

**New Ways of Seeing and Storytelling: Narration and  
Visualisation in the Work of Bruce Chatwin.**

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**PhD Dissertation**

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To the memory of my parents and my sister.



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I thank my family and friends who have all had a role in the completion of my work.



## **Abbreviations, formatting and photographic images.**

For Chatwin's books I have used the following abbreviations:

*In Patagonia, IP*

*The Viceroy of Ouidah, TVOO*

*On the Black Hill, OTBH*

*The Songlines, TS*

*What Am I Doing Here, WAIDH*

*Anatomy of Restlessness, Anatomy*

For John Berger's work, mostly in chapter three:

*Ways of Seeing, WOS*

*About Looking, AL*

*Pig Earth, PE*

In chapter four:

*How our Lives Become Stories, HOL* by Jean Paul Eakin

*The Stories We Live By, The Stories* by Dan P. McAdams

I have followed the conventions of the MLA Formatting and Style Guide. As far as notes are concerned I am using notes at the end of each chapter.

Next to each of the photographs by Chatwin which I chose to illustrate the front page of each chapter, I have added a comment in italics. My comments attempt to anticipate some of the main ideas I develop in the chapter and aim to strengthen my conviction that Chatwin's storytelling style is tightly connected to his particular way of seeing. Mrs. Elizabeth Chatwin has given me permission to reprint her husband's photographs.

The cover design shows one of Chatwin's drawings found in his moleskins. It represents one of the various archaeological findings he was so fascinated by. This one was on a Greek vase and is taken from one of the two notebooks (probably one of the notebooks kept in Box 32 in The Bodleian Library in Oxford) which were exhibited in New College Oxford during a Symposium on Bruce Chatwin held on Saturday 1 July 2008.

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## Introduction



Bruce Chatwin photographed by James Ivory in 1972.



## Introduction

Ah! Sunflower, weary of time,  
 Who countest the steps of the sun,  
 Seeking after that sweet golden clime  
 Where the traveller's journey is done;

Where the youth pined away with desire,  
 And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,  
 Arise from their graves and aspire;  
 Where my sunflower wishes to go.

*(Ah! Sunflower William Blake, 1793)*<sup>1</sup>

In this introduction first I will present my research questions. Next, I will describe the chapters that structure the thesis. In order to develop my arguments this thesis examines all of Chatwin's full-length texts. These are his five books: *In Patagonia* (1977), *The Viceroy of Ouidah* (1980), *On the Black Hill* (1982), *The Songlines* (1987) and *Utz* (1988), as well as the posthumous *What Am I Doing Here* (1989) and finally *Anatomy of Restlessness* (1996), edited by Jan Borm and Matthew Graves. For the study of his photographic work, I focus on *Winding Paths* (1999), a collection of Chatwin's photographs edited and introduced by Roberto Calasso, Chatwin's photographic archive at the Trevillion Library in Brighton and accessible on the website: [www. Trevillion.com](http://www.Trevillion.com), and the photographs included in the English edition of *In Patagonia*. I have also examined what remains of Chatwin's archives: Chatwin's 85 notebooks, manuscripts and other material are deposited in the Department of

Special Collections and Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The material is kept in 41 boxes. Boxes 31 to 35 contain the 85 notebooks, dating from 1968 to 1988.

Chapter Two is a continuation of my MA dissertation, defended in 2002. It draws upon and expands the ideas first raised within it and opens up new research questions.

### **Research questions**

“He was interested in borders, where things were always changing, not one thing nor another,” says Elizabeth. (Nicholas Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin* 277)

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak [...] But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world. (John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 7)

My research focuses on the study of two essential connections within Chatwin’s work. The first is the connection between Chatwin’s texts -both fictional and non-fictional- and the anthropological concept of liminality. My readings employ theoretical material that, as far as I am aware, has not been previously applied to Chatwin’s narrative style. Second, I examine the close relationship between writing and seeing in his texts, particularly the connection between Chatwin’s storytelling and photography and painting. The visual quality of his style in storytelling subtly interconnects all his work and stems from different sources: at Sotheby’s as a professional eye for works of



art; his gaze when writing uncompromisingly about British imperialism, his gaze when defining personalities with commitment; finally his lens when taking photographs.

While my study of Chatwin's storytelling style mainly examines these two perspectives, I also explore Chatwin's role as a travel writer. Chatwin is mostly a writer of fiction but he is also the writer of two travel books, or better said books of fiction framed in a context of travel experience. Nicholas Shakespeare writes that "Bruce, like Leigh Fermor, hated the classification of travel writer. 'He was a writer who happened to travel. He was writing to prove or further some idea, like the songlines'" (448). Although Chatwin did not regard himself as a travel writer, he has been "widely considered to have launched the travel renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s"<sup>2</sup>, and has gathered a large number of followers in the world of modern travel writing. His experiences in Patagonia have inspired hundreds of adventurous travellers;<sup>3</sup> likewise back-packers from all over the world have been to Alice Springs to get in touch with Australian Aboriginal culture after the publication of *The Songlines*. Despite this "Chatwin Effect" (Shakespeare 535), it is known that Chatwin experienced no risk or danger at all on his journeys; his was a different search. My study examines the adventures his followers were looking for, what things they were expecting to see and what they saw and what Chatwin made his readers see in such a globalised charted world. My contribution to the topic of Chatwin's position within or outside modern travel literature is the hypothesis that Chatwin was a writer of a new fictionalised geography of adventure and that his stance both unites with and separates him from traditional and modern travel writing. I assess Chatwin's deliberate blurring of fact and fiction which provides a point of departure for the consideration of how his travel accounts both exceed the bounds of travel writing and also subvert traditional autobiographical practice expected in this kind of "out-of-place" text. The experiments

in style of Chatwin's two travel books suggest that all traditional literary and epistemological divisions are open to question.

Finally, I approach the idea that although Chatwin is an excellent storyteller he seems to have no story of his own. Might his early death and his unique lifestyle have created a myth, but a myth devoid of meaning and reference? My contribution to these issues is the development of a concept which I have called narrative difficulties in finding one's bearings. I have taken the term "finding one's bearings" from the world of navigation and mountaineering to illustrate Chatwin's narratology in terms of autobiography. I find the title of his posthumous work "*What Am I Doing Here*" and the comment of one of Chatwin's friends: "Bruce was a compass without a needle" (Shakespeare 221) most revealing. He consistently shied away from giving his readers any personal details about what he thought or felt. I try to account for Chatwin's reluctance to acknowledge and tell his own story.

My reading of Chatwin's texts is informed by theories of travel literature, anthropology, psychoanalysis, postmodernism, post-colonial and cultural studies, photography and visual art.

### **Overview of chapters**

My thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter one develops the idea of wanderlust within Chatwin's texts and discusses Chatwin's position within the panorama of modern travel writing. So as to locate him in or discard him from traditional and modern travel writing I compare his work to that of different travel writers (eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries). I contrast the content and structure of their work following certain narrative and thematic axes. In order to place these writers in a historical context, chapter one briefly traces the development of travel writing from

Samuel Johnson's age of travel, the Victorian era of exploration, through the heyday of travel writing in the 1930s to the present. The texts I take as reference in this part of my study are: Barbara Korte's *English Travel Writing. From Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, Percy Adams's *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, Franck Michel's *Désirs d'Ailleurs* and essays by Kowalewski, Buford, Cocker, Dodd and altri which provide the theoretical frame to this chapter. Paul Fussell's *Norton Book of Travel and Abroad. British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* give an overview of travel literature from its origins to the present time. Robert Byron's *The Road of Oxiana* (1937), Samuel Johnson's *Selected Writings* (1779), Stevenson's stories *The Ebb Tide* and *The Beach of Falesa* (1893), Darwin's *The Voyage of The Beagle* (1839), Jonathan Raban's *Coasting* (1986) and *For Love and Money* (1987), Alexander Kinglake's *Eothen* (1844), Naipaul's *In a Free State* (1971), Evelyn Waugh's *When the Going Was Good* (1946) and Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* (1957) are representative of different approaches to and styles of travel writing.

Although Chatwin formed part of the mid-1980s boom in travel writing and publishing, he differs greatly from his peers because of his distinctively personal style. *The Songlines* is a completely original travel text: a mixture of essay, fiction and journal. *In Patagonia* represents a clear break from one tradition of British travel-writing; according to Murray (1993): "In Chatwin's book there are no funny foreigners, no Englishman-abroad slapstick, no comic restaurant menu translations, no clotted purple passages, no turgid potted history, no self-admiring derring-do, no virtuoso lists" (43). I do not think this is the only difference between Chatwin's texts and those which might fit into the genre of travel writing. Chatwin's voyages do not correspond to those of other travel writers and neither are his journeys the representation of inner journeys or examples of *Bildungsromane*. I present Chatwin as the creator of a new geography of

adventure whose thrill without danger makes him different from his predecessors and contemporaries.

Chapter one is structured in three sections. Although the chapter starts by recalling Samuel Johnson's era as the Age of Travel, my analysis is not carried out in chronological order within travel writing but through a comparative analysis between Chatwin's work on the one hand and the travel writer Jonathan Raban on the other. To present Chatwin's singularity when writing about journeys, the first section revises the taxonomy of traditional travel writing and assesses how Chatwin applies it or transgresses it. I start by considering the essential issues within it which, I sustain, Chatwin questioned or was not guided by, that is, I analyse what norms and conventions he broke, namely the motives for departure and the way of voicing these motives. The idea of quest and hero, adventure and loneliness, escape, home and nationality, the Self's efforts to describe a foreign Other and the landscapes that accommodate a desire for self-reflection and self-discovery are the most important ones. In the second section I assess the idea of chronotope in Chatwin's writing so as to analyse not only the texts which reproduce -fictionalise- a real journey abroad, far away from home, but also the texts located in circumscribed worlds where the journey leads to other sub-worlds. I analyse the treatment of space and time, as well as the places evolving into new meanings such as Patagonia, and places evolving into mythical constructions such as the songline. Paul Smethurst in *The Postmodern Chronotope* provides convincing arguments to read space and time in Chatwin's texts and to regard the postmodern treatment of these two elements as a reasonably coherent way of seeing and representing the contemporary world. Gnoli's reflection on Chatwin's relationship with space and time in *Bruce Chatwin. La nostalgia de espacio* makes us envisage Chatwin's metamorphoses as the best way he distanced himself from himself, from his origins and

from his own history. They were -in Gnoli's words- a sheer exercise of oblivion, and I will question this view. Section three tries to elucidate Chatwin's longing for elsewhere<sup>4</sup> by reflecting on his overcoming of globalisation on the one hand and his experimenting with narrative forms on the other as two new perspectives of travel writing.

The second and third chapters are, I believe, the chapters that make the strongest and most original contribution to Chatwin scholarship. To found his narrative style, Chatwin was in search of a reader and a listener as well as in search of a beholder. Chapter two deals with the former search under the heading Chatwin's Narrative Style (I): A New Way of Telling/Storytelling based on the Anthropological Concept of Liminality. A Search for a Reader and a Listener. Chapter three examines the latter search under the heading Chatwin's Narrative Style (II): A New Way of Seeing/Storytelling based on the Eye and the Gaze. A search for a Reader and a Beholder. For the analysis of the concepts of liminality and visualization in the narrative of Bruce Chatwin I focus on studies and theories which I will specify in each chapter/section.

The aim of Chapter two is to show the essential connection between Chatwin's texts and the anthropological concept of liminality and to demonstrate how this connection determines the content and form of his writing and becomes the springboard for a consistent philosophy of life and art. The anthropological concepts of threshold and *communitas* –developed by van Gennep and Turner- constitute the core of Chatwin's work and both the geographical space and time constructs and the exile-like characters which frame and inhabit his texts emerge from that transitional area. They all share a status of in-betweenness. Most of his protagonists are exiles, refugees, wanderers, artists and drifters who, despite striving to preserve their individuality, share

a common condition: they are all near-naked men and their destinies are inevitably connected. He locates these liminal characters in transitional areas such as the Pampas of Argentina, the Outback of Australia, the Border County between England and Wales or Prague during the Cold War and by doing so avoids the issue of questioning their gender, and their literary, political and national identity. What really matters are the stories Chatwin tells about them and the stories each of them tells. If we superimpose these fictional destinies onto that of Chatwin's we might understand that Chatwin does not become a compulsive traveller simply to escape from England; he does not hide or disguise himself like an escapologist in order to avoid making commitments with other individuals. Both Chatwin and his characters roam those far-flung frontier places he describes in order to find the best milieu for their creative power. Chatwin takes the ideas of liminality, homogeneity, near-nakedness and creation to an extreme: he regards and works with them as essential soil where literary production thrives because, in a way, he himself -as a man and as a writer- needs a neutral communal and universal terrain where he can explore his own strategies of selfhood.

Chapter two is organized in three sections. The first section analyses the anthropological concept of liminality. I start by highlighting the place and time and the characters described in Chatwin's novels, travel books and articles: I examine the similarities and differences between them and to what extent they are all liminal personae and chronotopes. I pay special attention to Chatwin's literary symbolism concerning the double-sided nature of man. At this point I refer to some of the protagonists in *WAIIDH* to exemplify the proximity of Chatwin's fictional and non-fictional texts. Next, I turn to explore the anthropological concept of *communitas*. The focus is on the idea of universalism which derives from it as well as its implications regarding Chatwin's idea of Englishness. I also illustrate how *communitas* is used by

Chatwin as a springboard to reflect on other issues such as social structure, violence, barbarism and civilization. Storytelling is likewise connected with *communitas* since it enhances human interrelatedness and unites past and present in a bond of common living; by telling stories people live an experience of sharing and creating. In the second section I analyse two of Chatwin's obsessions: collecting and creating, and the way he determinedly assembles them within an extensive map of "hypertext" connections which unite metaphorically and coherently his texts and give sense to his innovative vision of art and life. The third section focuses on Chatwin's obsession with storytelling. From his texts I seek to confirm his deep belief in the aesthetic and metaphysical strength of storytelling; Chatwin's telling of a story being an authentic act of both poetic and personal creation which takes place in liminal phases and is part of a continuous process of transformation. I also study the role of the narrator: who tells the stories and from what perspective, what irony Chatwin displays and how we should interpret his sometimes patronizing attitude. Chatwin enjoys being the observer more than the hero, the travel companion rather than the confidential friend or the moralist and this stance conditions his narratology. Finally, I examine the way in which the stories which Chatwin himself and people in *IP* and *TS* tell are structured and presented and the reason why Chatwin elaborated this kind of narrative.

The central thesis of Chapter three is that Chatwin's way of seeing generates a way of telling; it shapes his narratives. His particular visual perception, manifested in his capacity for looking at things and people, at landscape and time differently suggests to me that part of Chatwin's literary strength lies in his search for a listener as well as for a beholder. Not only his own talent for photography and his skill in distinguishing authentic works of art from fakes but also his obsession with collecting are all signs of an exhibiting mania. Chatwin's narratology emerges from his belief in liminality as

much as from his love of images and stories, which are both valuable objects in his literary microcosmos. His photographs have been collected in *Winding Paths* which is in fact a visual testimony of his aesthetics. Some snapshots tell us as much about what his mind map was like as any event or reality that he described.

The first section focuses on Chatwin's contact with the world of art (both painting and photography) and how his talent for the visual determined his way of writing. His "eye" for spotting fakes amidst works of art and his non-reportage photography, the *photo témoignage* that Michel describes (113), are not only a way of telling life but also a way of capturing personality and the authenticity within it. I briefly discuss the work of two women writers who also believed in photography as a powerful tool to capture "certain moments": Virginia Woolf and Eudora Welty. At this point I consider the work of the British writer and intellectual John Berger, the photographers Henri Cartier-Bresson and Diane Arbus and the writers and essayists Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes with their theories on photography and image. I examine Walter Benjamin's idea of *Denkbilder* and his theoretical studies of photography. In the second section the ideas of the peripheral and the marginal are reviewed: Bruce Chatwin, Diane Arbus and Walter Benjamin are compared so as to throw some light upon the concept of the uncanny, so present in Chatwin's work. In Chatwin both the uncanny and the marginal are found both within himself and in the Other and they are both regarded as sources of creation. The third section covers the concepts of flâneury, voyeurism, visual travelling and gaze and to what extent Chatwin incorporated them into his narratology. Flâneury is analysed in terms of liminality rather than marginality, according to Aguirre, Quance and Sutton's (65) definition of these two terms. Voyeurism will be studied as a new form of distance. Journeying and visualization will be discussed from three different perspectives. First, they are set side



by side to assess the traveller's freedom -or the lack of it- to choose the targets and the scope of his vision while travelling: what panoramic views should be considered musts, which ones should be discarded. Second, the idea of physicality of representation will be presented as a requirement to grasp travel accounts in their totality. Finally, the writer's self-effacement, commitment and detachment will be analysed taking into account John Berger (novelist, playwright, art critic and essayist ) and Chatwin's stances towards intervention. Chatwin and Berger are compared in their personal visions of the writer's self-effacement when set in contact with the observed object. Chatwin's photographs are analysed in terms of the artist's attempt to seize personality without intervention in his reliance on the effects of the camera gaze and in his mistrust of the cultural gaze. The study of the concept of gaze in Chatwin's texts will be explored through Fuery's idea of the eye-twister and the empty eye (developed in his article "Prisoners and Spiders. Surrounded by Signs. Postmodernism and the Postcolonial Gaze in Contemporary Australian Culture"). I argue that Chatwin employs it in his writing to render his perception of personal and cultural gaze. When someone is eye-twisting, they are "constructing things in a particular way and by doing so certain ways of representing, and even certain representations themselves, become privileged. This tends to produce a corpus of images, narratives, ideas that eventually form the cultural model" (White 193). I consider the question of to what extent Chatwin reproduces or avoids a cultural gaze. My approach is also innovative in its development of seeing and looking -gazing- as a way of accounting for the perspective of style in Chatwin's texts.

In Chapter four I consider whether Chatwin has a story of his own, bearing in mind that he is more the enthusiastic teller of other people's stories than the teller of his own. He has been accused of being an accomplished escapologist; however, while he

might have fled from a certain idea of Englishness, he did not flee from himself. Sartre writes: “This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them, and he tries to live his life as if he were telling a story” (qtd. in Murray 19). The core of my thesis at this point is not so much a critical approach to Chatwin’s mute and uncommitted attitude to his personal life, nation or politics but an exploration of his reluctance to reveal his own story and his narrative difficulties in telling it in autobiographical terms. The ideas about personal myths and the making of the Self developed in Dan P. MacAdams’s *The Stories We Live By* and *The Person* provide convincing arguments to endorse my belief that Chatwin did revisit his story: he told it to himself through his writing and to others through his conversations with friends and the few interviews he gave. In fact, his five books taken together are the collection of all the different Chatwins he embodied. Chatwin gives himself away through the fictions lived by his completely un-stereotyped characters, through the pictures and objects he collected, through the photographs he took of the uncanny, the universal and the innocent. The first section focuses on the reasons why Chatwin did not “speak[s] to us most clearly” (Elsbree 59) and on the way he lived his life and anticipated his death through writing. I pay special attention to the issues of concealment and self-exposure and also to how Chatwin fictionalises the concept of the artist in the making: how does an artist make himself through writing? By gathering the stories of others? By telling his own story? The second section examines the impact of childhood memories on one’s own construction of a life story, in particular how Chatwin’s self-explanation was conditioned by them. I will take Sebald’s (2005) article “The Mystery of the Red-brown Skin. An Approach to Bruce Chatwin”, included in *Campo Santo*, as a reference to try and throw some light onto the riddle of Chatwin’s life; according to the German writer

“Chatwin himself ultimately remains an enigma” (179). Following Sebald’s intellectual thread, Chatwin’s novels, Balzac’s *La Peau de chagrin*, Flaubert’s *Trois Contes* and Pécoc’s *W ou la souvenir d’enfance* have some elements in common which might help us to reach a closer interpretation of Chatwin’s work and life. The third section, presented under the heading: “taking and finding one’s bearings rather than writing in autobiographical terms,” aims to discover whether Bruce Chawin was really “‘a compass without a needle’ as one friend called him at this time” (Shakespeare 221) and whether he found his bearings at the end of his life once he had resolved the problem of simultaneously playing different roles and after having experienced more than one metamorphosis both in reality and in fiction.

In the Conclusions section I will present the key ideas that can be drawn from my study; I found it helpful to put them in point form. I will also refer to the suggestions for further research that have emerged from my findings: some of them are related strictly to the work of Bruce Chatwin, the others to his literary legacy.

## Notes to Introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Blake's poem "Oh Sunflower!" is one of the quotations and famous lines of writers and thinkers that Chatwin collected in some of his black notebooks. This one can be found in Notebook 2, Box 31 in Chatwin's archive in the Bodleian Library. It corresponds to his search for information about travelling and nomadism but I believe it also contains his recurrent reflection on the passing of time and the ephemeral nature of youth.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Graves. "Nowhere left to Go?". The Death and Renaissance of the Travel Book" in WLT, *World of Literature Today*, October-December 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Among these followers is Adrian Giménez Hutton, a Buenos Aires lawyer and travel writer. Impressed with Chatwin's narrative style in *In Patagonia* and prompted by a friend's declaration that Chatwin's work was completely fictional, he decided to go and see for himself. He jeeped around Patagonia, tracing Chatwin's footsteps, visiting the towns and the *estancias* where he had been and interviewing some people he had interviewed. His narrative titled *La Patagonia de Chatwin* was published in Argentina in 1998.

<sup>4</sup> The translation of *désirs d'ailleurs* into English was not as easy as I expected. Finally, a French friend Patrice Pointereau, suggested the following: "longing for elsewhere."

## Chapter One

### Wanderlust in Chatwin's Work: Writing About Journeys or Travel Writing?

#### Towards a New Taxonomy of Travel Writing.

*Adventure and escape*



Photograph by Bruce Chatwin. Catching the bus, Afghanistan.



## Chapter 1

### **Wanderlust in Chatwin's Work: Writing About Journeys or Travel**

#### **Writing? Towards a New Taxonomy of Travel Writing.**

“You did well last night to take my advice,” said he, “and if you would, I should like to be with you often on the voyage, for the love of adventure alone.” (Captain Joshua Slocum, *Sailing Around the World* 42)

Chapter one develops the idea of wanderlust within Chatwin's texts. My aim is to reconsider the traditional taxonomy of travel writing so as to assess the degree to which Chatwin applies or transgresses its most significant issues. I start by highlighting the progressive renewal that the genre has experienced in the last few years. Then I analyse this taxonomy through the study of the most recurrent motives for a journey and of the way Chatwin voiced these motives. Finally, I examine the concepts of chronotope and globalisation as well as the innovative formal quality of Chatwin's travel texts.

Duncan and Gregory (1999) draw attention to the explosion of interest in travel writing and its progressive renewal during the last two decades of the twentieth century. This interest in travelling has continued up to the present time and is demonstrated in bookstores not only in the sections of atlases, guidebooks, maps, cooking, music, spirituality and all kinds of travel gadgets and magazines, but also in the sections devoted to more imaginative accounts of travel. Nowadays readers can find both objective information and more personal reports which range from the poetic to the comic, from the nineteenth century tradition of exploration to late twentieth century

postmodernism and post-colonialism. Among these new travel writers Duncan and Gregory highlight Bruce Chatwin, Pico Yver and Redmon O'Hanlon as original authors in the sense that "[t]hey have driven travel writing beyond itself- some reviewers claim that they have even re-invented travel writing, giving it both a new popularity and a new critical respectability (1). In fact, these authors embody the modern trend in travel literature in which Chatwin played a truly pioneer role. Their personal way of re-imagining the world presents new models of literary constructs which show subtle but undisguised shifts from fact to fiction and vice-versa.

These changes become apparent first in a freer formal flexibility and a more remarkable hybridisation of disciplines within travel accounts, thus mixing anthropology, philosophy and documentary for example, as well as in more heterogeneous modes of expression. According to Korte: "fragments of narrative are mixed freely with descriptions, sketches, dialogues, scenes, passages of reflection, short essays or even poetry, as in *Letters from Ireland* (1937) by W.H.Auden and Louis MacNeice" (Korte 142). Second, the narrative pattern of the romance quest that focused on its male hero and his triumphant discoveries is questioned and gives way to less male-oriented deeds and to different models of sensitivities and gazes. Third, there is the recognition of new spaces of power and transculturation, that means that the representation of power and its discourse is no longer based on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized where the Western "Reason," reproducing the ideological apparatus of Empire, fixes moral codes and predetermines individual expectations; neither is it exclusively based on the emergence of the post-colonial traveller with his urge to find his roots and his need to question his cultural past and his emotional ties, trapped in the dichotomies of East and West, First and Third World. Now the post-colonial traveller, forced to live in an itinerant age, somehow enjoys the



development of a cosmopolitan identity. All in all, this shift in the understanding of transculturation is rather the expression of an allegiance to a politics of difference: the writer and the reader share new ethical and democratic foundations which include a recognition of difference and the commitment to resolving antagonisms. The ethical dilemmas in which travellers, and their narratives, are invariably caught up are given a new focus. A final sign of the progressive renewal of modern travel writing is the launching of new social and personal concerns, travel literature is laying new soil from which both social-political awareness and psychological introspection emerge, thus opening up an inexhaustible thematic field within the frame of a journey. Several questions arise then, such as what the upcoming modes of voyaging will be like, how the already-seen quality of modern day adventures is going to be overcome, whether we will henceforth travel less or more, and where travel writing is going next.

With a title similar to the aforementioned question “On the Road Again. Where Travel Writing Went Next”, *Granta*'s issue 94 (summer 2006) shows the general interest that travel writing still arouses. Despite our increasingly globalised Internet-based society -with fewer possibilities of being off the beaten track but more possibilities for virtual travel- and despite the difficulties in finding the essence of travel in a world shattered by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, readers even now want to be offered the chance to participate in original travel experiences and live them authentically. In the introduction to this 2006 *Granta* issue Ian Jack writes that in the 80s readers believed “what had happened, in more or less the order it had happened in” (14) but he also admits that things are changing and we might need to adjust or change our frame of mind as now we are more aware of the omissions and distortions that narrative usually imposes and of the sometimes blurry division between fiction and fact. He argues that: “it seems to me that if travel writing is to be more than a persuasive

literary entertainment – if it's to have [...] some moral purpose – then the information it contains needs to be trustworthy”(14). At present, the dichotomy between fact and fiction and the choice between literary entertainment and moral purpose is a recurrent issue within travel writing.

Chatwin's motivation for looking for the unexpected and the mysterious -more than the self-betterment- should be found in his desire to live adrift, an urge that would take him far from England's shores. James Hamilton-Paterson in “The End of Travel” (*Granta* 94 223), even though he is a little “overtaken with nostalgia for a lifetime of uncomfortable journeys” (224), decides to set out on a journey again, this time to Brazil. He tries to understand his wanderlust:

What would I be doing there? Just *being*, really: in its way the essence of one kind of travel. No zoo quest to find new animal or plant species; no anthropological fieldwork to do in a backwater of those *tristes tropiques*; no wretched tribe to evangelize; no gap year to dutifully fill; not even a notion of self-discovery, that pathetic trip to nowhere of interest. Simply an overwhelming urge to be out of my own culture, beyond the reach of home, decisively elsewhere. (*Granta* 94 225)

Chatwin wrote about people and places which suggest clash, borders and the sense of *being* which often emerges in contact areas. The ideas of quest and self-discovery are deconstructed in Hamilton-Paterson's text and as a result the psychological, *Bildungsroman*-like nature traditionally attached to a journey is in turn deconstructed. Neither does Chatwin believe in the task of self-discovery, at least there is no biographical or autobiographical evidence of a radical, solid transformation of his personality after his adventures all over the world.

### **1.1. Chatwin's New Taxonomy of Travel Writing: Adventure, Quest, Escape, Nationality, Home and Belonging.**

The present section first overviews Samuel Johnson as a primary stage in the evolution of travel literature. Then it examines the essential themes within the taxonomy of the genre. These will be examined through a comparative analysis between Chatwin's novel *IP*, his controversial *TS*, some articles in *WAIDH*, these being his three texts that evolve around a journey or various journeys, and Jonathan Raban's *Coasting* (1986). At one point of the analysis I will briefly refer to Alexander Kinglake's *Eothen* (1834) and Captain Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World* (1898). The aim is to draw out the interconnections between the style and content of such works and elucidate whether Chatwin's wanderlust produces texts which simply evolve around a journey or his wanderlust has generated another expression of travel writing as a genre. Through the similarities and the differences that bind these writers together, an overview of British travel writing will be exposed as well as a closer view of Chatwin's position within it.

The contemporary British travel writer Jonathan Raban was born two years after Chatwin and, like Chatwin, belonged to the same generation of politically aware travellers of the 1980s. According to James J. Schramer, Raban revitalised British travel writing in the 1970s and 1980s "along with Bruce Chatwin, William Dalrymple, Nicholas Cruse, Redmon O'Hanlon, Colin Thubron and Gavin Young."<sup>1</sup> Raban is essential to the main arguments developed in this section because although he lived the same political, social and aesthetic phenomena as Chatwin, his texts show a different literary and personal assimilation of these phenomena. The resulting travel accounts incorporate an autobiographical mood, a symbolic unit and a notion about the relationship with the past that Chatwin never contemplated. This leads me to suggest

that Chatwin initiated an independent outlook on the issue of writing about a journey. Regarding Kinglake, he is the nineteenth-century British traveller and adventurous Victorian gentleman who was proud of his country and its empire and believed everything English was best be it at home or overseas. Despite this he adopted a casual and intimate style, quite unlike that of many earlier travel writers. His writing is both an ideological and a literary reference from which to study Chatwin's connection with the tradition of travel literature and with the idea of Englishness. Captain Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World* is the account of his seafaring experience on the *Spray* from 1895 until 1898. Elizabeth Chatwin explains that this book was one of her husband's favourite readings.<sup>2</sup> Chatwin himself declares that "[the] first grown-up book I read from cover to cover was Captain Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World*" (*Anatomy* 9), therefore it is worth considering what kind of influence this book had on Chatwin's concept of wanderlust.

The attempt to locate Chatwin within or outside the tradition of travel literature leads us to consider a specific period of British history when travel lived its golden age, where humanity and science started to unite and the inquisitive and liberal minds of travellers were given a great opportunity. This was the opportunity to prove that other advanced civilizations and other kinds of morality existed beyond European frontiers. This era corresponds to Samuel Johnson's lifetime (1709-1784) which has been defined by Curley (1976) as the Age of Travel. It was in Johnson's time that history and literature were fashioned by travel. In fact, travelling matched the nation's enthusiasm for exploring the new and the unknown and was fostered by the Georgian curiosity to study the expanding limits of both geography and human knowledge. Johnson endorsed the epistemological element of travelling as he considered this to be an educational and maturing process which every Englishman should experience in order to grow in

wisdom. The protagonists of the travel plots of the time played the role of the English traveller or explorer or scientist who ignited the inquisitive spirit of the eighteenth century and brought far-fetched places closer. These protagonists also lit up the spirit of romance with their dangerous journeys to strange lands full of captivity and escape, all of them edifying for the traveller. Travel literature became really popular and almost every important writer like Swift, Fielding, Smollet and Sterne included travel accounts in their literary production. Thanks to the progress in geographical discoveries, people could learn about Australian cannibals, Pacific savages, Patagonian giants, African pigmies and other primitive cultures in Asia which altered old anthropological and social assumptions. Travelling entailed intellectual growth and yielded a new morality in the sense that people began to appreciate the diversity of foreign cultures and accept the fact that social customs vary with race and environment. Before this era of discovery, foreign cultures had been regarded as forming part of the widespread idea of the moral uniformity of man. The idea that humanity was homogeneous, regardless of time and place, was affirmed by philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke and Hume. This generalized intellectual notion of moral uniformity together with some strong English prejudices about the “other” worlds, was the result of centuries of geographical ignorance. According to Curley (1976) “English explorers were major catalysts of [a] geographical revolution” (7). However, it was not only a geographical revolution that King George III’s adventurers initiated but also a revision and a renewal of old myths. So the discovery of places such as Tahiti in the South Pacific, or the exploration of the South Pole, Hawaii and Australasia by James Cook extended the British Empire into the southern hemisphere and also modified artistic sources of inspiration: the old myths of Patagonian giants no longer typified alluring objectives, whereas Polynesia became a new paradise that would haunt Europeans ever after.

Johnson widened his knowledge of travel writing by familiarizing himself with three centuries of travel literature but he also laid the foundations for a strengthened tradition of writers and readers who believed in the power of geography. Geography became both the sign of an expanding empire based on a physical territory being charted and also the sign of an expanding space for adventure and imagination. The animating principle of Johnson's age of travel meant that the English mind had definitely entered an era of acknowledgement of new worlds and new kinds of humanity, thus raising the awareness of new moralities. It is within this sensitivity to difference that we should place Chatwin's work: not in the recognition of an empire but in the recognition of a diversity of ethical codes and social values and of the possibility of changing old established myths and principles. The Victorian era, the 1930s and the 1980s also represented golden age phases in British travel literature, each period providing either elements of inspiration or elements of criticism for Chatwin the traveller and the writer.

To explore the essential taxonomy of travel writing I will consider Chatwin's main motives for departure, the issues evolving around them and the way in which Chatwin voiced these motives. These are the ideas of adventure, quest and self-discovery, escape, nationality, home and belonging. Egotism and loneliness (considered typical of both the postmodern condition and postcolonialism) are two more elements of this taxonomy. As far as the way in which Chatwin described his relationship with travelling is concerned, I contend that the recreation of the past and the incorporation of the ancestors in the narrative thread lie at the core of his style.

To begin with, adventure seems to be the leading impulse of travellers, at least for all those who wished to follow in the steps of the great explorers. Chatwin claims that: "[Stevenson] yearned for adventure, for a 'pure dispassionate adventure such as

befell the great explorers'. But he hadn't the stomach for it; on the whole, he travelled in a world made safe for aesthetes" (*Anatomy* 131). Likewise Captain Joshua Slocum in *Sailing Alone Around the World* shares a simple reason for a journey: "for the love of adventure alone" (42). Chatwin shows both viewpoints: on the one hand he looks for adventure alone with no nationalistic or transcendental goals, on the other hand his journeys are safe, the excitement being found in the aesthetic quality of the travelling experience and its telling rather than in other signs of adventure.

Secondly, among the most frequent motivations for the departure of travellers is the idea of quest. The traveller finds his way through charts and maps as well as in the information provided by previous travellers whose written wayfaring experiences become mediation texts. Nevertheless, besides the factual background there exist the ideas of passage and quest that have traditionally been attached to it, and these are surrounded by a complete set of symbolic and literary overtones. It is this metaphorical side to travelling that really enriches travelling itself. Every individual lives this passage and this quest differently and the account of the explorer, backpacker, pilgrim or trickster grants the resulting story -either oral or written- a unique narrative dimension. Moseley writes:

[...] we have a very different vision of man as a psychological, biological, social, and ecological phenomenon than we did twenty years ago, and we can't expect the old formulae to serve as well. We are much more aware of our selves, of life, and relationships, as a process of becoming rather than being, for which the ultimate metaphor must be the act of voyaging, the quest, rather than the arrival, the finding. (207)<sup>3</sup>

In *Patagonia Revisited* Chatwin recalls the element of quest. He writes that the piece of dung in a cave at the end of his journey in Patagonia wasn't exactly "the Golden Fleece,

but it did give me the idea for the form of a travel book” (17). Matthew Graves (2003) affirms that with *IP* what Chatwin set out to do “with his tale of a journey to the ‘uttermost part of the earth’ in search of an extinct beast was to blend the best of the modern travel book -the formalism, the economy, and erudition of Byron’s writing with the ancient tradition of the Quest or Wonder Voyage grounded in myth and fable.”<sup>4</sup> However, Chatwin’s peculiar way of constructing his travel accounts places him in a special position within the long tradition of European travel writing. Chatwin, as he himself declared, was not a travel writer. Nor did he identify himself with other travellers and writers who, looking for exoticism, turned their backs on the Western world. His exoticism, both in his photographs and in his texts, is not an ontological alternative to his condition as a westerner, but a search into the limitless possibilities of the imagination. I would argue that his refusal to be labelled a travel writer is based on the motivations which probably spurred him to set off on a journey and the narrative structures he chose to express them. Neither of them corresponds to the ones traditionally associated with travel writing, in particular the structure of the quest romance. Fussell suggests that the quest -both picaresque and pastoral- is an indispensable element of the travel book inasmuch as readers are not fully satisfied unless the traveller returns to his departure point. He claims that the action, as in a quest romance, must be completed:

We are gratified -indeed comforted- by the “sense of an ending,” the completion of the circuit, as we are at the end of Waugh’s *Labels: A Mediterranean Journal* (1930) or Byron’s *The Road to Oxiana* or Greene’s *Journey Without maps* (1936), where the “hero” invites us to enjoy his success in returning home. (qtd. in Kowalewski 84)<sup>5</sup>



Similarly Raban writes: “With all the ardent solemnity of a thirteen-year-old, at thirty-nine I saw my trip as a test, a reckoning, a voyage of territorial conquest, a homecoming” (*Coasting* 21). To Fussell travel books are romances in the old sense, the difference being that contemporary adventures have a different location: they have a real topography- usually a famous one- meant to satisfy a readership who wants to live adventures vicariously but who at the same time wants to feel himself within a real world authenticated by updated studies on anthropology, political science, sociology, economics and contemporary history. A similar approach to travel writing and romance is provided by Patrick Brantlinger when he states that: “The great explorers’ writings are nonfictional quest romances in which the hero-authors struggle through enchanted, bedevilled lands toward an ostensible goal: the discovery of the Nile’s sources, the conversion of the cannibals [...]” (Kowalewski 245).

First, in Chatwin there is no metaphor of the quest romance or the bringer of light. These metaphors are not as innocent as many former travel writers might have believed; in fact, as Henderson argues: “Turning ‘himself into the hero’ does not merely liven up a traveller’s tale; it also reinforces Western cultural chauvinism” (245). Although he is at the centre of the tale, Chatwin does not construct himself as hero as his quest is not for domination. Like Stevenson his travelled world is more “a world made safe for aesthetes” (*Anatomy* 131). By shying away from the encounter with enemies on his road he avoids exhibiting his weaknesses but he also avoids heroism. Richard Burton’s *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Hal-Hadinah and Meccah* tells of his journey through Arabia in 1855 and he depicts himself as a brave traveller who, as well as being the protagonist of his hazardous deeds, is also devoted to the imperialistic mission. Once, after he had managed to penetrate the Kaaba, he prided himself on this feat; he felt self-satisfied with a strong sense of achievement: “mine was

the ecstasy of gratified pride” (Korte 90). In “The Coup”, included in *WAIDH*, Chatwin is the victim of a dangerous episode but his stance is ironical, unemotional and full of sarcasm, even self-mockery as the “coup” was just a fake; he never narrates himself as the heroic adventurer. Similarly Chatwin’s account of his achievement in Patagonia sounds completely different from Burton’s:

Well, “I thought”, if there’s no skin, at least there’s a load of shit. And then, poking out of a section, I saw some strands of the coarse reddish hair I knew so well. I eased them out, slid them into an envelope and sat down, immensely pleased. I had accomplished the object of this ridiculous journey. (*IP* 182)

Although Chatwin feels he has accomplished the object of his journey, his is not a feeling of pride. If we find any pride in his account, it is disguised with sharp irony and an overpowering visual image that, like a photograph taken by surprise, captures the strength of reality in a small snapshot. He does narrate his snapshot: a piece of dung and bit of hair appear to be the culmination of a -now ridiculous- journey he had been nourishing in his imagination for years. When Chatwin reaches the cave and finally sees the remains of the mylodon (or Giant Sloth) he had been looking for, it is not uplifting triumph what we read about but an ironical account of the whole experience (*IP* 182). There is no feeling of victory as Chatwin is never part of a tragic plot, in the same way as he hardly ever endangers his life as travellers and explorers in the nineteenth century did. Neither does Chatwin celebrate triumph or homecoming with “ecstasy of pride” or “champagne” -like Waugh in *Labels* when he throws his champagne glass overboard on his journey back home- because he does not believe in the total completion of a journey. In fact, Chatwin’s feelings of homecoming are rather irrelevant. Thus the tripartite nature of the travel hero or narrator in traditional travel literature defined by

Campbell in his study on the archetypal monomyth of heroic adventure does not apply to Chatwin's experience. His "disjunction from the familiar" and "[his]return and reintegration into society" are not as appealing, as engaging as "the trials of initiation and adventure."<sup>6</sup> Chatwin narrows and diminishes the moments of heightened ritual or magic of the first and last stages of the tripartite experience. Peter Fleming, on the contrary, highlights the starting and the ending of a journey by magnifying the magical feeling upon returning, a moment when the traveller moves from a form of non-existence back to existence and recovers one's normal self-consciousness before the others. The traveller stops being an alien in a foreign country and "suddenly [on returning] encounters his other self, a relatively solid and considerable figure [...]" (Kowalewski 85).

As a result of his refusal to admit completed goals, neither is there any sign in his works of the journey as self-discovery and personal growth. At the end of his adventures, Chatwin does not become a different person; nor do his main characters discover anything about themselves. His travel account is not a *Bildungsroman* either, and the protagonist is not the traditional hero: he initiates, lives the middle phase and integrates himself in the new status but not as a new person. No doubt his polyphonic/choral stories comprise adventure, risk and monsters of one kind or another, but travelling is not the symbolic acting out of an inner journey. Here lies one of the differences between Chatwin's journey accounts and those of the travel writers of the 30s. Shattock contends that "[the] 30s writers turned their travels into interior journeys and parables of their times, making landscape and incident – the factual materials of reportage – do the work of symbol and myth – the material of fable" (Dodd 151). Like Stevenson, when he writes about his book *An Inland Voyage*, Chatwin focuses on the experience of travel rather than on the "digging into the corners of myself." (Korte 102)

Having said this, Chatwin and his characters do seek something. In a way there is a quest, as in many travel accounts, but the quest is real, not symbolic: in *IP* Chatwin's motive for his journey is to retrace the footsteps of a distant cousin and find the remains of a giant sloth. Even though he undervalues his finding in the cave, we perceive that there has certainly been some fieldwork done when we see him sliding the strands of the for-so-long sought reddish hair into an envelope. In *Utz* the narrator has to undertake some research on a collector of Meissen porcelain and is therefore sent to Utz in Prague. We follow the narrator's quest. However, in this novel Chatwin alters the idea of quest again because the protagonist reverses the traditional quest for the grail that is fundamental in Western literature: Utz already possesses the grail (his treasure is more than 1000 priceless Meissen figurines) which is like a curse for him. His quest has been really successful but his task is now to discover how to keep his collection out of the hands of those who do not appreciate its aesthetic value.<sup>7</sup> In *TS* the narrator is going to fulfil his lifelong desire to find out the secret of the nomads; he wants to study the Dreamtime in the Australian Outback and he is given the telephone number of an expert, Arkady, in Alice Springs. All of these quests sound like anthropological fieldwork and, in fact, are just that. Chatwin looks for objective facts and reliable data to furnish his fictional quests, so he includes some lines of investigation in them as part of the plot itself.

Secondly, the hero/narrator is not the picaresque type either (to connect with one of the traditional travel models), in as far as he does not redo the "other" world before coming home (Adams 199). The expatriates, outlaws and other wandering men and women in Patagonia do not show an interest in reconstructing the new world; theirs is rather a question of survival and adaptation. So the narrator in *TS* does not aim to rectify or redesign the other world because the new territory is more stable, rooted in

tradition and sacred than his own land; altering it would mean destroying it. Similarly the journey of Francisco da Silva, an exile in the African kingdom of Dahomey, in *TVOO* does not succeed in imposing a civilized-western vision of life onto the African tribal way of life; on the contrary, Ouidah transforms and ruins him.

To illustrate the concepts of transformation and discovery traditionally associated with the idea of quest, it is worth mentioning the visionary observations of Captain Joshua Slocum in *Sailing Alone Around the World*. Despite being less naive and unworldly, Chatwin's attitude towards a journey is similar in spirit and storytelling to that of Slocum after he completes his journey

Was the crew well? Was I not? I had profited in many ways by the voyage. I had even gained flesh, and actually weighed a pound more than when I sailed from Boston. As for aging, why, the dial of my life was turned back till my friends all said, "Slocum is young again." [...] My ship was also in better condition than when she sailed from Boston on her long voyage. She was still as sound as a nut, and as tight as the best ship afloat. (Slocum 278)

The transformation Slocum outlines is mostly physical; his concern is with the endurance and strength of both man and ship, and although he describes his psychological worries and his own Self in terms of loneliness and insignificance respectively, his main aim is a personal challenge of adventure, not a personal challenge of inner metamorphosis: "I had already found that it was not good to be alone, and so I made companionship with what there was around me, sometimes with the universe and sometimes with my own insignificant self." (Slocum 145)

Regarding the discoveries, Slocum's stance -like that of the 1930s traveller- is far from representing what Dodd has defined as the "culturally bestowed conviction of

superiority of the late eighteenth century traveller, nor the Edwardian traveller's confident exploitation of place as a source of renewal for himself and his reader" (128). He reports that the *Spray* did not discover new continents on her voyage and nor did she seek new worlds or sail just to boast about how dangerous the seas are. Slocum believes that

To find one's way to lands already discovered is a good thing, and the *Spray* made the discovery that even the worst sea is not so terrible to a well-appointed ship. No king, no country, no treasury at all, was taxed for the voyage of the *Spray*, and she accomplished all that she undertook to do. (Slocum 279)

Slocum's adventure around the world *is his own* adventure, insofar as there is no scientific mission, no form of aristocratic education and no cultural heroism. In the same way, the lack of *terra incognita* does not make him feel less well provided with moments of novelty and adventure for he finds this where other travellers and travel writers would not. He befriends westerners of all nationalities throughout his journey but he writes about them from a detached position because he is aware that man alone at sea is different from man in society, even if this society has been formed far away from the metropolis of Europe or America. By setting himself in a special "maligned" medium like the sea, he justifies his condition of both solitary adventurer and expert captain, and ultimately vindicates his individual rather than his national commitment. Slocum's wanderlust finds in seafaring the optimum condition and mood; Chatwin's sense of wanderlust is shown in the geographical variety of his books. For both writers travelling abroad is a great opportunity to present transculturation without questioning the relationship of power between the different poles but by diverting the reader's attention to their own fantasies, desires and even transgressions. Neither of them shows

a complicity with imperialism even though Slocum's ship hoists the Union Jack as well as his "own noble flag" the Stars and Stripes, and Chatwin never denies he is English when he is out of England. Slocum meets representatives of colonialism all along the way such as a resident magistrate on the northern coast of Australia, a harbour master and a botanist in charge of a scientific expedition. In Mauritius he visits the proprietor of a great flower conservatory who has just discovered a "new and hardy plant" which to his great honour will be named "Slocum." He exclaims how different things are in different countries and comments:

In Boston, Massachusetts, at that time, a gentleman, so I was told, paid thirty thousand dollars to have a flower named after his wife, and it was not a big flower either, while "Slocum," which came without the asking, was bigger than a mangel-wurzel! (Slocum 229)

Irony enables him to distance himself from his own society and to develop a particular vision of adventure, a particular Slocum-like way of travelling. This is something Chatwin also managed to accomplish seventy years later: to create a personal narrative style -a Chatwinesque manner- to illustrate a personal adventure. Slocum's quest is not a quest for glory or literary reputation but simply a desire to experience the joy of sailing: "And now, without having wearied my friends, I hope, with detailed scientific accounts, theories, or deductions, I will only say that I have endeavoured to tell just the story of the adventure itself" (Slocum 279). In contrast to *TS*, in which the account of "the story of the adventure itself" is encompassed by theories on nomadism and philosophical deductions derived from his notebooks, *IP* offers a similar approach to storytelling and irony to that of Slocum. The quest for the piece of skin of his long sought after brontosaurus (*IP* 5) and its finding does not transform him into the hero of an expedition, nor is the moment of discovery a vision or epiphany. Unlike Meador I

would argue that Chatwin does not envision his quest in mythic terms; neither do I agree that “he departs Patagonia a sober and more thoughtful traveller” (Meanor 36). It is the sheer being on the move to reach the objective which really matters; his imagination -not his attempts at introspection- has been fulfilled. This is something that Meanor finally concedes when he comments on *IP*:

[Chatwin] also discovered the absurdity of his own quest, to replace his family’s grail – the piece of mylodon sloth skin that Uncle Charley Milward brought back to England in the early part of the twentieth century. Chatwin made that most important realization serendipitously; that is, *on his way* to the ancient cave to find a replacement for the family treasure, he realized that the journey itself was the treasure. (Meanor 8)

Chatwin’s lack of self-discovery forethoughts can be inferred in his story “On Yeti Tracks”. In spite of the myth that travelling in Tibet produces personal transformation, Chatwin’s story approaches the mythical place and its fabled inhabitants differently. His quest for the Yeti in Tibet is first the realm of imagination which he aims to find in “that nebulous area of zoology where the Beast of Linnaean classification meets the Beast of the Imagination” (*WAIDH* 271), second the confirmation of the fact that “Man’s real home is not a house, but the Road, and that life itself is a journey to be walked on foot” (273) and third the confession that “I still have no idea what these ‘Yeti tracks’ were. My whole life has been a search for the miraculous: yet at the first faint flavour of the uncanny, I tend to turn rational and scientific” (282). Imagination, wandering and the miraculous are the essential reasons why Chatwin set off on a journey; these goals are far from representing the spiritual quest or the initiation voyage of self-discovery in Asia. His journey into Tibet represents the essence of travel rather than the narration of personal ecstasy or the



search for eastern wisdom and mysticism. The title of Chatwin's article has nothing to do with the titles of this sub-genre that Mark Cocker lists and questions: "*Secret Tibet, The Truth About Tibet, The Opening of Tibet, Tibet the Mysterious, Tibet: A Lost World, A Year in Tibet [...] Twenty Years in Tibet*" (Cocker 240).<sup>8</sup> Chatwin's particular pursuit of the Yeti moves away from the long process of spiritual exploration which all of these titles try to describe. As if he was trying to recover the major role of geography per se in traditional travel writing, he chooses a mythical geography like the Himalayas as one last frontier where three empires (British, Russian and Chinese) meet and confront each other and where an overpowering in-between landscape is not silenced for the sake of the man's quest.

Escape is the third motive for a voyage: escape from nation, from civilization and its routine, even from the Self. Buford explains that the most noticeable attraction of travel writing is in what it represents: escape, and that this itch, this need to keep moving, is evident not only in the texts but also in the lives of the authors themselves. (*Granta 10* 6). He also affirms that for some writers like Jonathan Raban and Hugh Brody escape has become an obsession. Central to the discussion of Chatwin's need to flee is the question as to whether it is simply a wish to break away from both home and its moral limitations and from the Self, or merely the wish to fulfil a passion for travel. Chatwin's journeys are in one way or another concerned with getting away from England or being somewhere else; in Shakespeare's words: "It was his English pain. He greeted it as an old friend. It was the pain that told him to head south" (359). Shakespeare also observes that: "[Chatwin] didn't like England, but that is very English too. The British Empire, after all, was based on people trying to get away from England" (6). Graves (2003) admits that the recurrent theme of escape peculiar to the British travel writer has been to get away from the claustrophobia of his little island, a

desire which Chatwin expressed in a few well-chosen words, “compactly ‘I Always Wanted to Go to Patagonia’” (54). Insularity, then, could be considered a determining factor in the cultural psyche of a country, bearing in mind that in Britain “[u]nlike continental European countries, there is no liminal space of transition and acculturation” (54).<sup>9</sup> This search for a space of transition seems to be why Chatwin insistently pursued liminal spaces both inside and outside his country. If his belonging to an island should imprint both a motive for travelling and a pre-determined choice of literary genre upon him, his belief in liminality completed that mark of flight and diversified his literary style.

Thus the interpretation of the pull of wider horizons cannot be limited to the fact that Chatwin came from an island, but must be attributed to other motives which he developed in his writing. Chatwin’s flight should be examined as the fictionalisation of his attempts to escape from his obsessions: storytelling, travelling, connecting and collecting. Chatwin might have tried to break free from them all and found himself unable to do so. Therefore, he transformed them into new channels of fiction and non-fiction and in doing so he transformed the traditional idea of escape from the Self, recognisable in some conventional travel texts, into an innovative form of escape from the Self, to be found in his unconventional travel writing. He fled from fixations rather than from homes and constructed an extensive map of interrelations.

Buford declares that when he was preparing his collection of travel accounts in *Granta 10* it was not easy to reach Chatwin as he seemed to be “congenitally absent [...] I heard a rumour that his rucksack had arrived, mysteriously, at a friend’s flat” (*Granta 10* 6). Theroux also observes that Chatwin was intensely solitary and that “he was given to sudden disappearances” and that his expeditions were “one-man affairs” (*Granta 44* 213). Interestingly enough, Chatwin himself writes about Stevenson: “One

side of Stevenson was the perennial boy with the pack on his back, always happier to be somewhere else, unable to face the complications of sex, and ready to work it off on a bike. He belongs, in spirit, to a long line of literary vagabonds.” (*Anatomy* 134)

More than a century later Raban writes in *Coasting* that one of the reasons for his trip was that he was “[p]ossessed by the idea of making [his] own escape into this wilderness” (41). His story as a sailor around England becomes his story as a man and as an Englishman. Korte considers Raban’s trip in *Coasting* “both a search for the essence of his ‘fatherland’ and the traveller’s quest for his own personal identity -an identity in large measure defined by the relationship with his father” (135). Raban, like other travellers and literary travellers, comes to a point where he feels bound to assess his own nationality and also to clarify his place in the particular kind of world that was inescapably awaiting him just because he had been born in England. It is then that he unavoidably generates intellectual and emotional connections. Raban confronts the idea of Englishness through two different channels: first, by identifying it with his father when he claims that England was his father’s land, not his (*Coasting* 17) and second, by setting himself against former travellers, both the old writer-voyagers and the voyagers who were dreamers like himself. He declares that he feels united to the former because they all experienced a “compulsive itch for the escape valve of a wilderness, and open frontier, and [a] common discovery that even now Britain does have a last frontier, in the sea” (35); he identifies with the latter because they were people who shared his own dream “of making an escape from an overcrowded country in a private ark.” (167)

Unlike Slocum, Raban is involved in a search for a wider, less claustrophobic world rather than in a display of skill at seamanship; however in both writers it is the sea that provides them with the very last frontier. What unites Chatwin, Raban and MacGregor, Middleton, McMullen and Belloc is a “craze for solitary coasting” (35).

Chatwin always admired the adventures of solitary travellers and he usually travelled light and alone.<sup>10</sup> Although the travellers and writers Raban mentions in his novel met and were befriended by people along the way, they were in fact engrossed in the solitary experiences of writing and sailing. Enzensberger provides a convincing argument when he affirms that even though Chatwin was a solitary wanderer and solitary wanderers are a product of the imperialist past,

there was no other trace of colonial views in Chatwin. He was not concerned with the dealing of foreign cultures only. He aimed to spot what foreign and strange was to be found within these cultures; and he did so in a much more determined way than his predecessors

T.E.Lawrence or E.M.Foster, George Orwell or Malcom Lowry. (Balmes 122)<sup>11</sup>

Duncan and Gregory (1999) explain that over the course of the nineteenth century travelling became a bourgeois experience, born out of the combination of romanticism and industrialism. Romanticism granted travelling a new dimension: Reason did not rule the space of representation but “unconstrained impulse, individual expression and the creative spirit” (6). Personal perception -and hence the duality of truth and lies- prevailed over objective observation. At the core of romantic travel was the appeal for “the wildness of nature, cultural difference and the desire to be immersed in local colour” (6). The slower and more solitary the experience, the more authentic the experience was. Duncan and Gregory characterize the nineteenth century romantic traveller as: “the young bourgeois fleeing the dull repetitions and the stifling mundanity of the bourgeois world” (6). Although the longing for immersion into the wilderness and the local as well as the need to flee from stifling social and cultural circumstances seem to be the recurrent motivations of the nineteenth century wayfarer, they also

express the motivations of twentieth century romantic travellers such as Chatwin and Raban. These two writers at some point admitted their desire to run away from home; in Raban's words: "I was indignant when I was mistaken for a comeover, because this, surely, was exactly where I'd spent my childhood: the Island was Home with a capital H – the home I had always been running away from." (*Coasting* 79)

The fourth motive for travelling to be considered within the taxonomy of travel writing is manifold. It includes the concepts of home, belonging and nationality. Balmes (2002) speculates on whether Chatwin was the Englishman who left Sotheby's because he wanted to flee from his small country and see the world, as well as on whether *TS* is the literary justification of Chatwin's wanderlust or a covert way of expressing his extreme need to escape. In an interview with Michael Ignatieff,<sup>12</sup> Chatwin declares he has the feeling he can only be English, behave as such and only regard himself as an Englishman when he is not at home; that is so because he has a love-hate relationship with his own country. Chatwin's attitude to Englishness is difficult to trace and judge. On the one hand, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that he tried to escape from English culture. He spent only short periods of time in England, his journeys around the world and his stays in Europe becoming his real home. On the other hand, he finds it hard to detach himself from England, his wife, his friends and his collections. We even see Chatwin's fondness for Britain in his fascination with British territory, which dates back to his school days when Bruce's stamp collection "was drawn exclusively from the British colonies" (Shakespeare 58) and continues through Malraux's "pro-English" words in *WAIDH*, where he praises England as the last country to have "*une grande création de l'homme*" (121). Chatwin is defining his positive vision of Englishness. The double-sided nature of his viewpoint was to affect many of the issues tackled in his texts because Chatwin is in-between, simultaneously

displaying both refusal and admiration. The dissolution of boundaries and his challenging of Englishness both in his novels and in his travel writing represent the ontological liberties he was personally looking for.

Chatwin's friend Francis Wyndham said that "Bruce thought internationally" (Shakespeare 540) and Theroux commented that Chatwin never struck him as being "thoroughly English" (*Chatwin Revisited* 218). Chatwin himself once declared that being an Englishman made him uneasy and according to Shakespeare:

He called England "*le tombeau vert*", the green tomb, and to a friend in Sidney began a letter: "a quick note *in extremis*, i.e. from London". The wife of Carlos Fuentes assured him, "You are not English at all." He looked pleased. He liked to misquote the actress Arletty, telling how his nationality was one thing- "but mon cul is international." (7)

I agree with Enzensberger (Balmes 122) when he suggests that, in spite of the tight connection between solitary wanderers and an imperialist past, Chatwin should be set apart from colonial views. First, because he overtly condemned imperialism. Second, because Chatwin defined himself as a traveller of the Vietnam-era who not only embodied the English traveller but also the international; he recalls that in the 1960s many people were "on the way" (Balmes 123). The between-the-wars generation of poets and writers also represent the popular interest in the travel motif. Among them we find Eliot, Sassoon and Macleish who shared "a mentality, a collective state of mind, that left its imprint on the language and literature of the 1920s" (Kowalewski 77).<sup>13</sup> According to Fussell: "Sacred to this generation is the image not just of the traveller but of the wanderer, the vagabond, or even Chaplin's cinema tramp, all skilled in the techniques of shrew evasion and makeshift appropriate to the age's open road" (77). Both the urge to be "on the way" of Chatwin's generation and the figure of "the

open road” of the between-the-wars generation are factors that enticed young people to lead an itinerant existence and to metaphorically link the act of travelling and the act of reading.

Not only does Chatwin refuse to be exclusively labelled as English but he also regards the English class system as the origin of a castrating anxiety. To him, travelling brings enormous relief, a way of avoiding the pressure from upper and lower layers of society and he enjoys being the travelling Englishman instead of the domestic one. Although he never denies his Englishness when travelling abroad, he certainly despises some aspects of his society, such as the class war and its pedantic triviality.<sup>14</sup>

While Chatwin finds the English pedantic, he really admires the French for both their inquisitive mindset and their attitude towards culture and progress. Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin explains that her husband felt ashamed of the English way of thinking because it lacked -he said- intellectual zeal, openness and curiosity. Chatwin felt stifled in his own home and that might have been one of the sources of his feeling of restlessness and homelessness. She tells the story that one day her husband was in a taxi in Paris and he happened to mention the Parisian literary magazine *Apostrophes* to the taxi driver. To his surprise the taxi driver knew the magazine quite well. That impressed Chatwin very much and reaffirmed his belief in the cultured minds of most French people, regardless of their social background and profession.<sup>15</sup> Chatwin spoke French fluently and read in French eagerly. His favourite writers are found among well-known French poets and novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even those authors and texts who were not commonly read at the time such as Rousseau’s *Des reveries du prometeur solitaire*, Gide’s *Nourritures terrestres*, Rimbaud’s *Les Illuminations* and Le Comte Xavier de Maistre’s *Voyage autour de ma chambre*.<sup>16</sup> Chatwin himself confesses his inclination for French culture and artists when he names Baudelaire, Nerval and

Rimbaud and declares that: “I loved everything French – painting, furniture, poetry, history, food -and, of course, I was haunted by the career of Paul Gauguin” (*Anatomy* 10). Theroux also thinks that Chatwin was rather a cosmopolitan man who loved France, who felt free in America and fascinated by China and Russia. Everywhere seemed better than his Britain. This stance was also present in the 1930s when, according to Korte, the intellectual climate had become “oppressive and narrowing” (Korte 140). Chatwin’s less than constructive attitude towards England could also be elicited from Fussell’s interpretation of the turning abroad of so many writers in the 1930s:

The main loss in England was a loss of amplitude, a decay of imaginative and intellectual possibility corresponding to the literal loss of freedom.

The very theatre of thought and feeling contracted; the horizons closed in [...] the tone of England turned stuffy, complacent, cruel, bullying, and small-minded. (Korte 140)

More than forty years separate the England of the 1930s from Chatwin’s England of the 1970s-1980s, but little seems to have changed. Waugh in *Labels* shows his dislike of England and Greene in *Journey Without Maps* looks for alternatives to “the lifelessness and constriction of their own country” (Korte 140). Chatwin refused constrictions all his life and even though the plots of his stories might show uneventfulness, lifelessness is definitely not their flaw; on the contrary they communicate a convincing joy of being alive, aesthetic innovation, individual freedom and the possibility of change. Chatwin was against the “intellectual and moral pusillanimity” of man that Fussell criticises and in favour of the writer’s “internal freedom and philosophic courage,” which Fussell considers one of the requirements the writer of a good travel book should fulfil. (Kowalewski 81)



Chatwin also reflected on exile as an alternative to journeying and homecoming even though he once declared: “There is something horribly claustrophobic about my country and yet [...] I cannot get used to the life of exile” (Shakespeare 345). Michel’s concept of exile is based on the idea that being an exile does not mean seeing a new country but leaving one’s own. He asserts that in the act of being an exile there is also the need to be somebody else, as in a transitory rebirth which leads to the rediscovery of oneself. In Michel’s view, when setting off there is always a loss but also a gain; the most important thing is “to be aware of this” (Michel 121).<sup>17</sup> Despite his dissatisfaction with his own country and his frequent urge to escape from it, Chatwin does not want to become an exile. Utz, the main character of his fifth novel, does not want to join the flow of exiles either: “He would not sit complaining in rented rooms. He knew that anti-Communist rhetoric was as deadly as its Communist counterpart. He would not give up his country. Not for them.” (*Utz* 87)

Chatwin looks for an alternative to nationality: the multiple nationality, a deeper understanding of what has been called “hyphenated subjectivities” or “hyphenated identities”: “I explain that I am Ukrainian-Canadian and that the hyphen is essential” (Korte 171)<sup>18</sup> which would represent a step further from what Chatwin found both in the telephone directory of Buenos Aires: “the history of Buenos Aires is written in its telephone directory. Pompey Romanov, Emilio Rommel, Ladislao Radzimpl [...] told a story of exile, disillusion and anxiety behind lace curtains” (*IP* 7) and in the mixture of races and motherlands in Australia described in *TS*. Chatwin develops his belief in the “dynamic of belonging and becoming”<sup>19</sup> based on the fact that in our postmodern and postcolonial age we live a time of uncertain identities. Chatwin is aware that identities cannot be negotiated as easily as before, but he does not envisage the solution to this loss to be portraying England with nostalgia so as to maintain the old traditional values.

Nor does he strive for any reasonable explanation to insecurities about the sense of belonging. The question is still open: what is home? where is home?

According to Korte it has become extremely difficult for postcolonial writers to define their own home; sometimes “the search for a home may even be their primary motive for travel” (Korte 170). As early as 1895 Captain Joshua Slocum wrote that “[a]n Englishman, even on his great battle-ship, unbends when the stranger passes his gangway, and when he says “At home” he means it” (Slocum 48). Home can be the sea or a ship in Slocum; similarly home can be a farm, a one-bedroom apartment and the other side of the Iron Curtain in Chatwin who claims that: “Home, after all, is where your friends are” (*Anatomy* 15). To Chatwin home is also the road and the journey itself; that could be the reason why he found the nomad’s idea of a journey without an end so fascinating: “a kind of nonteleological journey whose only purpose was the continuation of its own circular, cyclic process.” (Meanor 100)

In Chatwin’s life story, home is often represented precisely by a homelessness that was deeply and happily experienced during his early childhood (*TS* 5, *Anatomy* 5) and which would determine his adulthood in terms of both physical and existential movement. Later in his life Chatwin would theorize about nomadism in *TS* in his attempt to understand why man -and definitely himself- so often feels the urge to wander. Homelessness, then, became a theory and a *Weltanschauung*. However, it also became an aesthetic symbol: the suitcase or the rucksack embody two aspects of human life: agency and contingency, meaning that human beings are simultaneously action and eventuality as everybody is what they do and what they carry with them on their journeys. In Chatwin’s personal views of home, home can be anywhere as well as any object: “[home] if we had one, was a solid black suitcase called the Rev-Robe, in which

there was a corner for my clothes and my Mickey Mouse gas-mask. I knew that, once the bombs began to fall, I could curl up inside the Rev-Robe, and be safe.” (TS 6)

Home has become a difficult term to define in the context of post-colonialism. In some of his travel books such as *An Area of Darkness*, *The Middle Passage*, *Among the Believers* and *A Turn in the South* Naipaul feels like an outsider everywhere and his sense of home becomes complex. Unlike most travel writers, who write about foreign places with a clear sense of where they come from because they know where home is, and thus what is familiar and unfamiliar, in Chatwin what is unfamiliar is “universally” unfamiliar, not the opposite to home, home being England, but the equivalent to the uncanny. As a result, the unfamiliar and the idea of strangeness in his texts does not come from an outlook of geographical and cultural dislocation or an awareness of uprootedness but from a rather metaphysical angle which is not to be found in post-colonial literature. Korte (2000) states that writers such as Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, Amitar Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Pico Iyer, Vikram Seth and Tahir Shah intimate a mixed sense of belonging inasmuch as they might be in one sense “at home” and in another sense “abroad” when they visit a place. Korte also contends that in Naipaul there is a clear attempt to search for a real origin and for his own people as he does not know who his own people are or where he is going to locate his identity “among the Indians, West Indians or the English in “Big England”?” (175). He seems to need to belong to somewhere when in *An Area of Darkness* he writes that when he visits India he is a “translated man” (175), belonging neither to one place nor to the other. Chatwin did not experience this mixed sense of belonging as he never felt the need to justify his origin or his race and neither did he ever feel translated nor show a proprietorial attitude towards his own country. He left England and came back at will and said his home was the road. His narcissistic streak and his self-centredness are rather a personal vein than a

wish for a national identity and this is what really alters his sense of belonging.

Likewise Chatwin's attitude towards home resembles that of the trickster, who is able to make himself at home in places other than home, because he knows how to adapt himself to new environments and wander around at ease. Either because he usually felt trapped within the structures of his own culture or he believed transformations are at the core of human nature, he found it easy to turn into someone different, at least outwardly. Despite his restlessness, though, he always came back: home and to himself.

Connected to the ideas of quest, escape, home and belonging is egotism.

Chatwin has been accused of being arrogant, an egotist, a poseur, a scrounger<sup>20</sup> who often took for granted both his friends and his wife. However, we should look at his egotism from a new perspective. Travelling alone feeds egotism because the traveller, even while he relates to other individuals and groups along the way, is usually left to his own devices; also he often feels the desire to see things for himself. The traveller-writer becomes the only teller of his own adventure and by *being* the narrative centre he believes the tale must be *his* tale. From this statement, literary egotism could be justified in terms of narrative self-centredness and not in terms of idolatry. That is Chatwin's position. Likewise Kinglake in *Eothen* acknowledges "the egotism of a traveller [...] His very selfishness, his habit of referring the whole external world to his own sensations" (5). In *Coasting* Raban mentions egotism as well; to him the egotism of a man by himself in a boat is reinforced by the surroundings as out on the water sailors become the centrifugal point of the world; they realize that the universe has not been constructed to satisfy their needs:

Either out in the water or in the Patagonian fields or in the Australian desert, navigators and travellers turn into epicentres "*Geocentric* and

*egocentric* are one small typing error apart; in celestial navigation, I had at last hit on a cosmology I could live with. (120)

Raban is expressing the contradictions within travel writers themselves. On the one hand, they are the centre of the tale in their “lumpy patch of water” (119). On the other hand, geographical and social circumstances force them to accept their insignificance in more global contexts. What we see in Raban, we see in Chatwin and in other travel writers: the creation of a cosmology in which they accommodate their personalities and their style and which justifies-eventually amends- their egotism. Their “searches” -a term coined by Chatwin to define *TS* (Murray 12)- are certainly to be found in different ways of travelling but they all contain a compulsive fictionalising of experience. Schramer (1999) defines this fictionalisation of experience as one element of transformation of travel writing after Chatwin, Raban, Thubron, Gavin Young and other British travel writers, “[a transformation] from an often unabashedly imperialist genre into a postmodern form of personal narrative.”<sup>21</sup>

The motives for travelling analysed so far have brought to light Chatwin’s position within the general panorama of travel writing. His motivation resembles and at the same time differs from the motivation of other travellers who, like him, felt the urge to transform their wanderlust into a narrative experiment. Some of these narrative experiments have in turn transformed the traditional taxonomy and stereotypes of travel literature. Chatwin is to be found among these “transgressors.” Now I turn to consider the way in which he developed this change within the genre.

Chatwin’s treatment of past and ancestors plays an essential role in this change. In order to explore such a role, I will start by contrasting Raban’s memories of places and family in his travel text *Coasting*. Raban’s presence in this comparative analysis is essential not only because he shows that in travel writing the past can be approached by

questioning it instead of recreating it through simulacra, but also because he suggests that through travel writing the author can reveal part of his autobiographical cargo. Raban and Chatwin belonged to the same generation of 1980s writers but they tried to escape from the influence of history and nation differently. The burden which the ancestors represented for Raban is an aesthetic legacy for Chatwin; the former feels encumbered and enslaved by them, the latter feels inspired and liberated. One of Raban's destinations is the Isle of Man where he spent his childhood in his father's parsonage. He writes that it had been furnished not by his parents but by "some dreadful personages whom we called The Ancestors" (*Coasting* 80).

The Ancestors we find in Raban's text could be connected to Chatwin's own Ancestors. These are Chatwin's grandmother and great aunts, the old cousin Charlie Milward, uncle Geoffrey<sup>22</sup>, a "nebulous French ancestor" (*Anatomy* 3) even his grandfather and his yacht the *Aireymouse*.<sup>23</sup> They all fed his imagination and inflamed his wanderlust and through them he found the origin of his own identity: the books he read on their bookshelves, the myriad of objects-wonders he beheld in a glass-fronted cabinet and the atlases he leafed through (*Meanor* ix). He associated books with being on the move, with the mysterious and with safety. Likewise Raban's Ancestors had left his family all sorts of objects among which there were "aspidistra bowls, barometers, walking sticks, pin cushions, samplers, crested silver and old shoes" (*Coasting* 80). However, Chatwin and Raban show different ways of recovering the family past. Raban senses the presence of their Ancestors at home negatively because their Ancestors not only outnumbered them but also outclassed them: "So much cleverer, more adventurous and richer than we were ourselves, the Ancestors were our island heritage, our history, our men of yore, and we crept bashfully about in their long shadows (81). In contrast, Chatwin admires his old relatives and finds them a source of inspiration. In a way,

Chatwin's ancestors open up a whole collection of aesthetic possibilities, while Raban bears a grudge against them.

Raban remembers his father often being busy tracing their family tree. This concern with kinship upset him, as if keeping the Ancestors alive had stolen his father's love and attention. This custody of the past had darkened Raban's childhood years and his vision of the future of Britain. That might be the reason why he always wanted to escape from these "slablike" (81) portrayed lives, maybe fearing that his own life would become stifling and pinned down on the bottom line of a family tree. By travelling away from home and questioning his father's sickly attachment to his forefathers, he was in turn questioning his own attachment to his father: "Every time I looked my father in the eye, I felt the depth of my own failure. He represented all the things that I knew that I was doomed to flunk" (*Coasting* 18). In his fiction Chatwin does not discover himself through his father. Nevertheless, he shows his feelings of affection towards him in "Your Father's Eyes Are Blue Again" and in "A Place to Hang Your Hat" where Chatwin's absent father is depicted as a hero:

My father has the most beautiful blue eyes I have ever seen in a man. I do not say this because he is my father. They are mariner's eyes, level and steady. On the Malta convoys they scanned the surface of the sea for mines, or the horizon for an enemy warship. They are the eyes of a man who has never known the meaning of dishonesty. They have never tempted him to anything mean or shoddy. (*WAIDH* 9)

Chatwin writes that when he was four years old and he visited his father, the captain of the *Cynthia* at the time. Aboard his ship the place he liked the most was his father's cabin where there was a photograph of him on a shelf "[...] And ever since, the rooms which have really appealed my imagination have been ships' cabins, log cabins, monks'

cells” (*Anatomy* 15). During Chatwin’s childhood his father was always away at sea as a result of the war. Raban’s father was always at home, devoted to his parish. With their fathers at home or away, in their presence or in their absence, Raban and Chatwin developed divergent psychological mechanisms to enable them to confront their own ghosts of reminiscence as well as to learn how to get rid of them and how to integrate them in their travel accounts.

The second connection between Raban’s Ancestors and Chatwin’s is found in the idea of “the Ancestors” developed in Chatwin’s *TS*. In this hybrid book, half novel, half essay, the Australian Ancestors are the Fathers of Australia and a ‘tjuringa’ is the actual body of the Ancestor (pass pro toto)” (*TS* 286). In the fictional and ideological world Chatwin recreates in the book, he claims the existence of a common universal kinship which unites all human beings. In the mind of the native Australians the concept of “father” includes both a human being and the earth:

A man knew very well who his father was. Yet, there was, in addition, a kind of parallel paternity which tied his soul to one particular point in the landscape.// Each Ancestor, while singing his way across country, was believed to have left a trail of “life-cells” or “spirit-children” along the line of his footprints.// “A kind of musical sperm,” said Arkady, making everyone laugh again: even, this time, Flynn. (*TS* 60)

Rather than the providers of a national identity, the Ancestors in *TS* are universalising, shamanic elements. *TS*, much more than a description of the Aboriginal tradition of Dreamtime and the songlines which criss-cross the entire continent of Australia, is also a studied account of reminiscence. The family tree in Chatwin’s cosmos -in contrast to Raban’s- extends beyond branches bound together by a common blood; it reaches higher layers of connection. When he writes about his ancestors he makes them



fictional but when he writes about the Australian “father” ancestors he makes them real. By doing so, we perceive the clear intention of avoiding divulging personal wounds or showing attachments to either people or country as what matters in his work is neither his Britishness nor the possibility of escaping from either this Britishness or from the Self. By researching on universal links and presenting the Australian Ancestors as everybody else’s ancestors, he places himself at a distance and becomes one of the crowd.

Chatwin’s concern with ancestors and forebears comes from his primary interest in the interwoven relationship between past and present and how this tight connection - usually transmitted through storytelling- determines the apprehension of a place and its people. An example of his interest in the recreation of the past and its aesthetic consequences is the incorporation of museums and simulacra<sup>24</sup> in his writing. In Patagonia, when Chatwin reaches Tierra del Fuego, a Salesian father gives him the key to the local museum in Río Grande where he views artefacts of the now-extinct Indians Ona and Haush, Alakaluf, and Yaghan, some of them foot hunters, others canoe hunters. On the shelves of the museum “which seems a mausoleum for the native tribes” (Meanor 27) the narrator sees:

Their bones and equipment decayed on the glass shelves – bows, quivers, harpoons, baskets, guanaco capes – set alongside the material advances brought by a God, who taught them to disbelieve the spirits of moss and stones and set them to petit-point, crochet and copy-book exercises (examples of which were on display).” (*IP* 109)

The vision of these exhibited objects is certainly a dramatic experience for the narrator. He lives a threshold moment where two cultures simultaneously share a space and clash; one of them obviously overpowering the other, illustrated through some trivial

symbols of western civilization. Similarly when Chatwin visits the museum in Punta Arenas he realizes how the Yaghan Indians have been depicted: they look like apes in contrast to the beautiful and serene image of the virgin (*IP* 144). Chatwin never explicitly condemns the agenda of the European colonizers; nevertheless, he repeatedly presents the extinction of the Indians of Tierra del Fuego as the undeniable result of western colonialism. For a traveller abroad like Chatwin such museums do not entail a better knowledge of the unknown but the source of a shock as they force the recognition of the cruellest sides of one's own culture. The cultural gaze is then blurred, if not completely modified.

The traveller in the late twentieth century is aware of the different cultural models of representation and interpretation. However, the gaze that has exerted most control over the literary scenario has been the postmodern and the postcolonial conditions. The postmodern condition is shown in a constant and excessive production of images of the Self and sometimes of the cultural gaze. Therefore, phenomena such as replication and duplication become the core of many texts that illustrate the process of image making, rather than a process of what these images are and how they function. Jonathan White maintains that the simulacrum is fundamental to this process:

Simulacra, it would seem, are an essential part of the postcolonial condition because of the cultural referentiality involved. When a culture attempts to represent itself, its own "culturalness," the images become crucial to the ideological and historical sense of the society. (200)

Neither Raban nor Chatwin can escape from witnessing postmodern signs either in their own England or in foreign landscapes. In *Coasting* Raban writes about the Isle of Man, Lymington and Rye as three models of representation of the past which have become simulacra. The Isle of Man has become a theme park with its miniature railways and

roads; it is like a “a Lilliputian setting trying to represent something else; a simulacrum devoid of meaning and real historical meaning” (62). Lymington has been maintained as a museum and the ways of speech and feeling of the retired gentry brand “the tone of the place” (164). Rye with its Rye Town Model has been turned into “a perfect scale replica of the place [...] for Rye itself was a model town: this was a model of a model, a picture within a picture, the second step of an infinite regression.” (206-209)

Much to Raban’s disgust, Rye Town Model somehow works as a representation of Britain at large. Again the problem of representation in postmodern travel writing strikes the reader as an unresolved issue. In Raban’s book, the solution to a national problem -that of Britain becoming a “service industry”- seems to lead to the reopening of old productive locations such as the pits and mines as museums. Similarly in Chatwin when he analyses some historical landmarks presented as museums or relics of the past in the towns near the Volga; emblematic communist monuments no longer represent the reality of a country but past realities whose value is encapsulated in their museum-like nature.

Chatwin in *TVOO* reflects on the idea of real people impersonating fictional characters. In *Cobra Verde*, the cinema version of *TVOO* directed by Herzog, the role of the King of a tribe in Dahomey is performed by the real African king of this tribe. In “Werner Herzog in Ghana” Chatwin explains that this native authority seems to have enjoyed portraying himself in a film and Chatwin himself praises Herzog’s decision to hire and film a *real* court as well as some “real members of a hunting tribe in the north” (*WAIDH* 140). Chatwin approved of the presence of this king and other tribesmen in the filming because, as in his travel accounts, he was acknowledging the existence of a fine line between fiction and reality and the possibility of identity transitions. The anthropologist Marc Augé in his study on the impact of tourism on the contemporary

world criticises the tourist's vision of exotic countries; to him it is an illusory fictitious vision of the place. He feels sad about the attitude of some native people who have ended up looking like the image that the tourist wishes to see. He remembers travelling around Kenya and seeing a Masai who was playing the role of a Masai merely to sell things to a group of tourists. Augé refuses to take part in the game of regarding other human beings as objects of an industry that sells fiction and spectacle in which everybody wears a disguise; in fact, he criticises all the simulacrum-relationships that stimulate fake roles.<sup>25</sup> In *Coasting* Raban criticises the "Britain's scenery" which Rye tries to sell. Some people from the village become actors and actresses for a while to entertain the tourists. "It is, as Plato argued when he banned the profession from his Republic, a dangerous thing to treat people as actors because they tend to lose any secure sense of their own authenticity" (*Coasting* 212). Neither Raban nor Chatwin approve of these theatrical stages aimed at business where there are few chances left to enjoy watching real things.

As in Raban, besides the recognition of ancestors and the transitional quality of time, there is an element which also models Chatwin's recreation of the past and questions the "ideological and historical sense of the society" (White 200); this is his particular vision of duplication. Jacinta Matos provides a convincing argument when she examines a recurrent phenomenon in the travel writing of the last three decades: the reduplication of old journeys. Matos states that the purpose of many modern texts is to revisit places and recover journeys. She adds that these journeys show a double nature: the traveller narrates his own real experience in the present but at the same time he gives life to a past account, thus creating a double focus: "a journey made by somebody in the past is duplicated by a contemporary traveller, and a prior text is articulated with a present narrative. The old journey serves, that is, both as pretext and pre-text"

(Kowalewski 219). In “A Lament for Afghanistan” (*WAIDH* 286-293) Chatwin does not follow Robert Byron’s *The Road of Oxiana* -which tells of Byron’s journey through Persia and Afghanistan in 1933 and 1934- faithfully, but reopens an Afghan world different from the one Byron encountered: it is a lament rather than a duplication of a former journey. *IP* was in Chatwin’s imagination before he could read the travel-log or the sea stories written by Charley Milward. More than Afghanistan in “A Lament for Afghanistan”, Patagonia was a “pretext” not a “pre-text”. The way in which Chatwin tries to duplicate the original journeys does not correspond to what Matos negatively considers to be the tendency of some contemporary texts, that is the way some authors duplicate former journeys not simply using occasional references to other texts but “deliberately [shaping] their new journeys in terms of previous ones, retracing an already travelled route with the purpose of reliving another’s experience. (Kowalewski 220)

Chatwin is aware of the heavy burden prior readings bear on a writer and he wants to feel free from this mediation; then he remarks: “My reason for coming to Australia was to try to learn for myself, and not from other men’s books, what a Songline was -and how it worked. Obviously, I was not going to get to the heart of the matter, nor would I want to.” (*TS* 12) To Meanor intertextuality is an ubiquitous element in *TS* because Chatwin’s reading of Strehlow’s *Songs of Central Australia* and *Aranda Traditions* is what brought him to Australia: “In a sense Chatwin’s readers are reading Chatwin reading Strehlow or any of the hundreds of texts he quotes after chapter 30” (107). Chatwin’s first experience of Australia was in written texts, and I do agree with Meanor when he states that

[Chatwin’s] literal journey to and through Australia is another “text” that he adds to the initial ones. This book is, then, one of the clearest

examples of the process of intertextuality *as it actually occurs*. Reading becomes so important, in fact, that by chapter 30 his text has literally become what he has read. (Meanor 107)

However, despite the obvious intertextuality in *TS*, we should minimize the presence and performance of previous readings in the conception of the essential plot. Long before the reading of all those texts, Chatwin's imagination had already started to process the idea of Australia. Likewise *IP* includes references to Darwin's account of the *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839), to W.H. Hudson's *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893), and to Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838). Patagonia is observed not only through Chatwin's own eyes, but also through other texts; however, Chatwin's readings are previous to setting off and they are perceived as being dreamt, internalised and assimilated. Even though he might have followed the footsteps of earlier travellers, Chatwin never stops at the same places or sees the same sights. He envisages places through the voices of the protagonists of the stories he encounters and listens to and also through the voices of different tellers of the same stories. There is an overlapping of tales: of the previous inspiring texts (the mediated texts), of spontaneous oral accounts emerging right at the time of the narration and of Chatwin's personal imaginative versions.

As far as old journeys which shadow new ones are concerned, Korte mentions Glazebrook's *Journey to Kars* as an example of a travel account in which the author retraces previous adventurous journeys but his real travel companions are the Victorian travellers whose books he has taken along with him. In a modern-day Turkey, the narrator follows the traces of Victorian travellers through the Ottoman Empire. Glazebrook states that the traveller of the 1980s knows the reality of the countries he visits, but he travels "in the company of ghosts" (Korte 147) and encounters "[...] the

shades of real travellers, whose voices I have tried to overhear, and whose thoughts I have tried to understand” (Glazebrook 7, 9). In some episodes, Glazebrook becomes so immersed in the reading of other texts that he forgets about his own trip: “Whilst I had been sitting thinking of Edmund Spencer’s description of Nyssa in 1850, instead of attending to Nis in 1980, had the train perhaps come out of the station backwards as they sometimes do?” (qtd in Korte 147). In Chatwin’s travel books the mediated texts do not eclipse the traveller’s current experience; on the contrary, it is his own account that eclipses the old ones.

Shakespeare affirms that Chatwin and his brother Hugh “had no interest in repossessing the past” (Shakespeare 546). My argument is that Chatwin did not want to preserve the past if that implied what Jameson has called “cannibalisation” of the past. This phenomenon consists of “appropriating a past that no longer stands in any meaningful relation to the present” (Kowalewski 220) and it implies the creation of an artificial frame of reference “that eliminates the lived context in which objects existed” (220). Therefore, Chatwin subverts the representations of the past which no longer have a correspondence with the present. An example of such subversiveness is “The Volga” (*WAIDH* 170-191) which describes Chatwin’s trip down that river on the MV Maxim Gorky. On the way to an ancient city called Bolgar Chatwin is told a story which was told by an Arab traveller in the tenth century. The account is full of fantasy and myth and although it reads more legend than reality it remains in the readers’ mind as a representation of a mythical past; timeless yet alive. In contrast, later on the journey they arrive at Volgograd, once known as Stalingrad:

Once the war was over, someone suggested leaving the ruins of Stalingrad as they were – a perpetual memorial to the defeat of Fascism. But Stalin took exception to the idea that “his” city should remain a pile

of rubble, and ordered it to be rebuilt the way it was, and more so. He did, however, leave one ruin intact – a shell-shattered mill-building on the downward slope to the river [...] where visitors (by previous appointment) can view a mosaic panorama of the battle. (WAIDH 187)

In Stalingrad the remnants of the past have become either duplicates or tourist-attraction sites. The past is not recreated but duplicated, therefore partly lost. Chatwin is suggesting that we cannot repossess the past, the only thing we can do is to relive it by letting it coexist with the present. If we move from this duplication in history to duplication in travel writing, I agree with Matos when she states that sometimes “history is appropriated and consumed as a spectacle” (Kowalewski 222) because the historical context of a journey is often lost in favour of a duplication of a previous itinerary or the introduction of dehistoricised monuments; it lacks depth because the old and the new are presented as equivalent. Matos argues that many travellers encounter examples of “cannibalisation” of the past, usually in museums or other places that preserve relics of people’s lives because, in her view, the hunger for the past in terms of “the real” can only be satisfied through the creation of fakes. Chatwin accepts fakes as long as they do not dehistoricise the past but enrich it. Fakes can sometimes live together with reality only if we accept the duality of human life.

In Mamayev Kurgan, a hill near Stalingrad, Chatwin lives a different experience. There is a monumental complex built by the Soviets to the Fallen Dead and meant to live “longer than people”, the gigantic statue of *The Motherland* striding into the haze and waving a sword:

Like pilgrims to, say, Rome or Mecca or Benares, visitors to Mamayev Kurgan are obliged to progress round a sequence of shrines – Fallen Heroes Square, the Hall of Value and many more – before arriving at the



feet of *The Motherland* [...] The atmosphere was eerie, and religious: all too easy to scoff at; but the crowds, with their rapt and reverential expressions, were no scoffing matter. (WAIIDH 189)

From a historical point of view, *The Motherland* represents the image of those Russian heroes who fought against the Germans and died for their country during the Second World War. Inevitably we attach historical value to this place through past associations, and that confers authenticity. However, according to Chatwin, this pilgrimage to a non-westernised place represents “Asia warning the West not to cross the Volga” (189), therefore in his interpretation the monument does not stand for historical reminiscence but marks a political boundary. As a result, it loses its value in terms of recreation of the past, this being the reason why Chatwin’s description of *The Motherland* resembles that of a nostalgia business -with all the symbolic stages- or an Asian Disneyland rather than of a real centre of devotion: the combination of history, myth and reality in such places prompts tourism, even though the item for sale is political propaganda. In the same story “The Volga” one of Chatwin’s most powerful literary snapshots can be visualized. The setting is again *The Motherland* and the people are those “pilgrims” who walk all the way to the pantheon, among them is a lame woman:

Her down-at-heel shoes had been slit at the toes to relieve the pressure on her bunions. She shuffled forward, in a raincoat, on the arm of a younger companion. She had tried to make herself a little festive by wearing a red scarf shot with tinsel. Her cheeks were caked with white powder, and streaming with tears. As she crossed the Court of Sorrows, her raincoat flapped open – to show a white blouse covered in medals. (WAIIDH 189)

The shiny tinsel which decorates her scarf is more visible than the probably unpolished non-visible medals she won in the war. Chatwin is indicating that appearance and

tinsel- an image of small fake medals- often overpower the real value of people, things and acts. He is actually telling us a story of injustice and tyranny since real heroes and heroines -lame and shoeless- are the ones who really suffer the oblivion of political systems. The anonymous lame Russian woman is the representative of millions of human beings whose fate is cursed just because they followed the call of a nation: Vietnam veterans, world war ex-combatants and German soldiers are all examples of this. The tinsel on her scarf and the almost clownish white powder on her face are used by Chatwin to blur the limits between fake and reality.

In *Travels in Hyperreality*, Eco analyses Superman's flight to the Fortress of Fortitude. For Superman the fortress is a museum of memories where all his deeds during his adventurous life are recorded in perfect copies or in miniatures:

Thus he keeps the city of Kandor, a survival from the destruction of the planet Krypton, under a glass bell of the sort familiar from your great-aunt's Victorian parlour. Here on a reduced scale, are Kandor's buildings, highways, men and women. Superman's scrupulousness in preserving all the mementoes of his past recalls those private museums, or *Wunderkammern*, so frequent in German baroque civilization. (5)

Eco's major argument in his essays is that there are a lot of Fortresses of Fortitude in the USA today because the average American taste and imagination demonstrates a need to preserve the past and keep it in full-scale copy: "a philosophy of immortality as duplication. It dominates the relation with the self, with the past, not infrequently with the present, always with History and, even, with the European tradition" (6). At times reality becomes fake, so the sign of the thing becomes the thing itself and the reference is eliminated. Chatwin's imagination does not demand true stories so he needn't fabricate irreality. The original reference, either historical or legend, never disappears.

When Chatwin reaches Eberhard's cave in Patagonia and is at last able to take some strands of hair from the famous Giant Sloth (*IP* 182), whose picture he had constructed in his own imagination since he was a child, the fake is finally uncovered. Nevertheless, the story does maintain its mythical and mysterious quality because history is diluted by Chatwin's imagination; it is weakened by the immediacy of his way of seeing. The final vision of the place is not rendered in chronological sequence but in the form of the destination of an ego trip whose narrative time is broken by sub-narrative times.

Chatwin's style, when reporting his wandering spirit, commits the reader to an aesthetic attachment. Chatwin generated a "Chatwin's Effect" (Shakespeare 535 ). Many adventurers have literally followed Chatwin's traces in Patagonia and Australia mostly because the line between fiction and reality in his travel texts is much finer and we are left with a feeling of suspension of disbelief. As Matthew Graves (2003) argues, Chatwin also provoked envy among his contemporaries. Graves quotes Andrew Harvey, the author of *A Journey to Ladakh* and someone who speaks for many writers of his generation, when he evokes Chatwin's heritage in a critique of *TS* published in the New York Times in 1987: "Nearly every writer of my generation in England has wanted, at some point, to be Bruce Chatwin; wanted, like him, to talk of Fez and Firdausi, Nigeria and Nuristan, with equal authority; wanted to be talked about, as he is, with raucous envy; wanted above all to have written his books."<sup>26</sup> Chatwin's journeys are not really much in themselves: there seems to be no danger or risk in them but their uneventfulness does not engender boredom or emptiness. My argument is that Chatwin's achievement (based on Morris's assessment of Kinglake's achievement in *Eothen*) is that he made "something altogether new out of a relatively commonplace experience, and he did it in three ways: in form, selection and above all in style" (*Eothen* x).

## **1.2. Chronotopes: Reading Space and Time in Chatwin's Travel Texts and Fiction.**

The present section assesses the concept of chronotope in Chatwin's texts. My thesis is that Chatwin's treatment of space and time is used as a *Weltanschauung* which reproduces both his belief in thresholds and his idea of visualization. Chronotopes will be examined not only in Chatwin's travel texts but also in his fiction. The analysis will focus first on *In Patagonia* and *The Songlines* as two travel accounts of places far away from home. Next, *On the Black Hill* will be examined as the tale of the lives of some housebound characters who never leave their timeless home between Radnorshire and Herefordshire and who do not fear to confront a rapidly globalising environment. Then, *Utz* will be interpreted as an experience of both movement and attachment to a place: a story firmly rooted in Prague but with a geographical movement back and forth in the pattern of Utz's seasonal migrations between Vichy and Prague. Finally, *The Viceroy of Ouidah* will reveal that home is where your grave is and that time can be extended back and forth. Chatwin's mapping of time and space entails a new approach to history crucial to an understanding of his narrative.

I begin with the premise that the possibility of *terra incognita*, the unavoidable existence of mediated texts and the spectre of belatedness have become polemical issues within travel writing and conditioned the choice and handling of time and space. Some of the questions the contemporary traveller-reader may ask himself when confronted with his expectations of an authentic journey are questions such as whether all landscapes are already "written" when we first see them, whether the landscape of travel is always mediated, thus conditioned, sometimes overdetermined, by patterns of time and place previously designed or whether the writer is free from the ghosts of past writers. Added to the concern about text mediation, there is the awareness of the "already charted" in the world of travel. Augé (2001), Michel (2000) and Kaplan (1996)

claim that there are no longer unexplored places and that there are few spaces left which might provide the traveller with surprise and wonderment as mass tourism and low-cost flights have plundered our planet, thus shrinking and defiling the undisputed words of former explorers of *terra incognita*. Augé (2001) contends that the travel writer, at present, must provide factual information, be ethically engaged in our threatened world (both ecologically and politically) and produce interesting texts. Moreover, this heavy burden should be carried together with the Self so that the place and the time they are portraying can show a certain amount of reliability and veracity. The travel writer also lives with the constant sensation of being behind time in the almost race-like frenzy to step foot on places he has not yet been to. He is hardly ever free and easy (as Kinglake was in *Eothen*, “a thoroughly self-centred book”) or in a position to decide and declare he has written about what interests him only and not about what readers would expect from a travel book. Now travel writers more than providing useful information, more than “seeing what there is to be seen,” represent subjectivity and the personal. Matos quotes Thubron’s words in his lecture for the Royal Society of Literature:

The travel writer “has become more subjective, more turned in on himself.” Whereas before he exhibited more of an interest in ruins, monuments, and other signs of the past, he now “travels in the present” with “an awakened social consciousness,” devoting himself more to the description of people than objects, to the human rather than the material, landscape. In short, Thubron claims that “we have taken a voyage away from the beautiful, the historical and objective, to something more representative, more immediately human and more subjective.”

(Kowalewski 216)

However, this would be too simplistic an interpretation both of the new trends in travel literature (objective-external and subjective-internal realities) and of the ways these realities are depicted. There are still contemporary travel writers -Colin Thubron, Pico Iyer, Kira Salat, Vikram Seth, Dewla Murphy- who prefer to play the role of the adventurer and the explorer and seek the exotic and the wild; they are maintaining the tradition of travel writing as discovery of the unknown and exploration of remote places. Others, such as Jonathan Raban and Ian Sinclair, have chosen the familiar -their own cities, countries, coastlines- as the target of their expedition. Familiar places can be rediscovered and reinvented; this is a new way of travelling and writing about it.

Graves (2006) states that in recent travel writing we can find not only the unexpected in adventure, but also a sense of universality and the rediscovery of place for epiphany.<sup>27</sup> To assume that a place can be rediscovered by means different from real geographical exploration and the actual knowledge is to accept that charting inner landscapes is as constructive as charting the outer landscapes. We know how powerful the images of a glass-fronted cabinet in Chatwin's imagination were. Likewise a drawer full of objects and some letters written by the mysterious Lady Hester Stanhope had a strong impact on Kinglake's curious spirit. Kinglake writes in *Eothen*:

I never had heard, nor indeed, I believe, had the rest of the world ever heard anything like a certain account of the heroine's adventures: all I knew was, that in one of the drawers, the delight of my childhood, along with attar of roses, and fragrant wonders from Hindostan, there were letters carefully treasured, and trifling presents which I was taught to think valuable because they had come from the Queen of the Desert- a Queen who dwelt in tents, and reigned over wandering Arabs. (79)

Those letters in the drawer might have had the same effect on Kinglake's literary imagination as the piece of skin in Chatwin's grandmother's glass-fronted cabinet had had on Chatwin's: a fairy-tale account and a mysterious object made the writers long for the East and the Travel respectively. Chatwin travelled to Patagonia in search of the skin of the brontosaurus and he tried to retrace the footsteps of a distant cousin Charles Milward; his journey became a literary journey and he became (as he himself declared) a literary traveller. Likewise Kinglake travelled to the East, visited Cyprus, Palestine, Cairo, Gaza and Lebanon. However, Kinglake's journey, like Chatwin's, is not just the seeking of remarkable sights or the reconstruction of a lady's adventurous life but the literary envisaging of a world which had excited his imagination since early childhood. Michel believes that the creation of a journey takes place before the departure and that if we resort to atlases and we dream of elsewhere, we are already travelling. In fact, we invent a country before getting there and we imagine its people before encountering them. (Michel 67)

The anticipated journey is therefore a milestone in the whole process of travelling: the genesis of Chatwin's and Kinglake's journeys lies in a timeless stage prior to departure whose literary value is as important as the resulting text itself. Both writers created their own mental pictures of a place before visiting it, thus turning the real spaces into replicas of their own imaginary constructions. In his imagination Chatwin had also partly produced the Australian Outback as a "place" before he actually visited it. Therefore, he and his readers visit not so much "the real" place before them, but rather the place Chatwin had heard of or read about, and then he and his readers map this representational place onto the actual place. Duncan and Gregory state that: "all geographies are imaginative geographies – fabrications in the literal sense of 'something made' and our access to the world is always made through

particular technologies of representation” (Duncan & Gregory 5). I agree with Duncan and Gregory that places are born out of the imagination, out of dreams and above all they are places of memory. Like Patagonia, the Australian Outback might represent the “south” that Chatwin once wished to head but it also represents a legendary geography. This raises questions about the nature of place itself, such as whether place is just the physical landscape or if it has a more abstract dimension.

Chatwin’s imaginary and mythical time-space constructs compensate for what many critics regard as the loss of authenticity. This is the reason why geographical inventiveness is really significant in Chatwin’s travel writing and why his liminal places are milieux for insight, creative power and narrative. Shakespeare comments on Chatwin’s search for spaces: “All his life Chatwin was in search of what he described as “this mythical beast ‘the place to write in’” (Shakespeare 359). In *TS* we are told that aborigines go back to their “conception site, their centre; the place where they belong” (460): a journey back to the past and to creative singing milieux.

Places can also be disassociated from history as Kinglake claims in *Eothen*:

If one might judge of men’s real thoughts by their writings, it would seem that there are people who can visit an interesting locality, and follow up continuously the exact train of thought that ought to be suggested by the historical associations of the place. A person of this sort can go to Athens, and think of nothing later than the age of Pericles -can live with the Scipios as long as he stays in Rome. I am not thus docile: it is only by snatches, and for a few moments together, that I can really associate a place with its proper history. (116)

Chatwin definitely has his own way of relating place to history: he flees from previous portrayals and blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. Some of the historical



accounts in *IP* are based on actual research but a flavour of legend also inhabits them. The story of the Wild Bunch, for example, with its most famous members Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (*IP* 45, 51), is read more as a piece of fiction than an authentic episode in the history of Patagonia. Although Chatwin found some police records and newspaper articles of that time<sup>28</sup> and the existence of these men is proven, nobody really knows whether they were just a legend or if they were real North American outlaws who landed in Patagonia and after a short time working as farmers and sheep shearers re-started their career as *bandoleros*. The stories of Wilson and Evans (*IP* 65) and the Prince of Araucania and Patagonia (*IP* 18-23) also reveal the subtle shifts from historical facts to fiction and vice-versa. Similarly the bandit Cobra Verde (*TVOO* 53) and his life in Dahomey mentioned in *TVOO* tiptoes between myth and a real historical figure. As to the historical references in *Utz*, we do not know whether some of the exotica kept in the cabinet of curiosities of the Schloss Ambras assembled by the emperor Rudolf II's uncle, the notoriously famous Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, really caused "long-standing" arguments between uncle and nephew (*Utz* 12, 13). Chatwin's selection of historical accounts and episodes connected to these places builds up his own version of Patagonia, Prague and Dahomey so his version becomes a literary one because history is transformed into literature. His report of Patagonia, for example, is the result of his "longing for Patagonia" which eventually confers marks of sacredness and mystery on the newly designed space and time construct rather than historical truth. Even though the story of *In Patagonia* is fragmented into sub-stories, as a whole they tell an entire tale, that of Patagonia, based on both fiction and reality: it is both the home of lived experience and the world of fantasy and dream, therefore it comprises the qualities of both an authentic and unauthentic place.

Bakhtin's definition of chronotope serves to make sense of Chatwin's time-space maps inasmuch as it states that

chronotopes are places of intersection of temporal and spatial sequences. By concentrating on these intersections, rather than seeking to draw conclusions about temporal or spatial form, space and time are less differentiated than in other approaches, and the indicators of space and time within the novel are treated more or less as two sides of the same coin. (Smethurst 69)

To Smethurst (2000), Bakhtin's model produces two kinds of chronotope: "one in which locality or place is defined by its history, and the other in which events, or history, are governed by the relationships between things and people in space" (69). Chatwin would fit into the second approach better as in his fiction "spatial properties determine a moment in time by producing an event" (69). However, his belief in the intersection of space and time has not only diversified his scope of spatial and temporal representations but has also branched out and flavoured his style, which comprises a great geographical variety. I agree with Renzo D'Agnillo (2000), when he observes that the heterogeneity of the countries represented in Chatwin's fiction, all, significantly outside the English territory (Patagonia, Brazil, Africa, Australia and Czechoslovakia) "contributes in no small way to a thematic and stylistic diversity which gives each work a unique form of its own"<sup>29</sup> (22). Therefore the concept of abroad in Chatwin's texts is to be interpreted as a window onto the outside world and an opportunity to recognize not only forms of reality other than the ones at home but also forms of reality similar to the ones we are familiar with. Dodd (1982) writes that "[a]s abroad became a threat, it became a reality"<sup>30</sup> (151). In Chatwin's time abroad was no longer a threat and nor was it the representation of the exotic Other. He believed that in spite of cultural difference

both within and outside Europe and, however uneasy at the beginning, the adventures or the experiences of the traveller were, abroad offered them entertainment and what Duncan and Gregory have defined as “spaces of licence and liminality” (5). Even in the 1930s, travellers knew that they would find some civilization in the places they were writing about, thus lessening the risk or the surprise involved in it. Later in the twentieth century when psychology and psychoanalysis became the essential factors in the exploration of human fears, the threat was to be found inside ourselves. Therefore interior journeys became -and some are still nowadays- less abroad-oriented and less based on a real travel experience; they turned into inner-directed, inward-looking journeys, in Dodd’s words: “a correlative of [the writer’s] psychological condition” (130). Rather than focusing exclusively on abroad, adventure found new places to develop: introspection, one’s imagination and representational spaces.<sup>31</sup> Chatwin locates his fiction and his travelling experiences almost exclusively outside his home territory because he maintains that introspection is not the target of a journey but the search for adventure on a real external space.

While I agree with Fussell when he argues that “[o]ne travels to experience the past, and travel is thus an adventure in time as well as distance” (Kowalewski 87), I am not of the same opinion, as far as Chatwin’s travel texts are concerned, when he envisages the metaphor of life as a journey. Fussell states that travel books, like no other kinds of writing, exploit the idea that past is conceived as backwards and the future as forward. Although Chatwin and other protagonists and travel companions in Patagonia and Australia do experience the past on their voyages where both actual time and sacred time are captured, Chatwin does not encapsulate the experience of living and dying in the experience of travelling. It is true that, as Fussell contends, travel books manipulate the chronotopes that we utilize to get our bearings in time by invoking the

dimension of space and that they “make more or less conscious an activity usually unconscious” (87) but to me this metaphor is not as essential in Chatwin. My argument is that in Chatwin’s travel texts there are multiple metaphors which veil the metaphor of a journey, such as his own emotional exploration of his obsessions and fears as well as of his search for the miraculous. Moreover not only do his travel texts “make more or less conscious an activity usually unconscious” but his fiction does so too, even if it contains no central journey.

Chatwin’s chronotopes do not only frame the stories of idlers, travellers and outsiders, but also the life stories of characters trapped in circumscribed worlds, confined on farms and small apartments where time seems to have stopped and journeys do not entail long distances. Most of them live almost caged in spaces they have chosen to be caged in. I agree with Murray (1997) when he argues that “Kaspar Utz’s life is like that of a monk who has shrunk his horizons down to those of his best friends, who were all porcelain figures seven inches high” (45). Utz’s apartment in Prague (*Utz* 49-53) is made entirely of plate-glass shelves, all of them crammed with valuable porcelain, reaching from floor to ceiling. It has become an immortal place. Actually, this is Utz’s own cabinet of curiosities which is in turn his private shrine. In the same way in Raban the sea is a timeless place and yachts are like “arks of the Covenant, holy vessels bearing sacred texts” (*Coasting* 34). Raban believes that “[In Belloc, too] the sea is a place -or rather a huge and rich assortment of particular places- as solid and recognisable as the individual landscapes of a continent” (31). According to Smethurst, Foucault’s *heterotopia* includes places which “are capable of juxtaposing in a single real space, several spaces that are in themselves incompatible [...] and are linked to particular slices of time, such as the accumulation of historic time, or the continual re-enactment of a past time” (41). The sea and life on a ship as well as Utz’s apartment

in Prague and the Australian Outback are all examples of *heterotopia*: places within places and times within times thus multiplying the effect of chronotopes and dislocating the actual space-time construct of the travel account and of the novel's plot.

*Utz* is an example that not all the characters in Chatwin's novels need to leave home to experience a shift in time or get closer to the past. *Utz* was published in September 1988 and seemed everything that *TS* (1987) was not: instead of a philosophical treatise on the virtues of nomadism, Chatwin wrote a Europe-focused story whose drama concentrated on the objects exhibited in a single room of a small apartment in Prague. It is this collection of objects rather than real territoriality which provides Utz with his identity. Kerry Featherstone in his unpublished thesis "Not just Travel Writing: An interdisciplinary reading of the work of Bruce Chatwin", states that Utz is obsessed with his collection because it grants him control over both time and space. Also "[as] the narrator has already discovered, Utz is the hero of his own collection. Outside the space of his collection, he is no hero, failing to assert himself in any meaningful social interaction, and failing to establish a sense of self through his experience of travel."<sup>32</sup> Utz's is a journey-escape from the present but it is also a journey-immersion into the past. On the one hand, Utz experiences the present time by tiptoeing on both sides of the Iron Curtain: he lives in the communist Prague and he holidays in Vichy once a year. This journey enables him to run away from the present even though he never becomes an exile. On the other hand, his journey in the present time is intermingled with a journey into the past through a collection of old Meissen porcelain figurines that he keeps as a treasure. The result of this peculiar criss-crossing of space and time is the creation of a chronotope which reveals Chatwin's personal way of seeing and responding to the contemporary world; it is rather a move towards what

Smethurst has considered “Henri Lefebvre’s *history of space*, in which space and place are the focus of experience, and exist *across* and *through* time.” (113)

Meanor in “*Utz: Museum or Mausoleum*” affirms that in *WAIDH* we find parallel figures of collectors such as the Soviet Union’s leading private art collector George Costakis who turned his house into a sort of museum of products of the Futurist school. The authorities allowed Costakis to keep the collection in his home provided he left it to one of the state museums on his death. Similarly Utz planned to escape with his treasures on his way to Vichy after the communist bureaucrats entered his flat and photographed all of his treasures so that on his death the state would know what might be missing. These men tend to be solitary and live in houses-spaces presided over by things instead of people; and these things keep them in close contact with the time they live in but at the same time they keep them at a distance from it: they are diversionary elements. They might embody the chronotopes which Smethurst attributes to archaeologists: “they can find and reconstitute historical time from the objects they find and reconstruct the past” (204). These parallel characters demonstrate that Chatwin’s chronotopes both give away his personal *Weltanschauung* and reveal his stylistic consistency inasmuch as they reproduce a recurrent idea in a rich and original variety of sceneries. Meanor comments on the issue of collecting:

Chatwin creates a mythopoeic world in all of his books: Mama Wéwé’s syncretic menagerie in *The Viceroy of Ouidah*, the native museums of the Salesian Fathers in *In Patagonia*, the aboriginals’ portable mythopoeic *tjuringas* in *The Songlines*, and *The Broad and Narrow Path* in *On the Black Hill*. (137)

Regarding *OTBH*, this novel defines a new dimension of space in Chatwin’s narrative. Miller compares several literary and mythic twins to Benjamin and Lewis in

*OTBH* and invents a new term, “Chatwinshire,” to characterize the author’s uniquely personal cosmos. He also agrees with V.S.Pritchett’s assessment of the book’s Russian “strangeness”: “The Chatwinshire we read about in the novel is apt to look apocryphal, like some Kamchatka – Russia’s Patagonia, which figured, during the Romantic period, in the inventory of the remote, as part of the fairyland of the traveller’s tale” (Meanor 65).<sup>33</sup> The sheep farm The Vision in Radnorshire in the Welsh border country is one of the original but most bewildering cosmos Chatwin creates; this fabled place being the product of not only his imagination, but also of his intellectual and emotional obsessions for which the author feels compelled to find the right scenario. Chapter 24 is one of the longest chapters of *OTBH* and represents one of the novel’s principal dramatic climaxes. It develops the reasons for the twins’ confinement on their farm The Vision -a confinement in space and time. At the age of twenty-two Benjamin and Lewis Jones begin to behave, according to their mother, like “crabby old bachelors.” This sudden change takes place after having been ridiculed in the national peace celebrations in Rhulen (a social space) which turn into a nightmare for the twins. They are called “shirkers” and Benjamin notices one of his torturers from the Hereford Barracks eyeing him. Rosie also makes fun of them by handing Lewis a white feather -a symbol of cowardice- and he thanks her not realizing the significance of the object. “The twins barely escape a mob beating and somehow make it back to The Vision.”<sup>34</sup> As a result of this renewed torment the brothers decide to avoid any journey outside their immediate setting: “Since the day of the peace celebrations, the twins’ world had contracted to a few square miles, bounded on one side by Maesyfelin Chapel and on the other by the Black Hill: both Rhulen and Lurkenhope now lay on enemy soil” (*OTBH* 131). What the twins have after their parents’ death is The Vision which embodies and preserves their childhood innocence, gives them strength and provides them with safety. The

twins are bound to remain together inside this rural paradise; when they venture out, they are brutally ridiculed and abused. Place protects them from time, a present time which has become their enemy but which they cannot stop from entering their lives: the British Army with its barracks, civilization and technological progress with its tractors - a tractor inadvertently causes Lewis's death- remorseless immorality with its representatives such as Joy Lambert, and scientific and psychological advance with its Viennese psychotherapists like Lotte Zons who appears at The Vision's door to interview the twins. Their retreat into the past eases their minds and provides them with a sense of recovery and a sense of connection; something which the young people who will inherit their farm will also preserve. Without leaving home they manage to survive the present and live the past, so the connection with the Ancestors -a recurrent motif in Chatwin's work- is warranted and made invulnerable. Chatwin does not make the twins travel in search of the miraculous or to get to know the world as some of his other fictional characters had done; the world comes to visit them because their world contains the miraculous within itself. The Vision turns into, as Smethurst (2000) defines, "a shell-like space of home" (44) and the house itself and the spaces within it become a refuge charged with symbolic meaning. The twins' house is an "externalised representation of human space, with their analogues in natural space, and connected to a cosmic whole" (44).

Having overviewed *OTBH* and *Utz* as two of Chatwin's fictional worlds in which confinement rules over space and time, now I turn to analyse a new element within his travel texts which is also connected with the idea of chronotope, that of the role of the native people in the places visited. Michel contends that ultimately, "[t]o travel is to dream of a space-time different from ours" (232) and in Chatwin this dream implies less an involvement with than an original report on the new space-time



construct. Although contemporary mass travel has left few places to be reported, and the easier it becomes to travel the more difficult it is to be a real traveller, Thubron once declared that the challenge of travel writing is that of “one civilization reporting on another.” (Kowalewski 3)

No matter how much “inside” description a traveller employs in evoking another culture and its people, a crucial element of all travel writing remains the author’s ‘visitor’ status. He or she remains, as the reader’s surrogate, a cultural outsider who moves into, through and finally beyond the places and events encountered.” (9)

Thubron argues that the narrator’s response to the landscape and people he or she encounters is sometimes appreciative and sometimes caustic or indifferent, but in both cases readers are bound to live not only outer journeys but also “temperamental journeys” (9). One of the usual attitudes and responses of travel writers has been that of populating or depopulating the places visited. This issue represents one of the significant elements of contemporary travel writing in contrast to travel writing during the Victorian era. Michel provides a convincing argument when he states that “As far as men, they are always the biggest absences”<sup>35</sup> (186). Chatwin does not depopulate his accounts in the sense that even though he is certainly a self-centred first person narrator, the autochthonous people are never left behind or unnamed. His view of the travelling experience is similar to that of Naipaul: the writer-traveller moves around but is slightly withdrawn because the inhabitants of the visited country occupy the foreground. Chatwin in his role of real writer-traveller becomes less present and less of a researcher so as to give way to a new attitude, that of the intuitive witness and the eager listener of the stories of authentic individuals. Chatwin and most of his contemporary travel writers differ from writers of the high Victorian period insofar as their accounts do not

“avoid the portrayal of culture *contact*” and nor do they refuse to “establish a genuine interpersonal relationship.” (Korte 188)

Similarly Nichols observes that the strategy of silencing the indigenous population in some travel texts is simply an attempt to silence the native population verbally, thus avoiding the problems which might arise from their potential power: a potential threat to the dominant authority.<sup>36</sup> Chatwin certainly establishes personal interrelationships in his two most widely considered travel texts: *TS* and *IP*. Needless to say, the ruling voice in Chatwin’s *TS* is Chatwin’s. Not only is he the one who leads - together with Arkady- the itinerary and the pace of his exploration in the Australian Outback, but it is also his philosophy and theories about nomadism, aggression and sacredness- among other issues- that gives voice to anthropologists, writers, and authors and to the real native inhabitants of the Bush. Although Australian Aborigines were better known after Chatwin’s *TS* was published, it would be too naïve to award Chatwin the merit of having re-discovered the Australian Outback. In fact, it is the Land Rights Movement which is the representative of the indigenous population and which is responsible for their recognition in Australia and worldwide, but Chatwin voiced aborigine rights and their cosmology by turning them into literary and aesthetic objects. Readers face a hybrid work, half fact, half fiction, but they do not have the feeling that the natives’ power -the power of their dreamtime- may threaten the political status quo of the Australian government. They are overwhelmed by quotations and theories that illustrate Chatwin’s beliefs, very few of which show political or social vindications; in fact, they are in a different realm of vindication. However, readers are likely to perceive that the aborigines are potentially entitled to claim the land they inhabit and that they have the right to own it. Chatwin’s experience in Patagonia is an experience of contact with the Other, not with the Other understood as the native population, but with the

“new Other”, the “new” native population, consisting of people of mostly Western origin: exiles, immigrants and drifters who do not consider themselves Westerners any more but Patagonians. These new Patagonians will be described in their in-between states, during their adventures and through their stories told and retold orally. We sense that they populate the place fully, both in space and time. Shakespeare quotes a conversation between Chatwin and the Argentinean journalist Uki Goni when they were discussing how Chatwin would deal with the theme of the human condition: “Your fascination is people?” asked Goni. “Yes, in the end. It took rather a long time to discover that.” (291)

Pratt argues that one of the writing strategies of the imperialist travelogue is “the strict separation of descriptions of a country’s population from geographical and topographical descriptions, so that the country, which is, after all, the real object of the imperial gaze, comes across as ‘unpopulated’” (Korte 92). With the exception of *Utz*, both Chatwin’s travel accounts and his novels are highly populated. In *IP* he meets and follows the tracks of people who are already dead through ninety-three vignettes; he populates Ouidah with blacks and whites, whole tribes, slaves and colonizers in *TVOO*; Welsh culture and English influence in Radnorshire are personified in a well-portrayed congregation of characters in *OTBH*. People’s life stories are presented as being more important than the landscape itself, so although there is clearly a geographical aesthetics, it is definitely superseded by a human aesthetics. At the end of his novels we gather a real portrait of each population. In this sense, regarding the question as to whether we should locate Chatwin within or outside the tradition of travel writing, we should relate him to the counter-discourse seen above all in the 1890s which “began to make itself heard against the values and norms of Victorianism” (Korte 102). The main assumption was that the traveller -like in Stevenson’s accounts- is the foreigner and so

he should never consider the country his or regard it chauvinistically. Stevenson showed an attitude of cultural relativism towards the travelled region, which was actually part of a strong critique of European civilization and imperialism. As to Patagonia, for example, W.H Hudson in *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893), found finding any trace of civilization really attractive; he looked for a solitary wilderness, a territory “untouched by man” (Korte 103), whereas Charles Darwin, sixty years earlier, had missed the signs of civilization in the Patagonian landscape. Cunninghame Graham in *Magreb-el-Aksa* (1898) also discloses a stance of criticism at imperialism. The text is about his journey and adventures in inland Morocco in 1897. He speaks of the inhabitants and the culture of the travelled country and in this act of populating the place he shows sympathy for the native population which is portrayed in detail and as individuals. He ends up sharing the Moroccans’ distrust of Europeans and giving voice to the indigenous, the “Other.” His preface to the book anticipates his idea of Victorian exploration:

I mean I strove to write down that which I saw without periphrasis, sans flag-wagging, and with no megrim in my head of having been possessed by some great moral purpose, without which few travellers nowadays presume to leave their homes [...] I fear I have no theory of empires, destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race, spread of the Christian faith, of trade extension, or of hinterlands. (Korte 103)

Cunninghame Graham’s idea of a lack of “theory of empires” resembles that of Chatwin when refusing to impose some morality upon the facts and the people encountered on the way or when trying to write about what he really saw instead of what he was supposed to see.

Having examined the issue of populated and unpopulated chronotopes in Chatwin's texts, now I proceed to the analysis of two previously mentioned elements: loneliness and distance. Durrell in *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* considers loneliness one of the inherent elements of a journey: "We had become, with the approach of night, once more aware of loneliness and time – those two companions without whom no journey can yield us anything" (Cocker 110).<sup>37</sup> Slocum in *Sailing Around the World* explains how he finds himself once more "sailing a lonely sea and in a solitude supreme all around. When I slept I dreamed that I was alone. This feeling never left me" (57). Loneliness belongs to the very nature of true travelling. Not only do Slocum and Lawrence Durrell avow this idea but so do Theroux and Chatwin. The question as to whether the loneliness of the traveller is a personal wish or a drawback brought about by the landscape itself should be analysed in terms of voices. This means that on a journey it is either the voice of the traveller or the voice of the place which speaks. On the one hand, narrators often hide their deepest insights in favour of more objective information and traceable landmarks. On the other hand, some places are so charged with myth and/or dominating geography that they often control the narrative and blur the narrator's true impressions. The isolation of the landscape can be so powerful and overwhelming that its physical remoteness and the solitude felt by the travellers become one. This psychological state would represent the romantic motif of the empathy between man and nature, the withdrawal of reason to give way to impulse and individual expression. In Chatwin, however, the romantic loneliness is of a different type. The solitary path of romantic travellers, together with their personal perception overpowering objective observation, allows Chatwin to justify his lack of complicity with the people he meets and to elude conflict with culture contact. Shakespeare comments that certainly this distance caused a lot of disapproval and recrimination

among the inhabitants of Patagonia, who still remember him with dislike and have left him very much alone with his truths, his lies and his aloofness (292, 313-317). In Australia, Chatwin demonstrated little support for the Land Rights Movement and resisted the pressure from those around him to radicalise; there is no obvious political agenda and this attitude of non-commitment exposed him to criticism (413).<sup>38</sup>

Chatwin's refuge in loneliness in solitary empty sceneries paves the way for creating an uncompromising narrative which is reinforced by Theroux's idea that the serious traveller always journeys alone:

Travel is at its best a solitary enterprise: to see, to examine, to assess, you have to be alone and unencumbered. Other people can mislead you; they crowd your meandering impressions with their own; if they are companionable they obstruct your view, and if they are boring they corrupt the silence with non-sequiturs, shattering your concentration.

(qtd. in Kowalewski 155)

Chatwin establishes a similar relationship with the places he visits and their people. He wishes to be alone, away from responsible contact, escaping from situations that might remind him of the ones he has fled from. So his escape is not just an escape from home and country but also an escape from the people he comes into contact with. However, for the construction of his own model of time and space, for his storied chronotopes, he needs some human proximity and some communication. So his obsession with storytelling forces him to listen to others and share experiences, something which unavoidably draws him closer to the human side of his wanderlust. D'Agnillo interprets this stance as an attempt to portray "a country from an internal perspective, rather than through the detached filtering consciousness of an alien observer" (22). D'Agnillo might be right to some degree but Chatwin is definitely a distant observer because,

when travelling, Chatwin does not seek loneliness to increase concentration as Theroux suggests but to strengthen and intensify his position of outsider. There is a game of approaching and keeping his distance in his texts that bewilders both the reader -not so much the listener of his storytelling- and the critic. In any case, we might agree with Adorno when he states that “[d]istance is not a safety zone but a field of tension.” (Kaplan 101) because distance is not merely a shield for a cowardly mind within Chatwin’s personal battles but the positioning of an inquisitive mind who observes instead of stepping in. This issue will also be examined in chapter three.

### **1.3. Chatwin’s New Perspective of Travel Writing: Overcoming Globalisation and Traditional Narrative Forms.**

The issues of globalisation and monoculturalisation have been dealt with at the beginning of this chapter as two of the main engines of change in travel writing in the last three decades. These two factors have brought about not only a transformation in the themes and destinations of people’s wanderlust but also a transformation in the narrative format and the expectations of the readership. At the same time, this era of international exchange of mores and values has meant the emergence of new ethical concerns. Now I turn to explore Chatwin’s outlook on this universalising effect, which stems from both his unyielding concern about finding the state of *communitas* in his own literary and personal worlds and from his “connecting” frame of mind -his *Beziehungswahn*- described by Shakespeare as follows: “he was in a sense a precursor of the Internet age: a connective super-highway without boundaries, with instant access to different cultures [...] He holds the possibility of something wonderful and unifying (542). Yet his double concern with unity is far from any sort of cybertourism or

cybernomadism which provide “adventure without misadventure. Elsewhere (somewhere) without the Other.” (Michel 231)<sup>39</sup>

Chatwin lived his journeys elsewhere fully, as well as the journeys of others elsewhere vicariously by extended reading. In turn, Chatwin’s readers live his journeys vicariously, by meeting the Other in a variety of geographical settings; however, they also learn that the Other exists ontologically and that they might all even be part of it just as everybody comprises a diversity of Selves. Therefore by acknowledging this diversity outside and within the Self, Chatwin widened the scope of the travelling experience. Even though Chatwin lived in a time of progressing monoculturalisation, he took a stance more on the margins of globalisation rather than within it. Having said this, he still wanted to be a traveller of the world and he managed to achieve what Jean Chesneaux has defined as his own art of travelling. Chesneaux’s art includes a recognition of the plural and also unified future of contemporary societies and provides us with a new perspective because to him travelling around the world “means to philosophise about the world, it also means to ask ourselves about the always unstable balance which might be established between the weight of uniformity and the remaining forces -still alive- of diversity”<sup>40</sup> (Michel 259). Augé is currently involved in a project whose focus is tourism and its impact on urban contexts. He comments that the role of the anthropologist is to study those personal relationships “which emerge in a specific medium, and the medium, nowadays, is the entire world, the global world. [...] the history of the world -as such- has just started: until now there were partial histories and, now, there comes the beginning of the history of the world.”<sup>41</sup> Augé’s vision of globalisation then is based on the transformation of individual relationships; he argues that the personal histories and stories of people on the move have blended with the already existing myths thus generating a second layer of globalisation: time and



economic dynamics have modified not only political frontiers but also the limits between worlds, and as a result, the image of reality and the way in which reality is ordered has also been modified. Added to Augé's idea of monoculturalization is that of image, which he sees as a new form of voyeurism inasmuch as the journey of the tourist nowadays is not a written text but the journey between two images: the photograph in the travel agency and the photographs brought home. It is in this context of globalisation and image provided by Augé that Chatwin's texts about a journey should be analysed.

Globalisation has given prominence to a new type of journey: the trip to hell. Although Chatwin was in search of a new wanderlust adventure, he did not create any reality trips to slums or war panoramas or any trips to hell. In *TS* Chatwin writes: "One night, caught in a sandstorm in the Western Sahara, I understood Muhammed's dictum, 'A journey is a fragment of Hell'" (*TS* 19). In spite of the sandstorm and the fake coup he lived in Benin on his way to Togo, which might have momentarily endangered his life, Chatwin's experience of hell does not correspond to the situations and scenery of a dark travel text. Rather than the risk or the suffering, his concern is the going and the seeing simply for the sake of it and with no attempt to fix images of pain born out of devastation and injustice. Likewise, Chatwin's photographs of his journeys are innocent photographs, inasmuch as they do not use images to fulfil the competing claims of reportage or the collective memory. The question is whether this new concept of travel writing as an experiment in narrating man-made landscapes and this new concept of photography as an experiment in capturing new modes of human landscapes will ever turn into accepted literary and photographic forms and will establish a new aesthetic morality. Chatwin, in an anti-globalisation attitude, does not aim to describe shocking hellish adventures nor does he recreate the landscapes generated in them because he

believes that these scenarios have become places-museums and are supported by some guided narrative strategies and rhetorical devices which strengthen their artificiality. And yet Chatwin suggests that people are not irredeemably doomed to be tourists rather than true travellers as Augé (2001) claims.

Chatwin's optimistic perspective on true travelling leads to the definition of sincere, genuine and individualistic wanderlust. According to Rojek, tourists have no initiative or discrimination as they are "unadventurous, unimaginative and insipid. For them, travel experience is akin to grazing [...] The traveller is associated with refined values of *discernment, respect and taste*" (Korte 130).<sup>42</sup> These three qualities, however, are difficult to maintain in a world where the processes of globalisation have inevitably worked towards placelessness and a proliferation of signs as places. We live a nostalgia for the values of transcendent signifiers and referents which would give meaning to our surroundings. In *Brazilian Adventure* (1933), Peter Fleming writes that "Adventure is obsolete [...] The age of geographical discovery has gone" (Korte 136). Cocker (1992) states that we live in an era of destruction, exemplified not only by the desertification problems in parts of inner Asia or the drought in two thirds of Africa, but also by the Mediterranean coastlines. These were beautifully described by Lewis and Durrell but now they have turned into Fussell's pseudo-places: crowded and sterile zones taken over by the leisure industry and far from representing imaginative geographies. Waugh lamented the death of the travel book in *When the Going was Good* (1946): "My own travelling days are over, and I do not expect to see many travel books in the future [...] There is no room for tourists in a world of 'displaced persons'" (Korte 128). Fussell declared in 1980 that the interwar years were "the final age of travel." Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) showed his pessimism about the impossibility of those forms of travel which had inspired earlier travel accounts when he wrote that "he

had lived in the days of real journeys, when it was still possible to see the full splendour of a spectacle that had not yet been blighted, polluted and spoilt.” (128)

What is left for new travel writers to inspire their texts? Although in Chatwin’s time the world was not yet in such pseudo-apocalyptic conditions, people had already witnessed tragic events in and outside the Western world as well as the progressive destruction of the landscape. In spite of this Chatwin suggested an outlet for both people’s urge to travel and travel writers’ urge to write; this is Chatwin’s contribution to travel writing: he foresaw no end to travel either as a personal experience disconnected from writing or as a literary genre.

The tenth edition of *Granta* (1984) was devoted to the work of some of today’s most important travel writers. Among the contributors are Saul Bellow, Bruce Chatwin, James Fenton, Norman Lewis, Jan Morris, Redmond O’Hanlon, Jonathan Raban, Paul Theroux, Colin Thubron and altri. In the “Editorial” Bill Buford tries to account for why there was such a revival in travel writing. He comments that these contemporary writers still address the past, not to discover it but to preserve it, and even while they still offer extraordinary descriptions of place, they also appear to be achieving something else. They all show a special way of devising their stories by playing with fiction and fact. Buford calls this ambiguity “generic androgeny” (*Granta 10*: 7) as it borrows from the memoir, the reportage and the novel. He considers this mix of genres partly responsible for the revival in travel writing which is: “pre-eminently a narrative told in the first person, authenticated by lived experience. It satisfies a need. A need for a fiction answerable, somehow, to the world. Or perhaps I’ve got it wrong. Perhaps it’s a need for a world answerable to our fictions.” (7)

Obviously globalisation and its monoculturalization process have dramatically brought homogenisation to the modern world. There is no longer exclusivity, variety, or

anonymity after September 11, 2001. From that date on “[a] stranger in a strange land is now a security threat and anathema to the new authorities” (*Granta 94*: 233). The true or at least the old-style travellers are finished in the same way as some old ruins have been transformed into totally infrastructured archaeological sights. In *The Road to Oxiana* Byron comments that in the old days people rode their horses up to the ruins of Persepolis, made a camp and not a sound disturbed the peace of the landscape. In such a magical atmosphere, travellers could sense the ancient world around them whereas in the year 1937 the same place had become a spectacle devoid of surprise and mystery, defended by walls and greeted by a porter who let you in: “These useful additions clarify the intelligence. You may persuade yourself, in spite of them, into a mood of romance. But the mood they invite is that of a critic at an exhibition” (188). Byron’s account of his travelling experience sounds like a lament for a lost authenticity. In fact, he is grieving for a world that will never come back, either in Asia or at home. The newness of Byron’s style and Chatwin’s innovative prose is illustrated by their use of irony and in the form of their texts. Regarding Byron in *The Road to Oxiana*, Fussell affirms that maybe due to his obsession with frontiers and fragmentations he had juxtaposed a wide variety of rhetorical materials ranging from new clippings, letters, documents and diary entries to dissertations in art history and comic dialogues.<sup>43</sup> Matos (1994) also reminds us that even though travel books between the wars had become “phoenix-like”, they seem to have risen again: “Postwar literary travellers have had to devise new strategies both for travelling and for writing about it – some of which create new points of departure, some of which constitute a reappropriation of older routes.” (qtd. in Kowalewski 216)

At the beginning of the second section I argued that one of the greatest difficulties in producing original travel texts in Chatwin’s time was the consciousness

of a lack of *terra incognita*. Chatwin, like other contemporary literary travellers, had to face the question of how already charted places could be re-discovered or how the feeling of belatedness could be overcome. Besides they had to face the difficulty in creating something new in literature for two reasons: first from the lack of new art forms and second from the fact that there will always be writers and stories and models of stories that precede others, mediated texts rather than original texts. As far as Chatwin is concerned, the reader does not experience this feeling of end. Chatwin is aware of the scarcity of new landscapes and chronotopes but he shows that travel is meant to be transformed and transcended. By opening new paths of imagination, representation, interpretation and style, he invents, or at least initiates, a new literary form, part hybrid novel, part memoir and part travelogue, often involving the experiences of a Bruce Chatwin we find it difficult to get to know. His style stands apart from the post-colonial depiction of the third world/colonized world which usually disrupts and deconstructs the patterns of European travel writing. Chatwin's style contains irony, pastiche, collage, juxtapositions and playfulness and by including these varied perspectives, he subverts the rules of the travel writing genre from within. This style might sound familiar to us now, but when Chatwin wrote *IP* and *TS* it was truly innovative. However, despite this break with tradition, Chatwin had had no interest in deliberately producing something new, as he declared in an interview with Michael Ignatieff<sup>44</sup> in which he was asked if he still believed in the possibility of creating something fresh. Chatwin answered that: "The idea of the *new* worries me the least. As I see it, most of the latest progress within literature seems to be heading towards a cul-de-sac."<sup>45</sup> Finally, I agree with Buford (1981) when he affirms that travel writing satisfies the need for a world answerable to people's fictions (*Granta 10: 7*)<sup>46</sup> because he seems to have deciphered what I consider Chatwin's formula for his literary success.

Travel writing is one of the channels Chatwin used to satisfy his need for a world answerable to his fictions and he wrote this world in twelve years. The innovative quality of his style is that the world he created answered not only to his fictions but also to his obsessions and in spite of this his voice became fictional rather than autobiographical.

To conclude I turn to summarise the main issues which confirm Chatwin's innovation of the genre. First, Chatwin's work is aesthetically challenging. He broke thematic conventions and transgressed the clichéd narrative structures of the genre; according to Shakespeare: "Bruce's first book [*IP*] inaugurated a category: "the new non-fiction." (311)

Second, he exhibits a clear formal flexibility; his texts have a hybrid, "androgynous" quality. Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana* is a literary reference for Chatwin as it "had a 'omnium-gatherum'" (Korte 141). In *The Rings of Saturn* Sebald resorts to a similar 'omnium-gatherum' which ultimately becomes the collage of his text. These three writers mix fictionalised memoir and travel journal, inventories of natural and man-made curiosities, musings on paintings, political revolutionaries, zoology and architecture and an appeal for eccentricity. Both Chatwin and Sebald inhabit a limbo: they are devoted to an intense privacy but, paradoxically, enjoy the real world as a springboard for meditation upon history, philosophy, human tragedy, memory, writing and, with much reserve, the inner Self. In a way, both Sebald and Chatwin pursued what Byron had in his pilgrimage through Persia and Afghanistan in the 1930s: the portrait of difference through the eyes of a visionary traveller. In Byron the traveller is still heroic, still a member of a certain time and culture; in Sebald the traveller is a chronicler of a philosophy and the protagonist of a history of exile; in Chatwin the traveller is the drifter moving around in-between spaces and in-between

times, exhibiting an attempt “to intermix a sense of freedom with social awareness, an itch to escape with a candid respect for unfamiliar landscapes and cultures”

(Kowalewski 8). These three writers narrate their own trips in fragments, consciously chosen and gathered, never at random. As to form, Chatwin is also innovative insofar as he looks for less topographical and anthropological description and intermingles form and content to accommodate autobiographical material. Yet his journeys are certainly outer journeys. The “temperamental” quality of his journeys -a term coined by Kowalewski- does not emerge from a need for self-reflection and neither are his texts personal diaries. His Self is enlivened in the background, behind the actual experience of the journey. Chatwin seems to have anticipated what Kowalewski claims to be one of the dangers which affect travel writing and that some authors have been unable to rise above: self-therapy: “Too exclusive a journey into self represents a risk because the main adventure in such private voyages often consists of, as John Krich says, ‘uncovering the motives for having departed’.” (Kowalewski 9)

Third, to Chatwin travelling is a way of seeing, an exercise of insight rather than distance<sup>47</sup> and should be regarded as one of his multiple forms of visualizing both the world and art. Moreover his accounts breathe an air of observant openness which prevents us not only from narrowing our eyes at signs of cultural chauvinism but also from looking at landscapes and people with imperialist nostalgia or with a “sense of loss experienced as belatedness” (Duncan and Gregory 8). In “A Lament for Afghanistan” even if its title suggests loss, Chatwin does not communicate anxiety but beauty. He does what Duncan and Gregory believe is most important in travel writing: “[he]maintains the authenticity of the experience itself” (8); so despite mediated texts that provide him with previous information, while travelling Chatwin is able to rediscover the familiar and narrate it differently, with irony and originality. This would

lead to a final requirement -suggested by Kowalewski- for the writing of a good travel account which Chatwin fulfilled both in his fictional and non-fictional work, namely narrative intelligence: “What shapes a travel book’s imaginative texture is its narrative intelligence. Some modern travel classics are worth studying less for the facts they contain than for their elegant, inventive, sometimes cranky styles of personal witness” (Kowalewski 9). Chatwin’s journeys still have an aura of adventure and novelty. His view is not a nostalgic one; the past of explorers and adventurous people is relived and enhanced in spite of the almost complete Westernization of the globe, the few unexplored places left and the many replacements of the real all over the world.



## Notes to Chapter One

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- <sup>1</sup> See “Jonathan Raban” by James J. Schramer in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Volume 204: British Travel Writers 1940-1997, Detroit and London: Gale Research, 1999. p.235.
- <sup>2</sup> Mrs.Elizabeth Chatwin. First personal Interview. March 2005. Sinclair Gardens, London.
- <sup>3</sup> C.W.R.D Moseley (ed/trad.). *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. London: Penguin Books, 1983, p.207.
- <sup>4</sup> *World Literature Today*, October-December 2003, p.53.
- <sup>5</sup> For further information see Fussell’s article “Travel and Literary Imagination of the Twenties and Thirties” in Michael Kowalewski, ed. *Temperamental Journeys. Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1992, p.84.
- <sup>6</sup> The sentences within inverted comas are Fussell’s summary of the three different phases of the myth of the hero developed by Joseph Campbell and included in his article “Travel and Literary Imagination of the Twenties and Thirties” in Kowalewski’s *Temperamental Journeys*, p.85.
- <sup>7</sup> For more details on the novel see Patrick Meanor’s *Bruce Chatwin*, 1997, pp 128-129.
- <sup>8</sup> Mark Cocker. *Loneliness and Time. British Travel Writing in the Twentieth Century*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1992.
- <sup>9</sup> *World Literature Today*, October-December 2003, p.54.
- <sup>10</sup> Chatwin never set out on a coasting trip except for his sailing trip somewhere off the coast of Boston during his honeymoon. Elizabeth Chatwin. First personal interview. March 2005. Sinclair Gardens, London. Elizabeth Chatwin explains that her husband

felt really proud of his helmsmanship in the fog when he managed to get over a difficult situation at sea during a sailing trip off the coast of Massachusetts. He felt he had proved himself.

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Balmes, ed. *Chatwins Rucksack. Portraits, Gespräche, Skizzen*, p. 26-27. My translation from the German: “Der einsame Wanderer ist ein Produkt der imperialen Vergangenheit. Im übrigen aber gibt es bei Chatwin keine Spur von kolonialer Gesinnung. Er pflegt nicht nur Umgang mit fremden Kulturen. Er geht direct auf das los, was fremd an ihnen ist – noch viel entschlossener als Vorgänger wie T.E.Lawrence oder E.M.Foster, George Orwell oder Malcom Lowry.”

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Ignatieff’s interview with Bruce Chatwin in Balmes, p.38.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Wohl’s words quoted by Paul Fussell in his article “Travel and the British Literary Imagination of the Twenties and Thirties” in Kowalewski, p.77.

<sup>14</sup> My translation is from the first sentence of the text in German: “Der englische Klassenkampf mit seiner pedantischen Kleinlichkeit ist mir fremd.” I also translated the rest of the paragraph: “[...] during the war, when my father was often away in the Navy, I lived in NAAFI-canteens and I was passed round from one hand to another like a teapot.”: Vielleicht hängt das damit zusammen, dass ich während des Kriegs, als mein Vater bei der Navy oft unterwegs war, in NAAFI-Kantinen lebte und wie eine Teekanne rumgereicht wurde.” (Balmes 28)

<sup>15</sup> Mrs.Elizabeth Chatwin. First personal interview. March 2005. Sinclair Gardens, London.

<sup>16</sup> Balmes, p.85.

<sup>17</sup> The original text in French: “Se dépayser n’est pas voir du pays mais quitter son pays. Tout dépaysement nécessite non seulement de quitter ses occupations habituelles et son lieu de résidence, mais aussi de se quitter soi-même pour renaître

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momentanément ailleurs. Altération du corps et de l'esprit, le voyage est une coupure avec la réalité ... mais aussi une soudure au monde et des retrouvailles de soi : on ne fait pas que perdre en partant, en laissant 'tout' derrière nous, on y gagne aussi, mais encore faut-il en être conscient» (Michel 121). My translation: "Being an exile does not mean seeing a new country but leaving one's own. In every act of exile there is not only the need to stop one's usual activities and leave one's place of residence but also the need to stop being oneself so as to be born elsewhere for a while. By altering both the body and the spirit, the journey becomes a break with reality ... but it also becomes welded to the world and it entails a rediscovery of oneself: when setting off, when leaving everything behind, we always lose something but we also gain something. The point is to be aware of this."

<sup>18</sup> The sentence is quoted from Myrna Kostash's *Bloodlines* (1993). See Korte, p.171.

<sup>19</sup> See Violetta Krakovsky "Dilemmas of Place and Identity in Dionne Brand's Prose Poem 'No Language neutral'". *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Volume Four, Number 3, p. 63. Published by Balfour Printing, Little Rock, Arkansas, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Nicholas Shakespeare. *Bruce Chatwin*. London: The Harvill Press, 1999. See pages 8,15,63,75, 360, 370, 385 for a better explanation of his character traits, both faults and qualities.

<sup>21</sup> See *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol.204, p.236.

<sup>22</sup> See *Anatomy of Restlessness*, p.3-10.

<sup>23</sup> See *What Am I Doing Here*, p.9-11.

<sup>24</sup> Jameson's term to describe an identical copy for which no original has ever existed.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Marc Augé in La Contra, 2 July 2001. La Contra is a special section at the back page of the Spanish daily paper *La Vanguardia* and it is based on an interview

with a remarkable national or international celebrity either a scientist, a politician or a writer.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Graves. "Nowhere Left to Go? The Death and Renaissance of the Travel Book". *World Literature Today*, October-December 2003, p.53.

<sup>27</sup> Conference in Paris 19/03/04. Published by Publications de l'Université de Provence under the title *Récits de voyage et romans voyageurs. Aspects de la littérature contemporaine de langue anglaise*. Sous la direction de François Gallix, Vanessa Guignery, Jean Viviès, Matthew Graves. Aix-en-Provence, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Boxes 1-8: Notebooks. Bodleian Library.

<sup>29</sup> Renzo D'Agnillo. *Bruce Chatwin. Settlers, Exiles and Nomads*. Pescara: Tracce 2000, p.22.

<sup>30</sup> Philip Dodd, ed. *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing*. London: Frank Cass, 1982, p.151.

<sup>31</sup> See Paul Smethurst. *The Postmodern Chronotope. Reading Space and Time in Contemporary Fiction*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000, p.48. Lefebvre's analysis of spatial moments constituting social space: "*representational spaces* are the symbolic and metaphorical mental maps by which we experience physical space. We live by representational spaces, reading signs and symbols as our reality, but this is also a poetic space which writers and artists may appropriate and seek to change."

<sup>32</sup> A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Nottingham Trent University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. September 2000. It is available in The British Library (Shelfmark DX216580).

<sup>33</sup> Karl Miller. "Twins" in *Doubles: Studies in Literary History*. London: Oxford University Press, 1985. See Chapter 20.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Meanor. *Bruce Chatwin*, p.76.

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<sup>35</sup> My translation from the French: “Quant aux homes, ils sont toujours les grands absents.”

<sup>36</sup> Note 13 in Korte, p.188.

<sup>37</sup> See Cocker. *Loneliness and Time. British Travel Writing in the Twentieth Century*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1992.

<sup>38</sup> See Shakespeare (1999) pp.317 and 413. See also *Imaginary Homelands* by Salman Rushdie, p.234.

<sup>39</sup> See Franck Michel. *Désirs d’Ailleurs*. My translation from the French: “L’aventure sans la mésaventure. L’Ailleurs sans l’Autre.”

<sup>40</sup> See Jean Chesneaux. *L’Art du Voyage*. Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1999, 228-229. My translation from the French: “Accepter d’être un voyageur du monde tel qu’il est, c’est sans doute le prix à payer pour pouvoir légitimement s’interroger sur le devenir à la fois pluriel et unifié des sociétés contemporaines ... Voyager dans le monde, c’est philosopher sur le monde, c’est s’interroger sur l’équilibre toujours instable qui s’établira peut-être entre les pesanteurs de l’uniformité et les forces restées bien vivantes de la diversité.”

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Marc Augé under the title “El turismo destruye el mundo” in *La Contra*, special interview section in the Spanish daily paper *La Vanguardia*, 2 July 2001. My translation from the original text: “un antropólogo estudia las relaciones personales que se dan en un medio dado, y el medio, ahora, es el mundo global [...] La historia del mundo- como tal- acaba de empezar: hasta ahora había historias parciales y, ahora, empieza la historia del mundo.”

<sup>42</sup> The italics are mine.

<sup>43</sup> See Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling between the Wars* in Korte, p.141.

<sup>44</sup> See Michael Ignatieff. "Interview with Bruce Chatwin", *Granta* 21 (1987), pp. 21-28.  
and also in Jürgen Balmes, *Chatwins Rucksack*, p.22.

<sup>45</sup> My translation from the German: "Die Idee vom Neuen beeindruckt mich nicht im geringsten. Die meisten Fortschritte in der Literatur kommen mir fast immer so vor, als führten sie in eine Sackgasse." (Balmes 22)

<sup>46</sup> See the Editorial by Bill Buford in *Granta* 10 (1984), p.7.

<sup>47</sup> Let's recall Paul Theroux's words: "Travel has less to do with distance than with insight. Successful travel narratives have to do with both." (Kowalewski 8)

## Chapter Two

### **Chatwin's Narrative Style (I): A New Way of Telling/Storytelling based on the Anthropological Concept of Liminality. A Search for a Reader and a Listener.**

*Form and content.*



Photograph by Bruce Chatwin. Wall of Stupa, Pakistan.





## Chapter 2

### **Chatwin's Narrative Style (I): A New Way of Telling/Storytelling based on the Anthropological Concept of Liminality. A Search for a Reader and a Listener.<sup>1</sup>**

Reality is that place between the sea and the foam.

(Irish Proverb)

Chatwin availed himself of anthropological studies not only in order to confer a more realistic-scientific-historical quality to his travel texts *IP* and *TS* thus joining the literary tradition of travel writing, but also to enrich the story of *TVOO* and *OTBH* as well as some articles and stories in *WAIDH*. By doing so he created a new narratology; his style is based on his belief in the homology between ritual and narrative and he used the structures both issues share. Chatwin's texts evolve around "the creation of man" (*WAIDH* 121) and the search for the place and the time where this creation can be fulfilled. He considered the anthropological concept of liminality to be the ritual phase in human life which best offers the possibility of this cosmic process and he remained consistent in his creed until the very end of his life. Living on the threshold became his formula, as it is clear in his statement "East minus West equals Zero" in the story "The Volga" (*WAIDH* 170). By exploring the concept of threshold he also claimed that human beings cannot rely on certainties as there are no clear definitions of reality. This idea is what he seems to be hinting at in the following description in *IP*: "It's not easy. First there's a road that's hardly a road and then there's a track that isn't even a track." (89)

## **2.1. An Anthropological Approach to Chatwin's Writing. Liminality and *communitas*.**

“Do you wish,” he asked, “to be initiated?”

He added that, if I did so wish, I'd be obliged to submit to circumcision if I hadn't been circumcised, then to subincision, which, as I doubtless knew, was to have your urethra peeled back like a banana skin and flayed with a stone knife.

“Thank you,” I said. “I'll pass.”

*(The Songlines 42)*

The involvement of anthropology in literary studies has been, and indeed is, as important as other social sciences such as sociology and psychology. Two of the major anthropological concepts connected with literary theory are ritual and myth. The relationship between anthropology and Chatwin's work, in particular travel writing, should be considered from two different perspectives. On the one hand, there is the traditional clear-cut connection between anthropology/ethnography and travel writing with its depiction of worlds other than ours. Contact with a different culture entails contemplation of and responsible research into that new culture, therefore, the study of the Other, when writing travel accounts, frequently includes an anthropological field-study and eventually a contrast and reflection on the new encountered world. In this sense, Chatwin would fit into the long tradition of travel writers such as Joseph Conrad, Malcom Lowry, Robert Byron and Graham Greene, who acted as anthropologists to illustrate their creative texts with scientific information. According to Shakespeare, the sources Chatwin used to write *TS* were the anthropologists and lawyers who had spent

time with the aborigines. Many of them were involved in the Land Rights Movement and were based in Alice Springs. He also read Theodor Strehlow's work on the Australian aborigines, which dealt primarily with the Aranda people amongst whom he had lived as an insider and whose traditions he had studied (Shakespeare 409-414). When Chatwin was studying archaeology at Edinburgh University he was really impressed by the lectures of Charles Thomas on both the Welsh in Chubut (Patagonia) and on Darwin's reaction to the Yaghans of Tierra de Fuego. These were the main sources he used to document *IP* (286). The symbiotic relationship between anthropology and literature is to be found in most American and European travel writing and also in Chatwin's travel works *IP* and *TS*, as well as in some stories in his miscellany *WAIDH*.

On the other hand, although Chatwin investigates and documents Australia and Patagonia, China and Russia, Afghanistan and Tibet, what really links anthropology to Chatwin's writing is not just the scientific component but also structure. One of the most deeply rooted anthropological structures is Arnold van Gennep's rite of passage. In Chatwin's texts it is the middle phase of this rite in particular, the liminal phase, that becomes a source of creative inspiration and artistic production. Throughout both his fictional and non-fictional work he infers that by living on the threshold as a liminal character Man can be himself and create out of himself.

To begin with, it is necessary to explain what a rite of passage entails and to what extent Chatwin reproduces its structure in his texts. Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process* studies van Gennep's three-phase scheme. Van Gennep defines rites of passage as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age [...] all rites of passage or "transition" are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying "threshold" in Latin) and aggregation (94). The first phase (of

separation) in a rite of passage is associated with the initiation of adolescent boys to manhood among traditional peoples and it involves the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure. The boys are taken from their villages and families to a comparatively remote ritual site. During this second phase, the intervening liminal period, the characteristics of the passenger are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural space that has few or none of the attributes of either the past or of the coming state. Sometimes the boys are subjected to various ordeals or humiliations and in some cases they are even mutilated. Such initiations may take anything from a few days to a few months, occasionally even years. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation) the passage is consummated by means of a strongly ritualistic reunion with the home village. The boys are often considered to have died and to have been reborn as men and are then expected to behave in accordance with certain norms and ethical standards. Only after completion of the initiation ceremony can the neophyte enjoy adult relationships such as marriage or tribal representation.

Turner develops this basic scheme by detailing the form and attributes of rites of passage and by contrasting liminality and *communitas* with status system. His work is an enlightening reference for Chatwin's writing because to Chatwin the important point in this anthropological scheme is that there is the liminal phase, the betwixt and between phase, where the boy is no longer a boy but not yet a man. In this period of the initiation rite the candidates are stripped and levelled of their former status, standing and rank. As a result, they develop an intense fellowship and comradeship among themselves based on individual choice of friends rather than on family ties. Therefore, liminality offers a blend of homogeneity and egalitarianism, "a blend of lowliness and sacredness [...] a moment in and out of time" (Turner 96). The liminal phase is then a

sacred phase, a mystical background where the initiand is like a *tabula rasa*, a mass of clay or dust “on which is inscribed the wisdom and knowledge of the group.” (103)

In Chapter one we anticipated that despite the form of journey presented in Chatwin’s travel books, the real focus of his writing is not on the whole rite of passage, but just on the middle phase. Chatwin masks the rituals of departure and return by avoiding too much detail about them because in fact, neither the departure nor the coming back really matters. He sets out to investigate the origin of a piece of skin or the Dreamtime but the results are not the main issue.

The liminal phase in a rite of passage involves a liminal time, space and personae whose attributes Turner (1974) has listed and described in *The Ritual Process*. Much of Chatwin’s texts are taken up with liminal characters and they take place in cosmic sacred spaces and times. *TS* and *IP* are both travel texts and thus show some similarities in structure and perspective. Despite this the final account is completely different. On the other hand, most of the stories and articles collected in *WAIDH* as well as the novels *Utz*, *OTBH* and *TVOO* also contain liminal elements, but *WAIDH* has not the narrative unity of the other three books. Just because *WAIDH* is a collection of seemingly unconnected stories -both in time and space- it is difficult to follow a track of content as in the other novels; however, there is a strong intelligible line of affinity between the places Chatwin visits, the people he encounters and the experiences he lives. This affinity is articulated in terms of transition, sacredness, in-betweenness, the uncanny and creation. The places and the people chosen as examples from *WAIDH* or *OTBH* embrace the same qualities as the places and people described in *TS*, *IP*, *Utz* or *TVOO*.

Concerning *TS* and *IP*, we should start by looking into liminal times and liminal places. Not only people in conjunction with rites of passage may be in a liminal state;

there may be time periods that are liminal as well. That is, certain times of the year may be between one state or another. Dawn and dusk would be examples of daily liminal periods. Likewise, there may be liminal spaces such as caves, rivers, paths into forests, the pilgrim road or crossroads where suicides, gypsies, witches and outlaws used to be buried. At some point in Patagonia, Chatwin starts his journey to Punta Arenas. He wants to follow the same track as Lucas Bridges in his famous book *The Uttermost Part of the Earth*, one of Chatwin's favourite books in his youth. This is the unused path from lake Kami in Harberton to Viamonte; much of the trip is done through a forest "a journey through a dark wood" (IP 132). He also has to cross the same river at least twenty times; Chatwin is re-enacting the mythic journey of a young hero, as river crossings are always threshold experiences. Trubshaw (2001) in "The Metaphors of Rituals of Place and Time" labels these magic places "zero dimensional", meaning that they represent a sacred centre, neither north nor south, neither east nor west, but the place where one is. According to Elsbree (1991): "Liminality is both temporal and spatial. It can characterize not only the events that compose ritual transition but also the place or places where these events occur [...] liminal space of a certain kind is essential to creation" (47). Chatwin's use of Patagonia and the Australian Bush are examples of this kind of space, these large milieux being "a complex fusion of oral tradition, actual settings and occurrences, and fictive elaboration" (47). Thus liminal places function as sacred spaces of ritual which become universal destinations.

The Pampas in Patagonia in the late 70s and the Outback in Australia in the late 80s represent those remote ritual places in the initiation rite. The geography of adventure which Phillips (1997) details in *Mapping Men and Empire* corresponds to these liminal spaces: "a marginal, ambiguous region in which elements of normal life are inverted and contradictions displayed [...] a place of polymorphous beings,

unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight” (13). Both Patagonia and the Bush are imaginatively inhabitable places and not restricted to “a narrowly-understood realism”(Elsbree 47). They are occupied by hundreds of near-naked initiands/ passengers/neophytes whose national and religious origins have been left behind. Most of them are exiles, drifters, refugees, second generation immigrants, wanderers, misfits and outlaws who share a territory which is also on the move because it is still being created; it is a transient area itself. Past and present intermingle by means of either a sequence of stories that blend different periods of time into a timeless era as in *IP* or by the ritualistic nature of the territory itself as in *TS*. These conditions turn place, time and people into mystical entities due to their resurgent nature. *IP* and *TS* are cosmic books since Chatwin makes art and identity emerge from those rudimentarily structured far-flung places where “no one would want to drop an atom bomb”(IP 64). In fact, both books are celebrations of liminality.

The Pampas and the Australian Outback with all the emptiness of their deserts, their “absolute remoteness and foul climate”(IP 24), and the diversity of their people epitomize the state of *communitas* Chatwin was looking for. They are geographical areas where people of different nationalities live together, befriend and also confront each other. Within this diversity there is an affinity of personality and a common vision of the world: both Argentina and Australia are countries of emigrants and these people all share the same state, namely as Elsbee argues: “the drama of the liminal is that of emergent identity, it is the passage during which values are tested, issues are clarified, choices begin to have consequences” (126) and as Chatwin evokes: “the history of Buenos Aires is written in its telephone directory. Pompey Romanov, Emilio Rommel, Ladislao Radzimił [...] told a story of exile, disillusion and anxiety behind lace curtains.” (*IP* 7)

As narrated in *TS*, Arkady's parents applied for emigration papers to the United States and Canada but "Argentina, they were told, was a better bet for people of doubtful status. At last, after a year of anxious waiting, there came news of jobs in Australia and passages for the ones who signed" (*TS* 38). The Australian territory, still with empty places, offers the possibility of starting a new life from scratch. Likewise, even though Patagonia has traditionally represented the end of the world, in the early 30s it was "the land of opportunity and the tango" (*IP* 61) and a place where German immigrants and naval deserters, as Chatwin records, dared to go because they knew they could achieve and create something there. Shakespeare quotes an old Patagonian woman who endorses this idea: "In Patagonia [...] Dreams proliferate. Patagonia is different from anywhere else. That loneliness, that grandiosity. Anything can happen" (Shakespeare 290). Chatwin discovers, ultimately, in the Australian Outback and Patagonia a space "to devise a stance that tests the limits of individual choice and freedom." (Elsbree 57)

Immigrants in Patagonia exhibit a liminal nature as they are physically here, emotionally there, in-between and betwixt. They have settled in the new country but never quite forgotten their origins. In Shakespeare's words: "Patagonia spans two nations; a good many of its inhabitants pass a life likewise divided, rebuilding the environment they have escaped" (290), like the Swede who had died fifteen years before and had never left Río Pico. His son was a trucker who wore chequered shirts and a red handkerchief at the neck, but when he relaxed "his face collapsed in Nordic sadness" (*IP* 61). Similarly the Scot whose family did well, bought land and learned a little Spanish but "kept Scotland in their hearts" and kept in the bottom of a cage "the dried-up skeleton of a thistle" (*IP* 67). In Patagonia Chatwin also drinks a toast with a first generation German immigrant who praises King Ludwig of Germany as the last



genius of Europe and cultivates a typical German garden in his house. However diverse the nationalities of origin, the new Patagonians see how a new common soil is created and new symbols of unity appear both in the physical and mythical landscape: “The arching stems of a pampas rose sprung up as if fertilized by the bodies of Wilson and Evans”(IP 64). Chatwin explains that Willie Wilson and Bob Evans were two American outlaws who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century and who robbed office and bank safes with their Winchesters. Despite the popular legend, there is not only one Wilson and Evans story but several spread across the vast territory. Chatwin follows them up and discovers that Patagonia is fertilized with stories that link past and present and that have little to do with nationality or race; as a result national traits are blurred by the imposing force of nature, legend and adventure, and also by the timeless quality of the place. In fact, although exiles group according to their origins and sometimes fight and accuse each other of cattle-stealing, they are also united as “[i]n their hatred they were friends” (IP 56). The mixed community of Welshmen, Scots, Germans, Lithuanians and Boers among others, engender a universal spirit because, as Elsbree argues: “*communitas* does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms” (27) and “it strains toward universalism and openness” (127). Chatwin is claiming that liminality does not breed crowds of faceless people devoid of distinguishing features, fused in the prevailing fellowship of a state of *communitas*, but represents an existential middle where identities, according to Elsbree, “both knit and remain distinct” (49).

*TS* and *IP* outline a special medium, “a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and the fairyland, where the Real and the Imaginary may meet” (Elsbree 47). Just as the Dreamtime of the Australian aborigines is always and never, so the “dream” of liminal place is everywhere and nowhere. Chatwin resorts to this spatial and

temporal neutrality to devise a particular narrative framework which almost verges on the philosophical. In *TS* his theories on nomads and wandering become cosmic as the whole of Australia “could be read as a music score [...] The man who went Walkabout was making a ritual journey [...] By singing the world into existence, he said, the Ancestors had been poets in the original sense of *poesis*, meaning “creation” (*TS* 13). Both aborigines with their rituals and their nomadism, and immigrants, exiles and Westerners with their expectations and their lives on the move bring a new world into existence. The Man then becomes the Track and this act of creation takes place in Chatwin’s liminal places. This is one of the reasons why liminality should be interpreted in terms of sacredness.

In places such as Argentina, Australia, Tibet, the Volga or Afghanistan, away from his London and his circle of friends, Chatwin learns that truth is contextually relative. He finds himself in in-between times and in in-between spaces, and he shows that not only this liminal state may enrich the way the Self is perceived but also how the different ways the world is viewed may become balanced. The human interaction in *IP*, the ideas recorded in his notebooks, the stories we are told in *TS* or the episodes in the life of Francisco Manoel da Silva in *TVOO* reveal the fact that we all contain within ourselves multiple intersecting identities. Chatwin’s belief in the nature of human restlessness fosters these intersections because no matter who you are or how many identities you assemble, there is always a place where Man can be fully a Man with all his contradictions. The Australian Outback in *TS*, the Pampas in *IP*, Prague during the Cold War in *Utz*, the Volga or Tibet in *WAIDH* and the farm TheVision in Wales in *OTBH* are mystical places meant to provide the ideal milieu for personal and artistic creation.

After liminal space and time in *TS* and *IP* have been analysed, I turn to examine the attributes of liminal personae in Chatwin's fictional and non-fictional texts. Turner argues that liminal personae or threshold people have certain attributes which distinguish them from those individuals living according to the status system. The first distinguishing trait of threshold people is the stripping off of preliminal and postliminal attributes, hence the unimportance of departure and return in Chatwin's travel accounts as well as the idea of near-nakedness which he constantly infers and highlights. Turner asserts that liminal entities in initiation rites are represented as possessing nothing:

"They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia [...] in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands" (95).

Religious orders and the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions represent the institutionalization of *communitas*, the social quality of the middle phase in a rite of passage. Father Terence in *TS* is an Irish priest who came to Australia to join a new Cistercian community in Victoria. He lives in a hut on a deserted beach on the Timor Sea and is writing a manual on poverty, for he has found it necessary to rid himself of all material things. He claims: "Today, he said, more than ever before, men had to live without things. Things filled man with fear: the more things they had, the more they had to fear" (*TS* 64). According to Meanor: "Father Terence, whose earlier counterpart is Theo the Tent in *OTBH*, is another Franciscan model that Chatwin admires and envies" (Meanor 106). However, not only people belonging to religious orders have decided to reject possessions. Arkady, Chatwin's travel companion and friend in his journey through the Australian Outback also travels light: "Yet, preferring solitude to domestic chaos, he no longer lived with his wife. He had a few possessions apart from a harpsichord and a shelf of books" (*TS* 1). Father Terence and Arkady are

fighting for the same cause: to preserve the most essential liberty of the Aboriginals: “the liberty to remain poor, or, as he phrased it more tactfully, the space in which to be poor if they wished to be poor” (*TS* 3). Chatwin is vindicating the liberty and the space in which to remain oneself. This condition of near-nakedness is to be found in *IP* as well. Florentino Solís is a wanderer “without wife or horse, owning nothing but two sleek *criollo* ponies, their saddles and a dog” (*IP* 57). The only possessions of Simon Rodowitsky, a Russian from Kiev, are some family photographs, and the Indians of Tierra de Fuego are wanderers who owned no more than they could carry.

In addition to near-nakedness, sexlessness and sexual continence are two other attributes of liminality. Men in Patagonia live without their wives; women are old widows or spinsters, fathers of religious orders are chaste, male travellers and travellers’ sisters have remained unmarried, for the monks in the Tibetan mountain monasteries “the idea of taking a wife was NOT POSSIBLE” (*WAIDH* 277), in *TS* a woman who is described as being capable and intelligent is a divorcee. Celibacy seems to be the choice and neither is there any room for romanticism. Regarding this, Rushdie writes that: “In the complete works of Bruce Chatwin there is not a loving fuck” (Shakespeare 505). The protagonist of *TVOO* shows a similar attitude towards relationships “[w]ith partners of either sex, he performed the mechanics of love in planked rooms. They left him with the sensation of having brushed with death: none came back a second time” (*TVOO* 65), and for his first wife “[m]aking love meant no more [to her] than sweeping the floor” (55). As in his novels *Utz* and *OTBH*, sex might be there behind the inexperience of the repressed Jones brothers and in their father’s brutal sexuality or in the crazy collection of one-night stands of *Utz*, but it is not a main issue. There is an ongoing lack of affection. In *TS* the only sign of sexual voluptuousness comes from a black prostitute; only at the very end of the story do we

learn that Arkady and Marian love each other and have just got married. Likewise only at the end of *Utz*, do we see Marta embracing Utz “as a true wife” (Utz 152). As I previously explained, at some point on his journey in Patagonia, Chatwin decides to walk the “Track,” described in *The Uttermost Part of the Earth* by Lucas Bridges. Chatwin follows a guanaco -an animal related to the llama- for a while. His description of the animal is basically allegorical: “He was a single male, his coat all muddied and his front gashed with scars. He had been in a fight and lost. Now he also was a sterile wanderer” (*IP* 133). In Chapter one, the issue of loneliness and egotism within travelling was already discussed; now both issues are examined in terms of infertility: wandering goes hand in hand with solitude and individuality, therefore no fruit can thrive. Shakespeare comments that Chatwin connected infertility with the position of the shaman and with the notion of escape. (199-200)

A fourth characteristic of liminal personae is the absence of marked sexual polarity. We find several examples of this minimization of distinction between the sexes in *IP*. Etta Place, the female companion of Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid, is a good horsewoman and sharpshooter and she often has to disguise herself as a man so as to escape from sheriffs. She is one more outlaw in a totally male-oriented profession. There is also Miss Starling who travelled alone with a lightweight suitcase looking for flowering shrubs and who bit the arm of a boy who tried to snatch her handbag. Although Marian, the idealized and elusive lover of Arkady in *TS*, dresses in a skimpy, flower-printed dress and takes showers in the desert, males and females in *TS* and *IP* are generally not treated very differently. A portrait of distaste for sex and tomboyish manners is found in Chatwin’s description of Stevenson’s wife Fanny Osbourne and her relationship with her husband: “She then developed a distaste for aggressive masculinity, and perhaps a distaste for sex in general [...]. There was not going to be

much sex in this marriage” (*Anatomy* 135). Fanny Osbourne showed a tomboyish attitude in the same way that Stevenson showed certain “girlishness [...] always kept within the bounds of Victorian prudery, that thrilled at tough, aggressive masculinity” (136).

Another distinguishing trait of threshold people, and closely related to the issue of duality within human nature, is the fact that they are entities in transition. They live the drama of emerging identity and whatever the particulars, they become rather ambiguous, not wholly or clearly one type and not yet unmistakably the other, neither here nor there. Turner defines such ambiguity in liminality: “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial [...] likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness” (96). The legendary outlaws Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid live between two cultures; crossing borders between states in North America, crossing borders between countries in South America, living between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, their lives and deaths lying somewhere between legend and reality. They are the epitome of a historical and social change which took place at the turn of that century and whose most fictional picture would be the outlaw who starts his career riding a horse and ends up riding a bicycle.

Three clear examples of human duality in *WAIDH* are the following: “Shamdev: The Wolf-Boy” is the story of a man-cub who is saved and suckled by wolves, then taken to a mission where they try to turn him into a “less animal” creature. In “Chiloe” we are told that the people “are a mixture of Chonos Indian, Spanish and sailors of every colour, and their imagination churns with tormented mythologies” (346). Likewise “The Very Sad Story of Salah Bougine” tells the story of the *pieds-noirs*, neither French nor Algerian, frontiersmen and refugees who cannot identify with any

nation. Also “Kevin Volans”, a South African composer and friend of Chatwin’s, lives a similar experience of being a threshold persona: “On returning from Africa he was bitterly disappointed to disclose he was neither African nor European. Soon he realised that he was free, free to compose whatever he wanted” (*WAIDH* 69). Individuals are endowed with freedom and ultimately identity by accepting their duality.

Chatwin had already played with human duality in his novel *OTBH* to show the wide scope of liminality. He did so by means of various figures, one of which is the fact that the protagonists of the story are twins. The writer is suggesting that the border between selfhood and otherness is sometimes almost unrecognisable. The character of Alfie, the son of a brother and a sister, a “halfwit” people said, is clearly among Chatwin’s gallery of threshold people: “Alfie was a troublesome child. He was always stripping off his clothes and playing naked in the beast-house, and sometimes he went missing for days” (*OTBH* 154). Although Francisco Manuel da Silva is based on a real person, what Chatwin is doing with the protagonist of *TVOO* is fashioning a fictional character who embodies the conflicts of two different cultures and who is a victim and a victimizer at the same time: he had a brutal upbringing as a child and later he would become a slave trader enslaving African natives. In his last novel *Utz* Chatwin presents his main character as a divided man. On the one hand, he hates the Communist bureaucrats who run the government; on the other hand, as Meanor argues, he feels a great disgust over “the excesses of capitalism he sees in France” (138). One more internal division is between his confined life in Siroka Street in Prague, enslaved by his treasured collection, and his journeys to Vichy, Geneva and sometimes Paris. “Utz was those rare individuals who, throughout the Cold War, persisted in the illusion that the Iron Curtain was essentially flimsy” but “he succeeded in keeping a foot in both camps” (*Utz* 88). The split between the settler and the nomad, such a recurrent theme in

Chatwin's writing, is also shown in the article "The Road to the Isles" in which Chatwin reflects on Stevenson's split nature. One side of Chatwin's most admired and best-read writers was "the perennial boy with the pack on his back, always happier to be somewhere else, unable to face the complications of sex, and ready to work it off on a bike" (*Anatomy* 134). The other side of Stevenson "was the man with the staid, conventional view that he should marry and settle down." (134)

A final attribute of liminal personae is their uncanny and magical nature. At the heart of liminality are the conditions that call into question the "normal". The people described in his travel texts *TS*, *IP*, in his collection of articles *WAIDH* and finally in his fiction *TVOO*, *Utz* and *OTBH* are the least commonplace as they live unusual lives and have done unusual things. Thubron comments that Chatwin was fascinated with "crazed people out of their context, for the ambiguous, the odd, the peculiar" (qtd. in Shakespeare 126). Most of Chatwin's characters dwell in the margins of society but even though they may be "awkward in company" (*IP* 57), there is always something to learn from their stories because they share the "marvel" quality of the land they inhabit. Trubshaw (2001) argues that liminality may contain what may be called "a time of marvels. Masked figures, representing gods, ancestors or other magic powers may appear to the neophytes in grotesque, monstrous or beautiful forms" (8). Both *TS* and *IP* assemble a huge variety of monsters, strange creatures and magic sacred objects that are shown to the initiands at some point in the story; however, it is not only these traditionally ritualistic items that confer mysticism to the general atmosphere of the books, but more down-to-earth objects: a piece of furniture or a book in a library can also have shamanic effects on people. These objects are, as to *IP*, a glass-fronted cabinet in his grandmother's dining room and in the cabinet: "a piece of skin [...] A piece of brontosaurus" (*IP* 5). As to *TS*, Chatwin's great aunt Ruth told him that



Australia was the country of the Upside-downers and she had a book about the continent where he would “gaze in wonder at pictures of the koala and kookaburra [...] Australia is a land of wonders.” (*TS* 5, 47)

Turner (1969) states that liminality, marginality and structural inferiority are “conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art” (128). The Yeti in Nepal (*WAIDH* 271), the Unicorn, the Sloth, and the Yoshil in Patagonia in *IP* are some of the mythical creatures which turn Chatwin’s texts not only into anthropological sites but also into legends. Such legends, encompassing the in-betweenness and betwixtness of liminality, tell stories about man-cubs, wolf-children, half-human monsters and people of mixed race, outlaws and exiles, symmetry, doubles, namesakes and twins, automatons, frontiersmen and tricksters. All these real and fictional elements are symbols of the double-sided nature of man which Chatwin so insistently developed in his texts.

Australian Aboriginals in *TS* go Walkabout which means that “they would step from their work-clothes, and leave: for weeks and months and even years, trekking half-way across the continent if only to meet a man, then trekking back as if nothing had happened” (*TS* 10). They are presented as two people in one: they have another Self which drags them along and transforms them. Even the “other” Bruce in the story personifies a kind of ontological question: What is the point of a namesake? We wonder whether this man really existed or whether Chatwin was simply playing with double identities in general or with his own double identity in particular. One of the people Chatwin meets on his journey through the Outback is Titus. He is a forty-eight year-old Aboriginal who embraces two different identities. There is the educated Titus who speaks both English and German fluently, reads the *Scientific American* and masters all kinds of mechanical skills and there is the “other” Titus:

the ultra-conservative song-man who lived half-naked, with his dependants and his dogs; who hunted with a spear and never a rifle; who spoke six or seven Aboriginal languages and was famous, up and down the Western Desert, for his judgments on tribal law [...]. He had the stamina to keep both systems going. (TS 156)

Chatwin leafs through Ovid's *Metamorphoses* during a short break in the Australian desert and again he reflects upon the tendency of human beings towards transformation. In particular the story of Lykæon's transformation into a wolf makes him think of the real significance of the Songlines. He realizes that the whole of Classical mythology might represent the relics of a gigantic "song-map": "that all the to-ing and fro-ing of gods and goddesses, the caves and sacred springs, the sphinxes and chimaeras, and all the men and women who became nightingales or ravens, echoes or narcissi, stones or stars- could all be interpreted in terms of totemic geography" (TS 117). The reference to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the tendency of human beings to enforce an "intimacy with the Beast" (TS 253), people of mixed race and babies who from the waist down are seals (WAIDH 350) are all part of Chatwin's obsession with the passage-like and ambiguous nature of man.

Meanor (1997) argues that Chatwin found in both his reading and his travels the oldest story in the world: the fall of man, not in the story of Adam and Eve but in the story of their children, Cain and Abel (92). To me Chatwin illustrates this story in most of his narratives and chronotopes because his is an attempt to show that the duality of Man and Beast can be found anywhere and any time. The conflict between settlement and nomadism is an example of this duality whose sometimes devastating effects Chatwin acknowledges and narrates. In this sense, he does recognize the cruel consequences of Western cultural imperialism on native cultures, such as the Australian

Aborigines and the Araucanian and Tehuelche in southern Chile and Patagonia.<sup>2</sup>

However, his close observation of human nature leads him to apprehend deeper layers of malice and goodness. For example, he detects the life conditions of people during the Cold War years in Eastern Europe, who, as Meanor claims, were oppressed by both “the bleak world of Communist bureaucracies [and] the equally disturbing world of capitalist greed” (10). In such conditions, Utz’s attempt to construct his own version of Eden is doomed to failure. Chatwin also detects the impossibility of the brothers Jones to evade the unstoppable push of mechanization and technology in *OTBH* to the extent that they cannot relish life even in their self-made Eden, their farm The Vision.

Enslaving the innocent African natives and destroying their primitive way of life for the sake of European culture and Christianity is another side of the co-existence of Man and Beast and it is one of the central points in *TVOO*. Thus damage and pain can be found all over the world, either when travelling or staying at home. What Chatwin manages to do by means of a genuine narrative style is to keep his distance from this extended evil gloom and to look at it with irony and detachment and also with both full awareness of and respect for idiosyncratic diversity.

From Chatwin’s fiction we assume that not because we do not venture into the outer world will we be safer, and not because we become wanderers and nomads will we be wiser and better human beings. We all contain good and evil and sometimes we can be our own enemies. Meanor reflects on the issue and concludes: “[In *TVOO*] Chatwin’s genius as a fiction writer shows itself in the subtle way he creates an exceptionally evil character who remains compellingly human throughout the book” (8). Chatwin is also a “romantic traveller”, as Duncan & Gregory argue,<sup>3</sup> and due to his romantic belief in the essential goodness of human nature, he justifies in *TVOO* Da Silva’s evil attitude by delineating the cruel circumstances of his childhood. The axis of

his ontological and epistemological theories about good and evil is that we can choose to be either the Man or the Beast inside ourselves by inhabiting thresholds and by allowing ourselves to experience the possibilities of change that threshold states provide.

*IP* also includes these dualities, but with a mythical component. The monsters which inhabit the caves and the wilds of the Pampas are half-human and have names (the Yemishe, the Su, the Yaquraru, the Elegassen). They belong to the magic world of the Indian legends and now that there are no Indians left, these magic creatures and giants are part of the myth of Patagonia and an interesting subject for anthropology. Chatwin tells the stories of The Red Pig and the Yoshil in his attempt to conceptualise his idea of the duality of human nature. The story of The Red Pig is about a man who ran out of his house; nobody knew about him for days until: “[...] a peon found him in a pasture with some cows. Naked! On all fours! And eating grass! And he was bellowing like a bull because he thought he was a bull. And that was the *end* of course” (*IP* 113). Similarly the story of the Yoshil:

The Indian Paka killed the Yoshil. He fired and heard a scream of pain.

In the morning he found the corpse nearby. To his horror, the animal had the same features as his brother, who had recently died. He dug a tomb, uncertain if he was burying a Yoshil, or reburying his brother. (*IP* 72)

The Yoshil’s “scream of pain” symbolizes our awareness, as human beings, that we comprise animal attributes which we cannot get rid of so easily. This awareness entails pain because we must accept this duality and adapt to our own nature. Chatwin displays and dwells on this duality to encourage us to recognize it and to live with the pain within this act of recognition. Chatwin depicts threshold people and double identities because he believes nothing is steady or naturally determined: sex, nation, religion,

gender or political stance. Neither his fictional characters nor the real people he meets on his journeys have a fully "socially-approved human identity" (Elsbree 45) and this lack of category enables them to escape identification; it grants them the possibility of being free to choose who they want to be and how they want to live. This is the reason why Chatwin, being an escapist himself, plays the role of the Harlequin like his character Utz: "[t]he arch-improviser, the zany, trickster, master of the volteface [...] would forever strut in his variegated plumage, grin through his orange mask, tiptoe into bedrooms [...] dance in the teeth of catastrophe [...] Mr. Chamaleon himself!" (*Utz* 114)

Anthropologist Mircea Eliade<sup>4</sup> states that the trickster is a symbol of man during his rite of passage; the trickster would embody that phase itself. This phase is a no-man's land between past and future, when you are not one thing or the other, a state utterly at odds with the regular social order and its hierarchy. Belonging to different worlds at once, Chatwin gets away with breaking the rules of society: being a scrounger with friends, mistreating his guests at his own home, sometimes lying, flirting with both men and women, ignoring social rules, coaxing people out of their tales, and showing general disregard for politics and being sometimes a benefactor as well as a deceiver. When analysing the figure of the trickster, we find out that contradiction is one of its most basic traits. According to van Duin, the trickster is a cunning liar full of schemes, "both clown and fool, both subtle and rude. But he is at the same time that unfathomable, ambiguous character that with roguish delight evades every attempt at describing him"(van Duin 41). He is a dual character that effortlessly merges at least two otherwise opposite roles into his personality and he can show both positive and negative traits. Chatwin and some of his characters such as Utz and da Silva are tricksters inasmuch as they suffer transformations and provide humanity with an important social element, contradiction. The question would be whether Chatwin with

all his paradoxes bestows any social, cultural, or narrative certainties on the literary panorama. However unappreciated his contribution to these certainties may often be, Chatwin served as an example by being the counterexample, fulfilling his role with a dandy-like, seductive and laid-back manner, “determined to enjoy life as well as to survive.” (38-39)

The trickster figures are found in folklores of many different cultures. Kaspar Utz, the protagonist of Chatwin’s novel, has got the same name as the Czech folkloric character Kasperek even though his deeds and failures probably differ from the original model. Utz fools customs officers and communist politicians so as to be able to keep his precious collection of porcelain figurines and avoids serious responsible love relationships almost until the end of his life when he finally decides to marry his maid, either for love or for self-interest; there is ambiguity and trickiness in Utz’s acts. Shakespeare explains that Chatwin had a great talent for mimicking the people he met: “there was an additional quality to his mimicry. He did not transform his voice into the other person: they co-existed [...]. This gave the hallucinatory feeling of being confronted by two people.” (105)

Chatwin finds in literary ventriloquism the perfect way of crossing the boundaries between selfhood and otherness. Not only does he use others to speak for himself, but he also tells stories that others have told before or he makes characters ask others to tell stories. By multiplying the voice of the narrator he keeps himself at a distance: the “other” Bruces protect him. David Plante, an author and friend of Chatwin’s, once declared that “Bruce almost seemed to lack a self at times, no matter how impressive he was, because he became a reflection of so many personalities” (qtd. in Shakespeare 367-368). Elsbree (1991) provides a convincing argument to the issue of distance and liminality when affirming that in the Victorian period “this technique of

displacement, a liminality that strategically provides an aesthetic distance, was a recurring one [...] liminality serves the writer's need to remove himself or herself from the present, to confront it obliquely by going elsewhere." (80)

Chatwin's travel books *IP* and *TS*, his novels *Utz*, *OTBH* and *TVOO* as well as *WAIDH* all supply transitional contexts and threshold people in which we see van Genep's liminal phase. *WAIDH*, with its miscellaneous world and the out-of-the-ordinary characters, is clearly a center of liminality; however, with regards to structure, *WAIDH* should be dealt with separately. Rushdie (1992) states that this posthumously published book is a "personal selection of essays, portraits, meditations, travel writing and other unclassifiable Chatwinian forms of prose" (237) which in the most authentic Chatwinian way, collects the experience of a restless man. In *WAIDH*, there are life transitions of all kinds (geographical, social and personal) which have been poeticised and turned into storied liminal experiences. The titles of these stories read something like a list of Chatwin's acquaintances and at some point the book might just seem to be the transformation of a name-dropper's account into written texts. Nevertheless, Chatwin's ideas of the individual and the marginality of the aesthete, be he a writer, architect or dressmaker, eliminates any flaw of superficiality or any breach in his literary envisioning. What really matters are the men and women who uncover themselves and how Chatwin interprets their searches. In this sense Chatwin is constructive because, in spite of the marginality of the people he profiles, he recognizes and understands the multiplicity of their experience and uses it to enhance his idea of the identification of selfhood with liminality. Chatwin himself declared he felt unlike the rest, outside the cultural mainstream of the society that he had been brought up to consider his own. *WAIDH* presents Chatwin as a man living an experience of difference.

In the story “The Volga” (*WAIDH* 170-191) this river is like the Pampas in Patagonia or the Australian Outback or the Border area, liminal spaces that represent the spatially and temporally detached “zone unknown” as defined by van Gennep. The Volga that Chatwin describes is “the nomadic frontier of modern Europe, just as the Rhine-and-Danube was the barbarian frontier of the Roman empire” (*WAIDH* 173). On its banks two Kazans are delineated: the Russian city with its kremlin and cathedrals and the other Kazan, the Muslim town where the Tartars live. There is liminality in geography itself: a place has two sides because there is always another Self. Similarly the nomads in the northern frontiers of China “wore wolfmasks and armour with reptilian leather scales, it was preferable to think of them not as men, but as dangerous animals” (198). Tibet is a threshold space as well with its assembly of sherpas, “compulsive wanderers” (273), lamas, monks, merchants and monsters like the Yeti, all of them tiptoeing between two worlds, sharing earthliness and sacredness, legend and reality.

Chatwin’s main ideas on liminality are personified in several threshold personae in *WAIDH*. His belief in the blurring of boundaries and status restrictions is light-heartedly hinted at in the story of Madame Vionnet, a famous 96-year-old French dressmaker who showed her pioneering liberalism by discarding the corset for the first time. She boasts of having freed women from outer and inner constraints and praises Isadora Duncan, who, in Chatwin’s own words, “danced with bare feet, flapping breasts and trailing draperies” (89). Madame Vionnet exercised her job with creativity and freedom and broke rules nobody had dared to break before: asymmetry and no artificial stiffening were her creed.

The portrait of Maria Reiche, a 72-year-old German mathematician and astronomer is an example of marginality within liminality. This lady studies the Nazca



lines in Peru, which are strange lines imprinted on the desert and considered the largest astronomy book in the world. These magic lines remind her of the desert drawings of the Australian Aborigines. She regards herself as an artist and has found her space in the desert because there she feels “things germinating inside me all the time” (99). However, this obsession with her work turns her into a liminal woman and “a fanatical recluse, a regional curiosity [...] an odd sight” (99) who lives on little food and owns few things.

The Russian architect Konstantin Melnikov is presented by Chatwin as a “‘poet’ of reinforced concrete” (107), “with a proud and lonely boast that true art can only be the creation of the individual, never that of the committee or group” (106). He is also the exile who feels like an outsider in his own country because his individuality and his asymmetrical buildings do not fit into the communist (not *communitas*) orientation of his nation. Chatwin identifies Melnikov with his art: “[that building]. Built of clay and straw, it looked like a foreigner in its own homeland [...] but all the magnificent carving of the surrounding houses yielded before it.” (108)

Having analysed these three threshold personae in *WAIDH*, I agree with Esbree (1991) when he presents the concepts of rite of passage and liminality as two strong “performative” concepts, meaning that “they assimilate our experiences as subjects of personal passages and personal liminal phases to our discussion and analysis [...] they bridge the sequences in our own lives and the sequences in narratives” (173). Both performative concepts broaden our range of awareness of what it means to be human in that they identify all the transitions that an individual might undergo, transitions prompted by biology, culture, personal history and preferences. Madame Vionnet, Maria Reiche and Konstantin Melnikov are introduced to us through liminality and the resulting effect is their complete humanization.

### 2.1.1. *Communitas*.

*Communitas* in Chatwin's texts is the second issue to be examined within his anthropological approach to writing: which of Chatwin's beliefs can be associated with *communitas* and what kind of influence upon his storytelling *communitas* had. To begin with, I will briefly extend the concept of *communitas* and will apply it to Chatwin's narrative. Second, I will develop five major issues around *communitas* which I have formulated in order to get a global vision of Chatwin's narrative in relation to liminality. As a way of conclusion, I will finally attempt to illustrate that *communitas* definitely exists in Chatwin's texts.

Turner (1974) defines *communitas* as the modality of social relationship provided by the liminal phase of a rite of passage. In this area of common living an essential and generic human bond is recognised without which there would be no society. However, the model of society which emerges in this in-between period is "an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals" (46-96) and opposes the other model of human interrelatedness "a structured, differentiated and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less" (97). Chatwin values the blend of homogeneity and comradeship as well as the blend of lowliness and sacredness offered in the middle phase because in it status disappears and spontaneous relationships are generated. According to Elsbree, *communitas* has a universalizing dimension because human beings become individuated and leveled and the potential connections between them "can cut across cultures" (119,127). Chatwin's texts transmit this communion of free individuals and egalitarian principles. Be they universality or internationalism, these principles all inspire his personal narrative in which nationality is just a passing

condition. His Englishness, as a distinctive sometimes alienating trait, will not be as important as his placelessness or his internationalism.

In *TS*, *IP* and *WAIDH* there is an unmistakable link between the anthropological concept of *communitas* and Chatwin's vision of nationality, culture and storytelling. First, in the world of *IP* all the small personal histories of the characters lose their local nature and are fused in the transitional space of the Pampas. Their peculiarities become universal because the time-place construct where they live includes the whole of mankind. Patagonia is a place of exiled and displaced people, native Indians and the prehistoric; an odd cultural mix whose genuine weirdness is shared by all the giants, monsters, strange beasts and the unfamiliar which germinates in that land on the edge of the world. The stories of Russians of pedigree merge with those of ancient Scots, young kosher butchers from Tel-Aviv, German foremen, Boer women with Welsh husbands and the Yoshil, a tail-less protohominid. Their stories, some of them told and others retold, fuse reality and legend into a universalising feeling of adventure. Second, in *TS* the mythical quality of the Aboriginal Dreamtime permeates the everyday life of the characters Chatwin meets on the way or is introduced to, most of whom are "ordinary folks who leave the suburbs to reinvent themselves royally in the sticks" (Shakespeare 6). The universalising elements emerge from the essence of the songlines themselves, this being that the meaning of a country can be established from the stories written across its landscape. Chatwin reminds us of our origins as nomadic peoples and tries to understand our continual fascination with cultures which do not objectify space and time on a linear progression. He is looking for a point of confluence by recalling the wandering nature of our Ancestors; he longs to live a real state of *communitas* by researching and recreating our common past. Finally, *WAIDH* collects and portrays people from all parts of the world. Chatwin is fascinated by their personalities and their

achievements and he crosses geographical, national and political borders in order to meet them: Mrs. Gandhi, Ernst Jünger, Donald Evans, Salah Bougrine, the Tibetan nomad, Malraux, Marie Reiche, Madeleine Vionnet, George Costakis are all individuals who fight for their ideals and their own unconventionality, not their nationality. This ontological lack of commitment to imposed structures reveals Chatwin's attempt to make commitments to the universality which this gallery of uncommon people exhibit, as well as his attempt to create a free space where everyone can live and tell their personal stories. This space is to be found in the social model of *communitas*. The ontological fusions we find in these three books are the poeticised versions of the ontological liberties Chatwin was looking for. The Pampas in *IP* and the Outback in *TS* are spaces of encounter which transform distinctive origins and nationalities into universal entities. Tibet, the Volga, the museum-like flat of George Costakis and the Peruvian desert in *WAIDH* all represent blurred boundaries between the Self and the Other; the two parts being one and universal.

At the same time, the universalising egalitarian qualities of *communitas* are called into question by Chatwin. Although he challenges national stereotypes and confronts the idea of civilization and decadence in his own culture, Englishness always being at stake, he does not blindly believe in the universalising dimension of *communitas*. He also mistrusts unstructured communities of people and reminds us that one of the most rooted dualities all human beings embrace is that of Man and Beast, this Beast being constantly inserted in his narrative. Therefore, we must be aware of the difficulty inherent in generating a complete state of *communitas*. Even though liminality brings into being communities of equal individuals, it does not guarantee an ideal formula for maintaining such equality and comradeship and Chatwin does not hesitate in showing the cruellest side of humanity. We do not participate in a representation of

Paradise, a world of innocence, ultimately the democratic-socialist Utopia one might expect of a society of levelled individuals, but learn about bloody confrontation, hostility and unscrupulous violence.

Regarding the question as to where the state of *communitas* described by Turner is to be found in Chatwin's world, I would suggest the development of five different issues all related to the idea of *communitas* and present in most of Chatwin's stories: *communitas* and structure, institutionalised *communitas*, *communitas* and violence, *communitas* barbarism and civilization and finally *communitas* and Englishness.

The first issue, *communitas* and structure, deals with Turner's distinction between the twin modalities of collective life: *communitas* and *societas*. The daily functioning of a community is ruled by values of *societas*, where individuals pursue their own practical ends often in competition with others. Here individuals are defined by their position in social hierarchies and distinguished by cultural values. *Societas* leads to the eventual fragmentation of *communitas*. In liminal time-space constructs *communitas* represents a state where order is suspended and individuals at either end of the hierarchy have the opportunity to swap positions and mingle. They become levelled and thereby enjoy a full state of being. Turner (1974) asserts that *communitas* has an element of potentiality in the sense that individuals living this state generate symbols and metaphors and tend to produce art and religion instead of political structures. Therefore prophets and artists emerge among these people, who show a tendency to be liminal and marginal -"edgemen"- and "who strive with passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination." (127)

Chatwin's creed on the potentiality of art and literature conceptualises his attempt to free man from structure, status or rank; thus the anthropological idea of

*communitas* elaborated by Turner provides Chatwin with the theoretical ground upon which to develop his literary expectations. However, fleeing from structure eventually leads to a different structure. In other words, it is the structure of the non-structure. There is no complete zero status in the lives of Westerners away from their homelands or in the tribal models of the Aboriginals. Even religious orders, which apply the concept of *communitas* to their internal organization, inevitably create a new structured code; they are not transitionally but permanently liminal. Likewise those immigrants who start from scratch in a new land display the tendency to reproduce old social systems. The step from heterogeneity to homogeneity in liminal phases does not bring the promise of a complete lack of establishment.

In relation to the second issue: institutionalised *communitas*, both in *TS* and *IP* readers are introduced to representatives of the “institutionalization of liminality which has been clearly marked and defined in the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions” (Turner 107). In *TS* we meet Father Terence who lives with the Desert Fathers in the Australian Outback and Father Flynn, a black aborigine and ex-benedictine monk. Father Palacios, in *IP*, belongs to the order of Salesian Fathers. These three characters embody the institutionalised *communitas*. However, Chatwin’s irony masks the mystical unselfish nature of the religious orders they represent and he collects their storytelling and passage-like nature rather than their missionary zeal. Father Terence seems to be more interested in snorkling along the reefs and talking about computers and genetic engineering than in spreading the gospel (*TS* 64). Father Flynn leaves his order and together with a girl becomes an activist in Aboriginal politics. Father Palacios is more concerned with studying the Patagonian Unicorn and telling the story of the Yoshil than with being a missionary in charge of the salvation of the Indians (*IP* 72). Chatwin questions the institutionalization of *communitas* by

highlighting the unavoidable individuality of human beings. His idea of *communitas* is an idea of universality within individuality and includes the whole of mankind in transition. Most of his characters feel an urgent need to go their own way. Furthermore, he brings into question, in the same way as he brings into question British imperialism, the exemplary systems of the religious missions - “A mission (or prison) for the Indians” (*IP* 109)- capable of doing things that “struck me as the very height of cruelty” (*IP* 167). Father Menezes Brito in *TVOO* would represent one of the darkest sides of such institutions: “his one amusement was to baptize Indian babies with his spittle” (51), he made Francisco Manuel play the role of St Sebastian at Corpus Christi processions and kissed him in incense-reeking bedrooms.

In the liminal worlds Chatwin depicts *communitas* cannot be institutionalised because that would mean the emergence of a new structure. Religious orders create a frame within liminality through which the members of the community see their place in the world. Chatwin subverts this idea of guidance; that is why Chatwin’s “fathers” flee from the structures their orders impose upon them and find their own ways to escape.

*Communitas* and violence is the third issue worth studying within the connection between Chatwin’s literary production and the anthropological concept of liminality. Chatwin’s lengthy reference to *On Aggression* by Konrad Lorenz in *TS* evidences his interest in reminding us of the existence of Hyperions and Satyrs, Dr. Jekylls and Mr. Hydes within the nature of man. In “Variations on an Idée Fixe” in *Anatomy*, Chatwin recalls Lorenzian ethology to prove that man is a flawed, aberrant being who eventually feels disgust for himself and his works (148). In a way he is stating that *communitas* and violence are bound to coexist and that liminality is not always the “medium through which the individual gains strength, becomes a person and may anticipate community with others” (Elsbree 50). In “Werner Herzog in Ghana” Chatwin

writes: “The novel *The Viceroy of Ouidah* appeared in 1980, to the bemusement of reviewers, some of whom found its cruelties and baroque prose un stomachable” (*WAIDH* 138). Violence is also to be found in some of the stories in *IP* and *TS* as well as in some episodes in *WAIDH*. The Others are not always the comrades that liminality suggests but the enemy as in *TVOO*, the hated neighbour as in *IP* or the threat on the other side of the border as in *Utz*. Again *communitas* does not mean a common feeling of understanding and tolerance. *IP* is full of references to revolution, massacres and fights, as well as cannibalism. The story of Soto’s revolt proves that a lack of political and social structure can lead to a state of chaos, greed and death: “They shot hundreds of men into graves they dug themselves, or shot them and heaped the bodies on bonfires of *mata negra* and the smell of burned flesh and blood resin drifted across the Pampas.” (*IP* 99)

The story of Jemmy Button, a young Fuegian boy taken to England on the HMS Beagle in 1830 and given his name by the ship’s crew, is one more example of the effects of violence. This character undergoes the traditional rite of passage which comprises the three phases of separation, initiation and reaggregation. He is a Fuegian boy who clings on to his mother’s breast for two years, plays with boys his own age, is taught the manly chores of the tribe by his father and learns the stories “which wander at all times in the minds of all men [...]. The boy grew up fearless and loyal to the customs of his tribe” (*IP* 120). One day he is kidnapped by Captain Robert Fitzroy, chief officer of HMS Beagle and therefore separated from the group. Then the boy is taken to London and taught the “plainer truths of Christianity” (*IP* 121). In a way he is being initiated into a new state. But once back in Tierra de Fuego and so incorporated into his group, he reverts to savagery almost overnight and kills eight missionaries: “he staged a massacre that could have been written for him by Poe” (*IP* 125). It seems as if



the sense of communitarian spirit he had learned in his younger years amongst his tribe peers in Tierra de Fuego had been blighted by his contact with Western civilization in London. It could be that native tribes have always considered violence amongst their principles or that man is a “dangerously aggressive species” as Konrad Lorenz stated in *On Aggression* (TS 112). Chatwin finds the answer in his belief in the duality of Man and Beast, eventually in the difficulty in discerning who is the Other and who is the Self. Later in the book Chatwin writes about Jemmy Button, this young man being one more character who finds himself trapped in such a duality:

A tribe’s territory, however uncomfortable, was always a paradise that could never be improved on. By contrast the outside world was Hell and its inhabitants no better than beasts [ ...]. Perhaps, that November, Jemmy Button mistook the missionaries as envoys of the Power of Darkness. Perhaps, when later he showed remorse, he remembered that pink men also were human. (*IP* 130-131)

By killing the pink men Jemmy Button thought were beasts Jemmy was killing other human beings just like himself. He resembles another character in the book, the Indian Kappa who does not know whether he is burying the magic monster the Yoshil or reburying his own brother.

The story “Heavenly Horses” in *WAIDH* tells of a violent and bloody Chinese warrior who faced the nomads on the northern frontiers. It also tells of the deeds of a tribe who defeated their enemies “and converted the skull of their king into a drinking cup” (199). “The Coup” is the account of the coup Chatwin stumbled upon in Benin while researching *TVOO*. He was slapped in the face by a corporal and pointed at with a sub-machine-gun. “The Very Sad Story of Salah Bougrine” presents more evidence of violence and confrontation: someone cuts the throat of Monsieur Gerlache in a context

of hate between North African and French communities in Marseille and its surrounding area: “near Toulon the racists talked of relighting the gas-ovens- but that was only a joke [...]. It was not a joke when they machine-gunned Arab cafés, or threw Molotov cocktails into Arab lodgings. (*WAIDH* 243-244)

Violence and chaos in *TVOO*, *TS*, *IP*, *OTBH* and *WAIDH* are generally the result of the clash between old worlds and civilization and emerges when differences are exposed and a struggle for power appears within the group. In *TS* there is animosity between Poms and Coms, Whites and Blacks, British and Aboriginals, Newcomers and Old Territorians, between the Aboriginal Land Rights Movement and radical White power representatives. This is a proof that in spite of the hope for *communitas*, human interrelatedness may eventually result in injustice. Aborigines are dismissed as drunken and incompetent savages but British visitors are not really welcome in Australia either since they supposedly represent the British upper classes and it is not a good idea to be associated with them. A black urban activist of the Aboriginal Land Rights Movement shouts at Chatwin urging him to go back home (*TS* 31) and someone else in the story asks him accusingly: “And what makes you think that you can show up from Merrie Old England and clean up on sacred knowledge?” (*TS* 33). We are told that America is a cruel nation (*TS* 46) and that many Australian aborigines died when the British Army posted “Keep Out!” signs, in English, for Aboriginals to read before the British H-Bomb test at Maralinga, but not everyone saw them or could read English (*TS* 78). In fact, these references to animosity and inhumanity are the recognition of the shadowy side of liminality: the reality of death which, according to Elsbree, is “the one reincorporation we all share in common” (50); they all illustrate the passage from innocence to experience, the ritual of grieving which any initiand must undergo in order to enjoy a full sense of community.

The fourth issue evolves around the concepts of *communitas*, barbarism and civilization. In the time of the dominant European Empires, to civilize was to convert the Other, the exotic, the barbarian, into a member of the colonizing society. In *IP* Chatwin describes a beach where there is a concrete monument in memory of the Welsh, which he compares to the entrance of a bunker. On its sides there are bronze reliefs representing Barbarism and Civilization: “Barbarism showed a group of Tehuelche Indians, naked, with slabby back muscles in the Soviet style. The Welsh were on the side of Civilization -greybeards, young men with scythes, and big-breasted girls with babies” (*IP* 24). The message is that civilization and fertility, therefore continuity, belongs to the Western world and barbarism in the natives. The endeavour of the Westerners is to “collect” (166) natives and make them civilized individuals; such is the case of the Salesian Fathers who established a mission on Dawson Island and asked the Chilean Government to send them as many Indians as possible to teach them the basics of civilization, something which did not suit the Indians in any way. Even though they were given food and shanties to live in, “they craved for their old wandering life” (*IP* 166).

Religious missionaries obviously helped to extend this policy around the Empire and contributed to the disappearance of countless native civilizations, thus lessening the fear of the Other. It was a question of assimilation and suppression rather than common living and recognition of the Other. Civilization represented the maintenance of difference in terms of superiority and inferiority, therefore the Self was never the Other and the Other could not or should never become the Self. Colonial and post-colonial literature has extensively delved into and propagated this interrelation, but Chatwin’s concern with the issue has a different dimension. By highlighting the duality of Man and Beast within the nature of mankind Chatwin prompts the co-

existence of the Self and the Other and the fusion of the multiple Selves. In doing so, he takes away the boundary between civilized and barbarian and between upper and lower thus bringing forth a new ontological reality and extrapolating the political idea of civilization and barbarism to the innermost content of human nature. Chatwin deals with the Other more compassionately, from a more existential perspective: in the uncivilized Chatwin sees the non-Westerner, the nomad, the wanderer but also the authentic representative of a rite of passage. As far as travel writing is concerned, there are several Others in Chatwin's accounts. Not only does he focus on the dialogue between colonizer and colonized, outsider and insider but he aims to depict a wider human gallery in which imperialistic patriotic colonizers live together with natives on the one hand and immigrants, exiles and refugees on the other. As a result, different cultural transfers overlap and consequently national and political boundaries blur. Immigrants sometimes show more hostility towards the old timers than to the Indians in Patagonia or the Aboriginals in Australia. Confrontations are dispersed and are not as clearly defined in terms of superior and inferior, and friendships and animosities transcend the purely double-sided nature of colonialism. A new idea of *communitas* appears when Chatwin reflects on the aftermath of a long period of westernisation and diaspora of all kinds and adds the emergent Other as one more sign of the constant multiplication of the Self.

Chatwin considers the intersection of Western and non-Western societies and illustrates the fragility of *communitas*, understood as the model of society developed in liminal states. Elsbree provides a convincing argument when affirming that:

When such cultural matrices collide, all is called into question, including the rites of passage and the usually-assumed meanings of liminality.

Through such conflict we begin to apprehend the pain and the rawness

of new identities in the making, older identities dying, and the confusion, anguish, or even the occasional success of the passage from one culture to another. (4)

The “passage from one state to the other” is not an easy process. In certain milieux such as Patagonia or the Australian Outback Good and Evil no longer maintain their unflinching quality but trip over each other in certain milieux. This we witness in Patagonia where the mechanization of colonizers was for the Indians “something like their idea of Hell” (*IP* 168). In Tierra de Fuego missionaries and sailors were killed, mutilated and stripped by the Indians, but on the other hand the Onas were completely annihilated by the white men. At one point in the story Mr.Hobbs, an old Englishman and friend of Charley Milward (Chatwin’s grandmother’s cousin), comments: “the Government is so horribly nasty if you kill an Indian, even in self-defence” (*IP* 164). This comment illustrates that civilization had to set limits and stop repressing the natives for the sake of the Empire. Chatwin is existentially on the side of the natives, but he does need irony to be able to free himself from his English background.

The wild Indians in Patagonia in *IP*, in opposition to the tame Indians, and the black Aboriginals who go Walkabout in *TS* are authentic threshold personae who inhabit liminal spaces and go their own way. The tame Indians are the ones who have really undergone a change and turned into a new species of men: the civilized. Therefore, if liminality is “the medium of change [...] the threshold between past and future. It is the present tense of destinies in the making” (Elsbree 22), the tame Indians would obviously embody the liminal phase of a rite of passage. However, they are not the real liminal characters of Chatwin’s stories. Chatwin is stating that by remaining faithful to one’s own nature and culture despite external pressure, by avoiding forced changes, Man in general and artist in particular can dignify their identity. In terms of

*communitas* then, liminality will gather together all those who dare to be themselves, with or without change, but closer to the wild than to the tame.

On his journeys in Africa, Asia, Australia and South America Chatwin begins to gain a perspective on Britain's world position and he expresses clear opinions concerning the relationship between the British Empire and its subject peoples. Chatwin is shocked and angry about certain historical events which reveal some of the "aberrant episodes" (*WAIDH* 122) of British imperialist policy. However, the British experience of Chatwin in Australia, in Patagonia or in Dahomey cannot be described in literature as a journey into the unknown. At least, the journey motif is not the same as in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or in Greene's *Journey Without Maps*. Harries (1994) argues that in these two works:

in the literary framework of the journey, the reader sees the whole of Africa (the country is expanded into the continent) as a mysterious, exotic land; the native as a phenomenon of non-civilization, the "savage"; and the white Englishman as the bold explorer penetrating the heart of a great mystery and afterwards returning to England (i.e. "civilization") a changed man. The journey is often spiritual as well as physical. (50)

In Chatwin's travel texts the dynamics of the setting and the encounter with the Savage are different as his journeying through Patagonia and Australia does not cost him his sanity. Chatwin does not undergo the change to a new state, which is the step after the liminal phase in a rite of passage, but stays in his own pre-liminal condition and tries to dignify it by enhancing the possibility of change within Englishness, rather than the change itself. On the other hand, in spite of the fact that Chatwin seems to represent the "know-all attitudes of the English" (*WAIDH* 73) he is never indifferent to novelty and

there is some heuristic response to Australia and South America. Chatwin's attitude is one of openness: his literary world is a world of possibilities and transitions, where barbarians might be civilized and civilization fuses into wilderness. His characters and his journeys are the poeticised form of these possibilities and transitions.

The fifth and last issue focuses on *communitas* and Englishness. Chatwin questions Englishness because he understands that to assert a nationality, be it English, Welsh, "Westerner" or Tjakamarra means to put up barriers between individuals while the real meaning of *communitas* is the suppression of all kinds of boundaries. Chatwin's interpretation of Englishness could be derived from his words: "What the fuckers don't understand", drawled Titus, "is there is no such person as an Aboriginal or an Aborigine. There are Tjakamarras and Jaburullas and Duburungas like me, and so on all over the country" (TS 288). Chatwin vindicates the difference between little inner structures rather than the difference between larger impersonal macro-structures of nationality, politics, religion or gender and he justifies the escape from any of these if this escape implies the liberation from constraint. To fit his feelings of nationality/Englishness into a state of *communitas* he devises varied strategies. First, he maintains the universalising quality of this liminal social state and that means playing the role of the universal traveller rather than the local or national; he will even romanticise nomadic life so as to avoid any national attachment. Second, he respects no political agenda, in Rushdie (1992)'s words, he was "politically a little innocent" (238). Third, he is not a moralist; his aim is to be able to uphold nationality within liminality, not within a context of political commitment.

As far as being a moralist, Turner affirms that: "the poor and the deformed [...] appear to symbolise the moral values of *communitas* as against the coercive power of supreme political rulers" (Turner 110). Among them, Turner draws attention to the

court jester, the joker, “dwarfs and other oddities”, all privileged controllers of morals and able to express feelings of “outraged morality” (110). Most of Chatwin’s characters are those mythic types referred to by Turner who are structurally marginal and tend to show an open morality based on universal values. Chatwin’s representatives of this open morality come in all shapes and sizes. There is the large group of immigrants and exiles from different countries displaying various cultural backgrounds. Then there is Father Palacios in *IP* and Father Terence in *TS*, two missionary outsiders out in the Empire who seem to be incapable of indoctrinating the natives; they are mavericks in the wilderness. Father Flynn, Arkady and Titus in *TS* are all self-confident men who fight for a noble cause: the Land Rights Movement, but we never see them making speeches. The causes these people uphold go beyond imperialist interest or political action; theirs is more an ontological stance before life. Likewise Marie Reiche, Madeleine Vionnet, Kevin Volans and Konstantin Melnikov in *WAIDH* represent the artist, the prophet and the outsider -sometimes in their own homeland- who expand universal values such as respect for individuality and creative independence. Their works of art and their attitude to life embody this open morality which is in itself, in Turner’s words, “an expression of what Bergson called the *élan vital*, or evolutionary *life force*” (127) and which is likely to be found in states of *communitas*. Turner also claims that in closed or structured societies, this social model is related to “the marginal or ‘inferior person’ or the ‘outsider’ who often comes to symbolize [...] ‘the sentiment for humanity’.” (111)

Not only Chatwin’s characters are those outsiders that Turner regards as defenders of *communitas* but also Chatwin himself. None of them try to impose a new structure of thought upon others, neither do they moralise. Shakespeare writes: “ ‘He was not at all a moralist,’ said Rezzori. ‘His morality was totally aesthetic -built of the



best inks, but not with blood' [...]. He had a sort of artistic morality." (Shakespeare 443). I agree with Rezzori when he claims that Chatwin is hardly ever a moralist because Chatwin defends the human condition not human amendment. His voice is the voice of the individual who refuses to restore ethical and legal equilibrium and only observes, tells stories and enjoys life. Chatwin theorises and exposes his ideas so extensively in *TS* that sometimes the text looks more like an essay on nomadism than a travel account, but because he uses the ideas of other writers or philosophers and refers to someone else's theories we seldom listen to his thoughts. As far as his own life is concerned, Chatwin never became a nomad so he could not moralise on the need to be one. He also praised the near-nakedness of liminal personae, but he never abandoned his collections or unveiled his truths. He felt at ease among his snobbish aristocratic friends in London, but he loved the simplicity and the beauty of the utilitarian objects in primitive cultures. Therefore, Chatwin, from his own experience and within his own writing, embodies the contradictions within human beings; that is why there are multiple moralities in his texts, all of which are presented as acceptable. This multiplicity of moralities generates the ideal milieu for *communitas*.

Finally concepts such as placelessness and mobility are liminal attributes of Chatwin's personal and literary world and are essential to understanding the experience of *communitas* and Englishness in his texts. In *TS* Chatwin extensively endorses the idea that human beings are bound to be constantly on the move, therefore Chatwin's atlases, which make his characters travel in the imagination, are simply the obsessive physical support of his poetic interpretation of life. The urge to be physically mobile is the manifestation of our inner mobility: when wandering, migrating or fleeing from home and nationality individuals start mapping their own existential atlas. Shakespeare writes that Chatwin did not like ritual, ceremony or any duties towards family and

territory as he did not have “the coherent identity he perceived in Strehlow’s Aborigines because something in him insisted upon a perpetual unravelling of horizons, a continual reshaping of self” (428). Chatwin has no real interest in mapping the external territory and he underestimates the implications of nationality. His personal appreciation of the Australian Outback in *TS* allows him to formulate his theory about the songlines themselves: that the whole of Australia, perhaps even the whole world, can be seen as one interconnecting map of songs; that the world was, quite literally, sung into existence by our ancestors. This sense of wholeness and universalism is stronger than his evasion of Englishness. Chatwin suggests a new way of assessing the relationship between cultures by finding a new way of telling exile, immigration and the crossing of boundaries.

As a way of conclusion, I should affirm the relationship between anthropology and Chatwin’s work by restating the main points which can validate the belief that Chatwin included the anthropological concept of *communitas* in his texts. *Communitas*, as the state of social relatedness emerging in a liminal place and time and among liminal personae, does exist in Chatwin’s texts, first, in his particular vision of time, life and death: *Utz* begins with the funeral of Kaspar Utz, Lewis Jones in *OTBH* dies at the end of the story, Mama Wéwé in *TVOO* starts remembering things as she lies dying. *TS* (293) and *IP* (183) also end with a quick image of death. Chatwin writes that with Fuegian Indians: “Men were born and men died. The people had little sense of ongoing time” (*IP* 120). By rounding off his journeys and his stories with the reminder that we all have to die, he is uniting the whole of mankind: “Mortals and immortals, alive in their death, dead in each other’s life” (*TS* 292). The deepest component of the songlines, to communicate with and eventually become your ancestor, encapsulates his idea of *communitas*. Secondly, *communitas* exists in the lively chain of stories told and

heard in his texts: people, past and present linked by a process of *poesis* and *hermeneusis*. Thirdly, *communitas* should be interpreted in his idea of immortality and in his strong belief in reminiscence, be it in the form of a songline, storytelling and collecting; also in the form of alchemy and art. To illustrate the former we can recall *Utz*: “Alchemy was a mystical exercise. The search for gold and the search for porcelain had been facets of an identical quest: to find the substance of immortality” (109) and to illustrate the latter we have Chatwin’s ideas in *WAIDH*: “Man (alone, now that the gods have gone) will outlive the thread of his extinction; and great men, with all their faults, will continue to exist [...] the great artist belongs to Eternity” (118). Finally, he brings about *communitas* in his texts by exhibiting an unaffected sense of tolerance, compassion and freedom designed to allow individuals to be themselves, with no mistrust of difference and with no feelings of hatred. Chatwin strives for a blurring of ontological rather than geographical boundaries so he suggests everyone should internalise their own labels be they nationality, gender, sex or political stance in order to free themselves of them and bring down the barriers of difference. Chatwin subtly devised a special system of connecting people through his writing by showing that individuals will become fully levelled if they are ready to accept the existence of human dualities, the possibility of change within structures and the positiveness of transition. Individuals will be fully individuals when they learn how to transform the local into the universal.

## 2.2. Chatwin's Obsessions and Liminality (I): Collecting and Creating.

He was everything the English mistrust. Stylish. Passionate. A lover of theory and of French; an obsessive, which we dislike in particular.

(Shakespeare 7)

Half of Bruce despised being European and longed to be a Mauritanian nomad, renouncing everything; the other half was a wordly, acquisitive collector with an eagle's eye for the unusual who longed to go riding with Jackie Onassis. It was a permanent battle of values. The peremptory *non-sequitur* which is the hallmark of his prose is no less true of his character [...] He was a split personality, at any rate in this respect, and his extraordinary vitality and sharpness of perception owed much to the inner conflict of his two obsessive urges, the one sparking off the other.

(Shakespeare 111)

Chatwin constructs his stories out of his obsessions which form an extensive map of interrelations and impregnate his texts with a sense of unity. The most important ideas displayed in Chatwin's texts evolve around them and it is through his obsessions that we really get to know not only his literary style but also his personal story because ultimately they are the same thing: a unity of form and content, a rich image of wholeness. Therefore a close look as to how his creative production develops from his obsessive nature is essential to understanding his work. Chatwin finds in liminality not only the structure and the content to beautify these obsessions but also the means to express the core of his texts namely the possibility of transformation. Clapp (1999)

throws some light upon Chatwin's personal contradictions when affirming that: "The collector was another of Bruce's big categories: the opposite of the nomad, the person who – he declared every now and then – it was important to stop being" (228). Chatwin's different voices speak for his obsessions. This is the reason why his obsessive nature should be interpreted -globally- as one of the real sources of his poetics.

His well-known obsessions are wandering/travelling, creating, collecting and storytelling. Chatwin was an obsessive wanderer like the Aboriginal nomads in *TS* or the Indians in Tierra de Fuego in *IP* but he was also an obsessive collector like Utz in his novel *Utz*, an obsessive storyteller as in most of his encounters in *WAIDH* and an obsessive connector as it is his delirium of establishing connections that forges his storytelling style.

His first fixation, travelling, was examined in Chapter one in my attempt to interpret Chatwin's wanderlust and the way his genuine desire for travel fashioned his travel writing. Collecting and creating are the two other obsessions which will be explored in the present section. Chatwin's storytelling will be analysed more in detail in the following section together with the role of the narrator and the structure of his stories.

The interrelation between Chatwin's two great obsessions: creating and collecting, is essential to understand his view of the world. The basic idea of the story-legend of the Golem in *Utz* and also a major focus in the story of *TS* is the conviction that the world is created by using repetition, either by the power of speech or by the power of music. Chatwin creates his own narrative structures out of both his obsessions and his imagination as well as out of his belief in the extraordinary: "My whole life has been a search for the miraculous" (*WAIDH* 282). In his narrative we are also introduced

to the idea of an “inert mass of clay” (*Utz* 42), which is meant to be given form. This metaphor for the liminal issue of Man in the making can be found in both his fictional work and in his life: to create from nothing and to be the naked man in an unbiased society.

In the prologue to his edition of short stories *I Thought my Father was God*,<sup>5</sup> Paul Auster writes that with his “democratic” narrative project he expected to build up an archive of data and events: “a *museum* of the USA reality” (Auster 10). He was looking for real stories -based on personal experience- which could be fiction. On the one hand, people were given the chance to delve into their own lives and turn them into a literary text; on the other hand, they were joining in a collective endeavour, something more transcendental. The whole editing experience includes writing, listening and reading: a complete process which Chatwin had already aimed at in his travel writing and in his collection of stories and essays *WAIDH*. Chatwin is the listener, the narrator and the editor at the same time because he selects and tells the stories he finds most interesting, most revealing and most miraculous. He is democratic as well or, in anthropological terms, he is a *communitas*-minded writer as he gathers all kinds of voices, even those which may seem incompatible. Chatwin shows a conscious attempt to research humanity and to catalogue individual experience. By collecting experiences and events Chatwin founds a museum of the Patagonian, Australian, Russian and European reality, ultimately of the worldwide human reality. He may be also founding a museum of myth, of narrative myth; in McAdams’ words: “I ask people to tell me the stories of their lives because I believe their verbal accounts hold the outlines of internalised personal myths” (*The Stories* 32). Chatwin was not only in search for the miraculous, but also in search for a reader and a listener. The idea of being listened attracted him the most maybe in order to, as McAdams affirms: “be accepted

unconditionally as the center of another person's consciousness [...]. Real people telling the truth through stories as a sympathetic listener takes it in." (252)

The real significance of Chatwin's texts, like Auster's project, emerges not only from their democratic and museum-like quality but also from the idea of creation of an aesthetic wholeness. Chatwin's vision is global and all-encompassing yet its departure point has a geographical location. Chatwin unifies his literary production by presenting both sacred liminal space-time constructs and a gallery of liminal personae whose individual journeys have been enforced to design a collective journey. The personal stories of his wanderers, eccentrics and nonconformists would probably have not left any written record if Chatwin had not collected them and prevented their adventures and weirdness from remaining mute. Chatwin creates them through literature. What makes Chatwin different from other writers is that he gathers the experiences of refugees, exiles and immigrants without creating a literature of exile, without portraying just the foreigner living in an alien territory. Neither does he portray eccentricity from a psychoanalytic angle. What he looks for are good stories and narrators who have something valuable to tell. Rushdie, who travelled with him through central Australia, confirms his "search for the story": "He didn't give a damn whether they were true or not; only whether they were good" (qtd. in Shakespeare 10). In fact, Chatwin admitted that part of his travel writing had no basis in truth and argued that he had never asked readers to trust his accounts; he even declared in *The Songlines*: " 'A lot of this is fiction, a lot of this is made up,' he told Thubron, who was one of his interviewers. 'But it's made up in order to make a story real'" (486).

As for the construction of stories, the question is from where Chatwin creates his literary worlds and to what extent he subtracts from the truth or indeed adds to it. Chatwin constructs his art from both an epistemological and an ontological point of

view. On the one hand, there is an epistemological quest: what the songlines are and how they work, where the piece of skin of a brontosaurus comes from in Patagonia, how we can narrate and reconstruct the past through a collection of porcelain figurines. The author is there, “cosmologist and labyrinth builder” (McHale 151). On the other hand, readers become aware of the plurality of worlds and of the confrontation of opposites within human identity. Most stories are focused on the boundary or interface between worlds and are about the violation, in some sense, of ontological boundaries. Therefore, Chatwin’s ideas on creation do not only imply an ontological questioning of life and of the role of the writer in the creative process but also an epistemological restlessness based on his attempt to interpret the world out of his obsessions.

With respect to creation centres, the wilderness presented both in *TS* in the form of the Bush (the unexpected in the Outback, the desert and the magic) and in *IP*, in the form of the Patagonian emptiness, is the zone unknown suggested by Turner. It is also the place that Smith (1997) defines as “not only a place of temptation and sin: it is a *temenos*, a place of *poesis*, where the powers of imagination and dream are intensified” (263). Bearing in mind that creation and alchemy are tightly connected in Chatwin’s texts, his cosmic focal points could be like Borges’ ones in his short story “The Aleph,” where Borges explains that: “The Aleph is the microcosm of the alchemists and Cabalists [...] one of the points in space that contains all other points [...] the source of all creation.” (qtd. in Smith 375)

In *Utz* we learn that “the manufacture of porcelain was an approach to the Philosopher’s Stone” (*Utz* 11) and to the making of gold. According to Meanor, the Meissen figurines act out as the alchemical philosopher’s stone or the grail in that they “have the power to transform lead into gold, sickness into health, despair into redemptive hope” (130). This power of transformation keeps on functioning in spite of



the disappearance of Utz's treasure because its effect goes beyond the possession of Meissen porcelain figurines and finally turns into love: the love of Utz for Marta. In *TS* there is no metaphor of alchemy in the processes of creating the world but the idea of revelation. In this respect, Smith provides an insightful observation when he comments on Borges's *The Garden of Forking Paths*: "In Borges, the revelation provides a key to deciphering a text which is in itself an "image of the universe" which "embraces *all* possibilities of time". Like the Aleph, the text bears within itself the entirety of the Creation" (377). *TS* with its cosmological idea of the dreaming tracks or tjuringa lines, as stories written across the Australian landscape, resembles Borges' text in terms of revelation and chronotopes. Both Chatwin and Borges build certain space and time constructs that comprise all possibilities of time as well as a journey to the underworld or wilderness where man meets his fate and also death.

While the idea of the labyrinth is an obsession in the work of Borges, in the work of Chatwin it is the idea of connecting. Connecting entails the reconciliation of dialectical oppositions, so I agree with Smith when he relates hero journeys and alchemy to dialectical oppositions and their reconciliation and claims that the symbolism of this union in alchemy represents "the achievement of harmony within the Self" (172-174). Chatwin tries to achieve this "harmony within the Self" by creating literary spaces and images which might reproduce this harmony. He longs for the understanding of dualities: the alchemy in writing becomes the making of an existential unity just like the alchemy of the philosopher's stone or the making of gold became the accomplishment of a scientific unity. In his stories Chatwin recovers his own frenzies and the frenzies of artists -to him the modern alchemists- who believe in transformation. Besides this harmony within the Self Chatwin also works towards the accomplishment of a map of humanity. Keneally states that:

There is a link between all fine writers and Prometheus. Critics know that creative people have stolen the fire, that's why they are so mean to them: Chatwin had stolen the fire [...] Economists think that economic indicators are the metaphor for humanity. Novelists think that stories are the true indicators of human existence. Chatwin correctly saw stories as paradigms of humanity. (qtd. in Shakespeare 542)

Stories make people human: the acts of literary creation, which in Chatwin's world are likely to take place in liminal contexts, humanise society. Thus in *TS* the idea of creation comes "by singing the world into existence" (*TS* 14) an act of *poesis*, meaning creation. Similarly humanity comes from nomadism: "They became nomads again [...] they became human again" (*TS* 200). In the last pages of *TS* Chatwin poeticises the anthropological concept of liminality as the state when Man becomes a real Man. The magical object of the initiation rite amongst the Australian aborigines is the tjuringa:

both musical score and mythological guide to the Ancestors' travels. It is the actual body of the Ancestor (*pars pro toto*). It is a man's *alter ego*; his soul; his obol to Charon; his title-deed to country; his passport and his ticket "back in" [...] If you break or lose your tjuringa, you are "beyond the human pale, and had lost all hope of 'returning'". Of one layabout in Alice, I heard it said, "He hasn't seen his tjuringa. He don't know who he is." (*TS* 286-287)

Chatwin couples the sacred object of the tjuringa, without which man is lost, with the liminal issue of the creation of Man. This object tells who they are and where they are going, although it might mean death: "smiling at death in the shade" (*TS* 292). To Chatwin, stories are those sacred objects neophytes are shown in a rite of passage and give meaning to human existence: stories tell us who we are. He creates and reinterprets

stories as if they were valuable collection pieces and by doing so he gives life to his own dragons and monsters: he creates out of his memories, out of his imagination and out of his obsessions, always more concerned with the telling than with truth.

In *TS* we are given anthropological data through the oral tradition of a contemporaneous almost preindustrial aboriginal people but what really matters in Chatwin's text is the functions of oral texts in the construction and ongoing reconstruction of the cosmology of the Aboriginal world. The Outback is the setting of these stories, the Dreamtime the name of this cosmic phenomenon and the Walkabout the making of a ritual journey. The focus is essentially creation and creation takes place in liminal circumstances where choices and changes are likely to occur; according to Elsbree: "liminality is the medium of change" (22). Therefore, Man is always in transition, creating and recreating himself. Argullol (2002) considers there is a special category of men which is composed by all those individuals who construct themselves a little bit everyday and who are always curious and in search for something spiritual "as if they were a sentence of which just half of the meaning has been given."<sup>6</sup>

The collection of several thousand miniature watercolours in the form of postage stamps painted by the American artist Donald Evans inspire Chatwin to reflect on the act of creation:

In Muslim theology, God first created the reed pen and used it to write the world. Less ambitious, Donald Evans used the same sable brush, a Grumbacher No 2, to paint a limpid luminous world – a kind of Baudelairean *pays de Cocagne* – that would mirror his own life and the life of his times. (*WAIDH* 263)

Donald Evans left each watercolour stamp as "a window into his world, and the rest to the imagination" (*WAIDH* 268). With his collected miniature art he created both a

personal and a mythical world as well as a reminiscence of a historical time. Graeme Gilloch in *Myths and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*<sup>7</sup> reflects on Benjamin's study of the collector and concludes that a "collection is an act of renewal rather than possession." Gilloch's idea of renewal corresponds to Chatwin's idea of creation as both of them acknowledge a coming into being during the act of hoarding objects. By finding them, selecting them and putting some of them away, the collector develops and renews his identity. By identifying a current mood or a transitional intellectual phase with an object and acting upon it consequently, the collector is actually clearing out his own inner Self and at the same time extending it by ordering his own space and time. It is true that to collect means to possess but in Chatwin's world to collect also means to create and to tell stories is to create as well. The link between creating and collecting and storytelling comes from Chatwin's insistence on object-owning and object-shedding as a reflection of the transitory quality of people, places and things: -one day in someone's hand, the day after in someone else's- in the process of creating and recreating identities. His stories undergo the same passage: a story takes place in a certain time, in a certain place and among certain people and is transmitted to following generations, losing or preserving their authenticity; in a process of creating and recreating the past.

Within the idea of creating and collecting in Chatwin's texts, there is a significant issue, the question of reality and fake. Chatwin writes in *Utz*:

[...] for him, this world of little figures was the real world. And that, compared to them, the Gestapo, the Secret Police and other hooligans were creatures of tinsel. And that the events of this sombre century – the bombardments, blitzkriegs, putsches, purges – were, so far as he was concerned, so many "noises off." (*Utz* 114)

Chatwin is claiming that reality becomes tinsel and tinsel may become reality. Utz is the owner of a spectacular collection of Meissen porcelain which is crammed into his tiny two-roomed flat in Prague and to which he tries to restore “the life-giving touch of its maker” (*Utz* 20). When looking at Utz’s plate-glass shelves the narrator of the story realises how fine the line between reality and art objects is -be they porcelain figures, exotic miscellany or stories- and how powerful acts of creation can be in the eye of their own makers or in the eye of the beholder. Shakespeare describes Utz’s collection as follows: “The shelves were backed with mirror, so that you had the illusion of entering an enfilade of glittering chambers, a “dream palace” multiplied to infinity, through which human forms flitted like insubstantial shadows.” (477)

This “dream palace” reproduces the collection of curiosities kept in Isobel Chatwin’s cabinet which nourished Chatwin’s passion for exploring different parts of the world immaterial of whether some of these magical objects were real or just fake. Chatwin values them all inasmuch as they are conversation pieces which tell where the traveller has been and the adventures he might have lived or the philosophy behind the collector’s obsession. Sometimes the objects are fake like the mermaid tail in his grandmother’s cabinet “inevitably a piece of dried hake with a monkey sewn on” (Shakespeare 36). At times, the stories are half-legend, half-real like the outlaw rides of Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid in *IP*; sometimes they are real events which end up being unreal like in the story “A Coup” in *WAIDH*: “The coup had been a fake [...] ‘All of it’, he said, ‘was fake.’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘if it was a fake, it certainly fooled me.’” (*WAIDH* 32). In *TS* readers can also experience Chatwin’s questioning of representational models of reality. Arkady tells the narrator that “Aboriginals could not believe the country existed until they could see and sing it – just as, in the Dreamtime, the country had not existed until the Ancestors sang it” (*TS* 15). Chatwin’s reaction to

this statement and his conclusion is that “to exist” is “to be perceived” and that sometimes the world we see is just an illusion as no one can be fully certain that what we have seen or lived personally is real. Chatwin grants his stories the same openness because he “liked the off-beat. He liked the monstrous. He liked things that suggested an inadvertent crack in the seamless world of cause and effect” (Shakespeare 35). In this sense his perception of the world is all-embracing as he believes that things are not just black and white, clear cut or symmetrical. Things have “inadvertent cracks”, people contain different Selves, places can be zero zones and time cannot be regarded as a chronologically linear concept. Chatwin creates a personal cabinet of curiosities filled with stories and tries to achieve what historian Steven Mullaney explains when describing the concept of *Wunderkammer*: “a heteroclit order without hierarchy or degree, an order in which kings mingle with clowns.” A defiance of category was crucial.” (qtd.in Shakespeare 35)

Just like with his collectors and his collections Chatwin needs a democratic context to tell his stories so that they can mingle in a complete lack of hierarchy and where the possibility of a physical and metaphysical ambivalence can be opened up. To provide for such a need, Chatwin develops new strategies for storytelling.

### **2.3. Chatwin’s Obsessions and Liminality (II): Storytelling. The Narrator. Style and Content.**

In the tearoom at Sotheby’s, there was a phrase, “doing a Bruce”. It meant wrapping up something in a bit of myth and making a story out of it. (Shakespeare 91)

For Bruce, the lockable cabinet in West Heath Road was a sustaining metaphor and informed both the content of his work (faraway places, one-offs, marvels, fakes, the Beast) and its style (patchwork, vitreous, self-contained). The shelves and drawers were a repository for collecting, movement and story. Bruce's life would enact all three. "For those who are awake, the cosmos is one", he wrote in his notebook, quoting Heraclitus. (Shakespeare 34-35)

With these two quotations I aim to illustrate Chatwin's almost visceral relationship with storytelling. His work at Sotheby's and the cabinet in his grandmother's house in Birmingham determined his fate as storyteller and craftsman of myth. As for the first quotation, Chatwin worked in the Works of Art department at Sotheby's, the famous firm of fine art auctioneers in London, for about eight years. He entered the firm in 1958 as a numbering porter and left in 1966 when he resigned as Chairman of the firm. In Sotheby's he acquired a great talent for distinguishing authentic works of art from fakes: he acquired a special "eye" to deal with reality. Sotheby's helped him to fashion his narratives: cataloguing, researching and looking into things closely being some of his abilities. Clapp (1999) comments:

And from the procedure of cataloguing he developed a way of looking and a way of describing what he saw. The cataloguer's habits – of close attention, the chronicling of a mass of physical detail, the search for a provenance and the unravelling of a history- can be seen in the structure of his paragraphs and plots, and in his project of objectivity. (89)

The "unravelling of a history" in Clapp's words may correspond to the "wrapping something in a bit of myth" in Shakespeare's description of Chatwin's storytelling

style; in it there is a sense of recovering some mythical truth and historical past. As for the second quotation, West Heath Road was the street in a suburb of Birmingham where Isobel Chatwin, his paternal grandmother, lived and where the young Bruce stayed for some time during the Second World War. The Victorian cabinet is an essential object of reference, if not the most important one, in the development of Chatwin's narrative. For instance, Chatwin converts his grandmother's cabinet into Utz's plate-glass shelves and by doing so he shows that the piece of furniture which inspired him to write his travel books *IP* in 1977 and *TS* in 1987 still has the power to generate a fictional work in 1988. It influenced his way of designing form and content and provided him with the sources of inspiration for his major books: Charlie Milward's hairy remnant belongs to *IP*, Uncle Humphrey's seed necklace to *TVOO*, the Bruce china to *Utz* and the Victorian walker's compass and pocket sun-dial to *TS*. Chatwin converted these objects into story and legend and he did the same with the landscapes where he placed them, lending them much of what he wished to find there. Through these storied artefacts and spaces he not only reinterprets history and society but also his own social and cultural background together with his personal experiences, beliefs and fears. Chatwin's storytelling then comes from some inspiring objects and in turn becomes a shield: once Chatwin told Thubron that language was "the medium of uniting against "the Beast" (Shakespeare 5), so he believed, as Brain did, that "storytelling might have evolved from a need to issue warnings about our predator" (Shakespeare 5).

Now I turn to develop the arguments which clarify what storytelling really means to Chatwin, as well as the connection between his narrative and liminality which lies in his particular perception of the telling of stories itself.

First, storytelling is an act of creation, a cosmic element, Chatwin being one of those writers for whom "liminal space of a certain kind is essential to creation" (Elsbree



47). Shakespeare remarks that *TS* is a cosmic book because it describes a creation myth, that of the Dreamtime: “Aboriginal Creation myths tell of the legendary totemic beings who had wandered over the continent in the Dreamtime, singing out the name of everything that crossed their path -birds, animals, plants, rocks, waterholes- and so singing the world into existence” (*TS* 2). While in *TS* creation is presented in terms of singing, *Utz* contains a creation myth told through the story of Yossel the Golem, the Jewish legend of the clay figure which is brought to life by cabbalistic ritual and recitation: “All Golem legends derived from an Ancient Jewish belief that any righteous man could create the world by repeating, in an order prescribed by the Cabbala, the letters of the secret name of God. Golem meant “unformed”, “uncreated” in Hebrew” (*Utz* 42). Chatwin’s creative quality of storytelling is based on a huge variety of repetitions: repetitions of songs in *TS*, of letters and words in the story of the Golem in *Utz*, of certain types of characters such as misfits, wanderers and collectors in all his texts, of different kinds of Beasts, of folk-tale images of transformation like the gander which turned into a shining prince in *Utz* or the seal that turned into a star in the story “Chiloe” in *WAIDH*; the reference to the “hammering repetitions” in the “Ancient Mariner” in *IP* (87) and finally the omnipresent existential question “what am I doing here?” All these repetitions in Chatwin’s storytelling grant his literary production a sense of unity.

Second, storytelling gives voice to “poets, prophets, artists, marginal people, edgemen, people who tend to be liminal” (Turner 127). Storytelling is therefore the poeticisation of Chatwin’s multiple voices and expresses the multiplicity and intersection of identities, the co-existence of selfhood and otherness in a context of mutual recognition and acceptance of human duality.

Third, storytelling can become the strongest link between human beings and can generate *communitas*. The interlocutors in his stories and the readers of his texts generate a community of people sharing the same experience: an authentic yet transient state of sameness, an entire congregation of listeners and readers, regardless of the background of each individual member of the group. Chatwin is aware of the huge expressiveness of oral narrative, of its full living state and of its cultural and moral nuances. Therefore the interpretations of the life and the history of a group, both of which emerge from storytelling, are far more important than its ethnography or ethnology. Chatwin's aim is to disseminate such information and interpretation through channels that are more subconscious than the anthropologist's ethnographic narrative. His storytellers, either exiles, social outcasts or eccentrics, live a cross-cultural, universal experience because they manage to overcome the burden of immigration and the stigma of difference and they move around at ease in the new but no longer totally hostile environment. In one of his notes in *TS* Chatwin refers to a study of the behaviour of migratory songbirds. He highlights the fact that "the migrants must have some internal mechanism which favours co-operation and co-existence" (*TS* 271). Bearing in mind that in liminal zones individuals tend to act collectively and face conflicts together, this note might easily lead to an anthropological reading of life in Patagonia or Australia; however, Chatwin bases co-existence on a new phenomenon: the telling of stories. By hearing a story one can begin a journey of one's own and by telling of this personal journey out loud, someone else can start theirs. In *TS*, *IP* and *WAIDH*, whilst each work has its own particular narrative structure, Chatwin illustrates the fact that individuals suffer in a culture that denies interrelatedness and hinders dialogue, so he will prompt and stimulate the dialogue between characters so that a collective consciousness can emerge and eventually opposites can be reconciled.

Finally, storytelling represents the sacred centre of his writing, a liminal space-time construct. Chatwin's passage from home territory to the wider world, or from one cultural zone to another represents a ritualisation of his experience. Through storytelling he becomes involved in a new perception of time and space because he leaves behind - as in his texts about a journey- not only his place but also the conventional secular time of his own culture so as to enter, as Kowalewski defines, "a zone of enhanced experience" (41) where his subjective experience of time alters. Gray argues that travelling has in it something sacred: "In modern civilized society, where the sense of the holy is weakened and less easily located than in primitive societies, any place may be made the sacred ground or mecca of a personalized pilgrimage" (qtd. in Kowalewski 40). Chatwin's storytelling has a taste of the holy because it represents the *omphalos* where the collective and individual memory is preserved. In this sacred context, Chatwin's stories are the manifestation of a philosophy of immortality because they represent a temporal connector which unites ancestors and descendants, life and death in a time cycle.

Moreover, by including concepts such as placelessness, homelessness and rootlessness in his accounts, Chatwin demonstrates how little we belong to anywhere and how similar we all are. In spite of this liminal experience of sameness, there is not a total lack of belonging or a total loss of previous identity: through their storytelling exiles, wanderers and artists on the move do not live the unattachment to a historical nostalgic place dramatically, they create a new sense of place and they recreate their past.

The nature and the role of the narrator is the second issue to be dealt with: what kind of narrator Chatwin is and what role he plays in his first person texts. Rushdie (1992) explains that Chatwin was a name-dropper and a giggler (237). In his travel

writing and in *WAIIDH* Chatwin the “name-dropper” becomes the voice of the people he names and turns their stories into tales, not to show simply he has well-known contacts but to enhance their accounts. Chatwin is also a “giggler”, but a compassionate one, in the sense that he knows really well what and who he can ridicule or treat contemptuously. His stance is that refreshing irony is better than fierce criticism. Deep down this is the reflection of his belief that at times one of our various Selves may be laughing at the others, and that everybody can be laughed at while making fun of their neighbour. Finally, there is Chatwin’s curiosity, most of it comprised in his famous notebooks, the *cahiers moleskins*. Chatwin the narrator has an inquisitive mind which leads him to research such diverse subjects as the Nazca lines in the Peruvian desert, the real story of the legendary outlaws Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid, nomadism, aggression, the Tehueche Indians in Patagonia and the Aboriginals in Australia, palaeontology and fossils and abstract art in the Soviet Union. Chatwin was, as Updike well observed, “a demon researcher” as he “could never have invented his world without having first collected his characters” (qtd. in Shakespeare 395). Chatwin himself admits he did a lot of research to construct his texts, such as *OTBH*, for example, in which he used the Border Country and the motif of twins to reflect on the concept of cyclical, as opposed to linear time but above all he did “an immense amount of research, in life and from old newspapers, to root the story in actuality.” (395)

In addition to the qualities that Rushdie and Updike highlight, Chatwin’s creative achievement lies in his insight. Readers who might expect to find out something more realistic and informative about Patagonia, for example, are likely to feel disappointed because the landscape is presented poetically humanised, not geographically charted. I agree with Theroux when he remarks that: “It is a ridiculous conceit to think that this enormous world has been exhausted of interest. The horizon

remains open because travel has less to do with distance than with insight. It is very often a way of seeing” (Kowalewski 138). Chatwin is a narrator with insight in the same way that he is an expert at distinguishing an authentic picture from a fake. We could assume that his aesthetical visual eye when evaluating a work of art counterparts his insight when acting as a writer. To map certain magical areas of the world, he needs more than geographical or ethnographic information: he needs to pick up detail and Chatwin’s detail is focused on the tiny traits that mark out particular individuals. *OTBH* with the portrait of Mary Jones and *TVOO* with the description of Wéwé the White One, Dom Francisco’s own daughter, are two clear examples of subtle detail.

Apart from being an insightful narrator, Chatwin has been coined a “natural storyteller” (Shakespeare 10) and people as diverse as the writers Colin Thubron and Salman Rushdie, the actor and theatre director Peter Eyre, the Argentinian journalist Uki Goni and the film director Werner Herzog and people in and out of the literary world have all valued Chatwin’s innate “storytelling” talent. By defining his own temperament “toward the fantastic”, Chatwin manages to involve the reader in a multiple adventure which however devoid of threat, audacity or scientific accuracy still appeals. About *TS*, Thubron writes:

I can’t say I believe the songlines *literally*, says Colin Thubron. “Maybe any third-year anthropology student could shoot it to bits, but what’s wonderful is the passion with which Bruce approaches it, his love of it, the way he writes it, the imagery, so that it involves you while you are in it, you inhabit it.” (Shakespeare 487)

In Chatwin’s own words, stories come to their potential narrators, not the other way round: “everywhere you’d turn up, there, sure enough, was this somewhat eccentric personality who had this fantastic story [...]. At every place I came to it wasn’t a

question of hunting for the story it was a question of the story coming to you” (Shakespeare 291). By claiming such reverse narrative process, Chatwin is connecting the world and storytelling from a cosmological perspective: he creates or recreates the world through storytelling because these latent stories are there, just waiting to be given life and he has assumed the responsibility of narrating them. In his essay on the American photographer Paul Strand, Berger defines Strand’s camera as “not free-roving”:

Where he has chosen to place it is not where something is about to happen, but where a number of happenings will be related. Thus, without any use of anecdote, he turns his subjects into narrators. The river narrates himself. The field where the horses are grazing recounts itself. The wife tells the story of her marriage. In each case Strand, the photographer, has chosen the place to put his camera as listener. (*AL* 47)

Within the process of elaborating relationships and storytelling, Chatwin himself and Strand’s camera become eager listeners of stories. In Berger’s words “All villages tell stories [...]. Each story allows everyone to define himself” (*PE* 8-9). This definition affects both the storyteller and the listener and obviously it affects the one who retells. The role of the writer is to devise the right narrative form to let the characters and the landscapes speak for themselves.

Chatwin’s perception of the writer as a shaman has made him adopt a patronizing attitude to life. Back in his school years Chatwin was not popular among his schoolfriends; he was thought to be boastful, self-important and conceited. Later on he became a “clubbable loner” (Shakespeare 68) sometimes a snob and, for some people in Patagonia, arrogant and very sure of himself: “He was very ‘Me, myself and I’m the Queen of England’” (295). Chatwin knows things and people and wants to show people

he knows them; that could be the reason why he sometimes sounds a little haughty. However, he also stimulates dialogue. In *TS*, in which there is an extensive display of his notebooks, thus exposing his huge knowledge and his relevant documentation, the characters he meets on the way are confronted in dialectic relationships and they also give their lofty manners away. All in all, the narrator in his texts is an open-minded observer, a good travel companion and an excellent listener.

Insight, observant openness, shamanic powers and patronizing attitude are the attributes of Chatwin as a narrator described so far. The last attribute and maybe one of his most outstanding ones is irony. A good example is one of the embedded stories in *IP*; it takes place in 1922 and is about an expedition organised by Dr. Onelli, the Director of the National Zoological Gardens in La Plata. The aim of the expedition is to hunt a plesiosaurus which an adventurer called Martin Sheffield had seen tracks of on a pasture near a lake months before. Among the intrepid people who join it is an upper-class lady who paid 1.500 dollars for the equipment and two old age pensioners who escaped from the hospital to fight the monster. The plesiosaurus becomes so famous in the area that it lends its name to a tango and to a brand of cigarettes and “Meanwhile the country was paralysed by a general election which would decide whether to unseat its Radical president [...] and somehow the plesiosaurus managed to insert itself into the campaign as emblematic beast of the Right (*IP* 40-41). Some episodes in *IP* verge on the surreal and usually end in a surprising comic way, with the readers feeling that the story should be retold so as to clarify the mystery, but it is not: the next vignette starts a new account with new protagonists. Chatwin’s irony is often complemented and strengthened by powerful visual images such as the following:

The day before I had met the nuns of the Santa María Auxiliadora  
Convent on their Saturday coach outing to the penguin colony on Cabo

Vírgenes. A bus-load of virgins. Eleven thousand virgins. About a million penguins. Black and white. Black and white. Black and white.

(*IP* 108)

His ironic approach to humanity makes up for his lack of anthropological accuracy and his unpopular patronizing attitude. Irony fills his travel writing, his articles and some of his fiction with a spirited sense of humour, and although he never neglects the obscure side of man and its sometimes aberrant results, as narrated in *TVOO*- Chatwin's view of life is optimistic, piercing and humane.

The final issue to be developed in this last section is the structure of the stories and the relationship between style and content. In one of his black notebooks Chatwin writes: "Man is a talking animal, a storytelling animal [...]. I would like to think that he talked his way out of extinction and that is what talk is for" (Shakespeare 5). There is a mixture of aphorism and desire in this short statement which summarises Chatwin's perception of what a literary text should be like: writing contains as much life as the act of talking and therefore texts should reproduce this dynamic and dialogic correspondence. His stories emerge from his own imagination but above all they come from his thirst for talking and telling. In *IP* in particular he creates a compact network of storytelling by moving from one adventure or character to another, and by employing narrative constructions such as framing and linking. Also by inserting digressions, that means interpolating stories told by other characters, until the storytelling multiplies and results in stories within stories, embedded narratives, dialogues and the disclosure of personal creeds. Shklovsky defines linking and framing as follows: "Framing is found in *One Thousand and One Nights*, *The Decameron*, and *The Canterbury Tales*; linking is usually employed in stories with only one hero; Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* makes use of both" (qtd. in Adams 182). Adams affirms that: "[...] linking provides countless



opportunities for the protagonist to provide information about a new scene, idea, or person and to meet people who tell stories about themselves or other people (204). Even though Chatwin uses both structural schemes as well as digressions to confer on his two books about journeys a centre of order, linking is the device he most often resorts to. It provides him with the opportunity to split up the narrative responsibility of the central character and to include tales told by others and insert some stored research data in the plot. Once he has told a story, this story becomes the preface or embryo of a new one. In *IP* stories are interwoven in such a way that the characters of the ninety-seven vignettes are not only the narrators of their own stories but are also the subject of stories told by others.

In *IP* we usually find paragraphs which end with a sentence and a colon, for example: “From Esquel I went on south to follow up a second Wilson and Evans story:” (54, 60, 62). These sentences end a story and open a new one, all the stories sequenced and numbered. In the story “Chiloe” in *WAIDH* Chatwin employs a different procedure. One teller entices another teller to bring his own story to life. Doña Lucerina, the owner of the only hostel in the village of Cucao, asks one of her lodgers to tell Chatwin stories:

“Tell the young man stories,” said Doña Lucerina. “He wants to hear stories.” In soft musical Spanish, Don Antonio told of the Basilik and the Fiura, the Sirens and the Pincoya [...] “Tell him another, old man,” she said. “Tell him about the King of the Land.” [...] “And another one!” said Doña Lucerina. “Tell him about Millalobo.” (*WAIDH* 349-350)

A chain of direct or delegated storytellers starts so events are presented as being lived personally or vicariously and adventures are shared by more than one generation, from

Butch Cassidy to the youngest inhabitant of the Falklands. This circle of storytellers and listeners unites separate people for a while; that means that the anthropological social structure of *communitas* parallels Chatwin's narrative structures. A different procedure, what is called the technique of the corroborative anecdote, is introduced by Chatwin in his first book *IP* and developed to its furthest extent in *TS*. According to Murray (1993), the pattern is that Chatwin makes an observation, for example that Buenos Aires is reminiscent of Tsarist Russia, and then "conjures up, let us say, a "friend" who is the recipient of the aperçu and who caps it with corroborative observation that confirms the form of the original perception"(47). Regarding *TS* and this dialogue technique, Murray affirms that the book is "consciously modelling itself on the eighteenth century philosophical novel in dialogue form" (47).

The style of Chatwin's texts is based on the unity of form and content and on the idea of continual creation. To this respect Berger offers a compelling description: "As with the carvings on the capitols in a Romanesque church, there is an identity of spirit between what is shown and how it is shown -as if the portrayed were also the carvers" (*Pig Earth* 9). As far as the relationship between style and content is concerned, in *IP*, more than in *TS* and the rest of his work, form and content coincide: form is content and vice versa and each explains the other. The here today and gone tomorrow quality of the liminal people who roam his stories and the spatio-temporal constructions which frame them are also aesthetically expressed in the style. Some of the stories are connected in time and space, others are merely juxtaposed, others are embedded narratives. The plot is expanded backwards and forwards in time throughout ninety-seven episodes; all of them are connected by the leading story of a traveller protagonist. By sequencing the content within such a form, Chatwin is proclaiming that transition exists both in human nature and in the process of literary creation: the unifying, non-hierarchical, non-

chronologically linear nature of liminality can be found not just in the depiction of characters and in the choice of chronotopes but also in the compactedness of form and content. The formal result is the construction of an ellipsis which represents the non-linear discontinuity of Chatwin's content. He exhibits in form what he is narrating, an image to be found in Strehlow's perception of the Australian aboriginal myths: "a 'labyrinth of countless corridors and passages,' [...] a mental construction more marvellous and intricate than anything on earth" (*TS* 70).

This attempt to visualize an inner construction in his texts is more a reflection on unity of thought and a strong belief in connecting as a philosophy of life rather than a reflection on the process of writing itself. He did care about writing as a responsible process, but he cared about it from outside the text, not from within it. Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin explains that her husband really took his time producing the final version of his books. He wrote, rewrote, erased, corrected and threw away his drafts before he felt totally satisfied with his text. He would ask her or someone else to read the text aloud so that he could check how it would finally sound: "He perfected his style by dint of sheer concentration and focus, typing out his drafts again and again, and reading them aloud to be sure they were lucid" (Shakespeare 306). This is to suggest that Chatwin needed both a reader and a listener to make his literary creation complete, thus the importance of the oral component in his storytelling.

As Rushdie declared in *Imaginary Homelands*, Chatwin was a story-minded person who needed an audience to fulfil his irresistible urge to tell things (237). Likewise Chatwin once told Thubron that he had always loved telling stories as "It's *telling* stories for what it's worth" (Shakespeare 10). It was in his nature then to be a storyteller. On the other hand, according to Clapp, his expertise in cataloguing in

Sotheby's taught him how to structure his paragraphs and plots and how to deal with objectivity (88). This is his ontological and epistemological vision of life and literature.

At times his own story does not appear to be as important as the stories he is told or those lived by the people around him; this issue will constitute the content of Chapter four once his narrative style has been analysed.

## Notes to Chapter Two

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<sup>1</sup> As I explained in the Introduction, Chapter Two is a continuation of my MA dissertation, entitled “Elaborating Strategies of Selfhood. Liminality in Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonia*, *The Songlines* and *What Am I Doing Here*.” The conclusions I drew that Chatwin’s narrative style in his two texts about a journey is based on the anthropological concept of liminality are partly the basis of the present chapter. Those conclusions led to the development of completely new research questions which lie at the core of my thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Boxes 1-8, in particular Box 8, in Bruce Chatwin’s archive in the Bodleian Library prove how much he researched for his novel *In Patagonia*.

<sup>3</sup> See Duncan & Gregory, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> “Anansi as Classical Hero” by Lieke van Duin in *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*. Volume Five, Number 1. Editor Maurice A.Lee. Little Rock, Arkansas: Balfour Printing, 2007, pp.33-42.

<sup>5</sup> A selection of about 200 stories sent by radio listeners to his radio programme in the United States.

<sup>6</sup> See the complete text in Spanish from which I have paraphrased the essential ideas:

“-¿Y la tercera categoría?

-Es alguien que se va construyendo día a día, que tiene iluminaciones de su propio pasado que respeta y cosas que no le gustan nada. Gente que casi siempre está en un viaje de ida, lo que me parece sustancial, sobre todo en una sociedad que destaca por estar de vuelta sin haber ido nunca. (...) Hay que tener la retina y el cerebro abiertos a la curiosidad. Y desde el punto de vista espiritual, buscar, como si fuéramos una frase de la cual se nos ha dado la mitad del significado.” (*La Vanguardia*, 18/01/02)

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<sup>7</sup> Graeme Gilloch. *Myths and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, p.8.

## Chapter Three

### Chatwin's Narrative Style (II): A New Way of Seeing/Storytelling based on the Eye and the Gaze. A Search for a Reader and a Beholder.



*The Eye.*

Photograph by Bruce Chatwin. Unknown Location.



*The Gaze.*

Photograph by Bruce Chatwin. The Shrine of Gohar, Herat, Afghanistan.



*Asymmetry.*

Photograph by Bruce Chatwin. Untitled.





### Chapter 3

#### **Chatwin's Narrative Style (II): A New Way of Seeing/Storytelling based on the Eye and the Gaze. A Search for a Reader and a Beholder.**

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. (...) But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we *see* the sun set. We *know* that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation quite never fits the sight. (John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 7)

Chapter Three expands my idea that Chatwin explored new ways of seeing within narratology. His narrative style contains such powerful elements of visualization that his storytelling gains meaningfulness if we are able to discern the seeing behind the writing. It seems as if Chatwin needed a beholder as much as a reader.

### **3.1. Chatwin and the Eye. Photography as a Way of Telling Life and a Way of Capturing Personality.**

Bruce's aesthetic obsession compressed itself into the activity of seeing. He caught immediately uniqueness of form, whether of an ivory nose bone from the Solomons or a stainless steel chair. He later transferred his focus onto people and to books. "He would look at this bottle," said the writer Gregor von Rezzori, "in the same way as he looked at a person, a phrase." (Nicholas Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin* 94)

The idea of seeing and looking is ever present in Chatwin's texts. Chatwin does not only have "the eye" to catalogue and spot authentic works of art -something he trained, exercised and excelled at when working at Sotheby's, but he is also a photographer and an acute observer. His way of looking and his very personal way of expressing his visions generates a way of writing. In 1958, at the age of eighteen, Chatwin entered Sotheby's as a porter in the Works of Art Department. In "I always wanted to Go to Patagonia" he writes: "Finally, in December 1958, since my talents were so obviously 'visual', I started work as a porter at Messrs Sotheby and CO., Fine Art Auctioneers, of Bond Street, at wages of £6 a week" (*Anatomy* 10). Later he was moved to the Furniture Department until he became a cataloguer of Impressionist paintings under Wilson's tutelage, who was the Chairman of Sotheby's at the time. Chatwin left Sotheby's in 1966 having become one of the company's youngest directors. These eight years spent at the auction house would inform his prose style and introduce key themes to his work. Chatwin had a photographic memory and in Sotheby's he learned to look with close attention to detail and to remember what he had seen. Shakespeare writes that John

Hewett, a friend and business partner of Wilson's, taught Bruce how to look at objects and works of art. He also taught him "to hold something in your hand and feel it and *really* look at it," says Elizabeth. "Not just look, but look intensely. Bruce used to look at something in changing lights until you got pretty fed up [...]" (89). Hewett once said of Chatwin that "if you put ten things on the table, Bruce would pick out the best one. Basically he had a strange thing, rather unfashionable now, which is called a good eye" (92). Chatwin definitely had this skill and Sotheby's was a milestone in the fashioning of his narratives.

While he worked as a journalist for the *Sunday Times* magazine from 1970-73, Chatwin also proved to have a special talent for the visual. David King, the arts editor in the magazine and responsible for laying out Bruce Chatwin's posthumous book of photographs in 1993, said that Chatwin was interested in the visual side more than other writers and that he was one of the most visually aware people he had ever met. (Shakespeare 269). King would comment that his photographs, shot with a Leica, "were unbearably inquisitive of their subject." (269)

Chatwin's almost visceral relationship with storytelling has been analysed in chapter two in connection with liminality. However, Chatwin's poetics is not just based on listening and telling and then writing. First he feels the urge to tell and later the urge to write, but the in-between urge to see what will eventually be written is as powerful as the other two urges. Visualization is therefore a *sine qua non* in his literary production. Chatwin's photographs and his cult of art collections should be interpreted as proof of his belief in the visual. The way of looking, the way of seeing and both the eye and the gaze are recurrent elements and belong to his wide aesthetic scope.

In relation to Chatwin's urge to see his work we should mention the writer Redmon O'Hanlon, an intrepid explorer, a travel writer and one of Chatwin's friends

and fellow travellers. Once O'Hanlon visited Chatwin in Elizabeth's house in Oxfordshire when Chatwin's illness was worsening and he was so weak and thin as to not be able to write. Chatwin told his friend that he still wanted to finish "his real dream"-The Russian novel he would write one day" (Horne 104) and that the moment he was better he would start working on it. Chatwin was sure that: "It's going to work I can *see* almost all of it" (106).<sup>1</sup> As to *Utz*, Chatwin felt something similar to what he had dreamed about when figuring out his Russian novel: "I can *see* almost all of it. It's set in Prague and I shall call it *Utz- Utz* [...]. Anyway, one day you must tell people, Redders, but not now. It's a fable. It's all there, ready-made" (106).

My argument about the centrality of vision to Chatwin's writing leads to a similar apprehension of the sense of the visible in Virginia Woolf's texts, even though, Chatwin's visual quality entails a less psychological content. Dalgarno (2001) quotes part of Woolf's letter to her friend Vita Sackville-West:

The main thing in beginning a novel is to feel, not that you can write it, but that it exists on the far side of a gulf, which words can't cross [...] a novel, as I saw, to be good should seem, before one writes it, something unwriteable: but only visible; so that for nine months one lives in despair and only when one has forgotten what one meant, does the book seem tolerable. (1)

According to Dalgarno, "In Woolf's mind the visible is prior to and contrasted with the writable [...] The letter illustrates what I see at work everywhere in Woolf's writing, how narrative begins as a response to her sense of being oriented towards an unrepresentable visible" (1). Chatwin's bearings take him to a less visionary anticipation of verbal representations because Chatwin "gestates" (recalling Woolf's "nine months") his works from a "representable visible" as his seeing is his writing.

Not only Virginia Woolf but also Eudora Welty believed in the power of photography to capture reality. Welty was a photographer herself and often adapted some photographic techniques and procedures to her writing. In a way the snapshots in their memoirs and novels are based on the aesthetic belief that “a photograph imprisons a moment of time and by doing so steals, in a sense, its soul or spirit.”<sup>2</sup> From an early age, photographs defined Woolf’s world. She wrote about photography in her diaries, letters and essays, and used photographic terms descriptively in her fiction (Humm 40). The Monk’s House albums represent the Woolfs’ photographic memory. Humm argues that they do not contain, though, the contexts of politics and work present in Woolf’s letters, diaries and fiction, but the photographs are unconventional in the sense that there are no happy faces or sunny landscapes but multiple shots among which we find perfected takes of the same sitter and out-of-focus images. The written expression of her particular style of perceiving reality through the visual would be her short stories *Portraits* which are between one and three paragraphs in length.

There is a clear attempt by both writers to capture their characters unawares at moments of secret importance in which people unveil themselves. When Ellen in Welty’s *Delta Wedding* comments that “one moment told you the great things; one moment was enough for you to know the greatest thing”<sup>3</sup> we realize that a snapshot can reveal as much as it can conceal; as if we could appropriate visible and invisible worlds through such an art-technology of vision. Photographs also seize the presence of people both alive and dead, and consequently they represent a special memory in which the distance of the fictional eye determines, as Welty affirms, “frame, proportion, perspective, the values of light and shade.”<sup>4</sup> As to Woolf, Gillespie (1993) states that “V. Woolf focuses her verbal camera on inner lives rather than external appearances to provide glimpses of emotional experiences that defy words.”<sup>5</sup> Humm (2002) explains

that Woolf and Bell used photography both as a documentary device and as a way of joining the visual and the unconscious. She adds that: “most modernist writers and artists, like most middle-class women in the 1920s and 1930s, owned ‘vest-pocket Kodaks’ and developed photographs throughout their careers as well as writing about other visual representations such as cinema” (ix). According to Humm, domestic photography with its depictions of family and friends was a source of both psychological and aesthetic imaginaries and illustrated an endeavour to consider forms of representation other than “the ones suggested by the objectifications of masculine modernism” (5). Thus the visual became an instrument for the creation of a more “inclusionary modernism” (7). However, while Woolf within modernism and Welty within the southern literary tradition find the source of insight and subjectivity in everyday objects and familiar faces, Chatwin visualises subjectivity in the objects of foreign countries and the faces of strangers. His vision is not limited to a domestic or national environment but to wider frontiers; nonetheless it becomes inclusionary as well.

Woolf created the idea of “moments of being” to describe her moments of personal and aesthetic enlightenment. She fixed an intellectual discovery in a literary snapshot since our knowledge depends upon “the living relationship between what we see going on and ourselves. If exposure is essential, still more so is the moment, like a lucky snapshot, but comes in its own time and more slowly and from nowhere but within.”<sup>6</sup> Welty developed her poetics around the concept of “confluence” to define the moment in which one finds the source of understanding. Confluence, then, stands for a moment of awareness “at a meeting point” and it takes place in the human mind which she defines as a body of associations which are closer to the poetic than to the real. Welty’s confluence manifests “the break of the living world upon what is already

stirring inside the mind, and the answering impulse that in a moment of high consciousness fuses impact and image and fires them off together” (*The Eye of the Story* 15). Walter Benjamin’s “optical unconscious” would be the last metaphor for those moments of epiphany which emerge from the vision of certain images and which become a testimony to our unconscious pasts. In the essay ‘A Short History of Photography’, Benjamin argues that it was photography, for the first time, which displayed the optical unconscious. Concerning this visual concept Humm explains that:

The optical unconscious is Benjamin’s metaphor for the way in which photographs visualise ‘imperceptible moments’, those outside perception. To Benjamin such a moment is historical because ‘the spark of chance’ that has ‘seared the character in the picture’ is a moment and ‘in the immediacy of that long-past moment, the future so persuasively inserts itself’ (43)<sup>7</sup>

A deeper insight into Benjamin’s “spark of chance” leads to the work of Cartier-Bresson, who was considered the “eye” of the century. In 1933 he got his first Leica and started taking photographs of people without disturbing them, without them noticing. Not in terms of literary *poesis* but in terms of visual art he also found a word to define his own understanding of the relationship between human beings and art, between the photographer and the photographed subject: “the decisive moment” which gives name to his best-known book *The Decisive Moment* published in 1952. His aesthetic argument is that photography can document a co-occurrence of events at a given decisive instant, and this instant can freeze time. Cartier-Bresson believed this special moment is worth holding onto because the events happening then are charged with both formal and thematic meaning. However, the capture of this significance is only possible through a wide experience of moving around and closely observing

people and places, something Cartier-Bresson did and vindicated all his life. To exemplify this vindication it is interesting to recall some moments of his career. In 1973, when he was 66 years old he stopped taking photographs and began drawing and painting again. Almost thirty years later, he refused to attend the opening session of the macro-exhibition devoted to his work in Caixa Forum in Barcelona in 2003; he was seen in Les Rambles in Barcelona sitting in a terrace and watching people walking by. When asked what he had been doing all those years of photographic silence he replied that he had been observing, “sheer beholding.” He added that he considered himself a visual person, “I observe, I observe, I understand through the eyes.”<sup>8</sup> According to Cartier-Bresson then, by moving around and looking we may discover the world we live in and simultaneously understand it. Granted that this outer world can frame us, we can also alter it. Brookman quotes Cartier-Bresson, “A balance must be established between these two worlds -the one inside us and the one outside us. As the result of a reciprocal process, both these worlds come to form a single one. And it is this world that we must communicate.” (Brookman 2)<sup>9</sup>

An analogy could be drawn between the sheer act of beholding which Cartier-Bresson practised during his years of photography and painting and Chatwin’s belief in the act of sheer seeing which we find in his writing and in his pictures. In turn Cartier-Bresson’s work could be likened to that of Chatwin as for the tempo of their vision. By tempo I mean the lack of rush and pressure which characterizes their work: the every day life is captured at ease, relishing the duration, the continuity, the persistence, the time of waiting and beholding. This rejoicing in the passing of time and in the joy at being alive results in the development of a special style of the uneventfulness: nothing really exciting happens but what we see or read tells a lot. It describes a universe of forms and geometry in Cartier-Bresson and evokes a universe of obsessions and



connections in Chatwin. It is this subtle occurrence that takes place at the right moment together with a structure which appears with it what makes their style so unique and recognizable at the same time. Korte (2000) claims that for Stevenson the essential aim of a journey was the experience of travel itself, not the particular destination. Within this experience Stevenson included “the monotony of travelling, the absence of remarkable events or attractions. In fact, it is through its uneventfulness that Stevenson’s “inland voyage” allows him the leisure to find the pathway to his own self”(102). Like in Stevenson, there is no real programme in Cartier-Bresson or in Chatwin’s art: Cartier-Bresson takes photographs for photography’s sake and Chatwin travels for travel’s sake; that represents a vindication of style which determines their attitude towards life. As Clarke (1997) contends: “[...] we can speak of a style in relation to Bresson, for each of his images is recognizable as a signature of the photographer” (207). Readers and beholders perceive there is also a distinctive philosophy behind the literary and photographic messages of these two artists.

Cartier-Bresson believed in and practiced certain content and style issues in photography that Chatwin seems to have also examined and developed in literature. These are the organization of forms and space in a picture, the geometrical compositions, the spiritual sense that a completed visual composition may communicate, the life which is forwarded through the image and finally the passage of time. Likewise -Chatwin with words, Cartier-Bresson with images- both artists keep away from objective reportage and enter a domain of intimacy with the target subject. This is illustrated in Chatwin’s posthumous book *WAIDH*, where he portrays different famous people such as Kevin Volans, Howard Hodgkin, André Malraux, Werner Herzog and Mrs Gandhi. All these compositions could be compared to Cartier-Bresson’s portraits of famous artists and intellectuals of his time such as Giacometti,

Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Ezra Pound and Susan Sontag. The feeling of an aesthetic closeness in this portrayal of friends and well-known faces brings Chatwin and Cartier-Bresson together.

Similarly neither of them travelled just to confirm an idea but to learn things they did not know; they set off on a journey out of curiosity. This might be the reason why their photographs and their texts are not predictable insofar as they do not render the presumed expressions of their respective arts: they display the unexpected. In Chatwin we perceive an attempt to travel and to write unconventionally; Cartier-Bresson's photographs are unconventional as well. In fact, both Cartier-Bresson's images and Chatwin's writing manage to cleanse our view of preconceived ideas and make us look at reality in a different way, as if we are seeing it for the first time. Cartier-Bresson's photographs are not static impressions, but are fluid, catching movement unawares, constantly changing. The decisive moment is, after all, the moment when the past becomes present; this conveying a sense of process. The idea of art and Man in the making and the idea of the past being entwined with the present is also to be found in Chatwin's literary production. His ancestors, collection objects, stories embedded in other stories and the idea of the dreamtime are just a few examples of his concept of past as reminiscence and past as present.

Apart from a portrait artist and a hunter of urban life Cartier-Bresson was a tireless traveller and war reporter thus witnessing terror and injustice in many countries in the Third World, mostly Africa. While his photographs reveal just a part of this, he did experience fear and danger. He considered himself an adventurer who wished to testify to the tragic side of the world (this is shown in his photo reportage). On the other hand, Chatwin never risked his life or ventured into unwelcoming places, so his accounts embrace a cautious distance, not fully devoid of involvement, but far from

Cartier-Bresson's visual commitment and denunciation. Despite this divergence there is something essential which links these two artists: their rejection of simulacra and trickery both abroad and at home. Chatwin wrote about people on the margins and people out of the mainstream, either intellectuals, artists or ordinary individuals; in them he did look for the miraculous, but also for the authentic. Cartier-Bresson hated artifice and those forms of behaviour that are clearly the result of a studied simulation. As a result of this refusal, he hardly ever photographed actors or actresses because he was sure they were professionals of pose and disguise. He wanted to render a personality not an expression. Once he declared that he preferred the strips of photographs which had been taken in a photo booth and aimed at passports, displayed in a shop window, to photographs of posed portraits (Harguindey 74). A remarkable quality of Chatwin's written portraits was his ability to reproduce a personality; to demonstrate this argument we should consider his posthumous book *WAIDH* which is filled with accounts of some of the unusual people he met over the years. The work of Cartier-Bresson depicted the life and the underclass world of the very dispossessed and marginal. Like Chatwin, his eye also captured the eccentricities of human behaviour and he did so from a democratic perspective. Clarke states that:

It makes any thing and any subject open to the photograph. Any moment is possible; there is no hierarchy in Cartier-Bresson's approach. He is the quintessential photographer, for his approach is to encompass and reveal the world he sees rather than edit and restrict his frame of reference.

What we experience when we look at his images is a multiple response; the comic, the sad, the banal, the tragic are all offered within the single image. (207)

What Clarke describes as a lack of hierarchy, a multiple response in Cartier-Bresson's photography is comparable to the idea of universality in human nature and the belief in the sameness about individuals in Chatwin's writing. The anthropological concept of *communitas* provides Chatwin with a theoretical and ontological basis to support this democratic perspective. In liminal states such as the life of the voluntary and involuntary exiles in Patagonia, the coexistence of Aboriginals and whites in the Outback in Australia, the border quality of Radnorshire in *OTBH*, the time of the Cold War in Prague in *Utz*, the eccentric characters in *WAIDH*, there is a "decisive moment" or a decisive state in which people feel the universal within the difference, thus being able to preserve their uniqueness. Just as things do not all head in the same direction, the universalising quality of human nature is not presented in a linear continuum either. Cartier-Bresson's photographs range from Bergamín to Colette, from Isabelle Huppert to Samuel Becket, from Henri Matisse to Edith Piaf: singers, painters, scientists, supporters of the flesh or of spiritual perfection. Chatwin tries to depict the same diversity in his wide gallery of human specimen: from Madeline Vionett, the dressmaker who freed women of the corset to André Malraux, from Indira Gandhi to Werner Herzog from Welsh settlers and Swedish immigrants in Patagonia to Brazilian slave traders in Dahomey, from pied noirs to American outcasts. Clarke titles the chapter about Cartier-Bresson "The Cabinet of Infinite Curiosities" (207); it is significant that this title is also connected to Chatwin's admiration for the seventeenth century cabinet of marvels in which all kinds of objects were displayed in the same space regardless of their rank. Both in Chatwin's writing, and in Cartier-Bresson's photography, the term stands for a wide-ranging concept. First, it exhibits a non-hierarchical collection, usually of unfamiliar artefacts/photographs coming from places away from home. Recalling Clarke's words "any thing and any subject" can be open to

creativity and it can be shown with no restrictions; this sets forth the universal quality of art and its democratisation. Second, it supports the existence of a common space where personal and historical past coexist; a visual exposure of both an entire history and fragments of individual stories. This is why Cartier-Bresson's photographs and Chatwin's writing rise above their historical and cultural contexts. Third, it fosters the respect for mystery and the miraculous: two elements of the imagination that pervade beyond truth. Finally, this cabinet of curiosities shapes a style: both Chatwin's texts and Cartier-Bresson's images evince the energy and the curiosity of their authors, at times their irony. They show an experience of "joy at being alive," a *joie de vivre* (Clarke 208) which informs their work.

This optimistic mood is one of the essential qualities of Chatwin's writing. *TVOO* starts in Ouidah with the annual meeting of the family of Francisco Manoel da Silva. In that meeting they honour the memory of their ancestor Dom Francisco by attending a requiem mass and having a dinner. This time they celebrate the 117<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the family's patriarch. One of the events during this family gathering is the "annual photograph." The posing for the photograph is like a ritual which Chatwin masters to describe: the group must be composed but the ladies cause trouble as they go "on fidgeting, arguing, elbowing and shoving their sisters aside. Nor were the men behaving any better" (*TVOO* 16). The young photographer Cyriaque Cabochichi gets desperate behind his tripod:

half-hidden under the black cloth, signalling with both arms to Modeste and Pierre to push the ladies from either end and squeeze them within the frame of his plate camera [...] But the ladies took no notice: their attention was drawn to the Python Temple where a European tourist was photographing the *féticheur*. The old man stood on one leg, a blue cloth

round his midriff, pulling a face of absolute contempt, with the python's head nuzzling his left nipple and its tail coiled round his umbilical hernia. (16)

It is hard to get a static, orderly, motionless image -to Chatwin posing is against nature- but finally the snapshot of the group is taken and, as the eldest member of the family has set a picture of Dom Francisco on his knees, the honoured and remembered ancestor is also included in the present photograph. Past coexists with the present through a picture within a picture. Here we see a recurrent issue in Chatwin's fiction, that of the ancestors inhabiting the present as if they were still alive, not to oppress the living but to inspire them as well as to prolong their own lifetime, their own validity. This perpetuity can be transferred by a photograph. This is what happens with Dom Francisco's descendants: "Each hung Dom Francisco's picture among their chromolithographs of saints and the Virgin: through him they felt linked to Eternity" (16). In that same way, the photograph of the snake-charmer being photographed by the tourist is within the photograph of the Da Silvas posing for their annual celebration. Present within the present. Chatwin's style is optimistic and ironical, at times surreal but it is consistent; the handling of time is a clear example of this consistency.

Some of Cartier-Bresson's photographs also exhibit the artist's use of irony and surprise. The resulting visual effect of such images is that of a complex geometry which refashions the conventional codes of representation. Clarke comments about one of his photographs, *Madrid, Spain* (1933), that the well-known 'decisive moment' is given here full significance insofar as a series of unrelated elements coincide at just the right moment, thus creating "a visual geometry at once quizzical, humorous and enigmatic" (208). What we see in Cartier-Bresson's photograph is unexpected and humorous, verging on the surreal; in *TVOO* the different manifestations of the infatuation with the

past and the handling of death as in the character of Eugenia de Siva, Wéve, as well as Dom Francisco's behaviour and the stories lived by some of the protagonists are almost as surreal as the test of seeing we are likely to pass while looking at some of Bresson's photographs.

The aforementioned test of seeing is not based on an arbitrary and undisguised "visual geometry." In fact, the meaning of Cartier-Bresson's images is implied rather than stated and we have to find the decisive moment of balance if we want to seize that meaning. When Chatwin was asked on ABC radio about his journey through Patagonia, he claimed that his business "was to record what people said [...] I'm not interested in the traveller. I'm interested in *what the traveller sees*" (Shakespeare 292). He described his odyssey to Thubron in photographic terms. "I was [...] determined to see myself as a sort of literary Cartier-Bresson going SNAP, like that. It was supposed to be a take each time" (292). Cartier-Bresson's notion of the decisive moment represents the moment when everything in the picture is in balance, when something unknown in nature is captured and we feel we see it for the first time in our lives. Shakespeare claims that "Bruce sought for the same reverberating image" (292). However, the reverberating image that Chatwin pursued does not stem from his search for the moment of equilibrium, but the moment of disequilibrium and asymmetry.

Chatwin at times shows a lack of proportion, a calculated asymmetry when telling what he sees. He is waiting for the moment when things and people live either their acme of entropy or their nadir and unveil their natures free from constrictions. Regarding this moment of disclosure, it is worth mentioning Sontag when she comments on the work of two famous American photographers Stieglitz and Robert Frank. When Stieglitz describes his "patient waiting for the moment of equilibrium," he is making the same assumption about the essential hiddenness of the real as Robert

Frank's "waiting for the moment of revealing disequilibrium, to catch reality off-guard, in what he calls the 'in-between moments'" (121). Chatwin's literary searches focus on the moment of disequilibrium because his point of departure in his literary production is the in-between moments and spaces where things are in the making.

In *WAIDH*, we detect Chatwin's refusal of symmetry when he writes about Madelaine Vionnet, the French dressmaker who discarded the corset and imposed her "asymmetry of cut" in the world of fashion and about the architect Konstantin Melnikov whose architectural designs were all asymmetrical. *IP* offers two most revealing pictures of what this asymmetry means in Chatwin's world. The quotations below are two descriptions of symmetry which has been destroyed and turned into a complete imbalance. The first tells of Charles Milward the sailor, the cousin of Chatwin's grandmother who sent her a piece of brontosaurus skin, the object that inspired Chatwin's journey to Patagonia:

Charley the Sailor home from sea. Charley the Pioneer with the restlessness gone; pottering round his garden; taking prizes at the Taunton Flower Show; growing old with his young wife in England countryside; teaching the boy or playing with his two daughters, one showing signs of beauty, the other of his forthright personality – I am sad to report that this harmonious and symmetrical picture was not to be. (*IP* 162)

Through this written picture of Charley Milward's life back in England after his adventures around the world, Chatwin is showing his scepticism towards the possibility of symmetry in people's "settled" lives. Charley's new life, once he had set up home in a country house with his family, is not a utopia. With irony Chatwin endorses his belief that settling down goes against human nature and eventually dismantles preconceived



patterns of family harmony and stereotyped gender roles in Western societies. Despite his effort to become a conventional man Charley ends up ruined and far from Britain again. The second -more visual- picture of Chatwin's idea of asymmetry is the visualization of the suicide of José Macías, one of the leaders of the strike at the meat-works in Puerto Natales. He commits suicide by shooting himself. With irony and wit Chatwin lists three possible reasons for his decision. None of them is as powerful as the actual description of his death:

José Macías shot himself in his barber's shop, facing the mirror in his own barber's chair [...] The front room was bare and white. Flanking the plate glass mirror were two cabinets of pale wood containing pomades and brilliantines. On the shelf above the basin, he arranged shaving brushes, scissors and razors. Two flasks of hair spray faced each other, their nozzles pointing inwards, their red rubber puffers apart. The impact of the shot ruined the symmetry of his last composition. (*IP* 169)

José Macías can maintain neither the symmetry nor the orderly compositions in his barber shop. So much attention to the arrangement and display of his objects does not guarantee a perfect snapshot. Likewise in *OTBH* at one point of the story Mary Jones makes a mental picture of the scene at her death: "The room would be filled with sunshine and birdsong; a breeze would stir the curtains, and the twins be standing, symmetrically, on either side of the bed. A beautiful picture –and one she knew to be a sin!" (156). Chatwin's image of authentic art and rightful life is set away from what is solid, symmetrical and static.

Chatwin motivates us to search for the asymmetry of things, and we are urged to break the devious signs of visual perfection so that we can really catch the meaning of the world around us. The question is how we are going to train our eye and our minds to

be able to do so. The answer would be observation and what Gray (1992) defines as “observant openness”: the visual skill that scientific explorers and idler wanderers possess because they are able to discover the purpose of their trips as they go and may find something they had never dreamed of seeking. According to Gray in both task-oriented and less purposeful travel, “the key ingredient is observant openness, what the French called *disponibilité*” (Kowalewski 45). This quality is to be also found in the references to collecting and to collectors in most of Chatwin’s novels and in his essays and articles in *WAIDH*. This recurrent theme is the result of being a collector himself and of his obsession with the idea that things have to be seen, observed, beheld and ultimately exhibited. Zweder von Martels (1994) comments that having the talent of observation is really important in a traveller and it is tightly connected with the culture of the eye which was institutionalised during the Renaissance (xii). At that time men who had travelled widely started collections of all sorts of curiosities, plants and animals which they had gathered over a long period of time and regarded as worth being exhibited. These collections became manifestations of this talent of observation.

Chatwin has undoubted talent as an observer. He affects the reader’s perception of reality by making us look at things differently and making us look at different things. Therefore his stories are not simply an exercise in telling things, but an exercise in observing them from different angles. Guanacos and sloths in Patagonia, tjuringas in Australia, the Yeti scalp in Nepal or any bizarre man or woman he encounters are looked upon with insight and filtered through his imaginative eye and his narrative intelligence. The more fantastic they are the more sense they make, and the reason for such a perceptive involvement of the reader is precisely Chatwin’s own passion for making sense of his own experiences. The Canadian writer Stephen Leacock asserts that “it is no longer possible to tell anyone anything new about anywhere,”

(Kowalewski 2) something which Chatwin's texts completely disclaim. Shakespeare recalls the comments of people who met Chatwin:

“Once you read his interpretations you can't forget easily,” says Guillermo Alvarez, for 20 years a geologist in Patagonia. “I always saw *guanacos* and they followed me. I thought they were *guanacos*, nothing more. Then I read Chatwin and I saw *guanacos* in a different way. Now I wonder: “What does the *guanaco* think of me?” He motivates me to think, to want to know more, to be more observant. This is his power. Once you read him, you want to know: “Is this true?” (318)

The same line of reasoning can be found in Sontag's words when she states that: “What is exciting ‘are photographs that say something in a new manner,’ Harry Callahan writes, ‘not for the sake of being different, but because the individual is different and the individual expresses himself’” (*On Photography* 118). Sontag also claims that photography “provides a unique system of disclosures: that it shows us reality as we had *not* seen it before” (119). Chatwin's way of telling has the same revelatory character as photography, so by examining the visual quality of his writing we might apprehend his style fully. In *TS* and in *IP* Chatwin motivates readers to think, to be more observant, to see the world in a different way. As a result, Chatwin's vision of life becomes polycentric; Chatwin endorses the idea that if there are no fixed existential models, people can envisage new possibilities around them and that makes them freer. According to Shakespeare, he does not depict Patagonia and the Australian Outback as they are, but he creates a landscape called “Patagonia” and another landscape called “Outback”; this landscape generates “a new way of looking, a new aspect of the world” (318). These places are not fakes; they are real places with new meanings. Patagonia is explored by Chatwin as an idea and as an imaginative and

emotional site. It serves him as a two-way relationship: the “real” place inspires him - the traveller and the writer- whose writings then produce the “idea” of Patagonia.

Chatwin’s travel books are not just a reportage of landscape and people; they are the result of a more sophisticated act of perceiving reality. His texts speak for something other than the written embodiment of a real or imaginary snapshot. Concerning the sources of inspiration and the multiplicity of meanings, Sontag provides a convincing argument when affirming that the camera confers on each moment the character of a mystery and that:

Any photograph has multiple meanings; indeed, to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination [...]  
Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are  
inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy. (23)

As to the fantasy that Sontag envisages in photography, Chatwin’s texts contain the fantastical elements we could find in reality itself that just a few of us can discern. Once he declared: “I never liked Jules Verne, believing that the real was always more fantastic than the fantastical” (*WP* 118). Chatwin portrays the real by spotting its fantastic side and by doing so he gets closer to some photographic techniques that Sontag assesses, namely the power of the photographic view to show what is hidden and the non-essential urge to emphasize the mystery with exotic or outstanding subjects. Sontag mentions the American photographer Dorothea Lange as someone who “[urged] her colleagues to concentrate on “the familiar,” it is with the understanding that the familiar, rendered by a sensitive use of the camera, will thereby become mysterious.” (121)

Chatwin photographed all kinds of objects and the motivation for his choice was mostly a search for the mysterious. He gave voice to a subject-narrator (either first or

third-person narrator) who, to some extent, embraced some kind of mystery and weirdness himself. In *OTBH* Chatwin suggests the presence of the miraculous through a metaphor of seeing which in turn suggests a metaphor of threshold:

One of the windows looked out over the green fields of England: the other looked back into Wales, past a clump of larches, at the Black Hill [...] Long ago, the place had been called Ty-Cradoc -and Caractacus is still a name in these parts- but in 1737 an ailing girl called Alice Morgan saw the Virgin hovering over a patch of rhubarb, and ran back to the kitchen, cured. To celebrate the miracle, her father renamed his farm “The Vision” and carved the initials A.M. with the date and a cross on the lintel above the porch. The border of Radnor and Hereford was said to run right through the middle of the staircase. (*OTBH*, 9-10)

The Vision in *OTBH* should be regarded as one of the various metaphoric representations of the idea of visualization within Chatwin’s narratology, firstly because it relates the sense of seeing to the capability of understanding the world through wonders and miracles. In fact, Chatwin declared he had always been in search for the miraculous and this seems to be the reason why such an event as a religious apparition in a little village in Radnorshire gives name to the place where his fictional narrative develops. Likewise it justifies his belief in the fact that writing and seeing might actually be one thing: an act of art creation taking place in a liminal-border zone.

In *The Art of Travel* Alain de Botton presents visual art as an effective means of enriching our own way of looking at things and thus spotting elements around us which we might have neglected. Central to de Botton’s argument is that by being confident of visual arts we end up recognizing the value of these ignored things and eventually we give them weight in our lives. Therefore a good work of art can excite the beholder’s

sense of both beauty and interest and help him find the meaning of scenes whose meaning he had never expected to uncover. De Botton (2002) contends that: “[...] in so far we travel in search of beauty, works of art may in small ways start to influence where we would like to travel to” (187). Chatwin lived and worked among works of visual art all his life, be it working in Sotheby’s, collecting art objects or taking photographs. This continual exposure certainly determined both the places where he wanted to travel to and the style he decided on to describe those travelled places; the connection between visual art and travelling completed Chatwin’s aesthetic circle. Stuart Jeffries in “Sight Lines”, in which he analyses Chatwin’s photographic skills, affirms that: “He had a great eye -which isn’t surprising for someone who was an expert on painting. In fact, he often said he wanted to give up writing to become a painter.”<sup>10</sup> His widow Elizabeth Chatwin once declared that his husband “had a ‘painterly sensibility’ but this sensibility was aimed at recording things, buildings rather than people, he was interested in the beauty of their clothes. Even there I think Bruce was more interested in the forms the people made rather than their culture.”<sup>11</sup>

Chatwin’s understanding of artistic creation suggests that by familiarizing ourselves with visual art we can see better, we can become better observers and beholders, sometimes better writers and readers. According to de Botton, Van Gogh believed that “artists could paint a portion of the world and in consequence open the eyes of others to it”:

If he (Van Gogh) had such faith in the eye-opening power of art, it was because he had often experienced it as a spectator. Since his moving to France from his native Holland, he had felt it particularly in relation to literature. He had read the works of Balzac, Flaubert, Zola and

Maupassant and been grateful to these writers for opening his eyes to the dynamics of French society and psychology. (189)

Paintings opened Chatwin's eyes in the same way that literature had opened Van Gogh's. Jeffries explains that Chatwin was mostly interested in photographing buildings and that he knew how to transform a modest house into a beautiful, formalist composition. In his architectural snapshots, he practised a studied frontality, for example by taking pictures showing the nearest wall of a building at a precise right-angle to the line of vision. The critic David Sylvester affirms that this frontality "[served] Chatwin to great effect in his characteristic close-ups of multicoloured walls. Much of the world's best photography has had a strong, often reciprocal, relationship to the painting of its time."<sup>12</sup> Similarly paintings offered Chatwin the possibility of providing a basis for his fixation with buying and collecting art. Berger's *Ways of Seeing* analyses the origin and the essential elements of oil painting and provides enlightening arguments to understand Chatwin's rationale. He explains that when you buy a painting "you buy also the look of the thing it represents. This analogy between *possessing* and the way of seeing which is incorporated in oil painting, is a factor usually ignored by art experts and historians (83). Chatwin valued art, collected art but above all wanted the look of the things represented in art. Berger argues that by 1900 the traditional way of seeing of oil painting "was undermined by Impressionism and overthrown by Cubism [...] at about the same time the photograph took the place of the oil painting as the principal source of visual imagery" (84). Chatwin's visual imagery not only develops from his need for visualization but also from his need for possessing the look of reality no matter if the object is an oil painting exhibited in a gallery, a watercolour of a friend or one of his own photographs.

Much nineteenth-century photographic practice was guided and carried out within the language of painting and academic notions of beauty. The relationship between these two artistic forms extended to literature as is shown in the connection between the work of one of the leading British portrait photographers of the Victorian period Julia Margaret Cameron and the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson. Her portraits were associated with poetry in their attempt to suggest ideal beauty. According to Clarke (1997): “As Tennyson wrote in his poem ‘On a Portrait’, the painter had to seek ‘rare harmonies’ in order to achieve the ‘mystery of beauty’. In that sense many Victorians were as much painters as they were photographers” (48). If we should recall Elizabeth Chatwin’s words, in his photographs Chatwin recorded buildings and things rather than people, thus getting away from the nineteenth century demand for portraiture. Clarke states that the language of portrait photographs involves a sense of the inner Self being given away, confers individual status and “advertises the presence of personality” (103). While we do feel the presence of personality in Chatwin’s few portraits, in his photographs he is not interested in capturing myths of male or female dominance or submission or inner gazes/Selves. His vision of both faces and body poses is more withdrawn, he does not intervene or divulge a critical angle. Where Chatwin really indulges his passion for what Benjamin called ‘the spell of personality’ is in his written portraits as readers are clearly in the presence of unique individuals; they recognize “the assumed distillation of a personality” (103). In that sense his depictions of people in *WAIDH* could be likened to the portraits in oil painting inasmuch as they represent an individual text and a study over time in contrast to the photograph with its instantaneous capturing and its “populist and democratic form of representation” (103). Chatwin is democratic in the choice of the cultural and social background of his characters, but not



in the content (distillation) of their personalities, then he is exclusive and demanding. Playing with Clarke's assumptions, Chatwin is oil painting-oriented.

I have so far analysed a number of different issues in relation to visualization within Chatwin's narrative. These are the pursuit of asymmetry to grasp the meaning of life, Chatwin's joy at being alive when creating written pictures, the reliability of observant openness to identify what is worth seeing and internalising, Chatwin's talent for seeing the world in a different way and his talent for saying things in a new manner, the narrative possibilities of the miraculous and finally the relationship between painting, photography and writing. I shall now consider the voyeuristic attitude of Chatwin as a way of avoiding involvement in or commitment to not only his personal life but also his writing.

In no way does the term voyeurism when applied to Chatwin, imply an act of observing other people's lives, especially the unpleasant and shocking details. It is rather an aesthetic stance which he manifests both in his writing and in his photography and which should be interpreted as a new form of distance. Therefore, the negative connotations associated with the term are not to be used to censure Chatwin's aloof and uncommitted attitude during his journeys described by Shakespeare in his biography of the author (295). The question of distance in Chatwin's travel writing has already been examined in chapter one. His particular way of visualizing the world, though, can be found not only in his travel accounts but also in some of his more fictional narratives and in his visual perception of things in general. In "The Morality of Things" Chatwin recalls Freud and the psychoanalysts in their depiction of the "true collector" in contrast to the compulsive art collector. Chatwin is already stating that voyeurism embraces a kind of coldness, a clear distance from people rather than from objects.

The true collector, they imply, is a voyeur in life, protected by a stuffing of possessions from those he would like to love, possessed of the tenderest emotions for things and glacial emotions for people. He is the classic cold fish. He taps the vitality of former ages to compensate for the impotence of the present. (*Anatomy* 171)

Werner Muensterberger, a psychoanalyst who knew Chatwin from the early sixties once declared that “[he] was a looker, an observer, much more than a participant” (Shakespeare 126). In turn Chatwin told Muensterberger that “he liked playing the role of the voyeur and that in becoming a writer he had made his impulse legal” (126). This confession is partly reaffirmed by Chatwin himself when he once described to Lucie-Smith -a very good friend of his- a partner’s picture of himself in the sexual act:

“ [...] brows knitted and eyes bulging like a Japanese god”. Lucy-Smith was impressed by an aspect of Bruce’s description. “He’s floating above himself, seeing himself from the outside -or else seeing himself through his partner’s eyes. Which of us is self-conscious that we would take a snapshot of ourselves in that moment? [...]. The Japanese god was how Bruce wanted to appear, a self-image he approved of. (Shakespeare 127)

In July 1971, Diane Arbus committed suicide in Greenwich Village in New York at the age of 48 by taking a large quantity of barbiturates and then cutting open her wrists. Some rumours have sustained the story that she photographed her suicide, although the police found no photos. There seems to be some voyeuristic element in Chatwin’s attitude towards sex, as well as in Arbus’s macabre self-contemplation. To what extent did they use and abuse their “seeing” mania, their obsession with capturing the moment when they were at their zenith, either of life in its fullness or of a total lack

of life? As for Chatwin, his role as a voyeur corresponds to his role as an escapist; the role of the artist who sees his own work with a narcissistic disposition, like a “Japanese god.” He indulges himself in contemplating his own image, his most intimate acts, either his act of literary creation or his sexuality. Chatwin’s voyeuristic attitude could also be interpreted and partly shown to be reasonable in terms of personal myth, because he was delineating his identity through that myth which comprised all aspects of his life: present, past and future. According to McAdams (1993): “Fashioning a personal myth is not an exercise in narcissistic delusion, or a paranoid attempt to establish oneself as God. Instead, defining the self through myth may be seen as an ongoing act of psychological and social responsibility” (*The Stories* 35). Taking Chatwin’s self-indulgence to extremes, I would add that it was an act of aesthetic responsibility as well: he designed a personal myth by assembling his most precious, sometimes outrageous, visions and by giving them meaning.

In 1966, Chatwin told his boss in Sotheby’s that he would no longer be their expert on impressionist art because looking at paintings had made him temporarily blind. He needed, he told them, to view distant horizons to help him see again.<sup>13</sup> So he went to Sudan and studied and lived with nomadic tribes in the desert for a while. This anecdote is told in *TS* (16) as part of the autobiographical information we get in that travel account. He writes about this sudden decision in “I Always Wanted to Go to Patagonia” where he comments: “[...] people would compliment me on my “eye”, and my eyes, in rebellion, gave out. After a strenuous bout of new York, I woke one morning half blind” (*Anatomy* 11). I agree with Williams (2004) in her thesis on Chatwin when she states that: “This anecdote and its repetition is important because it stands in metonymically for Chatwin’s shift from art expert to travel writer [...] an act of self-creation [...] a specific construction of the self as a nomadic wanderer” (75). To

me, in the in-between momentary phase of blindness, Chatwin realizes that his talent is bound to creation and ultimately literary creation. From now onwards the act of looking and seeing will be an intrinsic element of his style together with liminality, as it is here in this liminal area of non-vision when and where he reinvents himself and starts anew.

Even though Sontag was not a photographer herself she provided photography with a real theoretical basis, in between literature and the essay. Neither was Benjamin an artist of the camera but he wrote one of the most enlightening books on photography, in between philosophy and literature. These two writers researched photography as a means of aesthetic representation, not only visual and literary but also social and political. In the interview he gave to Ignatieff, Chatwin declares that he was really impressed by Benjamin's project of an ideal book, in which the writer creates a kind of dialogue between the quotations he has been collecting and his own thoughts, a collection-book in which he can include everything. Benjamin, like Chatwin, was a passionate collector of quotations. The aesthetic possibility of including quotations when writing a story spurred Chatwin to write *TS*, a mixture of travel account, autobiography and anthropology which he considered a novel and a search. In one essay on Benjamin, Hannah Arendt writes that

nothing was more characteristic of him in the thirties than the little notebooks with black covers which he always carried with him and in which he tirelessly entered in the form of quotations what daily living and reading netted him in the way of 'pearls' and 'coral.' On occasion he read from them aloud, showed them around like items from a choice and precious collection. (qtd. in Sontag 75)

Chatwin also wrote, in his black-covered cahiers Moleskines, everything he thought interesting, strange or likely to be part of a good piece of writing, either fiction or non-

fiction. It was sometimes just a phone number, someone's address, a small sketch of an exotic insect, a verse of a poem. He felt an urge to jot down the findings of his curiosity, but he did so for himself only. Similarly Arkady, the main character of *TS*, is viewed by the narrator as someone who "was so struck by the beauty of this concept [the Dreamtime] that he began to take notes of everything he saw or heard, not for publication, but to satisfy his own curiosity" (*TS* 2). The fact that Chatwin's handwriting in his notebooks is completely illegible and his notes chaotic gives credence to his lack of interest in bringing them to light.<sup>14</sup> In fact, unlike Benjamin, he did not write in his notebooks in order to read their content aloud or to show them around; not even to collect the information inside. It was rather a private way of keeping the traces of his inquisitiveness. Chatwin thought that his art collections were meant to be seen and exhibited, and that his stories were meant to be written; his undecipherable notebooks did not match this exhibiting quality.

Benjamin believed that a collector is in charge of saving the fragments of what is left from the past in a world where history and traditions have been totally shattered. To him, the collector's wish after acquiring a new object is a wish to "renew the old world" (Sontag 77), so he tried to renew the world by gathering quotations. As mentioned above, he elaborated a project of literary criticism which was to be based entirely on quotations; he would become invisible and mute, thus letting the past speak in its own voice. That is what the history of photography discloses: "a long tradition of ambivalence about its capacity for partisanship: the taking of sides is felt to undermine its perennial assumption that all subjects have validity and interest" (Sontag 77). Both Chatwin and Benjamin refused to take sides, and thus photography provided them with the theoretical and aesthetic basis to endorse their refusal. Likewise collecting helped them to approach the past in an unsystematic way: two objects/subjects can be collected

or photographed regardless of their value or content; there must be an uncompromisingly egalitarian attitude towards them. What matters is that they are *there*.

This unsystematic manner fits in with the idea of asymmetry which Chatwin referred to in almost all of his texts, either in the randomly ordered objects in his grandmother's cabinet or in the democratically chosen characters such as Charles Milward and Antonio Soto in *IP* (162, 169) and the people depicted in *WAIDH* (67, 70, 86, 109). According to Sontag, one of the qualities of the professional photographer is "his pre-eminently wilful, avid gaze" and his attempt to resist, defy and subvert "the traditional classification and evaluation of subjects" (78). Sontag also states that both the photographer and the consumer of photographs resemble one of Baudelaire's favourite figures for the modern poet: the ragpicker. This character collects and catalogues everything that the big city throws away and despises; he also "sorts things out and makes a wise choice; he collects, like a miser guarding a treasure, the refuse which will assume the shape of useful gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of Industry" (78). We might wonder whether the choice that Chatwin made was a "wise choice" or whether his selection was the result of a whimsical refusal, but he certainly managed to form a "shape" in his literary and photographic production which invited readers and beholders to enjoy a worldwide vision of their time. This coincides with Sontag's idea that: "the most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads -as an anthology of images. To collect photographs is to collect the world" (3). It is true that Chatwin was a prolific photographer; however, as Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin comments, her husband never paid much attention to his photographic production. Neither did he ever intend to collect them. It is Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin who has kept thousands of

pictures which her husband took of thousands of things and has selected them.<sup>15</sup> *WP* displays this selection.

Curiosity inspired both his texts and his snapshots but it was literature and not photography that Chatwin finally opted for to narrate the world. He seems to subscribe what Sontag claimed about the limitations of photographic knowledge, that: “Only that which narrates can make us understand” (23). The muteness of what is, hypothetically, comprehensible in an image and that constitutes its attraction did not fulfil Chatwin’s aesthetic needs. My argument is that in storytelling he found a better way to free his obsessions and a better way to uncover his own muteness. To Chatwin, however meaningful a photograph can be, it is a perishable act of creation, whereas a story is both a meaningful and an enduring act of creation. A photograph represents something which is there with a history and a story attached to it; it is an image which is captured by the artist at the very moment of its perception. Despite possible changes from the original object, the photograph has an actual life in itself, that is, the life it represents. It represents moments which, according to Berger, “whether photographed or not, are discontinuous with all other moments. They exist by themselves” (*AL* 43). A written story is, in contrast, an act of creation at full, in the sense that it comes from the imagination of the artist, the original object being an interpretation of a fragment of reality. One more difference is that a photograph is something fragile while a story can be told and retold and reinvented throughout time.

I would argue that in Chatwin’s literary work what really unites text and snapshot is what Sontag has attached to photography and coined “an ethics of seeing” (Sontag 3). Chatwin’s both fictional and non-fictional texts contain a distinct moral freedom which revokes constraint and symmetry and involves observant openness. Sontag asserts that photographs show us a new visual code but at the same time they

widen our ideas on what's worth observing and what we have the right to observe. In Chatwin's work this ethics is not connected to politics or social commitment, though; neither to protest nor impact, but to aesthetics and to aesthetic distance. The same lack of social or political commitment in his texts is to be found in his photographs. Chatwin's photographs of his journeys, for example, are innocent photographs, inasmuch as they do not zoom images to fulfil the competing claims of reportage or the collective memory. Neither do they capture unconventional forms of beauty such as disorder, poverty, disease and other models of present breakdown which, according to Sontag, would testify to the most enduring of photography: "the aptitude for discovering beauty in the humble, the inane, the decrepit. At the very least, the real has a pathos. And that pathos is beauty (The beauty of the poor, for example)" (102). Even though photography often accompanies Chatwin's travelling experiences, the beauty of the poor does not become a photographic object, neither is it a travelling destination or a narrative object; the same stance is shown in the face of war settings, natural disasters and modern genocides. He practises his art whilst avoiding a portrayal of the current political and social situation: voyeurism becomes then a replacement for denunciation.

However, this non-aligned attitude does not make his work less real, less novel or less humanized. When he jots down a piece of writing he is a voyeur; when he takes a photograph he is still a voyeur because both actions in Chatwin's particular view of the world are acts of "non-intervention"(Sontag 11). Sontag declares that "The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene" (12). That might be the reason why Chatwin wrote from a distance and with some detachment instead of becoming part of the written or photographed object. He was for the recording that Sontag indicates. His involvement with writing is similar to his involvement with photographing and could be attributed mantras such as "let the others



be themselves”, “do not impose your own perspective onto them”, “do not turn your look into a subject on the photograph.” Nevertheless, he gives us some good examples of a humanized non-intervention. This attitude is to be seen in the photographs that Chatwin took of Marie Reiche, the lanky German mathematician and geographer who travelled to and lived in Peru for nearly forty years to study the mysterious Nazca lines.<sup>16</sup> Hers is one of the most warm-hearted portraits included in his collection of essays *WAIDH*. She is also mentioned in one of the many observations taken from his notebooks which are included in *TS*. One of them is full of irony, and certainly sympathetic:

We once spent a hilarious week with their [the Nazca lines] self-appointed guardian, Maria Reiche. One morning, I went with her to see the most spectacular of all the lines, which was only visible at sunrise. I carried her photographic equipment up a steep hill of dust and stones while Maria, in her seventies, strode ahead. I was horrified to watch her roll straight past me to the bottom [...] I expected broken bones, but she laughed, ‘My father used to say that once you start to roll, you must keep on rolling’” (*TS* 279)

Chatwin’s joy at being alive is again present in this description. When Chatwin visited Marie Reiche in the Peruvian Pampas she was carrying out one of her many reports/charts on the strange lines. In *WP* we can see three of the photographs that Chatwin took of her. In one of these pictures, Marie is leaning on a metal step-ladder in the middle of the desert. She is looking in one direction, but no one knows where. The image is really touching: an old, skinny, grey-haired, wrinkled lady with thick glasses trying to understand the secret of some lines in a bleak landscape. Her look gives away the dimension of her thoughts: despair, amazement, puzzle or maybe understanding. A

second photograph shows Marie on top of the same metal step-ladder, this time we see her back and her unprotected legs and her short dress swaying in the air. A weird, almost comic, image but as sublime as the first because, in spite of verging on ridicule, it is not disrespectful to the person. It describes the decisive moment when Chatwin captures the humanity of a woman who would undoubtedly be a fish out of water in our standardized societies:

To them she is the ‘mad woman with the lines’, a fanatical recluse, a regional curiosity that one should visit when driving south. Indeed, it *is* rather an odd sight, the old lady perched on top of an aluminium step-ladder, apparently gazing into nowhere, or measuring the desert with steel tapes. (WAIDH 99)

In Chatwin’s way of seeing and spotting humanity, Marie Reiche has almost become a sort of magic spirit in that last edge of the world. Once more Chatwin appears to be an amused and deep connoisseur of eccentricity. However, who are Chatwin’s eccentrics? Why is he so fascinated with the uncanny, either as the Freudian concept or as a personal apprehension of difference? In the next section this idea of difference embodied in peripheral and marginal characters will be analysed.

### **3.2. The Peripheral and the Marginal: Bruce Chatwin, Diane Arbus and Walter Benjamin. The Uncanny in Chatwin.**

Theo the Tent was his name. He was the red-bearded giant whom Lewis Jones had met in the lane. He was known as ‘The Tent’ on account of a domed construction made of birch saplings and canvas, and pitched in a paddock on the Black Hill, where he lived alone with a mule called

Max, and a donkey to keep Max company [...] His appearance sometimes put people off. Only when they realized he was incapable of hurting a fly, did they take advantage of his gentle, trusting nature.

(*OTBH* 228)

Chatwin felt a rapport with displaced people in general and with outcast artists in particular. By considering himself rare and “really mad”, he could feel a great proximity to them. To Colin Thubron, Chatwin was fascinated with crazed people, close to the ambiguous, the odd and the peculiar: “Bruce assumed, and was drawn to the assumption, that the extraordinary was everywhere. A lot of his celebration of the world was for its sheer peculiarities: ‘Life is peculiar. Everything is really mad. Not just me’.” (Shakespeare 126)

His joy at being alive described in section one parallels his obsession with and his attraction for the eccentric. Bearing in mind that one of Chatwin’s most original qualities was being a visually aware writer, were one to compare his narrative style of representing unusual reality to that of some photographers, we should consider the work of the American artist Diane Arbus (New York 1923-1971). Arbus often spoke of her desire to publish a “family album” of her own, a “Noah’s ark” of humanity. I assume that the passengers would be akin to those fools in Chatwin’s special *Narrenshiff*:<sup>17</sup> outcasts and strange-looking, strangely-behaving individuals who represent those hidden sides of mankind which are not usually exhibited, and who happen to be together in special contexts.

Arbus started as a fashion photographer and worked for prestigious magazines. Later she changed her vision of photography and started a new way of seizing reality: she became a photojournalist and began taking portraits of people on the fringes of

society, those people who in Sontag's words represent the "Hobbesian man [who] roams the streets, quite visible, with glitter in his hair":

Arbus's work expressed her turn against what was public (as she experienced it), conventional, safe, reassuring -and boring- in favour of what was private, hidden, ugly, dangerous, and fascinating. These contrasts, now, seem almost quaint. What is safe no longer monopolizes public imagery. The freakish is no longer a private zone, difficult to access. People who are bizarre, in sexual disgrace, emotionally vacant are seen daily on the newsstands, on TV, in the subways. (45)

Chatwin's photographic portraits are full frontal in the same way that his written portraits collected in *WAIDH* have no tricks; the descriptions are totally direct and the subjects are the least boring or conventional. A good example of this would be the portrait of Nadezhda Mandelstam in "Nadezhda Mandelstam: A Visit" in *WAIDH*. When Chatwin visits this old Russian lady, she is laying on her bed on her left side, her sheets are rumpled, and she is resting her temple on a clenched fist. She greets Chatwin without moving:

Her hair was coarse, like lichen, and the light from the bedside lamp shone through it. White metal fastenings glittered among the brown stumps of her teeth. A cigarette stuck to her lower lip. Her nose was a weapon. You knew for certain that she was one of the most powerful women in the world, and knew she knew [...] She waved me to a chair and, as she waved, one of her breasts tumbled out of her nightie. 'Tell me,' she shoved it back [...]. (*WAIDH* 83)

Arbus's portraits are also full face on, never in profile. Here lies one of the various similarities between the two artists: neither Chatwin nor Arbus catch people

unawares. On the contrary, their objects of attraction consent to be photographed or interviewed and these aesthetic objects/subjects reveal themselves in the act of photographing/writing. There is no political denunciation in the snapshots of their creators because their commitment is with the person behind the lens not with the situation behind the person behind the lens.

Arbus and Chatwin's portrayed individuals look at us with open eyes instead of three-quarter gazes that, devoid of confidence and cooperation, fear our gaze. They are not victims of grief who could feel their lives have been invaded; that means their portraits are not those "photographs of agony" that Berger examines in *About Looking* and that engulf us because of the suffering expressed in them. Berger argues that these portraits make us feel despair or indignation; however, despair in such circumstances has no purpose whereas indignation urges us to take action. Then, according to Berger: "We try to emerge from the moment of the photograph back into our lives. As we do so, the contrast is such that the resumption of our lives appears to be a hopelessly inadequate response to what we have just seen (42).

Indignation and despair emerging from the contemplation of a cry of grief beseech some involvement, at least some condemnation but neither Chatwin nor Arbus's try to thrust a judgment on the people they write about or photograph. In spite of this, their own consistency in depicting certain kinds of personalities or looks, in other words, their very range of subjects, creates an aesthetic morality and however neutral a photograph or a written portrait might seem, the author's guidance is perceived. Having said this, the micro cosmos within American society in the 60s that Arbus recreated in her photographs seems to be much more susceptible to render a moral stance than the literary work Chatwin built up in the Britain/Europe of the 80s. America, far from reproducing an ideal and all-encompassing pattern of society, was

gradually becoming the ground of multiple minority groups and invisible marginal realms which the traditional nationalistic gaze refused to acknowledge. When Chatwin writes in *OTBH*: “Outside the Chapel, farmers with fresh weatherbeaten faces were quietly moaning about Mrs Thatcher’s government” (243), he is suggesting that English society had a reason for moaning about their Conservative government. However, even though rural, mining and industrial areas were living one of the most conflictive social periods in years, Chatwin did not enter the hidden social spheres of the time; he travelled instead, whereas Arbus did. She killed herself in 1971 and we might wonder whether the reason for her suicide was the fact that she could not survive her own trip to hell. Even if her photographs were not “photographs of agony” as Berger described, she entered a world -or underworld- she was not able to escape from (personally and aesthetically). Chatwin died of AIDS in 1989 after having lived his last journey, a real trip to hell indeed, at a time when the disease was still not well-known and its treatment deficiently developed. But he chose life and by doing so he imposed a literary yardstick and morality. Chatwin believed that writing was a way of getting rid of one’s monsters and his faith in the restorative quality of literature might have prevented him from killing himself: “And the moral is simple; never kill yourself. Not under any circumstances. Not even when you are told you have AIDS.” (Horne 106)

In 1955 a photographic exhibition called *The Family of Man* organized by Edward Steichen in the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented 503 photographs by two hundred and seventy-three photographers from sixty-eight countries. The idea of so many artists from all over the world displaying their work was to demonstrate that humanity is “one” and that “human beings, for all their flaws and villainies, are attractive creatures” (Sontag 32); they could form a universal family album. In Berger’s words: “Steichen’s intuition was absolutely correct: the private use

of photographs can be exemplary for their public use” (*About Looking* 61). The people in the photographs were all shapes and sizes so the viewers looking at all those faces and bodies could identify with at least one of them. The human gallery in the pictures corresponded to the human gallery of the beholders and that created a feeling of joy and union. Seventeen years later, in 1972 the Museum of Modern Art hosted a Retrospective of Arbus’s work. The people in her one hundred and twelve photographs were really unpleasant to look at:

The Arbus show lined up assorted monsters and borderline cases -most of them ugly; wearing grotesque or unflattering clothing; in dismal or barren surroundings- who have paused to pose and, often, to gaze frankly, confidentially at the viewer. Arbus work does not invite viewers to identify with the pariahs and miserable-looking people she photographed. Humanity is not “one.” (Sontag 32)

Which of the two choices of photographs does Chatwin identify more with? As he supports the idea that individuals are born and die irremediably everywhere, the exhibition *Family of Man* certainly does fit into the core of Chatwin’s work which develops around the concepts of liminality and the state of *communitas*. His depiction of the human condition is based on sameness and universality: humanity then is “one”. However, all his texts illustrate that there is a dark side of human nature which proclaims that humanity is not “one.” The Man and the Beast are two sides of the same coin and we, as individuals living this duality, have to accept that ours is not the only legitimate domain. The Self or the Other can be evil, ugly, monstrous, twisted, crippled, different, homosexual, eccentric and uncanny. All of us are likely to fall into “the other side” at some time. In this sense, Arbus’s photographs of isolated aliens would meet Chatwin’s eccentrics and outcasts better. Thus Chatwin’s world embraces the two

photographic worlds that once aroused intense interest in American society: both a journey into a universalising feeling of sameness and a journey into a feeling of horror and isolation.

Sontag claims that: “Arbus took photographs to show something simpler – that there is another world [...] The other world is to be found, as usual, inside this one” (Sontag 34). These words might recall those of Chatwin when he speaks up for his eccentric characters and contends that the difference between them and the people we consider normal is that they live in a different world: “When you start to examine the so-called eccentric characters,” he told Melvyn Bragg in a television interview, “you find that they’re extremely sane and they’re not particularly eccentric -they are just living on a different time scale, in a different world” (Murray 14). Murray explains that Chatwin, when accused of writing about the bizarre, argued that the people he observed, in Patagonia or Radnorshire, for example, were perhaps closer to the centre of things. He found the Welsh country fascinating because in this territory between England and Wales people were different and they resisted the persistent existing pressures of conventionality and materialism. (15)

Chatwin was certainly drawn to people at the margins, “out of the apparent mainstream” (Murray 14). These characters are to be found among both the ones he created in his fictional work and those he personally met and about whom he wrote in his essays and articles. None of them, though, is a freak as in Arbus’s photographs. They are strange, both in personality and actions, but they do not automatically look strange and disturb our sensitivities when imagining them. When reading Chatwin’s stories, we are more concerned about the lives of his characters and the oddity of their behaviour than about their physical appearance. The visual element is there, but without overpowering the personality. The twin brothers in *OTBH* are described as two strange



individuals embracing an alienating nature and closed in a claustrophobic domestic sphere; however, the ideas of alterity and one-ness are presented as such an enriching unity that the reader appears to be untroubled by the duality of human nature. When he was doing some research for his novel *TVOO*, he discovered that in Dahomey twins were not regarded like ordinary men but considered gods. As a child, Bruce told stories to his imaginary friend Tommy and this dialogue with himself, according to Shakespeare, was just the invention of an “intimate, inviolable Other” (382). He probably would have loved to have an identical twin because the understanding between the twin brothers Lewis and Benjamin in *OTBH* has no cracks; neither of them is presented as being better than the other and their identities are doubly advantaged. What we do not encounter in the novel are premonitory signals that may threaten us with feelings of anguish and kinkiness, as happens in Arbus’ photograph *Identical Twins*.<sup>18</sup> According to Sontag:

Resembling or having something in common with someone else is a recurrent source of the ominous, according to the characteristic norms of Arbus’ dissociated way of seeing. It may be two girls (not sisters) wearing identical raincoats whom Arbus photographed together in Central Park; or the twins and triplets who appear in several pictures. Many photographs point with oppressive wonder to the fact that two people form a couple; and every couple is an odd couple: straight or gay, black or white, in an old-age home or in a junior high. (35)

Benjamin and Lewis Jones in *OTBH* are identical twins who form an inseparable couple, accomplices in building a unique personal world. The construction of this world is not possible with one of them being out of the game, something which results in a puzzling but at the same time reassuring sense of dependence. They are certainly an odd

couple -in Sontag's words, however, in their portrayal they are not posing calmly and stiffly like in a studio portrait photograph devoid of real life and unaware of their grotesque look. They communicate that they have comfortably reached their own interpretation of themselves, so when we visualize its characterization, there are no gloomy omens or signs of pain nor feelings of being in one of Arbus's "Grand Guignol" of urban drag balls and welfare hotels (Sontag 36). This is how Chatwin approaches their well-being:

Too often the twins had fretted at the thought of dying childless -yet they had only to glance at their wall of photographs to get rid of the gloomiest thoughts. They knew the name of all the sitters and never tired of finding likeness between people born a hundred years apart [...] Hanging to the left of their parents' wedding group was a picture of themselves at the age of six, gaping like baby barn-owls and dressed in identical page-boys collars for the fête in Lurkenhope Park. But the one that gave them most pleasure was a colour snapshot of their grand-nephew Kevin, also aged six [...]. (*OTBH* 14)

For the twins to find order in their world is as easy as to reorder some photographs on a wall. The question is to find the correct space to locate a new picture and revive an old feeling of community. Almost at the end of the story they are depicted trying to find an appropriate space to hang a colour aerial photograph of The Vision on the wall of photographs in the kitchen. Benjamin seems to have found the solution: "by shifting Uncle Eddie and the grizzly *up* one, and by shifting Hannah and Old Sam *along* one, there was just enough space for it to fit beside their parents' wedding-group" (*OTBH* 241). The relocation of their ancestors "up" and "along" their life portrait entails the relocation of their own nature, be it commonplace or unusual. It can be concluded that

in Chatwin's work being out of the ordinary implies a certain kind of aesthetic autonomy and detachment, even pleasure, never a stigma the characters must fight against and ultimately overcome.

Having analysed the figure of the eccentric in both Arbus's photographic work and Chatwin's texts, it is necessary to refer to Freud's essay "The Uncanny." Hooper and Youngs contend that the uncanny is in fact "nothing new or alien but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it through the process of repression" (79). It might be the expression of the body of monsters which inhabit our minds and which we either hide or surmount; that would be the uncanny that we actually experience in real life. But the concept also comprises a linguistic element; it is the uncanny that we merely picture or read about in literature and should be given a separate discussion.

Whilst the concept of uncanny both in Chatwin's fiction and in his real life adopts various forms and communicates various messages, in Chatwin's travel books it really confers something new on them and this is a new geography of adventure. In terms of content Chatwin's travel writing parallels that of other travel writers; his characters move around and explore and we live their adventures vicariously. However, Chatwin's capacity for vicarious experience to counterpart local or bordering circumstances goes somewhat further. Chatwin's greatest contribution to travel writing and to literature in general is that when he plays the role of the adventurer and "performs marvels on our behalf" (Rushdie 224), these marvels are to be found within the uncanny not the exotic or the intrepid. His voyages are framed in contexts where eccentricity equals individuality and difference equals sameness; where humanity is presented as one but as a multiple one. In Chatwin's journeys around Patagonia, Australia and Russia, individuals live a transitory contact with other individuals, who,

like them, come from different parts of the world and belong to different cultures and races but they “are in some sense ‘free’: free of their countries, their roots, even simply their usual securities” (White 89).<sup>19</sup> To set off on one of Chatwin’s literary journeys is to start an adventurous experience of liminality and consequently *communitas*. The Chatwinesque “uncanny” we encounter in his trips is never frightening but it calls for an attitude of assimilation, fellow feeling, tolerance and eventually familiarity. Jean-Yves le Disez (2004)<sup>20</sup> places the uncanny within the domain of travel literature by explaining the reaction of British people when visiting Brittany in the 1850s-60s. The differences and at the same time the similarities between the two places alternatively offered travellers “an opportunity to work out contradictions or, on the contrary, added to the emergence of the “Unheimlich” (the uncanny). As a consequence, they represent Brittany as either very wild or very sweet” (Hooper and Youngs 71). The essential idea is that the uncanny provides the traveller first and then the reader with the possibility of identification with or estrangement from what is different in the visited country. In Chatwin’s travelling the uncanny, taken as the expression of difference, hardly ever creates distance only or closeness only but it furthers a feeling of ambivalence.

My analysis of the uncanny in Chatwin’s novels derives from the concepts developed in Freud’s study of the term and tries to outline the real or hypothetical connections between these concepts and Chatwin’s own literary and linguistic assumptions. There are basically three relevant interconnections. First of all the appearance of eccentric characters and unusual individuals who perform unconventional actions. Second the presence of the supernatural and the mysterious in most of his stories. Third the final perception that in fiction many things are not uncanny which would be so if they happened in real life; thus fostering the instability of truth and lie in the realm of literature. The ambivalence of the term and the diversity of

its meanings become an open game for Chatwin who plays it fully aware of their aesthetic possibilities: homely and unhomely, native and foreign, familiar and mysterious, tame and wild, domesticity and homelessness, secretive and open; these are some of the ambiguities he endorsed in his narratives.

As for a more detailed study of the connections between Chatwin's texts and Freud's essay, five basic elements should be examined. To begin with, E.T.A. Hoffman's story *The Sand-Man* examined in Freud's article, enables us to get closer to Chatwin's particular ideas of vision and seeing, of the spy-glass to observe reality at full, even of blindness and violent blinding. The eye is essential in Chatwin, in the same way that being robbed of one's eyes would have tragic consequences. Secondly, in a Freudian view, to create an uncanny effect the reader must feel uncertain whether a character in the story is a human being or an automaton. The doll Olympia, a handiwork of the Sand-Man, ends up eyeless at the end of Hoffman's story and becomes one of the elements which conveys the biggest feeling of uncanniness because the distinction between fantasy and reality is effaced. In Chatwin's *Utz* we are told the story of Yossel. This is the golem that the Rabbi Loew created. He is an artificial man "a mechanical man [...] a prototype of the robot." He looks and acts so like a human that he does all sorts of menial tasks on weekdays but undergoes a change on some occasions: "Yet on the Sabbath – since all God's creatures must rest on the Sabbath – his master would remove the "shem" and render him lifeless for a day" (*Utz* 41, 45). This Rabbi is credited with supernatural powers and performs extraordinary actions. Likewise *Utz*'s porcelains "are alive and they are dead" (*Utz* 42). Thirdly, the theme of the double is present in *TS* when Bruce Chatwin stumbles on "another" Bruce, and in *OTBH* where the twins Jones behave as one person and can feel each other's pain: Benjamin must

undergo pain and abuse during his confinement in the Hereford Barracks; meanwhile, Lewis experiences the sufferings his brother is undergoing:

From the ache in his coccyx, Lewis knew when the N.C.O.s were frog-marching Benjamin round the parade-grounds; from the pain in his wrists, when they lashed him into the bed-frame; from a patch of eczema on his chest, when they rubbed his nipples with caustic. One morning, Lewis's nose began to bleed and went on bleeding until sundown: that was the day when they stood Benjamin in a boxing ring and slammed straight-lefts into his face. (*OTBH* 109)

In *TVOO* Dom Francisco, of all his children, is told to have a great love for and care only for two twin sisters by a mulatto woman who had died. His present wife Dona Luciana agrees to let these twin daughters come and live with them because: "Twins will bring us luck,' and she gave them a mother's love" (*TVOO* 115). Thus, while in Freud's essay the double may turn into somebody to be frightened of instead of a guarantee of immortality, in Chatwin's text the double is a comfortable support and the embodiment of affection; the Self is not destroyed by it but enhanced. The fourth element, as to people's feelings towards death, dead bodies and the return of the dead, *TVOO* caters for varied examples and descriptions. We share mental visions with some of the characters, we are told about supernatural apparitions and dead people who return to the world of the living. Death is perceived through the shrieks of vultures and despair through Eugenia da Silva after being abandoned by her suitor. We also notice the felt presence of the Beast through the King of Dahomey's madness and we learn about the superstition of the dread of the evil eye. One of Dom Francisco's descendants keeps a bottle of gin open on her bedside table in case he should wake up (*TVOO* 21); drummers call the ancestor back to the earth (23). Similarly the hundred-year-old

Eugenia da Silva is “a skeleton who happened to breathe” (829) who, as a young woman, was unable “to make the distinction between the real and the supernatural, she made none between the living, the absent and the dead” and “they suspected her of the Evil Eye” (35). Finally, in the bloodthirsty, frenzy, pitiless world of slavery and oppression, people’s bodies are dismembered, severed heads swing like dumb-bells and small boys are brutally garrotted by the Amazons. The atmosphere is washed with insanity. In *TS* Titus tells Arkady how, at night, he hears his Ancestors howling for vengeance and how he feels forced to obey them; it seems as if he was preventing his rivals from stealing his birthright and altering the tjuringas of his country. It is difficult to elucidate whether all of this uncanniness or just a part of it should be looked at from a psychoanalytical perspective. Did Chatwin aim to represent the idea of castration and childhood traumas through these signs, as Freud suggests? I argue here that rather than to a psychological problem, the repetition of the concept in Chatwin’s texts seems to correspond to a particular functioning of the imagination and to an aesthetic code, that of the shamanic power of repetition within storytelling.

As a writer Chatwin creates his own fictional microcosms peopled with rare and unusual specimens; the Other is described as uncanny, as the title of the present section illustrates. As a man he becomes one of these strange beings as well because he considers himself an exception; then the Self is described as uncanny. This is his confession to his friend Redmon O’Hanlon:

When I first came in here they told me I was mortally ill. They said I had a fungus of the bone marrow which I must have picked up in a cave in China. It’s exclusive! It’s so rare that I’m only the tenth recorded case in the medical literature! And they also let me know why I got it Redders- I

got it because I have AIDS. They told me I had six months or a year to live. (Horne 105)

By considering himself “exclusive”, “so rare”, he is defining difference and eccentricity as essential parts of his particular vision of reality and in turn of the Self. On the one hand, when Chatwin is told he is mortally ill, he is awake to death: even though he is still alive, he is also half dead. On the other hand, his illness is mysterious: a strange case, previously unencountered. As I previously explained, these two personal circumstances are both marks of the uncanny in real life, his life. Chatwin aims to transform the uncanny into literature so that the content of his stories will not be submitted to reality-testing and he will be free to tiptoe between his real life story and his story in fiction. In Chapter Four the idea of the uncanny will be more thoroughly explored and conclusions more linked to Chatwin’s personality will be drawn.

### **3.3. Chatwin the Flâneur, the Voyeur, the Visual Traveller and the Eye-twister. Exploring Chatwin’s Idea of Gaze as a Personal and Cultural Perception.**

Gazing on other people’s reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism, the ubiquitous photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests, as if its perspective is universal. In fact, photography first comes into its own as an extension of the eye of the middle-class flâneur, whose sensibility was so accurately charted by Baudelaire. The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitring, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes.



Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world “picturesque.” (Sontag 55)

Sontag points out three essential concepts ascribed to the art of a photographer: flâneury, voyeurism and the idea of gaze. In the present section I will explore these concepts, together with the close relationship between visualisation and travelling in Chatwin’s texts about a journey.

Chatwin is a middle-class flâneur in terms of idleness, strolling and observing and also because he becomes, like the flâneur, a literary myth himself. Chatwin’s horizons, though, are a little wider than the ones comprised in the walks of Baudelaire’s hero, away from the streets and arcades of nineteenth-century Paris. Chatwin’s heroes are flâneurs insofar as they are males and outsiders but their frame is not the Second Empire Paris in the 1840s but a multi-ethnic Britain in the 1980s. That makes his view less localized. Shakespeare writes that Chatwin “was inquisitive, spiritual and global and the grass was always greener where he had travelled [...] he became an archetype for the urban traveller” (537). He incited others to follow him, both men and women, young and healthy-living people because he was, as Shakespeare argues, “emblematic of a way of thinking and of being” (537). I should add that he was also emblematic of a way of seeing.

Apart from a new kind of flâneur, Chatwin also presents a new model of *Pays de Cocagne* which he questions as a model of social utopia. Despite his search for a state of *communitas*, Chatwin is aware of the difficulties in finding it within mankind and he makes it clear he does not believe in its universalising dimension blindly. It is true that liminality entails homogeneity because an undifferentiated communion of threshold people “elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states

and positions in cultural space” (Turner 90); but this area of common living does not guarantee an ideal formula for maintaining such equality in a world of innocence and happiness. Some Beast roams in Chatwin’s texts and the lodging of this evil does not fit into the democratic-socialist Utopia one might expect of a society of levelled individuals. Francisco Manuel da Silva, the protagonist of *TVOO*, leaves his Brazilian village and “drifts through the backlands of the North-East” (*TVOO* 53) for seven years. Although he learns he can be brave after having killed a man, met the bandit Cobra Verde and worked hard washing gravel at a diamond camp, he is hardly ever happy, “only if it was time to be departing” (53). Eventually he gets married but neither does his wife nor his daughter manage to make him abandon his wandering spirit and he flees again: “He went back to his solitary wanderings. Believing any set of four walls to be a tomb or a trap, he preferred to float over the most barren of open spaces” (56). The landscapes he walks through are dried up and desolate, with empty horizons and shrieks of vultures and “whatever broke the silence was sadder than silence” (56). Not until he reaches Taquitapera does he feel some soothing emotion, the warmth he had not experienced so far in his entire life; this is Chatwin’s sensual description of such a place:

The sea was always blue and dotted with the sails of outriggers, and offshore breezes soughed through woods of mango and cashew trees. The Coutinhos’ plantation house had cross-lattice windows and walls of pink stucco. Green silk curtains rustled in its flower-stencilled apartments. On the verandah there were aviaries of song-finches; and in the dining room vases of blue-glazed porcelain, gilded pilasters and panels the colour of lapis lazuli [...] The scents of rose and lily drifted through the garden. Humming-birds sucked from scarlet honeysuckle.

Morpho butterflies fluttered over the morning-glories and, after dark, in a Chinese loggia, black choirboys in snuff-velvet breeches and lace jabots would sing Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* [...] And Francisco Manoel imagined he had stumbled on Paradise. (*TVOO* 59)

Despite this comforting break on his wandering through barren lands, the place is not Paradise at all, at least for all the black slaves whose lives are not worth simple mourning. Besides, in the sight of so much "order, beauty, luxury, calm and voluptuous scenery,"<sup>21</sup> Francisco Manoel undergoes a transformation that will shatter his previous attitude radically: he becomes greedy, he longs for possessions, he no longer wants to own only "his knives and a few silver horse-trimmings" (60). He also discovers that friendship fades away when differences between social status become more evident. The Paradise he thought he had found in the house of a friend was certainly just a product of his imagination; it was rather a vision, a mirage. He sets off on the move again.

Despite people's repetitive attempts to build up a central recognisable *Pays de Cocaigne*, readers feel comforted to learn in Chatwin's work that utopias are fictions and visions. He seems to claim that human beings, despite this disappointment, are bound to look for contact zones, peripheral and liminal spaces because there, right in the meeting of disparate cultures, is a clash and a clash is never fruitless. Chatwin's memorandum is that utopias are to be found in one's own versions of threshold and in one's own versions of heterotopia.<sup>22</sup> We might wonder whether this should be interpreted as a way of escapism, as an unwillingness to accept that individuals have to be affiliated to a gaze. This will be analysed later on.

Marie Williams in her unpublished thesis "A Dystopian Modernity: Bruce Chatwin and the Subject in the Modern World", examines particular aspects of

modernity in Chatwin's work. She considers that the narrator of *IP* can be placed in the tradition of the flâneur, but it must be interpreted as a flâneur who questions his own condition. Williams also argues that some forms of personal utopia are problematized in *Utz* where the figure of the collector counterparts the flâneur and his idea of utopia is a retreat into the realm of aesthetics as a political strategy. Similarly Da Silva, the protagonist of *TVOO*, whose utopia becomes a dystopia due to his reliance on materialism and the oppression of others. Likewise the twin brothers in *OTBH* who retreat into the world of The Vision and flee from progress and sociability. Although I agree with Williams' arguments, her approach is an analysis of different aspects of Chatwin's work such as flâneury, nomadism and utopian spaces, within the framework of modernism; it has no anthropological focus. My approach deals with liminality and the significance of Chatwin's different ways of looking.

The Baudelaire stroller has an aloof attitude, as at times do Chatwin's narrators; the former spots ragpickers and marginal city dwellers, as does Chatwin in his restless ramblings; the modern Parisian figure strolls in a peripheral area and feels a great attraction to this frontier, as do Chatwin's protagonists in their border settings. These would be some of the similarities which might connect the two literary anti-heroes; however there are some essential differences which locate Chatwin far from the modern flâneur. Chatwin shows haughtiness when travelling and that generated a lot of dislike among people in Patagonia, "people thought he was arrogant" (Shakespeare 295). But he also reveals a great sense of empathy and understanding. His positioning, initially distant, transforms into a silent, but perceptible closeness. As I mentioned in Section two, when Chatwin portrays Marie Reichie (both literarily and photographically), he does not transmit a feeling of superiority, on the contrary, the strangely-behaving lady grows in dignity. As to the second point in common, although Chatwin also feels

attracted to some kinds of ragpickers and people on the margins, his is an obsession with a different kind of marginality; his basis is in liminality. Here it is crucial to refer to Aguirre, Quance and Sutton in *Margins and Thresholds* when they try to explain the clear distinction between these two concepts:

Although “marginality” and ‘liminality’ seem to be similar and have on occasion been used interchangeably ‘liminality’ designates a concept which, unlike ‘marginality’ or ‘marginalization’, necessarily suggests the existence of a second territory on the other side. A limen is a threshold between two spaces. If a border is viewed as the line, imaginary or real, which separates these two places, then the threshold is the opening which permits the passage from one space to the other. One of these spaces may be the favoured one [...] or both may have an equal status at any given time, but in principle there can be movement back and forth between the two. (6)

The peripheral area in Paris where the flâneur strolls is determined by the social status of both the looker and the object of attraction. The idler who walks and observes belongs to a social group which is different from the group of the marginal individual; he is almost always richer and freer than those he is among. There is a real frontier, in the sense that there are two distinct backgrounds and the contact zone is ephemeral; as soon as the encounter is over, the zone disappears. Chatwin’s borders are thresholds in themselves; they represent an ontological state because Chatwin creates liminal chronotopes in his texts where men can move back and forth in time and space. They have an intrinsic quality regardless of whoever treads on them. According to Aguirre, Quance and Sutton: “the threshold is in itself a territory or provides entry to one.” (65)

Now I turn to explore the concept of voyeurism in Chatwin's texts. In the previous section the concept was considered the mark of an escapist, that is a narcissistic disposition, as well as the replacement for denunciation. In the present section voyeurism will be examined from two more distinct sources. As to the first one, his voyeuristic attitude is born from the camera's gaze that Chatwin, being a prolific photographer, has unavoidably developed. One of the features of this look of the camera is that the object of the gaze is not aware of the current viewer, in other words, he might know and be aware of both the photographer and the moment of his own exposure but he cannot control the looks of all those strangers who will subsequently gaze at their image. The camera's gaze, the viewer's gaze and the reader's gaze gain thus a voyeuristic dimension. The second source is to be found in his role of travel writer-voyeur. In fact, Shakespeare affirms that Chatwin's travelling "was another form of voyeurism" (126). To illustrate such an issue, I have developed two different arguments: Chatwin's voyeurism as non-endotism, and Chatwin's voyeurism as the rejection of the Other at home.

*TS*, *IP* and "The Coup" (in *WAIDH*) are all accounts of Chatwin the traveller but in none of them does he become the local Other as he never looks for a blending with an Australian aborigine, a Patagonian exile or an African in Togo. There is no attempt in Chatwin to play the role of the ideal adventurer or ethnologist who, by using some kind of camouflage, either disguises himself as a native or pretends to be someone else to step into the world of the exotic. In his own concept of wanderlust, exoticism does not lead to endotism; it is true that the border between these two different approaches to alterity may be fluid but Chatwin's entrance into the universe of the Other is not based on a liberating fusion with the indigenous. His aim is to stay in the universe of the journey as the eternal newcomer never as the settler or the savage. Michel affirms that

“becoming the savage intrigues, disquiets but fascinates” (117)<sup>23</sup> and it establishes endotism which means to become the Other, whereas a process of “exotisation” means to become somebody different. With regard to Chatwin’s standpoint, he would be the man and the writer who is constantly becoming different versions of himself; as a result, not even the final product of these transformations is a different person, but Chatwin himself under one of his multiple chameleonic skins. He is aware of the impossibility of becoming the Other when travelling in the same way that he is aware of the modern idealisation of the Other to compensate for the colonialist misappropriation of its world. In fact, he is acknowledging that the Other can be found at home, next door or inside ourselves. This would correspond to the ontological distance Chatwin believed in: one can keep a distance from oneself after acknowledging the multiple identities inside us.

The contact that city dwellers living in fortunate urban areas have with the peripheral, slum zones of their own town, where they encounter a reality other than the reality they are familiar with, and which they might not have experienced before generates a new form of voyeurism. Chatwin was aware of these modern “urban” exotic worlds and of the fact that until now this exoticism had been the essence of the travel experience as well as the justification for people’s photographic targets. However, he did not find them appealing. The proximity of these places, as Augé (2001) explains, is too uncomfortable to make them attractive. I agree with Michel when he affirms that “[our] societies despise the poor ones but turn the travellers into heroes. The macrocosmos copies the microcosmos: the rejection of the other from abroad sadly echoes the rejection of the other at home”<sup>24</sup> (236). My argument is that Chatwin, while he had never rejected the Other from abroad despite his non-endotism, he definitely showed a voyeuristic attitude when facing the reality of such uninviting urban spaces.

Bearing in mind that he had always sought for uneventful, timeless and imaginative worlds, this landscape produced in him a feeling of an unsettling, contemporary and real itch.

As far as the idea of Chatwin the visual traveller is concerned, I argue that the close relationship between travelling and visualization in his texts is materialized in basically three different issues. First, the evolution of the imperialist's and tourist's gaze. Second, the idea of "physicality of representation." Finally, the writer's and the photographer's self-effacement, commitment and detachment; Chatwin is concerned about how the writer relates to the place he finds himself travelling in and about the visual representation of this place and its people. As to the first issue, Korte's ideas will be referred to. In relation to the second issue, Duncan and Gregory provide a new focus on representation. As for the third, Berger's fiction and essays define the position of the writer in the act of creating, be it self-effacement or commitment.

Korte tries to interpret the evolution of both the traveller's and the tourist's gaze and its impact on the social and cultural recognition of travelling. She claims that the tourist in Victorian times, like the people who now visit the contemporary panoramas, was concerned with seeing sights. They documented what they had seen first by sending postcards back home, and later in the century, by the photographs they took themselves. There was an irresistible urge of the traveller "to look and stare" (Korte 94) when they arrived in their destinations. This range of vision of the tourist opposes that of the conventional account of the Victorian explorer, usually full of moral purpose and a lot of flag-waving. Some explorers even became national heroes such as Livingstone or Stanley and although Stanley made real contact with the peoples he encountered, he was a Victorian paternalist and was convinced of the superiority of European culture. The journeys of such men could be claimed for the imperial cause. Others had a



philanthropic mission, like Darwin in his Voyage of the Beagle, and acted as the carriers of civilization. Explorers such as John Franklin, on his fatal quest for the Northwest Passage, became culture heroes and carried the Union Jack and the Western faith in his power. Not all the explorers embodied an imperialistic gaze; some of them like Sir Richard Francis Burton showed a wide anthropological understanding of the tribes they met and tried to get inside the alien culture. Also with his translations of erotic literature and “with the sexually explicit essays which accompanied his famous translation of *The Arabian Nights* (1885-8), Burton clearly overstepped the bounds of Victorian propriety” (Korte 188). In spite of this, the ideology of these explorers aims to possess what it has seen. Their view differs from the tourist view in the fact that the tourist is carried away just with the pleasure of seeing.

Notwithstanding that the accounts of the Victorian tourist, like the accounts of the Grand Tour, read like guidebooks, the attitude of the tourist has been criticized for being superficial, sometimes imprecise or “characterized as ‘panoramic perception’” in the special sense defined by Dolf Sternberger. Sternberger understands the experience of travel in the nineteenth century as a virtual “panoramization” of the world. By doing so he extends the term panorama beyond its meaning within the field of art history to incorporate an approach to reality which he considers characteristic of this period. According to Korte, Sternberger’s panoramic perception should be interpreted as a particular way of viewing “which is essentially connected with the accelerated mode of perception offered by railway travel: the world passes by the traveller in colourful pictures which are characterized by a sense of fleetingness, change and a foreground distorted by speed” (94).<sup>25</sup> Panoramic perception, in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belonged to the same space as the perceived objects: the traveller saw the objects and the landscapes through the apparatus which moved him through the world.

That machine and the motion it created became integrated into his visual perception: thus he could only see things in motion. That mobility of vision became a prerequisite for the 'normality' of panoramic vision. Korte contends that: "This vision no longer experienced evanescence: evanescent reality had become the new reality." (188)<sup>26</sup>

Sternberger's idea cannot be applied to Chatwin, the traveller. His is not a "panoramic perception" because his viewing is hardly ever accelerated, hardly ever fleeting. The background (both the narrated and the photographed) is not distorted by speed, as if looking at it from a train compartment. The railroad causes the foreground to disappear but Chatwin's focus of perception is both foreground and background; it is a global perception, as if both layers of vision coincide. The sense of change and transformation, ever present in his literary work, is undoubtedly emphasized by the effect of the visual, which is a passing moment in itself; but it is not "evanescent reality." Chatwin's landscapes are not moving panoramas, rather they are static captured images; they are enlarged significant instants. The journey in *IP* is presented in twenty-nine juxtaposed vignettes (juxtaposition being a clearly photographic pattern) in which the foreground set in the present is supported by a background in the past, and a background in one story recalls the foreground of the following one. The result of such an integrated strategy of visualization is that Chatwin's sights are measured and unhurried. *TS* suggests a different travelling experience, but the gaze is equally measured, explained and justified. This time form and content are not as blended as in Chatwin's journey in Patagonia because theory and essay encompass the actual trajectory of the narrator throughout the Australian landscape. There is no panoramic perception either, but a journey full of encounters, stories and theories presented as long stops on the way where Chatwin makes readers reflect on what the narrator and themselves have lived during the trip.

Duncan and Gregory (1999) develop the idea of “physicality of representation” in travel writing. The focus of their study is “the attending to the multiple sites at which travel writing takes place and hence the spatiality of representation” (3). Apart from the written texts in the form of journals and ship’s logs, travel writing has recorded experiences by different means. In his first Pacific voyage Cook was accompanied by draftsmen and artists. Flaubert was accompanied up the Nile by Maxime Du Camp who took with him one of the first photographic apparatuses to be used in Egypt. We know from their writings that the two friends had different preoccupations: that du Camp was obsessed by photographing the temples and tombs of ancient Egypt whereas Flaubert was frankly bored by the whole business and much more interested in the physicality and sensuality of nineteenth-century Egypt. (4)

Duncan and Gregory’s arguments endorse the integration of the various media involved in the adventure of exploring and travelling. The recognition of these varied perceptions “triangulates” (4) the space of representation. The union of textual compositions and photographic records (carried out by the same author or by a different one) creates a “complex and foliated space of representation” which creates, in turn, new imaginative geographies. Duncan and Gregory vindicate a new treatment of the travel archive by claiming respect for its varied physicality, thus avoiding its fractured nature. We must read all the different media together because if we do so we are likely to “attend to their different valences and silences.” (4)

The fractured nature of Chatwin’s travel accounts, as far as different media implicated in them are concerned, should be considered from the following aspects. In *IP*, his photographs reproduce what he writes: a grave, a cave, a wagon, a family picture, a Welsh farmhouse. The photographic record corresponds to the narration. The

spatiality of representation includes Chatwin's eye and Chatwin's pen. In *TS* there are no photographs and no drawings to illustrate the content or to visualize the stories of the protagonists. The text prevails over other possible spaces of representation. It is Chatwin himself who "fractures" the travel account by inserting philosophical essays and his own anthropological and ethnographic theories, thus diversifying the nature of the text itself. This flood of theoretical information comes from his notebooks, an intimate space for generating potential accounts, now materialized. The spatiality of representation is "foliated" again. Apart from Chatwin's own account, we have Rushdie's version of Chatwin's journey in Australia. Rushdie's was a good friend of Chatwin's and his travel companion on Chatwin's second visit to Australia in 1984. Chatwin and Rushdie took on this journey into the Australian Outback after the two authors had met at a literary festival in Adelaide. Rushdie witnessed and suffered the deterioration of Chatwin's health; he declared that *TS* had become a personal challenge for Chatwin because he was determined to complete the book before his illness worsened and was named, so he worked at double speed: "That book was an obsession too great for him, a monkey he carried around on his back," says Rushdie. "His illness did him a favour, got him free of it. Otherwise, he would have gone on writing it for ten years" (Shakespeare 427-434). This external detail adds to the details gathered in Chatwin's notebooks, so Rushdie's piece of information should be added to the text itself to finally reconstruct the spatiality of representation which Duncan and Gregory had called attention to. *WAIDH* collects articles, essays and people's portraits but there are no other media or spaces of comparison in the text. He took photographs, though, of the places and people he visited: Marie Reiche, Afghanistan, Abomey, Dahomey (now Benin). The book *Winding Paths* is the collection of some of these snapshots. Chatwin's visual apprehension of what he wrote in *WAIDH* is collected in that book and

should be adjoined to the written text so as to complete it. Therefore, his photographs cannot be only assigned to historians of photography or curators of art galleries but must be taken together with their corresponding texts. If we do not do that, we might miss some of Chatwin's "valences and silences."

As far as these valences and silences are concerned, when looking carefully at Chatwin's photographs in *Winding Paths*, they are not in reportage-like form. His way of looking at certain colours, patterns, roofs, deserts and men helps us understand what Chatwin valued most, and he showed us what that was with an optimistic look, fleeing from cynicism and disillusionment; also fleeing from what Michel considers "the impératif photographique" that is

a reality that might appear oppressive to the traveller: one must take photographs of this monument, and of this temple, of this market and of this mountain; one must take photographs in the same way that one must visit certain places; the choice offered to the traveller, who would like to stroll at ease sometimes, is limited. If we want to get free from the mental impositions of the journey, we will have to organize original forms of resistance very soon. (112)<sup>27</sup>

Chatwin did not establish places or things to be seen compulsorily on a journey; he certainly "organized original forms of resistance" by turning down commonplace views and leaving these musts to tourists' expectations and to guidebooks and travelogues. In fact, there exist no methodised strategies of seeing in Chatwin's perception, in the same way that there is no form of methodised style of travelling in his journeys. In his photographs as well as in his writing we experience what Korte thinks about searching for or discarding sights during a trip: "Travellers who [...] prefer to keep to the canonized paths and expect to see 'asterisked' sights, risk their expectations of these

sights being disappointed -an experience already recorded, as we have seen, by many Grand Tourists of an earlier age” (Korte 96). In relation to Chatwin’s interest in avoiding clichéd landmarks, we should consider Gavin Young’s idea of being the first of seeing a place: Is extreme novelty the core of a traveller’s perception? Young in *Worlds Apart* (1987) affirms that if we travel somewhere and we see something we have not seen before, this is as equally valid as if we see something nobody has ever seen. Thus the idea of authenticity in travelling as one being the first becomes wishful thinking. If something is “a first” for someone even though hundreds of people have already seen, it is worth having seen it. Likewise, if the writer has got me see that thing in a different way (as Chatwin does), it is not novelty versus clichéd sights that guarantees and enhances the travelling experience, but the insight and the capacity to have observant openness with which we look at the sight.

The next and last issue to be examined within the relationship between travelling and visualization is the issue of the writer’s and the photographer’s self-effacement and commitment. Berger’s work might help to review two essential aspects of Chatwin’s writing. First, in his books of essays *The Sense of Sight*, *Ways of Seeing*, *About Looking* and *Another Way of Telling* (with photographs of Jean Mohr) Berger explores our role as observers to disclose new layers of meaning in what we see. He analyses paintings, photographs, animals, sculptures and nudes as open aesthetic questions and as a result our vision is altered. Chatwin’s narratives awaken our vision in a similar way. Second, in his fictional work, mostly in the trilogy *Into Their Labours*, which is composed of *Pig Earth*, *Once in Europe*, and *Lilac and Flag*, Berger develops a special view of the relationship between the writer and the object of his writing; what is the role of the writer in the process of storytelling? He defends the idea that a particular place and its people should be dealt with in the right way. In *Pig Earth*, he suggests the question a

reader may sometimes ask, that is what relationship the writer has with the place and the people he writes about (*PE* 5), to which he tries to provide an answer: “At other times my relationship to the place and the people who live here is less simple. I am not a peasant. I am a writer: my writing is both a link and a barrier” (*PE* 6). He interprets the act of writing as an act of approaching the experience written about. He struggles to give meaning to such experience and hopes the act of reading would imply the same approach and the same struggle. To him the act of approaching a given moment of experience “involves both scrutiny (closeness) and the capacity to connect (distance) [...] As the movement of writing repeats itself, its intimacy with the experience increases. Finally, if one is fortunate, meaning is the fruit of this intimacy.” (*PE* 6)

Berger unfolds his conviction that in the process of writing about the Other there is always an act of taking a stance, of making commitments. He declares that his writing about peasants in *PE* is a two-sided experience. On the one hand, this writing keeps him away from them and on the other hand, it makes him feel attached to them because they have shared a portion of life; in any case, there is an exchange of knowledge during the contact. I agree with Berger when he claims that we stop being ignorant about the new community but not completely innocent when beholding it, as we have a view of life which is independent of the place where we happen to be when travelling. “Thus through our ignorance we were like *novices*, and through our assumed experience, we are independent witnesses” (*PE* 8). Similarly, Dodd points out that “the ‘substance of travel writing’ is the stance of the traveller towards place and reader” (128)<sup>28</sup> and renders his own interpretation of that ignorance Berger has also explored:

A certain kind of traveller abroad exploits his ignorance, showing interest in the cultural identity of the place he visits only in so far as the identity can be made to serve the interests he brings to the place, or as a

correlative of his psychological condition. What recent praise of such travel books ignores is that places and people are the sites of various established meanings –cultural, literary and political- or, as E. Waugh phrases it “are already fully labelled”, and that an attempt by the traveller to make of the place what he needs may simply sanction and confirm some of those established meanings. (130)

When analysing Graham Greene’s *Journey Without Maps*, Dodd considers that the author of this novel has collapsed “the tripartite distinction of traveller-place-reader, merging traveller with place and makes the reader someone who “overhears” rather than “hears” (130). To me Chatwin’s reader does “hear” the place and its people. Granted that Chatwin exploits symbols and myths rather than controversial issues, which he intentionally silences, but he does not use the life in the foreign country as a way of measuring his own pattern of life and English culture as Greene does, according to Dodd. What Chatwin sees and hears in his travels is what we see and hear as readers, his characters and his landscapes narrate themselves.

This double game of both living closer to the new experience and being a witness with an independent judgement of events is what differentiates one writer from others and particularly one travel writer from other travel writers. Regardless of his unwillingness to be labelled a travel writer, Chatwin plays a special role as witness-narrator of his beaten tracks. He rarely relates deeply to the population of the place he visits; he does not speak their language, he watches and takes notes, he does not overtly judge or condemn, he simply exhibits his particular way of seeing things. His contact with the unknown is based on his belief that by being a *novice*- using Berger’s term- he is already a part of the human *communitas* generated by the liminal phase every single individual undergoes while becoming a human being. He does not need to feel attached



to them, he is already attached just by living the condition of initiate. The question is to know whether this contact is rewarding on both sides: whether he learns from them or they learn from him; whether there is any feeling of authentic community and mutual understanding honestly created and whether there should be a commitment in the traveller's brief. In relation to *IP*, Matthew Graves (2003) writes:

While Chatwin skates troublingly over the political actuality of place – the military junta and its reign of terror – he is uncompromising in his account of the genocide of the Patagonian Indians and the oppression of Argentina's political exiles (although this is the domain of history, not actuality). Chatwin's elusive, elliptical "travelling I" cannot be easily reduced to the "imperial eye." The still-legible colonial discourse has to be squared with the humanist outlook of these books [*In Patagonia* and *The Songlines*]. (56)<sup>29</sup>

Similarly Meanor (1997) comments that Chatwin was aware that members of the tribe [Tehuelche Indians] now worked as day labourers and peons and that many of the men were in terrible shape. However, "Chatwin doesn't preach; he merely presents with deadly accuracy" (22). Also, even though most everywhere he goes, he is treated decently and given food and a comfortable place to sleep, "he rarely fails to show the reader the natives' abject condition. He never uses the word genocide, but it is obvious that that is what is taking place throughout the land." (22)

It is said that Chatwin's stance is "less forthcoming about politics: social and economic considerations rarely feature in his accounts" (Clapp 212). His wife thought of Chatwin as "hopeless politically," (212) but this argument would not be convincing enough to justify his political escapism. *TS* has been criticised by some Australian commentators and anthropologists who have objected to the book "as projecting a semi-

colonial view of the white man as hero, relying too much on whites' accounts of Aboriginal culture, and undervaluing the work done by those involved in the land rights movement" (213) and who have disapproved of Chatwin's lack of commitment to politics and his biased vision of colonialism. From Said's words: "narratives are either politically and ideologically permissible, or not."<sup>30</sup> We might presume that writers are expected to take a stance on the creation of a complete narrative, but Chatwin's literary and personal experience does not bow to this demand. He tells stories with compassion and irony but he refuses to commit himself politically. "The Very Sad Story of Salah Bougrine" in *WAIDH* is the story of the murder of a French bus-driver by an Algerian in Marseilles. According to Rushdie, this story, "which uses the inter-racial murder in Marseilles as a way of opening up the unsavoury subject of French colonialism [...] is one of the most vivid things ever written on this difficult subject" (Rushdie 239).

However, Chatwin's story shows a very different vision of Algerian history from that of Franz Fanon's study of colonial dynamics *The Wretched of the Earth* in which the author clearly recognises the existence of the Algerian nation and supports the process of national liberation. Said considers that Fanon's text is urging Europe to act together with its empire in the process of decolonization: "Despite its bitterness and violence, the whole point of Fanon's work is to force the European metropolis to think its history *together with* the history of colonies awakening from the cruel stupor and abused immobility of imperial dominion".<sup>31</sup> Chatwin does not think of the relationship between cultures as a political question but as an aesthetic compromise which might eventually lead to a complete permeability of cultures.

With his suggestion of a different way of telling about the Other and the crossing of boundaries, Chatwin appears to be the eternal distant stranger rather than the nearest and dearest visitor, his reluctance to give away his own motivations and

interests being the reason why he belonged to nowhere and to no one. Berger claims that the contribution of the stranger to a place is usually very small but it is also essential inasmuch as the way he tells and retells the stories he has been told might modify the “portrait already in existence” (*PE* 11) of such place. Actually, the stranger is involved in the continuous communal portrait of the chronotope he finds himself in. Berger provides a convincing argument when he states that the awareness of this portrait already in existence involves more than the recognition of names or faces (*PE* 11) and is what really gives sense to the experience of being in contact with a different community and to the telling of this new experience. The contribution of the stranger will then be unique to him or her and will become the source of an authentic human and aesthetic relationship. Chatwin was aware of this process of recognition: he knew he was a novice and an independent witness at the same time. Through storytelling he tried to establish reciprocal relationships so as to make this “contact” experience both meaningful and rewarding. Eventually he learnt about the places he travelled in by recognising their inner portraits and by becoming concerned with the narrated stories which “testify to the always slightly surprising range of the possible” (*PE* 8) rather than to more established forms of truth. In fact, he believed in the insight that “travel writing is about the creation of place, not just its discovery.”<sup>32</sup>

Either by avoiding moral judgements or by regarding them as simple details, Chatwin rounded off his aesthetic and ontological beliefs: he replaced morality by equality and he supported the non-discrimination of storytellers in his search for things that could bind people together. Like Berger, Chatwin thought that a story as a whole must be told with tolerance because “it involves those with whom the storyteller and the listener are going to go on living. Very few stories are narrated either to idealise or condemn [...] Although concerned with everyday events, they are mystery stories”(*PE*

12). As a result, that surprising range of the possible, which Berger urges to testify to, opens up a path of both freedom and fantasy for the traveller and consequently for the reader. The mystery of a story, both in Berger and Chatwin, is the guarantee that there are no moral barriers, and, like in Slocum's *Sailing Around the World*: "Avast, there!" I cried. "I have no mind for moralising." (41)

Bearing in mind that the stranger is involved in the continuous communal portrait of the setting he finds himself in, the definition of a place then becomes the sum of many circumstances which might range from its geographical and social features to those mythological and imaginary traits which locate places in certain aesthetic worlds. Chatwin is concerned with the changing nature of people and space so the life of his places and his characters is a life on the move, always becoming. As Berger puts it when describing the life of a village in *PE*:

the life of a village is a living portrait of itself: a communal portrait, in that everybody is portrayed and everybody portrays [...]. Every village's portrait of itself is constructed, however, not out of stone, but out of words, spoken and remembered: out of opinions, stories, eye-witness reports, legends, comments and hearsay. And it is a continuous portrait; work on it never stops. (9)

This is the model of living portrait that we find in Chatwin's landscapes. Chatwin looks at places with aesthetic commitment rather than with a real emotional attachment because he fathoms the countless possibilities of their changing nature. He approaches his characters similarly: he hardly ever gets close to them unless they personify some of his obsessions or vindicate some of his theories. Most of the times, though, he enhances their mysterious nature because that allows him to play with sanity and insanity, with innocence and evil, with savageness and spirituality, asexuality and passion.

I would like to create a bridge between the issue of Berger and Chatwin's standpoints when analysing the attitude of the stranger-visitor towards a place and the next and last issue to be explored, that of the cultural gaze. To do so I have retaken the world of photography, thus illustrating both poles of this connection. The nineteenth century saw the establishment of a major tradition of travel photography. In this splendid age of the European empires we find the work of photographers such as Francis Frith, John Thomson, Samuel Bourne, Maxime Du Camp and John Murry whose work shows foreign (non-European) cultures viewed through Western eyes and Western assumptions. Clarke contends that:

Books such as Frith's *Visits to the Middle East* underscored the interest in and demand for scenes "foreign". In these images the photographer is "cultural interpreter and witness to the world", but only because his assumptions place him at the centre of the geographies through which he moves. Many of these images have a valuable ethnographic and anthropological significance, imaging in detail the artefacts and values of other cultures and civilizations, and in the process making the world they photograph part of a museum culture. In a period when many western archaeologists were physically carrying away the artefacts of the cultures they viewed, photographers were able to "capture" entire monuments as a way of possessing that world for European eyes. (49)

Francis Frith's image *Entrance to the Grand Temple, Luxor, 1857* is one of many travel photographs in the period. This image reflects the new freedom of the photographer to record other cultures as well as to impose (through his camera) his or her own cultural view upon the scene. Even though such an image reflects Western assumptions about foreign lands and is intended for European consumption, it shows a certain degree of

detachment from the typical imperialistic eye. As early as in 1857 then, we can find the Western artist, witness of the foreign world trying to escape from the impositions of his own culture. A visual culture and new forms of visual perception were beginning to establish themselves and not only with their role in structuring the tourist gaze but also with their novel role in narrating reality. Chatwin is one of the heirs of this change in visualisation. In his photographic work, the old imperialist gaze upon the savage, the Aboriginal, the protohominids and the bwana-sahib disappears and the ultimate gaze is that of the Other upon us. By looking at Chatwin's photographs we perceive a feeling of cultural open-mindedness and a talent for transgression. During his various journeys around Afghanistan, Chatwin also played the role of the outsider capturing monuments and buildings -as Robert Byron had done in the thirties- but his aim was not to possess that world for European eyes. He did it for his eyes only and never to reproduce cultural expectations. The buildings in his pictures are spotted from the distance in the middle of a cloud of mist, or from the bottom to the top in a convex effect, or framed within multi-shaped frames.<sup>33</sup> We find transgression instead of musts to see abroad; there is no imperialistic eye in the same way that there is no picturesque. That happens both in his photographs and in his texts. Therefore we find Chatwin's eye between painting and photography and his gaze between a rejection of imperialistic look and a love for transgression.

As previously mentioned, one of Chatwin's goals within his aesthetic programme is to elucidate hidden meanings through the mysterious. This creates a barrier between him and the reality around him: when he looks at the external world, it is as though he was looking at something of which he is not part; something which surrounds him but from which he wishes to exclude himself. There is no doubt Chatwin lived contradictions in the way he looked at this world and which he ended up writing

about. These contradictions are to be found in his stance towards the settings he was familiar with and the territories he travelled. He probably felt he belonged “to a class who were convinced that the world was there to furnish their residence in it” and that he was a “colonial conqueror” looking down on the colonized (Berger *WOS* 96). However, he was also aware that the relationship between the observer and the seen object includes “inhuman estimates” and “mutual solitude,” as Berger has claimed. At the core of this double perception is Chatwin’s positioning based on the recognition that “[t]he way in which each sees the other confirms his own view of himself” (96). As I stated in Chapter two, Chatwin humanized society through dialogue and storytelling as well as he humanized eccentric individuals by beautifying their unusual nature. As to mutual solitude, Chatwin sought for loneliness in his journeys so as to keep a distance and avoid intervening. His attitude was based on his belief in individuality, the only way to survive social and mental impositions and the only form to produce equality among human beings. Chatwin does create individualized presences instead of impersonal stereotypes by designing a democratic collection of portraits of well-defined personalities instead of a collection of blurred identities. What is new and disconcerting is that Chatwin’s idea of individuality needs to suggest distance. Chatwin’s distance is materialized in his gaze.

The last issue to be tackled is the concept of gaze,<sup>34</sup> which is one of the basic concepts of visual culture. It deals with how an audience views the people presented. Chatwin’s texts, both fictional and essayistic, and his photographs comprise a diversity of “gaze” which should be examined when trying to interpret Chatwin’s personal way of seeing and depicting his characters. Chatwin portrays “oddities” like Arbus in her snapshots; in Arbus’s mind he would be taking a leftist stance in a conservative America. On the other hand, he tries to capture “personalities” instead of simply

expressions like middle-class vindictive Cartier-Bresson. At the same time he becomes one of Baudelaire's bourgeois "flâneurs" strolling around the city and one of Benjamin's "observers" of the marginal figures on the periphery of Berlin or Naples frozen in one of his *Denkbilder*. Also with his restlessness and wanderlust he shares an intellectual "peripatetic" taste in interpreting landscape with Sebald's walks in East Anglia. Chatwin's gaze is then a multiple one. This multiplicity as well as his permissive and unjudging literary and photographic gaze compensate for the voyeuristic dimension of some of his accounts. In fact, as Jonathan Schroeder (1998) notes, to gaze entails a psychological relationship of power "in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze" (208).<sup>35</sup> In his writing, Chatwin knows how to evade his attitude of superiority by resorting to a certain kind of self-effacement and voyeurism and by letting the personality of the depicted objects predominate over his own.

How does Chatwin's work encompass the idea of the cultural gaze and the concept of eye-twister (*Augenverdreher*) developed by Fuery (1993)?<sup>36</sup> Fuery analyses Carey's novel *Illywhacker* written in 1985 and set in Australia, a country which "as a postcolonial culture is constantly engaged in the idea of the gaze and in how it should look at its own signs and signifying practices" (White 190). The protagonist of the story, Herbert Badgery has to choose between being the prisoner trapped by the cultural signs that surround and determine him or the spider that uses the same signs to trap others. His solution is a form of twisting the gaze to being trapped or trapping; and eye-twisting means constructing things in a particular way. White affirms that one aspect of eye-twisting is that

certain ways of representing, and even certain representations themselves, become privileged. This tends to produce a corpus of images, narratives, ideas that eventually form the cultural model.



Australian culture, like other cultures becomes recognizable through a (relatively) clearly defined set of signs [...] The forced constructions of the gaze privilege one set of presences over any other, usually because of the social and historical basis of the twist. (193)

Travel writing appears to be a perfect medium to reflect on the concept of cultural gaze. The cultural gaze, according to Lacan, “is not simply a mechanism of perception but of a larger (often social) process that actually determines the subject itself” (qtd. in White 191). So travel literature, often engaged in the idea of representation as well as being an attempt to see the true nature of a culture, takes part in this cultural process. Fuery weighs up the different constructions of the gaze by examining the presences and the absences that have been privileged within these constructions. When a traveller recognizes a culture as such, the signs he identifies with should be analysed. Fuery asserts that “scopophilia relates to the notion of privileged presences and absence and the cultural gaze, which in part implies a connection with repression” (White 194). Moreover, central to the analysis of the gaze there is the relationship between what is repressed, represented and desired, which defines the subject’s relationship not with the object but with desire. Lacan argues that

Scopic drives are systems of meaning for the subject; they basically make something meaningful because of their centrality to the subject. It is this combination of meaning and desire which locates the operation of the gaze in systems of representation: how things are represented, how things are positioned in order to be read, and so on. (White 194)

The idea of cultural gaze is then manifold and entails a multi-dimensional positioning. There is a layer of representation embodied in a set of signs and a layer of recognition of these badges. By travelling or by living the condition of exile in a foreign

country we all witness the display of these varied cultural marks but it is in the personal recognition of a culture where we start finding confrontation between the subjects who hold differentiated gazes. Both in the layer of representation and in the layer of recognition the subject/writer resorts to a system of subjectivity based on the interplay of presences and absences -as pointed out by Fuery. Some travel writers feel they are part of a whole they are committed to and must spread the signs which represent this whole. These writers manifest the flag waving that the imperialist explorer used to exhibit. Taking distance and keeping silent is the attitude of the writer who looks for an alternative to getting emotionally involved with their culture and to promising allegiance to their country. Chatwin the eye-twister plays the game of sorting out these different layers of the gaze. Chatwin knows the representation of Britishness and he transgresses it within a Western narrative tradition, he recognizes his culture with both pride and shame and he lives the contradiction of identifying himself with Britain and of escaping from it at the same time.

This approach to eye-twisting should not only be applied to Chatwin's attitude towards his own particular way of looking at the world and at his own culture, but also to how he feels positioned in a particular way through the gaze. In his travel texts and most of his articles Chatwin finds himself facing -subjectively- a different culture, even though the story he tells does not entail a forced dialectical positioning. We might wonder which gaze Chatwin goes through when he travels around Australia, he being a British citizen; or when he visits Moscow, Afghanistan and Mauritania, he being a Westerner. He describes a Scottish immigrant in Patagonia who keeps a dried leaf of thistle in a box because he cannot escape from the traditional signs of his original culture. In *Utz* Chatwin describes England as a cruel nation after the bombardment of Dresden, the United States as noisy and depressing, Australia as a colony and Argentina

as the country of tango, is his cultural gaze too simple and stereotyped? Likewise, what cultural signs is he highlighting when he describes the life of the first Brazilians in Ouidah and what cultural signs is he ignoring? They were ex-slaves who had bought their freedom and travelled back to Africa. Although they were homesick for Brazil, they had one-way passports and couldn't go anywhere else. Dom Francisco offered them refuge:

The "Brazilians" turned Ouidah into a Little Brazil. They went on picnics. They gave dinners. They planted pots of lovelies-bleeding and the marvel of Peru. They decorated their rooms with pictures of St George and the Dragon and, at Carnaval, would pelt each other with waxed oranges full of scented water. (*TVOO* 110)

According to Fuery "the gaze is as much about what things mean as how they are actually "seen." For this reason we can speak of the gaze as a type of discourse; it is controlled, mediated, determined in a type of language system" (White 192). If eye-twisting belongs to this discourse of the gaze, what are the privileged presences forced by the gaze in Chatwin's home and abroad narratives? Bearing in mind that every gaze is twisted, what Chatwin really does is try to assimilate the new cultural encounters by drawing them into his own established cultural gaze/discourse, but it is difficult to determine what presences and what absences he finally singles out. Fuery states that "the discourse of the gaze makes the selection process invisible. This means that often the cultural gaze becomes tied to the perceived knowledge of the culture" (193). To many Australians, *TS* might be read like the account of a British visitor with his upper-class accent and manners but in fact, his text does not only picture the encounter of a British with the Australian citizens. Chatwin's gaze is presented in terms of opposites: americanized land vs. 'front' for Soviet expansion in Australia, imperialism vs.

Aboriginal Land Rights Movement, blacks and whites vs. blacks and whites, outsiders vs. outsiders, whites vs. natives, Bruce himself vs. tourists and natives, old-timers vs. newcomers. There is no novelty in his cultural gaze; he has just displayed the well-known existing rivalries and personified them in characters the protagonist meets along the way.

Although Chatwin clearly stands by the free nomadic spirit of the Aborigines and their journey into the Walkabout, his response to these apparently confronted cultural gazes is rendered with irony instead of a really political commitment. In fact, *TS* is not a travel book where different cultural gazes breed different signs of eye-twisting; not all the eye-twisters are given the chance to speak clearly. It is rather a philosophical, narrative, anthropological and poetic journey. What Chatwin sees in the Australian Outback and in the cosmology of the Bush is not a simple geographical landscape to be described and lived from a traveller's perspective. Chatwin sees in the Dreamlines a natural organization against the artificial organization of Alice Springs. In the same way, the Dreamtime of the Aborigines is not a tourist attraction or a mysterious souvenir-like concept; it recalls a cultural reference in his own literary world: "it is the time of Arcadia."<sup>37</sup>

Chatwin, the eye-twister, creates a narrative in which to fit his act of gazing. While "the discourse of the gaze makes the selection process invisible" (White 193), Chatwin's selection of absences comprise all those clichéd issues his own cultural gaze would expect him to include. Thus, as to *TS*, the imperialistic or post-colonial approach is missing whereas a criticism of artificiality and falsehood -as happened when comparing Cartier-Bresson's photographs and Chatwin's literary portraits- is what Chatwin attaches most weight to. Badgery explains about cities in *Illywhacker*:

I showed him, most important of all, the sort of city it was -full of trickery and deception. If you push against it too hard you will find yourself leaning against empty air. It is never, for all its brick and concrete, quite substantial and I would not be surprised to wake one morning and find the whole thing gone [...]. (Carey 547)

In Chatwin the city living in Alice Springs stands for artificiality and the Bush stands for the real. As early as in the first page of *TS* we read: “In Alice Springs -a grid of scorching streets where men in long, white socks were forever getting in and out of Land Cruisers- I met a Russian who was mapping the sacred sites of the Aboriginals” (*TS* 1). This Russian man is Arkady, a tireless bushwalker who would never “live in the hugger-mugger of Anglo-Saxon suburbia” (1). The almost puerile looks of men in white socks acting like automatons in the city contrasts with the sacredness of Arkady’s mission, in the same way that the chaotic structure of the city suburbia contrasts with the orderly and significant structure of the Dreamtime, “a mental construction more marvellous and intricate than anything on earth, a construction to make man’s material achievements seem like so much dross” (70). Carey’s illustration of the tension between living in Sidney as a lie and the return to the Bush as reality has the same effect. Similarly Rushdie (1992) in “At the Adelaide Festival” provides a double vision of Australia:

Bruce Chatwin and I flew out from Adelaide at the end of Writers’ Week, heading for Alice Springs. Very quickly the greenery of Adelaide was replaced by the desert. The great, red infinity of that awesome moonscape set the previous week in its proper context. The desert, the harsh pure desert, was the reality, was Australia, was the truth; the town I was leaving stood revealed as a mirage, alien, a prevarication. (231)

Despite their own cultural gazes, regardless of their own philosophical agendas, Rushdie, both Carey the Australian writer and his narrator in *Illywhacker* and both Chatwin the British writer and his narrator in *TS* seem to share the same insight into the Australian cultural myth, that is, that the grip on the land by the cities is far from being real. I argue that eye-twisting might end up uniting perspectives initially divergent. This is to suggest that, according to Graves (2003), although the old colonial discourse is still-legible, we find cultural go-betweens or *passseurs* who try to bridge the two worlds. Among them is Arkady, the neo-nomad in Chatwin's *TS*, who lives a humanist geopoetics boundary and whose narrative function is to explain aboriginal cosmology but who is also, arguably, "the agent of its expropriation". Despite this duality, Graves contends that: "Even so, Nicholas Shakespeare informs us that *TS* has also been credited with helping a generation of Australian readers to a greater awareness of and care for the indigenous culture and geopoetics of their country, in a context of national reconciliation." (56)<sup>38</sup>

Fuery defines eye-twisting as "the interplay of presences – the instigation of one set of presences over any other set – and the emptying of the gaze is the fear of losing the signifier of the self, translated into the loss of the gaze" (White 194). In spite of showing a clearly uncommitted attitude to nation and culture, Chatwin never denies his quality of Westerner and British. He does not "empty his eye" understood as the loss of a cultural gaze; he always comes back to his "Merry Old England" (*TS* 33). His emptying of the eye is born out of a deep sense of freedom which allows him to play with different signifiers of the Self and he feels at ease in such a state of perception. It is not born out of a fear -in White's view- but out of the attitude to life of a physically and metaphorically unhoused man.

### Notes to Chapter Three

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<sup>1</sup> *see*, my italics.

<sup>2</sup> See Eudora Welty. *The Eye of the Story: Essays and Reviews*. London: Virago Press, 1987, p.262.

<sup>3</sup> See Eudora Welty. *Delta Wedding*. London: Virago Press, 1982, p.92

<sup>4</sup> Eudora Welty. *One Writer's Beginning*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984, p.21.

<sup>5</sup> See Diane Gillespie's article "Her Kodak Pointed at His Head" in *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993, p.84.

<sup>6</sup> C. Ruth Miller, *Virginia Woolf. The Frames of Art and Life*, London: Macmillan, 1988, p.20. As far as the concept of the "politics of the visual", see Jane Goldman's *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-impressionism and the Politics of the Visual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin. "A Short History of Photography", *Screen*, 13 pp 5-26.

<sup>8</sup> Part of the conference "Cartier-Bresson: la construcció d'una Mirada" by Xavier Antich, professor of Aesthetics at the University of Girona. Conference held at Auditori Narcís de Carreras in Girona as one of the additional activities to the exhibition "Henri Cartier-Bresson. Fotògraf." Obra Social de "La Caixa" 29 November 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Brookman. "Conversations in Silence". 1 May 2009

<[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/museums/photogallery/bresson/essay.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/museums/photogallery/bresson/essay.htm)>. 15May 2009.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Guardian*, 9 January, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> *The Guardian*, 9 January, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> *The Guardian*, 9 January , 2003.

<sup>13</sup> See Balmes in *Chatwins Rucksack. Porträts, Gespräche, Skizzen*. Frankfurt: Fischer Tachenbuch Verlag, 2002. In the first part of the book we read Michael Ignatieff's interview with Bruce Chatwin. Chatwin explains the anecdote about his problem with his eyesight, his "vision."

<sup>14</sup> Bodleian Library- Chatwin's archive. Boxes 34 and 35.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin in Sinclair Gardens, Shepherds Bush, London in March 2005.

<sup>16</sup> The Nazca lines are miles in length and are carved into the ground of the Peruvian desert. Chatwin describes them as follows in *The Songlines*: "the Nazca "lines", which are etched into the meringue-like surface of the central Peruvian Desert and are, indeed, some kind of totemic map" (279).

<sup>17</sup> The title of Sebastian Brandt's fifteenth century satire of manners, written in 1494. He used a ship as a metaphor for life and presented the passengers as fools who indulged in their own follies. The book was immediately popular and, in the following years, it was translated into other European languages and into Latin. The same theme was taken by Katherine Ann Porter in her only novel *The Ship of Fools* (1962). It is also an allegorical story set on a passenger ship. It tells about a group of strange characters sailing from Mexico to Germany. Both texts include oddity and unfamiliarity within the panorama of mankind and reflect on the validity of all kinds of personalities.

<sup>18</sup> *Identical Twins*, taken in Roselle, New Jersey in 1967 is one of Diane's Arbus most famous photographs. It shows young twin sisters, standing side by side in corduroy dresses. One of them is slightly smiling and the other slightly frowning. Behind the "identical" appearance, the viewer realises the difference between them: one is sad, the other is contented.



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<sup>19</sup> See the article “V.S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Order” by Dennis Walder included in *Recasting the World*, edited by Jonathan White, p.89. The quote is about the novel *A Free State* by Naipaul.

<sup>20</sup> See his article “Animals as Figures of Otherness in Travel Narratives of Brittany (1840-1895)” in Hooper, Glenn and Tim Youngs, eds. *Perspectives on Travel Writing*. Volume 19. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> My translation of the central verse of the poem “L’Invitation au Voyage” in *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Baudelaire. Charles Baudelaire. *Les Fleurs du mal*. Montrouge: Brodard et Taupin, Le livre de poche, 1972, p.73.

<sup>22</sup> *Heterotopia*. A concept described in a lecture given by Foucault in March 1967 and entitled “Des Espace Autres” (*Of Other Spaces*). Heterotopias are real places that exist in every culture, in every civilization and that are something like counter-sites -to utopias, as fundamentally unreal spaces- where all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. These places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about. They can juxtapose in a single real space several spaces. Examples of heterotopias are cemeteries, Oriental gardens, theatres, museums and libraries, fairgrounds and ships. They are linked to “slices of time”; heterotopias function at full capacity when “men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.” Some heterotopias require rites of passage while others are more publicly accessible. June 2007 <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia> >

<sup>23</sup> My translation from the French: “l’ensauvagement intrigue, inquiète, mais fascine.” (Michel 117)

<sup>24</sup> See Franck Michel, *Désirs d'Ailleurs* 236. My translation from the French : “Nos sociétés méprisent les misérables mais héroïsent à l’envi les voyageurs. Le macrocosme est à l’image du microcosme: le refus de comprendre l’autre de l’ailleurs résonne tristement avec le rejet de l’autre de chez nous.”

<sup>25</sup> See Schiffer, 1986, p.134. Korte’s translation.

<sup>26</sup> See Barbara Korte. Notes, 188. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, (1986) *The Railroad Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, p.64.

<sup>27</sup> The original text in French which I have translated into English is: «une réalité qui peut s’avérer oppressante pour le voyageur: il ‘faut’ faire des photos de ce monument et de ce temple, de ce marché et de cette montagne; il faut photographier comme il faut visiter; le choix offert au voyageur qui voudrait un tant soit peu flâner est restreint. Pour se libérer des diktats mentaux du voyage, il faudra bientôt organiser des formes originales de résistance.» (Michel 112)

<sup>28</sup> Philip Dodd, ed. *The Art of Travel. Essays on Travel Writing*. London: Frank Cass, 1982. See his study “The Views of Travellers: Travel Writing in the 1930s.”

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Graves “Nowhere Left to Go? The Death and Renaissance of the Travel Book” in *WLT, World Literature Today*, October-December 2003, p.56.

<sup>30</sup> E.Said. “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors”, *Critical Inquiry* 1989, p.222.

<sup>31</sup> E.Said, *Critical Inquiry* 1989, p.223.

<sup>32</sup> See Matthew Graves “Nowhere Left to Go? The Death and Renaissance of the Travel Book” in *WLT, World Literature Today*, October-December 2003, 56.

<sup>33</sup> See his photographs taken in Afghanistan and Peru in his book of photographs *Winding Paths*.

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<sup>34</sup> For the concept of gaze, see Felluga, Dino. "Modules on Lacan: On the gaze."

Introductory Guide to Critical Theory. Last update: Nov. 28, 2003. 17 May 2009

<<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacangaze.html>>

The concept of the gaze became popular with the rise of postmodern philosophy and social theory and was first discussed by 1960s French intellectuals, in particular Michael Foucault's description of the medical gaze and Lacan's analysis of the gaze's role in the mirror stage development of the human psyche. There are different forms of gaze depending on who is doing the looking. The first one is the spectator's gaze: the reader who is viewing the text; this is often us, the audience of a certain text. A different one is the extra-diegetic gaze, where the person depicted in the text looks at the reader, such as an aside, or an acknowledgement of the fourth wall. The last one is the camera's gaze, which is the gaze of the camera, and is often equated to the director's or photographer's gaze.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan E. Schroeder, *Consuming Representation: A Visual Approach to Consumer Research*. London: Routledge, 2002, p.208.

<sup>36</sup> See his article "Prisoners and Spiders. Surrounded by Signs. Postmodernism and the Postcolonial Gaze in Contemporary Australian Culture" included in *Recasting the World*, edited by Jonathan White.

<sup>37</sup> See Jan Borm's article "The Songlines de Bruce Chatwin: du voyage philosophique à l'ethnographie poétique", Colloque international: "Récits de voyage et romans voyageurs dans la littérature contemporaine de langue anglaise", avec la participation de Matthew Kneale (*English Passengers*), 19 et 20 mars 2004, Paris IV Sorbonne.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Graves "Nowhere Left to Go? The Death and Renaissance of the Travel Book" in *WLT, World Literature Today*, October-December 2003, 56.



## Chapter Four

**Bruce Chatwin: Either the *Tusitalia* or the Teller of His Own Story.**

*The mysterious and the miraculous.*



Photograph by Bruce Chatwin. Nazca Line, Peru.

*Taking and finding one's bearings.*



Photograph by Bruce Chatwin. Footprints in the sand.



## Chapter 4

### **Bruce Chatwin: Either the *Tusitalia* or the Teller of His Own Story.**

To be with Bruce Chatwin was, usually, to be his willing audience [...]. He was a magnificent raconteur of Scheherazadean inexhaustibility, a guilt-edged name-dropper, a voracious reader of esoteric texts, a scholar-gipsy, a mimic -his Mrs Gandhi was perfect- and a giggler of international class. He was as talkative as he was curious, and he was curious about everything. (Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 237)

In Chapter Four I explore Chatwin's reluctance to tell and his narrative difficulties in telling his own story in autobiographical terms. I present Chatwin in the dilemma of being either the *Tusitalia*<sup>1</sup> or the teller of his own story. The stories Chatwin picks up eagerly are mostly either about other people or are stories that other people are willing to tell. Likewise, the observations jotted down in his notebooks are eventually turned into a travel account or an article and the resulting text becomes a coherent piece of narrative whose narrator appears to be the most reliable. However, there is so little explicit autobiographical material that we find it difficult to get to know the real Chatwin. Clapp states that "Chatwin hardly wrote a confessional line in his life" (204). Pfister declares that "Chatwin's stance is a pose rather than a subject; the result of a brilliant self-stylisation rather than the self-reflective depth and emotional richness of subjectivity" (Shakespeare 541). We wonder where Chatwin is in his storytelling and what the real story of Chatwin the narrator is.

#### **4.1. Gathering the Stories of Others and the Story of Bruce Chatwin.**

Bruce was a fairly bad listener [...] He kept so much to himself. We heard the colourful stories of a born raconteur. But what of the rest of it? We wondered what his private life was really like, and sometimes we speculated. (Paul Theroux, *Granta 44* 217)

According to Brookman (2009), Cartier-Bresson believed that it is impossible to really know a person through a photographic portrait or a self-portrait: neither the person portrayed nor the artist himself can be fully explained by them. Cartier-Bresson makes it clear that after all we may know the texture and the colour of someone's skin from a photograph, but we cannot see or understand what is inside them (1). He is proclaiming the impossibility of comprehending someone's "interior silence" and by doing so he is acknowledging and at the same time harbouring his own interior silence. It is true that Cartier-Bresson hated being photographed and never took a clear self-portrait; when examining his work we only find three photographs which come close. The first one -taken in Italy- might be regarded as a self-portrait, but it is the photograph of his foot; we do not see his face or body. The second one is taken from outside a café in Marseille. We can see him holding his Leica on the other side of the window but his image is distorted, deformed by a lens, so we cannot distinguish his physical traits objectively. The third one is taken in Provence but the photograph only captures his own shadow next to the shadow of a line of trees. Similarly Chatwin tells us stories where there is hardly ever any reliable autobiographical explanation. In his texts with a first person narrator there surfaces not only a whole universe of obsessions but also formal patterns which are presented as being intimately catalogued and



assimilated. The parallel between the two artists lies in their attempt to preserve their “interior silence” and not to give themselves away through means other than their art. Chatwin’s years at Sotheby’s and Cartier-Bresson’s years of painting lessons in Lotte’s studio provided them with enough formal compositions to be able to integrate their Selves into their art without feeling they were betraying themselves. Brookman argues that Cartier-Bresson’s silence comes from the connection of thought, vision and action, which is inherently present in his photographs, and he affirms that “It is in them where we should find a true extension of his interior thinking” (1). Both Chatwin and Cartier-Bresson emerge silently from their work.

Le Guin writes that there exists a commonly shared bond between the writer, the protagonist(s) and the reader and that: “The artist who goes into himself most deeply - and it is a painful journey- is the artist who touches us most closely, speaks to us most clearly” (Elsbree 59). Chatwin is a writer who might not “speak to us most clearly” but who does know about the painful journey that the process of self-recognition represents. So those readers who do not expect superficiality, or who would not dwell on others’ miseries or on the alienation that unmentionable taboo diseases such as AIDS may have caused in the 80s, will find a reference of personal freedom and acceptable non-commitment in his texts. There is integrity both in his lack of disclosure and in his ambivalence; as a result, in spite of his reluctance to speak to us explicitly about himself, we are shown the way to his interpretation of and his reactions to the facts he talks and writes about. Chatwin’s concealment does not mean he cannot “go into himself most deeply”; it is more a recognition that man is always becoming himself and that capturing the story or stories he lives is what is worthwhile. Chatwin “goes into himself” through his stories, through the fictionalisation of his experiences.

Unlike the general trend in contemporary travel writing which includes a confessional, autobiographical mood Chatwin looks for meanings rather than personal or objective reportage in *IP* and in *TS*. McAdams (2001) states that: “stories are less about facts and more about meanings” and that “history is judged with respect to such narrative criteria as ‘believability’ and ‘coherence’ rather than with its adherence to empirical fact” (*The Person* 622). Then in MacAdams’s view, Chatwin’s past as well as his “history” could certainly be constructed as there is a narrative truth in his life that appears to be far removed from logic and science; it is “the truth of a ‘good story’” (623). Having said this, Chatwin’s style is coherent and well-studied, not merely the result of a whimsical stance of eluding himself from the plot. In the first paragraph of *Indian Leaves. With a Portrait of the Artist by Bruce Chatwin*, a book about the art of Howard Hodgkin,<sup>2</sup> Chatwin considers Hodgkin to be an English painter whose beautiful autobiographical pictures have fallen into “none of the accepted categories of modern art” (Hodgkin 5). In fact, by praising Hodgkin’s unclassifiable autobiographical painting, Chatwin is stating that a novel or an article which does not follow the expected literary codes can also reveal the author’s story. Furthermore, he is fixing the kind of connection he feels with other artists who define themselves through their works of art instead of through autobiography.

Clapp’s description of the “last of Chatwin’s London flats” (18) is the most enlightening with regards to Chatwin’s concealment:

This apartment, at the top of a tall stuccoed house in Eaton Place, showed Chatwin’s taste at its most developed – that’s to say, at its most restrained. Eaton Place was bright and compact and immaculately planned. It had been designed by the minimalist architect John Pawson to Chatwin’s specifications [...] Bruce liked the flat not only for what it

displayed but for what it concealed. The place always appeared tidy and untroubled, because, although its compartments were barely divided, their functions were kept distinct: they didn't spill into one another.

(*With Chatwin* 19)

As with his flat in London Chatwin valued his books not only for what they displayed but for what they concealed and he was stylishly consistent in his "concealments." Shakespeare believes that Chatwin's "suppression of not the truth so much as any enquiry into the truth, is what makes him the writer, the journey-maker and the storyteller that he is, unwilling to be categorised by anyone" (499). If we bear in mind that having AIDS in the eighties was a stigma and a label, then we are better able to understand Chatwin's unwillingness to admit that he suffered from this disease and to realise why he hid it for such a long time. Being a PWA (person with AIDS) was not relevant to his stories so he did not *say* it. According to Shakespeare:

He hated the name, and the idea of such an ugly label being applied to himself was unbearable. He had escaped his life escaping from definition only to succumb to an illness that defined him and would lump him in popular conception with notorious homosexuals like Liberace, Rock Hudson and Robert Mapplethorpe (...) "None of us was allowed to say AIDS," says Salman Rushdie. "For all those years we had to talk about funguses. He was trying to make things go away *by not saying them.*" (467, 469)

Clapp's description of Chatwin's flat, whose compartments were barely divided and their functions were kept distinct by not spilling over into one another, presents not only the physical spaces he inhabited but also the fusion between form and content in

his writing and in his own life. Likewise, Rushdie believes that what we cannot find in Bruce's writing is an admission of his own true nature:

The thing that he concealed from all of us and that kept in compartments, essentially his sexuality, is concealed completely. That's the creature at the parameter prowling around. All this fantastic entertainment and language and originality and erudition and display is a kind of hedge against not letting in the truth. The writing might have become astonishing if he had. (Shakespeare 505)

Rushdie is magnifying the potential of Chatwin's writing had he allowed himself to tell himself. Chatwin's entire work is devoid of any kind of morality other than an aesthetic one and so we wonder whether this prejudice-free attitude would have been affected had Chatwin given himself away. Whenever the author reveals the author, there is first a personal positioning which entails *saying things* (to use Rushdie's words) from a certain moral perspective and from the interpretation of one's own past and present. There is no blank slate if we write down our own story on it, and Chatwin believes in and needs the blank slate of liminal states where the neophytes start anew, leaving their previous status behind. Chatwin plays with and treasures the existence of these open narrative spaces where the telling of the truth is not only unnecessary, but is not even expected.

The two particular ways of facing narrative that Chatwin is most reproached for are not telling the truth and not revealing himself. Glaser, however, in "Theroux and Poetry of Departures" maintains that every travel book is a trip through two dimensions, the external world and the internal world. It is within this two-layered perception that we start to outline the writer's Self:

This interior journey through a writer's mind in which the reader notes the contours of the traveller's mental landscape, is like looking through a train window at dusk, at just that moment when our own reflection is superimposed on the world outside the glass, and suddenly object and subject exist on the same plane, the perceived and the perceiver a single intelligence in an eerie rapprochement. (Kowalewski 155)

Both the detection of Chatwin's obsessions and our "eerie" involvement in them become the most direct ways of approaching his Self and his literary style. Only when our reflection and his are superimposed do we get to know Chatwin and his story. Rushdie (1992) calls the collection of essays and articles *WAIDH* an "autobiography of the mind" but he believes Chatwin did not disclose himself in it: "In this book, as in life, Bruce Chatwin is secretive about the workings of his heart. I wish it were not so, for he was a man of great heart and deep feeling, but he rarely let it into his prose"(239). When Chatwin was once criticised for this, he replied "[t]he heart is there, come on look for it. It is not with the best sentiments that we write the best literature" (Shakespeare 505).

Chatwin considered that literature is an aesthetic area which does not necessarily have to include the best sentiments. Clapp's *With Chatwin* provides readers with an opportunity to know what was included in and what was removed from the original drafts. The editing of *IP* by Chatwin and Clapp involved a long process of revising and deleting so that the final text could become a really "editable" piece of writing: "The large cuts that we made were administered not to get rid of duff stuff but to tighten the book's shape, give it more pace and focus its subject-matter" (32). Much of the material removed from the early manuscripts of *IP* contained autobiographical information, in particular from his childhood, which he recalled as being full of vivid moments (49).

This process of consensual cleaning up shows both to what extent Chatwin wanted to be *there* in his travel account, and how he ended up crossing out the personal for the sake of the “publishable.” This is not, though, the only reason why *IP*, whilst being full of autobiographical material, “abstained from personal revelation” (25). In fact, it inaugurated a new style of writing, in particular of travel writing, which was to distinguish all Chatwin’s texts: pungent expression, recurrent paradox, an abundance of autobiographical material despite the lack of explicit self-revelation and constant fluctuation between fact and fiction.

The aforementioned qualities can be found in one of his short stories -about 1100 words long- “The Seventh Day.”<sup>3</sup> As Clapp says, it is “about a boy going away to school” (*With Chatwin* 57). The story was published in the 2 June 1988 issue of *London Review of Books* when he was seriously ill and bedridden. Unlike some of the other stories he wrote at that time “The Seventh Day” was not included in *WAIDH*, the collection of pieces assembled under Chatwin’s supervision and published in May 1989, four months after his death; neither has it ever appeared in a book. According to Clapp, “it is autobiography disguised as fiction”(59); which may have been why Chatwin did not select it to be exhibited to a wide readership, as it would seem to tell too much about himself. As Clapp argues:

It is a dark, troubled tale, in which a boy’s experience is rendered apocalyptically, and in which scatology becomes eschatology. The title is based on the last few lines, which provide a Biblical recital of a crisis: the small boy who is constipated, is persuaded by his classmates that he is going to die in seven days, as another boy had done before him; a toll is kept of the passing days as in the First Book of Genesis. (58)

The protagonist is a fair-haired, thin, eight-year-old boy from Birmingham who hates his boarding-school and whose father was on a mine-sweeper during the war. Chatwin's real life seems to fit the same profile. Chatwin wrote "The Seventh Day" in the last twelve months of his life, at a time when he probably had "the sick person's concern with his bowels" (60) and when he was trying to anticipate his death without daring to acknowledge it. Like the young boy in the boarding-school, who in the middle of one of his nightmares sees himself in white walking across a charred landscape, Chatwin visualises his own black night through this story of struggle and concealment. By not telling anybody about his problem the boy manages to see the purple swelling in his anus go away; then his agony is over. Unfortunately, by silencing his illness Chatwin did not get rid of it, in fact it worsened every day. Other stories and books also disclose a little of Chatwin himself even though they cannot be considered autobiographical; what we perceive in the brief story of this boy -who has not been given a name- is extreme pain, anxiety and fear.

On the other hand, the ideas Chatwin expresses in his essays and in his conversations, or maybe confessions, with friends are presented through an outrageous impulse to use no tricks, but to speak clearly and overtly. He is not afraid to say things as they are, such as "I'm not going to waste away and go feeble in the head and defecate all over the place" (Horne 106), in an attempt to maintain his dignity as his illness worsened. However, this overt attitude is not to be found in the texts where he is the narrator; there he keeps silent about his Self. Neither do we find it in the third-person narrators of his fictional work. Funnily enough, Chatwin claims for "No tricks" (Horne 105) and unashamedly refers to men's urethras (*TS* 42); he also reminds his friends that his "*cul* is international" (Shakespeare 7) and that ill people defecate. Men are all the same in their most intimate actions. The state of *communitas* he endorses in

his writing is to be recognized in this sameness: everyone undergoes a phase of *communitas*, a universalising process. The legitimate beauty we can produce in liminality, or the creation of Man and Art, goes hand in hand with the scatology and dirt we can produce as human beings. It is all the same in the end: art and dirt, the Man and the Beast, lies and truth, the collector and the nomad. In arguing such, he raises the readers' awareness of the fact that these dualities and dichotomies inhabit life and literature. Chatwin mastered the poetics of duality, and even though he was reluctant to tell his own story in autobiographical terms, he included himself in the dual world he outlined in his fiction. In *The Art of Travel* Alain de Botton reflects on Flaubert's allure to the exotic:

Central to Flaubert's philosophy was the belief that we are not simply spiritual creatures, but also pissing and shitting ones and that we should integrate the ramifications of this blunt idea into our view of the world. 'I can't believe that our body, composed as it is of mud and shit and equipped with instincts lower than those of the pig or the crab-louse, contains anything pure and immaterial' he told Ernest Chevalier. Which wasn't to say that we were without any higher dimensions. It was just that the prudery and self-righteousness of the age aroused in Flaubert a desire to remind others of mankind's impurities. (87)

de Botton explains that Flaubert's welcoming attitude towards Egyptian culture was borne of its readiness "to accept life's duality: shit-mind, death-life, sexuality-purity, madness-sanity" (87). Cartier-Bresson also gathers all kinds of dualities in his photographic production: he photographs Colette, the French writer who defended the cult of the flesh, and then he takes a snapshot of José Bergamín, the Spanish writer and



poet who aimed at spiritual perfection. Chatwin also includes both flesh and spirit in the process of collecting reality because to him art embraces dichotomies.

One of the dichotomies within Chatwin's writing is that of truth and lies. When he writes that "It is not with the best sentiments that we write the best literature" (Shakespeare 505) he is suggesting that truth might not come only from the heart but also from other realms of the Self. Chatwin finds truth in the fabrications of the imagination more than anywhere else as can be concluded from his words in *WAIDH*: "The trouble with Solzhenitsyn is this. When he thinks he is telling the truth, he tells the most terrible falsehoods. But when he thinks he is making a story from his imagination, then, sometimes, he catches the truth" (84). In *Utz* he reinforces the idea that man can live authentically in spite of being a liar by learning how to live "within the lie" (81-82) and about *IP* he once wrote: "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). A sense that he had lied about his AIDS bred the suspicion that he might have lied in his art as well, and he was accused of having invented his stories in *IP*. Those who did not agree with such criticism declared that his gift was that "he had the imagination to tell stories, to connect them, to enlarge, colour and improve them, but not to invent. 'He was an artist, not a liar'" (Shakespeare 539).

So far we have approached Chatwin's life story as a man and as a writer and we have reached three primary conclusions. First, his abstention from personal revelation does not mean a lack of autobiographical material "[f]or all Bruce's mysteries, his writing is full of details about his own life. These are sometimes elided with the life of another" (Clapp 47). Thus we know that Chatwin is there and we can find his own story. Second, Chatwin's attitude towards truth and lies is born out of his finding truth within the imagination rather than in conventional forms of representation and self-

representation. This forces us to admit that telling lies when writing is not the immediate consequence of deliberate self-concealment, but an aesthetic and literary strategy used to represent the limits and the scope of the imagination and to envisage some literary truths. Third, Chatwin claims for universal truths rather than individual truths. Universal truths not only generate sameness between people but also strengthen our condition as human beings by recognizing the dualities within ourselves. These truths can be found in the most hidden parts of ourselves: scatology, for example, becomes a link; so does death, no matter the circumstances of the starting point of our last journey. Individual truths, which have traditionally nourished autobiographical material, can give rise to less reliable accounts of the Self.

Now I proceed to the analysis of a fourth element in Chatwin's construction of his own story. This is his relationship with things, not only with the objects that inspired him to write stories or those he hoarded almost obsessively, but also the objects he carried with him when travelling and the ones he permanently kept and treasured in his rucksack. In fact, they were all part of his own life: they inform us about his past and his present. To start with, according to Chatwin "things must be called stories" (Shakespeare 10). From such a premise, both Chatwin's collectors and storytellers gather pieces of reality and grant them sacredness. Plante, a good friend of Chatwin's, believed that in his wandering Bruce "was looking for the Holy Land, looking at least for the small objects that remained of its former habitation as evidence of something deep in humanity that might be humanity's saving grace" (Shakespeare 447). In addition to this sacred nature Chatwin's stories and objects have something else in common: objects are displayed in glass-fronted cabinets just as stories are presented in a "vitreous, self-contained" (Shakespeare 34) style in the books which include them. This means that both need a centre of order. Moreover, they both represent pieces of

life which transcend the mere exhibiting or telling or publishing value: they are tokens which recreate the past, as Umberto Eco contends: “to understand the past, even locally, we must have before our eyes something that resembles as closely as possible the original model” (*Travels in Hyperreality* 53). According to Shakespeare, what Chatwin saw in his grandmother’s cabinet was “a sort of Narnia. He reached through it into a fantastical world of lions, unicorns and ice queens where he would make his home” (27). A pocket sun-dial with names of cities written on the rim -among them Botany Bay- is the source of inspiration for *TS*. A piece of skin which belonged to a brontosaurus inspires him to write *IP*. Likewise the sacred artefacts he admired in a specially built cabinet in the house of Theodor Strehlow’s widow in Adelaide act as a spur to his imagination and to the creation of new stories and new fictional objects. Kath Strehlow comments: “I think he got the idea of *Utz* from the Strehlow collection. Bruce saw that these objects had a life of their own, were weighted with other people’s stories and burdens and troubles” (Shakespeare 480). Moreover, Chatwin’s concept of literary creation, based on the apprehension of things as stories, and the act of collecting go hand in hand in his poetics, and they are connected through a unity of style and content. He had seen a model of such a fusion in his grandmother Isobel’s glass-fronted cabinet which she had turned into the “family museum.” There she displayed little odds and ends as relics of the family past –of both the Chatwins and the Milwards’pasts- and to which “a narrative was attached” (Shakespeare 27). Chatwin learned that objects can bear a tale.

Second, the objects we hoard more or less obsessively and the things we carry with us in our rucksack also unveil passages of personal story. Chatwin’s “I Always Wanted to Go to Patagonia” and “The Morality of Things” provide us with fragments of Chatwin’s past and with his theories about identity. In “I Always Wanted to Go to

Patagonia” Chatwin writes that he had three precious possessions: “a wooden camel known as Laura, brought by my father from the Cairo bazaar; a West Indian conch shell called Mona in whose glorious pink mouth I could hear the wish-wash of the ocean; and a book” (*Anatomy* 6). These objects encapsulate passages of his personal story, both those that are past and those yet to come; namely a father who was often away, his own wanderlust represented by the sound of the ocean in a shell and his eagerness to read. In “The Morality of Things” Chatwin argues that possessions express personality and that “the collector evolves a moral system from which he squeezes out people” (172). Chatwin believes that in being “things-oriented” civilizations have to find outlets for their two irresistible urges: to possess things and to get rid of them. He is actually suggesting that he is living a dilemma himself: he is trapped both within this fetishistic civilization and in the spirit and life of Australian aborigines who wander around but return at seasonal intervals “to their sacred places to make contact with their ancestral roots, established in the ‘dreamtime’” (182). Chatwin resembles not only Utz with his attachment to Meissen figures in *Utz* but also the aboriginal nomad in *TS*.

“The Morality of Things” also narrates the story of a salesman who travels all over Africa and comes back to London four times a year, like an Australian aborigine coming back to his sacred place. This salesman “live[s] from a suitcase” that he uses on his business trips and also owns a box where he keeps his things which he displays privately when he is in London:

They were the assorted bric-à-brac of English middle-class life –the teddy bear, the photograph of his father killed in the First War, his medal, the letter from the King, some of his mother’s trinkets, a swimming trophy and a presentation ashtray. But each time he brought

from Africa one new thing, and he threw out one old thing that had lost its meaning. (183)

Chatwin explains that this imaginary salesman was the only man he had ever met “who solved the tricky equation between things and freedom. The box was the hub of his migration orbit, the territorial fixed point at which he could renew his identity. And without it he would have become literally deranged” (183). The content of this suitcase is the man’s life story because it reproduces his identity through a collection of meaningful objects. Jürgen Balmes’ story “Bruce Chatwins Rucksack” tells of Chatwin’s fascination with wandering and his relationship with the film director Werner Herzog to whom he handed his own rucksack before he died. In January 1989 Chatwin was seriously ill and yet he still wanted to set out on the road again. He said to Herzog “My rucksack is so heavy [ ...] You must carry my rucksack, you are the one who must carry it” (148). Balmes describes Chatwin’s rucksack as his talisman, an emblem which he took to parties to show people and friends that he had been to Patagonia and which he hung in the hall of his house so that everybody could see it.<sup>4</sup> His insistence that Herzog take it suggests that his rucksack had become a valuable object worth being handed on to a good friend, worth being inherited. Chatwin’s heavy old rucksack could be regarded as a symbol of his nature and could make up for the silence of its owner.

The question is whether objects really can make up for this muteness and tell us who we are, and whether some objects can actually renew our identity. “The Estate of Maximilian Tod” (1979) starts with the narrator telling the story of a certain Maximilian. In the middle of the story the narrator stops and declares that he is the said Maximilian Tod, determined to unfold his own story:

It should be clear, even to the most unobservant reader, that I am Maximilian Tod. My history is unimportant. I detest confidences. Besides I believe that a man is a sum of his things, even if a few fortunate men are the sum of an absence of things. Yet a few facts of my existence may help pattern my acquisitions into a chronological sequence. (*Anatomy* 65)

Maximilian Tod, who is the third-person narrator at the beginning of the story, becomes Maximilian Tod, the first-person narrator. The reason for this change in perspective is the man's desire to explain himself, even if the very last three words of the story are a confession of a crime; he wants the reader to be involved in such a revelatory act. Objects and collection objects are part of this explanation of the Self. We read about a "collection of curiosities that Mr Tod, by a process of elimination and the exigencies of travel, had reduced to the bleak essentials" (63). We also get to know a small inventory of his works of art and about "his two most treasured possessions" (64) as well as his unusual library which is a collection of "texts that held for him some special significance" (64). However, as soon as the first-person narrator unveils his real name, he starts writing about his American forebears and German ancestors, the summers of his childhood and his education, the friends he made and who he went to live with, his envy, his feelings and his travels. Although objects are not completely ignored, they are left unattended: "I have left my young companion. I have left my things" (69). In a way he needed to tell the tale of himself but at the same time he also needed to tell a universal tale. Maximilian is the man who is ready to describe in great detail collections of objects on the one hand and political attachments and nationality barriers with sarcasm on the other, when, in fact, he is retelling the old tale of the Man and the Beast. He is someone who is able to tell that he has killed a human being after having

maintained a fictional suspense, an innocent game of uneventfulness until the very last sentence. Thus, at the end of the story he becomes the naked man: the representative of good and evil, alone, with no possessions and completely honest when telling about the murder. In his memoir Maximilian Tod has shown the reader who he is through his objects and through the absence of them and also by telling a three-word truth: “[...] I pushed her.” (69)

Both Maximilian and Chatwin also unveil themselves through other subtle observations which give away their peculiar way of seeing. Estelle, the woman he kills, was “forty-three, a handsome masculine woman with black hair cropped short” (55). Estelle “had scribbled her material over thirteen hip-pocket notebooks with black leatherette covers -equations, graphs, and diagrams, which she alone could decipher, or someone as close to her as I” (54). Maximilian could tell the difference between an authentic object and a fake. Moreover, in Patagonia he was impressed by the sight of a weather beaten man dressed in black whose partner was a “hunchback Indian dwarf” (59). In Maximilian’s house “none of the walls were *precisely* the same length; all were *fractionally* inclined inwards; and these marginal asymmetries gave the building an air of movement in repose” (61)<sup>5</sup>. As early as 1979 with this story Chatwin seemed to be telling us about his own way of seeing or about who he was or who he was going to be. In a way he is urging us to be “observant readers,” able to work out what is inside the memoir of a fictional Other. First, Chatwin (like Estelle) wrote undecipherable notes in his black-covered moleskins which only he understood. Second, most of his female characters are masculine-looking. Third, he was an art expert, famous for his eye. Fourth, dwarfs are an example of those uncanny individuals he tried to depict and beautify in his work. Fifth, asymmetry belongs to his peculiar way of looking. Sixth, he has a special inclination to recover family ancestry. Seventh, movement was one of his

strongest creeds. And finally, he confessed his “crime/illness” overtly: he had AIDS. Maximilian Tod, when he declares who he is, is reproducing Chatwin’s hidden autobiographical and aesthetic nature.

Then who did Chatwin really tell his story to? Who were his real listeners if he chose not to tell his readers about it? Chatwin’s friend Redmon O’Hanlon (in his epitaph for Chatwin), Nicholas Shakespeare (in his biography of Bruce Chatwin), Salman Rushdie (in his article on Chatwin in *Imaginary Homelands*), Peter Levi (in his book *The Light of the Angel King. Travels in Afghanistan with Bruce Chatwin*) and Nicholas Murray represent some of the writers and critics who have offered reliable accounts about Chatwin’s personality. O’Hanlon reflects first on Chatwin’s special sources of imagination<sup>6</sup> and on his *Etnobilia*<sup>7</sup>

Beneath the first ridge of the Black Mountains we parked by a track and got out our boots: mine black Wellingtons; his, a pair of such fine leather that Hermés would have done a swap. I put on my Bergen (with nothing in it but a loaf of bread and two bottles of wine) and he put on his small haversack of dark maroon calfskin (with nothing in it but a Montblanc pen, a black, oilcloth-bound, *vrai moleskin* notebook, a copy of Aylmer Maude’s translation of *War and Peace*, Strindberg’s *By the Open Sea* and the most elegant pair of binoculars that I had ever seen. (*Bruce Chatwin: Congo Journey* 107)

O’Hanlon provides a convincing argument, when affirming that objects that are carried on a journey are connected with the traveller’s thoughts and sensitivities; they say things about the people who carry them. On the one hand, there are the objects travellers/writers usually or almost always carry with them, like the objects in Chatwin’s rucksack. They exist before the journey itself in the sense that they stand for



an *a priori* element of the act of travelling and their metaphoric function works independently, regardless of the places visited or the foreign novelty encountered. They are part of the artist and exist in parallel to the carrier's journey. On the other hand, we find the things that travellers have acquired during their travelling experience and which they bring home to exhibit; however connected to the writer's thoughts and sensibilities, they remind the traveller/writer of the moment and the place of the finding. These are not the objects in the rucksack but the objects likely to be kept in a home collection. Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay<sup>8</sup> in her article "*Bitter Lemons (1957) de Lawrence Durrell: le patchwork et le palimpeste.*" quotes a paragraph of Durrell's novel where the author describes Fortuna, Durrell's friend Marie's house in Cyprus. In this description he includes some of the objects which she had purchased on some journey and which are now displayed in the rooms. Durrell writes: "These are the sort of things which the writer carries about like talismans, to remind him of lost experiences which he must one day re-evoke and refashion in words. This dancer of Bali echoes the past with all the fidelity of a seashell held to the ear" (252-253)<sup>9</sup>. Chatwin's rucksack and Durrell's roofless house contain talismans which remind their owners of their own life stories and which in turn become their alter-egos.

A fifth element within Chatwin's particular way of constructing his own story is the concept of the Man in the making. In her unpublished thesis "A Dystopian Modernity: Bruce Chatwin and the Subject in the Modern World," Marie Williams regards Baudelaire as the main representative of modernity and connects Chatwin with it. She quotes Foucault to support her view: "The modern man for Baudelaire is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not liberate man in his own being; it compels him to face the task of producing himself" (83). It is Chatwin's belief in

liminality, on the other hand, therefore in the fact that transformation and creation lie at the core of threshold zones, that inspires him to support the idea that man in general and the artist in particular are constantly in the making. Chatwin the modernist is developing an aesthetics of the Self and he does so by making himself as a personal and literary construct, by undertaking a process of literary self-invention: the written expression of a fully lived life. Thus, when he refuses -together with Paul Theroux- to be called a travel writer and vindicates his condition of “literary traveller” instead, he is actually enlarging his own ongoing process of creation and avoiding being labelled. Eakin (1999) explains that he prefers to think of “self” less as an entity and more as a kind of awareness in process, a process which he defines as “making selves.” He argues that we are not likely to witness “the emergent sense of self as an observable event precisely because it is an ongoing process [...] We never catch ourselves in the act of becoming selves; there is always a gap or rupture that divides us from the knowledge that we seek” (x). Chatwin was aware of this process and believed in it as the mark of identity formation.

As a result of his wish to survive as a writer still in the making, Chatwin seems to have constructed his own myth. Clapp writes that he “was one of those writers who are acclaimed before they are dead” (ix) and whose writing gave rise to an adjective: “at about the time that the term ‘Thatcherite’ entered the English language, so did the word ‘Chatwinesque’ (ix). She even affirms that some readers wanted to be him. I contend that this is so because despite his evasive personal story, Chatwin managed to make a compelling aesthetic statement through a solid narrative tone. McAdams provides a convincing argument when affirming that: “We do not discover ourselves through myth; we make ourselves through myth” (*The Stories* 19). Chatwin made himself

through the myth he had progressively created of his own person and by doing so he delineated his identity.

Eakin (1999) refers to Oliver Sacks as a writer who has researched the creation and sometimes difficult maintenance of identity. When he summarizes the content of Sacks' story *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* he simply explains that it is about a man who was forced to *literally* make himself (and his world) up at every turn. Therefore, the possibility of the existence of man in the making, which Chatwin developed in his writing, and the possibility of representing this making in a text leads us to believe that there must be a sustaining narrative structure that can articulate the task of self-representation. In Sacks' words: "It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a "narrative," and that this narrative is us, our identities" (Eakin *HOL* 102). Chatwin does not seem to narrate or to know how to narrate his Self. Is there no identity without a narrative of some kind, then? The truth, according to Eakin, is that we all have textual Selves that can be "narratively produced" (101), the question is what narrative expression we give to our personal experience and if this expression corresponds to the usual models of self-representation so as to be easily acknowledged. To Chatwin, narrative is not coextensive with all of selfhood, because selfhood is multiple. Shakespeare affirms that Chatwin is "unaccustomed to reciting a reliable narrative about himself. But 'the self is all I can think of,' he wrote to Bail" (466). This contradiction lies at the core of Chatwin's writing: the Self is all the author can think of but he is unable (or unwilling) to give an autobiographical narrative expression. Added to this inability or unwillingness to practise a narrative of the Self there is a need to justify transformation. This is partly based on his idea of liminality, and partly because Chatwin surrenders himself to the compelling effect of travelling upon human nature, an effect which reveals itself in a constant process of change; as Bouvier declares in

*L'Usage du monde* (1963), a journey can make us but it can also undo us. (Michel 255)<sup>10</sup>

If we cannot perceive ourselves as comprising just one Self, either at home or when travelling, then we will have to accept that self-representation cannot comprise just one narrative but several: changing Selves generate changing narratives. To illustrate such a point, we can recall the relationship between the writer and poet Peter Levi and Chatwin. They set off on a journey to Afghanistan in 1970. Levi had to write a book focusing on Greek influence in the area and Chatwin decided to go with him. At that time Levi thought that Bruce was “in the process of transforming himself from an archaeologist into a writer” (Shakespeare 222). Levi also comments that it was he who advised Chatwin to make that change but in fact, the process of transformation in Chatwin had already started: “What I didn’t know or notice was that Bruce was changing himself. You write in order to change yourself in my view. He was trying to remake his life and become a writer” (222). Becoming a writer was one of Chatwin’s various metamorphoses. Not only did this belief in metamorphoses act upon his attitude towards literature but also conditioned both his relationships with other individuals and the decisions he made throughout his life. Within his philosophy of art and life there is something Chatwin turns into a creed: he cannot and does not want to “be everything to everybody at every place and time, but to be some important things in some important ways for some important people, at particular times and in particular places” as McAdams defines the positioning of some narrators (*The Person* 654). Chatwin’s choice is completely personal; he decides when and to whom he is ready to tell himself and what kind of self-narrative he is going to use. Not even Theroux, who shared with him the experience of giving a lecture to the Royal National Society about his travels in Patagonia, could provide reliable information about Chatwin’s personality: “While we

were preparing the lecture, I realized how little I knew him and what a strange bird he was”<sup>11</sup> (Balmes 90), whereas Rushdie, who travelled with him in Australia, seems to have a deeper insight into Chatwin’s feelings (103). Chatwin considered *TS* a work of fiction and therefore he claimed: “I can do what I like.” Shakespeare writes:

The camouflage of fiction did allow Bruce to do what he liked. Asked on ABC radio whether the Bruce who narrates the book is the same Bruce who writes it, he hesitated: “Whether it happened to me there and then is another thing which I keep rather close to my chest.” [...] There are moments when the two Bruces are not the same at all. Bruce the author, for instance, was terrified of snakes. Bruce the narrator is fearless, with a Hemingwayesque bravado that allows him to arrive in any country speaking the language and knowing the local customs. (419)

So far I have tried to outline Chatwin’s portrait by gathering pieces of personal information supplied by both his written legacy and the people who knew him well. The sixth element to take into consideration in this attempt to reconstruct his life story is the idea of attachment and detachment. In an interview with Michel Ignatieff, when Chatwin was asked if he considered himself and his travel books pilgrimage, the writer declared: “I am simply a free and unattached man and I cannot help it, I cannot do anything against it” (Balmes 20).<sup>12</sup> In *TS* Chatwin also confesses not to feel attached to anybody but to his own Self (*TS* 32). The writer travels light on his journeys, and usually alone or at least without his wife, but he is attached to things at home because he is a collector who cannot live without hoarding. At the same time, however, his restlessness does not allow him to stay in the same place for long. His vital bond then is both to the road and home, placelessness and a love of collecting. Shakespeare explains that Chatwin was fond of his friends, loved his wife dearly and found it easy to meet

people while travelling; however, he also mentions that some of his friends and acquaintances thought he was a bit of a scrounger, a *pique-assiette* -“someone who eats off another’s plate”- (387) and an eccentric, that he and his wife led completely separate lives for some years and that he did not form close relationships during his journeys. We might also assume, when we strive to justify this estrangement, that it was his obsessions that really alienated him from others and forced him to distance himself from the world around him. However, bearing in mind that Chatwin’s fixations shape his writing, then we might wonder whether his writing isolated him. It is undoubtedly his writing that unites him with everybody else: he manages to render the obsessive Self that he is by beautifying his aesthetic diseases, in particular his connecting mania which Shakespeare defines as follows: “in psychological terms, Chatwin suffers from *Beziehungswahn* – a delirium of establishing connections” (488). This search for connectedness eventually forges his Self and his style as he declares in *TS*: “One day, Aunt Ruth told me our surname had once been “Chettewynde”, which meant “the winding path” in Anglo-Saxon; and the suggestion took root in my head that poetry, my own name and the road were, all three, mysteriously connected (*TS* 9).

Sontag met Chatwin in New York in 1979 and observed the strange sexual avidity in which he engaged at that time:

He slept with everyone, once: it goes with being a great beauty. His sexuality was like his possessions, a means of engaging and also of not engaging with the world. He was profoundly solitary and therefore conducted his sexual activity as a way of connecting with people. At such an industrial rate it meant not an exclusive or intensifying connection: it meant he *had* a connection. (Shakespeare 128)

Either through detachment or attachment, Chatwin did look for a way of relating to others, for a way of looking for bonds; no matter how he did it: sexually, intellectually or emotionally. He did not speak clearly about his political stance, his romantic and sexual life or his AIDS but through his stories he speaks about life and death, past and present, suffering and relief; above all he speaks about solitude and the liminality that is unchosen, unwanted or unexpected when man is struggling to become a man.

To illustrate Chatwin's personal attitude towards self-exposure and his particular way of constructing his life story, I now turn to analyse the seventh and last element; this is Chatwin's reflection on death. Chatwin confronts the death experience in different ways.

First, death is connected with the idea of nakedness. The state of near-nakedness is one of the attributes of liminal personae described by Turner, but as Smith argues, it also corresponds to one of the steps of the hero's journey, the moment when man confronts a death experience:

The imagery of being stripped down, of having all that one had struggled to achieve brutally taken away, leaving one naked in the presence of death, is absolutely basic to the threshold crossings of the hero journey [...] Any identity crisis can precipitate the hero journey at any time in life, of course, and always involves a death experience, during which the old vestments of the personality are stripped away, leaving a sense of nothingness. (7)

Chatwin theorizes about and enhances the concept of both physical and metaphorical nakedness. Yet, the authenticity of his postulations should be questioned because he never gets rid of his art collections and he hardly ever discloses himself: his homosexuality is never expressed, his AIDS never fully declared until he finally accepts

the fact, and his commitments never clarified. Peter Oliva in his review of Shakespeare's *Bruce Chatwin* comments that "[t]here is one thing that Chatwin would not put into his fiction: himself." Chatwin's idea of nakedness, as far as the telling of his own story is concerned, is to be found then at the end of his life when he felt closer to his reality than to his theories and he did not hesitate to speak about himself. If he had openly admitted that he had AIDS, not only would he have known he was going to die but metaphorically he would also have become aware of his nakedness once he was stripped of all his disguises. Paradoxically, by silencing his illness for so long, Chatwin was also silencing something which was in fact reproducing his ontological questions and theories. Shakespeare quotes a friend of Chatwin's: "AIDS is especially terrible for people like Bruce," says Lucie Smith. "It's not merely that you know you're going to die, but all the layers of pretence get stripped away" (467). There is Bruce the theorist and Bruce the human being: two intersected identities suffering a dilemma.

Most of *TS* is a loud claim for voluntary dispossession, but it also speaks for both the fact that we are all within our rights to tell our life stories in the way we wish and the recognition of the human need to be free: "If this were so; if the desert were "home"; if our instincts were forged in the desert; to survive the rigours of the desert – then it is easier to understand why greener pastures pall on us; why possessions exhaust us, and why Pascal's imaginary man found his comfortable lodgings a prison" (*TS* 162). If "comfortable lodgings" may be a prison then we observe a contradiction other than the aforementioned one of Bruce the theorist and Bruce the human being, that is of Bruce the nomad and Bruce the collector. To him wandering is the essence of life as it was for the Aboriginal nomads in *TS* and the Indians in Tierra de Fuego in *IP*, and collecting is the reason for living as in *Utz*. Chatwin like Utz, under the effects of a kind of *Porzelainkrankheit*, becomes the obsessive collector who feels impelled to travel but



at the same time is driven to go back home and admire his domestic art gallery again. The idea of nakedness in *Utz* is resolved in a different way from in *TS*. In the latter, Chatwin admits that the “travelling phase” of his life is over. In the former, we realize that the “collecting phase” of the protagonist has also passed: Utz dies, his Meissen porcelain disappears and his wife Marta has gone back to the countryside where she does not seem to care much about her past: she would rather look after the gander who runs freely in her yard. Thus Utz’s death has finally reconciled him to others by putting an end to his obsession with collecting.

Second, Chatwin believes that death demands sincerity, therefore he urges the truth to endorse this belief. In contrast to his usual need for concealment, when his death is approaching Chatwin confides his worries to his friend O’Hanon and tells him to explain his story straightforwardly (Horne 106). Not only does he think death should be told beautifully but also with irony so as to make up for the pain involved in it: “You know- there is something else I want you to know [...] I got it because I have AIDS. They told me I had six months or a year to live. So I thought, right, Bruce is a dog’s name and I’m not going to stand for this.”(105)

Finally, Chatwin anticipates death in the form of a “malaise of settlement.” *TS* was written in 1987 and Chatwin died in Nice in 1989 after “twenty odd years of travel” (*TS* 160). By the time he finished *TS*, he knew he was soon going to die:

I had the 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 book, according to Rushdie, became an obsession, spurred on by fear and speed; he was afraid that he would not have time to finish his book. The aforementioned paragraph sounds like a premonition: what he feared was not the malaise of settlement itself but his own terrible illness. It was his own death that really harassed him. Settlement entails death, but not in the metaphorical sense he had suggested in his theories about nomadism and wandering; now the malaise is real. The travelling phase of his life that he mentions in *TS* recalls the liminal phase of a rite of passage. Throughout this phase people reconcile themselves to nature and to others and eventually acknowledge that we all have to live the dualities of our existence: life and death being one. Chatwin managed to achieve this reconciliation.

As to the reconstruction of Chatwin's personal story, Clapp comments that although Chatwin admired Flaubert and tried to subscribe to a "Flaubertian impersonality," his books are full of stories about himself: "he could talk compulsively about things that had happened to him. On the page he abstained from personal comment but wrote -with varying degrees of openness- about what he had done" (*With Chatwin* 39). It is true that Chatwin loved talking, his friends are a reliable testimony to this, so the document of his life story is an oral document rather than a written one. Readers do not find any unreserved trace of his life story in his texts, nor is there any memorial record of his love affairs, of the cause of his inward restlessness, of the psychoanalytical interpretation of his rootlessness, placelessness or sexual ambiguity. Clapp argues that:

The gaps that Theroux disliked in *In Patagonia* seem to relate to the sorts of thing -explanations and links- which he most often chose to leave out, considering them "boring," and to omissions of material which was not boring but which would have entirely changed his narrative. There was

no reference to his wife, to his profession, to where he had come from: it was as if nothing had happened to him between his childhood and the moment he put a pack on his back and set off for South America. (*With Chatwin* 41)

His books and his characters answer these “omissions of material” as do Francisco da Silva’s words in *TVOO*. Francisco tells of the sound of drumbeats pressed against his temples and how he has the feeling that he will never get out of Africa: “He confided his fears to no one. To convince himself they were unreal, he would sit, red-eyed into the night, writing letters to Joaquim Coutinho, tearing sheet after sheet in an effort to express himself” (*TVOO* 79). Like Francisco da Silva, Chatwin might have found it really demanding to write about himself because writing was no easy pastime for him, and because he was not sure what part of himself he wanted to omit, or which part he wanted to unfold. Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin explains that her husband performed a lot of “sheet tearing” before he finished a text. He really took his time producing the final version: he wrote, rewrote, erased, corrected and threw away many drafts before he felt totally satisfied with his text. He would ask her or someone else to read the text aloud so that he could check how it would finally sound: “He perfected his style by dint of sheer concentration and focus, typing out his drafts again and again, and reading them aloud to be sure they were lucid” (Shakespeare 306). Da Silva’s sheet-tearing is Chatwin’s style-perfection.

In “I Always Wanted to Go to Patagonia. The Making of a Writer” Chatwin tells something about himself: “I thought that telling stories was the only conceivable occupation for a superfluous person such as myself. I am older and a bit stiffer, and I am thinking of settling down” (*Anatomy* 14). However fleeting and almost inaudible his hint of self-exposure, Chatwin is in fact providing a rationale for his own Self. The

difference between Chatwin and travel writers is that the latter tend to show themselves by writing about themselves openly and shamelessly, hence their self-exposure is usually more complete than that of Chatwin. The author rarely acknowledges what he is like or if he has a double with a similar story to his as Raban does in *Coasting*, for example: “I kept on meeting my double [...] his story was very nearly the same” (42). Chatwin repeatedly includes doubles of himself in his texts but he makes them fictional, products of the imagination and hardly ever does he confess that they are himself playing one of his Selves. He multiplies his own story through the stories of doubles but the latter are given a genuine independence. We wonder what makes writers admit so openly that they do have a story and that this story is subject to be told; what made Chatwin silence his voice? In *Coasting* Raban writes about the poet Philip Larkin, who had been Raban’s professor when he was a student at Hull University, and affirms that Larkin did not have a happy life but he managed to live it with dignity: “If poems can teach one anything, Larkin’s teach that there is no desolation so bleak that it cannot be made habitable by style. If we live inside a bad joke, it is up to us to learn, at best and worst, *to tell it well*” (268). Francis Wyndham once declared of his friend Chatwin that “[it]’s not as if he had a tremendously successful and happy life. He wasn’t a darling of the gods. His life wasn’t particularly enviable” (Shakespeare 540). Granted that Chatwin “had kept profoundly to himself”<sup>13</sup> and that he never revealed his real nature, he managed to do what Larkin did: he made his life habitable with style, at least he created a style “to cope with his obsessions”, as Alvarez observes of Sterne and Godard:

What Sterne and Godard have in common is a style and an obsession, or rather, a style to cope with an obsession. By style I mean something beyond their elegance and wit and detachment. Instead, it is the ability to

maintain all those qualities whilst not leaving anything out, whilst refusing a narrow exclusive focus.<sup>14</sup>

Chatwin taught us that style can express personal substance without explicitly describing it. He inhabited his style, died with it and his style survived him. Chatwin rendered a short but complete life story, or in Eakin's words: "a storied<sup>15</sup> Self." (99)

#### **4.2. Childhood Memories, Pathologies and Ethics within Chatwin's Construction of a Life Story. W.G.Seбалd's Ideas in "The Mystery of the Red-brown Skin. An Approach to Bruce Chatwin."**

The purpose [...] is to remind us  
 How difficult it is to remain just one person  
 For our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,  
 And invisible guests come in and out at will.

(*Ars Poetica* by Czeslaw Milosz)

Section two is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the study of Chatwin's childhood memories, narrative pathologies and ethical problems within his process of creating a storied Self and within his endeavour to preserve identity through self-narration. The second part focuses on the ideas suggested by W.G.Seбалd in the article "The Mystery of the Red-brown Skin. An approach to Bruce Chatwin" included in *Campo Santo* in which Seбалd opens up new perspectives on Chatwin's "enigma" (Seбалd 179) as a man and as a writer by drawing a parallel with Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin* (*The Wild Ass's Skin*), Flaubert's *Trois Contes* (*Three Tales*, in particular *The*

*Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator*) and Perecs's *W ou le Souvenir d'enfance* (*W or the Memory of Childhood*).

The first part of this section explores the notion that most narratives of a life story start with the telling of early childhood experiences, as argued by Eakin (1999): “[t]he family stories you grow up with make you. They build you, they create you” (*HOL* 117). Even though he is not the writer of autobiographical tales and does not offer chronological records, Chatwin's childhood memories serve to bring into being his own life story. We connect with Chatwin the child and his perception of the world as soon as we start reading *IP*. In the same way, the first four chapters of *TS* are quite autobiographical if we regard the narrator Bruce as the writer Bruce. When he writes that: “The woman carried a dilly-bag and a baby at her breast. A small boy strolled beside her – I identified myself with him. I remember the fantastic homelessness of my first five years” (*TS* 5), he is relating his experience of movement at an early age to his fixation with nomadism in adulthood. Some articles in *Anatomy* also reveal aspects of his early years. Atlases, gas masks, trains, homes and homelessness, teddy bears, suitcases, glass-fronted cabinets, grandmothers and great-aunts, his first job as “self-appointed guide to Shakespeare's monument and tomb in the church” (*Anatomy* 6) are all rooted in his earliest memories and eventually shape his adult life and his writing. However significant, they are not real epiphanies of recall -the ones that abound in autobiography- which may open up a whole metaphysical world of self-recognition; instead, they operate as triggering elements which awaken in him not only the awareness of his own history but also of his own literary competence and aesthetic responsibility. It is these triggering experiences rather than self-reflective episodes that occupy his narrative. Despite the fragmentary quality of his memories and his

elusiveness, the reader of Chatwin's texts can detect both the foundations of autobiographical remembrance and the existence of a storied Self.

How is this storied Self to be recognized? To start with, it would be too easy a connection to find in Chatwin's memories of his journeys on the train and his suitcases, trunks and his fondness of atlases when he was a child the sole reason for his eagerness to travel and to escape from England when he reached adulthood. Actually, both childhood trips and atlases represent his open-minded, non-partisan attitude towards his own condition of Englishness: to him the world was much wider and diverse than the stagnant England depicted in the 80s and he found it challenging to venture out of it. Second, the fact that he lived his childhood in a pseudo-matriarchal community of mother, grandmothers and great-aunts should not be considered -following the Freudian notion of sexual repression- the reason for his homosexuality, but an unfailing source of "narrated" memories and "handed down" stories which ignited his imagination and helped him to construct his own past experiences "anew in each memory event or act of recall" (Eakin 107). Although Chatwin's storied Self contains much of what might be expected from such memories and experiences previously mentioned, it is more intricate and off the beaten track than the sometimes formula-like interpretations of psychological/Freudian criticism.

I would argue that Chatwin, like Eakin, considered autobiographical discourse to be "a theatre in which the self's uniqueness, privacy, and interiority are on display" (110). By now we know that Chatwin "liked the flat not only for what it displayed but for what it concealed" (Clapp 19), which is the reason why his storied Self does not fit in with the usual models of self-narration. His is not a Self devoid of story but an in-storied Self with a conscientiously elaborated content and narrative form: to confer credibility upon his work he turns to anthropological fieldwork on the Self rather than

psychological introspection or psychoanalytic diagnoses. McAdams refers to Margaret Mead not only as a prominent social scientist and anthropologist but also as a vivid traveller who perceived a special relationship between travel and home. Like Chatwin, she had a childhood on the move due to her father's university job which made it necessary that "his wife and children repeatedly move[d] – 'like a family of refugees'" (*The Stories* 138). McAdams affirms that this itinerant life shaped her nature and allowed her to explore her Self and her environment. It seems as if Chatwin and Mead both had found out that there were so many new people to meet and new territories to discover both nearby and far away that if one managed to keep pace with this, there would be little time left for digressions. Although Mead wrote her autobiography and Chatwin did not, both of them were "remarkably unreflective. [She] was more of a restless observer than a sedentary philosopher. [She] had little patience for leisurely speculation about anything, even about [herself]" (139). This evidences that some childhood memories can define adult life and fashion a life story without breeding a need for speculation about the Self. It seems as if the chronicle of the Self of these two writers who were on the move from an early age reproduced the same kind of "narrative" movement: there is no time to describe inwardness in a separate tale but to live it throughout the texts themselves.

Having enquired into Chatwin's childhood memories, I will now attempt to analyse the aim of Chapter four, which is to clarify the author's life story not only in terms of autobiography but also in terms of how comfortable the writer feels when trying to narrate himself. The question as to whether Chatwin had a story of his own to tell has been dealt with in section one and the conclusion is that he definitely has. I will now examine the question as to whether there existed real factors that prevented him from narrating it. The issue should be envisaged from two different perspectives. First,



as a possible pathology: is Chatwin's capacity for self-narration "impaired"? Second, does his resistance to self-narration have an ethical basis, in other words does it have something to do with his reluctance to affect other people, bearing in mind that when we disclose our own Selves, we disclose the Selves of others?

As far as the first perspective is concerned, Eakin (1999) argues that some clinicians, both psychologists and neurologists, think there is a tight connection between narrative disorders and identity disorders, as individuals who have lost "the ability to construct narrative have lost their selves" (124). Nevertheless, we cannot believe this assertion blindly because in Eakin's words: "is there such a thing as an unstoried self?" (126). We might not recognize Chatwin's Self in a text but it definitely exists in one way or another. The fact that some people cannot narrate themselves overtly and easily does not mean they are likely to have an "[un]healthier" (141) identity than those who can. It is true that Chatwin is reluctant to resort to autobiographical telling, but he does have a storied Self and we should regard his reluctance as a conscious act of secrecy rather than a lack of narrative competence or a sign of pathology. Chatwin developed and maintained his Self through the aesthetic homogeneity and the thematic diversity of his work, something which leads us to believe that Chatwin did not suffer from a narrative disorder and therefore neither did he suffer from an identity disorder; he showed signs of healthy identity through means other than those more familiar to us and more widely accepted. Sidonie Smith's theory on autism expands the possibility of "a subjectivity different from anything we think we know" (127), so we could say that Chatwin is rendering a new model of subjective narration. We, as readers and individuals, may be culturally conditioned to accept the most well-known and standardised models of subjectivity as necessary just because they fulfil our expectations of self-narration. As Eakin states:

The narrative model of identity that forms the bedrock of interpersonal relations in human communities is more like a piece of necessary cultural equipment than an ultimate psychological reality, something we need in order to get on with the business of living as we have been socialized to understand it. (127)

In the same way as he shied away from political commitment, domestic attachment and intimate contact with the native people in the places he visited, so Chatwin managed to strip himself of this cultural veil of “narrative socialization.”

Chatwin transgressed long-established models of many kinds; the model of autobiographical telling being one of them. In doing so he constructed a new model of identity: a new model of life story. In this respect and in spite of his non-autobiographical mood, he might approximate some twentieth-century autobiographers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Ronald Fraser, Roland Barthes and Richard Rodríguez who, according to Eakin, showed “a distinctly antinarrative, antiautobiographical desire”, that of undoing “the work of individuation altogether [...] to return to an earlier mode of being released from the burden of self-reflexive autonomy.” (136)

Chatwin travelled light: a few chosen objects and a couple of books to read on the way. His choice epitomized his endeavour to be stripped of the load that a nomad would never take with him. If we expand this metaphor into the field of literature, Chatwin also wrote light: his stories filter through to us by means of a simple neat style and by means of different degrees of proximity to things and ideas. Regarding Chatwin’s style, Gnoli (2002) contends that there is no clear background, no cause-effect explanation of things and no psychological description of characters; what is brought to the foreground is the straightforward strength of his style and his immediacy: “In fact, everything is brought to light equally, nothing remains in the shade” (Gnoli

16). Therefore the aforementioned “burden of self-reflexive autonomy” suggested by Eakin was bound to be discarded in his writing. His texts would carry the burden of representing the author, instead of the author being the one in charge of displaying self-representation. Eakin recalls Barthes’s autobiography *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* as an example of the lack of connection between the “I” of a text and any Self “anchored in an extratextual realm of biographical reference” (Eakin 137), and I claim that Chatwin recreates the same notion. Barthes declares “I do not say: ‘I am going to describe myself’ but ‘I am writing a text, and I call it R.B.’” (qtd. in Eakin 138); the text is its own author. By opening the book with a moving portfolio of photographs showing his childhood in Bayonne that “stand in for his absent story” (139), Barthes does not subtract personal information from the written account but rather extends his Self. Likewise Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, his last published book, ostensibly focuses on photography but the central pages are devoted to his mother’s final illness and death in 1977. Barthes offers a different model of autobiography/life writing and confers a different dimension on self-representation; something which Chatwin also practised in his narrative.

As far as the second perspective is concerned, I will analyse whether his resistance to self-narration has something to do with his reluctance to affect or involve other people in the act of life writing. To carry out such an analysis, we should recall Chatwin’s particular stance on moral freedom, his attitude towards self-effacement and his role as outsider. The position of outsider has been tackled in Chapter one in connection with Chatwin’s outlook of non-involvement while travelling and his unwillingness to experience *endotisme*.<sup>16</sup> The idea of moral freedom has been analysed in Chapter two as one of the consequences of approaching literature from the anthropological concept of liminality. Self-effacement, both in writing and

photographing, has been discussed in Chapter three where Chatwin's photographs and texts are compared with Cartier Bresson's pictures and Berger's writing respectively. Finally, his view on self-narration, which is explored in this chapter, reproduces a similar neutral approach, as far as the relationship between narrative subject and narrative object is concerned. Hence, we realize that Chatwin's ethics involves more than one aesthetic field.

Chatwin's mindset subscribes to the motto "you are you" (Eakin 141) in that it represents his attempt to avoid judgements of and distinctions between what is healthy/normal and what is unhealthy/uncanny. As Eakin observes: "Identity narratives generate identity judgements; the way we practice identity narrative makes a difference: is the display of affect appropriate, is it lacking? Either way, as we make such evaluations [...] we enter an ethical realm" (141). Chatwin never agreed to enter ethical realms so he promoted a form of life writing that would give voice to non-judgemental individuals. If we should ever believe, like Lejeune, that "[e]veryone thinks he is more or less the owner of his name, of his person, of his own story (and even of his image)" (167)<sup>17</sup> then we should all be careful that this proprietorial sense of identity narrative does not harm other people's lives: there must be an ethics of life writing. In the act of disclosing our own secrets, we disclose the secrets of others, so by telling our life story we are implicating the lives of others. Chatwin was aware of this threat to privacy and his choice was therefore no self-narration. Eakin affirms that we live in "a climate of the so-called age of memoir" and he wonders whether this is one more sign of "a decadent culture of disclosure" (Eakin 157). Chatwin rarely disclosed himself in his texts; we may wonder if this was so as not to associate himself with this climate of decadence or whether he was simply being true to his own convictions in trying not to violate one important ethical issue: that of human beings' right to privacy. Robert C.

Post states that “[p]rivacy does not refer to an objective physical space of secrecy, solitude, or anonymity, but rather to the forms of respect that we owe to each other as members of a common community.” (qtd. in Eakin 165)

Having said this, there is a contradiction between Chatwin’s refusal to narrate his own story overtly (in a way, to testify to who he was) and his texts. On the one hand, he portrayed real people and he did not hesitate to show irony, scepticism and sympathy towards them when telling their life stories. Similarly, when he travelled he listened to the stories other people told and eventually made them his; at times he even made things up. In this respect, he has quite often been accused of stealing their stories and of altering the original tale to adapt both theme and plot to his own emotional needs and to the aesthetic demands of his imagination. On the other hand, he was reluctant to render his own story: in spite of living in a time of easy access to people’s lives, he never let anybody intrude on his, almost as an act of self-preservation. This paradox must be interpreted in relation to the ethical issue of privacy. It is true that telling one’s own story may harm others, but there is also harm in the act of telling others’ life stories. Similarly others’ fictional stories are violated when they are transferred from an oral format into a written text. Ethical conflicts emerge at this point, in particular when it comes to defining a model of selfhood and agency, characteristically considered autonomous and free-standing, because if we conceptualise identity as a relational condition rather than an autonomous one, then it is more difficult to mark the limits of the Self to which we can apply “a privacy-based ethics of the person” (Eakin 160). The autonomous model of selfhood is to be found in Chatwin’s travelling and writing because he travels alone, he writes alone, he tells no one about himself. In a way, he seems to adhere to Reiman’s argument that privacy “is a precondition of personhood” (qtd. in Eakin 161). However, Chatwin’s process of storytelling requires a relational

model of identity: the distance between him and the others is transgressed for the sake of storytelling, therefore others' privacy is temporarily interrupted as he needs people in order to provide him with new plots.

The second part of this section focuses on Sebald's (2005) "The Mystery of the Red-brown Skin. An approach to Bruce Chatwin" included in *Campo Santo*. In this we meet Sebald an admirer of Chatwin. He reflects on episodes of Chatwin's biography and finds connections between the British writer and three well-known French writers: Balzac, Flaubert and Perec. He also praises both Chatwin's travelling spirit -a quality he does not find among his contemporary German writers- and Chatwin's biographer Nicholas Shakespeare for having set off on an adventure such as this where he follows the writer's traces wherever he travelled -the art of biography being held in low esteem in Germany. Sebald's travel text *The Rings of Saturn*<sup>18</sup> evidences that there is definitely a communion of ideas and narrative style with Chatwin. Not only do they practice a special kind of collage within their travel texts but they also dwell on those secondary findings that form part of a journey and which depart from the central plot thereby expanding the real philosophical and aesthetic aim of the author.

Digressions are essential in Chatwin's two travel texts as well as in *The Rings of Saturn*. Similarly, like Sebald, Chatwin seems to seek a connection which is different from the interrelating means that twentieth-century society offers. He hated computers but he loved interacting with people and crossing the threshold of cultures other than his own. His "Internet"-mindset was physical rather than technological. Coincidentally Sebald owned neither a fax machine nor a telephone answering machine. He was the only faculty member at the University of East Anglia without a computer in his office: he had declined the one allotted to him, recommending that the money be used instead

for student aid. Likewise, while both Chatwin and Sebald's stories are about something local in the sense that the settings have names and people are defined as belonging to a specific time, they both in fact lead to the same large themes. Another aspect that these authors have in common is that both were keen photographers. Sebald included images in his novels which range from simple objects and postcards to pieces of old newspapers. Finally, Sebald's words: "I don't think one can write from a compromised moral position"<sup>19</sup> could equally be Chatwin's. This idea put Sebald at odds with much of contemporary writing, but he believed that no one should claim a false intimacy with the dead or appropriate others' sufferings (mostly the victims of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz). In this sense both writers approached human tragedy obliquely: Sebald showed a kind of "historical amnesia"<sup>20</sup> and Chatwin was "politically a little innocent" (Rushdie 238) probably so as to avoid commitment and exclude art from judgement.

Having listed briefly some of the similarities between the two writers, we feel more ready to reflect upon the opinions presented by Sebald in his article. Why Flaubert, Balzac and Perec? Chatwin's biographer explains that "[a]fter *In Patagonia* Bruce embraced a new set of authors. Attempting a more classical structure, he looked away from Mandelstam and Hemingway towards French writers -Balzac, Flaubert and Racine" (Shakespeare 362); he also writes that *TVOO* has been compared to *Salambô* and "Herodias" in Flaubert's *Trois Contes* in its heartlessness and sadism. In Flaubert Chatwin also found a style, the visual effect of Flaubert's paragraphing being the element which Chatwin most tried to emulate in *TVOO*. Sebald's approach to Chatwin focuses on its content rather than its form so thanks to Sebald's analysis we can reconstruct some of the least known aspects of Chatwin's personal story, part of the enigma of his storied Self (*Campo Santo* 179). The aspects I refer to are basically his childhood memories and his passions, his obsessions, fears and dispositions.

Clapp suggested to the writer that he should cut out some of the autobiographical material gleaned from the early manuscripts of his first novel *IP*. The draft version of the book was so full of autobiographical snippets, childhood and family stories and description that it was difficult to see a clear sense of direction: so much detail would have delayed “the point at which the book got to Patagonia” (*With Chatwin* 33). However, by the time Chatwin finished the editing of *IP* all his memories of childhood monsters, boyish legendary geographies, fantastical beasts, school experiences, even the “two principal walks of [his] childhood” (36) had already branded his imagination. Although in the end they were not included in his first novel, they were meant to emerge eventually: some stories, such as his feeling of homelessness, took shape in *TS* and others came to light in *OTBH*, such as the handling of ancestors. Sebald’s study of the connection between Chatwin’s work and the stories of the three French writers unveils the fact that the experiences imprinted on a child’s memory are essential to both the artistic creativity and the development of an adult. I argue that Chatwin’s remembrance episodes may be fictionalised and not necessarily manifested in autobiographical material. This is not clearly stated in Sebald’s article but his choice of these three French stories is meant to prove that the aesthetic (sometimes psychological) legacy of both family bonds with their storytelling burden and childhood tales can be spotted not only in autobiographical texts but also in non-autobiographical ones. Bearing in mind that Chatwin had “an absorbing account of his own childhood” (49), the stories *The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator*, *The Wild Ass’s Skin* and *W or the Memory of Childhood* might help us to complement the explanation of those childhood memories, pathologies and problems introduced in the first part.

About “The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator” by Flaubert, Sebald writes:



I cannot read a page of this terrifying story, the product of its author's profoundly hysterical disposition, without seeing Chatwin as he was, an *ingénu* driven by a panic need for knowledge and love, still like an adolescent at the age of thirty. (*Campo Santo*181)

Chatwin was a researcher; his obvious thirst for knowledge can be seen in his cahiers moleskins and in all the information he collected to document his fictional and non-fictional texts, now kept in 41 boxes in the Bodleian Library. Chatwin knew things but he wanted to know more as if trapped -in his own words quoted in Shakespeare's biography- in a continuous search for the miraculous and for the story which is out there waiting to be captured and told (Shakespeare 291). So did he look for love, both within his marriage and from among his friends and lovers and, by extension, from mankind. But like Saint Julian in Flaubert's tale, Chatwin seems to be dragged along by a supernatural force, both good and evil that he cannot control and that makes him lead a rather isolated life enfolded by dreams and visions. He would prefer, as Saint Julian did, "to go off hunting on his own, with just his horse and his falcon" (Flaubert 47). Like an *ingénu*, who is unable to interpret either his noble deeds or his ignoble, sometimes self-destructive actions, Chatwin lives a feeling of inexhaustible youth and an appeal to whim and escape. In her review of Nicholas Shakespeare's biography of Bruce Chatwin, Hickman comments that: "the reader has the momentary, disconcerting, impression of the subject becoming younger, rather than older, over time. It is an observation Chatwin himself would have enjoyed" (Hickman 1). On the one hand, despite some bloodshed in *TVOO* and in some episodes in *IP*, there is not as much carnage as there is in Flaubert's tale. The feeling of movement in Chatwin's texts overpowers that of slaughter. On the other hand, travellers of all kinds: foot travellers, pilgrims, mercenaries, beggars, runaway slaves, rebellious peasants, disinherited

bastards and desperados in Flaubert's story seem to parallel the misfits and exiles and bandits that roam Chatwin's texts. Their adventurous nature and their transient passage enable Chatwin to nourish his nomadic spirit and avoid settling down for good, in Sebald's words "still like an adolescent at the age of thirty" (*Campo Santo* 181). "The legend of Saint Julian Hospitator" is definitely a life story: it tells about the life of the protagonist from his birth: "After much praying to God, she bore a son" (Flaubert 42) until to death: "Julian rose up into the blue, into the open arms of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who bore him up to Heaven" (70). Narrated in the third person singular, it reads like a biographical account, or rather a hagiographic account, but this time the person's life includes both good and bad things about them. It is a story full of anxiety and suffering in which the protagonist "roamed from country to country, bearing the burden of his terrible memories" (Flaubert 66).

Perec's<sup>21</sup> *Wou le souvenir d'enfance* is also about a life story, but a double one: it contains a fictional account about a young boy and an autobiography (the author's), and it focuses on childhood memories as well as suffering and loss. Sebald writes:

The story of the shipwrecked sailor Charles Milward immediately reminded me of Georges Perec's autobiographical study *Wou le souvenir d'enfance* ['W, or the Memory of Childhood'], a work full of the most terrible and painful sensations and phantom anxieties, which begins with the account of a mentally sick boy called Gaspard Winckler [...] Chatwin too saw his journeys to the ends of the earth as expeditions in search of a lost boy, and thought he might have found him, as if in a mirror, in Gaimán when he met the shy pianist Enrique Fernández, who has since died of AIDS (like Chatwin himself) at the age of forty. (*Campo Santo* 185)

Sebald suggests that Chatwin travelled so far south to search both for a lost boy, be it Enrique Fernández or any other Gaspard Winckler, and also to find himself, the eternal boy who got lost -symbolically- while seeking a childhood memory of a piece of skin of a brontosaurus. In the Elsewhere where he travelled he met doubles, mirrored images of himself in a premonition and he followed their traces.

To grasp the scope of Sebald's observation it is worth analysing Perec's book. *W* contains two alternate texts. There is a fictional text about a man (Gaspard Winckler) who tries to recover his life story. Thanks to a mysterious Otto Apfelstahl he learns that he experienced a shipwreck when he was a young boy but, while the corpses of his mother and the rest of the crew were found, they lost track of him for a long time. Then Gaspard remembers that he lived an adventurous life on an island in Tierra de Fuego called *W* which was ruled by the Olympic ideals of sport. He recalls those years with horror as if it had been a nightmare. Simultaneously there is in the book a fragmented autobiographical account in which Perec unfolds his own childhood years during the war of which he seems to have no good memories at all: his parents died and he had to live with his aunt. At first glance it would seem that these two stories have no connection whatsoever but in fact they complement each other. In a way, the two first-person narrators with their fictional/non-fictional accounts develop a whole story: the story of Perec the orphan who wrote "*W*" when he was thirteen years old and who resurrected it to write his adult novel *W*. The fictional story penetrates the real life story of the writer who says that when he was thirteen he "made up, told and drew a story. Later I forgot it. Seven years ago, one evening in Venice, I remembered that this story was called "*W*" and that somehow it was, if not the story, at least one of the stories of my own childhood"<sup>22</sup> (Perec 18). Thus factual autobiography is strengthened by fictional material. The "*I*" of the story is both realistic and imaginary.

As far as the form is concerned, *W* shows a peculiar construction. The chapters of the book alternate between the fictional story in italics and the autobiographical text in straight type. This means that the two texts are not only distinct from one another in content but also visually. The readers are introduced to the imaginary story with a feeling of mystery and dream, but this is interrupted; all of a sudden they enter the realm of a new text, an autobiography, with objective data about family, people and History with a capital letter. We are forced to make the shift from fiction to fact and vice versa and we get confused for a while. Perec seems to break the flow of the narration with a clear aim: so that we can understand progressively that the phantoms and nightmares we have produced in our imagination and that we put into writing are much closer to our real childhood memories than we might expect. In *W*, the form, materialised in the fragile intersections which separate one tale from the other, like points of suspension, gives voice to the content, namely the things which are unsaid during the construction of our Selves. Through these thin voices we become aware that fact complements fiction and in turn fiction shapes the silenced episodes of our lives. In *W* we realize that form and content are blended even if they are clearly differentiated; in turn a whole life story is told. Likewise in Chatwin's texts we realize that the form has been thinned down until it becomes thought and idea. Even though Chatwin does not fully give himself away as Perec does, Chatwin and Perec share a similar vision of both literary and personal creation: fact and fiction, truth and lies become reliable sources of not only biographical record but also autobiographical exposure. Through his shifts from fiction to fact and vice versa Chatwin also outlines his own story. Interestingly enough, Shakespeare explains that when Chatwin was in Patagonia he visited David Bridges, the son of Lucas Bridges, who had written one of Chatwin's favourite books, *Uttermost Part of the Earth*. As Shakespeare comments: "His [David Bridges]

grandfather, the first missionary to Tierra de Fuego, personified Bruce's childhood fantasy of the abandoned orphan" (291). The character of an orphan child developed through Perec's novel belongs to Chatwin's childhood fantasies as well.

Finally, Sebald relates Balzac's novel *La Peau de chagrin* (1830) with the strange piece of skin that Chatwin saw in his grandmother's locked glass-fronted cabinet and which inflamed his imagination and his wanderlust. Chatwin's relic, according to Sebald, has something perverse about it, and at the same time "something pointing far beyond the realm of the secular" (*Campo Santo* 185). The piece of wild ass's skin in Balzac's story resembles the scrap of fur of the giant sloth which drove Chatwin to travel to Patagonia. Both items "grant even our most secret and shameful wishes, but shrink a little with the bestowal of each desired object, so that the gratification of our amorous longing is intimately related to the death wish" (186). To try and understand the connection between the two writers as far as the relationship to the death wish is concerned we should recall section one. In this we examined the way Chatwin lived his life and anticipated his death through writing, now we can extend our conclusions by reviewing the way Sebald (2005) tackles the issue of death.

In a television interview given by Chatwin not long before his death we see him already wasted to little more than the proverbial skin and bone, with eyes dreadfully widened, but talking with an innocent and unprecedented passion about his last fictional character, Utz the china collector of Prague. It is the most shattering epiphany of a writer that I know. (*Campo Santo* 186)

At the beginning of the novel, Raphaël de Valentin, the protagonist of Balzac's story, is presented as nameless. He is desperately unhappy and wants to commit suicide. While browsing through different valuable objects in an antiques shop, he feels attracted to a

strange piece of wild ass's skin, but this object bears a curse: it will fulfil all its owner's wishes but it will shrink every time one of the wishes is granted: the smaller the skin becomes, the fewer days the owner will have left to live. Despite the power of this fateful talisman, Raphaël buys it and he accepts the death threat because he wants to live life to excess. Fortunately, thanks to love his attitude to life eventually changes. He feels happier and he tries to get rid of this talisman any way he can. However, the skin cannot be destroyed and its size has fatefully decreased. Raphaël's health degenerates day by day until he finally dies.

The connection between this story and the two previously reviewed by Sebald is that they all explore suffering, fear and death as well as an element of life story. The novel is structured in three chapters; in the middle one "La Femme sans coeur" the protagonist tells his friend Emile the story of his life and the reasons why he wanted to die and what drove him to buy the piece of wild ass's skin. The protagonist's autobiographical account is reinforced and deepened by his friend's comments which make the story livelier and closer to the reader. We perceive that the central character needs to tell his life to someone so as to justify his actions, all of which lead to death. He needs both an interlocutor and a listener. It is not until the end of the first chapter when the protagonist leaves the antiques shop with his piece of skin of wild ass and meets his friend that we know his name: Raphaël. Until then he is presented as "the young man," "the unknown" (*un jeune homme, l'inconnu*), somebody anonymous and lost. Once he acquires the mysterious talisman, he acquires identity and starts to relate to friends and people with names and faces. Paradoxically, as soon as he holds the talisman, his life starts to thin and in turn his identity begins to fade. The middle chapter with its recall of early memories is the protagonist's only autobiographical reference, the only time he really discloses himself. Both told by a third person narrator, the first

chapter “Le Talisman” (wrapped with magic) and the last one “L’Agonie” (like a countdown to death) act as the frame of the central narration adding suspense and anxiety respectively to the personal account. Why does Sebald find a trace of death wish in Chatwin’s longing for a mysterious relic like in Raphaël in Balzac’s story?

To find Chatwin in these three stories we should examine childhood memories and the “depths of the dreaming imagination” (*Campo Santo* 186) when we venture into the telling of our life story. To begin with, Sebald, impressed by the last interview given by Chatwin, reflects on suffering and grief and examines how life can shrink after years in search of a dream and a life lived to excess. In his view, Chatwin absorbed life until the end of his life as if he were driven by a passionate pull to extremes: Chatwin the wanderer in Patagonia (*IP*) and Australia (*TS*). The same seems to apply to his characters; all of them experience excess in various ways: the collector in Prague (*Utz*), the slave trader in Dahomey (*TVOO*) and the unsociable twins in Radnorshire County in Wales (*OTBH*); they all covet a particular way of life which may satisfy their desires. All of Chatwin’s fictional protagonists die at the end: there is no hope for those who have sought a dream and found it. Unfortunately, that was his own premonitory story. In “The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator” Flaubert depicts his character as being overpowered by his desire to hunt and kill: “Julian’s thirst for slaughter was insatiable” (50) and also as a man who travelled through the hottest and the coldest lands and slew Vipers and Dragons (54), similar to the main character in Chatwin’s *TVOO* (56). As for Pécq’s fictional character Gaspard, he tells about the life of a child on the island W where the aim of all the children is to become athletes and to triumph as such: “The struggle for life is the law in here [ ... ] the thirst for victory, the victory at any cost [ ... ] ‘One must fight to live’” (Pécq 123, 191).<sup>23</sup> Balzac’s young man Raphaël wants to taste the best wines, enjoy the best company of friends and women and fall victim to pleasure

(Balzac 102); therefore he will surrender to the supernatural effects of a talisman even if that leads to death.

Sebald's father came home a stranger to his three-year-old son in 1947 after being released from a POW camp in France. Chatwin spent his childhood with his mother and other relatives as his father was at war. Flaubert's protagonist Julian lives most of his younger years without his parents whom he eventually kills. Perec was an orphan: his father died in the war and his mother was taken to a concentration camp in the same way that his fictional character Gaspard lost his parents when he was a child. Raphaël de Valentin had an authoritarian father who controlled his wishes and his likes and he felt he would never be able to do what he had eagerly longed for. Chatwin could identify with at least two of these fictional stories, with more or less tragedy or supernatural powers involved. Chatwin's father spent the war years at sea and "he was only a visitor at home" (*Campo Santo* 181); this must have affected Chatwin's almost "clan" vision of a family with all the links and bonds of affection and dependence as well as all the particular rites of passage which every young member should undergo in order to really be connected to their kinsmen and kinswomen -like the boy on the island W in Perec's story. Kinship, struggle and death are key words in the three stories recalled by Sebald. Chatwin is to be found in all three of them, as a writer with a storied Self.



### 4.3. Taking and Finding One's Bearings Rather than Writing in Autobiographical Terms.

Children need paths to explore, to take bearings on the earth in which they live, as a navigator takes bearings on familiar landmarks. If we excavate the memories of childhood, we remember the paths first, things and people second – paths down the garden, the way to school, the way round the house, corridors through the bracken or long grass. Tracking the paths of animals was the first and most important element in the education of early man. (Bruce Chatwin, *Anatomy of Restlessness* 101)

Chatwin acts out a clear literary silence when it comes to admitting that he might need, as a writer and as an individual, to fit his own life into some metaphorical world. He believes that “children need paths to explore, to take bearings on the earth in which they live” but Chatwin never says he was one of these children in need of a real path, neither does he give his bearings away. In *Coasting* Raban's use of the metaphor of air and water out of sync is an example of a recognizable expression of not only a navigator's experience *in situ* but the experience of a man and writer who is trying to take bearings so as to achieve a deeper insight into his own personal and professional condition; he admits that:

I tried to fit my own life into these great movements of air and water[ ...]  
It was not a scientific exercise. It was more like Hindu astrology, a search for the single auspicious moment when you and the universe are in perfect conjunction and fortune smiles. But my stars were out of sync.

When the air was right, the water was wrong; when the water was right,  
the air was wrong. (40)

Korte claims that Raban plays some metafictional game (Korte 148) in this novel; I would argue that Raban is also telling a story of his own: he speaks out for his Self. We hardly ever find that openness in Chatwin's texts because he was looking for a way to give himself away without ever stating he was doing so. In fact, he was not interested in self-revelation; to him this would become an act of self-betrayal.

Having established a connection between Chatwin's "taking bearings" and Raban's *Coasting*, it is worth describing what each term means. A bearing is an exact position, usually measured from north. To get one's bearings means to orient oneself, to find out where you are and where other things are, and, metaphorically, it means to establish oneself, to decide on a course of conduct. To take a bearing you need a compass; an interesting coincidence in that, Bruce was said to be a "compass without a needle" (Shakespeare 221). Furthermore, he wrote his collection of articles under the title *WAIIDH*, asking himself what he was doing somewhere. One of Chatwin's friends comments on Bruce's personality: "One had the impression Bruce didn't have anyone whom he trusted to tell him where to go. Peter Levi helped him" (222). Levi writes that Chatwin thought that his [Levi's] life was some kind of solution because he travelled about and he was a writer. In "The Morality of Things" Chatwin claims that "things appear to be vital to us; to be without them is to be lost or deranged" (*Anatomy* 181). In *TS* Arkady Volchock explains that "'A song', he said, 'was both map and direction-finder. Providing you knew the song, you could always find your way across country'" (*TS* 13). Chatwin's obsession with paths, tracks and objects and his interest in deciphering and examining the meaning of the Dreamtime reflects his need to find his own way. All in all, there appears to be a sort of disorientation in Chatwin's vital and

professional trajectory and it is worth trying to find out why this was so. In Chapter one Chatwin was set side by side with Raban in order to compare their particular views on the act of travelling. Now they are contrasted again, this time to weigh up their implication in the narration of their own Selves. Chatwin seems to be in search of his bearings both in reality and metaphorically, whereas Raban does not display such a feeling of drifting in spite of sometimes being off-track. Raban involves himself in the definition of the term coasting, he makes himself the example of the definition. To do so he goes back to his own past, which he describes as “the dutiful, constrained, genteel 1950s England” (*Coasting* 20) and tries to interpret himself and his text. Once he was dismissed by his schoolmasters as “a hopeless coaster”: “The coaster – as my school report pointed out in no uncertain terms – is someone who uses the minimum of effort to go down a slippery slope on the margin of things” (*Coasting* 20). Then he renders a more personal description of the term and as a writer he identifies himself with a coaster, someone who lives a metaphor for a life on the fringe:

The coaster never stays in one berth longer than he can help [...] He doesn't quite belong either to the land or to the ocean. He is betwixt-and-between man, neither exactly a citizen nor exactly a foreigner. Choosing to live on the shifting frontier where the land meets the water and the water shades into the land [...] In writing I found a good coaster's occupation, unloading my mixed cargoes at one port after another. The writer, sitting alone in a room, watching society go past his window and trying to recreate by playing with words on a page, has his own kind of sea-distance. (20)

Both British writers, Chatwin in his quality of liminal character and Raban in his condition of coaster, seem to have lived their lives on the fringe, wandered or sailed “on

shifting frontiers” and they felt “neither citizens nor foreigners.” The essence of their wanderlust is found in border areas and it is rooted in an incapacity to stay in one place for long. Despite this similarity and the fact that they were born in the same decade and hence belonged to the same generation of restless writers of the eighties, they do not reproduce the same pattern of self-representation. While they both wrote about their journeys in and out of their land, Raban does not elude the telling of who he is or the reason why he is writing whereas Chatwin does. He guards his privacy at all costs.

The works of Philippe Lejeune, Mieke Bal and James Olney as well as that of other critics such as Elizabeth Bruss and Avron Fleishman<sup>24</sup> have certainly been essential to my study inasmuch as they analyse the autobiographical elements within fiction and the possibility or impossibility of an “I” completely formed. However, in my analysis of Chatwin’s life story and narrative subjectivity, they are a research reference rather than a key to the understanding of Chatwin’s lack of self-exposure. Eakin’s and McAdams’s approaches to autobiography, by contrast, provide a different element which I consider to be a starting point as far as Chatwin is concerned, as they evaluate autobiography from a new perspective. As to self-narration, their concern is to know how we come to be the people we say we are when we write the stories of our lives:

Thus my concerns are both literary and experiential, for the selves we display in autobiographies are doubly constructed, not only in the act of writing a life story but also in a lifelong process of identity formation of which the writing is usually a comparative late phase. (Eakin ix)

Eakin also claims that not all writers are ready to play the autobiographical game of stating “I was born ... I did things ... I felt feelings ...” (ix) and end up with the impression they have portrayed themselves. Some writers need time to find the right discourse to narrate themselves; some do not find it and others do not even want to.

According to Clapp “[Chatwin] was eager that the narrative shouldn’t be strewn with reaction shots of the author as sensitive traveller – this was to be a book about what he saw, not about what he felt” (Clapp 31).<sup>25</sup> Chatwin, then, seems to be willing to practise one particular strategy of self-representation which Eakin offers. Eakin develops a model of self-narration which not only protects identity but also sets one’s own Self in relation to the Selves of others, thus incorporating an “Ethics of Life Writing” into the concept of autobiography. He also insists on the idea of identity formation which Chatwin repeatedly develops in his texts in line with his fixation that we are constantly done and undone. Similarly, McAdams, with his imagoes as personifications of the Self, allows us to make sense of Chatwin’s chameleonic nature. Not only transforming but also storytelling helps him to stay away from who he is, therefore I agree with the actor and theatre director Peter Eyre when he comments on Chatwin: “In this he shared the malleability of all-knowing Proteus, eluding questions by changing into a lion, a serpent or fire. His whole life was spent transforming. As long as he was talking he could not be questioned.” (Shakespeare 10)

In fact, in Chatwin the question is not only being able to write about his Self but also recognizing the multiplicity of Selves within himself. Chatwin is the patchwork Montaigne identifies in his *Essays*: “We are all patchwork, and so shapeless and diverse in composition that each bit, each moment, plays its own game. And there is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others” (*Essays*, Second Book, 1). The psychologist Hubert Hermans presents a narrative approach to understanding the Self which may help us to grasp how Chatwin made sense of himself through the stories he told, through the “I’s” and “Me’s” he displayed. Hermans delivers the term “valuations”; these are: “beloved persons, disturbing dreams, difficult problems, cherished opportunities, memories of particularly important events from the past, plans

or goals for the future” (McAdams, *The Person* 668). Hermans suggests that the examination of valuations “is a window into each person’s uniquely positioned dialogical self” (670). He distinguishes the senses of Self as “I” and “Me”:

The I is the self as author of a life narrative, complete with the valuations that provide life with meaning. The Me is the self as actor in the life narrative, an actor who “moves” throughout the story to assume many different roles. But the I also moves, from one “I position” to another, making for multiple authors, multiple “I’s, for the same life story. (670)

Hermans’s ideas are applicable to Chatwin, as he defends the dialogical Self as multiple and embedded in dialogue. This means the “I” is the author of its own life story but its performance is not a static one; it moves from one “I” position to another and adopts different outlooks from which to understand the Self. All these positions are in dialogue with each other. Chatwin’s “I” positions are different and sometimes opposed, but this contradiction is a sign of reconciliation if we consider Chatwin’s peculiar way of dealing with dualities, as examined in Chapter two. The multiplicity of Selves that Chatwin displays in his work is dynamic. First, it changes in time and space. Second, because Chatwin’s “I”s are all endowed with a voice which interacts with the others as if they were characters in a story. This dialogue of voices takes place within one novel but also between several novels because Chatwin constructs a complex, narratively structured Self which is not limited to a single circumscribed text. He presents a Self that is polyphonic, each voice presenting its own world independently but at the same time forwarding a dialogical relation. To illustrate such a narrative device visually, Chatwin’s dialogical Self could be better observed from a bird’s-eye view as if it was one of those Nazca lines in the Peruvian desert he wrote about through Maria Reiche’s

research: mysterious and cryptic from a close position, clear and understandable from a higher field of vision.

Being a man who not only refuses to give himself away while writing, but also feels uneasy with the distance between individuals while travelling, Chatwin seems to be torn between Bakan's concepts of agency and communion. On the one hand, he tends to separate Self from Others so as to master, "dominate and control the self and the environment" (McAdams 254). On the other hand, as a result of his beliefs in both the anthropological concept of *communitas* and the powerful linking quality of storytelling, he feels impelled to merge or unite with others, "to surrender the self as part of a larger whole" (254). As in many aspects of his personality, Chatwin lives a clash of opposites which he struggles to make meaningful. When he follows the model of agency and communion together, he is the humanist. Sometimes he reproduces the model of agency; only then is he the deserter, the traveller, the sage, the maker and the artist. Sometimes he is the lover, the friend and the ritualist, thus sharing the essence of communion. A fourth model would be that of low agency and low communion, which Chatwin also recreates; then he is the escapist, the wanderer, the survivor and the victim.<sup>26</sup> Chatwin managed to reconcile these opposites without denying any of them and he finally became the mature Self, the synthesis of opposing imagoes<sup>27</sup> being a hallmark of this maturity. He found the way to narrate the change from one role into the other. In fact, Chatwin uses writing for two reasons: first to change himself and then to express these changes that are taking place inside himself. His multiple transforming Self is to be seen in the traveller and the storyteller in *IP*, the collector in *Utz*, the dual individual in *OTBH*, the beast in *TVOO*, the philosopher and the obsessive wanderer in *TS*, the friend and the inquisitive article writer in *WAIDH* and other roles which he tries

to organize within the narration of his multiple identity. This body of characterizations in narrative would shape his life story. According to McAdams:

I can be these things in a way that is unique to me, and in a way that is self-consistent, coherent, meaningful, purposeful, and gratifying.

Creating a life story that contains a rich but finite source of characterization –a suitable cast of *imagoes*- enables me to resolve the problem of simultaneously playing many different roles but still being myself. (*The Person* 654)

McAdams's concept of imago could be seen as the narrative pattern according to which the different Bruces we encounter in his texts are to be interpreted. In these imagoes we can accommodate the diversity of Chatwin's Selves and thus try to solve certain conflicts caused by his multiplicity of identities; mainly the conflict between telling the truth or avoiding the truth by taking advantage of his manifold personality. Chatwin's credibility can be guaranteed by all his contradictions as the more differentiation we find the more reconciliation appears. I agree with Hermans when he states that:

We may concede that the story may have many characters (or imagoes), but it is a single I who creates them [...] the I is really a host of storytellers; there is no single perspective for an author, but rather many different positions from which the story is told. Each I position can establish itself as a more-or-less autonomous "voice." (qtd. in McAdams, *The Person* 670)

Imagoes are the various forms in which the main character of a life story appears; they also share "conceptual space with certain psychoanalytic ideas such as 'internalized objects' and inner 'states', 'voices', and 'personifications'" (652). Chatwin has different voices through which he symbolically tells his own story. Therefore, Chatwin's life



story contains more than one imago and each of them is connected to a particular set of identity resources. Despite the interconnection between narrative characters in Chatwin's texts and McAdams's imagoes, the range of Chatwin's multiple characters is much wider and more assorted than the definition and types of imagoes that McAdams defines and develops in *The Person*, and the ideas of myth and story which he analyses in *The Stories we live by. Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. It is certainly thought-provoking to collect some of the different characters which Chatwin plays both in real life and through his fictional characters and which enable him "to resolve the problem of simultaneously playing many different roles but still being [himself]" (654). Some of them would be: the neophyte, the peripatetic and the traveller, the frontiersman and the placeless, the intellectual and the aesthete, the photographer, the writer, the storyteller and the journalist, the dilettante and the poseur, the name-dropper and the patronizer, the collector, the voyeur, the trickster and the escapologist, the mimic, the anthropologist and the ethnographic "I", the Westerner, the Englishman, the European and the cosmopolitan, the ironic, the obsessive and the sick PWA.

Through all these imagoes Chatwin was able to construct an open and coherent story of the Self and to make his life meaningful not only to himself but also to others. He could preserve his identity by, according to Giddens, "[keeping] a particular narrative going" (qtd. in McAdams, *The Person* 620). Chatwin's ongoing narrative, however, does not necessarily comprise turning points, envisioned endings, steady progresses in the face of obstacles and a key event which is usually a transformative encounter with someone or something especial. His storytelling definitely explains himself and his world to others by creating a new hero myth: a hero who incorporates the transformation into himself. This hero moves forward over time and grows but not always in a linear narrative as the plots this hero develops are sometimes multiple and

contradictory and show both cyclical movements and ambivalent emotional states.

Chatwin's writing is Chatwin himself, and this communion of author and work of art is to be found in him more than in any other writer because Chatwin fashions his stories out of his obsessions, passions and transformations. His is a narrative wholeness which results in a personal wholeness: Chatwin the writer and the thinker is Chatwin the man so if we take Chatwin's books together, they are like the distillation of his various personalities into one overarching myth of Chatwin.

His myth comprises an epistemological approach to reality in the sense that Chatwin asks himself how he can interpret this world of which he is part and what he is in this world. The title of his posthumous book *WAIDH*, for example is not just a coincidence with or a replica of Rimbaud's words.<sup>28</sup> It is the expression of a real inquiry about himself at a certain moment as well as an inquiry about human nature in general. Yet his myth also provides an ontological pursuit as Chatwin wants to know which world this is, what is to be done in it and which of his Selves is to do it. Therefore, when mapping Chatwin's identities, we realize that he multiplies himself to be able to interpret this world from different angles and at the same time to explore which of his Selves is to act in it. To validate such a myriad of personae we should recall what Pessoa (2002) wrote about the Self in *The Book of Disquiet*: "Each of us is several, is many, is a profusion of selves. So that the self who disdains his surroundings is not the same as the self who suffers or takes joys in them. In the vast colony of our being there are many species of people who think and feel in different ways" (200). Pessoa admits he is not a simple creature who thinks of and lives inside and outside his individuality at ease. He says that although he multiplies himself by getting deep into "his colony of being", he has created an echo and an abyss of himself by thinking (51). In relation to this disquiet it is timely to mention McAdams's revision of the concept "angst":

Each of us is thrown into the world with the daunting task of responding creatively to our own freedom. We do not know who we are, nor why we are here. We are free to define ourselves. Our freedom is a condemnation because of the anxiety we go through in constructing our personal myths. (*The Stories* 165)

Chatwin, in the process of fashioning his identity and in the elaboration of his own philosophy of art and life, considered freedom in general and moral freedom in particular two essential signposts. However, his conviction entailed anxiety because he had to figure out on his own what he was expected to do, what he was expected to give of himself. Gnoli's study on Chatwin's *IP* may help us trace the writer's anxiety. *IP* was first published in Italy in 1982. The same year Antonio Gnoli, a well-known journalist of *La Repubblica*, interviewed Chatwin when the writer was in Rome. Some years later, in 2000, Gnoli published his own book *La nostalgia dello spazio* based on his encounter with Chatwin and which included the transcription of the interview. At some point in the interview Chatwin declares that he had aimed to turn the remote Patagonia into a symbol of human restlessness; then he affirms that there is a difference between restlessness and disquiet. It is in this divergence of nuances that we can recall Chatwin's ontological and epistemological approaches to reality that I mentioned before. He maintains that disquiet is connected to the uneasiness caused by some inadequacy with the sense of doing and being as disquiet breaks our relationship with our own identity, and it also has to do with the soul and with time, in particular with the way in which we experience this soul and this time. He clarifies that restlessness, on the other hand, begins in our brain and somehow undermines our relationship with the space and destroys the certainties we have had of this space until that moment: all of a sudden the measure that unites us to a place, the distance that is familiar to us, ends up

choking us. To Chatwin a mystic or a poet can refine and elevate their disquiet, but restlessness belongs to children and to travellers.

Bearing in mind that Chatwin's personality comprises both categories, Chatwin might have lived both disquiet and restlessness in his life and work, as a poet and as a traveller respectively. By questioning his identity in relation to chronotopes and by questioning his role in the interpretation of these chronotopes, he was able to create various alter-egos and to live metamorphoses like the ones Ovid described in *The Metamorphoses*; a book which Arkady, Chatwin's travel companion in *TS*, gave Chatwin as a present. While I may agree with one of Gnoli's views of Chatwin's restlessness: "the zero degree of his metamorphoses was to become the other of himself" (59), I do not share his view on the reason why Chatwin decided to metamorphose into different others. Gnoli claims that Chatwin's transformations were his own particular way of "distancing himself from himself, from his own origins and from his own history" (35), and that through his metamorphoses he could break with the continuity of the past: what he had been, he no longer wanted to be. He also affirms that suddenly Chatwin was convinced that his past was not important, that it had no weight or influence in his life and that the metamorphoses were actually "a pure exercise in oblivion" (36). I would argue that to assume that Chatwin's metamorphoses were an attempt to forget his own past and himself, an elaborate device to stop being what he used to be, would be too risky and superficial a conclusion. Forgetfulness could not have healed his wounds from the past, nor prevented him from suffering future wounds. Feeling reassured by this, Chatwin did not plan to stop the continuity of the past, on the contrary, he sought to recreate it. Some of the literary evidence of this could be found in *OTBH*, for example, with the maintenance of the rural world opposing the progressive introduction of civilization. In the novel Chatwin opposes modernization

and longs for old worlds, although not without sometimes bitterly questioning it. In *TVOO* the protagonist is relived by both his descendants and rivals through photographs and annual rituals. As he moves backwards in time, the reader gains a sense of how the past creates the present and the future. Similarly we gain a sense of fate and destiny embodied in the character of Francisco da Silva. *IP* gathers past and present through a thread of stories and the past is reanimated by starting the book in the present. In *Utz*, Kaspar Utz's porcelain figures are a reminiscence of a historical past, his own past and also Chatwin's own earlier and present collecting mania.

Thus we might be able to conclude that Chatwin's peculiar lifestyle, literary programme and independent social standpoint are all bolstered by his peculiar way of living and reliving the past. This is confirmed by Chatwin himself when in the interview with Gnoli, he asserts: "We use our own past in a varied, sometimes even unpredictable way. We cannot leave the past behind, close the door and say: now I start again. This is why every single transformation entails a continuity with what you have been" (Gnoli 68).<sup>29</sup> Either disquiet or restlessness, these two special mind and physical states affected Chatwin's visualization of the world and conditioned his ontological and epistemological approach to reality. Despite Gnoli's words: "[n]othing concerning Chatwin was titanic" (41) and his idea that Chatwin never sought the sublime or had great missions to accomplish or important destinations to reach, I believe Chatwin managed to do something grand: he overcame his disquiet by beautifying the sense of loss and by writing stories without hatred, mistrust or moral judgement. This seems to be a titanic struggle in a world devoid of utopias or idealized lives.

At the beginning of the chapter I opened up the question as to whether Chatwin found his bearings at the end of his life once he had resolved the problem of simultaneously playing many different roles and after having experienced more than

one metamorphosis both in reality and in fiction. Definitely he did, and his story of partying, pleasure-seeking and dandy-flâneur posing helped him to face the anxiety caused by his illness and imminent death. But above all he created a life story and a literary story. Chatwin worked on his life story unconsciously and consciously throughout his childhood and his adult years respectively. Although he does not tell us about his watersheds clearly, they certainly existed and they recast his life story to embody new plots, characters and ultimately new goals. In *The Person* McAdams explains that there are six standards by which to judge a life-story: coherence, openness, credibility, differentiation, reconciliation and generative integration. To begin with, Chatwin's work shows purpose and aesthetic coherence. It also shows "openness to change and tolerance for ambiguity" (McAdams 663). As to credibility, Chatwin's omissions of truth should not be questioned unreasonably but should be viewed in light of his imagination and of his fully assumed role of traveller unable to assure his audience of the truth. Likewise there is both differentiation and reconciliation as his stories are rich in characterization, plot and theme and because he provides solutions to contradictions by fostering harmony between the multiple Selves. The sixth standard, generative integration, also occurs in Chatwin's construction of a human life. He does contribute to society through his texts because he promotes and enhances "the human enterprise" (665). This contribution is found in his creative involvement in the social world as his stories are oriented not only to himself but also to the community he sometimes finds it so difficult to fit into: his stories make us think outside of ourselves. According to McAdams if we are not true to ourselves and to our time and place, then the development of our identity may "degenerate into utter narcissism" (*The Stories* 113). Even though part of Chatwin's manners, part of his self-centred posing may verge on the narcissistic, his perspective is that of an inquisitive-minded person rather than the

outlook of a moralizing-educational thinker. Chatwin the story maker -mythmaker- not only of his own story as an autobiographer but also of the stories of others as a *Tusitalia* -enhancing the mythmaking of others- was searching for unity in the Self, in literature and in society.

Kinglake's words in *Eothen* during his journey from Cairo to Suez might echo Chatwin's at the end of his life once he had lived his life story and acknowledged the wholeness of his Self no matter how many "I"s were in it: "Hitherto, in all my wanderings I had been under the care of other people -sailors, Tatars, guides, and Dragomen had watched over my welfare; but now, at last, I was here in this African desert, and I *myself, and no other, had charge of my life*"<sup>30</sup> (220). For most of his life Chatwin travelled alone, cared for by anybody who watched out for his welfare but himself: he was the wanderer, the healer, the poet.<sup>31</sup> At the end of his life, once he had become a completely dependent, defenceless sick person, and he needed caring attention and the company of others, he could still say that he was himself -multiple and changing- in charge of his life. He assumed a new characterization in his life story: the settler, the victim and the poet. In *Chatwin Revisited* Theroux recalls Chatwin in one of their last conversations; this is his description of Chatwin the victim as a "lost traveller":

Seeing him was like looking at the sunken cheeks and wasted flesh of a castaway. That image came to me again and again, the image of an abandoned traveller -the worst fate for travellers is that they become lost, and instead of revelling in oblivion, they fret and fall ill. (*Granta 44* 220)

Before he had even started his literary career, Chatwin rendered a prophetic vision of his own story. After his journey around Afghanistan with Peter Levi in 1970 Chatwin realized that the trip had made him aware of something; this is what he wrote

to his wife Elizabeth: "I am going to be a *systematic writer*. And: "I love you" (Shakespeare 231). He did not want to be simply a writer but a systematic writer, bound to follow a discipline and an aesthetic coherence. At the same time he was not a faithful husband and most of his novels present single men, unclear sexual polarity and scarce romantic relationships but we definitely find love at some point in their plots, the same love he always felt for his wife. A similar foreboding of his life story is found in a paragraph of *IP*:

Full Members have the power to steal private property; to change themselves into other animals; to influence thoughts and dreams; to open doors; to drive men mad; to change the course of rivers; and to spread disease, especially some new virus that will not respond to medical treatment. (103)

Chatwin is giving some anthropological details about the initiation phase of the sect of male witches, known on Chiloé as the Brujería. The account is half story half reality but in either case it is premonitory. Bearing in mind that *IP* was written in 1977 and Chatwin died from AIDS in 1989, the fictional content of the last sentence seems to anticipate reality; Chatwin anticipated his own story: his life and his death. His search for the miraculous sets off from and ends up in his own person.



## Notes to Chapter Four

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<sup>1</sup> Stevenson sailed across the Pacific and lived in Samoa for some years. There he once entertained the King of Hawaii at dinner and from that day onwards he was known as *Tusitalia*, the “Teller of Tales.” His power over the natives became a power of storytelling. Chatwin’s reputation as a great storyteller could be likened to that of Stevenson; he was a twentieth century *Tusitalia*. According to Antonio Gnoli Chatwin knew how to entertain family and friends and how to imitate them. He was able to reproduce a varied set of voices by acting and miming in improvised shows and it might be through these show voices that he established the base of his metamorphoses (Gnoli 14).

<sup>2</sup> See Howard Hodgkin. *Indian Leaves. With a Portrait of the Artist by Bruce Chatwin*. London: Petersburg Press, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> The story is dedicated to his friend, the South African composer Kevin Volans who was staying with Bruce Chatwin and his wife in their house in the Chilterns at the time the story was written. Chatwin read it out to Susannah Clapp and to Kevin Volans trusting her editing expertise and his “musical ear attending to his prose” (Clapp 58).

<sup>4</sup> My translation from the original text in German: “Der Rucksack war sein Talisman, jeder Wanderer wird so empfinden. Er war das Emblem, mit dem er auf Parties auftauchte, um auf seine Abreise nach Patagonien aufmerksam zu machen, er war der begleiter, den er zu Hause in den Fluchtpunkt seiner Wohnung hängte, damit man ihn von überall sah. Ein Rucksack wird so zum Erbstück” (Jürgen Balmes, *Chatwins Rucksack* 148)

<sup>5</sup> The italics belong to the original text.

<sup>6</sup> See Redmon O’Hanlon. *Bruce Chatwin: Congo Journey*, 107: “I would begin wondering who or what Bunin was: with Bruce you could never be sure. The new

Stravinsky from Albania? The nickname of the last slave in Central Mali? A lighthouse-keeper from Patagonia? Scroll 238B from a cave in the Neger? Or just the émigré King of Tomsk who'd dropped in for tea? Still vaguely wondering, I lurched out of the house."

<sup>7</sup> Definition of *Etnobilia* : the things we carry when travelling. They are the cultural reminders or artefacts that border crossers carry on their journey. These artefacts might be reminders of home or evidence of the transgression itself. Arjun Appadurai points out that "commodities, like persons, have social lives." How are things imbued with cultural significance? How do objects become storied? What do these things say about the people who carry them? Do these objects signify membership in a particular community? Are they relics of a remembered past? Do they preserve or maintain history? (*Snapshot Traveller*. Monthly Newsletter of the International Society for Travel Writing: <<http://istw-travel.com>>, May 2008)

<sup>8</sup> "Bitter Lemons de Lawrence Durrell" by Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay, Université Paris XII. *Récits de Voyage et Romans Voyageurs. Aspects de la littérature contemporaine de langue anglaise ; sous la direction de F.Gallix, V.Guignery, J.Viviès, M.Graves*. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See Lawrence Durrell. *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* (1957). London: Faber & Faber, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> My translation from the original text in French: "Un voyage se passe de motifs. Il ne tarde pas à prouver qu'il se suffit à lui-même. On croit qu'on va faire un voyage, mais bientôt c'est le voyage qui vous fait, ou vous défait." (Michel 255)

<sup>11</sup> My translation from the original text in German: "Während wir uns gemeinsam auf den Vortrag vorbereiteten, wurde mir bewusst, wie wenig ich ihn kannte und was für ein komischer Vogel er war." (Jürgen Balmes, *Chatwins Rucksack* 90)

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<sup>12</sup> My translation from the original text in German: “Ich bin einfach nur ein freier und ungebundener Mensch und kann nichts anderes.” (Jürgen Balmes, *Chatwins Rucksack* 20)

<sup>13</sup> See Jonathan Raban’s *Coasting* (268). These are Raban’s words to describe Larkin’s introverted character.

<sup>14</sup> A. Alvarez in his introduction to Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* in Jackson, Noel. *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry*. Cambridge University Press, 2008; p.11.

<sup>15</sup> Eakin defines the term “storied self” as the identity which is constructed through self-narration. To illustrate such concept he quotes Anthony Paul Kerby: “...a model of the human subject that takes acts of *self-narration* not only as descriptive of the self but, more importantly, as *fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject*.” See Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 99. The quotation in Eakin’s book is taken from Kerby, Anthony Paul. *Narrative and the Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> *Endotism* means, in the world of travelling, a sort of implication in the life of the people and the places visited by travellers, adventurers and ethnologists. It sometimes means the fusion with the Other (the melting with the skin of the Other) in order to start anew a life which is no longer one’s life. The original text in French (Michel 115, 117): “L’exotisme peut ainsi conduire à l’endotisme – cette forme d’entrisme dans l’univers de l’autre – et la frontière entre les deux altérités est plus floue qu’on ne le pense. Le basculement du premier vers le second est toujours possible, l’inverse non”

“...distinguer l’endotisme de l’exotisme: la démarche endotique consiste à devenir l’autre, la démarche exotique à devenir autre. La première fait l’éloge de la substitution et du retournement, la seconde du mélange et du Divers. Le déguisement, c’est le besoin d’échapper à soi-même pour se transformer en un autre, ou l’imiter...”

<sup>17</sup> My translation from the original text in Spanish : “Todo el mundo se siente más o menos propietario de su nombre, de su persona, de su historia (e incluso de su imagen).” Philippe Lejeune. *El pacto autobiográfico y otros estudios*. Madrid: Megazul-Endymion, 1994.

<sup>18</sup> The original title of the book: *Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine englische Walfahrt* (1995).

<sup>19</sup> From the obituary of W.G.Seald by Eric Homberger. *The Guardian*, Monday, December 17, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> “W.G.Seald and the European Tradition”. University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom; 6-9 October 2006. Website: [www.uea.ac.uk/eas/events/seald](http://www.uea.ac.uk/eas/events/seald).

<sup>21</sup> A few notes on Georges Perec’s biography: Georges Perec (1936-1982) was born in Paris in 1936. Both his parents were Jewish and Polish. He spent his early childhood in Ménilmontant. His father was killed in the war in 1940 and his mother was taken to an extermination camp in 1943 where she died. The boy was adopted by his aunt -on his father’s side- and his husband. His book *W or the Memory of Childhood* was published in 1945 and immediately obtained critical success.

<sup>22</sup> My translation from the original text in French: “À treize ans, j’inventai, racontai et dessinai une histoire. Plus tard, je l’oubliai. Il y a sept ans, un soir, à Venise, je me souvins tout à coup que cette histoire s’appelait «W» et qu’elle était, d’une certaine façon, sinon l’histoire, du moins une histoire de mon enfance.” (Perec 18)

<sup>23</sup> My translation from the original text in French: “Le struggle for life est ici la loi ... la soif de la victoire, de la victoire à tout prix ... ‘Il faut se battre pour vivre’” (Perec 123, 191)

<sup>24</sup> See Works Cited to find the bibliographical information about the books by the writers mentioned here. Philippe Lejeune’s *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975), Mieke Bal’s *On Storytelling* (1991), James Olney’s *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and*

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*Critical and Metaphors of Self: The meaning of Autobiography* (1980), Elizabeth Bruss' *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (1976) and Avron Fleishman's *Figures of Autobiography: The language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England* (1985).

<sup>25</sup> See Susannah Clapp. *With Chatwin. Portrait of a Writer*. London: Penguin Books, 1997. Susannah Clapp worked as an editor and reader at Jonathan Cape. She first met Bruce Chatwin in 1976 when he was about to become an author. She was Chatwin's editor.

<sup>26</sup> See McAdams, *The Person*, p.254.

<sup>27</sup> The definition of imago has been taken from Dan P. McAdams' *The Person*: "In the life-story model of identity, an imago is a personified and idealized image of self that functions as a main character in the life story." (651)

<sup>28</sup> "What Am I Doing Here" is the question Rimbaud asked himself during his journey in Ethiopia. He wrote them in a letter to his family from Eritrea.

<sup>29</sup> My translation from the original text in Spanish: "Ocurre que se hace un uso diverso, a veces incluso imprevisible, del propio pasado. No puedes dejarlo sencillamente a la espalda, cerrar la puerta y decir: ahora vuelvo a comenzar. Por eso toda transformación requiere una continuidad con lo que has sido." (Gnoli 68)

<sup>30</sup> Italics in the original text.

<sup>31</sup> See *The Person* by Dan McAdams, p.254 for the classification of imagoes types.



## Conclusions

*A new way of seeing*



WP161.JPG - Trevillion Images  
Photograph by Bruce Chatwin. Marie Reiche.





## Conclusions

My study has explored two innovative elements of Bruce Chatwin's narrative style. The first one corresponds to his anthropological approach to writing, the second is his new mode of visual perception. I have claimed that the concepts of liminality and visualisation lie at the core of his texts and their analysis has led to elucidate the nature of the changes that Chatwin generated within travel writing. Chatwin's style not only branded travel literature in the eighties but transcended to other fields of fiction and non-fiction. Furthermore, I have argued that Chatwin's particular way of perceiving reality both abroad and at home made him perceive his own reality in a different way; he defined himself through an unconventional kind of subjectivity, thus creating a representation of identity other than the one expected in autobiographical accounts.

*Chapter One.* I conclude that Chatwin does play a truly pioneering role in modern travel literature because he goes beyond its existing traditions.<sup>1</sup> Chatwin manages to do so because he questions and subverts the form and the content of the genre, eventually providing travel writing with a new taxonomy. As for the form, what is new in Chatwin's travel texts is the fact that his journeys do not conform to the traditional model of departure, initiation and return, the departure and the homecoming being usually as valuable as the middle phase. To construct his plots he focuses on the search, not on the completion of the whole circuit or on the conditions of departure. Journeys become ridiculous once they are completed as he himself declares at the end of *IP*, after he has been to the Cave of the Giant Sloth (*IP* 182). Neither does Chatwin the hero return home wiser and stronger or invite us to share his success. By not doing so he no longer reproduces the archetypal monomyth of heroic adventure closely related to travel writing. He therefore questions the figure of the travel hero who lives the last stage of the tripartite experience as a magical moment. In anthropological terms, it is

the middle stage of a rite of passage that Chatwin recognises as sacred and magical since it is in this middle phase where his being -his becoming in Chatwin's philosophy- takes place. In questions of form, Chatwin cultivates hybridisation in his travel texts as well as a freer formal flexibility.

As far as content is concerned, Chatwin's travel writing parallels that of other travel writers but Chatwin's capacity for vicarious experience goes somewhat further. Chatwin's innovative element is that his journeys are circumscribed: there is no risk in them because he looks for the uncanny rather than the exotic or the dangerous. Despite this infrequent form of quest though, he excites readers and opens up new metaphorical routes. I conclude that Chatwin's greatest contribution to travel writing is his capacity to enrapture his readers through formal and thematic channels other than the ones traditionally connected with travel accounts.

I have argued that Chatwin both follows and transgresses the taxonomy of travel writing. Like most writers of travel texts, Chatwin has tried both to understand the motives for his departure and to explore the different ways of voicing them with a personal style. As for the taxonomy connected with these motives, my findings are the following: first, the quest in his texts is not a quest for domination, but a quest that would suit aesthetes since for Chatwin wanderlust is the representation of aesthetic movement. He avoids heroism, victory, and pride, he masquerades with irony. Neither are his journeys, journeys of self-discovery because his own corners of darkness and light are not verbalized through a confidential mood, but aesthetically transformed into literary themes. Be they obsessively repeated or coherently developed, these themes unfold the personal story of a man and a writer who has not changed since his departure day but remained the same anti-hero. Hence, instead of self-discoveries, Chatwin's journeys comprise and beautify the discovery of Selves in the making rather than

complete Selves who have moved from a form of non-existence to existence. Second, regarding the idea of escape, I have concluded that Chatwin fled from his fixations rather than from homes, as home can be not only a country but also a person, the road, the place where friends are or simply a suitcase or a rucksack which you carry everywhere. He also vindicates that man can be homeless by choice and he admits he would never be an exile. Likewise, Chatwin's attitude towards nationality, to Englishness in particular, is difficult to assess because he is in-between, simultaneously displaying both dissent and admiration for his country. My argument is that the dissolution of boundaries and his challenging of Englishness both in his novels and in his travel writing is, in fact, a symbol for his search for ontological liberties. Unlike in some post-colonial travel writing, in Chatwin, there is no mixed sense of belonging as he never felt the need to justify his origin or his race, neither did he ever feel translated nor show a proprietorial attitude towards his own country; he does not need a home or a nation to identify with. The conclusion I have drawn is that Chatwin's narcissistic and egotistical streak when examining his sense of nationality should be interpreted rather as a narrative self-centredness than a nationalistic one or even idolatry. This leads to the last motive for departure, that of the egotism of the traveller, which should be looked at from a new perspective as well. Chatwin's is a literary egotism based on an urge to invent mythical landscapes rather than on a need to be away physically. His self-absorbed nature must be justified in terms of narrative cosmology/symbolism in which he accommodates his personality and his style. This aesthetic egotism gives way to a new form of personal travel writing.

Regarding the way Chatwin voiced his motives for departure, I conclude that the concepts of recreation of the past and the incorporation of the ancestors in the narrative thread lie at the core of his narrative style. Their analysis has proven that Chatwin also

resorted to them in texts other than the ones about a journey. Actually, the recovery of the ancestors in Chatwin's writing represents an aesthetic legacy rather than a burden to get rid of: forebears inspire him and liberate him. Through the Ancestors in *TS*, Chatwin is claiming the existence of a common universal kinship which unites all human beings. Similarly, Chatwin's ancestors are shamanic elements: his own great-aunts and great-grandfathers because they pushed his creative spirit, the aboriginal "tjuringas" because they create the world. One of my concluding remarks is that one of Chatwin's primary concerns in his fictional and ideological world is the interwoven relationship between past and present and how this tight connection determines the apprehension of a place and its people. Also the incorporation of museums and simulacra in his travel accounts confirms his interest in the recreation of the past with all its aesthetic consequences. In this intentional incorporation Chatwin condemns fakes and any other element which may dehistoricise the past for the sake of spectacle. Nor does he duplicate former journeys because the presence of mediated texts, which might derive in the tracing and telling of previous steps, becomes a new route with new values. Chatwin's imagination had already started to process the idea of Patagonia and the idea of the Australian Outback long before the reading of texts about these places. In Chatwin's literary travelling experience, previous travel texts never become more important than his own journey; he lives the experience in full.

Bearing in mind that there are no longer unexplored places and few spaces left which might provide the traveller with surprise and wonderment, the creation of chronotopes in modern travel writing has been one of the most daunting challenges for those writers who still believe in the existence of uncharted places. My contribution in this second section of chapter one is to show that Chatwin faced the challenge by first creating the journey chronotope in his imagination and then travelling to the target

destination and writing about it. He describes the imagined place in such a way that the real place becomes the replica of his mental construction of the place. Likewise, unlike most travel writers nowadays, who more than providing useful information represent subjectivity and the personal thereby delineating chronotopes that seem to be inner sights rather than real outer sights, Chatwin relies on the imagination to depict outer sights rather than on confessional moods to explain inner sights. Thus, instead of learning about him in *TS*, we learn about his themes: the place, not the author, is the focus. I have also concluded that Chatwin's concept of chronotope is a doorway into his personal *Weltanschauung*: the places and times as well as the characters who inhabit them both encapsulate Chatwin's vision of human nature and explain how these characters, ironically or tragically, cope with their existence. Chatwin's chronotopes do not only frame the stories of peripatetic ways of life, idlers, travellers and outsiders, but also the life stories of characters trapped in circumscribed worlds, confined on farms and in small apartments or caged in small fake *Pays de Cocagne*. I have argued that the fact that he populates his accounts and does not silence his natives, unlike most Victorian travellers and writers, is one more sign of his *Weltanschauung*. Chatwin does not immerse his characters in the landscape but describes this landscape to create a background for their interaction. In fact, people's life stories are presented as being more important than the landscape itself, so although there is clearly a geographical aesthetics, it is definitely superseded by a human aesthetics. Despite his willingness to populate his landscapes Chatwin's stance is that of an outsider or an alien observer, even if this position entails loneliness, disapproval and criticism for creating an uncompromising narrative.

Chatwin's approach to globalisation and to the idea of the end of travel determines Chatwin's interpretation of wanderlust; this has been the central point in

section three. My conclusion is that he overcomes the aesthetic drawbacks of the former and the pessimistic prospects of the latter. First, he maintains the authenticity of the travelling experience itself by decreasing the impact of mediated texts that might have provided him with advanced information and by rediscovering the familiar and narrating it differently, with fun, originality, insight and formal flexibility. Second, he refuses to join the stream of globalised modern travellers who would rather look for places of pain and destruction and photograph well-known sights rather than capture still possible imaginary visions.

*Chapter Two.* My major conclusion would be that Chatwin bases his poetics on the anthropological concept of liminality, the middle phase of a rite of passage: not only his travel writing but also his essays and stories in *WAIDH* and his novels *Utz*, *TVOO* and *OTBH*. The ideological wholeness of his philosophy of life and literature would be the first innovative trait of Chatwin's texts and its analysis hopefully a major contribution to literary studies. I have argued that Chatwin develops the concept of liminality until he achieves what Glaser (1992) regards highly in all successful writing: "[an] internal consistency, [an] artistic manipulation of language, detail and structure."<sup>2</sup> To begin with, his anthropological approach to writing is carried out with conviction and originality: places, time and people as well as his idea of creation all fit in this approach. Second, Chatwin creates a new narratology based on three significant axes around which his personal storytelling style evolves: his particular perception of human duality and hybridity, the transfer of his own obsessions to the act of literary creation and finally the achievement of a unity of form and content in his writing. As to the first axis, I infer that most of Chatwin's stories deal with the double-sided nature of man and the in-between quality of human existence. In order to express this human condition he develops his own mythology and his own metaphors, different from those used by other

contemporary writers. Instead of depicting travellers as bringers of light who reinforce Western cultural chauvinism and try to impose their morality, Chatwin rather depicts people who live on the fringe such as the wanderer, the outlaw and the eccentric, all of whom are living in transition. Sometimes the representations of the alter ego have no human form: an object, the Beast, an automaton or a monster express human hybridity. Often his worlds and his characters are respectively the scenarios and the protagonists of metamorphosing images; that is, wherever Chatwin's imagination is engaged a twin is never just a twin, a half-caste is not always the opposite to a full-blood, and a particular memorial monument is never just a monument. All these things are at once themselves and whatever else they suggest through Chatwin's particular play of associations. Hence Chatwin opens up a new vision of reality by asserting that "I believe, rather, that Yeti was (for want of a better term) a creature of the Collective Unconscious. Man, after all, is the inventor of his own monsters. Babies 'see' monsters long before they are shown them in picture books" (*WAIDH*, 279). By validating the existence of these individual monsters, Chatwin encourages a new dimension of truth.

The second axis in his storytelling style is the inclusion of his obsessions in the process of literary creation. That is, Chatwin writes out of his obsessions or, in other words, out of his monsters which are travelling/wandering, collecting, storytelling and connecting. I have argued that the transformation of his personal frenzies into poetics generates both a completely original narrative form and his particular ideas about life and literature. From his wandering mania he learns to be compassionate and tolerant with the Other and to accept vulnerability; he seems to lack what Rushdie calls "ethnocentric narrowness of vision" (Rushdie 224). To Chatwin -as well as for the nomad- wandering is a virtue which encompasses a question of morality. Chatwin's enthusiasm for collecting provides him with both a sense of order and insight as well as

great expertise in distinguishing reality from fake. Collecting gives him the opportunity to erase hierarchy from his aesthetic world. For Chatwin stories are priceless things, therefore storytelling is the centre of the world; it is part of his cosmological interpretation of literature. By telling stories he creates the world and in turn interprets it. Finally, aware of his delirium of making connections, Chatwin constructs his own world and fulfils his existential dream of wholeness.

The third axis in Chatwin's storytelling lies in his belief in the unity of form and content which Porter (1991) connects with Baudelaire's style: "[...] to that which Baudelaire most valued in life, namely, art and, above all, the kind of art characterised by a dazzling formal order" (Hanne 61). The image of his grandmother's cabinet represents form and his *cahiers moleskins* order, the patterns of the Nazca lines in the Peruvian desert or the invisible but existent tracks of the songlines correspond to a cosmic structure; Chatwin's story-minded nature provides all these diverse formal manifestations with content. I have concluded that although his texts at times resemble a patchwork quilt, they do in fact show both an explicit fusion of form and content and a new perception of pattern. His patterns are not regular but complex; they represent eccentricity. It is not symmetry that Chatwin's literary patterns transmit; it is an existential and formal asymmetry which brings about harmony within the split Self and rules the lives of his characters. My final conclusion in section three is that Chatwin's thorough development of his ideas of *communitas* and universalism, together with a strong belief that Man cannot be a judge but an observer of the world around him, builds up a new moral code informed by a deep sense of moral freedom: man and the artist should personify the eye of the beholder and catalogue reality, never label it as good or bad. In fact, Chatwin is a writer whose art advanced on a "global front" (WAIDH 119) and someone who, by applying the anthropological concept of liminality



in his narrative, found the ideal context where Man can be created and be himself, where Art, Fiction and Life with all its rituals concur because they have the same structures.

*Chapter Three.* The major conclusion I have drawn is the significance of visualization in Chatwin's work. Chatwin's written snapshots stand for not only his way of looking at reality but also his visions of the miraculous. Like Welty and Woolf, photographers as well as writers, Chatwin believed in the power of photography to capture reality. He finds in photography itself and in photographic techniques within literature the appropriate way of visualising subjectivity without intervention. He aims to register meaning, insight and personal histories from a position of witness rather than intruder. One of my concluding arguments about Chatwin's new mode of visual perception is that Chatwin -like the professional photographer Cartier-Bresson- rejoices in the capture of personalities rather than expressions, on the one hand and in the passing of time and in the joy at being alive, on the other. This predilection results in the development of a special style of uneventfulness: nothing really exciting happens but what we see or read tells a lot. This photographing or telling the unexceptional goes hand in hand with first a real intimacy with the target subject, second a democratic perspective (or lack of hierarchy) in their portraits and finally a rejection of simulacra. Similarly the handling of time through visions or images is a milestone in Chatwin's style: the ancestors inhabit the present, this perpetuity being transferred by a photograph or a photograph within a photograph in Ouidah, by a grave in the Pampas, by a songline in the Australian Bush and by a Nazca line in the Peruvian desert. In Chatwin, the past can be *seen* and *told* in the present.

I have argued that Chatwin's search for asymmetry, bearing in mind that Chatwin's literary searches focus on the moment of disequilibrium, should be regarded

not only as a perception of formal pattern but also as one of the various metaphoric representations of the idea of visualization within his narratology. He aims to capture asymmetry because he believes in reality being constantly in the making; his characters and his chronotopes of all kinds lie basically at the core of change. Likewise, asymmetry seems to fit in with his own attitude towards real facts; this attitude, in Clapp's words, showed signs of ambivalence and dilemmas: "He was of two minds" (195). I conclude that we are likely to spot this aesthetic asymmetry if we acquire the observant openness that we need in order to reach the levels of visual perception that Chatwin seems to be eliciting from us. Furthermore, by saying things in a new manner (Sontag 118), he makes us see things differently as well. As a result, a new vision of reality is created and that allows us to accept different interpretations of the same object, event or human face. He frees us and helps us understand the world by turning life into a polycentric experience in which the miraculous and the fantastic are as valuable as realistic reportage.

My contribution is that Chatwin's understanding of artistic creation suggests that by familiarizing ourselves with visual art we can become better observers and beholders, sometimes better writers and readers. As he is not interested in capturing myths of male or female dominance or submission or inner gazes neither in his photographs nor in his texts, both viewers and readers are led towards a more open-minded outlook of art. Chatwin does not intervene or divulge a critical angle, he distances himself from his written or photographed target objects, manifesting a voyeuristic attitude but in the form of humanized non-intervention, showing aesthetic distance but for the sake of art. I have also argued that in Chatwin's literary work what really unites text and snapshot is the ethics of seeing that Sontag attached to photography. Chatwin's written images show us a new visual code but at the same time

they widen our ideas on what is worth observing and what we have the right to observe. To sum up, Chatwin elaborates a special moral freedom which, revoking almost any form of constraint or symmetry, involves observant openness and ultimately urges us to look at difference, be it cultural or personal, with unprejudiced eyes.

This is the difference that Chatwin embodied in varied forms of uncanniness. In Chatwin the uncanny is connected with liminality as it has to do with marginality and eccentricity but it also connects with visualisation because it represents the non-exhibited or the socially concealed. In this respect, Chatwin seems to struggle to create an Arbus “family album”, a particular version of ship of fools where all of mankind could be given a place on board. In section two I conclude that Chatwin’s innovative aesthetic stance emerges from his belief in the recognition of difference to attain sameness. As a result, the expression of the uncanny is to be found both in his fictional characters and in the portraits of real people, included in his posthumous book *WAIDH*. What really enriches Chatwin’s descriptions is that all his characters feel self-confident in their eccentricity thus rendering a sense of non-stigmatised autonomy that we are not used to attaching to strangeness. His polycentric perception of reality is based on multiplicity and freedom. As a result, uncanniness is rated highly because to endorse not only the flawless and the conventional but also the eccentric, the marginal, the mysterious and the supernatural is to construct a complete human gallery; this is the first step towards the state of *communitas* generated in liminality. There is a clear attempt on Chatwin’s part to view eccentricity differently so as to be able to concede that some individuals live in a different world and on a different time scale. To accept the existence of such multiple worlds and time scales, both internal and external, entails the acceptance of different codes of behaviour within ourselves as if we were divided into halves: the man and the beast, the settler and the wanderer, the conventional and

the uncanny. Chatwin solved the question of how we adapt and cope with this split nature by fictionalising and beautifying this duplicity and by encouraging us to live with it and to live with the pain involved in this act of recognition. The revealing nature of Chatwin's writing emerges from his particular ability to unveil human duality with both its benefits and its discomforts and to *see* and include not only the Other in this uncanniness, but also himself.

In section three I have concluded that Chatwin plays a three-layered role within visualization. This implies an unpretentious way of seeing: it aims at omitting nothing yet imposing nothing. First, Chatwin is the flâneur in a twentieth century globalised world who strolls and observes. He does not visualize utopias as real paradises because they do not exist, and if by chance some of his characters should bump into one of its representations, as in *TVOO*, they are soon deceived, as if they had been trapped in a mirage. Despite this deception Chatwin's readers feel comforted because they learn that utopias are truly fictions; significantly, as happens in *IP*, fictions enable us to live. What readers should be aiming at is the discovery of contact zones, peripheral and liminal spaces where disparate cultures meet; it is in these threshold zones -not ephemeral places but territories in themselves- where Chatwin's gaze is the most effective. Both his literary and photographic gaze are permissive and unjudging, something which ends in an attitude of self-effacement, but not devoid of empathy and understanding as his positioning, initially distant, transforms into a silent, but perceptible closeness. This distance presents itself in different forms, voyeurism being one of them and an essential element to interpret Chatwin's unobtrusive style.

Second, Chatwin the voyeur performs his stand by resorting to the effects of the camera's gaze, on the one hand and by playing the role of the travel writer-voyeur, on the other. As far as the latter role is concerned, being aware of the impossibility of

becoming the Other, in his journeys there is no identification (endotism) with the native population, neither does he include the description of unsettling landscapes likely to be found in urban areas at home. In his search for the miraculous, he finds places abroad which excite his imagination and allow him to play with fiction and reality whereas targets of dark tourism are too real to be turned into uncommitted fiction.

Third, Chatwin as visual traveller develops an “aesthetics” of the journey which empowers his way of seeing to become synonymous with understanding and insight. To begin with, unlike nineteenth century travellers and modern tourists, there is no panoramic perception in the telling of his journeys. His travelling experience in *IP*, *TS* and some essays in *WAIDH* is not fleeting but measured and unhurried like his gaze which is equally measured and careful. Next, the space of representation in his travel texts is triangulated and foliated, meaning that the actual physicality of the narrative is varied as it comprises the fictional/non-fictional text, paragraphs in dialogue form, photographs and theoretical information; this entails a widening of the scope of vision. Finally, there is a reflection on the writer’s relationship with the place and the people he writes about. In this sense Chatwin intentionally silences the controversial issues because he does not allow for commitment in the traveller’s brief. I have argued that to Chatwin the contribution of the stranger to the place lies not only in his recognition of the “already existing” portrait of that place, an idea that Berger develops in *AL* (47), but also in his personal modification of that portrait in which every element narrates itself (47). Thus the writer feels free to devise both his own narrative formulae and his personal version of distance. Now his undertaking is to listen, see, touch and write about the reality he has before him.

My final conclusion is that Chatwin’s creation and preservation of a cultural gaze is closely related to the concept of eye-twisting (Fuery 1993). I have argued that in

spite of his uncommitted attitude to nation and culture, Chatwin managed to establish his own cultural discourse. In Chatwin's travel writing, the representation of power and its discourse is no longer based on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. His gaze aims at the recognition of cultural difference together with the acceptance of the proven human duality both at home and Elsewhere; this implies the creation of a new aesthetic perspective and the acknowledgement of a new ethical positioning. The question has been to determine what presences and what absences Chatwin finally singled out in the process of eye-twisting. While the imperialistic or post-colonial approach is missing, a criticism of artificiality and falsehood is repeatedly shown. He still looks at the places he visits with the gaze of a Westerner and a Briton but there is no flag-waving. Nor does he acknowledge all the stereotyped and overused signs that remind us of the British and European influence in the non-Western world. The target of his cultural discourse is the pulling down of fake.

To conclude, despite his fondness of physical and conceptual asymmetry, which forces the readers' eyes and minds to adapt to new visions of reality, despite his voyeuristic attitude, which predispose critics and detractors to judge his literary style as rather unhealthy, and despite him playing with lies and truth in his travel accounts, which has made real people rather offended, Chatwin made us look at things differently and more widely. This enlargement of our vision may help us not only to understand his writing better but also refine our perception of the world. The world becomes wider and more diverse both at home and abroad and readers are all driven to join his open-mindedness and his non-judgementalism.

*Chapter Four.* After examining Chatwin's resistance to tell his own story in autobiographical terms, I have drawn the following conclusions. First, Chatwin's capacity for self-narration is not "impaired," he does not suffer any narrative difficulty

or disorder; his muteness when it comes to Self and self-experience is rather an ethical positioning than a pathological one. Second, Chatwin was an obsessive but exceptional storyteller, a twentieth-century *Tusitalia* whose tales, as we have now discovered, concealed more than displayed but they definitely contained as much autobiographical information as any other self-explanatory account. Although Chatwin preserved his interior silences by abstaining from personal revelation, he had a life story as a man and as a writer. Third, Chatwin's attitude towards truth and lies comes from his finding truth within the imagination rather than in conventional forms of self-representation. That makes us admit that telling lies while writing is not the immediate consequence of self-concealment but an aesthetic strategy to represent the limits and the scope of imagination. In Chatwin, this concealment does not mean that the writer is unable to go into himself most deeply but that man is always becoming himself and does not want to make commitments with just one individual Self or with just one individual truth: what matters is the story and its telling. Fourth, as to truths, Chatwin claims for universal truths rather than individual truths. Universal truths do not only generate sameness between people but also strengthen our condition as human beings by recognizing the dualities within ourselves. These truths can be found in the most hidden parts of ourselves such as in scatology, or in the ultimate rendering of resemblance: death; we are all alike going through a moment of truth when we live these human experiences. On the other hand, individual truths, which traditionally have fed autobiographical material, can give rise to less reliable accounts of the Self.

A fifth conclusion as far as Chatwin's construction of his own story is concerned is his relationship with objects, not only with the objects he hoarded almost obsessively but the objects he carried with him when travelling and the ones he kept in his rucksack and treasured. Be they in the form of talismans- like Chatwin's teddy bears- or in the

form of inheritable items- like his rucksack- some objects contain autobiographical material which could reproduce phases of the writer's story and history -both the imaginary and the real. As to his relationship with people, Chatwin's self-declared unattachment served to expose some contradictions in himself which in turn served to expose his attempt to find different means of "engaging and also of not engaging with the world." It was in Chatwin's nature to be obsessive -traveller, collector, storyteller, connector- but this personality trait did not alienate him from the others, neither did it force him to distance himself from the world around him. In fact, his obsessions set up and shaped his writing, then his writing did not isolate him but united him with everybody else. Chatwin managed to render the obsessive Self he was by fictionalising his aesthetic diseases, among which we find his connecting mania. Although Chatwin defined himself as an unattached man, he did look for a way of relating to others; no matter how he did it: sexually, intellectually or emotionally. Chatwin created a literary style which showed his own way of constructing the story of a man and writer who was looking for human bonds.

The sixth finding in the process of unfolding Chatwin's life story is that Chatwin believed in the idea of the man in the making and that this belief determined the way he exposed himself. He seems to be claiming Baudelaire's argument that the modern man is not the man who wants to discover himself through his secrets and his hidden truth but the man who struggles to invent himself, to produce himself. Both Chatwin the anthropologist with his belief in the concept of liminality where man is made from scratch, and Chatwin in his modernist attempt to "produce" himself, try to design a theoretical frame through which to justify his reluctance to serve just one Self in his writing. Aesthetically he finds it necessary to develop a multiplicity of Selves so as to fulfil this process of self-invention and self-production.



My final contribution in section one as to Chatwin's personal attitude towards self-exposure is that the author is tangled inside one more contradiction: on the one hand, he wants to be the naked man stripped off all his possessions and lies who wants to travel; on the other hand, he is a compulsive art collector devoted to his objects at home and in his last years a person with AIDS, hiding the truth about his incurable illness. At the end of his life, Chatwin cleared out his dilemmas: as in a final act of both self-exposure and self-invention, Chatwin *said* who he was and he became the naked man. He did so first, by confiding his fears to his close friends and urging truth, second, by struggling to finish *TS* which is where he really left his mark as a man and as a writer/intellectual and finally by selecting his most significant texts for his collection of articles and portraits *WAIIDH* which was posthumously published in 1989 and where he exhibits his mindset, his preference with regards to personalities and his uneventful adventures. It is a fact that he did not succeed in practicing the Flaubertian impersonality he so much admired; his books are full of stories about himself. Like the real storyteller/*Tusitalia* that he was, he seems to have preferred to render an oral self-explanatory account of his life story -by telling confident listeners- rather than leave a written document of it. By this I mean that there is no memorial record of his love affairs, of the cause of his inward restlessness, of the psychoanalytical interpretation of his placelessness or sexual ambiguity. If we want to get into his Self we should let his books reveal the things said and unsaid because Chatwin rarely refers to his own nature confidentially and unashamedly. He does include his doubles in his texts but he will never admit they hold a similar story to his; they own their own fictional story. This suggests something I have strongly argued for: Chatwin taught us that style can express personal substance without explicitly describing it.

In section two, by studying Chatwin's childhood memories, narrative pathologies and ethical problems when telling stories and by reflecting on Sebald's ideas (2000), I have drawn the following conclusions regarding the interpretation of Chatwin's process of creating a storied Self and of his struggle to preserve identity through self-narration. To begin with, Chatwin's childhood memories are not real epiphanies of recall but triggering elements which awaken not only his past but also his literary skills and his aesthetic commitment. He uses these triggering experiences rather than self-reflective episodes to build his narrative, and although some childhood memories can decidedly define adult life and fashion a life story, they should not be expected to breed a need for speculation about the Self in Chatwin. If we wish to recognize Chatwin's storied Self we will have to deconstruct standardised interpretations of childhood experiences and memories (crisis and emotional wounds, losses or unconscious repression) because his storied Self does not fit in with the usual models of self-narration: its content and narrative form shows that inwardness and self-recognition can appear in narrative forms other than the ones connected with early age experiences.

Secondly, Sebald (2000) sheds some light onto the riddle of Chatwin's life inasmuch as he reflects on four essential issues of Chatwin's work. First, Chatwin is concerned about how to construct a life story (both content and form). Second, his work examines the impact of childhood memories and kinship on the development of selfhood and healthy identity. Third, Chatwin believes in and practises the maintenance of ingenuity and adolescent spirit despite the passing of time. Finally, he shows his experience of anxiety, suffering and death. I have also concluded that the connection between Chatwin and the works of the three French writers referred to by Sebald is based on three main themes: first, the description of different kinds of "struggle for life"

lived by their protagonists, next, the protagonists' surrender to the power of supernatural talismans, be they family relics or constructions of the imagination, which eventually transforms them, and finally the appalling recognition that life can dissolve after years in search of a dream and a life lived to excess, something that the main characters of all these stories experienced at first hand.

My next concluding argument in section two is that Chatwin did not feel comfortable when trying to narrate himself but this does not imply that his capacity for self-narration was "impaired," or that he suffered some narrative or identity disorder. He definitely has a storied Self; one of the real factors that prevented him from narrating himself is that he resorted to signs of healthy identity other than those familiar to us provided by socialized forms of self-representation. I have argued that his is a conscious act of secrecy rather than a lack of narrative competence, in fact, he is offering a new model of subjectivity narration by discarding the burden of "self-reflexive autonomy." A second objection to self-narration is that Chatwin does not endorse the proprietorial sense of identity narrative that some writers seem to support. His resistance has something to do with his reluctance to affect other people, bearing in mind that when we disclose our own Selves when telling our life story, we disclose others. In Chatwin this belief informs an ethics of life writing: no one should violate human beings' right to privacy. However, we find a contradiction between Chatwin's reluctance to narrate his own story overtly (in a way, to testify to who he was) and his texts where he portrays real people with scepticism, irony or sympathy. The reading of such contradiction should indicate that Chatwin, even though he probably sought to develop an autonomous model of selfhood, was forced to choose a relational model rather than an autonomous one. The reason for this choice being his own process of storytelling which required a relational model of identity: the distance between him and

the others is transgressed for the sake of storytelling, therefore others' privacy is temporarily interrupted as he has a need for people to provide him with new plots.

Finally, in section three I conclude that Chatwin's apparent disorientation both in his vital and professional trajectory as well as his perceptible need to take and find his bearings instead of clearly defining himself in autobiographical terms is the consequence of having experienced more than one metamorphosis both as a man and as a writer. In fact, in Chatwin the question is not only being able to write about his Self but also recognizing the multiplicity of Selves within himself. His patchwork and chameleonic nature urges him to carry out the performance of a dialogical Self. This performance will be shown not only within one novel but between different novels or stories thus enlarging both the dialogical Self and its contradictions. This noticeable dysfunction, the result of discordant world views within his own nature, does not prevent his texts from expressing an open and coherent representation of the Self; in fact a multiple storytelling Self emerges which is in dialogue with the others. It is through the collective of *imagoes* in his narrative that Chatwin was able to make his life meaningful not only to himself but also to the others: he had found out the way to preserve his identity, to be free to define himself. I have argued that even though this freedom of self-representation entailed disquiet, Chatwin tried to overcome it both in his life and in his work. He did so by bolstering his peculiar lifestyle, literary programme and independent social standpoint through his peculiar way of living and reliving the past. Then Chatwin's every single transformation did not represent a break with his own Self but a continuity with what he had been. The question as to whether Chatwin was able to create a particular narrative of the Self without a traditionally accepted autobiographical account should be answered by regarding Chatwin's texts not

as the product of a single author -a single storymaking “I”- but as a dynamic “I” which moves in imagination from one authorial position to another.

It is clear that Chatwin’s poetics will transcend Chatwin’s life story; this was one of the arguments in chapter four and it expresses my conviction that his style spoke for him, so we are obliged to grasp the essence of his style first if we want to be able to understand his person. The core of my thesis has been the discovery and the analysis of a complex but powerful new way of seeing and storytelling, born out of both the inquisitive mind of an anthropological researcher and the accurate eye of a beholder.

### **Suggestions for further work.**

Some points I have raised in my thesis could be fruitfully developed further. I have considered a line of research which would be based on four primary suggestions; as I mentioned in the introduction two of them are related strictly to his work, the others to his literary legacy. They are as diverse and interdisciplinary as Chatwin’s work.

The first one would be a study of his short story “The Seventh Day.” Its literary analysis would be relevant to the following question: “What is fiction and what is autobiography in Chatwin’s texts? The controversy surrounding this story could also be an interesting focus of research. I would further suggest it be included in any future collection of Chatwin’s texts. “The Seventh Day” was published in the issue of 2 June 1988 of the *London Review of Books*, but it has never appeared in any book. Why was this story not included in *What Am I Doing Here* where some of the other articles and short stories Chatwin wrote at that time are to be found? If this book is a collection of pieces compiled under Chatwin’s eye, why did he decide to exclude the story from it? Why did it not find its way into *Anatomy of Restlessness* either, where his uncollected writings were brought to light by Jan Borm and Matthew Graves? What made his editor

Susannah Clapp think twice and finally fail to publish it posthumously? In Clapp's words: "It is a dark, troubled tale" (58), but so is "The Estate of Maximilian Tod" and to some extent so are "Assunta" and "Assunta 2." "The Seventh Day" is the story of a boy with no name who is constipated and leads a nightmarish existence in a boarding school. He is told by his classmates that he is going to die in seven days and as a result he is in a continuous state of anxiety and seems to be only concerned about the purple bulge in his anus. Yet, most of the story describes the day-to-day life of the eight year-old boy at school and could simply be regarded as a short account of someone's boyhood. Despite this, the scatological part of the tale seems to be the main issue due to its physical and visual strength; we might wonder whether this was the reason for its exclusion. The connection with Chatwin's real life is that he was really ill that year and his worries were probably connected with his health, in particular, the most scatological side of it. Both Chatwin and the boy in the story silence their pain: they are too afraid to admit that they are not fit, that they suffer from something shameful and unspeakable. The reason why this story was not chosen by Chatwin for *WAIDH* could be that it was too autobiographical; it told too much of himself. According to Matthew Graves, the fact that it did not find its way in *Anatomy of Restlessness* was not Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin's decision nor the recommendation of the editors -Jan Borm and himself. At the time, *Anatomy of Restlessness* was aimed at university publication rather than at publication for a public/wide readership. However, the executors of Jonathan Cape company did not believe it should be printed, therefore it was not included among this posthumous collection. Similarly Chatwin's literary agent never clarified the mystery. The issue was diverted and never spoken of again. Graves believes the decision was unjustified.

The second suggestion for further research would be to determine why Chatwin, at the end of his life, decided to write a long thick novel about love in the Russian style. The influence of Russian writers on his narrative would also be an interesting focus of study. Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin explained in an interview in London in March 2005 that his “Russian novel” would have been Chatwin’s literary dream, “meant to be a major work”: a lengthy story of love, passion and family bonds set in France. Clapp writes that: “For years [Chatwin] had had it in mind to write a large Russian novel, and towards the end of his life this began to take a definite shape” (217). Both Shakespeare (504-505) and Clapp (217) summarise the plot that the book was to feature, even the name of the female protagonist, Lydia Livingstone, the countries where the main characters come from and where he got his inspiration to design the story. This Russian tale would have probably become a complete novel; unfortunately it did not. In chapter two I discussed the fact that Chatwin seemed to have no interest in including love stories in his works. My sustained argument that he based his poetics on the concept of liminality would endorse this point since the middle phase of a rite of passage tends to diminish the presence of sexual polarity in the same way that it fosters ambiguity on the one hand and individuality within sameness on the other. Chatwin’s protagonists are often solitary people, spinsters, forsaken lovers, outcasts, members of religious orders and men who live one-night stands. Significantly, romantic plots, even loving fucks -in Rushdie’s words- are absent in his writing; so is passion, unless it is focused on wandering, collecting or storytelling. I believe Chatwin was experimenting with his large themes, namely nomadism, travelling and anthropology, among which he did not consider romanticism or sentiment despite the fact that he was a well-loved man and an eager lover himself. In a lengthy story of love set in Paris, written in the Russian style, he might have found the perfect frame to develop the themes he probably had not dealt

with in his previous work. Clapp explains that he even said he wanted to study Russian with the Russian Jesuits in Paris. Interestingly enough, he had never learned the native language of a country when travelling around the world during his most restless years. He did not overlook the themes he had already explored, though. In this respect, Clapp's brief outline of the embryo of such novel (218) does prove that Chatwin did not cease to think of travelling, the world of art or wartime since they are recurrent concerns in his work. Shakespeare comments that Chatwin's illness had made him become more himself: "A new strain of sweetness entered his observations –an enjoyment of simple pleasures" (503). He registered in his notebooks an "uncomplicated satisfaction with life" (503) as well as more allusions to future projects among which this Russian novel is to be found. Boxes 34 and 35 in Chatwin's archive in the Bodleian contain Chatwin's notebooks of this period and may offer the relevant material to expand the research on the un-written *Lydia Livingstone*.

My next suggestion for further work is based on one of the conclusions I have drawn in chapter three; this is the existence of a clear space of representation in Chatwin's travel texts. I have argued that this space is foliated, meaning that the actual physicality of the narrative is varied as it comprises not only the fictional/non-fictional text but also photographs and theoretical information. Chatwin's notebooks are essential to understand this widening of both the scope of visualisation and the range of narrative forms. The 85 notebooks, dating from 1968 to 1988 -together with his manuscripts and other material- are deposited in the Department of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. While some of the information is irrelevant to his literary work, most of the notes anticipate future texts and outline the mind of a curious researcher. Some of the notebooks contain a myriad of materials such as drawings of archaeological findings, disparate ideas taken down at



random, telephone numbers and addresses, lists of things he purchased in Teheran, even exercises to learn an Afghan dialect. Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin believes that to try and read these notes is to “decipher the undecipherable.” Actually, apart from his biographer Nicholas Shakespeare and his editor Susannah Clapp not many researchers and scholars have managed to fully understand Chatwin’s almost illegible notes. I suggest the selection of some of these 85 notebooks and its publishing so as to make this source of material attainable. I would make a start on the notebooks in boxes 31 and 34. In box 31 we find some of the information he collected for his ideas on anthropology and travelling, in particular on the idea of escape. As far as anthropology is concerned, Chatwin writes notes on the work of Colin Turnbull based on his year’s stay with the Efulu band of the Mhiti, one of the Pygmy tribes of the Ituri Forest in the Eastern Congo. Through the description of their traditions and lovemaking customs, Chatwin alludes to the existence and justification of homosexuality on the one hand and the acceptance of an unattached/unengaged form of love on the other. The idea of environment, the element of the forest being of central importance to these people, is also used by Chatwin as a starting point for exploring two of the major issues within his work. First, there is the stance of the writer towards place; these are his words in the notebook: “Environment is more than a passive [fro...]; it is a living THING, both natural and supernatural, respected, loved and obeyed.”<sup>3</sup> In chapter three I have argued that Chatwin considered a place a “living portrait” (Berger’s argument) that the author can only see, listen, touch and write, including all its mystery and reality. His words in this notebook confirm my argument that Chatwin regarded places as being constantly in the making, therefore only being approached or changed aesthetically. Second, for primitive tribes, the forest is the liminal place where the neophytes undergo a personal transformation; Chatwin will resort to this natural element in *In Patagonia* to represent

transition. Box 34 provides material to expand the study of *On the Black Hill* and *The Viceroy of Ouidah*. Chatwin researches different “goodies and baddies” as well as the ideas of cannibalism, the Good Savage and the “Nostalgia for Paradise,” all of them belonging to his distinctive handling of human duality. In this box we also find the last notebook, written in 1988, in which we perceive that Chatwin, aware of the irreversibility of his illness, starts to acknowledge the predictable circumstances of his future life. He observes: “Any “new” species -a man, a swallow, or HIV virus- must begin its career in a very limited [cor aied] (?) before bursting out in the world.”

My last suggestion for farther research is connected with the impact of Bruce Chatwin on other travel writers and the possibility of a Chatwinesque style or spirit within the genre. The article “Home Truths on Abroad” by William Dalrymple<sup>4</sup> published in *The Guardian*, Saturday September 19 2009 recalls a debate which evidences the interest in the renewal, purpose and maintenance of travel literature. It is introduced by the questions: “What is to become of travel writing now that the world is smaller? Who are the successors to Chatwin, Lewis and Thesiger?” The fact that Chatwin is still regarded as one of the writers who might have left a style legacy likely to be felt in the twenty-first century is a proven sign of his transgression and originality. Dalrymple is optimistic when envisaging a future for the genre: after assessing the evolution of travel writing in the last decades and identifying its possible ailments, he names some young travel writers at work such as Philip Marsden, William Fiennes and Suketu Mehta as well as a few “emergent talents” such as Rory Stewart and Alice Albinia.<sup>5</sup> He recognises in their style what Chatwin had generated with his: their accounts are less to do with heroic adventures, “rail, road or river journeys” or “funny foreigners” than a personal experience and ultimately a knowledge of places and people. A good line of inquiry would be the study of these emergent authors. It could be

interesting to analyse whether they are also literary travellers or whether they play with fiction and reality by developing both a narrative thread and characters as in a novel, yet what is being written is true. Are they open to curiosity and intuition and learn how to be good observers? Do they immerse their apprehension of national character and particularity in the general process of globalisation or look for new forms of universalism? How do they explore diversity beneath the layer of globalisation? Do they enrich the genre with other literary forms? Dalrymple affirms that “Rory Stewart, probably the most highly regarded of the younger generation of travel writers, believes passionately that travel books allow writers to explore other cultures in a slow and unhurried way that is impossible with journalism or most other forms of non-fiction.” This argument recalls one of mine in chapter three when I describe Chatwin’s vision as unhurried, contrary to the panoramic perspective of nineteenth century travellers. This lack of haste could be studied in terms of uneventfulness or simply contemplation, two essential characteristics of Chatwin’s texts. Interestingly enough, Shakespeare names some young British writers who are open about their “indebtedness to [Chatwin]” (541), among them are Philip Marsden and William Dalrymple who wrote to Mrs Elizabeth Chatwin that his book *In Xanadu* “would have never happened without my having discovered and loved [Chatwin’s] writing” (542). The connection Chatwin/Dalrymple/young emergent writers would be worth analysing. Shakespeare also considers successors to Chatwin: “the Italian philosopher Claudio Magris who turned to Patagonia for his first novel *Un altro mare*” and the Chilean writer Luis Sepúlveda who in *Mundo del Fin del Mundo* “has his hero set out from Hamburg airport to South America with Chatwin’s *In Patagonia* in his hands” (541). An approach to the literary experience in Patagonia of these three writers could also be a starting point for farther research.

## Notes to Conclusions

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<sup>1</sup> Clapp (1996) affirms that *IP* became one of the most influential books of a decade, spawning many imitators (95); in the same way Chatwin's biographer states that: "Among booksellers *In Patagonia* inaugurated a category: "the new non-fiction" (Shakespeare 311).

<sup>2</sup> See Kowalewski 162.

<sup>3</sup> This is what I deciphered from his handwriting. I apologise for its incomplete quality.

<sup>4</sup> See Dalrymple, William. "Home Truths on Abroad". *The Guardian*, Saturday September 19 2009. 9 November 2009

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/williamdalrymple>

<sup>5</sup> Alice Albinia has been the 2009 winner of the Dolman Best Travel Book Award with her book *Empires of the Indus*.

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