stems from the text's lack of, or resistance to, a singular narrative. Mark Cocker describes *The Songlines* as an accumulation of fragments (168-69): it is non-linear, jumping back and forth in time, and as with *In Patagonia* it delights in digression. Readers accustomed to a strong central narrative of travel, from one place to another, and structured around arrivals and departures, find that Chatwin is "already there," in the centre of the Australian desert, in the book's first sentence. As with *In Patagonia*, it is impossible to locate this journey, or know how long Chatwin travelled for. It takes one of Chatwin's biographies to learn that his time in the region amounted only to nine weeks, spread over two well-separated trips. However, even this fragmented text accords with Paul Fussell's double dictum that travel books always seek a greater significance than simply a relation of adventures, and that they are also "a subspecies of memoir," the autobiographical narrative emerging indirectly from the author's adventures (*Abroad* 214). Fussell's second point feels particularly relevant here, since to a remarkable degree, travelling, reading about travel, writing travel and telling his travel stories enabled Chatwin, in his own terms, to define and redefine himself. At the same time, this autobiographical narrative doesn't

take shape as Fussell imagines, indirectly out of the travel experience. Chatwin's autobiographical narrative makes itself apparent in the author's desires and preoccupations, which determine his style, his self-characterization, his characterizations of others, and the way he structures this text.

Rushdie describes Chatwin's posthumous anthology *What am I Doing Here* as an "autobiography of the mind" ("Chatwin's" 239). The label ideally suits *The Songlines* as well, however. This text is not singularly interested in the songlines themselves. Chatwin's text expresses a tension between a travelogue, generally describing Chatwin's search for the meaning of the songlines, and an overlapping, at times *interspersed* narrative articulating many of the author's long-held ideas on travel. Indeed, in relation to this second orientation, the songlines, for Chatwin, function less as an object of study, and more as a vehicle for presenting his own stories, anecdotes and meditations. Far from describing Aboriginal songlines in depth, Chatwin's study provides him with a means of writing his own "songlines".

The most obvious example of *The Songlines'* alternative thrust occurs when the text abruptly abandons its Australian travelogue, and readers suddenly find themselves browsing a selection of Chatwin's journal entries. He announces the interruption melodramatically:

I had a presentiment that the 'travelling' phase of my life might be passing. I felt, before the malaise of settlement crept over me, that I should reopen those notebooks. I should set down on paper a résumé of the ideas, quotations and encounters which had amused and obsessed me; and which I hoped would shed light on what is, for me, the question of questions: the nature of human restlessness. (161)

The text then launches into Chatwin's personal archive of travel anecdotes, epigrams and quotations. The selections indulge in travel writing's inclusivity, comprising philosophical, archaeological and anthropological notes and theories, as well as quotations, anecdotes, and other diary-type entries. Reading his notebook section, certain themes emerge: restlessness across cultures; the health benefits of travel, as well as a symmetrically opposite pathology of

restlessness; and the primordialness of the conflict between nomadism and sedentary life, with a particular interest in the story of Cain and Abel. Chatwin makes no sustained attempt to connect these epigrams to each other, or to the songlines. The section permits Chatwin to include material too diverse to fit coherently into his songlines quest.

However, the notebook section is also representative, in its diversity, as well as in its juxtapositions, of *The Songlines* as a whole. South African paleontology and Texan proverbs are too discordant to incorporate into the songlines quest narrative; nonetheless, Chatwin's mode throughout *The Songlines* anticipates the notebook section. In earlier conversations with insiders about the songlines, Chatwin's character constantly analogizes, introducing Rilke, Beethoven and other artists and philosophers in order to illuminate the information he has just received. To an extent this mode represents Chatwin attempting to bridge very different forms of knowledge for Western readers ignorant of Aboriginal culture -- a travel writer's sense of himself as a translator for his readers. For the most part, however, analogy provides Chatwin with an opportunity to introduce the wide-ranging nomadic material we find later in the notebook section. Elsewhere whole chapters tell alternative, and only loosely "nomadic" stories, as when Chatwin describes a previous journey he took with a North African tribe. These stories stretch an analogistic function to the point where the analogy "forgets" its function and seems to exist simply for its own sake as an interesting story. In other words, these analogies and anecdotes often digress from the songlines narrative. However, they function autobiographically as well, representing Chatwin's wide-ranging ideas and theories about travel. In their often discordant relation to Chatwin's songlines quest, they point to his preoccupation with telling his own stories.

As seen with *In Patagonia*, Chatwin was enamored by the wonder tale, which privileges fabulous anecdotes within a travel narrative. At times *The Songlines* takes this form to its fragmentary endpoint. Anecdotes overwhelm Chatwin's travel narrative to a point where that

narrative appears to break apart into a series of disconnected stories. The effect is disconcerting because an anecdote, like the quest for wonder that provokes it, “seems to resist recuperation, containment, ideological incorporation; it sits strangely apart from everything that gives coherence” (Greenblatt 17). Chatwin’s preoccupation with anecdote troubles readers because it exposes, in a text that implicitly seeks an essential explanation for human restlessness, the author’s real interest only in travel’s fragmentary wonder effects.

Patagonia existed for the author as a pseudo-textual “emptiness” connoting imaginative potential; similarly, the songlines represent, for Chatwin, a flexible enough metaphor to allow for the production of a kind of autobiography. Chatwin’s determination throughout *The Songlines* to include his own stories (both those involving him, and those he had accumulated), in what might otherwise be a more disinterested study, forces us to read the text’s notebook elements as part of an autobiographical enterprise. The presence of so much material from the author’s travel journals, both in the notebook section and elsewhere; Chatwin’s analogistic mode; and generally his determination to tell his own stories points to *The Songlines*’ function, at least in part, as a memoir. The text is rarely self-consciously autobiographical, which is characteristic for Chatwin: even in his unpublished journals Chatwin avoided confessional or introspective writing.⁸ An alternative, autobiographical narrative emerges almost despite itself: in the text’s unwillingness to exhaustively pursue the songlines as a subject of inquiry; in Chatwin presenting himself, unlike in *In Patagonia*, as a prominent figure in the narrative; and in his determination to claim conceit-like connections between the songlines and his own ideas. Most importantly, *The Songlines*’ patchwork accumulation of material reflects Chatwin’s determination to render permanent as many of his stories and sayings as the narrative could hold. The anecdotes and details that find

⁸ Chatwin’s mentor at the *Sunday Times*, Frances Wyndham, co-edited a posthumous collection of Chatwin’s photographs, as well as selections from his notebooks (*Bruce Chatwin: Photographs and Notebooks*). The latter reveal the degree to which Chatwin refused to write introspectively while abroad. His unedited notebooks, strikingly

their way into *The Songlines* reflect Chatwin's interests, and at least partly map a career of thinking about travel. The notebook section, set off from the rest of the book, comes across as an exhibition of an inveterate collector's best-loved pieces -- and not only described objects, but words, ideas, quotations, stories, and even people.

We can specifically perceive a memoir in *The Songlines*' frequently reminiscent tone, as well as in the text's preoccupation with sickness and mortality. Thinking of *The Songlines*' epigrammatic elements as mementos of Chatwin's travels seems appropriate, since Chatwin felt pressed for time. He was, in 1983 and 1984, already suffering from serious bouts of sickness, alluded to with self-deprecating nonchalance in his comment, "I had a presentiment that the 'travelling' phase of my life might be passing." For Chatwin, the songlines project constituted a last chance to work out in writing many ideas that compelled him.⁹ Chatwin realized, apparently, that this book could be a repository for his most provocative notes about nomadism, many of them distilled from a large work on nomads -- "The Nomadic Alternative" -- which had lain untouched since the late 1960s.¹⁰ The accumulation of journal material reflects a desire to publish, if not to explicate, his ideas about travel's primordialism. For a lifelong traveller, this task also represents an extended justification of a career in motion.

A striking autobiographical element in *The Songlines* is its unexpectedly serene closure. Many travel books provide examples of *deus ex machina* as they heavy-handedly impose tidy endings upon chaotical, open-ended experiences. But few travel book endings can compete with

like the polished notebook section in *The Songlines*, comprise emergent stories, portraits, amusing details, etc.

⁹ Nicholas Shakespeare's biography indicates that Chatwin had already begun to show symptoms of the AIDS virus before coming to Australia. Of course, Chatwin could not identify his illness, but he had heard rumours of "the gay plague" and felt, instinctively, that he was mortally ill (Shakespeare 425).

¹⁰ In the late 1960s publisher Jonathan Cape commissioned Chatwin to write a book provisionally titled "The Nomadic Alternative." The project was abandoned after several fruitless years, however, with Chatwin unable to find a central thesis, or write in a satisfactorily academic manner. Readers for the publisher described the manuscript as "lively and contentious" but marred by its "wilder digressions" and its "outrageous statements" (Shakespeare 26). This foray into academic writing, as well as a failed Archaeology degree at the University of Edinburgh, certainly contributed to Chatwin's anti-academic posture. At the same time, Chatwin's aversion to regimented scholarship adds him to a long list of intellectual English travellers (notably two of his idols, Robert Byron and Patrick Leigh Fermor)

The Songlines for sheer unlikelihood. Two of Chatwin's guides have, after a separation, fallen in love again; both arrive unexpectedly and with other good news. Arkady has just resolved a dispute for some Aboriginal friends; a different friend's feared cancer has turned out to be only a minor "blockage" (284). Up to this point Chatwin had only in passing mentioned the relationship between the two guides. Resolving the dispute hardly releases any dramatic tension, as the subject of the dispute had only just been introduced. The travel narrative's summary, implausible ending suggests Chatwin's ambivalence towards the travelogue portion of *The Songlines*, particularly once he had finalized his large section of notebook entries. More than anything else the ending answers Chatwin's desire for closure. It resolves the travel narrative after the long digression of the notebook section, anticipated earlier when Chatwin tells his guide that he needed to get an idea "out of my system" (16). Rushdie asserts that nomadism both represented Chatwin's passion and his "burden" ("Travelling" 233). The travelogue's ecstatic ending, contrasting with *In Patagonia*'s lack of closure, is a case of an author's relief at having gotten that "idea" out of his system spilling over into the story he is ending. The scene directly follows Chatwin, after many years, finally entrusting his favourite notebook entries to print.

Also directly preceding this ending, Chatwin integrates his notion of the songlines into his notebook section as a final entry. He quotes Heidegger, "The song still remains which names the land over which it sings" (281), and then inserts his vision of the songlines as a definitive ending to his notebooks. The act is symbolic: even if he doesn't successfully tie his nomad theories together with his understanding of the songlines, he is claiming at least the possibility of a Western, scientific theory of nomadic origins that includes the songlines in its discourse. He insists upon the songlines' broader relevance: "I felt the Songlines were not necessarily an Australian phenomenon, but universal: that they were the means by which man marked out his

territory, and so organised his social life" (282). By restating the songlines in his own words, and adding them to the ideas he had accumulated in his notebooks, he claims victory both for his songlines quest and for his notebooks, as *contributions*, at least, to a wider study of nomadism. At once, then, he completes (at least for himself) his quest to understand the songlines, and assuages the almost therapeutic need to relieve himself of his long-term study of nomadism.

The Songlines represents, in part, an involved meditation on, and search for, travel's origins; its closure suggests Chatwin's desire to find a greater coherence for his own restlessness by positing the universality of that urge to travel. Fiction provides him with a means of drawing conclusions, or filling in conceptual holes in his research. In a moment where fiction's unifying potential, for Chatwin, reveals itself most plainly, he draws his own conception of the songlines into a fictional realm: "And now I will go where I expect no one to follow . . ." (282). Chatwin then imagines the songlines as equivalent to all original acts of naming, evoking Adam in the Garden making his first step and beginning to name his territory. Throughout the text, the songlines represent, for Chatwin, the site of a conflict between the calls of fiction and non-fiction. Arkady's and others' shifting positions of accepting and resisting Chatwin's pseudo-scientific theorizing equate with, on the one hand, a felt duty to truthfulness, and on the other hand the self-validating coherence that fiction appealingly promises. In his study of explorer liars, Percy Adams asserts that when travellers lie they personally intervene in their accounts, and in doing so make the narrative theirs (10). Chatwin's fictionalizations take imaginative possession, in summoning a fictional world which utopically does not need to conform to reality in order to gain validity. But in so doing, despite his claims of breaking new ground, Chatwin rehashes tired stereotypes. Imagining Aboriginal Australia as a place where Chatwin can make sense of his own restlessness reveals his investment in nostalgic myths. His willingness to fictionalize the songlines in order to claim them as a key to his study of nomadism exposes Chatwin's belated

investment in the colonial myth of so-called primitive cultures, in their simplicity, providing an antidote to the malaise of modern society. Accordingly, the final tableau has Chatwin and his white friends admiring the spectacle of three Aboriginal men on hospital cots in the desert. The men are dying, but are nonetheless happy, "smiling at death in the shade of a ghost gum" (294). The spectacle illustrates Chatwin's dangerous tendency to simplify Aboriginal culture, to the point where it appears cute, and, in their simple happiness, the Aboriginals themselves seem imperturbable:

'Aren't they wonderful?' Marian whispered, putting her
hand in mine and giving it a squeeze.
Yes. They were all right. . . . (294)

Chatwin is confronted with and seems to acknowledge, elsewhere, more complex relationships between whites and Aboriginal people. But as this patronizing ending demonstrates, apparently the archaic and misleading fantasy that Aboriginals are "noble savages," happy because they retain a connection to their past, and because they have not been corrupted by civilization -- a state confirmed by the songlines -- is the impression Chatwin really desired. Determined to produce closure, the ending he chooses nostalgically reinscribes primitivism as an imaginative escape for the Western traveller.

Intent on learning about Aboriginal conceptions of space and movement, Chatwin only touches upon, for example, the historical appropriation of land by English settlers. He shows more interest in missionaries' eccentricities than in missions' destructive effects on Aboriginal cultures. Surrounded by stories of white racism and violence against Aboriginals, and immersed, if briefly, in a community deeply divided by that historical conflict, Chatwin remains characteristically distant. At a historical/geographical locus when being apolitical seemed impossible, Chatwin attempts just that. His evasive postures are largely responsible for accusations of amorality against him. The text's "lies," whether they refer to Chatwin's distorted

characterizations of his interlocutors, his inadequate research, or his recontextualization and reimagining of the songlines, provoke accusations of writing irresponsibly about travel.

Employing the songlines as a metaphorical frame through which he tells his own stories, and expresses his own theories about nomadism, represents a highly problematic example of speaking for Aboriginal peoples, and moreover, doing so in order to ensure the primacy of his own ideas.

This project is particularly troubling given the narrative's background of Aboriginal people trying to claim their rights. In light of the implications of European exploration and conquest in Aboriginal territories, Chatwin's narrative practice, naively or not, evokes a colonial unwillingness to accept the Aboriginals' presence on the land. One of the most insidious aspects of European conquests involved the hijinks of discourses that needed, rhetorically, to empty occupied lands in order then to claim their discovery (Greenblatt 61). Chatwin emulates the detective's ironic position of seeking knowledge but knowing more than anyone else, though he claims to be in a position of learning. His tone and preoccupations suggest he is travelling only to confirm what he already knows he will find. The importance of his intellectual project, of expressing his ideas on nomadism, and to an extent his own "nomadism," through the metaphor of the songlines, outweighs the political problematics of that narrative. As Rushdie noted about his travelling companion, "Bruce is untroubled, walking through the minefields of black Australian politics with unconcern" ("Travelling" 233). For example, even though the author describes Arkady's boredom at the nomad story he relates, Chatwin's determination to include the anecdote -- its personal relevance -- overcomes its irrelevance to Arkady, and to learning about the songlines in general. The political circumstances that Chatwin describes are anathema to the self-centred narrative he produces. Unlike *In Patagonia*, where his anemic living Patagonians lend themselves to his fantasy of Patagonia as an empty space he can fill with his imagination, or are eccentric enough to fulfill the wonder tale requisite, the politically assertive

individuals he meets in Australia haunt his attempts to produce an imaginary place.

Consequently, his own material (stories, theories, etc.) exists in a conflictual relationship with his travelogue. In blithe, ambivalent descriptions of political activism, readers sense most keenly a distinction between Chatwin's travel experience and the ends toward which he is determined to use that experience.

As with *In Patagonia*, and the lack of travel details that infuriated Paul Theroux, *The Songlines* at key moments elides the day-to-day, specific details that conventionally assert a travel book's truthfulness (Fussell 214). Moreover, Chatwin's style, characterized by biographer Clapp's "all-suggestive fragment," at once spare and flamboyant in its language, does not subdue its poetic expression. Even politically sensitive moments Chatwin renders with great style, to the point that readers question whether stylistics or documentation concern the author more. In one passage, Chatwin describes two drunk Aboriginal men fighting in a bar, for no stated reason, egged on by the white customers. The passage may be a fictional scene, perhaps representing Chatwin's sense of ethnic relations in central Australia. It may also truthfully relate the events of a stopover during a bus journey, as the narrator indicates. Chatwin's scene-making flair seems to transform such passages into short stories, yet although these scenes always *suggest* more profound meanings Chatwin never provides any indication of how we should read them. Instead events stand alone, on one level no more than colourful descriptions. A reader's discomfort with such scenes stems from the fact that they appear fictionalized -- if not entirely made up, then at least carefully edited, organized, and stylized to produce a powerful yet ambiguous effect on the reader. Chatwin describes the fight in terms that aestheticize it. David Birch, reading this same passage, contends that the scene forces readers into the position of producing our own meaning(s) of it (228). Birch insists the same contingency applies to all texts; however, Chatwin's dispassionate position while describing politically and racially charged scenes uniquely splits

readers. His elegant style lulls readers into passively absorbing the storyteller's words. At the same time the moral ambivalence and generic precariousness of this passage -- nominally, this is non-fiction -- place readers in an awkward position. Chatwin refuses to provide a subjective response to what appears to be a brutal, racist scene. And since we are unlikely to find another witness's account of the fight, as readers, are stuck with this highly stylized rendering of a real event, which reminds us of our mediated distance from that reality.

Chatwin unmistakably choreographs scenes, though to what ends he adapts his experience remains elusive. His dialogue, reminiscent of Hemingway, also resembles snappy, one-line Hollywood dialogue of the 1930s and 1940s. His descriptions often begin and end with theatrical tableaux; one, which I have already referred to, pictures Father Flynn as a king "holding court," surrounded by people resembling vassals and courtiers. Chatwin's choreographing of the scene transforms real people into characters, defined by roles ascribed to them by Chatwin, though as the bar fight above indicates, those roles are not always clearly discernable. Somewhere between Chatwin's experience and imagined scenarios, these scenes display Chatwin's taste for anecdote, moments that do not contribute to a larger design but remain self-contained. As Stephen Greenblatt writes of the anecdote, "they present the world not in stately and harmonious order but in a succession of brief encounters, random experiences, isolated anecdotes of the unanticipated" (2). In fictionalizing to a greater or lesser degree real people and experiences, even though this process does not apparently contribute to a more coherent narrative, Chatwin claims reality in his own terms. It contributes a mythical shape to everyday experience, and by doing so, "intensifies imaginative possession of the world" (Greenblatt 38). However, alternative claims by those real people, which do not lend themselves to the narrative Chatwin seems intent on producing, tend to be silenced. Toly Sawenko raises a pertinent question when he asks: "what is a writer's relationship to real people?" (Shakespeare 490). Writing about real experience,

Chatwin heightens his experience, but rather than contributing to narrative coherence these fictions only add to a sense of that experience's fragmentariness.

This text self-consciously evokes a tradition of disaffected travel writing that includes Flaubert, R.L. Stevenson, and preeminently Robert Byron. However, Chatwin goes far beyond travel writers conventionally citing other travel books as measures for, or comparisons to their own experiences. Writers he admires he self-consciously emulates. Chatwin admitted worshipping Byron's *Road to Oxiana* and wrote an introduction to an edition of Byron's classic in which he describes his early attempts to mimic Byron's style ("Introduction" 11). Susannah Clapp argues that Chatwin carried this tendency to the point of "eliding" his own life with those of his literary idols, mentioning Stevenson and Arthur Rimbaud as examples (42). The above-mentioned writers are dandies, privileging wit and an aesthete's eye for form over seriousness. These qualities compensate for a more melancholy sense of their own belatedness; they consider themselves keepers of significant cultural values that modern society has tragically rendered anachronistic. Chatwin's tendency to aestheticize his experience expresses his nostalgia for these previous travelling dandies. It also strategically evades more serious moral implications, and thus betrays the roots of that nostalgia in his uncritical association of such writers with a freedom to travel where they pleased, as well as write with unfettered authority about the places they visited. Unlike *In Patagonia*'s sustained fantasy, however, Chatwin has a more difficult time eliding the political context of his journey in *The Songlines*. At times, Chatwin acknowledges the anachronism of the primitivist myth that initially attracted him to the songlines. Yet all too often he romanticizes Aborigines, part of an "imperialist nostalgia" that idealizes Aboriginal cultures in an attempt to obscure the history of their decimation (Holland and Huggan 29). In so doing Chatwin undermines stories of political activism that he includes elsewhere.

In a passage that illustrates Chatwin's dandyism, before launching into the "notebook" section of his text, Chatwin devotes space to a eulogy of the "*moleskine*" notebooks he insisted upon using. Only an aesthete would argue, assiduously, for the superiority of the containers of their notes, and feel bound not only to describe the features of his notebooks that distinguish them from rudimentary ones, but launch into a history of these precious possessions. This moment is also a notable addition to Chatwin's self-stylization as an aesthete, since although he mentions Arkady laughing at his "pretentious" notebook, Toly Sawenko insists he never saw a journal (Shakespeare 414). He characteristically drops names of Paris streets and cafés near *the one and only* moleskine seller, suggesting a perfectionism in the stages of buying his notebooks as much as in his choice of book. They were uniquely sold, not just in any city, but in Paris; he didn't wait for his order in an office, but at the "Brasserie Lipp"; the shop was no run-of-the-mill stationary shop but a "*papeterie*" on "the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie"; the books themselves, sold in one shop in Paris, were nonetheless imported, from a single supplier, "a small family business in Tours" (160-61). From a mention of Paris, to the names of streets and restaurants readers are surely unaware of, these details are designed to *impress* rather than inform; like place names on a map, which provide no real information about the location they identify, but rather only tell a story about the namer, Chatwin's name-dropping necessarily goes over the head of an average reader: they map journeys of impeccable taste.

Chatwin admits to his inability to fully understand the songlines, but this lack of information hardly dissuades him. Indeed, the absence of facts in many ways excites him. Readers can witness Chatwin's fascination with travel, *in theory*, as much as travel in fact. Blithely declaring that he doesn't want to learn everything about the songlines, despite his book's title, and despite a text that at least partly *does* read as a search for knowledge, he playfully claims the text as *his*. Adhering to truthfulness is contingent upon the author's whims. Always a

champion of what he perceived as unconventionality in others, seeing it as a sign of genius, he recognizes in the songlines a means of writing his own unorthodox story. He embraces the fictional space provided by not binding himself to an exhaustive study. Knowing less, in fact, leaves ample room for his associative imagination to fill in the blanks.

Chatwin suggests the text will be his own, not subject to "other men's books" (12). Ironically, though we do receive a highly personalized account, as with *In Patagonia* this autobiographical narrative tells itself only implicitly. In a sense *The Songlines* represents an autobiography without a centre. Whether he appears as a satirical conversationalist, a brilliant intellectual, or a bush-savvy tough guy, Chatwin resists presenting a well-defined and consistent self-characterization. Indeed, he evasively downplays a dominant self-representation, but delights in covertly heightening other characters' representations. Blurring the distinctions between art and life in this text (Holland and Huggan 35), Chatwin produces a parallel, unreal world in which he can play without restriction. Rushdie recalls Chatwin's talent at mimicry, to the extent that he no longer perceived the individual being "done," but instead an excessive, caricatured version of them. Through Chatwin the person became "more themselves than themselves" ("Chatwin's" 238). Similarly we, as readers, lose Chatwin's characters in his performance of them. What the author produces, ultimately, is Camp spectacle, an exaggerated, superficially polished, and unquestionably celebratory performance of character. Susand Sontag writes: "to perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the furthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre" (109). Chatwin's presence announces itself most strikingly in his *performance* of his journey, a self-conscious thrill exhibited in the act of writing upon his subject. Chatwin takes to the travel form precisely for its flaunting of boundaries; he embraces a form where truthfulness has its rhetorical place, but whose facts are produced for a readership typically with no knowledge about the places described. Whether or not Chatwin

really did what he claims, writing his journey allowed him to be a Hemingwayesque tough guy in a bar at one moment, and sleep in the desert like Laurence of Arabia the next. In writing about his travels he could perform himself, and others, in various costumes.

A discussion of Chatwin's fictionalizing must appreciate the degree to which *The Songlines* comes across, as Susannah Clapp notes, as *performance* (8). This attitude to his travels partly represents Chatwin's response to his own belatedness. To a great extent, this Camp performance is nostalgic, Chatwin's response to a reality in which, in this instance, Aboriginal peoples can no longer naively be idealized as living a simpler, happier, unindustrialized existence elsewhere. Nor, as mentioned, can he recreate the journeys of discovery that brought fame to the travellers that inspired him. Unable seriously to correlate his fantasies of adventure and heroism with the reality of his travel experience, Chatwin resorts to excess and play. Unlike many other contemporary English writers, who conceal their neo-colonialist sense of superiority behind self-parody and self-deprecation (Holland and Huggan 32), Chatwin goes over the top. He exaggerates heroic qualities, indulging, through the *writing* of his travels, in an equivalent to the cross-dressing that used to transform a gentleman in a conservative suit into Arab costume, and in the adventure and freedom connoted by that transformation (Cocker 57). Limited to an unheroic nine-week trip, Chatwin finds adventure vicariously through his own narrative excesses.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to resituate Bruce Chatwin's lying within a holistic context, regarding his fictions as strategies, and by doing so approach travel writing with an appreciation for its resistance to easy definition. The preceding chapters move backwards, as it were, from Chatwin's fictions to the strategies underlying those effects, and by extension to the preoccupations that shape these two texts. By adopting such an approach I sought more rigorous, and hopefully more *productive* explanations for those fictions. Within *In Patagonia* Chatwin orients himself towards the past, travelling as much through literary territories as actual ones. He also exaggerates the characteristics of most of the people he meets. As a whole, his project seeks to confirm a myth of Patagonia as a fabulous place by retelling wonder tales about the region, and by claiming that contemporary Patagonia remains a fertile place for oddities. But in doing so he also justifies producing his own fabulous account, consistently remystifying Patagonia wherever possible. In *The Songlines*, Chatwin's fictions mostly relate to his determination to incorporate his own material, and aesthete's "eye," into his quest to understand the songlines. By doing so Chatwin produces an idiosyncratic memoir, not explicitly written, but written indirectly in the author's efforts to make the book his own.

Ultimately I perceive in Chatwin's texts a sense of his belatedness; his fictions expose a nostalgia for primitivist portrayals of Aboriginal peoples, as well as for a sense of wonder he associates with an era of discovery. Nonetheless, his postcolonial state compels him to negotiate his own belatedness, and I have tried to highlight the specifics of Chatwin's position. He attempts to disguise his nostalgia, a complex process that involves Chatwin undermining our ability, as readers, to locate the author, the reality of his characters, the degree to which his narrative is mediated through other texts. His style, in its self-reflexivity, also undermines its referentiality.

In my experience Chatwin's readers tend to have difficulty pinning down his lies. His

texts, to borrow from Timothy Dow Adams again, do not “ring true” generally; they certainly seem to lie, but where, and for what reasons? These two travel books provoke a general uneasiness with their truth claims. Chatwin’s texts are full of paradoxes and contradictions; assessments of his style inevitably seem to juxtapose opposite characteristics. His richly detailed descriptions work to authenticate his experience, since they imply that he was there, and witnessed people and places first-hand. Yet by sharpening his focus, Chatwin also heightens a sense of strangeness. He attempts to bring a camera’s eye to his descriptions, yet seems to notice only exceptional features. Since for readers, first-hand, eye-witness accounts continue to bear the stamp of authenticity, his style makes his worlds wonderful as well as asserting their actuality. The result, as I have argued, is that Chatwin’s style works at cross-purposes. It takes possession of details, re-presenting them in such a way that their truth-value and their aesthetic value become hopelessly conflated.

The texts I have been considering are as elusive as the author’s character within them. Chatwin’s playfulness destabilizes his texts’ referential material as well as their author’s authority (Bernard 68). His books are assembled at the level of anecdote. They appear as collections of portraits, stories, jokes, vivid descriptions, choreographed conversations and other fragments. Anecdotes are by definition discontinuous; they are “notes towards . . . a larger strategy towards which they can only gesture,” and which is endlessly deferred in the search for more anecdotes (Greenblatt 3). Indeed, as I have shown, Chatwin interferes with our ability to assess his narratives’ truthfulness. He plays with our always too-trusting faith that first-hand information told to the author by informants, or witnessed by the author himself, must be true. Exaggerating his own qualities, as well as those of his informants, he undermines our ostensibly reliable sources of information. While this move creates an uncomfortable arrangement of a self-consciously unreliable narrator presenting self-consciously unreliable information, it provides

Chatwin with the conceptual space to perform. As readers we are left to sift what appears to be truthful from what appears to be fabricated.

That playfulness is the lasting impression of Chatwin's travel narratives. Of all the characters Chatwin identifies with, whether they are tough guys or intellectuals, the ones who come closest to resembling the author are his con-artists. He admires the diverse passions he perceives in his intellectuals, as well as their eccentricity. These figures' shared characteristics, the way so many of them conform to type, together with Chatwin's indirect claims to the same virtues, indicate Chatwin's desire to be received with the same admiration as his heroes. As Mark Cocker points out, *fame* should not be underestimated as a motivation for English travellers (50). The promise of an appreciative audience makes hardship and deprivation much more bearable. In Chatwin's case, although he travels to "the ends of the Earth," these places have already been discovered and explored, and his moments of "hardship" are set pieces that can only provide self-parody. For travellers at least, the terms of fame appear to be anachronistic, attached to a bygone era. Yet with con-artists we find figures that Chatwin indulgently celebrates, perhaps because they most closely parallel his own displaced heroism.

The story of Henri Grien, near the end of *In Patagonia*, highlights Chatwin's own ambivalences. This figure talks his way aboard Charles Milward's ship in Australia at the turn of the century, needing to leave the country after developing a faulty diving suit that killed his test diver. He also abandons a wife and children, but nonetheless Milward allows him onboard because he appreciates his value as an entertainer (204). We get a description of Grien's various occupations, though unlike the multi-disciplinarity of Chatwin's intellectuals, Grien's crafts are partly enthusiasms and partly responses to picaresque necessity. Ultimately, Grien steals the identity of an Australian baron whom he had met and fabricates his life story for an English publisher:

Henri told Fitzgerald he was the son of a rich Parisian merchant called de Rougemont. As a boy his mother took him to Switzerland, where he developed an aptitude for geology and trick wrestling. To avoid returning to a military career in France, he went travelling to the East; sailed with a Dutch pearler from Batavia, and was the only survivor when their schooner sank. Stranded on a coral reef, de Rougemont rode turtles for amusement, built a house of pearl shells, and made a canoe. . . . (217)

Chatwin adds that the publisher “prided himself on his nose for a fake. He heard de Rougemont tell his story ‘as a man might describe a bus ride’ and was convinced of its veracity” (217).

As with Chatwin, details, as well as Grien’s casual intimacy with his “facts,” convince his publisher of his story’s truthfulness. Grien’s con-artist industry aligns him with countless exploration-era literary entrepreneurs for whom far-away places, similar to the American West, promised riches in some unsuspected but indubitable form. Well aware of a European reading market conditioned to expect wonders (and insatiable for more), these hucksters were more than willing to sacrifice literal accuracy in order to win political favour, as well as a lucrative publishing deal.¹¹ Market forces overcame moral obligations to truthfulness: readers demanded fabulous stories, publishers were simply responding to the tastes of their readers, and travellers were willing to cater to those tastes. A moral mandate to write truthfully was no match for the imperatives of wealth and imagination, to the point where many travel accounts could be written at home. Writers who never travelled plagiarized from writers who went abroad, but who themselves stole material to fill out an account, and the writer whom they stole from also wrote accounts full of lies. This system was endorsed by publishers keen to keep stories of Patagonian giants, Northwest passages and other feats and wonders alive in the public’s imagination (Adams 231). Through Grien, Chatwin challenges readers with an ambivalent figure who exposes their complicity in the travel lying industry. Chatwin’s popularity, likewise, points to our tolerance, and indeed to our half-guilty pleasure and indulgence in his trickeries. It may be possible to

¹¹ Percy Adams points out that Henry Fielding received £1000 for a novel at the same time that publishers were

expose his fictions, but it is more difficult to account for readers' willingness to be fooled.

Chatwin taps into a history of a distinctly mercenary, triangular pact of truthfulness involving writers, publishers, and readers, which he simultaneously deconstructs and reconstitutes to his own advantage.

As with Grien, travel writing (even more than travel itself) ideally provides for Chatwin an escape, as well as a stage for self-refashioning. As I have mentioned, Paul Fussell describes this as an escape "from the traveler's domestic identity, and among strangers a new sense of selfhood can be tried on, like a costume" ("Introduction" 13). Just as Grien adopts a disguise, in Chatwin's writing his evasive persona reflects his idealization of travel as an escape from the self. As I have described, however, Chatwin's new costume is not singular but multifarious. In writing Chatwin is able to appropriate former adventures as well as concoct new ones. When Chatwin conflates his retelling of adventures with his textual sources, or indeed exaggerates his own or others' qualities, he is performing a series of poses. Lacking the credentials, opportunity, and desire to reenact the epic odysseys of his travel-writing idols, he prefers the fluid role of poseur. Not restricting himself to the limited subjectivity of a well-defined protagonist, he is able, variously, to adopt an intimacy with Magellan's voyage he was four hundred years late for; produce visions of stoic asceticism he never would have had the patience to undergo in actuality; and generally intermingle his voice, desires, and guilt with a pantheon of characters. As a result, though Chatwin appears to be absent from his narratives, fragments of himself, if only desired ones, appear everywhere, both through his style, his narrative attitudes and within his characterizations of others.

Perhaps unintentionally, however, Grien's story also exposes the moral deficiency that accompanies travel liars' opportunism. Grien's wife and children, as well as the dead diver, could

offering £6000 for a collection of travel stories (Adams 224).

also stand for the omitted victims of Chatwin's fictions, denied an opportunity to relate their own version of events. Chatwin's poses ultimately represent evasive postures, an unwillingness to stand behind his claims as a writer. His excesses, his absences, as well as his nostalgic evocation of childhood, indicate his desire to maximize travel's promised imaginative freedoms, while at the same time avoiding its consequences.

Bibliography

Adams, Percy G. Travellers and Travel Liars. Berkeley: U of California P, 1962.

Adams, Timothy Dow. Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990.

Bernard Catherine. "Bruce Chatwin: Fiction on the Frontier." Theme Parks, Rainforests and Sprouting Wastelands: European essays on theory and performance in contemporary British Fiction. Ed. Richard Todd and Luisa Flora. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000. 220-34.

Berndt, Ronald M., and Catherine H. Berndt, The World of the First Australians. 5 ed. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies P., 1999.

Bevis, Richard. The Road to Ogden Heath: The Aesthetics of the Great in Nature. Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 1999.

Birch, David. "Strategy and Contingency." Twentieth-Century Fiction: From Text to Context. Ed. Peter Verdonk and Jean Jacques Weber. London: Routledge, 1995. 220-34.

Boehmer, Elleke. Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors. Oxford: Oxford UP. 1995.

Carter, Paul. The Road to Botany Bay. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Chatwin, Bruce. In Patagonia. 1977. London: Vintage, 1988.

---. "Introduction." The Road to Oxiana. 1937. New York: Oxford UP, 1982.

---. The Songlines. London: Penguin, 1987.

---. Utz. London: Jonathan Cape, 1988.

---. The Viceroy of Ouidah. London: Jonathan Cape, 1980.

---. What Am I Doing Here. London: Jonathan Cape, 1989.

Clapp, Susannah. With Chatwin: portrait of a writer. London: Jonathan Cape, 1997.

- Clunies Ross, Margaret, et al, eds. Songs of Aboriginal Australia. Sydney: U of Sydney, 1987.
- . "Research into Aboriginal Songs: The State of the Art." Clunies Ross. 1-13.
- Cocker, Mark. Loneliness and Time: British Travel Writing in the Twentieth Century. London: Secker, 1992.
- Colley, Ann C. Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture. New York: St. Martin's, 1998.
- Dickason, Olive Patricia. The Myth of the Savage: And the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1984.
- Ellis, Havelock. "Introduction." A Rebours. J.K. Huysmans. 1931. New York: Dover, 1969.
- Fussell, Paul. Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars. New York: Oxford UP, 1980.
- . "Introduction." The Norton Book of Travel. Ed. Paul Fussell. New York: Norton, 1987.
- Glaser, Elton, "Paul Theroux and the Poetry of Departures." Kowalewski. 153-163.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New Word. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.
- Henderson, Heather, "The Travel Writer and the Text: 'My Giant Goes with Me Wherever I Go.'" Kowalewski. 230-248.
- Holland, Patrick and Graham Huggan. Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998.
- Huggan, Graham. "Maps, Dreams, and the Presentation of Ethnographic Narrative: Hugh Brody's 'Maps and Dreams' and Bruce Chatwin's 'The Songlines.'" Ariel. 22 (1991): 57-69.

Ignatief, Michael. "An Interview with Bruce Chatwin." Granta. 21 (Spring '87):

21-37.

Jack, Ian. "Introduction." The Granta Book of Travel. London: Granta, 1998.

Kaplan, Caren. Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses on Displacement. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

King, David and Francis Wyndham, eds. Bruce Chatwin: Photographs and Notebooks. Toronto: Knopf, 1993.

Kowalewski, Michael, ed. Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1992.

Matos, Jacinta, "Old Journeys Revisited: Aspects of Postwar English Travel Writing." Kowalewski. 215-29.

Merlan, Francesca. "Catfish and Alligator: Totemic Songs of the Western Roper River, Northern Territory." Clunies Ross. 143-167.

Murray, Nicholas. Bruce Chatwin. Bridgend: Seren, 1993.

Pollock, Griselda. "Territories of Desire: Reconsideration of an African Childhood." Robertson. 63-93

Porter, Dennis. Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.

Robertson, George, et al. eds. Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement. London: Routledge, 1994.

Rushdie, Salman. Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991. London: Granta, 1991.

---. "Chatwin's Travels." Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991. 237-41.

---. "Imaginary Homelands." Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991. 9-21.

---. "Travelling with Chatwin." Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991. 232-36.

Shakespeare, Nicholas. Bruce Chatwin. London: Vintage, 2000.

Sontag, Susan. "Notes on Camp." A Susan Sontag Reader. Ed. Elizabeth Hardwick. New York: Farrar, 1982. 105-119.

Theroux, Paul. "Chatwin Revisited." Fresh Air Fiend. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. 395-407.

Williamson, Edwon, The Penguin History of Latin America. London: Penguin, 1992.