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**‘Anywhere Out of the World’:
Restlessness in the work of Bruce Chatwin**

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Abstract

This thesis is centrally concerned with the theme of restlessness within the work of the British author Bruce Chatwin. Critical interpretation of Chatwin's work has tended to focus on the generic and political status of the five full-length works he produced during his lifetime, exploring the theoretical implications of the author's formal approach. This concentration on the structural and ideological elements of Chatwin's creative output has resulted in the substantive thematic material of the works being somewhat overlooked. The following analysis intends to redress this balance, focussing specifically on the creative representation of the key theme of restlessness within Chatwin's body of work.

This thesis will explore the topic of restlessness through an analysis of both the author's published work and the embargoed archive of Chatwin's notebooks, diaries and manuscripts that resides in the Bodleian Library, the majority of which has never before been made available to critical scrutiny. Drawing on this important and previously unstudied archive, which includes the manuscript of Chatwin's first unpublished work, known as "The Nomadic Alternative", the following thesis will examine the origins and development of the theme of restlessness, which can be seen as Chatwin's chief literary preoccupation; a condition that he perceived as endemic to the human species, and which he argued crucially influenced both the individual possibility of discovering satisfaction in one's life and the wider likelihood of attaining social harmony. Tracing Chatwin's interest in the subject from its earliest literary manifestation in "The Nomadic Alternative", this thesis intends to document the development of the author's consistent engagement with the notion of restlessness, examining both his literary representation of the affliction as well as presenting an analysis of his theory of human movement.

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When the virus of restlessness begins to take possession of a wayward man, and the road away from Here seems broad and straight and sweet, the victim must find in himself a good and sufficient reason for going. This to the practical bum is not difficult. He has a built-in garden of reasons to choose from. Next he must plan his trip in time and space, choose a direction and a destination. And last he must implement the journey. How to go, what to take, how long to stay. This part of the process is invariable and immortal. I set it down only so that newcomers to bumdom, like teenagers in new-hatched sin, will not think they invented it. (1)

John Steinbeck, Travels with Charley

Introduction: ‘A Mythology for Every Man’

Ignatieff: Bruce, we’re talking in a sunlit room of a farmhouse that looks over a banked meadow in which black sheep are grazing. There’s a crackling fire in the grate, and we’ve just finished a delicious roast of lamb which Elizabeth prepared for us. The whole scene is a picture of home. For a wanderer, are you surprised at where you sit now? Is this home?

Chatwin: (*Long Pause.*) Terrible to say so, but it isn’t. I don’t know why, but it can never be. I couldn’t explain why. It drives Elizabeth insane, but ... we have everything here, but I always wish I was somewhere else. (35-36)

Michael Ignatieff, Interview with Bruce Chatwin

Diversion. Distraction. Fantasy. Change of fashion, food, love and landscape. We need them as the air we breathe. Without change our brains and bodies rot. (100)

Bruce Chatwin, Anatomy of Restlessness

My grandmother’s horror of the Gipsies. Across a field. The canvas hoods of their caravan on the far side of a hawthorn hedine in flower. To the gate trotting down the lane bareback on a piebald pony. Margie, Margie. Never ever, they might steal me! Secret longing to be stolen.

Bruce Chatwin, Chatwin Archive, Box 18

Restlessness is an undoubtedly nebulous concept. Not quite a medical actuality, yet an indisputable facet of the human condition, it is easy to understand, yet difficult to explain. Bruce Chatwin was a writer well aware of the subtleties inherent in the concept. His first major literary undertaking, embarked upon in the aftermath of his early departure from university in Edinburgh, and which Chatwin asserted was 'written in answer to a need to explain my own restlessness' (Chatwin Archive Box 34), was an attempt to submit the notion to objective scrutiny. This work, provisionally known as “The Nomadic Alternative”, contained many of the key ideas that would sustain the author’s interest in the subject of restlessness throughout the rest of his career, operating as something of an urtext within Chatwin’s oeuvre. During the writing of “The Nomadic Alternative”, however, the author discovered that the subject of restlessness was simply too individually specific to form a suitable subject for

an objective study, and the project was abandoned. This early experience was a salutary lesson to the young writer that the best way to approach the intangible is rarely head-on.

This thesis, though centrally concerned with the notion of human restlessness, does not propose to readdress the undertaking that Chatwin failed to bring to satisfactory completion in “The Nomadic Alternative” and attempt to formulate a coherent analysis of the affliction of restlessness. Rather, the work intends to develop an investigation into Bruce Chatwin's literary treatment of the subject over the course of his career, subjecting each of his major texts to considered scrutiny in turn, exploring the sources, both literary and biographical, for Chatwin's continuing preoccupation, as well as examining the techniques the author employed in representing the affliction.

This investigation will draw on previously unseen archival material, including the manuscript of “The Nomadic Alternative” – a work which Chatwin claimed in *The Songlines*¹ (75) to have burnt, but which in fact resides in manuscript form in the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, alongside forty-two boxes of notebooks and papers.² This archive remains under embargo to general readers until 2010, but has been made available, with the permission of Bruce's widow Elizabeth, for the purposes of this thesis. The following chapters will mark the first public presentation of much of this archival material.

The insight offered by the archive – and in particular “The Nomadic Alternative” – encourages a more unified reading of Chatwin's work than has previously been undertaken. Much past critical work on Chatwin has concentrated on either the political or generic aspects of specific texts within

¹ Hereafter *IS*.

² The archive is, at present, catalogued only by box number. Boxes can contain up to thirty individual notebooks.

Chatwin's oeuvre, at the expense of a more holistic approach. Critics such as Tim Youngs and Charles Sugnet have identified the author's political disinterest as a primary area for attention, singling out those works set in postcolonial societies, such as In Patagonia, The Viceroy of Ouidah and, in particular, The Songlines, which has been criticised for its direct approach to Aboriginal matters, presenting, in Youngs' formulation, a 'populist, pseudo salvage ethnography' ("Punctuating Travel" 83).³ However, these analyses often exclude Chatwin's more domestic, and less overtly postcolonial, texts, such as On the Black Hill and Utz, as do those equally prevalent critical studies which focus upon the issue of genre within Chatwin's oeuvre. Critics such as David Taylor and Manfred Pfister have attempted to place the author within the tradition of "Travel Writing", leading to a specific concentration on those works (In Patagonia and The Songlines) which can be said to owe something to the genre, generally eschewing any discussion of the substantive content or inherent value of Chatwin's other works or his oeuvre as a whole, as Taylor himself acknowledges: 'The status of Chatwin's art has been in question far less than the nature of the texts themselves.' (198)⁴

In the light of archival research, however, these critical questions seem to fade in relevance, with formal considerations and abstract political enquiries being overshadowed by the evident and overwhelming preoccupation of Chatwin's whole body of work with the single theme of restlessness, which, as

³ See also Kerry Featherstone's thesis on Chatwin and globalisation, "Not Just Travel Writing: An Interdisciplinary Reading of the Work of Bruce Chatwin", which deals with some of the complexities of Chatwin's political approach.

⁴ For more on this discussion see Taylor (198-199), Barbara Korte's English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations (144-146), Chapter One of Marie Williams' dissertation "A Dystopian Modernity: Bruce Chatwin and the Subject in the Modern World" and Manfred Pfister's "Bruce Chatwin and the Postmodernisation of the Travelogue." Tourists with Typewriters by Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan also touches on the issue of genre; see 167-170.

Michael Ignatieff observed in an interview with the author, forms the ‘question of questions’ (26) for Chatwin. This thesis will thus undertake to present an analysis that supports this assertion, offering a unified interpretation of Chatwin’s work and uncovering the frequently sublimated thematic core of his creative output.⁵

Within the context of Chatwin’s work, restlessness can be defined as an inability to settle, leading to either insatiable travelling (which the author posits as the main cure for the condition) or profound anxiety and dissatisfaction if the individual sufferer is forced to remain *in situ*. Broadly speaking, Chatwin’s treatment of the subject falls into two interrelated categories which can perhaps best be thought of in terms of ‘restlessness described’ and ‘restlessness explained’. The majority of Chatwin’s work rests in the former category, offering a literary exploration of the affliction of restlessness through character description, authorial self-representation and metaphor, all of which will be examined in the course of this thesis. In these works, restlessness is depicted in the main as an individual affliction emerging from particular domestic circumstances; thus, Chatwin describes Joachim Utz, the Czech porcelain collector of Chatwin's final novel of the same name, suffering the rigours of restlessness as a result of his seclusion, expressing a sense of personal confinement: 'By April [...] he felt acute claustrophobia, from having spent the winter months in close proximity to the adoring Marta; to say nothing of the boredom, verging on fury, that came from living those months with lifeless porcelain' (88). Lewis Jones, one of Chatwin’s twin brothers in On the Black Hill, is another character whose domestic situation creates restless anxiety,

⁵ Nicholas Murray had asserted the possibility of such a reading in his early critical study Bruce Chatwin (1993), though that work served specifically as general introduction to Chatwin's creative output.

viewing himself as trapped in a life he never chose, and constantly speculating and daydreaming of an impossible life away from his farm and his brother:

“Sometimes, I’d lie awake and wonder what’d happen if him weren’t there. If him’d gone off...was dead even. Then I’d have had my own life, like? Had kids?”

“I know, I know,” she said, quietly. “But our lives are not so simple.” (On the Black Hill⁶ 203)

These characters are engaged in a search for a means of life that constantly seems to elude them; they follow a model outlined in an oft-quoted passage from the prose poem by Baudelaire that lends this thesis its title⁷: ‘This life is a hospital in which each patient is possessed by the longing to occupy a different bed. While one longs to suffer close to the stove, another believes he would be healed if he could lie beside the window’ (102).

If it were the case that Chatwin’s representation of restlessness relied purely on these literary foundations, any analysis of the subject would perhaps be relatively slight. However, the situation of these characters and the wider approach of the works they are drawn from must be viewed within the context of those other fewer texts that fall into the latter camp of ‘restlessness explained’ and attempt more didactically to formulate a cogent reason for the individual frustrations and responses described. When looked at in conjunction with texts such as “The Nomadic Alternative” and that work’s foster-child The Songlines, it becomes apparent that the individual characters and situations of novels such as On the Black Hill and Utz can be read as representative of a specific framework of ideas. “The Nomadic Alternative” and The Songlines present a theory that, far from simply being a manifestation of personal dissatisfaction, restlessness emerges from a genetic predisposition towards travel and against settlement

⁶ Hereafter OTBH.

⁷ ‘Anywhere Out of the World’

that developed in the proto-history of humankind, asserting that:

in becoming human, man had acquired, together with his straight legs and striding walk, a migratory “drive” or instinct to walk long distances through the seasons; that this “drive” was inseparable from his central nervous system; and that, when warped in conditions of settlement, it found outlets in violence, greed, status-seeking or a mania for the new (Anatomy of Restlessness⁸ 12).

Settlement, with its attendant corruptions of materialist decadence, is an aberration from the natural state of the species and a condition that ultimately engenders restlessness. The only cure is to find escape from the civilised and settled world; an escape that Chatwin, and his characters, generally attempt to locate in a life of travel.

In support of this theory, Chatwin invoked the lifestyle of nomadic tribespeople, elevating the means of existence of tribes such as the Kalahari Bushmen and the Australian Aborigines to the status of exemplars of ideal existence, viewing these groups as continuing to live the life that his theory argued humankind had been bred for. They are ‘closer to being good than settled peoples,’ Chatwin writes, citing Ib’n Khaldūn, ‘because they are closer to the first state and more removed from all bad habits that have infected the souls of settlers through many ugly blameworthy customs’ (qtd. in “The Nomadic Alternative”⁹ 18).

Chatwin also employed a barrage of literary, philosophical, ethnographical and religious texts in support of his theory, from Baudelaire to Pascal, from Robert Burton to Theodor Strehlow, constructing a vast, compelling roster of support for his notion of inherited instinct for travel, identified by Holland and Huggan as ‘a highly idiosyncratic personal mythology, relying on a potpourri of materials that Chatwin, as determined bricoleur, can

⁸ Hereafter AOR.

⁹ Hereafter “NA”.

seize upon and utilize at will.’ (169) In “The Nomadic Alternative” and The Songlines, his conception of humankind's peripatetic nature approached the level of a secular religion, with Chatwin offering up his expansive vision of a unifying genetic predisposition towards travel as a belief system to explain individual and cultural phenomena. As Nicholas Shakespeare wrote, ‘The nearest thing he had to religion was his theory of restlessness’ (Bruce Chatwin 450). This theological aspect of Chatwin’s belief is evident in In Patagonia, where he tells the Persian, Ali, of his faith in the sacrament of walking: “My God is the God of walkers. If you walk hard enough you probably don’t need any other God” (In Patagonia¹⁰ 43). In a notebook dating from his visit to Patagonia, Chatwin observed that ‘Basically God is kind to people who walk on foot’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35).

Whilst this grand theory is, as will be seen, ultimately somewhat unconvincing, it cannot fail to add an extra dimension to any exploration of the individual representations of the affliction of restlessness in his creative work, encouraging a reading wherein the individual situations and characters of Chatwin’s novels and travelogues become allegories of the author’s philosophical ideas, situated in a scheme greater than the specifics of the text might indicate. That is not to imply that Chatwin’s creative work acts purely as a vector for his theory, but rather that an awareness of the author’s theoretical conception of restlessness adds a depth and complexity to any possible reading of that work. This analysis is encouraged in the present work by the insight offered by “The Nomadic Alternative”, which provides much of the interpretative basis for the work that follows, representing, despite its flaws, the most consistent and detailed overview of Chatwin’s intellectual conception of

¹⁰ Hereafter IP.

human movement.

This reading is undertaken, however, in the awareness that the theoretical argument of “The Nomadic Alternative” and The Songlines does not represent a successful objective explanation of the subject of restlessness, but rather offers insight into a personal belief system, with all the ambiguity and subjectivity that would imply. This thesis will not argue, then, that Chatwin’s work offers a totalising and coherent analysis of the theme, but rather that the descriptive and explanatory elements of his work combine to create an appealing and romantic mythology of restlessness, offering empathetic portrayals of the restlessly afflicted supported by a poetic theory that posits the affliction as resulting from a genetic call to travel, to, as Robert Burton asserted ‘ever be in motion’ (qtd. in TS 169). Chatwin’s work transmutes the relatively prosaic and seemingly negative condition of restlessness – which the author regularly refers to as an ‘affliction’ – into something grander and more appealing, in a similar manner to those Renaissance writers who constructed a romantic explanation of depression in the concept of melancholy.

The romantic appeal of Chatwin’s concept of restlessness is compounded by the public perception of the author himself. Bruce Chatwin has become a totemic figure, beloved of those young westerners who set off from home in search of consciousness-changing experiences, committed to a life of nomadism that they are convinced was lived by the author himself. As Richard Taylor wrote, the self-constructed image of the travelling Chatwin, walking boots strung round his neck, inspired a generation to ‘break loose and roam the planet. The Chatwin nomadic itch has inspired many to take-off, despite the fierce umbilical pull of “shuttered rooms” in houses filled with stress-filled belongings that tie people down’ (Taylor 61).

In life, Chatwin himself undoubtedly suffered from symptoms of the affliction that John Steinbeck referred to as the 'virus of restlessness' (Travels with Charley 1), struggling to reconcile the opposing appeal of the settled life in England, where he lived with his wife Elizabeth, and the exotic life of the traveller, with all the possibilities for self-mythologising and transgression that it entails. Travel also played a crucial functional role in the author's literary career; like Mandelstam, the author believed 'like dogma!' (Interview by Michael Ignatieff 37) the idea that rhythms of prose and of travel were inextricably linked, and his writerly need for change whilst composing was clearly a real part of the cause of Chatwin's restlessness.

These facets of Chatwin's personality are transmuted and romanticised in his work, however, creating a literary persona that embodies the appeal of the 'affliction' of restlessness. Chatwin micromanaged his own personal mythology, carefully choosing which aspects of his life he wished the reader to take from his work. Paul Theroux commented on this tendency of Chatwin's: 'while most of us knew his stories,' Theroux wrote in Fresh Air Fiend, 'there were always great gaps in between them [...] he never revealed himself totally to anyone, so far as I know, and in this way he kept his personality intact' (387–388). Chatwin's self-presentation offers a vision of an intrepid solo traveller, striding through exotic lands with nothing but a half-bottle of Krug and a copy of Hemingway's In Our Time peeking from his handmade leather rucksack. Chatwin's tendency towards myth-making is evident in much of his work, but can be immediately demonstrated through the quotation of a piece of self-representation intended to affirm his reputation as a modern nomad that emerged from a dinner with the artist Howard Hodgkin: 'The result of that dinner party was a painting called The Japanese Screen,' wrote Chatwin in an essay on Hodgkin, 'in which

the screen itself appears as a rectangle of pointillist dots, the Welches as a pair of gun turrets, while I am the acid green smear on the left, turning away in disgust, away from my guests, away from my possessions, away from the “dandified” interior, and, possibly back to the Sahara’ (What Am I Doing Here¹¹ 76). What is striking about this description, quite apart from the mythomaniacal self-centralising in an essay nominally concerning Hodgkin’s work, is that Chatwin is here employing an aesthetic metaphor to depict his own iconoclastic disgust with aestheticism.

‘The thing about Chatwin,’ commented Michael Oppitz, ‘is that through his life he gave a new definition of the Writer as Hero’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 541). In constructing his heroic image, Chatwin followed in well-trodden footsteps, clearly conscious of the earlier travelling mythomanes who essentially constructed the space for a writer such as Chatwin to function; the group includes, though is not exclusive to, Robert Byron, Wilfred Thesiger and T.E. Lawrence. Byron was an acknowledged influence: ‘Anyone who reads around the travel books of the Thirties must, in the end, conclude that Robert Byron’s The Road to Oxiana is the masterpiece’ (WAIDH 286), he wrote in an introduction to the work, whilst Chatwin saw in Thesiger a man somewhat after his own heart, commenting in a review of Desert, Marsh and Mountain on the author’s ‘conviction that the heroic world of pastoral nomads is finer – morally and physically – than the life of settled civilisations’ (AOR 110). The admiration went both ways; Thesiger told Michael Asher that of recent works of travel literature, he had particularly ‘enjoyed Bruce Chatwin’s In Patagonia, though he found the late Chatwin, with whom he once had dinner at his agent’s house, “the most talkative man I’ve ever met...He never stopped talking all the way through

¹¹ Hereafter WAIDH.

dinner. He was interesting but not fascinating” (Thesiger 507). Yet, perhaps the closest similarity is found in a comparison of Chatwin’s mythologising tendencies to those of T.E. Lawrence. Chatwin always professed to profoundly dislike Lawrence, saying ‘I hate T.E. Lawrence. Well, I think I do. Incredibly unpleasant’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 6). Yet, there are striking biographical similarities shared by the two authors: both studied as archaeologists, though disliked the scholarly rigour demanded by the subject; both travelled as a means of personal escape; both shared the striking blonde hair and blue eyes which led to admiration in both the orient and at home, both died tragically and prematurely, and perhaps most significantly, both were incorrigible mythomanes. Michael Asher, in his biography of Lawrence, records an account given by an Oxford tutor of the young scholar who observed that Lawrence would only read books that were in some way out of the ordinary: ‘books, in other words, which appealed to his sense of self-mystification’ (Lawrence: The Uncrowned King of Arabia 41). This was eminently true of Chatwin, who ‘looked rather glazed’ (Clapp 20) when asked about the English classics – indeed, when questioned on the BBC concerning his opinions on the state of modern British writing, Chatwin confessed to being unqualified to answer – but became considerably more animated when discussing Mandelstam’s prose or the doctrinal advice of seventeenth-century cleric Jeremy Taylor. Chatwin and Lawrence also shared a tendency to exaggerate the hardships and challenges of travel in their own accounts of their journeys. Michael Asher highlights Lawrence’s tendency towards this type of self-mythologising in his analysis of Lawrence’s conflicting accounts of a journey undertaken to recover a number of Hittite seals from Syria. Writing to explain that this trip would, due to unforeseen circumstances, delay his return to Oxford and his studies,

Lawrence's letter to Jesus College principal Sir John Rhys is, as Asher puts it, 'a masterpiece of English understatement and a display of stiff upper lip which would hardly have disgraced Lord Nelson. He told Rhys that he had had four attacks of malaria when he had "only reckoned on two," and had been "robbed and rather smashed up" only the previous week' (72). He also informed his principal that his journey had been undertaken alone and that he had travelled at all times in authentic dress. Asher refutes this claim and outlines Lawrence's exaggeration: 'He had not travelled alone all the time – at one point he had employed a guide, and for a major section of the journey he had travelled with a mounted escort [...] he had worn European dress throughout, including the pith-helmet which, as he himself said later, the Arabs regarded with superstitious hatred' (72). Chatwin too was prone to conveying an impression of an intrepid solo traveller, when in fact he rarely journeyed without a companion and was frequently accompanied by large volumes of personal belongings, particularly medical equipment, as his wife Elizabeth testifies: 'he took things like first aid kits [...] because he always hurt himself and he had absolutely no immune system. He just got infections and he would deny it in public, but I remember. I remember spending the nights with Bruce being ill in various different parts of the world and rushing out to chemists [...] and herbalists to get teas and things like that' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). Though he sometimes liked to cast himself in the mould of travellers such as Doughty and Thesiger, Chatwin was always more of a writer than an explorer, and his notebooks reflect a frequent disdain he felt for the rigours of travel that is generally absent from his published works:

18th Day of disasters. Wrecked my plans. Certainly well said that the internal combustion engine is the modern replacement for the Devil.
[...] Feeling very hard done by. At least sun is shining. It rained

earlier. Difficulties of Patagonia. Want a salad. Cannot face any more meat. Dust in your eyes. (Chatwin Archive Box 35)

The view of the reader, however, framed by the self-presentation of Chatwin's narrative technique, would seem to testify otherwise, just as readers of Seven Pillars of Wisdom may come away from the text inspired by possibly fabricated tales of derring-do. This discrepancy is, in both cases, a result of the inferences made by the reader on the basis of generic expectation. The genres encompassed in the work of Chatwin and Lawrence – travelogue, history, anthropology – lay claim to an objectivity which neither author saw as essential to the presentation of their work. As Paul Theroux observed, Chatwin had little interest in readerly expectations of the travel writer:

I used to look for links between the chapters, and between two conversations or pieces of geography. Why hadn't he put them in?
 "Why do you think it matters?" he said to me.
 "Because it's interesting," I said, and thought, It's less coy, too. "And because I think when you're writing a travel book you have to come clean."
 This made Bruce laugh, and then he said something that I have always taken to be a pronouncement that was very near to being his motto. He said – he screeched – "I don't believe in coming clean!" (Fresh Air Fiend 388).

Clearly, in the literary mythology of human restlessness found in Chatwin's work, this manipulated authorial persona is of key significance, and this thesis will employ biographical representation of the author in support of its investigations, including analysis of his private notebooks and diaries.

From this tendency towards mythology and the poetic nature of his grand theory, however, the reader is not to infer that Chatwin's work is some elaborate masquerade or that his preoccupation with restlessness is a façade intended to lend credibility and intellectual weight to his literary output. Some have undoubtedly seen his imaginative approach to self-representation as evidence of an inherent lack in his work; Nigel Barley, for instance, in a particularly carping

review of Nicholas Shakespeare's Bruce Chatwin, refers to the author as 'a mix of Jay Gatsby and Princess Diana with a designer rucksack' whose 'constant preposterous reinvention' (23) has obscured the essential deficiency of his work. This perspective is understandable, but somewhat narrow minded. For, though it is indisputably the case that Chatwin romanticises his characters, his locations and himself to create an appealing mythology of the affliction of restlessness, it is also the case that in the course of this mythologisation, his work offers profound and individual insights into why humankind feels a propensity to constantly move on. Chatwin may dress up the notion, theorising around the subject of 'genetic instinct', but his speculative approach to the subject does not negate the reality that many individuals do suffer from a restless desire, or the fact that Chatwin's work has some important insights to offer on the topic. This thesis intends to explore the subject of restlessness in Chatwin's work with an awareness of the possible literary manipulations the author may enact in the text, but also with a recognition that this tendency does not, as some critics would seem to believe, negate the significance of the works in which they are contained. To paraphrase Francis Wyndham, Bruce Chatwin was not in the business of writing government reports.

During his lifetime, Bruce Chatwin wrote and published five full-length works and one collection of shorter writings.¹² In the aftermath of his death, a number of other volumes were published in Chatwin's name, including

¹² What Am I Doing Here (1989).

Anatomy of Restlessness (1997), a volume of previously uncollected writings edited by Matthew Graves and Jan Borm, and two collections of the author's photographs, Winding Paths (1998), edited by Roberto Calasso, and Photographs and Notebooks (1993), put together by Chatwin's editor at the Sunday Times, Francis Wyndham. This thesis will employ all of these available sources in its analysis of the subject of restlessness, but will concentrate on the five full-length works that make up the core of the author's literary output: In Patagonia (1977), The Viceroy of Ouidah (1980), On the Black Hill (1982), The Songlines (1987) and Utz (1988). Each of these texts offers a different approach to Chatwin's grand theme of restlessness, reflecting their generic diversity in individual thematic preoccupations.

As has been noted, however, the following analysis will also draw on previously unseen archival material. Of particular relevance to any literary analysis of Chatwin's works are the two blue boxes of Moleskine notebooks (Boxes 34 & 35 of the archive) and the manuscript of "The Nomadic Alternative", both of which offer invaluable insight into the literary approach and development of the author. It is perhaps for the best that the manuscript of "The Nomadic Alternative" has not as yet been made public in its totality; it is very much a young man's work, full of speculation and grand hypothesising. As will be seen, however, in terms of any discussion of the subject of restlessness within Chatwin's oeuvre, it is a crucial work, and, accordingly, the first two chapters of the thesis will be devoted to the analysis and discussion of this key text, offering both the first literary study of the manuscript and moreover the first public appearance of the material quoted. These first chapters will attempt to draw out the underlying conceptual framework of the text, outlining Chatwin's early ideas around the notion of restlessness, and also examining how

the difficulties of the work's construction led to the rejection of academic models in favour of the creative literary approach that would garner the author such success.

Chapter One deals specifically with the implied main subject of the work – nomads. The chapter addresses the early development of Chatwin's interest in the nomadic life, which he believed offered evidence of humankind's innate disposition towards travel and which also provided a model of existence to which society should return. This chapter will outline the central discussion of nomads within the work, attempting to cogently explain the often contradictory and always confusing density of research material and theoretical speculation that constitutes the text.

Chatwin asserts, however, that "The Nomadic Alternative", despite its examination of historical forms of nomadic travel, takes as its true focus the notion of individual restlessness. Chapter Two will thus analyse how Chatwin attempts to connect concepts of professional nomadism and restlessness, discussing the exposition within the text of the first iteration of Chatwin's theory of inherited instinct for travel – an idea that would explicitly recur in The Songlines, and would run sublimated through much of the rest of his work. Both chapters aim at being an introduction to an unseen text, rather than any major critical deconstruction; an undertaking that would both be unfair, given that Chatwin never wished the text to be published, and also unhelpful, given that "The Nomadic Alternative" remains almost completely unknown. The chapters do, however, point out the ultimate failings of the text in an attempt to understand how the experience of writing "The Nomadic Alternative" led to Chatwin's development into a writer of creative representations of the subject of restlessness.

Chapter Three takes Chatwin's first published text, In Patagonia, as its subject. Generally read as a relatively straightforward travelogue, the author himself asserted that the work was in fact a 'symbolic voyage which is a meditation on restlessness and exile' (qtd. in Shakespeare 311). This chapter discusses the work in these terms, exploring how Patagonia functioned on the level of a metaphorical golden land for both the migrant community who set off for its shores in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and for the author himself.

Chapter Four examines Chatwin's second work, The Viceroy of Ouidah, a biographical novel which can be seen as the author's most profoundly literary analysis of the subject of restlessness. This chapter analyses the reasons behind the unsparing brutality and objectivity of this work, arguing for the text as offering a new frankness in the author's dealings with the subject of restlessness; one that, though of critical interest, was ultimately unsuccessful with the reading public, who found it simply too unforgiving in its treatment of both the subject of the slave-trade and the individual affliction of restlessness.

Chapters Five and Six discuss Chatwin's third published work, On the Black Hill, a text that can be seen as the author's investigation into the possibility of curing restlessness by staying put and living a life of rural asceticism. The first of these chapters analyses the particular influence and appeal of the area of the Welsh borders to the author, examining why Chatwin, with his profound dislike of Britain and anti-settlement ideology would be moved to locate in the area a model of contented sedentary existence. The subsequent chapter will examine the detail of Chatwin's propositions in On the Black Hill, exploring the novel's thematic material within the context of its central oppositional structure.

Chapter Seven concentrates on the work that many have argued represents the purest and most successful expression of Chatwin's grand thesis of modern nomadism, The Songlines. This work re-approaches much of the material from the discarded manuscript of "The Nomadic Alternative" and represents the most cogent version of Chatwin's theory of an inherited 'nomadic instinct' to explain humankind's restless nature. The work succeeds where "The Nomadic Alternative" failed, largely as a result of the humanising influence his characters exact on the otherwise somewhat dense material that Chatwin reconstitutes from that first project.

Chapter Eight will focus upon Chatwin's final full length work, Utz, which offers an analysis of one of the inherent problems, in the author's conception, of the settled life; that of materialist desire, or more specifically, collecting. Collecting for Chatwin is one of the enemies of movement; it is a confining influence that exacerbates man's restless desires whilst simultaneously restraining him from expressing them. His central character, Joachim Utz, is the personification of the conflict between the asceticism of movement and the aesthetic impulse of settlement – a conflict that, tellingly, is ultimately elided by Utz's destruction of his collection and his final discovery of the consoling power of human love; a conclusion that offers a vision of possible freedom from the curse of restlessness outside of constant travel.

Before moving on to this specific literary analysis, however, it is important to first detail the foundations of Chatwin's later career. Though the following work does not intend to act as another biographical account of the intricacies of Chatwin's life – there already exists, in Nicholas Shakespeare's

Bruce Chatwin (1999), an excellent source for those interested in the specifics of the personality – it is also indisputably the case that the author’s early experiences had a profound influence on his later preoccupation with and treatment of the subject of restlessness, shaping his literary identity in a crucial manner. The importance of Chatwin’s childhood, so consistently referenced in a number of his works, will be explored in the following respective chapters. However, it is appropriate at this early juncture to detail the author’s first ventures into adulthood, as the foundation stones of his later literary identity and approach began to be laid.

Chatwin had, from the age of 13, been a pupil at Marlborough, the Wiltshire public school that was also the *alma mater* of John Betjeman and William Morris, amongst others. The young Bruce was not, by all accounts, a natural student: ‘I was *hopeless* at school, a real *idiot*, bottom of every class’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 67), he later confessed, and it was decided, with some tacit encouragement from his father, that Bruce would not progress to Oxford or Cambridge, as would most of his friends. This decision individualised Chatwin to his great satisfaction at the time: “‘You’re all so boring,’” he told his school friend Michael Cannon. “‘You’re all going to Cambridge’” (qtd. in Shakespeare 82).

Chatwin instead found an opening at the London auction house, Sotheby’s, where he joined as a porter. One of his early responsibilities was to catalogue items for forthcoming sales, a duty that required close attention to detail and a succinct descriptive style. The experience was invaluable, as W.G. Sebald observes: ‘[H]e gained access to the treasure chambers of the past and acquired an idea of the singularity of artefacts, the market value of art, the importance of craftsmanlike skill and the necessity of precise research

energetically pursued' (182). His wife Elizabeth saw his experience at Sotheby's in similar terms, and perceived no deficiency from his lack of formal education: 'His life would have been completely different, of course, if he had gone to Oxford [...] He wouldn't have had that discipline without being at Sotheby's, that's the thing, of observation' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). His work at the auction house also encouraged a speculative authority – something that would become a hallmark of his later theoretical work – with Chatwin required to extrapolate stories and opinions from exiguous detail: 'I aired my scanty knowledge of the French Impressionists, and I prospered. Before long, I was an instant expert, flying here and there to pronounce, with unbelievable arrogance, on the value or authenticity of works of art' (AOR 10).

Yet, in turning down the possibility of going up to Oxford (he was prospectively to attend Merton College), Chatwin ultimately set up within himself an ambivalence towards academia that would colour his approach to his work – and the subject of restlessness – for the whole of his professional life. In his early career in particular, Chatwin oscillated between a desire to be seen as an authoritative academic on the one hand and an autodidact outsider on the other; as is the misfortune of the restless, Chatwin always wished to be where or what he was not.

Whilst seduced by the romance of the salesroom, Chatwin's engagement at Sotheby's also, ultimately, resulted in a restless dissatisfaction and a searching for escape. Put off partly by the rampant materialism of the life of an auctioneer, as well as the politics of a rapidly expanding Sotheby's, Chatwin, after a meteoric rise through the company, began to cast his eye around for something new. What ultimately attracted him was the chance to undertake the

degree he had foresworn when leaving school, and he duly quit London for Edinburgh, where he enrolled as a student of archaeology.

Chatwin was, as one might expect, an intelligent and committed undergraduate, engaging with the subject with typical enthusiasm. However, the degree course, and Edinburgh itself, was not quite what the idealistic student had envisaged. As he later wrote in an article for the New York Times Book Review, ‘My studies in that grim northern city were not a success’ (AOR 12). In later life, having achieved a great measure of literary success, Chatwin, now more comfortable in his autodidact identity, would frame his disillusionment with the course, and his ultimate departure from Edinburgh in grandiose literary-philosophical terms: ‘[L]ong before I could read, Aunt Gracie had taught me to recite the lines engraved on the tomb-slab:

*Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones
And curst be he yt moves my bones.*¹³

[...] One day, while excavating a Bronze-Age burial, I was about to brush the earth off a skeleton, and the old line came back to haunt me:

*And curst be he yt moves my bones.
For the second time I quit.* (AOR 12)

However, in reality, it was for more prosaic reasons that Chatwin chose to leave his degree course early. Chatwin had the misfortune of encountering archaeology at a point of transition; the late sixties and early seventies would mark a great period of change in the methodological approach to the subject. The work of American archaeologists, notably Lewis Binford, had begun to move the subject away from the so-called ‘culture-historical’ study of artefacts

¹³ The tomb in question is, of course, that of William Shakespeare, located in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon.

towards a more anthropological perspective.¹⁴ This shift towards ‘New Archaeology’ encouraged the construction of anthropological hypotheses upon archaeological discoveries; in essence, one was encouraged to think of the story behind any particular find – an approach which would no doubt have been of greater interest to a student such as Chatwin, who described his course of study at Edinburgh as marked by ‘dismal discipline – a story of technical glories interrupted by catastrophe’ (AOR 12). Unfortunately, this change did not reach across the Atlantic in time to secure Chatwin’s continuing interest in the subject.

As well as the displeasing curricular approach, Chatwin and his wife Elizabeth had struggled to warm to Edinburgh as a place of residence. Chatwin’s expressed opinion of the city was similar to that of the Edinburgh-born Robert Louis Stevenson, to whom Chatwin is frequently compared, and who, in his writings on his hometown, described with distaste ‘the winds which blew from all directions, of the icy rain, of the cold sea fogs from out of the east and of the snow which came fluttering down from the Highland hills’ (Hennessey 50). In a review of the biography from which the above quotation is taken, Chatwin himself wrote of the city as a ‘place of absolute contrast and paradox [...] The rational squares and terraces of the New Town confront the daunting skyline of the Old. Slums still abut the houses of the rich [...] On fine summer days nowhere is lighter and more airy; for most of the year there are icy blasts or a clammy sea fog, the *haar* of the east coast of Scotland’ (AOR 133). As the prospect of a second winter in Scotland’s meteorologically unforgiving capital became a reality, the temptation to leave became too much. His wife Elizabeth recounts his means of escape: ‘[H]e just didn’t go back. He didn’t tell anyone that he wasn’t going back. I went up to get him for Thanksgiving and loaded him

¹⁴ See New Perspectives in Archaeology, Binford, Sally R. & Binford, Lewis, Aldine Press: Chicago, 1969 & The Evolution of Culture, White, Leslie, New York: McGraw Hill, 1959.

into the car with some stuff and so on, and then he never went back at all' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). In his early departure from Edinburgh, as in that previously from Sotheby's, there is the overt sense of the restlessness of intellect and spirit that formed the subject of his later analysis, that persuasive voice of conviction which argues that *there* really is better than *here* and which Baudelaire described so effectively: "Tell me, my soul, my poor chilled soul, what would you say to living in Lisbon? It must be warm there and you would get your spirits back as if you were a lizard" (102).

Chatwin thus departed from Edinburgh with no formal qualification and little in the way of a career. He returned to his house in Gloucestershire in the November of 1968 with the weight of failure hanging heavily upon his shoulders; the restlessness which, as a subject preoccupied him even at this early stage, had seemingly already led to his ultimate rejection of two possible pathways for his life. It would yet lead to another ultimate, though perhaps more instructive, failure before Chatwin successfully discovered a workable and satisfying means of life, dedicating his literary career to the exploration of the affliction of restlessness that so profoundly influenced his own journeys thus far.

Chapter One: ‘The Useful Savage’

In the mid-nineteenth century, pioneers in Texas were surprised to see illiterate Comanche warriors taking Bibles and other books during their raids on outlying farms and settlements. In true nomadic style, the Comanches had discovered that paper made an excellent padding for their bison-hide war shields and would absorb a bullet if you packed it in thick and tight enough. The early Texas cattleman Charles Goodnight found a Comanche war shield stuffed with a complete history of ancient Rome (its rise, efflorescence and fall to nomadic barbarians from the north). (177)
Richard Grant, Ghost Riders: Nomads of the American Desert

No hero makes his mark without his years in the wilderness.
 (40)

Bruce Chatwin, “The Nomadic Alternative”

With Bruce, it was always midnight. (208)

Susannah Clapp, With Chatwin

Despite the apparent incautiousness of his sudden withdrawal from the degree course in Edinburgh, Bruce Chatwin was able to mitigate his decision somewhat through a commission he had received in May 1967 to co-curate an exhibition at Asia House in New York entitled Animal Style: Art from East to West.¹⁵ Chatwin’s invitation to curate the exhibition resulted more from his experience at Sotheby’s and connections in the art world than his qualifications as an archaeologist – the undergraduate is vaguely described in the foreword to the exhibition’s catalogue as ‘connected to the University of Edinburgh’ (7). However, in addition to sourcing many of the items for the event, Chatwin was also expected to produce an essay for inclusion in the catalogue. This piece is significant to the present discussion as it marks Chatwin’s first written engagement with the idea that would form the subject of his first book and ultimately become something of an obsession – that of the appeal of the nomadic life, and the possible insights it offered into the affliction of

¹⁵ The so-called Animal Style is a loose title given to an artistic practice that dates back to the seventh century BC and that applies to portable artefacts inscribed with animalistic images.

restlessness. 'It was more than a blazing topic about which to write,' Susannah Clapp observed, 'it was an obsessional interest which was also a creed, a way of making sense of – and of enhancing – his archaeological inquiries, his geographical investigations, his own history and neurosis' (200).

Chatwin's interest in nomads was intrinsically connected to his preoccupation with restlessness. Throughout his work, the reader finds the author in search of a more satisfying means of life, wherein one could avoid the anxieties of restlessness. The nomadic existence seemed to represent to Chatwin an ideal state of being, in tune with nature and the seasons, and with one constantly on the move. 'They are perpetually mobile,' Chatwin wrote of the Kalahari Bushmen. 'The golden-brown babies [...] never cry and are among the most contented babies in the world. They also grow up to be the gentlest people. They are happy with their lot, which they consider ideal' (AOR 102). Chatwin told Michael Ignatieff that his research and experience of nomads 'alerted me to certain things which were obviously close to me but which I hadn't realized before. They started my quest to know the secret of their irreverent and timeless vitality: why was it that nomad peoples have this amazing capacity to continue under the most adverse circumstances, while empires come crashing down?' (25).

Chatwin's interest in the seemingly profound lessons inherent in the nomadic way of life began to blossom, it seems, during his time at Edinburgh, where he had been moved during his studies to speculate on an ancient world inaccessible to the archaeologist: 'In the Cairo Museum you could find statues of pharaohs by the million,' he wrote in the late essay 'I Always Wanted To Go To Patagonia,' '[b]ut where was the face of Moses' (AOR 12). Chatwin would refine and develop his theories around the nomadic life over a period of four years

from this point, before the ultimate rejection of “The Nomadic Alternative” by the publishers Jonathan Cape forced his attention elsewhere. The commission he received from Asia House represents a first attempt by Chatwin to publicly explore the concepts that he would take forward to his later project, and he quickly adapted his brief, which, in reality, was tangentially related to the subject of nomads, to focus in on the nomadic influence on the Animal Style.

Thus, the resulting essay, employing for the first time the title Chatwin would later propose for his book length exploration of the subject – “The Nomadic Alternative” – eschews the traditional analyses of the Animal Style. Instead, the essay develops a passionate, though occasionally incoherent, exposition of many of the philosophical conceptions of nomadism that the writer would employ in later works. The introduction rails against the impositions of settlement, preferring the romantic vision of ‘a life in harmony with “nature”, unhampered with possessions, free from the grinding bonds of technology, sinless, promiscuous, anarchic, and sometimes vegetarian’ (AOR 85). The essay introduces the binary opposition between nomad and settler that would come to be a defining, if inaccurate, facet of the full-length version of “The Nomadic Alternative”, positing for the first time the fundamental theory of his oeuvre – that humankind was bred for a life on the move.

There is little discussion of the actual Animal Style itself until the final paragraphs, as if Chatwin realised that mention of the *raison d'être* for the essay was something of a necessity. Even at this stage, Chatwin’s assertion that shamanism formed an overarching influence on the style of the movement emerged more from the writer’s interest in the figure of the shaman through history – with whom Chatwin identified – than from any attributable academic source. The central argument – that through the common psychological state

attained by shamanistic ritual, the artistic homogeneity of the Animal Style (an aesthetic phenomenon common to many, often extremely geographically diverse, groups of people) can be explained – is more romantic than anthropologically provable. Chatwin describes in the essay the commonality between shamanistic visions and the Animal Style itself: ‘Animals are depicted from both sides at once, their heads abutted to form a frontal mask. The so-called X-ray style is common and shows a schematised view of the animal’s skeleton [...] The similarities between hallucinatory experience and nomadic art cannot be explained away as pure chance’ (AOR 99).

As would become common in later work, Chatwin presents a grand, romantic hypothesis that, although of obvious interest and appeal, was not quite what the exhibition’s organisers had anticipated. Chatwin had attempted to conform to their expectations through – for almost the only time in Chatwin’s published work – the use of footnotes. This one concession to academic rigour, however, did little to persuade the organisers of the exhibition that the essay was a suitable, or even desirable, contribution to the catalogue: “‘We came from different angles,’” one of the organisers, Emma Bunker, told Nicholas Shakespeare. “‘I came from a strictly academic background and I had not really travelled the world as he had. I expected him to have more footnotes. He was bored with academic nonsense. ‘Those frilly-shirted fools,’ he said” (qtd. in Shakespeare 216). In the introductory essay to the catalogue the Director of the Asia House exhibition, Gordon Bailey Washburn, wrote of the methodological differences between the group of curators:

During all of this pursuit of answers to one of the world’s most difficult historic problems, it is not to be wondered if our trio of scholars were inclined to differences of opinions. And it must not be supposed that unanimity of opinion was either expected or achieved. Mr. Chatwin, an anthropologist at heart, is inclined to find shamanism the most likely inspiration for the

Animal Style in its various ramifications – seeing in it the natural explanation for the style’s apparent encirclement of the globe. [...]

Mrs. Bunker and Dr. Farkas are less interested in an unprovable hypothesis and more concerned with the exacting research that traces the movements of ancient peoples and their styles of ornament across the vast face of Asia and the smaller one of Europe. They belong to that very small band of specialists, an international group of scholars, whose largely invisible research may in the end restore to us some of the many lost pages of ancient history. (7)

The introduction to the catalogue very obviously excludes Chatwin from the ‘small band of specialists’; an ostracisation that would occur not infrequently as a result of his attempts at academic writing. Indeed, such was the backlash in academic circles upon the publication of The Songlines that Howard Morphy began an article in Anthropology Today on the novel thus: ‘As an anthropologist who has worked largely in Australia I feel that professional duty requires me to write a slashing critique that reveals the errors of the book to a naive public waiting to be anthropologically informed’ (19). It could be argued however, despite the scepticism of his colleagues, that Chatwin was simply making the best of a bad job. The Animal Style is a phenomenon that is recognisably difficult to define, occurring over a wide geographical area in the course of a vast train of history. In his hypothesis, Chatwin attempts to provide a coherent explanation behind the diversity of the objects on display – and makes a typically passionate attempt at what one reviewer of the catalogue referred to as ‘the most difficult task in this book’ (Jettmar 258). In an essay for Artibus Asiae, Karl Jettmar reviewed Chatwin’s valiant attempt to fulfil his brief: ‘He has to give us justification of the decision to arrange such a bold exhibition. As an anthropologist, he does his best’ (258).

Irrespective of the subjective success or failure of his essay, Chatwin’s experience with the ‘Animal Style’ exhibition proved a final nail in the coffin of his academic impulses. Chatwin had begun to grow disillusioned with the

pretensions of academia at Edinburgh and his encounter with the perceived conservatism of the Asia House organisers persuaded him that his focus should ultimately rest elsewhere.

Chatwin's ambition to write now gravitated towards a more secular, philosophical analysis of the subject that preoccupied him – that of the causes of human restlessness. His next project, embarked upon in the immediate aftermath of his essay submission, was to be 'a wildly ambitious and intolerant work, a kind of "Anatomy of Restlessness"' (AOR 12), developing on the ideas he had put forward in his catalogue essay.

Chatwin's chosen analogy demonstrates just how ambitious his vision was in constructing what would become the unpublished "The Nomadic Alternative", consciously alluding to the gargantuan The Anatomy of Melancholy by the Renaissance scholar Robert Burton (1577-1640). Burton, who like Chatwin grew up in the provincial West Midlands, spent almost the entirety of his adult life in intellectual seclusion at Christ Church College, Oxford – one biographer stated of his dedication to the literary life that "To describe Burton as "bookish" can only be called ridiculous understatement' (Bamborough). Rarely leaving the city, Burton passed much of his life engaged in work on his Anatomy, a colossal work of scholarship that aimed at presenting an overarching analysis of the phenomenon of melancholy, a condition that had attained fashionable status in the period of the Renaissance. The work, which grew with each edition until his death in 1640, eventually numbered some 516,384 words spread over six volumes, with Burton facing the same problem Chatwin encountered in assembling his own 'Anatomy', as the critic Nicholas Lezard acknowledges: 'Burton never, strictly speaking, finished it: there was always something else to go in.' As Kevin Jackson commented in his

introduction to the Fyfield Edition of the work: ‘All [Burton] really did with his life was to read hundreds and hundreds of learned books, and then recycle them into his one big book, the Anatomy’ (x). The work retained popularity fairly consistently through until the last century, when it drifted in and out of print; the work was perhaps too unwieldy and generically unstable to appeal to the twentieth-century reader. These reasons may well have formed a major part of its appeal to Bruce Chatwin, who was a member of the ‘amiable conspiracy’ (Jackson vii) who read, loved and sometimes plundered the work, and who quoted from the Anatomy in both “The Nomadic Alternative” and The Songlines. In particular, Chatwin admired the heterogeneous nature of the work, the refusal to bow to academic specialism; a brave approach which influenced Chatwin strongly in the construction of his own ‘Anatomy’. Burton expressed his desire for his work to be generalist in approach in the de facto introduction to the text: ‘I had a great desire (not able to attain a superficial skill in any) to have some smattering in all, to be *aliquis in omnibus, nullis in singulis*¹⁶, which Plato commends [...] as fit to be imprinted in all curious wits, not to be a slave of one science, or dwell altogether in one subject, as most do, but to rove abroad, *centum puer artium*¹⁷ to have an oar in every man’s boat, to taste of every dish, and sip of every cup’ (22).

A sense of this spirit of generalism pervades the first extant synopsis of what was to become “The Nomadic Alternative”, chronologically stuck, as it is, between Chatwin’s rejection of academic models and his ultimate shift to writing creative literature. Despite his disillusion following the negative response to his ‘Animal Style’ essay in America, Chatwin had used the piece to

¹⁶ ‘To be somebody in everything, nobody in anything.’

¹⁷ ‘The servant of a hundred arts.’

secure interest in his full-length study of nomadism from Tom Maschler, the Chairman of publishing house Jonathan Cape. Maschler, who like Chatwin had eschewed University education, was one of the major publishing figures of the twentieth century – and he was not afraid to declare it to those who were unaware of his status. In one of the images from his recently published memoir Publisher, Maschler is shown wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the slogan ‘The World’s Greatest Publisher’. During his time at Jonathan Cape, Maschler introduced Thomas Pynchon, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Joseph Heller to the British market, published Salman Rushdie, Ian McEwan and Doris Lessing, and had, at the time of meeting Bruce Chatwin, just orchestrated one of the literary sensations of the 1960s with the publication of Desmond Morris’ The Naked Ape.

Adding to the appeal of Jonathan Cape was its history as one of the preeminent publishers of travel writing in the golden age, as Paul Fussell recounts: ‘[Cape] was acute in sensing the postwar demand for travel books of all kinds – Lady Warren’s Through Algeria and Tunisia on a Motor Cycle was on the 1922 list – and signing up some of the brightest stars, like Robert Byron, Peter Fleming, and Beverley Nichols’ (60). To the young Chatwin, the idea of becoming attached to the same publishing house as that of Robert Byron – whose The Road to Oxiana he referred to as a ‘work of genius’ and a ‘sacred text’ (WAIDH 286) – must have appealed enormously.

Maschler requested that Chatwin draft a proposal for “The Nomadic Alternative” in the form of a letter, an unusual request that Maschler asserts ‘frees people’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 217) from the general constraints of writing a synopsis. The letter – dated 24th February 1969 – offers an ambitious, but also hugely exciting, thesis for “The Nomadic Alternative” that the final manuscript

would sadly fail to live up to. In keeping with his recent negative experience of the academic world and his admiration for Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, Chatwin asserts that he wishes the work to be 'general rather than specialist in tone' and to pose the question "“Why do men wander rather than sit still?”" (AOR 75). In the letter he sets up – as in his 'Animal Style' essay – the conflict between civilisation and nomadism as a central thrust of the work, but also introduces an element less overtly present in that pseudo-academic catalogue piece: '[T]he mutual antagonism of citizen and nomad is only one half of the theme. The other is much nearer home – ESCAPISM (a good personal reason for writing the book). Why do I become restless after a month in a single place, unbearable after two? (I am, I admit, a bad case.) Some travel for business. But there is no economic reason for me to go, and every reason to stay put' (AOR 76). Chatwin's assertion of his own personal interest in the subject of restlessness – concealed within almost confessional parentheses – is tellingly significant to the ultimate failure of the book as a whole. Chatwin clearly saw the work as an attempt to explain and justify – both to himself and others – his wandering tendencies through a complex anthropological argument over the first state of man. As he wrote in a notebook entry which could equally be applied to his entire oeuvre: 'This book is written in answer to explain my own restlessness – coupled with a morbid preoccupation with roots. No fixed home till I was five and thereafter *battling*, desperate attempts on my part to *escape* – if not physically, then by the invention of mystical paradises. The book should be read with this in mind' (Photographs & Notebooks 13).

The confusion of purpose that this conflation entailed can be seen as a primary reason for the academic failure of the work. In conflating two separate strands – the personal and anthropological – Chatwin rendered his task in

writing “The Nomadic Alternative” near impossible. As would become abundantly clear, the pastoral nomadic tradition, as practiced by the Qashgai of Iran or the Tuareg of the Sahara and as studied by numerous ethnographers, has – anthropologically – very little to do with the condition of restlessness as experienced and described by Chatwin, Baudelaire, Pascal or Steinbeck. As shall be seen, Chatwin struggled valiantly to draw a connecting thread between the phenomena, developing a grandiose theory of inherited nomadic instinct, but was ultimately unable to equate the two with any objective success. It was only when, almost twenty years later, Chatwin largely abandoned the academic anthropology of his thesis in the writing of The Songlines that he was able to express his personal feelings on the nomadic life; in that work he concentrated on his ideas as offering a poetic insight into restlessness, rather than a didactic theory. Until that point, Chatwin would spend much of his career developing his discussion of restlessness through the various characters and situations of his creative work, who became vehicles for the ideas he was forced to abandon in “The Nomadic Alternative”. As a young, previously unpublished writer, the thesis of his work was too grand, and one can almost cast the young Chatwin in the mould of Edward Casaubon in Middlemarch, constantly defeated by the breadth of his work of Christian syncretism, upon whose mind ‘the difficulty of making his Key to all Mythologies unimpeachable weighed like lead’ (263).

“The Nomadic Alternative” would thus become an urtext in Chatwin’s oeuvre; it contained so much of the material that the author would spend the rest of his life exploring that it cannot simply be dismissed as a youthful folly, yet cannot be truly argued for as an expression of Chatwin’s creative potential. The following chapters consequently intend to discuss the text as an initial exploration into the territory that the later works would come to claim as their

own, offering theoretical explanations for the complex and ambiguous subject that would come to define Chatwin's oeuvre; that of human restlessness, its causes and effects. This first chapter will attempt to outline Chatwin's discussion of nomadism in "The Nomadic Alternative", undertaking to present a cogent synopsis of his ideas around the nomadic life whilst simultaneously pointing out some of the possible contradictions and flaws in his thesis.

Chatwin began his research for "The Nomadic Alternative" in earnest in May of 1969, having received a two hundred pound advance from Jonathan Cape. Just a month later, Chatwin embarked upon a research trip to Afghanistan with the poet and Jesuit priest, Peter Levi. Levi, who had organised the trip, was travelling to investigate the influence of the Greek invasions of Inner Asia in around 245 BC on Afghanistan: "The question I most wanted to answer was what was the Greek occupation of Afghanistan like, and what became of those remote Greek kingdoms?" (12). This was to be Chatwin's third trip to the country and, whilst Levi explored Greek/Afghan history, Chatwin sought out material for his book on nomads. Levi was later to turn the story of the journey they undertook around Afghanistan into a book, The Light Garden of the Angel King, and this now almost forgotten travelogue offers one of the only published first hand representations of Chatwin the traveller. The glimpses the reader catches of the young Bruce – introduced, even at this stage of his career, as 'a specialist in the study of nomadic peoples' (86) – testify to his humour as a travelling companion, as well as his occasional tendencies towards self-aggrandisement. Levi was, however, clearly enamored of his fellow traveller:

[I]t will be obvious from every page of this book that I was extremely fortunate in the travelling companion I did have. Most of our best observations and all the best jokes were his; and it was he who was interested in nomads, he who told me to read Basho, he who had done all the right homework in my subjects as well as his own, who knew the names of flowers and who understood Islamic art history. (15)

Levi and Chatwin travelled widely, visiting many of the architectural and archaeological treasures of Afghanistan, including the tomb of Babur in Kabul (from which Levi took the title of his book), the Minarets of Ghor and Ghazni and the Buddhas of Bamiyan, now sadly destroyed after the Taliban, in a fever of iconoclastic fury, spent a month shelling the statues to rubble in 2001. Their extensive travels left them somewhat fatigued and Chatwin's reaction to the hardships of the journey testifies to the veracity of those who questioned his fortitude as a western nomad; on their return from Bamiyan, Levi recounts their individual afflictions: 'I had a lip-sore, a septic hand and a bruised toe, Bruce had mild heat exhaustion and a sunstroke temperature; we were both thinner. He sat dazed on his bed dressed in a long Arab gown, reading fearsome sentences from the Royal Geographical Society's Travellers' Guide to Health, such as "after collapse, death soon ensues"' (80).

Whilst Chatwin sometimes comes across in the text as something of a modern Don Quixote, uncovering Kazakh nomad tents in markets and chasing down rumours of an ancient golden crown apparently sequestered in Kabul's jewellery bazaar (it later 'turned out to be a British hussar's brass helmet' (106)), there can be little doubt as to the significance of this journey to the young writer. Levi, who had already established some reputation as a poet, became the newest mentor for Chatwin, who was struggling to make the transition from interested amateur to authority on nomadic peoples. Levi offered him a personal model of a creative writer, a very different beast to those in the worlds

of commercial art and academia who had previously mentored him. Chatwin admired the apparent freedom the older poet seemed to represent: ‘He wanted from me a way of life that was largely in his imagination. He thought my life was some kind of solution: I travelled about and I was a writer. That interested him for the first time while we were in Afghanistan. We talked about the problems of writing, about Russian poets like Osip Mandelstam. 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’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 222).

Upon his return to England, Chatwin faced the realities of this transformation. The journal that he kept over this period testifies to some of the frustrations he encountered in these early stages of the writing of “The Nomadic Alternative”:

December 15

Worked during the morning with interruptions on the book. Fluency is elusive. Reached an impasse with the first chapter. I think I have bitten off far more than I can chew.

December 16

I have finally rearranged the first chapter and hope for God’s sake that, third time lucky, it is final.

Dec 18

Spent the morning clearing and organizing my study, and the latter part of the afternoon fiddling with the book. Less unhappy now than I was. (Chatwin Archive Box 34)

Bruce Chatwin was struggling with multifarious challenges in his construction of “The Nomadic Alternative”. Not only was the writer having to locate perhaps tenuous connections between the nomadic life and that of the western wanderer, as already noted; he was also having to contend with the complexities of varying forms of nomadic life. For, as Bruce Chatwin discovered in the course of writing “The Nomadic Alternative”, nomads are truly all things

to all men. As John Ure observes in his work In Search of Nomads, ‘Nomads are notoriously difficult to define. Are they pastoralists who move with the seasons from one pasture to another? Or are they Romanies who have no fixed abode and are forever on the move? Is returning to a homeland after travels a disqualification for true nomadism? Is being a nomad a frame of mind, or is it a physical activity?’ (xii). For anthropologists, the word ‘nomad’ has a specific sense; derived from the Greek for pasturage, these specialists argue that the meaning strictly relates to those communities, mainly found in the Sahel belt of Africa or the Eurasian steppes, who follow a regular route of pasture in order to sustain their herds of cattle. These academics would generally agree that the phenomenon of nomadism originated ‘in the Bronze Age, at the end of the second millennium B.C., among tribes of the mountains and steppes of Eurasia who had had a complex agricultural-pastoral economy since the Neolithic period’ (Markov 306), and has developed geographically and agriculturally from that point, never straying *too* far from the pastoral migration model. This definition has, however, proved too narrow for some, who view the phenomenon of nomadism from a more cultural, artistic perspective; Bruce Chatwin was amongst this number.

The aesthetic view of nomadism argues for a broader definition of the word to include groups and individuals for whom travelling is a way of life. Those writers who subscribe to this view have attempted to deconstruct the strict rules imposed by anthropologists, positing the academic definition of nomadism as unnecessarily narrow. The British travel writer Richard Grant, who in 2004 won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award for his exploration of North American rootlessness, Ghost Riders: Nomads of the American Desert, argues in that work for a more relaxed attitude to the semantics of nomadism:

‘The word “nomad” is derived from the Greek *nomos*, meaning pasture and, strictly speaking, it refers only to pastoral herding peoples. The more pedantic scholars, such as the Russian authority A.M. Khazanov, maintain that true nomadism has never existed in North America, with the arguable exception of the Navajo Indians [...] Outside scholarly circles, however, the word nomad has a broader, more metaphorical meaning – “Any of a people who have no permanent home, but moving about constantly, as if in search of pasture,” to quote *Webster’s New World Dictionary*’ (81). Note, here, the Chatwinesque implications concerning academia; the expert Khazanov is referred to as ‘pedantic’, whilst the phrase ‘outside scholarly circles’ implies that the debate had previously formed something of a self-contained discourse within the rarefied climes of European universities.

In “The Nomadic Alternative”, Bruce Chatwin similarly attempts to subvert the traditional academic approach to the subject, arguing that: ‘Nomads of today are truck-drivers, *gauchos*, *vaqueros*, *mafiosi*, commercial salesmen, shifting migrants, and those possessed of the *samurai* spirit, mercenaries and guerrilla heroes’ (“NA” 21). Curiously, Chatwin here includes at least two groups – mafiosi and salesmen – who will have a permanent home in a town or city of some description, whilst those who would not necessarily return to a fixed home base are motivated to wander for vastly different reasons; guerrilla heroes and *vaqueros* would surely be divided by more than they have in common, whilst the definition of ‘shifting migrants’ is so vague as to be almost meaningless; to be an aesthete’s nomad is obviously to be a member of a broad church.

The reality of the situation, however, is that, despite the aesthetes’ implications of academic rigidity, anthropologists tend to be more sophisticated in their analysis of the diversity of nomadic life within the boundaries discussed

above than are the aesthetes. Whilst artists and writers tend to construct an arbitrary opposition between the ‘civilised’ and ‘nomadic’ life of those – often fairly specific groups – they write about, those who work in the field with pastoral nomads recognise both the heterogeneity of the nomadic life and also the essential interaction between nomads and settlers. As Douglas Johnson observes: ‘Much of the semantic problem results from a desire to fit every group in a livelihood form that is inherently diverse into a neat pigeon hole. No rigid classification will suffice, for there would always be nomadic groups that fail to match rigid criteria’ (17). G.E. Markov further develops this point:

Usually a society is or is not considered nomadic depending on the extent of migrations in search of grazing lands. Yet it is well known that this extent varies a great deal according to the geographical environment: in a year the nomads may cross either thousands of kilometers (Arab Bedouins, Mongols, a considerable part of the Kazakhs in the past, and others) or only some dozens (some Turkmen in the past, Kurds, and others). The extent of mobility of the pastoral peoples is a variable, subject to change depending on season, weather, and local environment. Pastoral economy is always complex. (305)

Chatwin argues in “The Nomadic Alternative” that ‘[t]here are two conditions for men, to wander and to settle – to dig in or to move – two conditions with incompatible ideologies. The wanderer exults in his freedom, the settler compensates for his chains [...] The nomad is in permanent revolt against the city’ (18). This binary opposition, which often forms a key feature of the aesthetic view of nomadism, has always been somewhat inaccurate, and has become more so with the passage of time and the greater imposition of civilisation on travelling communities. Indeed, all nomads, no matter whose definition you pick, rely on the system of settlement to make their life viable. As A.M. Khazanov observes ‘nomads could never exist on their own without the outside world and its non-nomadic societies, with their different economic systems. Indeed, a nomadic society could only function while the outside world

not only existed but also allowed for those reactions from it – reactions which were economic, social, political, cultural, in a word, a multi-faceted response – which ensured that the nomads remained nomads’ (3).

The desire to construct such a binary opposition stems from the historical development of the aesthetic view of the nomad. In much aesthetic literature on the subject of nomadism, the individual nomad stands as a representative of the ‘noble savage’, the personification of the enlightenment concept of humankind’s innate goodness. The concept can be traced back to the classical era, but reached its apotheosis in the eighteenth century in part as a result of the philosophical work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the journals of James Cook, which described seemingly Edenic low-technology communities to be found in the South Seas.

The figure of the Noble Savage played an important cultural role over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; from Aphra Behn’s representation of the noble Oroonoko, through Defoe’s Friday, Dirk Peters in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket and Queequeg in Moby Dick, the gentle innocence of the Noble Savage offered a contrary vision to those who depicted the ‘uncivilised’ world as populated by bloodthirsty cannibals. These representations offered natural man as peace-loving and innocent of the corrupting influence of civilisation, and emerged directly from Rousseau’s argument in his essay A Discourse on Inequality: ‘[N]othing is more peaceable than man in his primitive state,’ wrote Rousseau, ‘placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civilised man, limited equally by reason and instinct to defending himself against evils which threaten him, he is restrained by natural pity from doing harm to anyone, even after receiving harm himself’ (115).

The industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, and the resulting urbanisation, increased the prominence of the so-called 'primitivist' view that sanctified the noble savage, and, consequently by implication, the nomad. The impositions of technology coupled with the violence and degradation of modern living sustained the myth through until the twentieth century, where it lived on through the work of writers such as Owen Lattimore, Wilfred Thesiger, T.E. Lawrence and Bruce Chatwin, as well as through the rise of ecological and environmental concerns, which have led to a primitivist reaction against the consumerist, acquisitive tendencies of modern Western society. The life espoused by the nomad has come to represent a modern alternative to the perceived failures of sedentary life, as Khazanov observes: 'Philosophers have influenced travellers and travellers have influenced scholars. Many sources and ideas have misinformed poets, writers and the general reading public; at the same time there has been a great desire and search for such misinformation about nomadism. In its striking non-conformity with the sedentary life of townsmen, the image of nomadic life has exercised the strong attraction of opposites' (1).

In the increasingly apocalyptic times of the present day, the adaptability of nomads has come to be espoused as a virtue sadly lacking in sedentary, Western civilisation, as Robyn Hanbury-Tenison testified in a talk at the Hay literary festival in discussion with Jeremy Swift, an anthropologist who met with Chatwin in Iran: 'One of the manifest differences between us and nomads [...] is that we will find it very difficult to cope with the impending disaster if there is an impending disaster [...] Increasingly as the world changes we are going to recognise as so many of their societies vanish how very valuable they are and I

hope we'll be able to do something about it and learn from them before too many more lose their knowledge.'

"The Nomadic Alternative" shares the view that nomads are representatives of the simpler, more natural state of man, and thus vehicles for enlightenment. Much of Chatwin's later work would be dedicated to the writing of requiems for dead or obscure means of life that offered an alternative to the urbanised, consumerist norm. At times – as in On the Black Hill – it was the model of the anchorite that provided the example to be emulated. For the most part, however, Chatwin continued to develop and refine in his later work the 'primitivist' conception that found its earliest full exposition in "The Nomadic Alternative", expanding on the argument that from humankind's nomadic origins 'all subsequent progress has been so many steps in appearance towards the improvement of the individual, but so many steps in reality towards the decrepitude of the species' (Rousseau 115).

This argument – that in order to live stable, happy lives within peaceful societies we must look backwards to the nomadic origins of the species – forms the central thrust of much of Chatwin's argument in the introduction to "The Nomadic Alternative": 'Urban civilisation has always bred the doubters (and I am one of them) who turn to writing Jeremiads in times of distress. Human nature may be immobile, but the human condition is infinitely worse than it was. These doubters have been called the Primitivists, and they look back with impotent nostalgia – and a lot of intellectual posing – on the Golden Age of Savagery, blending the charm of the exotic with the innocence of youth. Their writings belong to the literature of escape'¹⁸ (5).

¹⁸ One of the central problems of "The Nomadic Alternative" can be glanced in this early paragraph; Chatwin seems, throughout this lengthy work, unwilling or unable to commit to an argument. As above, he constantly undermines his point, seemingly in the interest of being considered fair-minded, whilst in fact simply muddling his argument. Chatwin seems to argue that the primitivist position is Utopian fantasy – yet he relies on it in espousing his grand theory of nomadism.

Chatwin takes issue with the bias he perceives in much anthropological writing, which, he argues, represents less technology dependent cultures as the poor genetic predecessor of Western 'civilisation'. These 'anti-primitivists' hold those ordained as noble savages to in fact be irredeemably uncultivated and barbaric, and view settlement as a redemptive and progressive state: 'Through ingenuity and their capacity for self-improvement,' the anti-primitivist's argument runs, 'men dragged themselves from a mire of taboos and ignorance and began to enjoy the rewards of settlement, instead of roaming the earth in a ceaseless struggle to keep alive. The remnant savages, who linger on in forgotten parts of the earth, are incompetent failures' (6). The anti-primitivists count amongst their number, in Chatwin's conception, Charles Darwin and Karl Marx, though the influence of this approach can be seen to permeate much writing on other cultures, particularly that dating from the nineteenth century.

The experience and testimony of Auguste Guinnard, a young Frenchman who experienced the ignoble savage first hand during a trip to Argentina in the 1850s, offers an illustrative example of this evolutionary perspective. Guinnard, who travelled with the intention of making his fortune in the golden land of South America, is out riding on the Pampas with a companion one day when:

[S]uddenly, at the turn of a piece of rising ground, we saw with terror a party of Indians, who were evidently on the scent of some kind of prey, man or game [...] I never saw anything more dreary and weird looking than the aspect of these half-naked beings, mounted on spirited horses which they managed with surprising dexterity. (23)

The passage is notable for the implications of Guinnard's use of language; the 'Indians' are the very definition of the 'other', 'dreary' and 'weird looking [...] beings' whom Guinnard works hard not to identify with in any way. Clearly he sees them as subhuman; indeed he reserves his only use of positive language to describe the horses that are handled, in a backhanded compliment, with

‘surprising dexterity’. Perhaps most striking, however, is the assumption that these ‘beings’ are searching for prey, and that the distinction between prey and human is not present in their consciousness; the implied assumption is that the ‘Indians’ are in thrall to the most primitive of human instincts, and that the only motivation behind their presence on the Pampas would be that of hunting – and possibly cannibalism. The mere presence of these beings is enough to send Guinnard and his companion into hiding for two days for fear of ‘being discovered and assailed by a savage and pitiless enemy’ (23), despite having only seen the ‘savages’ behaving peacefully, and at some distance.

Chatwin argues that anti-primitivists such as Guinnard or Darwin locate a vision of the early stages of man – as represented by the ignoble savage – in which they assert that the aggressive instinct is manifest: ‘They have concocted a most extravagant animal fable to illuminate the Fall of Man. Briefly, they have observed the existence of a hierarchy of dominance in some (but not all) animal species, and presume its existence in men to account for the spontaneity of human warfare’ (9). The human species, the argument goes, developed in a strictly hierarchical fashion, wherein a strong male acquires living space, food and the right to mate with the best females through aggressive behaviour: ‘The strong males, who discipline the hierarchy and beat it into submission, guarantee a defended living space (lebensraum) for all its members. In return they have the right – the right of force – to the best food and the best females’ (9). This system ensures the success of the species, as only the dominant, aggressive males survive; thus, aggression becomes a primary facet of our genetic template. The advent of weaponry has simply carried these genetically developed instincts to their logical conclusion. This seemingly Darwinian argument – espoused by Konrad Lorenz in his controversial work On

Aggression – feeds into the fantasies of neofascists and their conception of an *Übermensch* (Nietzsche's 'Superman') and *Herrenvolk* ('master race'). Low technology communities not only represent the most primitive, localised form of this aggressive instinct; their classification as 'lesser developed' also sanctions their domination by force by more 'civilised' communities.

This theory developed from the work of the Australian anthropologist, Raymond Dart, who, in 1924, made what has been referred to as the most important archaeological discovery of the twentieth century; it was also to be amongst its most controversial.¹⁹ At that point, Dart was working as an anatomist in the School of Medicine at the University of Witwatersrand in the Transvaal area of South Africa. Through a peculiar chain of circumstance, Dart ended up receiving for analysis what was thought to be a fossilised monkey skull, but which he quickly and correctly identified as that of a baboon. From the commercial mine where the baboon skull had been found, Dart excavated a vast quantity of fossils including one which would become famous the world over – that of the Taung child. Taung was the first example of the species Dart named as *Australopithecus Africanus* – the Southern African ape – and was subjected to scrupulous analysis. The skull was conjectured to have belonged to a small child of no more than three or four years old who would have stood approximately 3'6" tall. Of particular interest was the damage sustained by the skull, which led Dart to speculate that the child had perhaps been killed by a sudden, severe blow to the head. That the Taung child – at that point the earliest hominid specimen to have been discovered on the continent of Africa (and hence corroborative of Darwin's theory of human evolution) – could have been subject to a violent, seemingly weapon-related, death led Dart to extend a

¹⁹ See Bergman, Charles. *Orion's Legacy: A Cultural History of Man as Hunter*. New York: Plume, 1997.

hypothesis that was known as the Osteodontokeratic (bone/tooth/horn) tool culture theorem and which asserted that internecine violence had formed the mainspring of hominid evolutionary change, that ‘our species had emerged from its simian background *because* we were killers and cannibals; that the weapon had fathered the man’ (TS 235). Dart speculated that the area from which the Taung child skull had come was the refuse area of early men, who had killed, and presumably eaten, the child.

Dart’s theorem seems chilling in its implications for a modern audience, but after being first aired in the 1920s and 1930s, the assertions over man’s origins found some considerable sympathy amongst the academic community, partly as a result of the contemporary context of his research. As Charles Bergman observed: ‘Dart’s view of the australopithecines as murderous hunters was accepted, not because he adduced evidence, but because it must have explained something to us about ourselves. We seemed to believe it instinctively, perhaps out of the horrors inspired by the unprecedented bloodshed of World War I’ (38).

Dart’s theorem was the logical extension of all previous conceptions of our heritage as hunting apes. Despite the scarcity of evidence to support Dart’s assertions, his argument seemed to fit with the historical masculine view of man as a hunting animal: ‘From Jack London and *The Call of the Wild* (1903) to Edgar Rice Burroughs and his first Tarzan books (1912), boys entered manhood and the twentieth century with aggressive virile fantasies of the wild, all-male life’ (Bergman 215). The Taung child and its genetic implications seemed to legitimise all the masculine, dominating, vanquishing tendencies which can be seen to have reached their apotheosis in the Second World War and the patriarchal social culture of the 1950s.

Few serious anthropologists still subscribe to Dart's theory. Whilst this may in part simply illuminate a shift in contemporary attitudes, there is also little doubt that the evidence simply doesn't exist to support the vision of our ancestors as cannibalistic hunters for whom aggression provided the evolutionary spur to progress. Chatwin followed the debate for some twenty years, and wrote triumphantly in *The Songlines* of Professor 'Bob' Brain's assertion that the Taung child was in fact probably killed by a big cat of some description – the damage to the skull being caused by 'shearing', as a result of subsidence in the strata:

Among the fossils in the Red Room he showed me the incomplete calvarium of a young male Homo habilis. [...] On the base, there are two neat holes about an inch apart. Brain then took the fossil skull of a leopard found in the same stratum and showed me how the lower canines fit perfectly into the two holes. A leopard drags its kill by fastening its jaws around the skull, as a cat will carry a mouse.

The holes were in exactly the right position.

(TS 249-250)

Contemporary analysis has declared that responsibility for Taung's death may lie in a more unexpected quarter. In 1995, Professor Lee Berger, of the very same University of Witwatersrand at which Raymond Dart taught, published an article titled 'Eagle Involvement in accumulation of the Taung child fauna', which argued that previously unnoticed marks around the Taung child's eyes may be consistent with an attack by a large bird of prey. If correct, the truth of the Taung child's death, some two and a half million years ago, lies some way from the theory of innate human aggression posited by Professor Dart.

The anthropological argument around man's aggressive instinct forms the basis of the anti-primitivist cause that Chatwin railed against in the introduction to "The Nomadic Alternative". Rather than seeing primitive

hunting communities as evolutionary representatives of an inherited aggressive instinct, Chatwin argues that they are in fact examples of the Rousseauian vision of the ‘non-violent Society of Equals’ (22). Chatwin locates the origins of man’s aggressive instinct not in our ancestors on the savannas of Africa but rather in the proto-civilisations of the ‘fertile crescent’ of Mesopotamia: ‘that great arc of hills and mountains extending from Palestine to South West Persia’ (94). In the conception of Chatwin’s grand thesis, it is when men first crowded into cities that aggression began to emerge as a preeminent characteristic of the human race:

Many would like to blame our “sins” such as our aggression and our greed on some flaw in our nature. This would allow them to sin more. But analysed as the sins of settlement, they are not necessarily the ills of the human species. Original sin is a concoction of settlers, and settlement for any length of time is an unusual and aberrant condition in human affairs. The man who sits quietly in a room is often quite lethal. He may also be mad. (45-46)

It is in the second chapter of “The Nomadic Alternative” that the argument concerning the nefarious influence of social constriction is fully expounded. Titled ‘The Pyramid’, this section of the work outlines an argument against the excesses of civilisation, metaphorically embodied, in Chatwin’s conception, in the absurdity of monumental architecture which, the author asserts, reveals: ‘the cold rationality of the lunatic. Before the Nuremberg rallies, Hitler communed with himself in a subterranean cell inspired by the burial chamber of the Great Pyramid. All monumental architecture is abusive, bought in blood, the token of past and future suffering [...] The harmonious proportions of the Parthenon did not reflect some inner harmony in the minds of the builders, but merely announced that an age of turmoil and demagoguery had begun’ (48). In questioning the totemic structures of modern civilisation – the pyramids and the Parthenon – Chatwin is radicalizing his argument, attempting

to convert the sceptical reader to his perspective through a vitriolic attack on the most sacred symbols of collective cultural heritage. Chatwin recognises that in order to persuade his audience round to his, radically different, conception of evolutionary development, he must encourage an entirely unfamiliar conceptual approach. ‘The man who sees the reality of things,’ he asserts of the visitor to the Parthenon, ‘will imagine a thin crust of blood to interline each cadaver-white block’ (48). Chatwin espouses an essentially Marxist argument here; that monumental architecture of the sort described is not intended to inspire those who live in the shadow of it, rather to oppress them into a state-centred mindset (much like the M-Machine in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927)), where the individual simply becomes the unwitting tool of civilisation:

Power imposed from above averted spontaneous chaos from below. The absolutism of the Pharaoh was the logical conclusion to the pyramidal scheme. From the apex the High Command delegated authority to his immediate family and loyal supporters. At lower levels came the professional classes, the bureaucrats, the army, police, tax-assessors and specialist craftsmen. But the weight of the pyramid rested on the shoulders of slaves and workers. If the throne was heaven, their lot was hell. (49)

The grand buildings which grow up around any successful society are, in the author’s conception, token examples of the progress that the society as a whole strives for – and it is this collective belief and faith in the idea of progress that drives the individual to work harder and harder: ‘Mineral wealth,’ Chatwin argues, ‘torn from the body of the earth which opens its veins to the prospector, reinforces the life-preserving illusion of progress’ (59).

Eventually, however, this collective belief falters, engendering the fall of the great civilisation:

There comes a point when human individualism says NO. People realize they have been tricked by false promises and fake explanations of human existence. The government presses them to work harder to maintain a way of life that has become meaningless. Fewer and fewer people pay more and more taxes, once the

advantages of no fixed address become obvious. Devotion to the machine is, in human terms, futile, as more people adopt a Taoist attitude to the future of material improvement. (62)

The decline of great nations rarely, the author asserts, occurs as a result of external influence; instead, it is the internal, often sublimated, will of the people which engenders the gradual degeneration: '[T]he State carries with it a burden of guilt and militates against the freedom of the individual. Unless the State can mitigate the severity of its grip, ultimately the will to be free wins' (66). This observation seems to prefigure the narrative commentary of Utz, where it is observed that:

Tyranny sets up its own echo-chamber; a void where confused signals buzz about at random; where a murmur or innuendo causes panic: so, in the end, the machinery of repression is more likely to vanish, not with the war or revolution, but with a puff, or the voice of falling leaves... (99)

Stylistically, 'The Pyramid' suffers from the weight of Chatwin's condemnatory argument; the grand thesis of "The Nomadic Alternative" demands that these imperiums be vilified by the reader; thus the text of the chapter reads not unlike the propaganda of the allies designed to warn against the evils of Fascism. The language is emotive and oppressive; the state described as an 'unstable machine' in the face of which the oppressed masses 'quiver with fear' (53) at the barbaric acts executed in its name: 'One Pyramid text described metaphorically a Pharaoh's cannibal bloodlust. He eats men, strangles them, draws out their entrails, swallows his enemies for breakfast, smashes their backbones for the spinal marrow, and sinks his royal fangs into their lungs and palpitating hearts' (50). Like the constructions described, the prose is monumental and overbearing.

Chatwin's project in "The Nomadic Alternative" is to persuade subliminally as well as overtly as to the appeal of the nomadic life, as is made

obvious in the language of the opening section of the chapter that follows ‘The Pyramid’ which begins with a description of the spring migration of the steppe nomads notable in its contrast to the preceding section:

Each spring the nomads of South West Asia brindle the hills with their herds. Thin lines of animals – sheep and goats, horses and camels – follow the unfurling of the leaves on their journey from winter pastures to the mountains. The nomads are lean and sinewy, burnished by the sun and wind. They do not pause to talk to strangers and scowl at villagers. They fix their hawk-like eyes on their animals, watching for the first signs of sickness [...] The women suckle silent babies in the folds of their dresses. Their lithe bodies ebb and flow to the pitching of the saddles, their kohl-dark eyes glued to the road ahead. Showers of gold glisten on their breasts, and they have bought fresh printed calico dresses for the spring migration, brilliantly coloured to match the spring flowers that lacquer the ground. (67)

This utopian vision of a life in harmony with the natural world – the women’s dresses which match the spring flowers; the animalistic nomads ‘lean and sinewy’ with ‘hawk-like eyes’ – is an affirmation of the argument already outlined – that the nomadic life is the good life. It is, in Chatwin’s conception, also the sustainable life: ‘Empires have been smashed and cities have been blown up, but life in the black tents continues without significant change since the days when Abraham the nomad sheikh guided his flocks on his annual migration’ (68). This chapter, entitled ‘The Nomadic Alternative’, along with that following, ‘Hunting – the Art of the Minimum’ follows a central argument wherein the necessary asceticism of the nomad/hunter-gatherer offers a philosophical lesson to those who believe in the accumulation of material wealth as the source of contented existence. Chatwin emphasises the adaptability of nomadic society, which can be seen as the key explanation for the longevity of their way of life, as Owen Lattimore explains:

By sloughing off trade and other nonessentials a part at least of the nomad society can seek the least accessible part of the steppe and there escape wars that concern the political fusion of different orders of society. In doing so those who escape make it clear that

nomad mobility has two aspects – the limited range of normal movement and the unlimited range of potential movement. They also make it clear that it is the poor nomad who is the pure nomad: by stripping themselves of the accessories and luxuries that a prosperous nomadism acquires they establish afresh the possibility of survival under strictly steppe conditions [...] and thus attain once more the extreme phase of departure from the edge of the steppe. (522)

Through their ability to adapt and, if necessary, cut themselves off, nomads, as Jeremy Swift observes, offer a useful example to the sedentary: ‘There are a whole series of pluses which depend on flexibility and what nomadic pastoralists do is they are by their very nature flexible, they are able to respond rapidly to changes and in a dangerous and changeable environment, that is an extraordinarily valuable lesson for the rest of us.’

Adaptability is not the only explanation, in Chatwin’s hypothesis, for the longevity of the nomad/hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Nomads do not only avoid aggressive encounters and potential flash points by their ability to cast off for the wilderness. Chatwin argues that the very lifestyle they lead, devoid of the material desires implicit in the capitalist model and predicated on a culture of sharing, encourages a less confrontational worldview: ‘All food is shared equally and once a passing stranger shows himself a friend, hospitality is automatic, his life and property sacrosanct. The owner of a tent is honour-bound to share his “bread and salt” with a visitor’ (81).

On the rare occasions that this egalitarian social structure does break down and violence results, Chatwin argues that nomads are proportionate in their response. The nomads, he asserts, are experts of the raid, a tradition of brutal but swift justice, but refrain from committing atrocities on the scale of settled peoples, as Charles Doughty observed: ‘the Arabs of the wilderness are the justest of mortals...the nomad justice is mild where the Hebrew law, in this smelling of the settled countries, is crude’ (qtd. in Ure 97). Bruce Chatwin points

out that to the nomad '[t]he exquisite refinements of the torture chamber, that combination of blood, cracked ribs and mechanics, are unknown' (81). It is well documented that nomadic life relies on a system of self-policing in order to maintain social harmony; thus violence is not absent from nomadic life, it is simply more precisely directed, as Chatwin acknowledges: 'The notion of equivalence informs his criminal code – "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." A nomad never runs to the law. He is his own court and executioner and heaven help him if he makes a mistake. He identifies the criminal, personally pays him out for the crime. And he takes full responsibility for so doing' (81). The argument goes that, despite the occasional violent outburst amongst nomadic communities, they, in the words of Ib'n Khaldun, are 'closer to being good than settled peoples, because they are closer to the first state and more removed from all bad habits that have infected the souls of settlers through many ugly blameworthy customs' (qtd. in "NA" 18).

The hunter-gatherers of whom he writes in the subsequent chapter are, in Chatwin's conception, even clearer examples of the fundamental wrong-headedness of the anti-primitivist theory. Chatwin describes the lifestyle of the Yaghan of Tierra del Fuego, who, it was held, were amongst the 'least civilised' (120) people in the world. 'Their very humanity was doubtful and their appearance corresponded exactly to the popular conception of the savage. Encrusted with dirt and naked, they paddled their rough canoes through gale lashed waters in a climate worse than that of the Faroe Isles' (120). Yet in the Yaghan, Chatwin discovers a profound linguistic ability that reflects their harmonious relationship with the natural world: 'Their terminology of the phases of the year were hinged to changes in the weather, the cycle of vegetation and the migrations of animals and birds' (123). One finds in this section of "The

Nomadic Alternative” the tentative beginnings of the arguments he would expound more fully in The Songlines, where land and word are indivisible.

The wandering life of the Yaghan, Chatwin writes, precludes materialism; they were ‘entirely free of the European mania for possessions. If given an attractive present they would treasure it as a novelty for an hour or so, then present it to the dogs’ (125). As a result of this lack of material desire, Yaghan society is profoundly equable:

Sometimes they quarreled and fought, usually over women, but murder was unknown. To call a man a murderer was a terrible insult. The harrowing death of Captain Cook in Hawaii helped perpetrate a myth among 19th Century thinkers that the more savage a savage looked the more likely he was to eat you. But the Yaghan thought cannibalism far more horrifying than we do. The very idea of the Sacrament would have appalled them, and they refused to touch the meat of any carrion feeder for fear it might have helped itself to a human corpse. (126)

These wandering subsistence hunters formed the prime example for Chatwin of the ‘noble savage’; existing on just enough to get by, never coveting what the other man has, having reached ‘the golden mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our own pride [which] must have been the happiest epoch and the most lasting’ (115).

Chatwin’s central theory is thus outlined in the dichotomy between the settled world described in ‘The Pyramid’ and the more harmonious life of the nomad or hunter-gatherer. The contention of “The Nomadic Alternative” is that the wandering life – with its necessary condition of asceticism – encourages a sense of social harmony and individual content. Chatwin argues that, far from embodying the genetic heritage of our aggression, the low technology societies he describes actually represent an entirely contrary evolutionary blueprint – that of the need for movement. The aggressive instincts that Raymond Dart argued for as an inheritance from our paleolithic ancestors are engendered, in

Chatwin's analysis, by the frustration inherent in the sedentary life: 'The act of journeying contributes towards a sense of physical and mental well being, while the monotony of prolonged settlement or regular work weaves patterns in the brain that engender fatigue and a sense of personal inadequacy. Much of what the ethologists have designated "aggression" is simply an angered response to the frustrations of confinement' (WAIDH 221).

Yet, even Chatwin is moved to acknowledge that there are flaws in his argument. These arise not so much from the central thesis outlined above – that the nomadic life is the good life – but from the fact that there are so many representatives of this 'nomadic alternative' crammed within the pages of the book, all leading such different lives, that it becomes unclear as to which group provides the most persuasive model. For Chatwin, the Yaghan of Tierra del Fuego seem to offer the most idealised vision of the wandering life – yet the Yaghan were not travellers as such; they remained, as most small bands of hunter-gatherers do, within a confined, familiar, area. Chatwin does acknowledge this issue in his discussion of the Aranda hunter gatherers of Australia (even at this stage, Chatwin was aware of the work of Theodor Strehlow, whose Songs of Central Australia would spur Chatwin to revisit much of this material in The Songlines) who 'perpetually move about their lands, familiarizing themselves with every detail and fixing mental frontiers *beyond which they need not go*' (168 My Emphasis). As the great expert on central Asian nomadism, Owen Lattimore, observed, even nomads, those professional wanderers, often have a limited span of movement. Despite the overarching importance of seeking pasture for their cattle, the wandering of these nomadic tribes was not:

always infinite. Within the world of the steppe there are many types of migration cycle, governed partly by geography and partly

by social specialization in the use of different animals. [...] My own observation indicates that Inner Mongolian migrations can rarely reach 150 kilometers. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the ability of steppe nomads to move over very great distances when necessary is not due to a habit of distant travel but to the fact that the mobile organisation of their life can be converted from short-range movement to long-range movement. (73)

Nor is the life of the nomad necessarily peaceful. Whilst violence within and between nomadic groups is normally limited to the swift, proportionate raid, there are documented cases of nomadic communities forming militia groups. The Touareg of the Sahara and the Bedu of Arabia, in particular, are noted for their periodically violent behaviour, whilst the Janjaweed militia of the Sudan have perpetrated, albeit as tools of the state, genocide on a mass scale in Darfur. One could argue that this violent behaviour has more to do with the impositions of civilisation than the natural nomadic life; clearly, however the binary opposition of settler and wanderer on either side of a moral line is somewhat misguided.

The difficulty faced by Chatwin is found in his attempt to utilise these nomadic peoples to espouse a grand homogenous theory of instinctive movement, to fit the disparate means of existence of radically different groups of people into one model. Some nomads exhibit violent behaviour, others do not. Some wander over vast distances on a regular basis, others may travel only tens of kilometres to find pasture and, in good years of rainfall, may not move at all. Some of these nomads are not properly nomads at all, but hunter-gatherers, for whom an entirely different set of rules apply. As Jeremy Swift observed to Nicholas Shakespeare: 'He lumps together hunters, herders, gypsies. Everyone who moves is a nomad. In fact, what *separates* them is greater' (qtd. in Shakespeare 240).

Combined with the difficulties engendered by the diverse lifestyles of

these non-Western nomads, herders and hunter-gatherers, Chatwin faced the added complication of having to relate the theories extended from their nomadic existence onto the model of the restless individual that the author asserted as his main subject. As observed above, the attempt to directly equate the variable, and socially specific models of movement inherent in the nomadic life with the peripatetic existence of the restless westerner is an approach foredoomed to failure. Wanderers like Chatwin travel not out of economic imperative but rather for self-gratification. The traditions are entirely separate, and in trying to use the historical lifestyle of the nomads as part of an academic argument to legitimise and explain modern western restlessness, Chatwin engineered the ultimate failure of “The Nomadic Alternative”. In the current analysis, these two elements of Chatwin’s thesis have been separated, in order to more cogently deal with the subject. Having examined the approach of “The Nomadic Alternative” with reference to the ‘primitive’ cultures of the nomad and hunter-gatherer, the following chapter will focus more closely on Chatwin’s attempt to link their existence to the lifestyles of those restless individuals claimed as the true subject of the work.

Chapter Two: 'Searching for Symmetry'

The quest for knowledge or any creative endeavour is a hunt through a dark night of uncertainty. The quarry is the solution to a problem. But the quarry is fleet of foot and never tires, and the hunter tires and is mortal. (4)

Bruce Chatwin, "The Nomadic Alternative"

Any "new" species – a man, a swallow, or HIV virus – must begin its career in a very limited core area – before bursting out on the world.

Bruce Chatwin, Notebooks, Box 34

As the previous chapter demonstrated, "The Nomadic Alternative" is centrally concerned with the development and cultural import of the nomadic means of life. Chatwin expends a great deal of time extolling the virtues of diverse groups of nomads and hunter gatherers, all in the service of his argument that the life lived on the move is the good life, and that settlement is an aberration breeding discontent and even violence. As Chatwin professed, however, discussion of pastoral nomadism was to form only a part of the intended thesis; the aim of Chatwin's grand anatomy was to tie these historically ancient forms of travel into a more general analysis of the phenomenon of individual human restlessness. Indeed, despite the concentration of the work on the pastoral nomad as a model, it is clear from the outset that the broader aim of the text is in fact to discuss in general the concept of restlessness, rather than subjecting a social group to study, proposing to enquire 'What is this neurotic restlessness, this gadfly that tormented the Greeks?' (AOR 76). Chatwin emphasised in his letter to Tom Maschler that the work was intended to be generalist in tone, and the author's focus on the bigger picture is evident from the text's introduction, where the reader is informed that the following work was inspired by 'Baudelaire's proposal in the Intimate Journals for a "study of the great malady, horror of one's home"' (2). Those afflicted by this malady manifest symptoms including a 'chronic inability to remain in one place', with

the victim unable 'to concentrate on his work' (2), the reader is informed.

Chatwin goes on to outline the questions that "The Nomadic Alternative" is intended to answer: 'Where does happiness lie? Why is Here so unbearable?

Why is There so inviting? But why is There more unbearable than here?' (2).

These philosophical and deeply intangible queries were thus to form the overarching conceptual framework for the text, utilising the lifestyles of social groups such as pastoral nomads in order to explain and offer a solution to the condition of restlessness that Chatwin perceived as a common affliction, and which was certainly evident, at the least, in the character of the author himself.

Such an overarching, generalised thesis presented fundamental methodological difficulties to the writer, however. Chatwin had found it easy to research those well-documented social groups discussed in the previous chapter and to ascertain their motives in travelling; as "The Nomadic Alternative" attests, there was no shortage of secondary material outlining their means of life over a long period of history. When it came to connecting these nomadic cultures to the more generally restless individuals Chatwin identifies as the true subjects of "The Nomadic Alternative" in the introduction to the text, however, it became evident that the diverse, nebulous nature of individuals suffering from Baudelaire's malady created imposing challenges for a young writer engaged upon his first major work. Despite proclaiming its intention to answer the broad question of why 'men wander rather than sit still?' (AOR 75), Chatwin struggles in the early sections of the work to cogently outline a working definition or specific evidence of who exactly these wandering men and women are, and why they choose to travel, leaving his analysis intentionally vague in an effort towards universality: 'Few are secure,' Chatwin assures the reader, 'from the fury of this infection, this compulsion that beckons us towards the unknown' (2)

– and that is almost as much as the reader gets by way of a more definitive identification of the individuals Chatwin sees as restlessly afflicted. The difficulty of pinning down these restless travellers can be seen partly as a result of the non-specific nature of their journeys, as Chatwin acknowledges. They do not travel for food or trade, rather, ‘These wanderers who cast themselves loose in the world, to be buffeted around like a cloud, replace the security of an anchor of predictable route with the certainty of an article of faith or an idea’ (23) – hardly a helpful replacement. It is, he writes, a ‘great intangible’ that they search for – ‘the idea of freedom’ (17).

The wilful evasion of any attempt to pin down exactly who is being written about in this grand treatise of restlessness can perhaps be partly seen as a result of the professed personal reasons the writer had in attempting “The Nomadic Alternative”. The work constitutes, partly at least, an explanation and justification of Chatwin’s own behaviour. ‘Why do I become restless after a month in a single place, unbearable after two?’ (AOR 76) he hypothetically queries in his letter to Tom Maschler, positing the question as one of the fundamental paradoxes that “The Nomadic Alternative” was intended to unravel. Francis Wyndham has commented in the introduction to Photographs and Notebooks that Chatwin’s belief in the wandering life functioned on the level of instinct and that ‘he spent years accumulating data (anthropological, archaeological, philosophical, geographical, historical, scientific, metaphysical, mythical) in order to construct a framework to support this feeling and establish it as a theory’ (13). “The Nomadic Alternative” can consequently be viewed as a tentative exercise attempting to explain and, more significantly, to ‘justify a life wandering across some of the world’s farthest corners’ (Gurria-Quintana). Thus, perhaps Chatwin felt in writing “The Nomadic Alternative” that because he

himself experienced the emotions of restless anxiety so profoundly, they must consequently be universal and thus not in need of explication or definition? Or perhaps he simply unconsciously recognised that this was a work about himself, rather than other people.

In any case, the text declines any greater exposition on the matter of who these wanderers are, instead focussing its main attention on the nomads and hunter-gatherers whose lives and travels were more easily documented, undertaking to construct, through dense research and theoretical contortions, an overarching framework to unite the already inherently unstable conceptions of these nomads and the nebulous sufferer of Baudelaire's malady of restlessness. The thesis that Chatwin constructs to explain the connection between all of the apparently disparate travelling groups described within the pages of "The Nomadic Alternative" is based on the grand theory of inherited genetic instinct towards travel mentioned earlier. Chatwin's thesis, which would be later refined in The Songlines, argues that in the proto-history of the hominid species, our ancestors developed an instinctive urge to travel that continues to exact its effects on our now settled societies, leading to what Chatwin sees as an endemic restlessness. This hypothesis – 'that in becoming human, man had acquired, together with his straight legs and striding walk, a migratory "drive" or instinct to walk long distances through the seasons; that this "drive" was inseparable from his central nervous system; and that, when warped in conditions of settlement, it found outlets in violence, greed, status-seeking or a mania for the new' (AOR 12) – was intended to constitute the connecting thread with which the disparate traditions of the various travelling groups of the text are tied together; inherited instinct for travel represents the grand synthesising idea of the work, with the extant nomadic peoples offering a demonstration of

the ancient state of man: ‘Geography is a gut reaction,’ Chatwin writes, ‘[t]hat is the underlying supposition behind the ideas I should like to expound’ (17). Those seemingly restless wanderers that Chatwin introduces in the opening pages of the work are in fact following prescribed instincts according to this theorem, and Chatwin produces a typically romantic anecdote to support his argument: ‘I wonder if there is any such thing as random human movement,’ he writes in the introduction. ‘I once encountered an international bum, who expressively described his compulsion to wander. “It’s as though the tides was pulling you along the highway. I’m like the Arctic Tern. That’s a beautiful white bird, you know, what flies from the North Pole to the South Pole and back again”’ (23). Chatwin employed this analogy to describe his own inclination towards travel: ‘I have a compulsion to wander and a compulsion to return – a homing instinct like a migrating bird’ (76).

Chatwin understood, however, that anecdote would only get him so far in persuading his readers of this genetic predisposition towards travel and, in presenting his thesis, the author relies on a number of supporting evidential theories. The first of these outlines the inherent aggression that Chatwin argues emerges from settlement and that thus proves humankind’s disposition towards travel. Partly evidenced by the perceived peacefulness of the nomadic life analysed at length in the previous chapter, this instinctive restless impulse is evident in the individual, in Chatwin’s belief, even from birth:

The baby instinctively requires something quite different. To work off its frustrations, it demands to have them walked off. It screams not simply for the mother’s presence but HER MOVEMENT. The “aggression” of an infant does not bubble up from some innate fountain of rage. Babies yell BECAUSE THEY CANNOT BEAR TO LIE STILL except during the periods of the day and night the biological clock has reserved for sleep. And if a baby cannot endure inertia, how shall we settle down later? (230)

If repressed, this early aggression resulting from confinement develops, in Chatwin's argument, into a psycho-pathological condition. Travel, as we have seen, sloughs off the sins of the sedentary life, relieving 'the leaden inertia of confinement' (177). Chatwin argues that the individual risks actual medical affliction by not obeying the urge to wander: 'The symptoms include a chronic inability to remain in one place [...] The victim cannot concentrate on his work. He cannot read, but paces around his room arranging and rearranging his loved and hated possessions with neurotic precision [...] Pinned to one place he verbalizes or enacts his sexual fantasies. Violent solutions to complicated problems attract him' (3).

Traditionally, it was the wandering life that was considered medically troubling; thus, the phenomenon of 'dromomania', referring to an incorrigible tendency to wander that was widely diagnosed in France at the end of the nineteenth century. Chatwin observes in The Songlines that 'Psychiatrists, politicians, tyrants are forever assuring us that the wandering life is an aberrant form of behaviour; a neurosis; a form of unfulfilled sexual longing; a sickness which, in the interests of civilisation, must be suppressed' (178). In "The Nomadic Alternative", Chatwin reverses the concept, arguing instead, to quote the writer Richard Grant, that in fact it is sedentariness that is a 'forced, unnatural and oppressive condition for human beings' (16). Grant, in his book on American nomads, Ghost Riders: Nomads of the American Desert, goes on to point out, in an entertaining observation particularly pertinent to Chatwin's project of personal justification in "The Nomadic Alternative", that this argument is to be expected from the incorrigibly restless: 'The sedentary doctor smiles a patronising smile: a dromomaniac can always produce a good reason to

roam, just as an alcoholic can always find a good reason to take another drink' (16).

The second theory Chatwin posits as proof of a genetic travelling instinct relates to the continuing and seemingly universal cultural preoccupation with stories and myths of travel. Chatwin uncovers a preoccupation within religious mysticism and secular myth with the idea of the journey; the argument runs that the universality of this ritualised concept in religious and cultural belief is evidence of our inherited migratory drive.

Religious doctrine has frequently emphasised the significance of the ritualised journey:

[P]rofessional mystics, who answer a call to leave the chains of settlement, have always realized that the brief release of carnivals, pilgrimages and religious festivals might be prolonged indefinitely. The spiritual athletes either take to the perpetual pilgrimage of the road and walk their way to enlightenment; or they experiment with narcotic vehicles or harsh disciplinary exercises to resurrect the rewards and hardships of a wandering life. (178)

These travels, whether they be actual or psychological, aim towards the attainment of a plane of perfect spiritual balance; what the Buddhist faith refers to as 'nirvana'. The fundamental rationale behind the journey is not the attainment of a geographical goal, but rather the personal growth and insight that the journey inspires: 'The inner journey is inextricable from the outer' (192), Chatwin writes.

The author outlines multiple religious philosophies that emphasise the spiritual importance of the journey; from Sufism, whose followers speak of themselves as "travellers on the Way" – migrants along a spiritual Il-Rah that leads to Heaven' (179), through Hinduism ('The appalling discomfort of India, the pullulating populations, the inequality of rich and poor and the visible presence of death reinforced the illusion that the body was a cage for the

soul' (182)), to Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity: 'The Early Mediaeval Church inaugurated the perpetual pilgrimage as a therapeutic cure for the sins of settlement' (203).

Chatwin, for the reasons cited in the introduction to the chapter, focusses mainly on the easily documentable religious precedent for the wandering life, though he does briefly touch upon secular travellers and anti-urbanists, notably the Cynics and their 'ascetic counterparts in Palestine, the Essenes' (199), as well as mentioning in passing the later tradition of the wandering scholar, who 'drifted from school to school in search of a better education or more interesting thesis' (207) and who was known as a 'vagus'. The author eschews, however, any discussion of those who travel for no fixed purpose, analysing the phenomenon of wandering purely within the context of religious and cultural doctrine. This omission can perhaps be attributed to those challenges outlined above, found in attempting to pin down a workable definition of those who travel restlessly without a purpose; Chatwin relies, instead, on the more easily documented philosophers and holy wanderers.

In this diverse, syncretist tradition of religious travel, Chatwin identified a rich vein of cultural evidence for his theory of innate restlessness. These preoccupations, the argument goes, are part of our hardwiring; this explains the commonality of diverse faiths in their attitude to the wandering life. In "The Nomadic Alternative" the author argues that these journeys – those of the pilgrims, crusaders and scholars – are manifestations of an archetypal model of the journey inherited from *Homo Sapiens'* development on the African savannah:

The idea of the journey is, along with the Creation and Oedipus stories, one of the most persistent of all human myths. And for a band of wandering hunters [...] life was quite literally a journey – and, in the light of palaeozoology, a dangerous and heroic one for

all. Through life our ancestors walked through a series of initiations or new beginnings and correctly timed their final appointment with death.

But once they settled down and barricaded themselves from the horrors of the bush, they began to compare their settlement with the dangerous but exciting mobility of former times. Settled home brought no new freedom from anxiety, but introduced fresh sources of anxiety. And it remained for them to reenact symbolically the Myth of the Archetypal Journey, that of the Hero and his Road of Trials. Deprived of an actual journey the mind invented one. The animal compulsion to migrate through life emerges in man as the Idea of Life's Journey. (36)

Chatwin would return more speculatively to this theory in The Songlines, which posits the extant Aboriginal dreamtime myths as the only surviving model versions of what he refers to as a 'World Song'. Despite the seeming eccentricity of the idea, however, and its employment by Chatwin in the service of a speculative theory, "The Nomadic Alternative" was not its first expression. In modern history, perhaps the most celebrated study of the theory is found in Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough. Frazer's vast exercise in comparative religion, the first two-volume version of which was published in 1890, and which, by the time of its completion, had grown to twelve volumes, featured at its heart a similar argument to that expressed in "The Nomadic Alternative"; namely, that there appear to be founding myths common in otherwise disparate cultures: '[R]ecent researches into the early history of man have revealed the essential similarity with which, under many superficial differences, the human mind has elaborated its first crude philosophy of life' (2). In The Golden Bough, the archetype under examination was that of sacred kingship, and Frazer identified a myth of seasonal death and rebirth that recurred in world culture, emanating from an analysis of the myth of the priesthood at Nemi. By the time of the work's completion in the first decade of the twentieth century, however, The Golden Bough had grown to take as its subject 'nothing less than

humanity's long upward struggle towards an understanding of itself and the world' (Ackerman).

The concept of archetypal myths was further developed through the rest of the early twentieth century. The literary critic Northrop Frye wrote of it in both his Anatomy of Criticism, and also more specifically in his earlier essay "The Archetypes of Literature", in which Frye argues that one could form a more scientific, totalising literary-critical approach by accepting an archetypal foundation for literature: '[W]e glimpse the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive cultures [...] Here we begin to wonder if we cannot see literature, not only as complicating itself in time, but as spread out in conceptual space from some unseen center' (Fables of Identity 12-13). Frye is more interested in the implications of his theory of archetypes on literature, whilst Frazer's preoccupation is more expansive, questioning *how* and *why* these myths recur and what they have to say about societies and cultures; The Golden Bough was, resultingly, a lifetime's work.

The fashion for more fundamentally deconstructionist approaches to literature ensured that the archetypal literary-historical approach fell from vogue during the latter decades of the twentieth century. Recently, however, the journalist Christopher Booker published a work that shares a central theme with "The Nomadic Alternative". Booker began the work in the nineteen-sixties, when archetypal criticism retained its critical sway, but was so overwhelmed by the vast quantity of source material for the project that it took him almost forty years to complete. The Seven Basic Plots offers a bridge between the tentative theories of Frye's work and Frazer's expansive cultural study; its focus is textual, whilst its scope is broad. The book can be seen as fulfilling the remit that Frye

theoretically proposed in “The Archetypes of Literature” in its examination of a colossal range of texts in an attempt at the application of an overarching theory of literature. Booker comes to a conclusion similar to that of Chatwin in “The Nomadic Alternative”; namely that:

Not only did it seem to be true that there were a number of basic themes or plots which continually recurred in the storytelling of mankind, shaping tales of very different types and from almost every age and culture. Even more surprising was the degree of detail to which these ‘basic plots’ seemed to shape the stories they had inspired; so that one might find, for instance, a well-known nineteenth century novel constructed in almost exactly the same way as a Middle Eastern folk tale dating from 1200 years before.
(5)

In Chatwin’s conception, the theoretical models first proposed by Frazer, and expounded upon in the modern age²⁰ are put into the service of his theory of inherited instinct for travel²¹, and as such Chatwin shapes his interpretation of the concept around the archetype which best supports his argument.

Like Frye and Booker, Chatwin sees the fundamental archetype to be that of the quest, in which

A young man, bursting with vigour and often credited with superhuman audacity in childhood, leaves home on a long journey. After a sequence of adventures in remote and fabulous lands, he faces the Jaws of Death. A fire-breathing monster menaces with fangs and claws and jealously hoarding a treasure, threatens the inhabitants of the land with total destruction unless they cringe before it and appease its bloodthirstiness with sacrificial victims. The hero fights and kills the monster, rewards himself with the treasure and a bride, returns home to the jubilant acclamations of his proud parents and people and they all live happily ever after. (“NA” 36-37)

Chatwin would return to this argument again and again; In Patagonia would overtly use the model of the quest as a structuring foundation, with the

²⁰ I have dealt above with only a select few examples; for further illumination, see Maud Bodkin’s Archetypal Patterns in Poetry and Robert Graves’ The White Goddess, which extends much of Frazer’s work in The Golden Bough.

²¹ Chatwin’s knowledge of the texts mentioned above is not possible to ascertain from “The Nomadic Alternative”, with its lack of citation; however, there is little plausibility in the idea that he was unaware of Frazer’s work in The Golden Bough.

role of the menacing beast played by the long-dead Mylodon: '[It] wasn't exactly the golden fleece, but it did give me the idea for the form of a travel book, for the oldest kind of traveller's tale is one in which the narrator leaves home and goes to a far country in search of a legendary beast' (Patagonia Revisited 17), whilst, of course, this theoretical concept would also be reapproached in The Songlines, which takes as a founding principle the concept of inherited myths; Chatwin clearly believed profoundly in the cultural significance of these myths, seeing in their archetypal nature evidence of humankind's genetic hardwiring – and thus proof of his theory of restlessness.

These are fairly dense theoretical arguments, all proposed in support of a unifying theory of nomadic instinct that ties the diverse wanderers of Chatwin's text together. However, in the final chapter of "The Nomadic Alternative", called 'A Journey is Walking Itself Out In Us', Chatwin goes even further, extending the assertions outlined above of an inbuilt set of mythological guides to life and attempting to demonstrate that our inbuilt archetypes extend beyond simply the realm of travel to the very structure and fabric of our lives. Chatwin sees the whole of life as 'programmed in advance, each phase marked by an initiation' (224). In Chatwin's argument, our inbuilt system of instinct is focussed on more than simply the nebulous notion of movement; the nomadic urge is part of a wider impulse towards living a life in accordance with a series of natural phases. Only the life on the move properly obeys the prescribed format of these phases: 'The metronomic action of the wanderer's legs,' Chatwin writes, 'propels him through a sequence of timed appointments with trials and pleasures and synchronizes his arrival with annihilation point on time' (220).

Chatwin argues that those who live a nomadic life are more in tune with these phases, as they retain a seasonal approach to life, co-ordinating 'his annual activities to his biological clock', and measuring 'the passage of time by seasonal changes of vegetation, animal movements and the position of the stars' (221). Chatwin goes on to assert: '[t]he annual death and rebirth implicit within the cycle of the seasons repeats again and again in miniature the events of that larger unit of time, *The Seven Ages of Man* [...] In the course of each of these ages, the glands of the body perform a fixed sequence of functions which should coincide with a fixed sequence of messages that surface in the brain, telling the individual how to behave' (224). What began as an argument around an inbuilt desire to travel has emerged as a unifying theory of existence.

Chatwin is particularly focussed in this chapter on the implications of this scheme on one's encounter with death, employing the analogy of a symphony to demonstrate his theory of the need to obey the implicit orders of instinct:

[L]et us imagine this programme to take the form of a symphony, divided into movements from the opening to the finale, and recorded in advance from a master pattern onto an interior gramophone record, which will obviously have to be played on very different sorts of equipment. The symphony is a long and difficult work. Some movements are exceptionally tedious. But to enjoy its subtle harmonies, the least we can do is to play it on *adequate* equipment. It must be loud enough; it must be played at a given speed; the pick-up must not get stuck in a groove or be allowed to play the same movement twice. To arrive at the finale of a happy death – when the symphony of the soul is finished and done – we must patiently hear out the tedious parts. As the annual cycle, if lived properly, is not altogether pleasant, the life cycle is not altogether pleasant. (225)

It may seem odd for a young man of his late twenties to be so preoccupied with the correct approach to death. Chatwin, however, sees the issue as part of the ongoing debate over the right way to *live*, arguing that the

aberrant nature of civilised life has left humankind out of touch with its basic instincts: 'We are stuck in a groove,' Chatwin writes, 'and our urge to produce and advance materially signifies a fear of playing the next movement in ourselves [...] We are stuck uneasily in a condition of suspended adolescence, and suffer adolescent torments for most of our lives' (226). The cure is to travel, and to live life resultantly in accordance to the seasons.

Chatwin goes on to outline the upbringing of nomadic and hunting children, writing of the relationship between land, language and upbringing that he would echo in On the Black Hill and extend in The Songlines. He follows through the first initiation of birth and the second of weaning which, he asserts, is 'the most important initiation of all. For if it is incorrectly timed all successive stages will be displaced' (234).

Subsequent to weaning, the next important stage that Chatwin identifies is that of puberty, which the author argues is particularly important to the young man, offering a chance to prove that he is 'now a man, fit to mate with a woman and defend her' (242). The initiate is obliged to demonstrate his virility; traditionally, Chatwin argues, this test would have come with an encounter with one of man's early predators: 'The male initiate introduces himself to the Devil [...] Young manhood thrives in the jaws of death, and if they fail to snap, the man is less than a man' (242). In modern tribal communities, however, the test has become sublimated into a puberty ritual, often constituting 'the splitting of the urethra or skinning of the groin' (242).

The next stage in Chatwin's seven natural ages comes with marriage: 'One man and one woman join themselves into an economic and sexual partnership, which should last the rest of their lives. Neither can afford to

remain single. If they did, the man would go without his share of vegetables, and the woman be deprived of her share of the meat' (244).

The fifth stage comes when a man reaches full maturity, and becomes a tribal elder, an acknowledged repository of wisdom to whom 'young hunters attach themselves in the hope that this wisdom will rub off on them' (245). In the sixth stage, this authority begins to wane: 'The leader finds that his eldest son has supplanted him in influence, and he must reconcile himself to his reduced status. During the period of decline the ageing man prepares himself for death' (244).

Death itself is, of course, the seventh and final stage. Chatwin sees the promise of heaven as implicit in the end of a correctly lived life: 'The subject has lived his myths on time and has recovered the Peaceable Kingdom, where even a hungry lion is a friend. Extinction of the body is of no further interest to him or to anybody' (245).

In this final chapter, the smaller theories of "The Nomadic Alternative" – that man is an instinctive traveller, and that this causes his restlessness – give way to a grand theory of human existence, in which the whole of life is preprogrammed by our evolution. In the settled world, Chatwin's argument goes, humankind is unable to follow these programmed stages, ham-strung by a disconnection from nature. The author seems to be proposing that in this natural, difficult state of human existence, settled civilisation should see a model.

Chatwin concludes the chapter with an outline of what he sees as a basic workable definition of human society:

A human society is a small unit of men and women, paired off into sexual and economic partnerships. They do not settle in one fixed place, but migrate along the tracks of a given stretch of territory, to exploit its animal and

vegetable resources as they come in season, without taking active steps to store surplus or propagate their food supply. They deliberately calculate for alternate seasons of plenty and want, and their bodies allow for at least one unenjoyable period of enforced torpor in the year. They divide the human life cycle horizontally into distinct phases, or units of biological time, which synchronize with glandular changes of the body; and they actively ensure that the members live out all the possibilities contained within each phase. (246)

This is Chatwin at his grandest, his most speculative. We have moved some distance away from the initial aim of the work – to find an explanation of humankind’s restlessness – towards wholehearted assertions around the natural state of humanity. Whilst perhaps not wholly persuasive, the argument of this last section of the work does perhaps give the most overt perspective of the totalising means by which he saw *all* of the disparate wanderers he includes in “The Nomadic Alternative” as fundamentally connected. It is a broad answer, however, to a narrow question, and the reader comes away from the text uncertain as to whether Chatwin’s central concern – ‘Where does happiness lie?’ – has been addressed, or whether the whole issue has simply been diverted from and obscured by speculative theory. As Kerry Featherstone observes: ‘There is a contradiction [...] between the material that Chatwin used to support his thesis, and the end point that he seems to be trying to reach’ (238).

The previous two chapters have attempted to outline and cogently explain Chatwin’s undertaking in “The Nomadic Alternative”, presenting an analysis of the work that will function as an aid to future understanding and interpretation. “The Nomadic Alternative” is undoubtedly a key text in Chatwin’s literary career, and offers valuable insight into the core ideas of his theory of restlessness. In conclusion, however, it must be observed that the

work does not achieve success in its own right as either a literary or anthropological text, fundamentally flawed, as it is, by the overall approach of the author.

As has been noted, Chatwin faced a key difficulty in assembling “The Nomadic Alternative”. His intention had been to use the life of nomadic tribes as an explanation for (and ultimate solution to) the affliction of restlessness. Chatwin saw the life lived by nomads as the continuation of an ancient, natural state of man; one that must be returned to in order to assuage the anxieties of restlessness in the present. He argues that the two subjects of his work – pastoral nomads and hunter gatherers on the one hand, restless Westerners on the other – are connected by an inbuilt journeying instinct that unites all of those who travel, and that explains the restlessness he sees as endemic in the species.

The issue with this argument, however, is that Chatwin was attempting to construct a vast, unifying anthropological argument on the back of a feeling, an intuition – a desire, almost – that humankind has a need for movement. Despite the overwhelming circumstantial evidence Chatwin assembled in service of his argument – Elizabeth Chatwin entertainingly referred to the text as ‘Write everything you know about nomads,’ (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin) – the reader simply cannot get around the fact that, in objective terms, the unifying theory outlined above has no firm rational basis.

This is only a problem because of the expectations that Chatwin himself sets up in the tone, form and approach of the work. “The Nomadic Alternative” is a work ‘stranded,’ as Nicholas Shakespeare wrote, citing Chatwin’s own notebooks, in ‘a nebulous no-man’s land between scientific theory and autobiography’ (219). It retained the semblance of academic rigour, and, as a

result, one can not ignore its rational intention and simply argue for the romanticism of the idea; this is a work that, despite its idiosyncrasies, wishes to be taken seriously. In such terms, it can only be seen as a failure.

In the writing of “The Nomadic Alternative”, Chatwin would have been well advised to look more closely at the texts that he took as models. Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy, for example, is a work that succeeds as a result, rather than in spite of, its heterogeneous approach to its subject matter, whilst Rousseau’s A Discourse on Inequality – which also clearly influenced Chatwin’s approach in “The Nomadic Alternative” – presents itself as a work of opinion and discussion (as the name would imply) rather than fact.

Chatwin would later come to realise his methodological failure in “The Nomadic Alternative”. In The Songlines, Chatwin, now more confident and sophisticated as a writer, was able to incorporate many of the key ideas of his aborted text into a framework that did not insist on academic authority. The Songlines, with its own, author-written, creation myth; its formally inventive central notebooks sections; and its ‘vision of the Songlines stretching across the continents and ages’ back to the First Man who, ‘opening his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him, shouted the opening stanza of the World Song, “I AM!”’ (280), demonstrates Chatwin’s later willingness to eschew convention and aim at the unprovable hypothesis that runs, suppressed, through his other works.

“The Nomadic Alternative” was eventually rejected by Chatwin’s publisher Jonathan Cape. Chatwin was deeply affected by his failure to produce a publishable manuscript, though his wife Elizabeth believes that Jonathan Cape’s response to the work was not unexpected: ‘I think he knew it was impossible [...] it’s completely indigestible and virtually unreadable, I think.

[H]e had to leave it; he just knew, he knew all along that it wasn't right, even though he'd never published anything except magazine articles' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). The awareness of the ultimate futility of Chatwin's work is manifest in the opening pages of the text, which rail against the act of writing itself:

The best travellers are illiterate. Narratives of travel are pale compensation for the journey itself, and merely proclaim the traveller's inadequacy as a traveller. The best travellers do not pause to record their second-rate impressions to be read third-hand. Their experience is primal. Their minds are uncongealed by the written word. Optimists have assumed that the invention of writing rescued man from savage ignorance, developed in him a critical awareness of himself, and heralded his progress to higher things. But writing proper began as a system of accountancy, and, like an accountant, has remained a commodity of doubtful benefits. [...] What follows is even more perverse than a written narrative of a journey – a provisional account of an ill-advised and ill-prepared expedition to discover the source of *The Journey* itself. Such an undertaking is a contradiction in terms and foredoomed to failure. It may tail off into supercilious rubbish; we are disoriented from the start. "Useless", as a proverb in the Chinese *Book of Odes* neatly expresses the situation, "to take the advice of a wandering man about the construction of a house. The work will never come to completion." (1-2)

"The Nomadic Alternative" reached the point of completion, yet never manifested itself in the public domain. The manuscript of the work, occasionally corrected for typographical mistakes, and with some infrequent suggestions for revision, remains at present under embargo in the Bodleian library. In 2010, when the archive is made public, readers will have the opportunity to reassess the manuscript and comment themselves on the work that Susannah Clapp referred to as 'Chatwin's alternative work; a project which was never quite relinquished but never quite addressed anew, and may well have been too over-arching and all-encompassing ever to have been realised' (26).

For Chatwin, the ultimate rejection of the work appears in retrospect to have jolted him to a realisation that the subject of human restlessness was not

best explicated by an objective study; as has been noted, everybody has a different story behind why they travel – or indeed why they do not, and one cannot answer questions around restlessness with a totalising theory. Richard Grant, despite his obvious admiration for Chatwin, found the all-encompassing nature of the argument for genetic predisposition for travel untenable in the real world: ‘Chatwin’s theory has an elegant symmetry,’ he wrote in the conclusion to Ghost Riders: Nomads of the American Desert, ‘and it is certainly curious that all human babies are calmed by the rhythm of motion, as they are by music, but it does not answer the question that nomads are always asking: why do so many people prefer to stay in one place?’ (307).

Chatwin realised that to get to the bottom of human restlessness, he would have to, for the most part, eschew a theoretical approach, and instead focus on the individuals who suffered from the same ‘horreur du domicile’ that afflicted him. This, ultimately, is what he would spend much of the rest of his career doing; telling the stories of the individuals he encountered who represented something of the spirit he was trying to pin down in “The Nomadic Alternative”; from the migrants of In Patagonia to the forever restless Da Silva in The Viceroy of Ouidah. His abilities lay in storytelling; in the construction of parables and allegories for the states of wandering and exile he saw as endemic to the human species. Though he never fully abandoned the theories he developed in “The Nomadic Alternative”, in the future these assertions would be framed within a narrative centrally concerned with the human implications of those theories; even The Songlines, the work in which Chatwin dared to re-approach the material assembled in the cause of his first work and which most resembles its expansive models, is softened by its central focus on the human relationships of the characters within it. Chatwin moved away from the negation

of the human implicit in “The Nomadic Alternative” towards an approach rooted in the individual, in the specific stories of those that he met: ‘The failure was a liberation,’ wrote Susannah Clapp. ‘[W]ith his attempt at large-scale speculation put on hold, Chatwin turned to doing what he did best – describing what he saw and heard about him, without feeling the need to summon a higher seriousness’ (26). In the aftermath of his failed thesis, Chatwin came to understand that it was with people that his abilities lay; he had a gift, his wife Elizabeth disclosed, for deciphering the motivation of those he met: ‘He had this amazing talent because I used to watch it. He’d meet someone he’d never met before, didn’t know anything about them and within five minutes he’d discovered what their main passion was, and then they were off and they always thought he was their friend for life. There were a lot of them’ (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). Nicholas Shakespeare recounts in his biography a conversation between the Argentinean journalist Uki Goni and Chatwin in which Goni asks: “Your fascination is people?” to which Chatwin responds understatedly: “Yes, in the end. It took rather a long time to discover that” (qtd. in Shakespeare 291).

Chapter Three: ‘Nowhere is a Place’

[I]t may seem cruel kindness to whisper into the ear of the migrant the warning “That which thou goes forth to seek thou shalt not find.” It is not said, be it remembered, that he will not find happiness, which, like the rain and sunshine, although in more moderate measure comes alike to all men; it is only said that the particular form of happiness to which he looks forward will never be his. (59)

W.H. Hudson, Idle Days in Patagonia

[T]his is no more a travelogue than Turgenev’s Sportsman’s Sketches is a book about shooting woodcock. (11)

Bruce Chatwin, Introduction to A Visit to Don Otavio

In “The Nomadic Alternative” Bruce Chatwin exhaustively expounded a complex theory to explain why people feel compelled to travel, drawing in anthropological evidence to attempt to prove that humankind is hardwired for a life on the move. Chatwin would revisit this idea in a more speculative way in The Songlines, and he never fully abandoned his belief in some interior motivation towards travel; however, in those texts that immediately followed the failure of “The Nomadic Alternative”, and that form the backbone of Chatwin’s body of work – In Patagonia, The Viceroy of Ouidah, and On the Black Hill – one finds the author approaching the subject of restlessness in a substantively different fashion. Whilst retaining to some degree the suggestion of an inherited instinct for travel, these works are rooted in the personal, eschewing the grand gesture in favour of the telling detail. These three central works in Chatwin’s oeuvre focus on the individual motivation to move on from the status quo, to branch out and venture in search of the happy, stable life that so constantly seems to elude the characters he describes.

Key to Chatwin’s refocussing of his ideas around the subject of restlessness was his experience in the South American region known as Patagonia, where he travelled in late 1974 and early 1975. Chatwin had been

working in the intervening years since the final rejection of “The Nomadic Alternative” as an arts correspondent for the Sunday Times; a job that functioned as a necessary apprenticeship for Chatwin, who over this period still harboured aspirations to write. The prospective subject of Patagonia had long been a preoccupation, as Elizabeth Chatwin attests: ‘[H]e had always talked about Patagonia,’ she observes, ‘it was something in the back of his head all the time’ (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). His decision to embark upon a trip to the area was, however, sudden and unexpected: ‘[H]e came to America for my father’s funeral,’ Elizabeth recounts, ‘and went back to New York with some very amusing cousins of mine and I didn’t see him again for six months or something and he said “Well, I’ve decided to go to Patagonia.”’ From this sudden departure emerged a Chatwin myth; that of the fabled telegram to his superiors at the Sunday Times. ‘Gone to Patagonia’, it was claimed to have read, though Nicholas Shakespeare found little evidence to suggest that it was anything more than a fiction. Patrick Meanor, in his slim volume on Chatwin, concluded similarly: ‘Two former editors of the Sunday Times claim to know nothing about any such telegram principally because Chatwin was never a member of their editorial staff; he was a freelance contributor who was paid a healthy retainer of £2,000 a year and would not have needed to announce his departure to any editor’ (13). The story was perhaps modelled on Eric Newby’s telegram to his friend Hugh Carless: ‘CAN YOU TRAVEL NURISTAN JUNE?’ (17). Like Chatwin, Newby had just left his job for a life of literary travel: ‘It had taken me ten years to discover what everyone connected with it had been telling me all along,’ Newby wrote in A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush, ‘that the fashion industry was not for me’ (17).

Unlike Newby, however, who had secured a contract before his departure, Chatwin had not travelled to Patagonia with the explicitly stated intention to write a book on the region. Nevertheless, as he travelled around the peninsula over a period of some months, Chatwin clearly came to realise that this substantively unexplored region and its people offered a perfect vehicle for an exploration of the themes of restlessness and travel from the abandoned “The Nomadic Alternative”, populated, as it is, by refugees and exiles who have sought in the landscape a refuge from the tyranny of civilisation. The fundamental dissatisfaction of those who had left homes in the West to establish a life in Patagonia, coupled with the metaphoric resonance of the land, led Chatwin, as he explored South America, to see the peninsula as the perfect subject for a study in restlessness: ‘I think then he began to think about it,’ comments Elizabeth. ‘I mean when he went to Patagonia there were so many stories’ (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin).

In order to understand the appeal of Patagonia to both Bruce Chatwin and those migrants he was to write about, it is first imperative to outline something of the imaginative history of this unique land. Distant and sparsely populated as it is, Patagonia operates on a peculiar psychological level, as shall be attested to, and is frequently invoked as a metaphor for ‘[t]he Ultimate, the point beyond which one could not go’ (Patagonia Revisited 7). W.H. Hudson, best known for his Venezuelan romance Green Mansions, noted the profound psychological impact of the landscape in his memoir Idle Days in Patagonia: ‘There it lay in full sight before me,’ he wrote upon his arrival in Patagonia, ‘the unmarred desert that wakes strange feelings in us...’ (13).

This metaphorical layer of association can be attributed, in part at least, to the fact that Patagonia exists in the minds of many as a political and geographical abstract. Lacking distinct boundaries, or a cogent political system, the Patagonian desert is a place that may be known in a connotative sense, but is not well understood. It functions on the human imagination in a similar way to the city of Timbuctoo, a city, that, as Bruce Chatwin observes, exists as both a geographical actuality and a psychological construction: ‘There are two Timbuctoos. One is the administrative centre of the Sixth Region of the Republic of Mali [...] And then there is the Timbuctoo of the mind – a mythical city in a Never-Never Land, an antipodean mirage’ (AOR 27). To many, Patagonia seems similarly unreal, a fictional land of childhood stories perhaps, similar to Ruritania, the imagined country of Anthony Hope’s The Prisoner of Zenda. Others envisage it as a land of times long past; a suitable setting for Conan Doyle’s The Lost World. John Pilkington, who visited Patagonia in the late 1980s, attests to this lack of concrete signification:

This southernmost tip of South America tantalisingly resisted definition. It was neither a country nor a province, but included bits of Chile and Argentina; and though a glance at my atlas disclosed the label ‘Patagonia’ stretched across that turnip-shaped appendage to the continent, it looked almost like an afterthought. I rummaged in vain for evidence that the name had ever enjoyed any solid political status. (2)

The name Patagonia itself was coined by Ferdinand Magellan, who, arriving on the peninsula during his 1520 circumnavigation, saw ‘a giant who was on the shore, quite naked, and who danced, leaped and sang, and while he sang he threw sand and dust on his head’ (Pigafetta 42).²² Magellan named these people – known today as the Tehuelche – Pathagoni, meaning ‘dogs with

²² The etymology of Patagonia is, however, contested; Bruce Chatwin argues in In Patagonia that the name can trace its origin from Primaleon of Greece, a piece of chivalric literature published in Castille eight years before Magellan’s circumnavigation. (IP 126)

large paws', a result of both their stature and also of their habit of wearing guanaco hide as covering for both body and feet. The height of the Tehuelche, and Magellan's response upon seeing them, was recorded by a young Venetian citizen and Knight of Rhodes, Antonio Pigafetta, who had joined the fleet as a volunteer and was numbered amongst the *criados del capitán y sobresalientes*²³, though he later gained the confidence of the Captain and became Magellan's translator and chief cartographer.

However, despite the historical significance of Pigafetta's account, Patagonia never came to enjoy any solid political status subsequent to Magellan's visit. Though the South American conquests by the Spanish and Portuguese soon carved up the rest of the continent, the colonialist forces struggled to establish a foothold in Patagonia. In 1581, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa was sent from Spain with 2,500 men, in twenty-three ships, to attempt the foundation of colonies in the Magellan Straits. He left at San Felipe four-hundred men, and thirty women. When Thomas Cavendish visited the area in 1586 he found only twelve men and three women remaining. In response to his discovery, Cavendish assigned a grim new title to the inlet: Port Famine.

Spain attempted to colonise the region again in 1779, but withdrew in 1783. They attributed their failure to: 'the unfruitfulness of the region which suggested to the authorities that where Spaniards failed, others would also fail' (Williams, The Desert and the Dream 112). When the Peninsula's boundaries were finally fixed in the late nineteenth century, the area had been known as Patagonia for so long, without any solid nationhood, that it simply retained its title, despite having been divided between Argentina and Chile. The very unsustainability of life in the region ensured that the nomenclature of the

²³ 'Captain's servants and marines' (Pigafetta 10).

land remained in place where so many original titles were swept away by the imperial missions, thus creating a land that exists in name, but not in any concrete political sense.

The persistent inability of Patagonia to establish itself in the world's imagination as a solid political and geographical entity has been further exacerbated by the bleakness of the peninsula's landscape. Though wild and desolate, the Patagonian scrub does not, indeed, possess the striking and overwhelming potential for spectacle of the great deserts of Arabia or Africa or the mountains of the Himalayan ranges. Indeed, it has the capacity to be positively depressing. As Jorge Luis Borges reflects to Paul Theroux in The Old Patagonian Express: "It's a dreary place. A very dreary place" (399). The little appeal most see in the landscape derives from the astonishing monotony of the scrubland and desert. Defined by the dullish grey of the basalt pebbles that litter the valley floors, known as rodados patagonicos, this flat, undramatic landscape does not evoke 'any dramatic excess of the spirit' (IP 19). Yet, despite the seeming sterility of Patagonia, the peninsula provokes a surprisingly strong aesthetic response in those who have experienced it. Perhaps the most striking example of the power of the Patagonian environment comes in the work of the usually demure Charles Darwin, who visited the region on the ship the Beagle in the early 1830s and who was, along with Magellan, primarily responsible for establishing the prevailing public image of Patagonia as a mysterious, desolate land.

Darwin was amongst the first western visitors to record a thorough account of the Patagonian landscape, most of which is constituted by objective, empirical observation. However, in the conclusion to his journal, in a rare insight into his personal reflections, Darwin attests to the power of Patagonia on

the imagination, referring back specifically to the land above all others he encountered during his journey:

In calling up images of the past, I find the plains of Patagonia cross frequently before my eyes: yet these plains are pronounced by all most wretched and useless. They are characterised only by negative possessions; without habitations, without water, without trees, without mountains, they support merely a few dwarf plants. Why then, and the case is not peculiar to myself, have these arid wastes taken so firm possession of the memory? (375)

Darwin's conclusion poses for the reader a conundrum, for how can a landscape defined by negatives in such a way exact so powerful an influence over the mind of any individual, let alone the empirically minded Darwin?

Almost half a century later, another naturalist, this time a specialist in avian wildlife, visited the area and, in the book he produced some years later concerning his voyage, attempted to answer the question posed by Darwin. W.H. Hudson had experienced a similar psychological awakening whilst in Patagonia, an experience he attributed to the blankness of the landscape that surrounded him:

In Patagonia the monotony of the plains, or expanse of low hills, the universal unrelieved greyness of everything, and the absence of animal forms and objects new to the eye, leave the mind open and free. (Idle Days in Patagonia 138)

W.H. Hudson discovered this disquieting effect unintentionally, having been forced to spend some months convalescing after an accident involving a firearm. The naturalist had originally travelled to Patagonia with the intention of following up research on the various bird species of the area, a subject he had already written on in Birds of La Plata. However, following the accident mentioned above, a book quite different from the objective, naturalistic account planned emerged. Idle Days in Patagonia is a quiet, Proustian discussion of the regressive influence of the Patagonian desert, covering subjects as diverse as a

particularly vexing gun dog, the migration of summer swallows and the allusive effects of the scent of evening primrose, all united by a conveyed sense of loss, of impermanence. The book was truly a testament to the digressive psychological effect of the Patagonian landscape.

In the chapter of Idle Days in Patagonia that Hudson devotes to considering Darwin's question, he asserts that it is the very timelessness of the region that induces the peculiar psychological response:

It has a look of antiquity, of desolation, of eternal peace, of a desert that has been a desert from of old and will continue a desert for ever. (227)

For both Hudson and Darwin it is the sheer implicit age of the landscape that leads to the curious psychological effect that Patagonia exacts; Darwin asserted similarly:

The plains of Patagonia are boundless, for they are scarcely practicable and hence unknown: they bear the stamp of having thus lasted for ages, and there appears no limit to their duration through future time. (375)

The temporal awareness induced by the landscape of Patagonia functions in imaginative terms in much the same way as the lunar landscape did for children and adults of the twentieth century; the very unsustainability of human life in such an ancient landscape coupled with the isolation and, particularly, the sheer sense of timelessness of the place renders the traveller acutely aware of their position of significance in the global (or indeed universal) schematic. The landscape lacks any markers of civilisation, and hence no temporal reference points; the land exists as testimony to the world before man's existence. Indeed, a tourist website for the area, Patagonia-Argentina.com, features a slogan: 'Planet Earth, the way it used to be.'

The very blankness of the landscape, coupled with the lack of any empirical assessment of the area, led to Patagonia becoming talked of, in the

mid-nineteenth century, as a remaining free territory, ‘the last far west’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35), as Chatwin wrote in a notebook, somewhere free of social and political constraints, where nature was the only ruling influence. It was ‘a fertile land bursting with minerals,’ states one deceptive account of the peninsula, which significantly, as Chatwin notes, ‘didn’t mention it was full of warrior Indians’ (IP 23). As the myths grew, and the western world became industrialised, the appeal of this possible paradise began to grow for many Europeans and, later, North Americans. Patagonia became a magnet for the restless, those who were dissatisfied with their life in the West and saw in the blank space of Patagonia the possibility of establishing a new life, free from the troubles that afflicted them in their homeland, as Nicholas Shakespeare observed: ‘The whole place was a magnet for those who suffered from a bad case of Baudelaire’s Great Malady: Horror of One’s Home’ (Introduction to In Patagonia xv). Motivated by poverty, unemployment, oppression and other less practical concerns, these migrants began to establish a foothold on the Patagonian peninsula around the middle of the nineteenth-century. Patagonia subsequently became a repository for the dispossessed and displaced, restlessly searching for stability. Exiles arrived from across the globe, all of them with different motivations, fleeing the law, poverty, persecution. They were united not by their longing to come to Patagonia, but rather their inexorable desire to escape from the life they were leaving behind in the West. For them, the blankness and isolation was key to Patagonia’s attraction: the land was apparently ‘wide-open and fertile’ and the exiles were able to disappear from the radar of civilisation ‘carting their culture into a mountain valley and ignoring the rest of the world’ (Theroux, The Old Patagonian Express 362). Hudson and Darwin’s desert of antiquity soon became Europeanised, with the settlers

constructing scaled-down versions of the homelands they had been so desperate to leave: ‘The remoter the valley the more faithful the re-creation of an original homeland. In Gaiman, the Welsh preserve their language and their hymns. In Rio Pico, the Germans plant lupins and cherry trees. In Sarmiento, the Boers continue to dry biltong’ (Introduction to *In Patagonia* viii).

It seemed possible that upon this blank landscape, a new homeland for the various dispossessed and restless could be constructed. Yet, as shall be seen, for many of the exiles Patagonia was no promised land. The reasons for Patagonia’s lack of population became quickly apparent, with the emigrants struggling for years – in some cases decades – to establish themselves on the land. The Patagonian communities became, in the words of Herman Melville: ‘the voluntary tarrying places of all sorts of refugees; some of whom too sadly experience the fact that flight from tyranny does not of itself insure a safe asylum, far less a happy home’ (95).

Patagonia, as a very function of its semi-mythological presence in the human consciousness, could never support the promises made for it; it is well noted that Utopia is not, as widely assumed, a synonym for paradise, rather, it translates from the Greek as ‘No Place’. Yet the hope of a better life, however ill-founded, will always motivate the dispossessed and alienated, as W.H. Hudson noted. Ever before, he writes:

flutters and shines the dream that lures him on. And now at his journey’s end comes reality to lay rude hands on him with rough shaking. Meanwhile, before he has quite recovered from the shock, that red flag on which his dreamy eyes have been so long focused stays not, but travels on and on to disappear at last like a sunset cloud in the distant horizon.
(*Idle Days in Patagonia* 60)

The ultimate disillusion engendered by the life that migrants discovered upon arrival on the peninsula meant that they offered the perfect subject for

Bruce Chatwin in his study of restlessness. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Chatwin's early work focusses centrally on the motivation of those in search of a stable life; however, what makes his characters truly restless is their inability to settle when they have seemingly found the object of their desire, constantly lured on by the 'red flag' of Hudson's metaphor, which can perhaps be seen as analogous of Chatwin's theory of inherited instinct for travel. Those who travelled to Patagonia come to fit well the definition of 'immigrant' from Ambrose Bierce's The Devil's Dictionary: 'IMMIGRANT, *n.* An unenlightened person who thinks one country better than another' (148).

Patagonia was a land, in Andrew Palmer's words, 'populated by immigrants who both love the place and wish they could leave' (16). Chatwin wrote in his notebook that 'Europeans come to Patagonia only provisionally, and most stay to die here' (Chatwin Archive Box 35), whilst one of the author's stereotypical 'strong women', Nita Starling, comments to the narrator of the Patagonian landscape: "It is beautiful [...] but I wouldn't want to come back." The narrator confesses: "Neither would I" (156). Patagonian life, in its narrative of hope turning to gradual disillusion, offered Chatwin a metaphorical representation of the ideas around restlessness that he had worked so hard to express in "The Nomadic Alternative".

It was not, however, purely for literary reasons that Chatwin was drawn to Patagonia. That metaphorical layer of association described above, insidious in its effect on the consciousness of the restless, exacted a similar impact on the imagination of Chatwin himself; the reader is told of his youthful preoccupation with the country, ignited by a fascination with the piece of brontosaurus he discovered as a child in his grandmother's cabinet of curiosities. As an adult, the sense of extremity inherent in the landscape functioned as a further spur to

Chatwin's imagination; the author was attracted, in particular, by Hudson's suggestion, described above, of the almost meditative effect of the landscape, the 'primeval calmness (known also to the simplest savage), which is perhaps the same as the Peace of God' (IP 19). The metaphorical attraction of the landscape was as key a factor in the production of In Patagonia as was the astonishing literary resource Chatwin discovered in the Patagonians themselves.

Also significant in the authorial attraction to Patagonia was the peninsula's liminal status. As Nicholas Shakespeare wrote in the introduction to the Penguin Classic edition of the text: 'Bruce Chatwin was always attracted to border countries: to places on the rim of the world, sandwiched ambiguously between cultures, neither one thing nor another. In South Africa, I met a poet who said that Chatwin wrote as if he was in exile from a country that didn't exist' (xii). Chatwin's own sense of being an outsider and his consequent identification with Patagonia is affirmed by a hastily scribbled note found in a red-bound notebook dating from his trip to the peninsula. The note appears to relate to a section of In Patagonia wherein Chatwin discusses the attentions he has attracted from a guanaco (a llama-like creature native to the Andes) as he walks from Harberton to Viamonte, along Lucas Bridges' old droving track: 'Sometimes I saw him up ahead, bobbing over fallen tracks, and then I came up close. 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 too was a sterile wanderer' (181). The relevant notebook entry reads, pertinently: 'Am I the lone guanaco?' (Chatwin Archive Box 31). The commentary reflects Chatwin's sense of communion with the Patagonian environment, confirming that the author's relationship to the land as expressed in In Patagonia is of crucial importance in defining the attraction of the peninsula to the restless.

Consequently, Chatwin's In Patagonia can be seen as exploring the theme of restlessness in two central ways; firstly, and primarily, through the book's focus on the experience of those individuals Chatwin encountered during his travels, dissatisfied by the existence they discovered in South America, and secondly through the representation of the narrator's own motivations in travelling to Patagonia. This chapter will include an analysis of both facets of the travelogue, beginning with an exploration of Chatwin's representation of the Patagonians themselves.

As was demonstrated in the preceding introduction, literary representations of the Patagonian peninsula traditionally focussed on the physical aspects of the environment, detailing at length the specific nature of the Patagonian landscape and often emphasising the blankness of the peninsula. This emphasis is straightforward to explain; historically, those who visited the region did so with the aim of assessing or recording some facet of the nature and environment of the area. Consequently, the literature these visitors produced was purposeful and empirical in nature; documentary descriptions of the area are commonplace, resulting from the slew of scientists, explorers, geographers, geologists, botanists and biologists who constituted the overwhelming majority of those writing about the area before the advent of tourism. Rarely do any of these texts belie an interest in the human population²⁴ of the peninsula, fixated, as they are, on the specific and unique environmental details of the Patagonian

²⁴ There were occasional exceptions to this rule in regard to the native population who were, before their extinction, remarked upon by visitors such as Darwin in a typically empirical, colonialist manner. Their description bears more relation to that of the other Patagonian fauna than to any true social analysis such as that which Chatwin undertakes upon the migrant communities. Chatwin himself was simply too late to include any detail of the indigenous way of life in In Patagonia; most of the native communities had been lost to the epidemics by the time of his visit.

landscape; this passage from George Chaworth Musters' account of his travels in Patagonia in 1869–70 is typical in its focus on the blankness of the landscape, with little sign of human habitation noted: 'The Pampas [...] of Patagonia, occasionally indeed present a tolerably even and uniform succession of rolling plains covered with coarse grass, but more frequently the surface, even when unbroken by hills and suddenly yawning ravines, is sterile, with a sparse vegetation, consisting of stunted bushes and round thistle clumps' (26). Jorge Luis Borges noted this general concentration on the particulars of the landscape, commenting of W.H.Hudson's Patagonian travelogue: 'Idle Days in Patagonia is not a bad book, but you notice there are no people in it – only birds and flowers' (The Old Patagonian Express 402). Borne of the pragmatic attitudes of the most famous early visitors to the peninsula – Magellan and Darwin – Patagonian literature seemed to have established a tradition of discussing the region as if it were uninhabited.

Even in the modern age, when tourism and cheap travel had opened the area fully to migrants and visitors alike, much of the literature concerning the area failed to regard it as anything other than a blank landscape. In Paul Theroux's The Old Patagonian Express, perhaps the most popular recent account of the region, the author not only avoids mention of the Patagonians themselves, he avoids the area wholesale. As Theroux explains, to him '[t]he journey, not the arrival, matters' (14). Despite the implications of the work's title, Theroux constantly reminds the reader that Patagonia is nothing more than a destination, a point on the map; for the very purposes of his narrative, there can be nothing of interest there. It becomes significant in the text purely for its relative insignificance in comparison to those vibrant, exotic and populous South American countries that Theroux travels through in the course

of his journey: '[I]f there really is nothing there,' Theroux writes, 'then it is the perfect place to end this book' (402). Upon arriving in Patagonia, Theroux simply turns around and heads for home: 'The nothingness itself, a beginning for some intrepid traveller, was an ending for me' (430). Theroux proffered the opinion that 'to be here, it helped to be a miniaturist, or else interested in enormous empty spaces' (429). Theroux is clearly neither.

Bruce Chatwin, however, was an expert miniaturist; his days as a cataloguer at Sotheby's had left him with an unerring ability to objectively sketch a scene, or outline a character. Susannah Clapp, Chatwin's editor at Jonathan Cape, rightly observes in her memoir With Chatwin that: '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). These habits were utilised to their full extent in In Patagonia, which overturned the previous conceptions of Patagonian literature to offer a fresh perspective on the peninsula by focussing detailed attention not on the landscape, but on the restless individuals who inhabited it.

In contrast to the view of Theroux and his predecessors of Patagonia as bereft of human influence, Chatwin vividly portrays a land densely populated with interesting and diverse characters, subverting the reader's well-established expectations. When the narrator visits the intellectual recluse known only to the reader as 'the poet', Chatwin writes: 'For the next two hours he was my Patagonia' (37) confirming that, for Chatwin, the land of Patagonia was constituted not by the landscape, but rather the Patagonians themselves. Passages of naturalistic description occur infrequently, essentially serving to emphasise the insignificance of the landscape: 'I sleepily watched the rags of

silver cloud spinning across the sky, and the sea of grey-green thornscrub lying off in sweeps and rising in terraces and the white dust streaming off the salt pans, and, on the horizon, land and sky dissolving into an absence of colour' (17). Chatwin linguistically imparts a sense of the very negativity of the landscape – rags, white dust, absence of colour – belying the authorial disinterest in Patagonia as location. In In Patagonia, the landscape is set in counterpoint to the vibrancy of the characters described within the text.

Despite the authorial concentration on the specific details of individual lives, however, the principal figure of the text – Bruce Chatwin's narrative alias – is never placed centrally as a character; he is merely a chronicler of those he meets. Chatwin wrote the central narrative figure out of the work, preferring to concentrate instead on the individuals and communities that offered the author an allegory for those theories of restlessness that had so preoccupied him. He wrote of his Patagonian project: 'My business was to record what people said [...] I'm not interested in the traveller [...] I'm interested in what the traveller sees' (qtd. in Shakespeare 292). Chatwin had compared his literary endeavor in Patagonia to the photography of Henri Cartier-Bresson, 'going SNAP, like that. It was supposed to be a take each time' (qtd. in Shakespeare 292). Indeed, the connection between Chatwin's prose and the photographic still, preserving a single fleeting moment, was recognised by Rebecca West in her oft-repeated comment concerning the photographs that accompanied the text of In Patagonia: 'They are so beautiful that not one word of the text is necessary' (qtd. in Calasso 11). Robert Calasso, Chatwin's Italian publisher observed of this statement that: 'As with many bon mots, it contained a deeper truth. For there is something about the short, numbered chapters of In Patagonia that suggests an analogous series of photographs. One can imagine those numbers on the

margins of a film slowly unrolling before eyes' (11). Yet, Chatwin never placed himself in the frame of these snapshots; his dialogue is terse, his observations more succinct and pared than in any other of his works; the narrator barely exists for the reader. As Susannah Clapp observed: 'He was eager that the narrative shouldn't be strewn with reaction shots of the author as sensitive traveler – this was to be a book about what he saw, not about what he felt' (31).

This desire is reflected in the notes Chatwin made whilst travelling in Patagonia. Contained in his celebrated Moleskine notebooks, these records of the journey demonstrate the objective vision that motivated the author, containing little or no personal anecdote, recording, in concise, detailed language, the specific characteristics of those he encountered on his journey. The following passage, taken from a notebook dating from his trip in 1975, demonstrates the incisive, objective technique Chatwin employed in noting his experiences whilst in South America:

Jorge Mansilla shot himself in his barber's chair on the morning of February 17th. At midday his cook, Margerita Maxim – a careless and spirited woman in gypsy earrings with two sons and never a husband found the front door bolted and the white blinds down, when she came to make his lunch. She enlisted the help of his neighbour, Pepe Vargas. They worked their way into the back garden and broke open his kitchen door. Mansilla had managed to put two bullets through his right temple with a Winchester 1917. He must have sat in the chair and looked at himself in the plate glass mirror – neat new razors, the spirit lamp for sterilizing clippers, bottles of brillantine [...]
The impact of the shots had ruined the balance of the composition swivelled the white enamelled barber's chair. Slumped down head resting in the green leatherette seat, blood, which had poured down the white enamelled column was sticky [...]
Nobody heard the shots. The police estimated the time of death at 10am. (Chatwin Archive Box 31)

Throughout these notebooks, Chatwin concentrates on recording the particular detail, of capturing the fragment of conversation that will illuminate a character, an approach that defined the content of In Patagonia itself. Yet, from

this approach, one should not draw the conclusion that In Patagonia is a work of pure reportage, offering unshaped and unrefined representations of those he met during his time on the peninsula. The author had come to Patagonia with the echoes of his failed nomad book still reverberating in his brain, and Chatwin intended In Patagonia to readdress the issues he had failed to deal with satisfactorily in that work. The travelogue was not intended to be a simple, linear account of a journey made by Bruce Chatwin. Rather, the work was designed as a premeditated and complex examination of the psychology of restlessness. Chatwin shaped his material, and his account of the characters he encountered, to fit this underlying plan; he aims, to quote Jan Borm, ‘at showing *his Patagonia* rather than *Patagonia*’ (Perspectives on Travel Writing 25). To extend Roberto Calasso’s photographic metaphor, Chatwin’s snapshots reflect an objective reality – these characters are not inventions – but the images are artfully arranged to offer, when seen as a whole, a larger thematic vision. In this approach, Chatwin was heavily influenced by his admiration for the poet Osip Mandelstam, whose Journey to Armenia was a touchstone text in the construction of In Patagonia. Mandelstam’s controversial prose work assembles anecdotes, observations and character descriptions that, by themselves, seem as objective as those of In Patagonia:

He cultivated the fruit of his small-commodity plot of ground, his tiny vineyard on its tenth of a hectare, baked into the stone-and-grape pie of Askarak, and, as an extra mouth to feed, was expelled from the collective farm.

In a hollow of his chest of drawers were preserved a university diploma, a school certificate, and a thinnish folder of watercolor sketches – an innocent test of character and talent. (221)

Taken together, however, Mandelstam’s ambition becomes clearer, and the text emerges as a paean to the nomadic life of the south, and a profound critique of the personality cult of Stalin; so profound, alas, that it proved to be

his last published writing before his transportation to the gulag and eventual death in 1938. There is, of course, nothing as important at stake in Chatwin's In Patagonia; however, the influence of Mandelstam's approach is unmistakable in the sophisticated technique Chatwin employs in fusing the stories of the individuals he encountered onto his grand ideas around restlessness.

Chatwin saw in this blending of fact and imagination a means of presenting the themes of restlessness and exile that are the touchstones of In Patagonia, whilst simultaneously grounding the work in the generically familiar form of the travelogue, with its emphasis on the personal anecdote; it allowed him to write on the subject that so preoccupied him without revisiting the theoretical mess of "The Nomadic Alternative". As Nicholas Shakespeare observes, Chatwin intended the work 'to continue his serious exploration into wandering and exile' from the point at which he had left off his unfinished nomad book. 'Only this time,' Shakespeare comments, 'he intended to grapple with his theme not in the abstract terms that had suffocated "The Nomadic Alternative", but in concrete stories' (Introduction to In Patagonia xv). Chatwin wrote in the proposal for In Patagonia that: 'The anatomy of restlessness is a very intangible subject. If you air it in vacuo, you spread into sweeping generalities and cannot make the theme cohere. I propose to use this journey through Patagonia as a vehicle on which to pin a series of notes towards a theory of the Journey itself' (Chatwin Archive Box 41). Consequently, In Patagonia takes the tales of the individuals Chatwin met on his journey, and subtly adapts them in the service of this greater creative ambition, shaping and manipulating the material he discovered in his time in South America. Patagonia is the ideal setting for such an undertaking, stuck, as it is, halfway between fact and fiction.

Before In Patagonia was published in an American edition, Bruce Chatwin wrote to his agent, Deborah Rogers and requested that a number of points be made clear on the edition's back cover. Key amongst them was Chatwin's invitation that the reader choose between two journeys: one to Patagonia in 1975, the other 'a symbolic voyage which is a meditation on restlessness and exile' (qtd. in Shakespeare 311). This conflation is evident from the first chapters of the book, where, in the early description of the author's first days in South America, Chatwin presents a piece of factual, objective information that subtly introduces the central purpose behind the work that is to follow:

The history of Buenos Aires is written in its telephone directory. Pompey Romanov, Emilio Rommel, Crespina D.Z. de Rose, Ladislao Radziwil, and Elizabeta Marta Callman de Rothschild – five names taken at random from among the Rs told a story of exile, disillusion and anxiety behind lace curtains. (5)

This seemingly off-the-cuff observation reveals Chatwin's true ambition in the work. In Patagonia is to explore the individual stories of those who travelled from the west to make their home in the peninsula, offering in their specific tales an allegory providing insight into his key theme of human restlessness.

The story of Patagonian immigration is unlike that of many other countries. For a start, it began relatively late, with the first permanent migrants – the Welsh – establishing a home in the peninsula only in the second half of the nineteenth century. In motivation, too, those who came to Patagonia were different to those who sought the fortune promised by the American dream. The Patagonian migrants were looking for the escape promised by the fabled

blankness of the landscape, for the possibility of living a life outside the strictures and impositions of the civilised Western world. Those who came were the outsiders, the oppressed, and as such were of profound and specific interest to Bruce Chatwin, who had always related to those on the margins of society, and who saw in the narrative of Patagonian migration a metaphor for his ideas around restlessness. Of particular significance to Chatwin was the element of disappointment that so frequently recurs in the stories of those who migrated to the peninsula; many of those who travelled to Patagonia and had given up their lives and livelihoods in the West discovered upon their arrival that the land was far from the paradise they had envisaged.

Given the unique appeal of the narrative of Patagonian migration, it is perhaps worth sketching out the most pertinent and telling migrant experience; that of the Welsh, whom Chatwin always felt a particular affinity towards, given their uncertain, abject relation to the dominant hegemony of England. Indeed, Chatwin would return to their story in On the Black Hill, which takes as an article of faith the separation of Welsh and English culture.

The seeds of Welsh emigration were sown in the border towns and hill farms of Wales in 1801, with the introduction of the Enclosure Act. This piece of legislation effectively ended the free rights of grazing and farming which had been central to the livelihood of the peasant farmers of the Welsh borders; they were now subject to the strictures, both financial and agricultural, of the agrarian landowners. Rarely seen, and generally living either in England or Scotland, the absentee landowners made the already challenging life of the border farmers all the more difficult, breeding discontent and anti-English feeling amongst the Welsh, who began to see themselves as the 'exploited poorer half of a dualism' (Williams The Desert and the Dream 3).

This sense of disillusionment was exacerbated by the perception that, not only were the Welsh being pressured economically, they were also being repressed culturally. The use of Welsh in schools had recently been outlawed, increasing resentment and a sense of marginalisation, and many turned to nonconformist Christianity as a way of both registering their displeasure at the hegemony of the Anglican landowners, and also in an attempt to safeguard some form of cultural identity. However, even this element of cultural subversion was quashed, with the landowners frequently exercising control over the religion practised and language spoken on their lands. Together, the cultural and economic impositions of the English gentry, whether in Westminster or the local Manor, led many to actively discuss emigration, believing that the only solution to the hegemony of the English was to locate, as Chatwin observed, ‘a stretch of open country uncontaminated by Englishmen’ and there found a ‘New Wales’ (IP 26).

This was not a new idea; in the first half of the century, Welsh families had emigrated to the United States in search of a better life. However, the formative social structure in place in the United States tended to ensure that the Welsh community became quickly assimilated into a bigger melting pot, shedding their previous cultural identity. As Glyn Williams, the central chronicler of the Welsh in Patagonia, observes: ‘With all immigrants who leave their homelands in search of upward economic mobility, the tendency to regroup depends upon the number who happen to come into contact, and the opportunities available in the new settlement’ (*The Desert and the Dream* 22). For those wishing to uphold the cultural purity of Welsh society, emigration to a relatively densely populated country such as America did not form a viable solution to the oppression of the English, and ‘hence many came to actively

discuss the establishment of a unified Welsh colony' (The Desert and the Dream 22) elsewhere, in a less densely populated location.

Key in this movement was Michael D. Jones, a Welsh nonconformist and fervent patriot, who was already involved in the emigration effort to the United States. Along with others in the nonconformist movement, Michael Jones began to investigate possible virgin territories for the establishment of a Welsh colony. Amongst others, Oregon, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Uruguay, and Vancouver Island, were all suggested as possible locations. Somehow, however, the deserts of Patagonia emerged as the leading contender in this discussion. There were a number of reasons for this. The organisers had been partly encouraged to choose Patagonia as a result of the possibilities seemingly offered by the peculiar blankness of the landscape; the literature of the peninsula, as has been noted, emphasises above all the lack of any other communities or individuals who could conceivably clash with the new immigrants. Equally significant, however, was the Argentine government's encouragement of inward migration to the Patagonian peninsula. The lack of permanent settlement by any of the imperial powers in the region had ensured that any political claim to Patagonian territory by either Argentina or Chile remained shaky at best. The Argentine authorities recognised that it was necessary to shore up any claim with evidence of settlement; hence, one finds in Article 25 of the 1853 constitution the following statement: '[the government] shall encourage European immigration and may not restrict, limit or burden with any tax whatsoever, the entrance into Argentine territory of foreigners who arrive for the purpose of tilling the soil, improving industries and introducing and teaching the arts and sciences' (Williams The Welsh in Patagonia 24). Some Western migrants had already made the journey to Argentina, but preferred to

settle in Buenos Aires or the outlying districts, put off from venturing further south by tales of the unforgiving landscape and harsh climate. For the Welsh, however, settlement close to a large conurbation, where they would be subject to a similar form of cultural imposition as they currently experienced in Wales, was never an option. The appeal of Patagonia was its very lack of civilised communities, an appeal which was sweetened by the approach of the Argentine government, who insinuated to the organisers of the Welsh emigration that, if enough of the disenfranchised were persuaded to make the journey to Patagonia, they would be prepared to hand over a stake of land for the establishment, not only of a Welsh colony, but of an independent state within Argentine territory; a true New Wales.

As a result of the promising overtures of the Argentine government, a party was organised with the explicit aim of assessing the viability of life on the peninsula. Two of the central figures in the movement, Lewis Jones and Sir Love Jones-Parry, were dispatched to the peninsula, returning in May of 1863. They delivered a report which exaggerated the few positives they found in Patagonia, whilst attempting to skirt around the negatives with, in Glyn Williams' words: 'a great deal of emphasis being given to the supposed existence of a more favourable location to the west' (*The Welsh in Patagonia* 32). On the back of this report, Michael Jones launched a propagandist marketing campaign, presenting the possibility of moving to a New Wales, similar in landscape and climate to the Welsh borders, but outside the jurisdiction of a distant governing authority. In the handbook which was distributed by the Colonizing Society, those considering emigration were informed that the landscape was of: 'tall strong forests' along the riverside, with the surrounding land being 'green and splendid'. Upon these lush pastures 'herds of animals'

grazed. The weather, too, was presented in deeply favourable terms; it was blessed with 'the most healthy and pleasant climates in the world'. It was a temperate land being 'neither too hot, nor too cold' (Williams The Desert and the Dream 34). The tone and content of the report neatly contrasts with the account of George Musters, who published At Home with the Patagonians six years after the first wave of Welsh emigration: 'The climate does not permit wheat or barley to ripen, though, perhaps, oats or rye might succeed. The tame cattle seemed to me stunted and miserable' (Musters 23). Despite the blatant propagandism of Michael Jones' handbook, a number of the disenfranchised did sign up for the Patagonian project, and on the 24th May 1865, one-hundred and sixty-three settlers sailed from Liverpool on the *Mimosa*.

They were unprepared for what greeted them upon their arrival. The fervent religiosity of the Welsh emigrants had led them, only naturally, to draw parallels between their own plight and that of the Israelites in the wilderness. The land to which they were sailing held almost impossible promise for the seafarers aboard the *Mimosa*; Patagonia was so little known that, coupled with the influence of the literature distributed by the emigration committee, it was easy for them to believe that they were sailing for the promised land, as God's blessed people. As Bruce Chatwin observes of their arrival in the Lower Chubut Valley: 'From Madryn it was a march of forty miles over the thorn desert. And when they did reach the valley, they had the impression that God, and not the Government, had given them the land' (IP 26). The first sermon preached in the new settlement took as its theme 'Israel in the Wilderness', with the English playing the role of the Egyptians in this biblical allegory.

However, it was not only English oppression of varying forms from which the Welsh sought respite in Lower Chubut; they had sailed also to avoid a life of

poverty. Patagonia offered expansive tracts of land for grazing and crop-raising, with no externally imposed boundaries. The emigrants believed that this land, signed off by the Argentine authorities and blessed by God, would provide a fruitful soil for crops and grazing, with the settlement able to grow sufficient cash crops to not only support their own community, but also for the purposes of trade. The emigrants had brought little with them, and trade was key to the establishment of a viable settlement, despite the emigrants' wish to be self-sufficient.

They must have realised on the very moment of their landing that their hopes would be almost impossible to realise. Patagonia looked nothing like Wales; there was little but thornscrub and sand to greet them upon their arrival. Life was desperately difficult for the first months and years; crops failed, washed out by floods or killed off by drought, and it was not until 1873 that the community achieved any kind of security. George Musters - nicknamed 'the King of Patagonia' as a result of his extensive travels in Southern Argentina - saw immediately the difficulties faced by the settlers: 'The visionary scheme of a Welsh Utopia, in pursuit of which these unfortunate emigrants settled themselves, ought not to be encouraged, likely as it is to end in the starvation of the victims to it' (244). He even recorded an account of the settlers eating grass, so desperate was their plight.

However, the Welsh viewed the Lower Chubut Valley, where they had settled, as merely a staging post; they had been promised, and intended to eventually seek out, finer land further west. The emigrants felt that they had not yet emerged from the wilderness into their land of plenty; however, they were initially unwilling to take on trust the assertion by those who had organised the emigration, and so misled the community, that expeditions should be

dispatched to locate this Edenic land. The organisers were not the first or last to believe in a lost paradise at the heart of the peninsula. Carl Skottsberg, a young Swedish explorer who visited Patagonia in 1907 recorded that: “The shipwreck of Carmarga in the Magellan Straights in 1540, as well as the unhappy result of Sarmiento’s colonising experience in 1584, gave birth to all sorts of stories. It was said that survivors of these disasters had wandered into the interior of Patagonia, where they had found immense treasures and established a settlement, which by-and-by had developed into a flourishing city, mentioned in the tales as “la Ciudad de los Césares” (152). Bruce Chatwin wrote of those quests that sought the city in In Patagonia:

Several expeditions set out to find the City. Many single wanderers disappeared on the same quest. An eighteenth-century description placed it south of Latitude 45° [...] a mountain fortress, situated below a volcano, perched above a beautiful lake. There was a river, the Rio Diamante, abounding in gold and precious stones. (110)

Unsupported myths such as this made the Welsh emigrants sceptical of the promises made by the organisers of the expedition, and it was not until July 1877 that, persuaded by accounts from the Tehuelche Indians of a lush mountain pasture further west, an expedition was launched. In September, the dozen men who had been dispatched on the expedition returned to Trelew, announcing that there were indeed lush pastures to the west, which they had christened Cwm Hyfryd, or Pleasant Dale. This land, finally, seemed to offer the paradise that the Welsh had searched for; however, even as they arrived in their Utopia, the migrants were looking backward to the homeland they had left behind:

[It is] one of the most beautiful scenes I have seen since leaving Wales. Picture a large pan, the bottom of which is rich pasture land, and the sides are forested hills, at the same time covered in good pasture, you can imagine what kind of land it is when strawberries and currants of many different types grow there, there are plants and flowers

of the types to be seen in the Old Country. (qtd. in Williams The Desert and the Dream 117)

The Welsh were undoubtedly the most significant population – both in numerical and cultural terms – to have emigrated to Patagonia, and their story offers a neat illustration of the clear appeal of the migrants’ story to Bruce Chatwin. However, as In Patagonia documents, over the course of the nineteenth century, the peninsula became a home for multitudes of exiles and wanderers, all of whom had come in search of the ‘great intangible’ that Chatwin posited as a key motivation in “The Nomadic Alternative” – ‘the idea of freedom’ (17). The migrants of Patagonia became the real life examples of the ideas he had so struggled to express in his aborted first work. Chatwin peppers the pages of In Patagonia with accounts of these wanderers and exiles. Some were loners, such as Butch Cassidy, who wrote to a ‘Dear Friend’ in the United States that his home country was ‘too small’ for him and that he was ‘restless’ and ‘wanted to see more of the world’²⁵ (55), or the unnamed miner who relies on an out-of-date map from the National Encyclopedia to help him find work, and who ‘had no money and his passport was stolen. He had dinner on me. In the morning, he said he’d be heading on south. Man, he’d be all right. It was simply a question of finding the right mine’ (72). There were also other communities that had set up home in Patagonia, in particular the Germans and the Boers: ‘A lot of Boers lived round Sarmiento, and met up at the Hotel Orroz for lunch. Their names were Venter, Visser, Vorster, Kruger, Norval, Eloff,

²⁵ No small influence on Cassidy’s emigration to Patagonia must have come from the increasing difficulty of avoiding police capture in the U.S..

Botha and de Bruyn – all descendants of hard-line Afrikaners who emigrated to Patagonia in 1903, sickened by the Union Jack' (92).

That Chatwin saw in these individuals and communities a real-world exemplar of his ideas around restlessness was only partly a result of this diversity, however. What was significant to Chatwin in regard to the Patagonian communities was the noted disappointment of the migrants, which developed into an extreme ambivalence towards their new homeland. From almost the point of their arrival, many began to look with longing towards the homelands that they had so strongly desired to leave.

Indeed, as there was no social structure into which to assimilate in Patagonia, the emigrants, confronted by a hostile and unfamiliar environment, took their nostalgia to its logical conclusions, constructing scaled-down versions of their homelands. Partly, this endeavour was a result of the nationalistic intentions of the migrants; equally, however, the undertaking seems to demonstrate the ambivalent relationship the migrants felt to their new country; clearly, this was not 'home,' and some effort needed to be expended to make it so: 'Apart from its metal roof nothing distinguished it from the houses of a South German village,' Chatwin wrote, 'the half-timbering infilled with white plaster, the grey shutters, the wicket fence, the scrubbed floors, painted panelling, the chandelier of antler tines and lithographs of the Rhineland' (84). These communities in exile latched on to the most stereotypical national pursuits in order to mark their heritage out; hence the Scots built bagpipes and wore kilts, the English took tea and the Welsh went to chapel. The religious element was particularly relevant for the Welsh, given that a large part of the original motivation for coming to Patagonia was the avoidance of religious persecution. As Glyn Williams observes: 'The chapel was the physical structure

which allowed the Welsh to identify with their religion which was, in turn, a factor conducive to the maintenance of a national consciousness [...] Here is a case where religion is a means of expressing national sentiment among immigrants' (Williams, The State 60).

For Chatwin, these communities embodied in literal terms the paradox of restlessness. Even having broken free of their previous strictures, having escaped the dissatisfaction that must have been endemic in their previous lives to have motivated them to travel the many thousand miles to Patagonia, those immigrants that Chatwin writes about still retain an ambivalence about their present status, embracing the future with one foot stuck conservatively in the past. Chatwin documents case after case of such a perspective. The author describes one encounter with a Swiss exile plagued by nostalgia: 'She took up a coloured photograph of her city and began to recall the names of quays, streets, parks, fountains, and avenues. Together we strolled around pre-war Geneva' (82), whilst a Canary Islander that Chatwin meets is described as: 'homesick and dreaming of lost vigour' (112). He goes on to talk of 'the flowers, the trees, the farming methods and dances of his sunlit mountain in the sea' (112).

The perfection of the allegory offered by the nostalgia of the immigrants was heightened further for Chatwin by the fact that the author encountered these communities at a point when the social structures thrown up by the Patagonian immigrants in order to preserve the life of their homeland were beginning to fragment, as, after many decades of isolation, memories began to fail and the outside world began to encroach. In many cases, the attempts by Patagonian migrants to maintain ties to the old country lapse into unintentional pastiche, as with the 'Englishman' whose 'dress was the result of meticulous

planning: the Norfolk jacket in brown herring-bone tweed, the hardwood buttons, the open-necked khaki shirt, the worsted trousers, tortoise-shell bifocals and spit-and-polished shoes' (40), but who has forgotten the geography of the country he so desires to belong to, believing Gloucestershire to be 'In the North, what?' (40). Patagonian life seems to offer confirmation of Salman Rushdie's observation that, should migrants attempt to keep hold of the culture they have left, they 'must [...] do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from [our homeland] almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost' (Imaginary Homelands 10).

In Patagonia represents a world on the cusp of losing any connection with the homelands from whence the Patagonian emigrants came. In Bethesda, Chatwin encounters a Welsh family whose grasp of their homeland is based on a tea-towel map:

Their grandfather came from Caernarvon but she couldn't say where that was. Caernarvon wasn't marked on her map of Wales. "You can't expect much," she said, "when it's printed on a tea-towel."
I pointed out where Caernarvon should be. She had always wanted to know. (30)

The narrator detects a degree of fatalism amongst the exiles regarding their future, with their culture beginning to be diluted by assimilation and emigration: "When Welshmen marry foreigners, they lose the tradition." Gwynneth Morgan was unmarried. She wanted to keep the valley Welsh, the way it was. "But it's all going to pieces," she said' (IP 36). One mother from In Patagonia, the Genoese wife of Ivor Davies, struggles with the corrupting influence of assimilation and cultural distance: 'She spoke Welsh and sang in Welsh. But, as an Italian, she couldn't make the boys Welsh. They were bored with the community and wanted to go to the States' (35). Chatwin presents a

steady stream of both metaphoric and actual representations of this slow dissolution of cultural identity; the Draigoch guest house in Gaiman, owned by Italians who ‘played Neapolitan songs on the juke box late into the night’ (29); the grandson who ‘called his grandmother ‘Granny’ but otherwise [...] did not speak English or Welsh’ (29), the unnamed, and thus emblematic ‘Scotsman’ whose thistle has been unable to survive the harsh climate of Patagonia.

The ambivalent attitude of younger generations towards their supposed homeland exacerbated this gradual dilution of culture. The descendants of Patagonian migrants are depicted as turning away from their homeland just as those who originally settled on the peninsula did, disillusioned by the lack of opportunity in their small villages and towns. It is perhaps unsurprising that the Patagonian youth wish to speak Spanish or English and live in Buenos Aires or New York, given the restless tendencies of their parents and grandparents. John Pilkington, in his travelogue An Englishman in Patagonia quotes an elderly resident who, in an observation that would have pleased Chatwin, succinctly expresses this notion:

“Just look at us: runaways, dreamers – hopeless romantics every one! Our ancestors left their homes and countries to throw their fate to the wind, and now their grandchildren are doing the same. If a Patagonian has a choice, you see, he’ll always go for the unknown.” (167)

In his writings on Patagonia Bruce Chatwin traces the origin of his preoccupation with the peninsula back to his childhood. The introduction of In Patagonia and Chatwin’s essay ‘I Always Wanted To Go To Patagonia’ both offer a number of childhood experiences in an effort to explain the author’s

motivation in traveling to the area, all of which seem to key into a youthful desire to escape.

In part, the landscape appealed for a similar reason to that which motivated the waves of nineteenth century immigration; it offered a refuge from the tyrannies of civilisation. As a child, the reader is told, Chatwin suffered nightmares, induced by the urban nightmare of his childhood in Birmingham, that the world teetered on the brink of nuclear holocaust. Having, in his childhood, watched the civil defence lecturer ‘ring the cities of Europe to show the zones of total and partial destruction’ (IP 3) in the event of a nuclear attack, the young Bruce formulated a survival plan: ‘The only hope lay in escaping to some remote place where one would a. escape nuclear fall-out or b. remain in ignorance until the end. I pored over atlases and geography books. I studied currents and prevailing winds. And I concluded that Patagonia [...] was the safest place in the world. Accordingly I plotted to run away from school and found a colony there’ (Chatwin Archive Box 41). As Chatwin observed as he toured the Patagonian wilderness: ‘Who would want to bomb Patagonia?’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35).

This search for refuge from civilisation is a recurrent theme of Chatwin’s work; indeed, almost all of the author’s published texts suggest that life is better lived away from settlement. In “The Nomadic Alternative”, Chatwin argued the point on a theoretical level, asserting that settlement was an aberration from the inherent state of man, and that as a species we were genetically predisposed to live a freer, more primitive life. In In Patagonia, by contrast, Chatwin continues his project of narrowing his terms of reference to the individual; hence, just as Chatwin rooted his discussion of restlessness in his descriptions of the experience of the individual Patagonian migrants themselves, so similarly he

employs his own childhood experiences in Birmingham to illustrate the point he laboured to make in “The Nomadic Alternative”.

Chatwin harboured a fundamental dislike of his home town of Birmingham for the whole of his life; after leaving the Midlands for the bright lights of London, Chatwin returned to the city only twice. As he sat on a waiting train one afternoon at Birmingham’s Moor Street station, he looked out at the grey concrete of the city and wrote in his notebook: ‘25 years ago? The last time I came on this train 1955? I would think so,’ noting the ‘puddles on top of a flat roof [...] The absolute hideousness’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35). Given the impact of the urban landscape on Chatwin’s young mind, it is little surprise that his youthful fantasies of Patagonian life, spurred on, no doubt, by Lucas Bridges’ The Uttermost Part of the Earth – an acknowledged childhood favourite – were of a retreat far from this ‘absolute hideousness’. Chatwin imagined ‘a low timbered house with a shingled roof, caulked against storms, with blazing log fires inside and the walls lined with the best books, somewhere to live while the rest of the world blew up’ (3). Notably – and in keeping with the disappointment felt by the migrants discussed above – the single log cabin he encounters on his journey is far from his aesthete’s retreat: “In winter it’s terrible,” she said. “I covered the wall with *materia plastica* but it blew away. The house is rotten, Señor, old and rotten. I would sell it tomorrow. I would have a concrete house which the wind cannot enter” (53). As for those Patagonian immigrants who failed to discover the paradise they sought, so Bruce Chatwin’s childhood dreams of a refuge turn out to be fundamentally illusory – as do so many dreams of the restless.

Alongside this profound childhood motivation, Chatwin also presents another, seemingly more whimsical explanation behind his journey to the

peninsula. In 'I Always Wanted To Go To Patagonia', the author recounts the stories of a number of family members who, like Chatwin himself, were drawn to exotic, far off lands: Uncle Bickerton ('Pick miner and bigamist'); Uncle Humphrey ('Sad end in Africa') and Uncle Geoffrey ('Arabist and desert traveler who, like T.E. Lawrence, was given a golden headdress (since sold) by the Emir Feisal. Died poor in Cairo' (AOR 4)) amongst them. Yet the relative whose story had the most impact upon Chatwin's childhood imagination, the reader is told, was his grandmother's cousin, Charles Milward:

Charley Milward was captain of a merchant ship that sank at the entrance to the Strait of Magellan. He survived the wreck and settled nearby, at Punta Arenas, where he ran a ship-repairing yard. The Charley Milward of my imagination was a god among men – tall, silent and strong, with black mutton-chop whiskers and fierce blue eyes. He wore his sailor's cap at an angle and the tops of his sea-boots turned down. (IP 1-2)

This inspiring figure was partly responsible for the discovery of a preserved carcass in a cave in southwest Patagonia, thought by the young Bruce to be a piece of brontosaurus. In fact the remains of a mylodon, or Giant Sloth, Milward sent a small piece of the skin of this animal to his cousin, Bruce's Grandmother, as a wedding present and it was this piece of skin 'thick and leathery, with strands of coarse, reddish hair' (IP 1) that consolidated Chatwin's dreams of Patagonia upon his discovery of it as a child in a glass fronted display case kept at his Grandmother's house in Birmingham.

Nicholas Shakespeare sees this case, which Chatwin referred to as the 'Cabinet of Curiosities', and which he consciously emulated in later life in a cabinet at his house in Oxfordshire, as roughly analogous to the wardrobe in C.S.Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia: 'He reached through it into a fantastical world of lions, unicorns and ice queens where he would make his home' (Bruce Chatwin 27). W.G. Sebald wrote similarly of the cabinet:

[M]ost important of all in Chatwin's development as a writer were surely those early moments of pure fascination when the boy crept into his grandmother Isobel's dining room and, looking past his own blurred reflection, marvelled at the jumble of curios arranged on the shelves of the glass-fronted mahogany cupboard, all of them from very different lands. It could not even be said where some of them came from or what they had been for; apocryphal stories clung to others. (183)

The contents of the cabinet were a spur to both Chatwin's childhood imagination and his later literary approach; indeed, Andrew Palmer argues that alongside the image of the nomad, 'there must also be one of Chatwin as collector' (130), an observation that will be returned to in the final chapter of this thesis which will explore Chatwin's attitude to the matter of collection in an analysis of the author's short novel Utz.

Of the piece of mylodon hide that Chatwin discovered within this cabinet, Chatwin wrote 'Never in my life have I wanted anything as I wanted that piece of skin' (IP 2). Upon the occasion of his grandmother's death, however, the skin was disposed of, disappointing the young Chatwin, but offering the mature writer the perfect device upon which to hang the narrative of In Patagonia – the form of the work would be that of the quest, with the narrator journeying to replace the skin he lost as a child.

In a presentation to the Royal Geographical Society, Chatwin admitted that In Patagonia was written in conscious imitation of what he referred to as the 'oldest kind of traveller's tale', in which 'the narrator leaves home and goes to a far country in search of a legendary beast' (Patagonia Revisited 17). "The Nomadic Alternative" had argued that this literary form constituted part of the human hardwiring; that it offered evidence of inherited instinct towards travel. In Patagonia appears to resuscitate that argument; as Nicholas Shakespeare observes, part of Chatwin's plan was to 'retrieve from his abandoned nomad manuscript [...] the idea of the Journey as Metaphor, in particular Lord Raglan's

paradigm of the young hero who sets off on a voyage and does battle with a monster' (xv). It is a sign of how far Chatwin had come as a writer, however, that he did not load this archetypal form with the portentous significance it takes on in "The Nomadic Alternative", but rather employed it in a deeply sophisticated, seemingly subversive fashion. Chatwin discussed his intentions in using the form with Melvyn Bragg on London Weekend Television's The South Bank Show, commenting: 'You find it in the Gilgamesh epic, in Gawain, in Beowulf', he observed. 'My story was so ridiculous that I wanted to use it as a spoof of all those things.' Chatwin's account of his journey to Last Hope Sound to retrieve a piece of the lost mylodon skin can thus be read as a postmodern quest; digressive, essentially pointless, and ultimately motivated by personal wish engendered by a domestic remembrance rather than necessity or glory. Chatwin frequently disappears up narrative blind alleys, chasing, at any opportunity, an offbeat anecdote or interesting character. When the narrator arrives in Last Hope Sound, the ultimate destination of his unfocussed journey, he at first discovers nothing but preserved Mylodon droppings, observing deprecatingly: "Well," I thought, "if there's no skin, at least there's a load of shit" (IP 249). Subsequently, however, having found some remaining skin, Chatwin comments that he has 'accomplished the object of this ridiculous journey' (249).

It is understood from this ending, then, that Chatwin's In Patagonia is intended as a playful interpretation of the quest form, rather than any sincere emulation. Certainly, when compared to the generalised synopsis of the traditional quest put forward by Chatwin in "The Nomadic Alternative", it is clear that the narrative of the Patagonian travelogue is not intended to fit the prescribed format of such a specific journey:

After a sequence of adventures in remote and fabulous lands, he faces the Jaws of Death. A fire-breathing monster menaces with fangs and claws, and jealously hoarding a treasure, threatens the inhabitants of the land with total destruction unless they cringe before it and appease its bloodthirstiness with sacrificial victims. The hero fights and kills the monster, rewards himself with the treasure and a bride, returns home to the jubilant acclamations of his proud parents and people, and they all live happily ever after. ("NA" 37)

One can thus not argue that Chatwin's narrative matches the affirmational structure outlined above. The journey undertaken by Chatwin in search of the mylodon skin is essentially anti-climactic and, indeed, does not form a coherent and resolved conclusion to the narrative, which drifts existentially onward for another ten pages after the discovery of the cave at Last Hope Sound. Yet to so fully abandon the sincerity inherent in the classical form of the quest seems perverse, particularly given the metaphorical weight such a journey is lent in "The Nomadic Alternative". Why employ a form so loaded with significance simply in an effort towards pastiche?

In truth, Chatwin's claim that the form was employed purely as a spoof is disingenuous. When one compares his version of the quest to that of the models he references one finds, despite an obvious concentration on the personal aspect of the story (there are no nation states at risk in the narrative of the travelogue, after all), that the characters and stories of the classical stories do not often match Chatwin's synopsis and live happily ever after, their journeying having come to a fixed and definitive end; they are by their nature subject to the same fate-bound restlessness that Chatwin identifies in himself. In "The Nomadic Alternative", Chatwin identifies these tales as metaphoric of a genetic predisposition towards movement; in *In Patagonia*, the author sets the metaphor to work in his own text, heightening and extending the central themes of restlessness and exile.

The characters of those quest narratives that Chatwin mentioned in interview and essay are all afflicted by the same instinct that affects the narrator of *In Patagonia*. Thus, Beowulf is not permitted to rest following his triumphant homecoming; he is compelled to face a final challenge in his later years, confronting the fire-breathing dragon who eventually kills him. “I risked my life often when I was young,” he tells his assembled warriors. “Now I am old/ but as king of the people I shall pursue this fight/ for the glory of winning” (2510).

Nor, too, does Gilgamesh find satisfaction in the great quest he undertakes; after the death of his great friend Enkidu, Gilgamesh sets off to seek the path to eternal life, only to be counselled by the great sun-god Shamash:

O Gilgamesh, where are you wandering?
The life that you seek you will never find. (Tablet IX, Si i 15)

Odysseus would seem the exception to this general rule, returning home in glory to his wife and son. Yet, Tennyson, for one, finds this resolution unconvincing and in the romantic speculation of his poem ‘Ulysses’, he depicts a restless monarch, aching for the journeys of his youth:

Come, my friends.
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,--
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (182)

Despite Chatwin’s professed aim of writing *In Patagonia* as pastiche, the literary form of the novel can be seen as a continuation and confirmation of the themes of exile and restlessness that permeate the novel. The characters of the

quest narratives referenced above share with both Chatwin and the characters of In Patagonia an inability to settle, a sense that they are, to quote Elizabeth Chatwin ‘in exile from everywhere’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 376). Chatwin’s narrator – engaged in a quest to rediscover his youth in a piece of skin – is, far from being an anomaly in this pantheon, simply continuing the literary tradition established in Gilgamesh, Beowulf and Gawain in his profound need for travel and his invention of a cause to do so.

The subtlety and sophistication of this approach demonstrates that Chatwin had broken free of the dogmatic style that had hampered the writing of “The Nomadic Alternative”. In In Patagonia, Chatwin managed to fuse the personal and cultural in a manner that had eluded him as a younger writer, creating a profound meditation on the compulsive effects of restlessness. In his next work, Chatwin would demonstrate that he had full mastery of both his theme and his literary talents, crafting, in his tale of Francisco Da Silva, a novel that extended, through the freedom offered by fiction, his treatment of the subject of restlessness to an entirely new plane.

Chapter Four: 'A Bellyful of Colours'

- Everyday you walk forty miles through the thorns and why are you barefoot? Don't you have any shoes?
- I don't trust shoes.
- Then why don't you have a horse?
- I'd never trust a horse. I don't trust people either, but I long to go forth from here to another world.

Werner Herzog, Cobra Verde

In Patagonia, in its concentration on the immigrant experience, directly addressed the disillusion experienced when an individual, restlessly travelling in search of a utopia, instead finds themselves trapped in a new home that fails to meet their expectations. Many of those who had journeyed from the west in search of the intangibles of freedom and happiness in the landscape of Patagonia had, ultimately, been disappointed; a disappointment that developed to the malaise of intensified restlessness and nostalgia upon the realisation that they were unable to leave. The author's second published book, The Viceroy of Ouidah, addresses a very similar theme; it is also, essentially, a work about the perils of restlessly travelling in search of illusory goals and ultimately getting stuck. As Nicholas Murray observes, 'In Patagonia introduced Chatwin's great theme of restlessness and his second book focuses on the life of another restless spirit' (55). Chatwin's approach to his theme, however, was substantively different to that of In Patagonia, with a combination of factors provoking a new response to old problems, and ultimately producing a work more profound and insightful in its analysis of restlessness, but also bleaker and less empathetic. Where the disappointment of the Patagonian emigrants exacted a response of general disillusionment and nostalgia, so, in The Viceroy of Ouidah, the same frustrations engender a far more dramatic reaction. The central character of the novel, an irrepressible wanderer who, through a series of passive decisions,

finds himself imprisoned on the edge of Africa, is moved to violence and sex to alleviate the symptoms of his restless nature.

A number of factors contributed to Chatwin's new approach. Key amongst these was the main geographical setting that Chatwin chose for the novel; the Marxist Republic of Benin, formerly Dahomey, which as Nicholas Murray observes, 'already had a place in the literary imagination where it functioned as an image of extreme barbarism' (52). Richard Burton (from whose A Mission to Gelele Chatwin took much of the background detail for his novel) had visited and was disappointed to find that stories of canoes floating on lakes of human blood were untrue; the myth arose, Burton recorded, from 'the custom of collecting the gore of the victims in pits about four feet deep and two in diameter' (The Present State of Dahomey 403). There was, however, no shortage of active ritual violence on display in the era Chatwin portrays, as Lieutenant Frederick Forbes attested on the occasion of his ambassadorial mission to the country in the mid-nineteenth century, designed to encourage the abolition of the slave trade there. Forbes records his visit with some horror: 'At the foot of the ladder [...] lay six newly-cut-off human heads, the blood still oozing; at the threshold of the entrance gate was a pool of human blood. Within, the scene was entirely different from yesterday: in the centre of the Palace-court stood a huge crimson cloth tent [...] ornamented with devices of men cutting off others' heads, calabashes full of human heads, and other emblems of brutality and barbarity' (King Guezo of Dahomey, 1850-52 60). Eighteenth and nineteenth century accounts of the Slave Coast abound with representations such as these, taking delight in contrasting the civilised lifestyle of Georgian and Victorian England with the barbaric and primitive cultural practices of the unrefined Africans; a necessary objectification, one might cynically observe, for

a society whose economic structure was intrinsically bound up with the slave trade.

The violent undertones of The Viceroy of Ouidah did not, however, emerge exclusively from historical accounts of the region. Chatwin had experienced at first hand a present day instance of violent instability on the occasion of his second trip to Benin. During his 1976 visit to the country, undertaken to research The Viceroy of Ouidah, Chatwin had the misfortune to become embroiled in an attempted overthrow of the Marxist government, an action seemingly orchestrated by the President in order to root out his enemies. As a foreign national – a writer, no less – Chatwin was of suspicion, and hence was duly rounded up and imprisoned for the duration of the coup. Chatwin recounted his experiences in a piece written for Granta magazine which vividly evokes the tenuous uncertainty of the situation: ‘In addition to the mosquito bites, my back had come up in watery blisters. My toe was very sore. The guard kicked me awake whenever I nodded off [...] At two or three in the morning, there was a burst of machine-gun fire close by, and we all thought, This is it’ (WAIDH 28). Whilst in captivity, Chatwin remembers a pertinent and discouraging observation made by a descendant of De Souza’s: “‘Yes,” he sighed, “the Dahomeans are a charming and intelligent people. Their only weakness is a certain nostalgia for taking heads” (24). Despite the threat of violence, Chatwin and his fellow captors were released shaken but unharmed, though there is the suggestion in both his writing and in documentary reports of something darker having taken place that remains unwritten. An account from James Lees-Milne elaborates on this possibility:

In one little country – I forget which – he was arrested for some misdemeanour, passport not visa-ed, and beaten up. He was hit in the face, stripped of all his clothes – what a pretty sight to be sure – and humiliated in public. “How awful!” I said.

“Well,” he replied. “I must confess to having rather enjoyed it.”
 “Then you are a masochist, I surmise.” “Just a bit,” he answered.
 (qtd. in Shakespeare 332)

The veracity of this story is unknown, and, given the source, perhaps not to be taken on faith. Yet, if one assumes that Lees-Milne did not wholly invent the story, the account offers more evidence of an undertone of violence in the author’s experience of the country. Given both Chatwin’s contemporary experience and the evidence of historical sources, it can hardly be seen as surprising that he should have written a novel so distinct from his previous text; the volatile political and social landscape of Benin sits in stark contrast to the passivity of the Patagonian pampas.

However, location was not the sole, or even primary, influence on the new approach to the subject of restlessness taken by Chatwin in The Viceroy of Ouidah; yet more important was the provenance of the story that eventually developed into the published fiction. Whilst In Patagonia was a text fundamentally predicated on lived experience, The Viceroy of Ouidah had a far murkier relationship to the real world. As he attests in the – subsequently excised – preface to the first edition of the work, Chatwin had initially planned his work to be a biography of Francisco De Souza, a man referred to by Pierre Verger as ‘the most notorious slave trader of all time’ (28). Chatwin had been busily engaged on research in Benin for this non-fiction piece, when he became embroiled in the machinations of the coup d’etat referenced above: ‘His research came to a screeching halt’ (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin), comments Elizabeth Chatwin of the impositions of the coup. Having escaped imprisonment, Chatwin describes, in his account of the coup, a conversation regarding his project with one of his fellow captives:

“This is Africa.”
 “I know and I’m leaving.”

“For England?”

“No,” I said. “For Brazil. I’ve a book to write.”

“Beautiful country, Brazil.”

“I hope so.”

“Beautiful women.”

“So I’m told.”

“So what is this book?”

“It’s about the slave trade.”

“In Benin?”

“Also in Brazil.”

“*Eh bien!*” The champagne had come and he filled my glass. “You have material!”

“Yes,” I agreed. “I do have material.” (34-35)

The material was partial, however, and did not offer a solid enough basis for the non-fiction work Chatwin had intended: ‘I did not go back to Benin,’ he wrote in the novel’s preface to the first edition. ‘I did come away with the bones of a story and a number of vivid impressions. [...] But such was the patchiness of my material that I decided to change the names of the principal characters – and went on to write a work of the imagination’ (Preface to the First Edition 2-3).

The influence of external events led Chatwin to create a work that contains elements of both fact and fiction; there is quite obvious authorial license evident within the text, yet, equally, much of Chatwin’s experience in Benin clearly filtered into the novel. In ‘Werner Herzog in Ghana,’ an article first printed in Interview magazine, and subsequently included in the collection What Am I Doing Here, Chatwin recounts that one of Herzog’s favourite lines was ‘given to me by the eight-year-old Grégoire de Souza’ (WAIDH 138); a clear indication that there are cases of direct quotation from real sources in the book. Elizabeth Chatwin attests to the work’s opening as having its foundation in reality: ‘[A]ll that was real, I mean the luncheon party that starts the novel; he walked in on that. They had gathered from Paris and all different places where they lived and went on about how they were white. And then someone came in

screaming that Mama Wewe had died' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin).

Chatwin even tacitly acknowledges his observational role in these ceremonies in the text:

One of the women plucked a wing-feather from a live fowl and twizzled it in her ear.
 "It's to take away the human grease," a small boy informed the European tourist: and the tourist, who was collecting this kind of information, patted the boy's head and gave him a franc. (6)

From the basis of this lived experience, however, Chatwin had to develop and refine the historical narrative at the heart of the text, and the infinitude of possible fictional approaches to the material Chatwin had gathered must have been daunting for an author whose work, until this point, had been totally reliant on either lived experience or documentary sources. Before *In Patagonia*, Chatwin had worked for the *Sunday Times*, where he had posted documentary reports from around the world; before the 'Times', he had, of course been engaged in the writing of his pseudo-academic tract, "The Nomadic Alternative". *The Viceroy of Ouidah* was to be the first time the author had been forced to construct – rather than reconstruct – the bulk of a narrative, and it proved a struggle: '*The Viceroy of Ouidah*,' remarked Chatwin's editor, Susannah Clapp, 'was squeezed out sentence by polished sentence' (165).

Yet fiction also offered certain advantages; Chatwin was freed from the restrictions of fidelity to sources, and his story could be as outlandish and excessive as he wished. Chatwin must certainly have been encouraged in his project by a letter he had received from the polymath writer Patrick Leigh Fermor soon after the publication of *In Patagonia*. Praising the travelogue as 'splendidly original', Fermor told Chatwin that he wished the work 'half as long again – not, here, for an extension of those particular travels after the last page (though of course one would like that too) but I wish you had let it off the leash

a bit more [...] I think you are too strict with yourself' (Chatwin Archive).

Chatwin certainly seemed to take Leigh Fermor's advice to heart and 'let it rip'; whilst rooting his novel in a recognisable reality, the author simultaneously took great delight in allowing his imagination to dictate the outcome of the story, taking authorial control over the eventual fate of his characters and, through this control, offering a more dramatic depiction of the symptoms and effects of his grand theme of restlessness.

In this new approach, Chatwin turned to new models. Where In Patagonia had taken as its inspiration the documentary photography of Henri Cartier-Bresson, with Chatwin taking faithful 'snapshots' of the individual characters of the work, and subsequently rearranging them to form a cohesive thematic whole, the main influences on the writing of The Viceroy of Ouidah were writers who, whilst seemingly offering an objective reality, were in fact masters of the art of fiction, simply masquerading as dispassionate observers; chief amongst them were the disparate French authors André Gide, Gustave Flaubert and Jean Racine. These writers, divided by some years, share a punishing disinterest in regard to the destiny of their characters, assembling a fate-bound group of individual types in a claustrophobic environment and allowing the action to play out as if not in true control of the ultimate consequences. Of Racine's Bajazet, referenced in the opening chapters of The Viceroy of Ouidah, Susannah Clapp observed: '[W]hat really interested him was the sense of constriction: whenever he spoke about Bajazet he talked with horror about the confined space in which the characters were stuck together' (Clapp 164). The approach of these authors – which might be best described as 'objective fictionality' – offered a bridge to Chatwin from the documentary depiction of the restless communities of Patagonia to the clearly

embellished story of the tortured Francisco Manoel Da Silva, Chatwin's fictional stand in for the slave trader De Souza. The character of Da Silva is a composite figure, combining the factual material he had already accumulated in his research for the proposed biography with a profoundly non-realist literary depiction of a character afflicted with an almost pathological restlessness.

Francisco Da Silva is born into the harsh and unforgiving environment of the Sertao, in north-east Brazil: '[I]like all people born in thorny places,' Chatwin writes, he dreams of 'green fields and a life of ease' (31). Da Silva's early life is marked by tragedy; his father dies when the boy is one, and Da Silva is brought up by his mother and an 'Indian half-breed called Manuelzinho' (32). His first memories are of 'watching the pair, creaking night and day in a sisal hammock: he never knew a time when he was not a stranger' (32). The harshness of his upbringing cultivates a spirit of fierce independence in Da Silva; he has the pedigree of a wanderer. In early adulthood, he drifts around the Sertao, 'taking odd jobs as butcher's apprentice, muleteer, drover and gold panner. Sometimes he knew a flash of happiness, but only if it was time to be departing' (37). Already, at this early stage of the narrative, the bleakness of Chatwin's depiction of the character's restlessness exceeds anything contained within the pages of In Patagonia.

Soon, however, it seems that perhaps the narrative will become one of redemption: 'he [...] believed he would go on wandering for ever: yet on Santa Luzia's day of 1807 – a grey, stifling day that held out the promise of rain – the aimless journeys ended' (38). Da Silva marries; yet, like the rain, the happiness that the union seems to offer is an unrealised promise. Settlement engenders frustration and ultimately violence from Da Silva:

He woke one sunrise on a patch of stony ground and, squinting sideways, was surprised to see, so far from water, a green frog

crouching under the arm of a cactus. [...] He poked the frog with a stick. It stiffened with fright. He watched its eyes suffuse from silver to purple. He took a stone and pounded it to a blood-streaked slime and, for a whole week, regretted what he had done. (39)

In “The Nomadic Alternative”, Bruce Chatwin put forward the theory that enforced settlement of an individual could lead to aberrant behaviour, including violence and sexual perversion: ‘Violent solutions to complicated problems attract him; for diabolic energy is less insupportable than torpor’ (3). The characterisation of Da Silva in The Viceroy of Ouidah is the literary manifestation of that theory. As the character sinks into settlement and domesticity, Da Silva’s violent tendencies grow more uncontrollable; the protagonist first kills his wife’s cat, then almost murders his own child: ‘He held the guitar above the cradle, waited for the crash of splintering wood, then checked himself and broke it across his knee’ (40). The character is at least sufficiently self-aware to extricate himself from confinement, and in the aftermath returns back to his peripatetic life: ‘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’ (40).

Whilst the intangible of romantic love proves to be insufficient to counter his restless instincts – it would be later in Chatwin’s writing career that his characters began to find the solution to their restlessness in the arms of another – Da Silva does eventually cease his wandering. He begins to gravitate towards the ‘cities of the coast’ (42) where he becomes friends with Joaquim Coutinho, the son of a rich trader. Da Silva begins to associate the lifestyle of this wealthy youngster with his notion of an earthly paradise:

The two young friends fought gamecock: and trained a pack of hounds to hunt for capybaras in the forest. Returning, hot from the chase, they would wave up to Joaquim’s sisters, who lounged

on feather hammocks or fed slips of custard-apple to their pet marmosets. [...]

Or they would leaf through volumes with vistas of European cities, or visit rooms where precious objects were strewn in disarray: Venetian glassware, silver from Potosi, crystal and cinnabar and black lacquer cabinet sloughing pearlshell.

Francisco Manoel could not account for what he saw. He had never thought of owning more than his knives and a few silver horse-trimmings. Now, there was no limit to his thirst for possessions. (44)

Africa seems to offer a possibility of realising this desire for property:

‘The most valuable slaves came from Ouidah,’ Da Silva is temptingly informed, ‘and Ouidah, by terms of the Prince Regent’s treaty with England, was the one port north of the Equator where it was legal to trade [...]’ (48). The country also appeals to the restless Da Silva on an imaginative level, in its very difference to Brazil – an appeal not dissimilar to that of Patagonia to the western migrants of the previous chapter: ‘Jeronimo told him stories of mudbrick palaces lined with skulls; of tribes who exchanged gold dust for tobacco; a Holy Snake that was also a rainbow, and kings with testicles the size of avocados. The name “Dahomey” took root in his imagination’ (46). Da Silva is persuaded to travel to Dahomey to re-establish the trade, an undertaking that his financial sponsors think impossible, though, at the cost of one man’s life, worth the gamble: ‘At the end of the interview,’ Chatwin writes of the city meeting at which it is decided Da Silva will travel to Dahomey on their behalf, ‘everyone rose to their feet to congratulate the man they knew would be a corpse’ (49).

Da Silva travels to Africa naively unaware of the implications of his decision. On arrival, however, Da Silva is starkly presented with the reality of the position he has accepted: ‘He landed at Ouidah between two and three of a murky May afternoon smelling of mangrove and dead fish. A band of foam stretched as far as the eye could reach. Inland, there were tall grey trees which, at a distance of three miles, anyone might mistake for watersprouts. He was the

only passenger on the canoe: the crew knew better than to set foot in the Kingdom of Dahomey' (51).

Almost from the moment of his establishment at Ouidah, stuck on the edge of the African continent, Da Silva, mirroring the response to arrival expressed by those who travelled to Patagonia, realises his mistake and begins to long to leave: 'And Da Silva was always dreaming of Bahia. Whenever a ship sailed, he would watch the yardarms vanish into the night, then light a pipe on the verandah and sink into a reverie of the future: he would have a Big House, a view of the sea, grandchildren and the sound of water tinkling through a garden. But then the mirage would fade. The sound of drumbeats pressed against his temples and he had a presentiment that he would never get out of Africa' (58).

Da Silva becomes the personification of many of Chatwin's ideas around the implications and effects of a settled life. Chatwin addressed the issue not only in "The Nomadic Alternative", but also in a number of essays, and the consequences Chatwin ascribes to this enforced lifestyle are severe; he cites American research that declares that 'Monotonous surroundings and tedious regular activities wove patterns which produced fatigue, nervous disorders, apathy, self-disgust and violent reactions' (AOR 100).

In The Viceroy of Ouidah, the frustration engendered by Da Silva's imprisonment leads to violent and dramatic outbursts, as evidenced by this indulgently bleak and troubling passage – a passage which acts as testimony to the fact that Chatwin was attempting something quite different and fundamentally unremitting in The Viceroy of Ouidah:

Each year with the dry season, he would slough off the habits of civilisation and go to war [...] He crossed burning savannahs and swam rivers infested with crocodiles. Before an attack on a village, he would lash leaves to his hat and lie motionless till cockcrow. Then, as the dawn silhouetted the roofs like teeth on a sawblade, a whistle would blow, the air fill with raucous cries and, by the end

of the morning, the Amazons would be parading before the King, swinging severed heads like dumb-bells.

Dom Francisco greeted each fresh atrocity with a glassy smile. He felt no trace of pity for the mother who pleaded for her child, or for the old man staring in disbelief at the purple veil spread out over the smouldering ruins. (74)

Violence is not the only consequence of Da Silva's frustration at his enforced settlement; the character also indulges in sexual promiscuity in order to alleviate his torpor. In "The Nomadic Alternative", Chatwin writes of the settled individual that: 'Pinned to one place he verbalizes or enacts his sexual fantasies. (The Marquis de Sade is pre-eminently the product of confinement)' (3). The Viceroy of Ouidah – for which the original title, tellingly, was 'Skin for Skin' (Chatwin Archive) – realises this notion in the almost insatiable sexual desire of Da Silva: '[H]e would lie in his nightshirt, waiting for the creak of the verandah: on the bad nights, the game of breaking virgins was his only consolation' (79). Francisco's sexual desire is not expressed specifically towards women, either; Chatwin makes the character's homoerotic tendencies explicit and Africa itself is transmuted into, to quote Edward Said, a 'living tableau of queerness' (Orientalism 103). Francisco's most profound relationships are with men; as is so often the case with Chatwin's restless protagonists, Da Silva has little interest in establishing a relationship with a woman, with all the constriction and domesticity that implies in the author's conception. Da Silva establishes a number of significant male relationships in the novel; first with Joaquim Coutinho in Bahia, then with the Major-Domo of the fort at Ouidah, Taparica, who 'slept outside his master's room [...] found girls for his bed, aphrodisiacs if the weather was exceptionally sticky, and warned him not to make lasting attachments' (87), and finally with the Dahomean King, with whom Da Silva swears a blood pact: 'The two men knelt

facing each other, naked as babies, pressing their thighs together: the pact would be invalid if their genitals touched the ground' (106).

Sex is inextricably linked to the restlessness of his central character; Da Silva seems to take little erotic pleasure from his encounters – he indulges because the experience takes him away from who and where he is: 'He never knew what drew him to the mysteries. The blood? The god? The smell of sweat or the wet glinting bodies? But he was powerless to break his addiction [...] (60). Chatwin goes to great lengths to convey the inherent sense of dissatisfaction his central protagonist feels with both himself and his surroundings. The transgression inherent in the sexual or violent act offers a way of alleviating that monotony, of providing a way out of one's self.

In Chatwin's work, however, this connection is generally rarely drawn; sex is almost always sublimated in his oeuvre, perhaps as a result of his own complicated sexuality. Yet, The Viceroy of Ouidah is overt in its presentation of the sexual – and even homosexual – possibilities found in the travelling life. This openness seems to be attributable to the climate and culture of 'the relaxed latitudes that Sir Richard Burton termed the sordid zone', (Ryle) and first manifests itself in the short story 'Milk'. The tale, published in 1977 (the same year In Patagonia entered the public realm) presents a vision of Africa, which, in its sense of the forbidden exotic and its frank presentation of sexual desire, shares a number of similarities with The Viceroy of Ouidah. The story is essentially around the pleasures and possibilities of transgression. A young American – who may or may not be an authorial persona; Kerry Featherstone observed that: 'Chatwin's wavering moods and his obvious attraction to the African men he meets make him a candidate as the model for this character' (87), whilst Jan Borm and Matthew Graves comment that the tale

was ‘clearly drawn from Chatwin’s African notebooks’ (AOR 188) – visits Africa and whilst travelling through a non-specific French-African colony, has an affair with a prostitute. The title, ‘Milk’, refers to the warnings the young American, Jeb, has received from his family in Vermont to avoid drinking African milk. Jeb, however, chooses to ignore this advice and in his transgressive behaviour finds pleasure: ‘The doctor had given him sterilising tablets and packets of dehydrated food. He had not used them. Jeb drank the milk in spite of and because of the doctor’ (AOR 36). His thrill in performing the sexual act is born of a similar delight in breaking Western/African boundaries in sleeping with a black prostitute:

“You have loved an Africaine?” asked Annie.
 “Never,” Jeb said in an even voice. He had never been to bed with a woman, but he did not want to show this.
 “You must go with Mamzelle Dela. She wants it.”
 [...]
 “Listen,” she said protectively. “I speak with you as a mother. You are afraid to go with her because you have heard bad things. I tell you, African women are cleaner than white women. They are très pudique. And they are much more beautiful.” (43)

Africa’s appeal in the story is centred on the possibilities of transgression for a western protagonist away from the judging eyes of family and friends. Jeb notes his distance from home: ‘It was winter in Vermont. He tried to picture it, but the picture kept slipping from focus, leaving only the heat and light’ (37).

Chatwin establishes in this story a connection between the erotic and exotic that certainly seems manifest in the unusual frankness of the later The Viceroy of Ouidah. A number of accounts suggest that Chatwin’s experience of Africa and Brazil, in conjunction with the manifest literary sources for the novel, provoked these overt references to sex and sexuality, which are, generally, absent from Chatwin’s other work. Susannah Clapp commented of the impact of this authorial experience that ‘The Viceroy of Ouidah has many glistening black

male bodies and many lithe black females. Bruce was to talk – sometimes as if it were fantasy, sometimes fact – of a day at the Rio Carnival spent making love first to a girl, then to a boy’ (161). Nigel Acheson, Chatwin’s host in Bahia, confirmed Clapp’s assertion: ‘Bruce cruised around and often went off on his own to make conquests’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 336). This sense of transgressive freedom is also present in his account of the Benin coup he became embroiled in during his 1976 visit: ‘I’d asked the waiter what there was to see in town. “Patrice” “Patrice?” “That’s me,” he grinned. “And, monsieur, there are hundreds of other beautiful young girls and boys who walk, all the time, up and down the streets of Parakou”’ (WAIDH 23).

In Chatwin’s notebooks, too, one finds confirmation of the erotic appeal of Africa to the author. A poem written during a visit to Mauretania ends:

Black and rippling
And the rump
And the walk
Both sexes are irresistible. (Photographs & Notebooks 40)

For both Da Silva and Chatwin, the exoticised sexuality of these tropical climates seems to appeal for their offer of a way out from the constrictions of their individual personalities and situations. Sexual indulgence – and sadistic violence – are the unmentionable results of the inherent personal dissatisfaction that clearly plays a significant role in cultivating a desire to constantly move on, to restlessly search; as Paul Fussell observes, ‘the English popularity of the term *wanderlust* conveys its own suggestions’ (113). The Viceroy of Ouidah, together with Chatwin’s few other African writings, represents the only occasion that Chatwin would overtly and frankly deal with the topic, though it continued to resonate as a sublimated theme, particularly in On the Black Hill and Utz.

That the novel deals so openly with issues of sex and violence vividly highlights the fact that Chatwin was attempting something new in The Viceroy

of Ouidah. The unsparing openness of this approach was precipitated by the possibilities Chatwin saw in the generic ambiguity of the work as already described and appears to a great degree inspired by the literary models he followed in the writing of The Viceroy of Ouidah, in particular Flaubert, whose writing on Africa – specifically his diaries, published as Flaubert in Egypt – also demonstrates a degree of permissiveness absent from that writer’s other works. Chatwin intended the work as objective and unstinting in its representation of the life of Da Silva, and he consequently adapted his approach from that of his previous work, stripping down his prose style and characterisation and overtly addressing new and controversial themes, to offer as pure and artful a representation of the consequences of restlessness and enforced settlement as was possible. The closest comparison in modern fiction to Chatwin’s undertaking in The Viceroy of Ouidah is to be found in Flaubert’s Salammbô, the follow-up to his own phenomenally successful debut, Madame Bovary. Chatwin had always been a great admirer of the reclusive Flaubert, as his wife Elizabeth testifies: ‘He adored Flaubert, he thought Flaubert was absolutely fantastic. He must have practically memorised Madame Bovary. He used to carry it around with him’ (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). Flaubert had achieved public notoriety with Madame Bovary, and in Salammbô he attempted to push the tolerance of his audience even further, recounting a story of third century BC Carthage in dense, oblique, historical prose. Flaubert’s influence on The Viceroy of Ouidah is profound; the dispassion of Salammbô, and the way in which it weaves together documented historical information with very modern literary representations of sex and violence is manifest in Chatwin’s novel.

Part of the cost of this new and unsparing literary approach, however, was that Chatwin was forced to abandon any sort of humanistic characterisation

or description, remaining dispassionate and unemotional at all costs. The critic John Thompson, in a review for the New York Times compares the novel unfavourably to Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God (which Thompson, mistaking it for Conrad's late novel, refers to as Arrow of Gold) as a result of this lack of human emotion, commenting: 'That novel of West Africa has violence enough, and cruel superstition too, yet it is suffused with the common humanity of which I find not one dried drop in The Viceroy of Ouidah' (28). Chatwin's work avoids 'scrupulously, any authorial interventions or oblique commentaries' (54) observed Nicholas Murray, an approach that sets the novel in contrast to In Patagonia, with its obvious narratorial empathy and humane rendering of character. The characters of The Viceroy of Ouidah are something less than human, though something more than caricatures; they resemble figures from the age of myth, inscrutable in their behaviour and ultimately bound to fate.

This deficit of human emotion had implications for the author; Susannah Clapp documented the difficulties Chatwin confronted in the construction of the work: 'The cruelty of his material oppressed him. He left his desk each day washed out, often having found it hard to produce anything' (165). His struggles would have been familiar to Flaubert, who grew similarly frustrated by the lack of humanity in his own Salammbô: "I would give the demi-ream of notes that I have written during the past five months and the ninety-eight volumes I have read, to be really moved by the passion of my hero for just three seconds" (qtd. in Steegmuller 346). In an observation worthy of Chatwin's work, Gerard Hopkins wrote of Flaubert's African novel: 'Motive, psychology, life – these things are missing from the central characters, and we are left with what must surely be a freak in the long history of imaginative fiction – a novel which is almost wholly descriptive' (Salammbô 8). In his emulation of Flaubert, Chatwin

surely comes close to replicating this feat of authorship, providing the reader with a deeply sensual literary world which remains – almost – entirely surface: ‘always detached’ (Orientalism 103).

Chatwin’s distanced approach to the subject matter engendered controversial press, with some citing his attitude to Africa as politically naive and essentially touristic in its objectivity. Charles Sugnet commented of Chatwin’s novel that its ‘lurid prose belongs on the shelf somewhere between Conrad and H. Ryder Haggard’, pigeonholing Africa’s appeal to the author as that of the typical western visitor: ‘Chatwin loves Africa – the Africa of safari postcards and Hollywood films – it’s just those inconvenient Africans that spoil it’ (73). In particular, the novel’s aestheticised approach to the slave trade and its seeming delight in the barbaric details of the industry, caused some to question the appropriateness of Chatwin’s approach: ‘We should be able to endure reminders of its horrors,’ John Thompson wrote in the New York Times, ‘but should we relish them or leer at what is repellent to us?’

Yet, these critics miss Chatwin’s intention; despite the objective approach, the novel – like those of Flaubert – was never intended as a realist text, to address the self-evident wrongs of slavery or colonialism, nor were the characters of The Viceroy of Ouidah intended as realistic or to pertain to equivalents in real life; they act primarily as personifications of Chatwin’s framework of ideas around restlessness. The author’s moral ambiguity on the matter of the slave trade results from his treatment of it within the terms of the novel, viewing it as a pursuit which turns a ‘footloose wanderer’ into ‘a patriot and man of property’ (86). The novel suffers, like Conrad’s Heart of Darkness from being a novel set in Africa that does not overtly address the African ‘issue’; Chatwin has failed to give proper consideration to Gide’s apposite observation

in the introduction to The Immoralist that: '[t]he public nowadays will not forgive an author who, after relating an action, does not declare himself either for or against it' (8). For the purposes of The Viceroy of Ouidah, Africa is merely a space where Western conventions are – as yet – not present, providing a reality in which the gradual corruption and psychological decay of the central character can occur. The key fact is, of course, that Da Silva, like Kurtz, was a damaged human being before he left Brazil; the appeal in both novels is to a more universal corruption than that evident in the strict politics of slavery, as Hunt Hawkins observes: 'The dark wilderness, as Marlow realises by the end of the story, is not just in Africa but lurking in the streets of Brussels and hovering over the Thames' (Hawkins 371).

In The Viceroy of Ouidah, political considerations are sublimated by the pre-eminence of the subject of restlessness and dissatisfaction in the novel. There is barely a character in The Viceroy of Ouidah who does not act as a vehicle for Chatwin's ideas on the subject; as well as the afflicted Da Silva, whose struggles with his contradictory instincts are analysed above, the reader encounters the slaver's modern day descendants, who perversely romanticise the era of their progenitor as a 'golden age when their family was rich, famous and white' (9), an age that, were they as black Africans to return to it, would no doubt enslave them. Even the slaves themselves (despite Eugenia's assertion that her father 'sent them to PARADISE!' (44)) are motivated to return to Africa in search of some lost Utopia: 'They landed near Lagos, hoping to go upcountry to their old homes in Oyo. But the fetid swamps were far from the paradise of their grandmothers' tales. Villagers stoned them and let loose their dogs. They panicked at the thought of being sold again. They were homesick for Brazil but, with one-way passports, had nowhere else to go' (134). The theme of

dissatisfaction and the restlessness it engenders echoes In Patagonia and is all pervasive in the novel.

The thematic core of the novel is carried over into the film adaptation made by Werner Herzog, Cobra Verde (1987), which reaffirms and extends the centrality of the subject of restlessness. Herzog was in many ways the obvious choice to direct the adaptation of such a novel as The Viceroy of Ouidah; he had already established himself as a director preoccupied by the impact of the singular colonial vision upon exotic cultures in his films Fitzcarraldo (1982) and Aguirre, Wrath of God (1972). Herzog had contacted Chatwin whilst both were in Australia in the mid-1980s and the two had met in Melbourne and immediately hit it off, as Herzog recalls: ‘From the airport, before we even stepped into the car he was telling stories from Central Australia and for forty-eight hours almost non-stop we kept telling stories to each other, eighty percent of the time him telling stories and whenever he had to take a breath, I would tell stories that I had’ (Commentary to Cobra Verde). Both shared a passion for walking and, indeed, before Chatwin died in 1989, he gave Herzog his precious leather rucksack, telling the filmmaker: “You carry this on now.” Because like him I was someone on foot, I travelled on foot a lot, sometimes a couple of thousand of kilometres and we had the same feeling for space’ (Commentary to Cobra Verde).

Chatwin wrote of the influence of Herzog on the writing of The Viceroy of Ouidah in an article for Interview, later reprinted in What Am I Doing Here: ‘Since it was impossible to fathom the alien mentality of my characters, my only hope was to advance the narrative in a sequence of cinematographic images, and here I was strongly influenced by the films of Werner Herzog. I remember saying, “If this were ever made into a movie, only Herzog could do it”’ (137).

Like the novel, Cobra Verde does not make an attempt towards realism; it offers a vision of a singularly afflicted character, played with manic intensity by Herzog's nemesis and muse, Klaus Kinski (described by Chatwin as 'a sexagenarian adolescent all in white with a mane of yellow hair' (WAIDH 143)) in what would be their last collaboration. Herzog emphasises, through long silent scenes, the loneliness of the slaver's enormous, deserted fort and, through the casting of Kinski, the fundamental instability of the character. Da Silva seems content, like Kurtz, only when wielding his power over the native population, in particular during his manic training of an army of topless Amazonian women. The film strips all extraneous plot and characterisation, leaving a vision of a character that is, if anything, even purer and more unremitting in its personification of the themes of restlessness and exile than Chatwin's novel.

Herzog was unable to finish the film as he wished due to the pressures of working with Kinski, yet the enforced conclusion can be seen as a metaphorical image, conceptualising the whole narrative impulse of Chatwin's vision for the work. The scene shows Da Silva desperately straining, like Crusoe, to pull a too-heavy boat out to sea, desperate to escape, yet finally conceding, allowing himself to be tossed in the surf, resigned to his fate: '[C]onscious that he was playing the final scene, Kinski allowed himself to be dragged back into the waves and rolled back, time after time, onto the sand' (WAIDH 143). It is perhaps of interest to note that Herzog viewed this ending as so unremitting that he felt compelled to add a final scene of young African singers performing in an effort to mitigate the brutality and loneliness of the preceding account.

Herzog's vision of the bleakness at the novel's heart was one shared by many readers. The Viceroy of Ouidah offers little in the way of redemption or

ultimate satisfaction to either its characters or its audience; it can perhaps be seen as a text, like John Steinbeck's East of Eden, that offered almost *too* pure a distillation of authorial vision. After having completed the novel, the author himself seemed aware that something was not entirely right about the project; Susannah Clapp recalls visiting Chatwin at his flat in Albany in order to discuss the work before publication, where at one point in the conversation 'he caught my eye, as if to indicate that we'd both been discovered taking part in some disreputable prank [...] Not that the finished book was disreputable: the feeling we shared had to do with the sense of strain involved in the enterprise, with a scabrous subject-matter – and with trying to please a worried publisher' (166). Chatwin's publisher, Jonathan Cape, must have been somewhat disappointed by the wider reception of the novel, which was something of a commercial failure – it remains the least read of Chatwin's works – and was pointedly ignored as a work by the judges of the Whitbread prize, who had no hesitation when they awarded Chatwin's next work, On the Black Hill, their prize for 'Best First Novel'. The contemporary critical reaction, meanwhile, whilst not hostile, was somewhat ambivalent. Mary Hope wrote in The Spectator that 'It is flawed as fiction but has such an obsessional quality, such vigour and exactitude in the description of life beyond conventional boundaries that it is intensely powerful stuff. Chatwin is fascinated by the flamboyant savagery, the barbarity of the African kings matched only by the barbarity of the Christian slave-traders who deal with them.' Many reviews picked up on the unremitting literary approach of the novel; Graham Hough, damning the novel with faint praise, wrote in the London Review of Books that he thought the work a 'grimly remarkable piece of writing' (20), whilst Karl Miller, also in the London Review of Books wrote of the stylistic approach: 'This is like the jewelled prose of the upper-class English

traveller, carried to the threshold of burlesque – and maybe across it, to produce a variety of camp’ (15). Chatwin himself later acknowledged the ambivalent reception of the style of the work, commenting that the novel engendered ‘bemusement’ in reviewers ‘some of whom found its cruelties and baroque prose unpalatable’ (WAIDH 138). A year after publication, Chatwin asked his American editor, Elizabeth Sifton, what she thought of the book. “I danced around,” she told Nicholas Shakespeare. “I said I thought it was beautiful, but cold and repellent.” “But it’s *meant* to be, he said” (qtd. in Shakespeare, 374).

Chapter Five: 'Chatwinshire'

A man travels the world in search of what he needs and returns home to find it. (122)

George Moore, The Brook Kerith

INTO my heart on air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again. (40)

A.E. Housman, A Shropshire Lad

In the majority of his works, Bruce Chatwin's analysis of the subject of restlessness is predicated upon a profound frustration at the restrictions of home. In Patagonia's migrants were all motivated to depart the shores of their country by the perceived impossibility of continuing life *in situ*; Francisco Da Silva is, from childhood, depicted as longing to get away from the drought-prone scrubland of the Sertao, dreaming of 'green fields and a life of ease' (31), whilst Joachim Utz in Chatwin's final novel feels constantly oppressed by his domestic life and the burden of possession. These characteristic traits emerged in part at least from the disdain that Chatwin himself felt towards home, both in concept and reality.

Bruce Chatwin professed to hate his mother country – he called it 'le tombeau vert' (qtd. in Shakespeare 7) – in keeping with a tradition amongst British literary wanderers that reached its apotheosis in the 'Hate it Here' attitude of many of the travelling writers of the early twentieth century. Paul Fussell, who discusses this attitude in his critical study of the era Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars, identifies a trope amongst writers such as D.H. Lawrence, Norman Douglas and Evelyn Waugh in their 'conviction

that England is uninhabitable because it is not like abroad' (15). Elizabeth Chatwin recalls her husband's similar reaction upon returning to British soil from hotter climes: '[W]e'd land and he'd be in a terribly bad mood at having to be back here [...] He used to say "Look at all those terrible looking people"' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). His aspiration was to eventually leave Britain altogether, to settle abroad: 'He talked about everywhere he wanted to live,' comments Elizabeth. 'I used to resist; it became a sort of game because I didn't want to move. And then he started: "Let's get a house in France, let's get a house in Italy, let's get a house in Greece, let's get a house in Spain"' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). Even when away from home, however, both Chatwin and his characters struggle to find contentment; indeed, it is that very paradox that leads to the restlessness that permeated the lives of both characters and author: 'I always wish I was somewhere else,' (36) Chatwin told Michael Ignatieff.

Consequently, the knowledgeable reader may well be surprised to discover that Chatwin's third novel, On the Black Hill, focusses on the lives of sedentary hill farmers from the border region of Wales, many of whom seem perfectly content in their homes, professing no real desire to ever leave their rural life even for a holiday. That these homes should be found in the British Isles, the author's own homeland, compounds the astonishment; what could possibly have motivated this new attitude, the reader may find themselves asking?

The truth is that, despite its setting, On the Black Hill is not the dramatic volte-face that it may initially seem; the novel continues Chatwin's consistent engagement with the subject of restlessness. Indeed, as will be seen in the subsequent chapter, in On the Black Hill Bruce Chatwin makes his grand theme

of the restless need for the intangible of freedom the more manifest and profound in the personification of the idea in the two central characters of the novel, the twins Benjamin and Lewis Jones, of whom Lewis is the familiar Chatwin protagonist, constantly dreaming of distant lands, of possible escape:

“Sometimes, I’d lie awake and wonder what’d happen if him weren’t there. If him’d gone off...was dead even. Then I’d have had my own life, like? Had kids?”
 “I know, I know,” she said, quietly. “But our lives are not so simple.” (203)

Significantly, however, this attitude is counterbalanced in the novel by the characterisation of Benjamin and a number of other significant figures in the novel who *do* find satisfaction and happiness in settlement. The novel can thus be read as Chatwin’s attempt to work through the limitations of the sedentary life, investigating, as Patrick Meanor observes, whether it is ‘possible for settlers to avoid the inevitable fall into “the sins of settlement” – greed, private property, the corruption of ownership? Can the twin brothers, Benjamin and Lewis, sustain their innocence in the isolation of their Welsh farm, The Vision? Or are even the most remote locations vulnerable to the outside world’s corruptions?’ (9). Certainly Benjamin appears to have discovered an escape from restlessness in the – to him – paradisiacal environs of the brothers’ farm:

He never thought of abroad. He wanted to live with Lewis for ever and ever; to eat the same food; wear the same clothes; share a bed; and swing an axe in the same trajectory. There were four gates leading into The Vision; and, for him, they were the Four Gates of Paradise. (88)

Benjamin is the first of Chatwin’s characters who finds fulfilment in a settled life, and represents, along with the reclusive family of neighbouring farm The Rock and the happiness found in the early married life of the twins’ parents, Amos and Mary, a model of rural living in which Chatwin clearly saw the possibility of living contentedly in one place. The subsequent chapter will place

this model within the framework established in Chatwin's preceding works, viewing the claim of possible settlement as another facet of the existing debates of the author's creative output. This chapter, however, intends to discuss how the incorporation of this new attitude came about and, in particular, what it was that Bruce Chatwin discovered in the border country around Hay-on-Wye that moved this author – so renowned for his disdain of the sedentary life – to locate a means of life there that seemed to offer a solution for the affliction of restlessness.

The border country around Hay-on-Wye and the Black Mountains of Wales had been known to Chatwin since a youthful trip with his father to Rhyadder. It was an area to which he would return frequently throughout his life and for which he felt great fondness; Chatwin told Melvyn Bragg that he had 'always thought of this landscape [...] as my home in many ways' (The South Bank Show), whilst his wife Elizabeth calls the Black Hill 'his favourite place' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin).

Written testimony to the appeal of the area to the author came early in his career; indeed, Chatwin's very first attempt at travel writing dates from a school visit to Capel-y-Ffin on the Welsh borders. It takes the form of a short letter written to his parents describing Blyton-esque bike rides and camping adventures: 'We charged down Hay Hill and went straight onto Glasbury where we stopped to buy some icecream...We arrived in Rhyadder and were very thirsty and so invested in ice-cream and more 'pop' at a cafe where a very heavily made-up and extremely ugly girl served us' (Shakespeare 377). These youthful experiences are echoed in On the Black Hill's idyllic account of Lewis

and Benjamin's own walking expeditions with their grandfather: '[O]ld Mrs Godber would come out with mugs of lemonade for the twins. She made them bawl into her ear-trumpet and, if she liked what they said, she'd give them a threepenny bit and tell them not to spend it on sweeties – where upon they would race to the Post Office, and race back again, their chins smudged over with chocolate' (45).

In later life, Chatwin wrote explicitly on the influence exercised by these youthful encounters with the border landscape, describing in his essay 'I Always Wanted To Go To Patagonia' another childhood visit to the area, this time with his father:

By 1949 the hard times were over, and one evening my father proudly drove home from work in a new car. Next day he took my brother and me for a spin. On the edge of an escarpment he stopped, pointed to a range of grey hills in the west and then said, "Let's go on into Wales." We slept the night in the car, in Radnorshire, to the sound of a mountain stream. At sunrise there was a heavy dew, and the sheep were all around us. I suppose the result of this trip is the novel I've recently published, On the Black Hill. (AOR 8)

However, it was not solely the specific influence of the Welsh landscape that led to the production of On the Black Hill; much of what was precious from Chatwin's general childhood experience also filtered into the book. Chatwin was born in 1940, and, as a result of the impositions of war, spent much of his life travelling around Britain, as he recounts, with typical mythologisation in The Songlines: 'I remember the fantastic homelessness of my first five years. My father was in the Navy, at sea. My mother and I would shuttle back and forth, on the railways of wartime England, on visits to family and friends' (5). One of the Chatwin family's many temporary wartime homes was in the Derbyshire village of Baslow, situated on the eastern flank of the Peak District, where the young Bruce lived with his mother and brother Hugh. With his grandfather, Sam

Turnell (who appears in the novel as the twins' grandfather 'Sam the Waggon'), Bruce would walk the moors and explore the local area. The young Bruce's favourite walk with his grandfather took the pair up to the Eagle Stone above the village, a large gritstone outcrop which was traditionally a point of pilgrimage for young men who would climb the rock to prove their suitability for marriage and which, in On the Black Hill, is transplanted to Wales: 'On fine summer evenings, Sam walked them as far as the Eagle Stone – a menhir of grey granite, splotted with orange lichen, which, in the raking light, resembled a perching eagle' (49). In the notebooks he kept whilst writing The Songlines, Chatwin recounts his reaction to those he found walking the same path: 'I was very possessive about the path to the Eagle Stone and if ever we passed a walker – "Get off my path"' (Chatwin Archive Box 35). The twins, of course, react identically to intruders on their own 'Welsh' walk: 'The twins looked on the path to the Eagle Stone as their own private property. "It's Our Path!" they'd shout, if they happened to meet a party of hikers. The sight of a footprint in the mud was enough to put them in a towering rage, and they'd try to rub it out with a stick' (50). Chatwin often recounted Proust's assertion that the walks of our childhood provide 'the substance of our "mental soil" – to which for ever after we are bound' (Chatwin Archive Box 35). These youthful pathways are, for Chatwin and Proust's narrator alike, inexpressibly personal, forming bonds which remain significant throughout one's life: 'It is because I believed in things and people while I walked along them, that the things and the people they revealed to me are the only ones I still take seriously today and that still bring me joy' (In Search of Lost Time 184). Chatwin wrote in "The Nomadic Alternative" that '[t]he scene of a child's first explorations binds him in a way no subsequent experience can. An exploring child sees his territory as a complex

network of paths linking his observations and experiences. These combine to form the raw material of his intelligence' (232). On the Black Hill is testimony to the profound influence exacted by Chatwin's youthful experiences on the intellectual territory of his later creative output.

Also incorporated into the positive representation of the Welsh borders in On the Black Hill was the bucolic atmosphere of Chatwin's most permanent childhood home at Brown's Green Farm in Warwickshire, where Bruce and his younger brother Hugh (later to follow a similar path to Wilfred Thesiger's brother Brian and live a relatively sedentary, professional life) lived from 1947 onwards. Brown's Green was a working smallholding, not dissimilar to the farm that Lewis and Benjamin grow up on, which Chatwin names 'The Vision'. Life on a working farm had a tremendous impact on the young Chatwin, who thrived in the countryside, delighting in the possibilities for exploration and adventure. One can perhaps see On the Black Hill's romantic casting of Benjamin's life as a fictional version of what the author's own life might have constituted had he managed to curtail his restless affliction and follow through his rural beginnings in Tanworth-in-Arden. Chatwin employs much of this youthful experience in On the Black Hill and, indeed, the allusions to his bucolic youth are made overt in the novel by the mention of Umberslade, the very estate that the Chatwin family farm in Tanworth formed part of: '[Mrs Bickerton] had planned to be present, with her family and house-party, but the guest of honour, Brigadier Vernon-Murray, had to drive back to Umberslade that evening; and he, for one, wasn't wasting his whole day on the hoi polloi' (121).

Chatwin's youth in Tanworth meant so much in part because it represented a move away from not only the peripatetic existence of the war years – Chatwin recalls the 'fantastic homelessness' (5) of that period in The

Songlines – but also, more specifically, the industrialism of Birmingham, where the author had spent an unhappy two years after his father Charles had returned from the war in 1945. His younger brother Hugh observes:

“A special flavour of our childhood [...] is that while we enjoyed romping in Lewis and Benjamin’s playground – damming the infant River Alne with pebbles, pausing to wave at the passengers in passing puffer-trains so that they would be bound to wave back – we were also rejoicing in a much better time than we had known, had heard about, had witnessed at Birmingham’s bomb sites. We knew that everything was getting better.” (qtd. in Shakespeare 47)

From 1945 until 1947 the Chatwin family had lived in a terraced house, used during the war as a brothel, on Stirling Road in Birmingham. Chatwin had suffered here, as Robert Louis Stevenson did in his early life in Edinburgh, from a bronchial illness that coloured his attitude to urban landscapes; his distaste for the city, and for industrial Britain in general, remained with him throughout his life. Chatwin’s notebook account of the ‘utter hideousness’ of Birmingham has already been recounted in the earlier chapter on In Patagonia, and in an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald, the author reiterated the profound psychological effect of his early upbringing in the city: ‘My bedroom looked out on a Satanic mills landscape, with factories belching smoke and a black sky. The curtains had a fearful pattern of orange flames and like many children I had terrible dreams of the Bomb, of wandering through that blackened landscape with my hair on fire.’ This is a dream shared by the Jones twins who, on the night after hearing news of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: ‘had an identical nightmare: that their bed-curtains had caught fire, their hair was on fire, and their heads burned down to smouldering stumps’ (198). For Chatwin, this vision of urban apocalypse acted as a psychological spur for his restless searching for a life outside of the settled, civilised world – a search which found

its first place of refuge in the safe-haven of Patagonia, but which ultimately resulted in the author's constant nomadism.

In On the Black Hill, by contrast, Chatwin documents a quite different reaction to this vision of urban nightmare. Rather than restlessly pursuing a new life, the twins take the opposite path, and instead entirely cut themselves off from the outside world, immersing themselves in the compensations of the natural environment. The effect is the same – in both travel and seclusion, one abdicates responsibility for the world around one, discovering the possibility of escape – but the strategy of the twins does offer the security and stability of a fixed base. This isolationist attitude pervades the novel; on the glow of Coventry, seen from the farmhouse window, Benjamin comments: “And a good job t'isnt we!” (192) – and goes back to bed. This is, in Karl Miller's formulation, a world from which it is ‘right to retire’ (Doubles 406).

Strikingly, the account is similar to one related by Raymond Williams in his book The Country and The City, dating from his own youth on the Welsh borders, growing up in Llanfihangel Crocorney near Abergavenny, though the emphasis is significantly different:

In the south-west, at nights, we used to watch the flare, over the black ridge of Brynow, of the iron furnaces of Industrial South Wales. In the east now, at nights, over the field with the elms and the white horse, I watch the glow of Cambridge [...] (5)

Williams, too, was a writer in exile; irrevocably drawn to the landscape of the Welsh borders – indeed, in his later life he began work on an epic overview of the history of the area, which remained incomplete at his death; it was posthumously published in two volumes as People of the Black Mountains. However, the comparison made above, taken from The Country and the City, is the opposite to that which Chatwin posits in On the Black Hill, invoking a contrast between the wild Welsh ‘*flare* [...] over the *black* ridge’ and the

civilised, urbane ‘*glow* of Cambridge’, seen over a field of elms. In Williams’ account, it is the civilised world of Cambridge – the literary world – that offers in adulthood refuge from the childhood tyranny of industrialism.²⁶ In Chatwin’s adulthood, however, the situation was very much the reverse; the Welsh borders, embodying the lost innocence of the author’s childhood, temptingly offered a life in which one could seek escape from the ‘civilised’, urban world in the aftermath of emotional, social and intellectual overload.

Chatwin arrived in Wales in 1980 with the idea of writing ‘a short story about the brothers who lived up the road from Penelope’ (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin), after some years travelling around West Africa and Brazil, interspersed with periodic residence in New York, a city that at the time was suffering from ‘the vast new population of homeless people, and of the drug-damaged staggering around like something out of William Hogarth’s *Gin Lane*’, (193) writes Rebecca Solnit. He was seeking solace from many things: his failing marriage, the urban nightmare of New York, the pressures of the literary world, even himself. In retiring to the Welsh borders he continued a tradition, first established at Sotheby’s, of seeking escape at times of crisis.

The pattern had begun in 1965, when Chatwin suddenly experienced some serious difficulties with his eyesight, resulting from a previously unnoticed squint: ‘After a strenuous bout of New York,’ he wrote in ‘I Always Wanted to Go to Patagonia,’ ‘I woke up one morning half blind’ (AOR 11). His career at Sotheby’s was flourishing, and Chatwin was talked of as a future chairman in

²⁶ It must be remembered that Chatwin’s attraction to Wales was, in part, born of the fact that he did not belong to it – that it was not England. This enabled him to ignore the tyrannies of industrialism found on the Welsh borders themselves.

some quarters. However, the stress and strain of the job gradually grew to be unmanageable, and Chatwin began to nurture a disdain, both personal and philosophical, for the job: ‘The atmosphere of the Art World reminded me of the morgue. “All those lovely things passing through your hands,” they’d say – and I’d look at my hands and think of Lady Macbeth’ (AOR 11). Chatwin’s ‘blindness’ was symptomatic of these emotions, and his doctor suggested he take in some wide horizons, which he took as an excuse to head off to the Sudan: ‘On camel and foot I trekked through the Red Sea hills and found some unrecorded cave paintings. My nomad guide was a hadendoa, one of Kipling’s “fuzzy-wuzzies”. He carried a sword, a purse and a pot of scented goat’s grease for anointing his hair. He made me feel overburdened and inadequate; and by the time I returned to England a fierce mood of iconoclasm had set in’ (12). Chatwin returned from Africa with his eye problems cured; however, the journey was little more than a sticking plaster, incapable of disguising Chatwin’s growing disdain for the Art World and soon after his return, Chatwin handed in his resignation and began his undergraduate degree in Edinburgh.

This pattern of escaping at times of anxiety repeated itself with monotonous regularity in the author’s early adulthood, first at Edinburgh, then again at the Sunday Times, from which Chatwin suddenly departed for the plains of Patagonia. In many ways, one can trace the root of much of Chatwin’s restlessness from the imposition of external pressure; nomadism was just something of an excuse to disappear when times became trying. As Michael Ignatieff noted, [Chatwin’s] life could be described as a sequence of escapes’ (‘On Bruce Chatwin’). His behaviour is reminiscent of that of the film director Orson Welles, who also manifested a tendency for ‘withdrawal at a critical moment,’ as his biographer, Simon Callow writes. He adds: ‘The

definition of the psychiatric term “fugue” or, more technically, “psychogenic fugue”, seems appropriate here: “a sudden and unexpected leaving of home with the person assuming a new identity elsewhere” (137). Professional and personal anxieties were not the only motivating factor in Chatwin’s restlessness; there are clearly more innocent reasons behind the author’s constant travel. However, simultaneously, one cannot ignore Chatwin’s pattern of behaviour, and the suspicion that the author’s grand romance of restlessness had its origins – in part at least – in relatively prosaic anxieties.

Having published The Viceroy of Ouidah, Chatwin found himself once more in need of escape from the realities of life; his marriage to Elizabeth was in trouble and he had been wounded by the break-up of a relationship he had established with an Australian stockbroker named Donald Richards. An uncharacteristic note reflects the bitterness and disappointment Chatwin felt after the breakdown of his relationship with Richards: “Talked to DR in morning – bittersweet phone call. Less obtainable than ever – was at Oxford exploring the bisexuality of undergraduates’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35). Chatwin was seeking escape once more in the Welsh marches; this time, however, the escape was not geographical, as before, but psychological, with the author attempting to recapture and re-imagine the landscape of his youth. By returning to this youthful idyll, the author perhaps hoped to alleviate the insistent allure of travel.

The sense of refuge inherent in the border country, emanating from Chatwin’s childhood love of the place, crucially influenced the tentative assertion of the possibility of settlement found in On the Black Hill; it can perhaps be seen as the motivating spur in the philosophical argument of the novel. Yet, the subject and tone of On the Black Hill did not solely result from

authorial nostalgia. As he recuperated on the borders, Chatwin found that he began increasingly to relate to the specific way of life of the area; it seemed to embody much that he admired and searched for, and offer wider possibilities of escape. One of the key reasons that Chatwin felt at home in the border counties was its liminality, its sense of being in between two worlds. The inhabitants of the Radnor Hills and Black Mountains struggle with dual national and cultural identity; they are neither properly English, nor properly Welsh. Wales shared the same indistinct national character, particularly on the borders, that had so attracted the writer to Patagonia: '[T]hough Wales is a country, it is not a State. It has a capital city, but not a Government; its own postage stamps, but not its own currency; a flag, but no embassies, an indigenous language, but not indigenous laws' (Jan Morris 1). The inhabitants of the Welsh borders in particular face the brunt of this nationalistic confusion; they must choose between languages, between religions, between cultures. Indeed, until the passing of an Order-in-Council to clarify the matter in 1968, the border county of Monmouthshire was often considered to be part of England, so confused by the vacillations of history were its borders. The traditional coat of arms for the county shows the gold fleur-de-lis of Gwent being supported on the left by the lion of England and on the right by the dragon of Wales. The motto below reads *Utrique Fidelis* – 'Faithful to Both'. Despite the pageantry and rhetoric, however, the inhabitants of the Welsh borders often found themselves outsiders to both cultures, unable to claim true national or cultural identity; the diarist Francis Kilvert, who documented rural life during his chaplaincy at Clyro near Hay-On-Wye, recorded the contortions of a mother in labour: 'remembering the extraordinary story which old Bethy Williams of Crowther used to tell me about the birth of a child in this house [the Pant] and the care taken that the child

should be born in England in the English corner of the cottage. “Stand here, Betsey, in this corner,” said the midwife. And the girl was delivered of the child standing’ (95). Chatwin enjoyed the anecdote so much that he incorporated the idea of a nationally-divided house into his description of *The Vision*. The uncertain national status of the border dwellers was certainly a key attraction of the area for Chatwin, who was always interested in those who felt – like himself – that they did not quite belong.

During his residency in Wales, Chatwin divided his time mainly between two friends, Diana Melly and Penelope Betjeman. In her strikingly honest memoir, *Take a Girl Like Me*, Melly, wife of jazz singer and legendary raconteur George Melly, describes the experience of having an author in residence:

I had met him before, but I found his blond good looks and the stream of often unintelligible chatter quite intimidating. I was both impressed by and shy of him. On that early visit Bruce spotted that I could cook, and that the top room, with only a small window and rather cut off from the rest of the house, would be ideal for writing. Early the following year he wrote to me from America tentatively inviting himself to stay; he enticingly suggested that we could take it in turns to make supper as then we could both write.

Bruce stayed with me off and on for five years and never even made a cup of tea, although he did occasionally boil up some rather disgusting-smelling Mexican leaves into a brew which he said gave him energy – not something I thought he lacked rather he fizzed with it. But if Bruce, with his endless demands for coffee, company, meals and an ear for his latest pages, did nothing to enable me to write, he did get me out of the house. (163)

In the absence of Elizabeth and upon his return to his youthful idyll, Chatwin was restlessly searching for maternal figures: ‘He was very childish and needed looking after,’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 388) Melly told Nicholas Shakespeare. In Melly’s autobiography, Chatwin appears to fill, in some small way, the hole left by her son Patrick, who died in 1980 as a result of a heroin overdose. The sense is of two damaged individuals seeking solace in one

another's company; his wife Elizabeth commented of Melly: 'She was crazy about Bruce' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin).

Whilst Melly offered Chatwin maternal comfort in a time of anxiety, the author's other host, Penelope Betjeman, offered the author something arguably more important to someone with a literary imagination, introducing a number of local personalities whose means of existence formed another key influence on Chatwin's assessment of the border life as offering an alternative solution to the impositions of civilisation and the symptoms of restlessness. As has been noted, throughout his life, Chatwin was naturally drawn to communities and individuals outside of the 'mainstream of twentieth century materialism' (The South Bank Show), whether they be West African nomads or Orthodox monks on Athos; he was constantly searching for a feasible alternative to the impositions of the settled world, which he viewed, as the reader will be aware, as an aberration. Often these alternatives were predicated on movement; one kept oneself free of the dangers of settled life by constantly moving on. However, in the unchanging rural existence of the Welsh hill farmers that he was introduced to by Penelope Betjeman, Chatwin felt he had uncovered, surprisingly close to home, another such means of existing outside the impositions of the settled world and hence escaping the affliction of restlessness.

Key to Chatwin's appreciation of the local way of life was its sense of timelessness, of having been unaffected by the impositions of the modern age. The way of life of those he encountered on the borders had hardly changed in the past century; Hugo Williams recounts Chatwin's surprise on one visit to a local farm, where he discovered 'one of the first tractors to be used in this country, a Fordson, probably imported from America in 1914 as part of the war effort.' The tractor was, Williams relates, 'buried up to its axles in earth and

nettles.’ Chatwin asked the boy whether he realised how rare the machine was – observing that the tractor belonged in a museum. “Oh, don’t worry about that,” the boy told Chatwin. “I’ll soon have that going again” (18). In her discussion of Welsh history, The Matter of Wales, Jan Morris confirms the essential truth of this impression, describing individuals ‘living lives that have not changed in fundamentals since the nineteenth century. The advent of electricity, the car and the telephone has hardly frayed their unbroken attachment to their own particular patch of soil, or their loyalty to the unwritten rural traditions, good or bad, that govern their affairs’ (43).

Betjeman facilitated many encounters with local farming families and, as Chatwin began to understand the community more fully, his appreciation of the compensations of their frugal, often ascetic, existence began to grow correspondingly. Chatwin became close in particular to two families, who separately provided the inspiration for the two main families of the novel. The first of these families was made up by the Howell brothers, Jonathan and George who, despite Chatwin’s protestations to the contrary, are indisputably the models for the novel’s twins; in early drafts of the novel, Chatwin even retained their names. From Chatwin’s notebooks, the brothers come across as perhaps more worldly-wise than Lewis and Benjamin; they are perfectly cognisant of VAT and Income Tax regulations, and understand the currents of political change rushing through Europe: ‘Sitting on the settle – we discussed the world – They knew all about Yugoslavia – how it was divided’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35). However, it is also clear that Chatwin’s account of the slow pace of change and the frugal existence of border life in On the Black Hill found one major source in life on the Howell brothers’ farm:

Sunday afternoon. Walked across Cefn Hill to the Howell brothers. The snow was deeper than I expected and [...] I fell

through [...] up to my knees. Inky clouds backed up behind Lord Hereford's Knob but as you looked back into England the fields were green.

The two brothers were mucking out the cowshed onto the dung pile. They seem incapable of doing anything apart. They showed me the Granary and Stable that they built in 1937 [...]

In the house – nothing changed. [...]

There was a side of bacon hitched up in the rafters: I imagine they must cure their own.

Never went to Hereford.

Occasionally had £15 for their pockets [...] Expenses for cake, medicine – groceries.

Fear of the antique dealers. (Chatwin Archive Box 35)

The Howell brothers were clearly important influences on Chatwin's depiction of the life of his twins Lewis and Benjamin, which retains much of the detail of Chatwin's notes on Jonathan and George. However, in terms of both their personal impact upon the author himself and their importance in persuading Chatwin around to the inherent dignity of a settled, ascetic existence, the most significant characters that Chatwin encountered in his time on the borders were Joe and Jean the Barn, the models for the Jones twins' neighbours in On the Black Hill, Jim and Meg the Rock.

Joe and Jean lived in a crumbling grey stone farmhouse on an ill-tended hillside smallholding near Capel-y-Ffin. Joe himself was something of a local character – Chatwin records a story of him evading an Income Tax officer, 'only to meet him in the road and say: Joe the Barn be out for the day' (Chatwin Archive Box 35). Joe is vividly described on the occasion of their first meeting as having 'Sandy green eyes [...] Tobacco breath. Wide smile. Shaved – hair once fair now straggly almost like lichen' and a 'turned up nose like an imp' (Chatwin Archive Box 35).

Chatwin's relationship with Joe and Jean may very well however have remained at the level of literary resource were it not for the fact that, shortly after their first meeting, Joe was taken to hospital having suffered a stroke:

17th Jan

Joe the Barn was taken last Thursday night at 2 in the morning with a stroke. Jean the Barn said how it happened: she got up in the night to put more coal on the fire and found him fallen off the settle where he slept and caught his head

“I hope ‘e comes back –

We’ve been together all our lives, like & doin’ the work, like together – .” (Chatwin Archive Box 35)

As a result of Joe’s illness, Chatwin became crucially involved in the life of Jean and Joe, in a fashion quite unfamiliar to a writer used to parachuting into people’s lives to uncover material, and as swiftly moving on. It is clear that the author felt great affection and admiration for the couple and the frugal life they led, and it seems he felt in some way duty bound to help Jean as she struggled with the day-to-day upkeep of the small-holding in Joe’s absence: ‘She offered me a £1 for cleaning the chimney but I would take only 50p. She very distressed because she hoped I’d come back to do more odd jobs – and was worried she wasn’t paying enough’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35). Chatwin’s assistance to Jean is fictionalised and embellished in the novel:

He borrowed a set of rods to clean her chimney. Halfway up, the brush snagged on something solid. He pushed, harder, and clods of soot came tumbling into the grate.

Meg chortled with laughter at the sight of his black face and beard: “And I’d think you was the devil hi’self to look on.”
(OTBH 242)

Chatwin developed a great affection for Jean during his visits, and took copious notes, capturing her patterns of speech and idiosyncrasies of lifestyle, many of which find their way wholesale into the text of On the Black Hill: “I tell you what I done” – I done all the foddering and the feeding – she is complaining of pains in her arms and legs [...] She said she could have some eggs if she could only find where ‘em girls is laying’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35). Some have seen the spectre of Cold Comfort Farm, Stella Gibbons’ satire of the fatalistic rural perspective of Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, Mary Webb et al., in the

representations of the Watkins family, particularly Meg, who bears some comparison to Cold Comfort Farm's 'nature spirit' Elfine; Nicholas Murray refers to a critical response to Meg's 'comic Starkadderish idiom' (79), whilst Andrew Palmer locates in the character of Meg a source of generic instability: 'Is Meg's language,' Palmer asks, 'an accurate representation of Radnorshire dialect (i.e. agrarian record)? Or is it an extension of Meg as the earthy, simple, wise woman of the land (pastoral convention)? Or is it too marked to be serious, a parody, poking fun, undermining convention?' (74).

The reality is that Meg's dialogue, along with many of the physical details of *The Rock*, are taken verbatim from Chatwin's encounters with Jean and Joe the Barn. The description of the farmhouse of *The Rock* is virtually identical to Chatwin's notated descriptions of Coed Major, even down to the row of toy soldiers on the window sill. The dilapidated state of the buildings, and the desperate lack of materialism of Jim and Meg in the novel were not fanciful authorial impositions, but rather taken directly from the realities of Joe and Jean's life, as evidenced by Chatwin's contemporaneous notebooks:

Calendar from the 1950s. The fire was drawing better today because it seems that the sun iced over the chimney pot and caused the smoke to fill the room – the whole of the back of the house has fallen out and there is nothing but a few zincs to keep it in place.

No evidence whatever of another room. (Chatwin Archive Box 35)

The deeply anachronistic life that Chatwin uncovered during his time with Joe, Jean and the Howell brothers, pursued as much of the population of Great Britain began a decade of material indulgence, provided what seemed to be a viable alternative to mainstream settled existence. The author had come to Wales in search of a vanished childhood playground, and had found in his time there a way of life that embodied much that he had believed was only achievable in a life of constant movement. The life of the Welsh borders seemed to offer a

means of escape comparable to that which Chatwin had only previously found in travel. This experience inspired Chatwin to expand what had initially begun life as a short story around Betjeman's farming brothers into a full-length novel that would properly explore the ideas thrown up by the existence of those he had met on the borders.

As a result, despite the profound influence of Chatwin's personal relationship with the people and landscape of the Welsh borders, On the Black Hill cannot be read as a *roman à clef*; rather it constitutes, in Nicholas Murray's words, 'an imaginative reordering of experience' (62). As will be seen in the subsequent chapter, On the Black Hill employs the raw materials Chatwin acquired during his various periods of residency on the Welsh borders to develop and extend his previously expressed conceptions of restlessness and settlement, situating the raw material of his experiences of border life within the intellectual framework he had established in "The Nomadic Alternative".

Chapter Six: ‘The Broad and Narrow Path’

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

[H]e played a spume of imagination upon empirical phenomena, generating subtle emotional states and devising unique psychological forms and structures to contain them. (156)

Paul Fussell, Abroad

As a result of both its setting and tone, many critics have seen On the Black Hill as marking an abandonment of the intellectual territory of Chatwin’s previous work. The novel, it has been argued, is pleasingly free of the generic complexity and the underlying ideology of restlessness that marked out his first published texts. American critics, in particular, read the novel as offering the traditional pleasures associated with the pastoral mode, presenting an uncomplicated documentary of life in the British countryside. Robert Towers in the New York Times Book Review wrote of Chatwin, in a review entitled ‘A Novel of Pastoral Vision’: ‘He belongs, like Lawrence and Hardy before him, to that line of novelists, poets, diarists and amateur naturalists who have made the rural life of Great Britain more intimately known to generations of readers than that of any other country in Europe or America’, whilst John Verlenden termed the novel: ‘Pastoral, idyllic. Black Hill [sic] supplies the oldest antidote to a world that would be too much with us: nature, simple living, the business of animals and planting.’

On the Black Hill undoubtedly offers something new to the reader in its depiction of a settled, rural life which brings contentment to many of the novel’s characters. It is fallacious, however, to assume from this new aspect to Chatwin’s literary vision that the novel abandons the intellectual framework of

his previous works. On the Black Hill embodies at its creative centre the same debates that permeate the rest of Chatwin's oeuvre, questioning how best to find escape from the restlessness endemic to settled, civilised life. The work supplements the notion of a nomadic alternative with an ascetic model of living that can perhaps be referred to as a 'hermitic alternative', yet the novel, and the author, retain the central preoccupations that mark out the rest of Chatwin's creative output. The question remains the same, though the answer now incorporates a new element.

These debates are evident in the formal conceit that is manifest in the text and implied in the original title of the novel – 'The Vision and the Rock' (Chatwin Archive). The structure of On the Black Hill is built around key dualisms, which posit an opposite for each facet of the novel. This chapter intends to explore the structural conceit of duality, examining how the approach extends and illuminates Chatwin's expressed oppositional framework around the subject of restlessness.

The first, and most obvious dualism of the novel is found in the central characters of On the Black Hill, the twins Lewis and Benjamin Jones. As has been noted, Chatwin sourced his idea for Lewis and Benjamin from both the Howell brothers, Jonathan and George, and, to a lesser extent, his own experience of growing up as one of two brothers. In On the Black Hill, however, Lewis and Benjamin's lives are extended beyond pure biography and imbued with an allegorical power that Chatwin himself imposed, coming to embody the central arguments of Chatwin's life and work – to stay or go; asceticism or materialism; homosexuality, heterosexuality – or abstinence. This allegorical element to Chatwin's characters was partly inspired by a particularly significant, though now little known, text called On the Marble Cliffs.

Written by the controversial German author Ernst Jünger and published in 1939, On the Marble Cliffs (note the titular similarity) is a work that Chatwin first encountered in translation during his time at the Sunday Times. John Russell told Nicholas Shakespeare that Chatwin had an ‘unlimited and obsessional regard’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 276) for Jünger’s work and in later life the author wrote a fascinating, admiring review of Jünger’s diaries for the New York Review of Books. Jünger had served with great success in the First World War, and published an autobiography, Storm of Steel, which related his wartime experiences in somewhat grandiose terms. His position towards the National Socialist party in Germany in advance of the Second World War was not one of active support and he was later associated with the Stauffenberg bomb plot of 1944. However, unlike many of those involved with the attempt on Hitler’s life, Jünger was not executed, and he later told the translator Stuart Hood that he believed that ‘someone high up held a protecting hand’ over him. His position towards Nazism was ultimately complex, one of detachment yet resistance; whilst On the Marble Cliffs has been referred to as ‘the only major act of resistance, of inner sabotage, carried out by German literature under Hitler’ (Steiner), Jünger himself claimed it as a non-specific allegory of totalitarianism. Chatwin wrote of Jünger’s complex attitude to fascism that ‘[t]hough he deplored Hitler as a vulgar technician who had misunderstood the metaphysics of power, he did nothing to try to stop him, believing anyway that democracy was dead and the destiny of machine-age man was essentially tragic’ (WAIDH 303).

The novel – which is fantastical in style – concerns two brothers living in rural seclusion high on the marble cliffs above the populated area bordering the sea known as the Marina. The brothers hold themselves generally aloof from the

prosaic reality below them, working as botanists, and enjoying little company. Ultimately, however, their repose is disturbed by the senseless acts of slaughter performed by the Chief Ranger, who resides above the cliffs in the black forests and who, with his hordes of hired thugs, the Mauretians, begins to destroy the cultured way of life enjoyed by those who live on the marble cliffs. Though the brothers join the uprising against the Chief Ranger, they are ultimately unsuccessful, and are forced to retire to Alta Plana, across the sea, on a boat mysteriously prepared for their departure.

The novel shares a number of key similarities with On the Black Hill aside from its close title. The obvious connection of two brothers living in rural seclusion (Jünger's brothers are 'brethren both in the flesh and in a fraternity of elect spirits' (9)) echoes not only the plot of On the Black Hill, but also the novel's personal resonance, for the relationship depicted in Jünger's novel is based on that of Ernst and his own brother Friedrich Georg. Their occupation as botanists (also drawn from Jünger's life) was one which Chatwin himself aspired to: 'This is my ambition – BOTANIST written in my passport', (qtd. in Shakespeare 156) he wrote to Cary Welch in 1964. Crucially, however, both novels share the sense that the modern world is one in which it is dangerous and counterproductive to involve oneself. The brothers feel they are 'right, therefore, to keep clear of affairs in which no honour was to be won, and to return peacefully to the Marina; there by the sunny banks we would devote ourselves to flowers, those fleeting coloured signals which in their secret painted script express the unchangeable order of things, and are like timepieces that never fail to tell the hour' (31) just as Chatwin's brothers feel no compulsion to involve themselves in the ordeal of two world wars, and willingly attempt to return themselves to unchanging nature. On the Black Hill and On the Marble

Cliffs belong to the literature of escape as surely as does a work such as The Songlines, demonstrating the possibilities of freedom should one choose to cut oneself off from the civilised, urbanised world.

The influence of Jünger's novel upon On the Black Hill is overt, and helps give the lie to those who would claim the work as a simple advocacy of rural existence. Indeed, in On the Black Hill, the author introduces an extra element of complexity to the framework donated by On the Marble Cliffs, with the, apparently unconscious, transmutation of his fictional brothers into identical twins. 'He said "Suddenly, they turned into twins,"' comments Elizabeth Chatwin. 'They took on their own life – they became twins. And it wasn't going to be a short story anymore after that. It got longer and longer' (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). This transmutation allowed Chatwin to extend the allegorical power of his main characters, manifestly representing in Lewis and Benjamin ideas of the conflicting nature of the human personality that so preoccupied him, with one brother frequently on a different side of the key arguments of the text from the other. Chatwin manifests the internal conflicts he sees as endemic to the affliction of restlessness in the characters of the two brothers, who become allegories of the author's framework of ideas.

The opening pages of the novel, which depict the twins in their old age, affirm this dualism in the list of physical differences between them; the implication being that, despite their similarities, their contrasting lifestyles and desires have, over the years, gradually manifested themselves physically:

Lewis was tall and stringy, with shoulders set square and a steady long-limbed stride. Even at eighty he could walk over the hills all day, or wield an axe all day, and not get tired [...] Benjamin was shorter, pinker, neater and sharper-tongued. His chin fell into his neck, but he still possessed the full stretch of his nose, which he would use in conversation as a weapon. (2)

From a position in their childhood, when they are unable to understand ‘the difference between “yours” and “mine”’ (40), the brothers over a number of years learn a method of dividing labour and domestic roles based around traditional gender lines. The brothers function as a domestic unit in almost every way; Lewis is the stronger, masculine figure with a mind for the practicalities of farming, whilst Benjamin is the more effeminate twin, who cooks, cleans and deals with the household expenses: ‘He did all the cooking, the darning and the ironing; and he kept the accounts’ (2). Chatwin sources this division from the time of their birth; Lewis the first born, the strongest, marked, like Cain – also a first born and a wanderer – in order to distinguish him from his brother.

Strikingly, it is significant that Benjamin is the devoted shepherd; like Abel, his hands are bloody from the tendering of animals: ‘Sometimes, he had to thrust his forearm into the womb to disentangle a pair of twins; and afterwards, he would sit by the fireside, unwashed and contented, and let the cat lick the afterbirth off his hands’ (3). The disentangling of the twins in this passage is not specific to the livestock; the act distinguishes Lewis and Benjamin themselves in two specific ways. Firstly, and prosaically, it presents Benjamin as the domestic, maternal figure, the midwife to his flocks and, as has been seen, this irrevocably aligns him with Abel. Secondly, and more significantly, it introduces the sublimated sexuality of Benjamin, a character generally presented as either a non-practising homosexual or completely asexual. This implication is never overtly developed, yet it links into the suggestions of incest that will be explored later in the chapter.

The relationship between the twins can thus be seen in practical terms as an unconsummated marriage. Indeed, Benjamin reacts as a jilted wife whenever

Lewis, the overtly heterosexual twin, expresses any interest in the opposite sex: 'Benjamin's love for Lewis was murderous' (190). Yet, to reduce the relationship to nothing more than a chaste marriage is to ignore the metaphysical aspect of their relationship. For – ultimately – Lewis and Benjamin are two halves of the same person. This aspect of the novel is implied by the profound spiritual connection that the brothers share; their secret childhood language is 'the language of the angels' (40) whilst their physical bond – referred to by John Updike as a 'mysterious, infrangible connection' – can be seen as paranormal, with the twins being able to communicate physical distress over long distances. The connection is so profound that 'if either twin caught sight of himself – in a mirror, in a window, or even on the surface of water – he mistook his own reflection for his other half' (87). As Benjamin learns to shave, he sees his brother's face in the mirror and as he holds his razor 'at the ready and glanced up at the glass, he had the sensation of slitting Lewis's throat' (87).

That the brothers together represent one person is evident not only in their intangible connection, but also in the clear division and conflict of personality traits and psychological desires. These divisions are manifest: Lewis, for example, has little or no interest in acquisition of material possessions, and leaves all financial matters to Benjamin – who has a mania for buying land. Lewis is practical, straightforward, heterosexual; whereas Benjamin is bookish, morbid and a cross-dresser. Within the context of this thesis, however, the division of most interest surrounds their attitude to the settled lifestyle they lead. In this aspect of the novel Lewis can be seen as standing on the side of Cain, the wanderer, condemned to be forever restless, whilst Benjamin represents the voice of domesticity and settlement.

Free of possessions, and not subject to the burden of materialist desire, Lewis is the voice in the novel of what Chatwin described in the title of his first work as the 'nomadic alternative'. Lewis's restless instinct is first provoked by a picture of a Red Indian sent to the family from Canada by the expatriate 'Uncle Eddie': '[I]t was this picture, with its Red Indian, its birchbark, its pines and a crimson sky – to say nothing of its association with the legendary Uncle Eddie – that first awoke in Lewis a yearning for far-off places' (5). Lewis's desire to travel is encouraged by a youthful trip to St David's on the Pembrokeshire coast – the furthest that either of the brothers travel in the course of their lives. Whilst on holiday, Lewis and Benjamin strike up a friendship with a local fisherman: 'As a young man, he had sailed on the Cape Horners. He had seen the Giant Patagonians and the girls of Tahiti. Listening to his stories, Lewis's jaw would drop with wonder, and he would go off alone to daydream' (68). When he returns to his home, Lewis tells his parents: "When I grow up, I'm going to be a sailor" (69). Lewis's desire to travel the world never comes to fruition, though the force of his passion, repressed by his enforced settlement, is ameliorated by his lifelong ability to travel in his mind. Provoked by an image, a scent or a story, Lewis is able to transport himself to another place and time:

An aroma of coffee beans caused him to halt before a bow-fronted window. On the shelves sat little wicker baskets heaped with conical mounds of tea: the names on the labels – Darjeeling, Keemun, Lapsang Souchong, Oolong – carried him away to a mysterious east. The coffees were on the lower shelves, and in each warm brown bean he saw the warm brown lips of a negress.

He was daydreaming of rattan huts and lazy seas, when a butcher's cart rolled by; the carter yelled, 'Watch it, mate!' and chutes of muddy water flew up and dirtied his breeches. (101)

Lewis's Proustian ability to travel in his mind is inherited from his mother, Mary, a legacy of her days of internationalism. Upon reception of a flowerhead of Mimosa from Mrs Bickerton, stuffed into the envelope which

brings the Jones family permission to buy their farm for a reasonable price from the Bickerton estate, Mary recalls ‘the sea, the olives blown white in the wind, and the scents of thyme and cistus after rain [...] Yet this letter, the letter she had prayed for, was it not also a sentence to stay [...] for the rest of her existence, in this gloomy house below the hill?’ (150).

Mary never does escape her life on the black hill, and on her death-bed visions of her peripatetic past preoccupy her: ‘Images of India kept passing before her eyes. She saw a shimmering flood-plain, and a white dome afloat in the haze. Men in turbans were bearing a cloth-bound bundle to the shore. There were fires smouldering, and kitehawks spiralling above. A boat glided by downstream’ (190). Lewis, on the other hand, does finally manage, at the tail-end of his life, to escape the restrictions of his sedentary existence; motivated by his uncle’s passion for aviation, Lewis and Benjamin’s nephew, Kevin, organises a flight over the Welsh hills on the occasion of the twins’ eightieth birthday: ‘And suddenly he felt,’ Chatwin writes of Lewis, ‘even if the engine failed, even if the plane took a nosedive and their souls flew up to Heaven – that all the frustrations of his cramped and frugal life now counted for nothing, because, for ten magnificent minutes, he had done what he wanted to do’ (254).

Whilst Lewis’s restless frustration is soothed by this short plane journey, his brother Benjamin has no need of consolation, eminently satisfied, as he is, within the boundaries of *The Vision*: ‘He never thought of abroad. He wanted to live with Lewis for ever and ever; to eat the same food; wear the same clothes; share a bed; and swing an axe in the same trajectory’ (88). Benjamin personifies the materialist instinct in the novel, hoarding the money the brothers have made and incessantly pursuing the purchase of new land. He is also, as has been noted, the voice of domesticity in the novel: ‘He creamed the butter, beat the

eggs, sifted the flour, and watched the brown crust rise. Then, after filling the two layers with raspberry jam, he dusted the top with icing sugar and, when Lewis came back ravenous from school, he carried it, proudly, to the table' (62).

Part of Benjamin's ability to find satisfaction at home can be located in his overt love for his brother, and any consideration of the oppositional representations of the twins cannot ignore the homosexual aspect of Benjamin's character. Originally, On the Black Hill was to have made much more of the issue of homosexuality. Chatwin apparently hinted to Edmund White of a more explicit version of the story and his notebooks contain hints as to the form the novel could have taken: 'Yes: They did it 2 brothers involuntary at night, and afterwards it was a shame. 2 placed a bolster between them. Incapable of talking about sex. Sometimes they hunched against one another. Never spoke about it' (Chatwin Archive Box 35).

Indeed, Chatwin retains the image of a physical barrier between them in the opening description of the shared double bed: 'Under the goose-feather mattress, there was a second mattress of horsehair, and this had sunk into two troughs leaving a ridge between the sleepers' (1), and there are strong hints as to the feelings Benjamin hides from his brother: 'Benjamin loved his mother and his brother, and he did not like girls. Whenever Lewis left the room, his eyes would linger in the doorway, and his irises cloud to a denser shade of grey: when Lewis came back, his pupils glistened' (88). On the brothers' intermittent visits to Rhulen, the market town of the novel, based on Hay-On-Wye, it is Lewis who spends his time talking to girls, while Benjamin is reviled by the female flesh on display, the bare legs of the girls reminding him of 'his one and only visit to an abattoir and the kicks of the sheep in their death throes' (164).

However, in the published novel, whilst Benjamin undoubtedly conveys a homosexual desire towards his brother, which intensifies his wish to stay put, it is significantly counterbalanced by the repressed heterosexuality of Lewis, which partly motivates his restless longing. Consequently, though the issue of sexuality is key in motivating Lewis and Benjamin's differing responses to settlement and travel, Chatwin does not make it the central focus of the work. The complexity of the brothers' relationship would have been reduced to one dimension had Chatwin chosen to make their love the central thrust of the novel, and would have led to a reductive critical and reader response. Indeed, even before the novel was written, Susan Sontag was referring to it as 'the novel about the incestuous brothers' (qtd. in Shakespeare 383). In dividing the sexuality of his brothers, Chatwin extends the overt dualism of their characters, reaffirming the sense that the brothers represent two emotional sides of one person.

If, as has been argued, Lewis and Benjamin represent the conflicting instincts present in one individual, then there is one convincing candidate for the model of this individual. All of the personality traits evident in the twins were seemingly present in the personality of the author himself, who veered throughout his life between restless travel and a desire for stability and refuge, as well as struggling with the lure of materialism and the confusion of his own sexuality. Chatwin's friend Jonathan Hope observes: 'The novel is between Bruce and Bruce' (qtd. in Shakespeare 382), whilst Susannah Clapp calls the novel a 'submerged piece of autobiography. They're two parts of himself' (Interview with Susannah Clapp). That Chatwin's personality was so

divided can be seen as a key source of his own restlessness, constantly tormented, as he seemed to be, by instincts telling him to do or be what he was not.

On the Black Hill, with its dualistic structure, might then seem a conscious interrogation of the author's divided personality; certainly, the biographical resonance of the work is overt. Chatwin peppered the novel with direct references to his own childhood; the mention of Umberlade, for example, as well as the general reminiscences of his youth discussed in the previous chapter. Chatwin also incorporates direct quotations of his childhood self, both in the passage where the twins assert that snow is god spitting, and in the wilful jettisoning of the Humpty-Dumpty, which Chatwin, like the twins, cast off without compulsion. It seems evident, then, that Chatwin, at least in part, consciously sketched his twins from the memory of his childhood.

It is not clear, however, that Chatwin was writing from any sort of conscious autobiographical perspective. The author's model was almost always Flaubert, and On the Black Hill retains a Flaubertian distance in terms of any authorial intervention or involvement with the plot of the novel. The inclusion of autobiographical detail could be seen as no more than evidence of a literary ruthlessness, with Chatwin willing to draw his source material from any resonant story or event.

Despite the clear relevance of the thematic material of On the Black Hill to the author's life, the reader is left uncertain as to the degree to which the key philosophical tenets of On the Black Hill are inspired by a conscious autobiographical instinct. This leads to a peculiar ambiguity in Chatwin's work, for, though the author work is so obviously and constantly in search of personal solutions for his peripatetic tendencies, he rarely acknowledges the biographical

source of his preoccupation, generally hiding behind the universal resonance he claimed to be exploring in his analysis of the subject of restlessness. As Susannah Clapp acknowledges: ‘There’s a sort of paradox in someone who tries to scrape away all biographical details from his work whilst constantly investigating himself’ (Interview with Susannah Clapp). This tension is present in all of Chatwin’s work, but is none more evident than in On the Black Hill, which, despite being undoubtedly the most personal of Chatwin’s works, retains the Flaubertian disdain of authorial emotion that permeates the entirety of his oeuvre.

There is, however, another overarching dualism in the novel, the oppositional strands of which dictate and expose the main argument of the work. Centred around the idea introduced in the previous chapter that On the Black Hill was something of a manifesto for settlement, this framework, which can be thought of in terms of the town versus the country, centrally addresses the notion first formally asserted in “The Nomadic Alternative” that civilised, urban existence is an aberration from the natural state of the human species, breeding discontent and restlessness: ‘settlement for any length of time is an unusual and aberrant condition in human affairs’, Chatwin writes in “The Nomadic Alternative”. ‘The man who sits quietly in a room is often quite lethal’ (46).

In most of Chatwin’s work, the solution to this state of existence is found in ‘the nomadic alternative’; one must simply spend one’s life on the move, never settling, and scrupulously avoiding large conurbations. Indeed, this ideology is found in On the Black Hill in the typically Chatwinesque figure of

Theo the Tent: 'He remembered, in Africa, seeing the Kalahari Bushmen trekking through the desert, the mothers laughing, with their children on their backs. And he had come to believe that all men were meant to be wanderers, like them, like St Francis; and that by joining the Way of the Universe, you could find the Great Spirit everywhere' (241). Theo's vision, to an extent at least, is shared by Lewis and his mother Mary, who also desire a more peripatetic life.

However, as has been noted, this solution to the impositions of civilisation is significantly supplemented in the novel by the suggestion that one can also find escape in the ascetic life lived by characters such as Benjamin or Meg the Rock, and this final section of analysis on the novel intends to explore the central opposition between this rural existence and the corrupting social environment of the town – an opposition which sets up national and religious contrasts in addition to the urban/rural dialectic – in an effort to explore the thematic development of Chatwin's ideas around the possibility of finding escape from the impositions of settlement and consequently a cure for restlessness.

Chatwin sourced this solution from the attitudes and ways of life he encountered in his time on the borders, in particular those of the ascetic hill farmers such as the Howell brothers and Joe and Jean the Barn, who embodied the freedom from civilised life that Chatwin took as a hallmark of the life well lived. In On the Black Hill Chatwin transmutes the emotions of such individuals to become part of his grander dualistic scheme, setting up a contrast between the frugal, rural existence of his main characters at The Vision and The Rock and the materialism and fundamental disconnection of the novel's representatives of the civilised world, arguing for an inherent dignity and

reward in the asceticism of the Welsh farming life that is fundamentally lacking in the avarice and immorality of 'the town'.

The mechanics of rural life are not depicted as in any way idyllic in the novel; they are a source of frustration to some – such as Lewis and his mother Mary, who believes herself stuck, like Francisco Da Silva, settled where she wishes not to be, 'trapped for ever and ever, for the rest of her existence, in this gloomy house below the hill' (151) – and of extreme poverty and hardship to others, whilst the town can be a place of excitement and relief from the rigours of rural life. In the larger structure of the novel, however, one can see, despite individual experiences, a division between the redemptive power of rural life and the corrupting influence of mass culture. 'What I wanted to do', he told Melvyn Bragg, 'was take those people as the centre of the circle and see the rest of the twentieth century as somehow abnormal' (The South Bank Show).

Chatwin's intention in the novel is clear; the town is filled with corrupt antique dealers, lecherous (and ultimately murderous) solicitors and the impositions of military conscription. The countryside, though often cruel, does offer the possibility of isolation and ultimate consolation in the natural world. To Benjamin, in particular, the Welsh landscape is a paradise not to be improved upon: 'Crossing the pasture one evening, he watched the swallows glinting low over the dandelion clocks, and the sheep standing out against the sunset, each one ringed with an aureole of gold – and understood why the Lamb of God should have a halo' (88–89), whilst Meg the Rock exists in total and content symbiosis with the natural world around her: 'On frosty mornings she sat on an upturned bucket, warming her hands around a mug of tea while the tits and chaffinches perched on her shoulder. When a green woodpecker took

some crumbs from her hand, she imagined the bird was a messenger from God and sang His Praises in doggerel all through the day' (237).

In this depiction of lives in tune with a beneficent nature, Chatwin's novel heavily referenced the work of the Shropshire writer, Mary Webb. Webb, a clear disciple of Thomas Hardy who dedicated her final work, Precious Bane to the Wessex author, believed, like Chatwin, in the fundamental advantages of a life rooted in the natural world. Webb's work, and in particular Gone to Earth, provided a way in for Chatwin to understand and write about what he described as the 'curious reverence for nature' (The South Bank Show) that one finds in the Welsh borders and that Jan Morris also identified, describing a 'profound affinity with the nature of the place, which is something very different from mere patriotism, but is more akin to the territorial instincts of the beasts themselves, or the migratory urges of the birds' (44). Webb's novels, unfortunately, though perhaps unsurprisingly, unfashionable at present, are firmly rooted in their natural environments; the landscape of Shropshire is as vivid a character in her novels as any of the main protagonists. She believed, like Bruce Chatwin, who told Melvyn Bragg, shortly after the publication of On the Black Hill that '[t]here will come an ascetic movement', that a life in tune with nature could offer a panacea for the profound social ills of her time; Gone to Earth was written during the chaos and destruction of the First World War. She presents this life as a fundamental alternative to the cynical utilitarianism of the early twentieth century, asking 'what will happen if we *feel*, if we make ourselves available to the enormous and often ruthlessly irrational powers of the natural world and our own inner passions' (Duncan iv).

Gone to Earth concerns a young girl, Hazel Woodus, who lives with her father Abel in bucolic surroundings. Hazel is quite unaware of the discourses of

society, and lives a life according to her desires and instincts, finding comfort in her one true friend, a tame fox called Foxy. After a time, however, Hazel becomes the focus of attention from two competing suitors, Edward Marston, an Anglican vicar, modelled on the diarist Francis Kilvert, and John Reddin, local squire, master of the hounds and personification of the corrupting power of modern, civilised values. Though pragmatically allied to Marston, whom she marries, Hazel is unable to resist the, to her, inexplicable sexual attraction of Reddin, leaving Marston twice to live with the squire at Undern, his dilapidated manor. Ultimately returning to Marston, who renounces the church in favour of the paganish lifestyle of his wife, Hazel is run down by hunting dogs and killed whilst trying to protect Foxy.

Though ultimately a novel of sexual politics, and the essentially base nature of the male pursuit of the woman – allegorically depicted in the chase of the pack hounds and their ultimately savagery (a pursuit prefigured by the rape of Hazel by Reddin earlier in the book) – Gone to Earth provided a number of direct influences on On the Black Hill. Most notable is the depiction of Hazel’s reclusive home life with her father Abel, which bears strong similarities to life at The Rock in Chatwin’s novel. Like Tom Watkins, Abel is a coffin maker, living in rural seclusion in a tumble-down cottage; significantly, the depiction is in no way idyllic – as in On the Black Hill, the attempted meaning is rather more profound than simple utopian dreaming:

The cottage was very low, one storied, and roofed with red corrugated iron. The three small windows had frames coloured with washing-blue and frills of crimson cotton within. There seemed scarcely room for even Hazel’s small figure. The house was little larger than a good pigsty, and only the trail of smoke from its squat chimney showed that humanity dwelt there. (14)

Hazel is a clear model, along with the real-life Jean, for Meg the Rock:

‘Her skin was plastered with reddish mud. Her breeches were the colour of mud.

Her hat *was* a rotting stump. And the tattered green jerseys, tacked one to the other, were the mosses, and creepers, and ferns' (221). Compare this with the description of Hazel in Gone to Earth: 'She had so deep a kinship with the trees, so intuitive a sympathy with leaf and flower, that it seemed as if the blood in her veins was not slow-moving human blood, but volatile sap' (163). Both imply not just a kinship with nature, but a fundamental connection with the constitution of the natural world.

In this connection, Chatwin and Webb saw a model for a naturalistic utopia, outside the pressures of twentieth-century materialism. Chatwin's assertion of his belief in an ascetic future, prompted by the author's desire to find a stable means of existence, free of settlement-induced anxiety, finds its precursor in Gone to Earth, where Webb writes of Hazel: 'She was of a race that will come in the far future, when we shall have outgrown our egoism – the brainless egoism of a little boy pulling off flies' wings. We shall attain philosophical detachment and emotional sympathy' (163).

The novel's contrast between the redemptive power of a life in tune with nature and the corrupting influence of the civilised world is perhaps most obviously apparent in the representational print of The Broad and Narrow Way, which hangs in the Jones' farmhouse and which acts as a key visual metaphor for the novel. This nineteenth-century print, based around Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, represents two paths; one, to the left, flanked with casinos and theatres and populated with people fighting and drinking, represents the Broad Way – the road to perdition. To the right, the Narrow Way is less populated and bordered by chapels and Sunday schools. The Broad Way

culminates in troops fighting a pitched battle below flaming battlements ‘which looked a bit like Windsor Castle’ (OTBH 89), whilst the Narrow Way is crowned by a troop of trumpeting angels.

The two paths become emblematic not only of two moral worlds, but also become associated with the contrasting qualities of the two nations between which the novel, and the Jones’s farmhouse, is divided. The distinction in character between these two countries is a familiar one to those who live in the border region, borne of experience, as John Powell Ward explains: ‘From England, the border meant the enticement of emptiness, a strange unpopulated land, going up and up into the hills. From Wales, the border meant the road to London, to the university, or to employment, whether by droving sheep, or later to the industries of Birmingham and Liverpool’ (138). To the twins, these differences are implicit in the print of The Broad and Narrow Way; the restrained, simple buildings of the Narrow Way are ‘unmistakably’ Welsh, and the twins’ examination of the print leads them to believe that ‘the Road to Hell was the road to Hereford, whereas the Road to Heaven led up to the Radnor Hills’ (89).

This belief is reaffirmed to the twins by the contrasting walks they take with their grandfather, one up the mountain into Wales, the other down into the grounds of Lurkenhope Park, and England. The English walk represents the sins of settlement: decadence and temptation; symbolically represented by Lurkenhope Castle, residence of the Bickerton family, which, like the castle crowning the Broad Way, later burns to the ground.

It is on the latter walk that Lewis first succumbs to temptation of the flesh upon sight of Nancy Bickerton, and professes to his mother: ‘Mama, when

I grow up I'm going to marry Miss Bickerton' (46) – a confession that brings his brother to tears.

The Welsh walk, by contrast, takes the twins up past The Rock, home of the emblematic Watkins family, who embody – as has been seen – the frugal existence implied (and somewhat secularised by Chatwin for the purposes of the novel) in the Narrow Way. In the Watkins' farmhouse, Chatwin places an overt reminder of the metaphor of the print in the framed text: 'The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness. Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord, make His Paths straight...' (47). The Welsh walk follows the path to salvation, and the implication is that to follow in the frugal traditions of the Welsh hills is to avoid the sins of settlement represented by the 'civilised' urban centres of England. It is no coincidence that during the Second World War, besieged Coventry is described as 'a red glow on the horizon' (192). The description is a direct allusion to the flaming battlements which crown the Broad Way.

The oppositional nationalism of the novel gives the lie to the suggestion at the beginning of the previous chapter that On the Black Hill somehow circumvented Chatwin's dislike for home. In fact, as has been demonstrated, the novel is an indictment of the English way of life, representative in the novel of all that is corrupting: settlement, materialism, immorality. This opposition affirms that On the Black Hill is as much a novel *against* home as is In Patagonia or The Viceroy of Ouidah. The key difference in Chatwin's Welsh novel is that the author appears to have found an alternative that does offer the possibility of contented settlement – though it is definitively not an *English* solution.

The division between this English and Welsh sensibility, and, in the larger scheme of the novel, between the civilised and rural worlds, is reaffirmed

by the respective oppositional roles played in the novel by the Anglican church and the Welsh nonconformist chapel. Mary, the representative of Anglicanism in both a religious and national sense, is the voice of a measured faith, lacking the strict oppositional dogma of the nonconformists. Her faith is tied into the cultural associations of the church; Anglicanism is the way of the middle classes, of the educated, and is more of an intellectual pursuit, rather than the product of any great emotion. The vicar of the parish, in particular, conforms to this idea of an abstract, intellectual faith and is entertainingly described as having ‘regretted the bible – to the extent of distributing translations of the *Odyssey* round the village [...] He knew the whole of Homer by heart: each morning, between a cold bath and breakfast, he would compose a few hexameters of his own’, (51) whilst, when Amos first comes to court Mary at the vicarage where her father lives, he is confronted by a vast library of literature. The Anglican calling, as depicted in the novel, is simply an excuse to pursue a life of scholarship, and is ultimately out of touch with the realities of Welsh rural life, as Jan Morris observes: “The established Church in Wales had grown more English than ever, more blatantly allied to the landed classes, and much more out of touch with the needs of the people, who called it [...] “the old traitress” (119).

By contrast, the Nonconformism of the Welsh chapels connects more directly to the natural world of the Welsh farmers, and offered Chatwin an allegory for the ideas around asceticism that so attracted him to the Welsh way of life. On the Black Hill is not truly concerned with religion in the sense that it is ‘about’ faith or religious devotion; it is not a holy book. Rather, Chatwin sees in the bible archetypal stories which allow him to draw out greater resonance from the narrative he is weaving. Like the farmers who prefer the Old

Testament 'because there were many more stories about sheep farming' (28), or Lewis and Benjamin, to whom Hellfire is 'Something like London, I expect' (202) and the gates to The Vision 'the Four Gates of Paradise' (88), Chatwin's interpretation of Nonconformism is secular and allegorical, tying in to his own preconceived notions of the dignity of rural life as offering a solution to the affliction of restlessness. The ascetic vision of chapel doctrine essentially offered the writer a central idea on which to hang his notion of a possible settled life; it provides the philosophical support to Chatwin's perhaps rather nebulous idea.

The doctrine of Nonconformism recurs throughout the novel, but it is only in the final pages of On the Black Hill that the significance of the subject becomes clear. As the key characters of the novel assemble in chapel and patiently listen to the sermon of Mr Isaac Lewis, the central theme of On the Black Hill becomes apparent. The novel, predicated on an oppositional structure that runs through almost every element of the work, is centrally about the need for balance; a balance that Lewis and Benjamin find in one another, and that is implicitly present in the frugal life of the Welsh borders. It is an argument against excess in any form:

They had gathered in this humble chapel to thank the Lord for a sufficiency. The Lord had fed them, clothed them, and given the necessities of life. He was not a hard taskmaster. The message of Ecclesiastes was not a hard message. There was a time and a place for everything – a time to have fun, to laugh, to dance, to enjoy the beauty of the earth, these beautiful flowers in their season...

Yet they should also remember that wealth was a burden, that worldly goods would stop them travelling to the City of the Lamb...

"For the City we seek is an Abiding City, a place in another country where we must find rest, or be restless for ever. Our life is a bubble. We are born. We float upwards. We are carried hither and thither by the breezes. We glitter in the sunshine. Then, all of a sudden, the bubble bursts and we fall to the earth

as specks of moisture. We are as these dahlias, cut down by the first frosts of autumn...” (259)

This sermon, which acts as the thematic apotheosis of the novel, reaffirms the central notions of the work; that in the frugal asceticism of the Welsh borders, Chatwin perceives a possible solution to the restlessness that so afflicted him personally, and that he extends to all those labouring under the yoke of civilised settlement. The notion of a life in balance can be seen as linking back to some of his key ideas from “The Nomadic Alternative”, in which he argued for the consolatory effects of a profound connection to nature, which he identified, at that time, only in the primitive life of Neolithic man, arguing that ‘Only at such a level of human society, reduced to its absolute minimum, do we find the dream of every idealist thinker – the non-violent Society of Equals’ (22).

One finds then that On the Black Hill, despite its relatively prosaic setting and foregrounding of sedentary life, occupies the same intellectual ground as its precursors and successors in Chatwin’s oeuvre. Ultimately, one realises, the division between the sedentary and peripatetic in Chatwin’s work is actually not always of key importance; what the author is really interested in is discovering a means of living outside of the pressures of materialism and mass culture. In Chatwin’s work this is most obviously and frequently found in travel; however, as has been seen in On the Black Hill, the author posits the idea that such an escape can also be found in settled isolation. For Chatwin the life of the nomad and of the anchorite were of roughly equal interest, as is evident in the description of the dwelling of Father Terence in The Songlines:

Father Terence had found his Thebaid on the shores of the Timor Sea.

He lived in a hermitage cobbled from corrugated sheet and whitewashed, and set among clumps of padanus on a dune of floury white sand [...] He had lived here for seven years. (63)

On the Black Hill's notion of a hermitic existence offers another possible way out of the restlessness engendered by settled, civilised life; it represented another facet in Chatwin's continuing exploration of how best to be in the world. Chatwin's next work would address the subject even more straightforwardly; having concentrated, in his first three works, on offering a literary representation of his key ideas around restlessness and human existence, Chatwin chose for his next project to re-approach the theoretical material he had amassed in preparation for "The Nomadic Alternative".

Chapter Seven: ‘Transformations’

Changes of shape, new forms, are the theme which my
spirit impels me
now to recite. Inspire me, O gods (it is you who have even
transformed my art), and spin me a thread from the
world’s beginning
down to my lifetime, in one continuous poem. (1)
Ovid, Metamorphoses

Ignatieff: Let me see if I understand this. Human beings
originate on the desert plains of Africa three million years ago...

Chatwin: Yes...

Ignatieff: And they gradually acquire a set of instinctual
behaviours that enable them to survive on the grasslands and
vanquish their predators...

Chatwin: Yes...

Ignatieff: ...and as they acquire a set of instinctual nomadic
patterns of behaviour they also acquire a meaning system, a set of
myths which are imprinted on the brain over millions of years.

Chatwin: Yes...

Ignatieff: ...and these are the story patterns that keep recurring
even in the modern day.

Chatwin: Absolutely. (29–30)

Interview by Michael Ignatieff

Bruce Chatwin’s first three works offer profound insight into the author’s
preoccupation with the subject of restlessness. All three texts – In Patagonia,
The Viceroy of Ouidah and On the Black Hill – share a commonality in their
analysis of what Michael Ignatieff refers to as Chatwin’s ‘question of
questions’ (26), centrally interrogating why it is that people feel compelled to
travel away from their station in life, and what can possibly be done to stop the
compulsion. In Patagonia presents a place and community that becomes a very
metaphor for the idea of restlessness, focussing on those who travelled to the
land in hope of a better life; a life that they saw receding before them upon their
arrival on the peninsula. The Viceroy of Ouidah narrows the author’s focus to
present an uncompromising vision of an individual afflicted by a raging internal
dissatisfaction that emerges from sublimation in acts of violence and sex. On the
Black Hill, meanwhile, tentatively explores the possibility of an ascetic solution

to the conundrum, positing the lifestyle of Welsh hill farmers as a possible way out of settled, civilised life whilst simultaneously continuing to explore the debates between travel and settlement present in the author's previous works. These three texts are formally very different, as has been seen. However, they share not only a preoccupation with a particular subject, but also a commonality of approach; all three deal with the topic of restlessness obliquely, through character and theme. There is rarely any attempt to engage with the subject head on.

Chatwin's fourth published work, The Songlines, abandons this reticence, full-bloodedly engaging with his subject in an overt and unabashed manner. The text revives the work that Chatwin failed to bring to completion in "The Nomadic Alternative", offering a new version of the theories he espoused in that text; namely, that humankind is hard-wired for a life on the road. The possibility of readdressing this material resulted from the author's discovery of the Aboriginal songlines, which Chatwin describes as:

[A] labyrinth of invisible pathways which stretch to every corner of Australia. Aboriginal creation myths tell of the legendary totemic ancestors – part animal, part man – who create themselves and then set out on immense journeys across the continent, singing the name of everything that crosses their path and so singing the world into existence. In fact, there's hardly a rock or a creek or a stand of eucalyptus that isn't an "event" on one or other of the songlines. In other words, the whole of Australia can be read as a musical score... (Interview by Michael Ignatieff 31)

Despite telling Ignatieff that he didn't 'quite know what implications to draw from them' (31), Chatwin saw the idea of the songlines as a 'springboard from which to explore the innate restlessness of man' ('The Songlines Quartet'). The Songlines presents the idea, fundamentally derived from the manuscript of "The Nomadic Alternative", that humans are pre-programmed with an instinctive nomadic urge which led, in the early stages of man's development, to

the development of a system of meaning predicated on this nomadic life; one now sublimated in Western culture as we have abandoned our wandering roots and relaxed into lives of cosseted settlement, but still present in the continuing traditions of the Australian Aborigines.

It is an argument around the same Rousseauian notions of the natural state of man that one finds repeatedly in Chatwin's notes and unpublished manuscripts, and which is implied in the fascination of a work such as On the Black Hill with the renunciation of the civilised world by the farmers of the Welsh borders. Chatwin had been preoccupied with the idea of the 'noble savage' since his days at Edinburgh, as noted in Chapter One, captivated by the notion that he could discover a representative of the species 'subject to so few passions, and sufficient unto himself, he had only such feelings and such knowledge as suited his condition; he felt only his true needs, saw only what he believed it was necessary to see, and his intelligence made no more progress than his vanity' (Rousseau 104). Chatwin had tried before to discover the right candidate upon which to hang this description, without any great success; as he writes in one of his moleskine notebooks: 'If you're going to idealize the Noble Savage – as I do – the problem is to pick the right savage' (Chatwin Archive Box 6).

What he was looking for was specific: 'The hunters and gatherers who live at the minimal level of material culture in bands of twenty-five to fifty, bound up within a kinship structure of five hundred or so all speaking the same dialect, are usually to be distinguished from all others by their complete freedom of movement. For our purpose they are the right sort of savage', (134) he wrote in "The Nomadic Alternative". In that work, Chatwin strikes upon the Yaghan Indians of Tierra del Fuego as prime candidates for this notion of the

noble wandering savage. Historical precedent did not offer Chatwin much support in his choice of the Yaghan. Charles Darwin had visited Tierra del Fuego in December 1832 and had been profoundly unimpressed by the aboriginals he encountered, commenting that the Fuegian language ‘scarcely deserves to be called articulate’, (Darwin 173) adding that ‘the cries of domestic animals are far more intelligible’ (qtd. in Beer 23). His impression was compounded by his preconceived notion that the standard of intelligence and civilisation dwindled the closer one got to the poles; Tierra del Fuego, the final stop before the Antarctic, was, then, prime territory for the discovery of the most limited of beings. For Darwin, thus, the Yaghan of Tierra del Fuego represented the most primitive state of man; his assessment was social Darwinism of the most profound sort.

Chatwin saw Darwin’s assessment as a grave injustice and in a long section of “The Nomadic Alternative”, he sought to rehabilitate the reputation of the Yaghan, positing them as representatives of the finest ascetic existence:

The Yaghan had invested in freedom of movement, not in things. Therein lay their sense of well-being. Those who abandon a settled existence may feel the flickerings of such liberty, but this is a poor substitute for the liberty of those innocent of the alternative. The Yaghan – in common with other hunting and gathering peoples – knew that settlement entails hoarding, and hoarding the genesis of a hierarchy. Settlement robs men of the risks that give a sense of accomplishment to the processes of life. [...] As an act of policy they had remained in the state that Rousseau recognised as being the best for man. This was *not* the State of Nature, extolled by the Romantics, a condition we would now describe as sub-human passivity. This state demands man fully formed, fully equipped with an intelligent brain, fully satisfying his material and intellectual needs, each for himself within the framework of a society of equals. (128)

Chatwin wrote the above at a time in his life when his only encounter with the territory and lifestyle of the Yaghan was through the work of anthropologists and missionaries such as Martin Gusinde or Lucas Bridges.

When Chatwin later visited Patagonia, it could perhaps have been expected that he would have extrapolated those second-hand theories with his own first-hand observations. However, in his depiction of the South American continent in In Patagonia, Chatwin was unable to expand his assessment of the Yaghan, or to definitively anoint them as the embodiment of Rousseau's Natural Man, for there were simply no living examples for Chatwin to observe or interview. The communities had been almost totally decimated by the epidemics that beset them after the colonisation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "It was the epidemics," a pure-blood Yaghan known as Grandpa Felipe told Chatwin on the occasion of the author's visit to Tierra del Fuego. "The epidemics came and we watched our people die. Mister Lawrence wrote words on stone when they died. We did not know about epidemics. How could we know? We had good health then. We never had epidemics before" (IP 171). Lucas Bridges recounted the demise of the native tribes with sadness in his account of Patagonian life, The Uttermost Part of the Earth:

My hopes that Tierra del Fuego would be the happy home of worthy descendants of their proud splendid forebears, who had so freely roamed the woods, were not to be realised. With the inrush of civilisation into such a small country, the Indian way of life could not prevail against it. Those of the Indians who avoided hard work as much as possible fast degenerated into "poor whites". Even then, the Ona might have survived as a people had it not been for two epidemics of measles that swept through Ona-land [...] and destroyed over seventy percent of the remnants of the tribe. (520)

The only reminder of their existence was to be found in the 'few piles of crustacean shells' ("NA" 122) which marked their campsites.

Nonetheless, the way of life embodied by the Yaghan exacted a profound effect on Chatwin's imagination, in particular as a result of the documentary evidence the author discovered of their profound linguistic abilities. In the course of researching the life of the Yaghan, Chatwin had discovered a text

compiled by Thomas Bridges, father to Lucas, who himself grew up a foundling in the charge of Revd. George Pakenham Despard, secretary of the Patagonian Missionary Society. Bridges was responsible for the compilation of a comprehensive dictionary of the Yaghan Indian language, a text which now resides in the British Museum and which forms the only comprehensive overview of native Patagonian culture still extant. This text, which Chatwin wrote about at some length in *In Patagonia*, was the result of close work with the Yaghan Indians during Bridges' years in charge of the first successful Patagonian mission at Ushuaia on Tierra del Fuego. It offered Chatwin a tantalising glimpse into a linguistic system firmly predicated on the individual territory of the native tribe. Chatwin began to tentatively explore the theoretical possibilities emanating from Bridges' dictionary, intrigued by the close connection between language and territory in Yaghan culture: 'The Yaghan tongue – and by inference all language – proceeds as a system of navigation,' he wrote. 'Named things are fixed points, aligned or compared, which allow the speaker to plot the next move' (IP 175). However, the tragic demise of the Yaghan population by the time Chatwin came to visit Patagonia meant that, despite the obvious fascination with which Chatwin regarded those communities described by Thomas and Lucas Bridges, the author was not able to fully extend his apparent theoretical interest in the linguistic systems of ancient tribal communities. It was only upon his visit to Australia some eight years later that Chatwin encountered a *surviving* tribal community in whose linguistic systems the connection between territory, nomadism and language was still intact.

Chatwin's interest in the Aboriginal notion of the songlines had initially been piqued by another fairly obscure work of literary analysis written by a non-

Aboriginal who had grown up on the Hermannsburg mission of Central Australia in the early decades of the twentieth century. The author was an anthropologist named Theodor Strehlow and the book, now long since out of print, was titled Songs of Central Australia. This enormous work of cultural history documented the, at the time little known, Aboriginal tradition of the songlines, its relationship to the landscape and its thematic commonality with Western mythological structures. The tangible notion of the songlines, of walking trails criss-crossing the continent, offered, in the author's eyes, cultural evidence, supplementary to that already outlined in "The Nomadic Alternative", that humankind had developed in an early stage of evolution an inherent instinct for travel. In settled cultures, Chatwin's argument goes, this instinct is still manifest, though sublimated, and emerges in the affliction of restlessness, as well as a common preoccupation with myths and stories of journeying. Strehlow offered a unifying theory, tying together the continuing Aboriginal tradition of the songlines with historical Western myth and thus demonstrating a united foundation of preoccupation.

Strehlow was born in 1908 on the Hermannsburg mission, south west of Alice Springs, of which his father, Pastor Carl Strehlow, was a superintendent. Theodor was brought up as part of the local Aranda²⁷ Aboriginal community, learning the language and taking part in the ceremonial life of the group – though significantly he was never initiated. Following in the footsteps of his father, who had also studied Aboriginal culture, he attended the University of Adelaide and later became an anthropologist focussing on the Aranda language. Songs of Central Australia was his keystone work, the culmination of his life's effort to understand and transcribe the complex network of Aboriginal verse

²⁷ There are a number of variant spellings of Aranda including Arerrnta and Ararrnta; I am employing Strehlow's own preferred spelling.

which Chatwin popularised as ‘songlines’. Given his assimilation into Aranda culture, Strehlow was in a unique position to study the songs and myths of the central Australian Aborigines. Indeed, he was apparently openly encouraged to do so by the elders of the community who felt, in a not dissimilar fashion to those exiles Chatwin encountered in Patagonia, that the tenets of their culture were gradually being eroded by the impositions of modernity.

Unfortunately for Strehlow, however, his involvement as a white man in Aboriginal affairs created some controversy, not least as a result of the apparent bequest of a large quantity of totemic objects to the anthropologist by the elders of the Aranda community, who felt their own sons and grandsons could not be trusted with these sacred artefacts. Strehlow’s ownership of these objects, of which there were almost twelve-hundred, coupled with his publication of a number of photos of secret ceremonial rites in a German magazine, led to many accusations of exploitation in the wider community of Aboriginal activists. Strehlow was subject to many of the short-sighted accusations which also dogged Thomas Bridges’ reputation following the publication of his Yaghan dictionary. Maria Fernanda Peñaloza has asserted that Bridges’ endeavours were ‘shaped by the Imperial rhetoric responsible for a discourse of cultural supremacy’ (91), and argued, without proof, that the transcription process necessary to the writing of the Yaghan dictionary was questionable as it may have taken place against the will of the Yaghan people. Like Peñaloza, critics of Strehlow’s work also ignored the monumental contribution texts such as Bridges’ Yaghan dictionary or Strehlow’s Songs of Central Australia make to the comprehension of a culture that is now irretrievable.

As a result of the political groundswell over the land rights issue in the 1970s and 80s, Strehlow’s dedication to a community he saw himself as part of

was overlooked, with activists obsessively focussed on the attempt to return the objects bequeathed to him by the Aranda to their ‘rightful’ owners – many of whom were long since dead. Chatwin catches some of the irony and complexity of this project, which continues in Australia today, in a passage from The Songlines where Bruce attends a barbeque in Alice hosted by a number of Aboriginal activists, including the character nicknamed ‘Gym Bore’:

To “de-programme” sacred knowledge, he said, meant examining archives for unpublished material on Aboriginals; you then returned the relevant pages to the rightful “owners”. It meant transferring copyright from the author of a book to the people it described; returning photographs to the photographed (or their descendants); recording tapes to the recorded, and so forth. I heard him out, gasping with disbelief. “And who,” I asked, “will decide who these ‘owners’ are?” “We have ways of researching that kind of information.” “Your ways or their ways?” (43).

Strehlow died in 1978 just hours before the official opening of the Strehlow Research Foundation, an institution intended to collate and archive the notes, recordings, photographs and sacred objects which Strehlow had collected in the course of his work. His last words were said to be spoken in Aranda.²⁸

Bruce Chatwin was fully cogent of the controversies that swirled around the author, and felt aggrieved that short-term politics had obstructed what he saw as a hugely significant piece of work. Chatwin was fascinated by the immensity of Strehlow’s ideas; Songs of Central Australia, in its dense theorising, heartfelt argument and frequent incoherence, appealed to the author’s grand scale of thinking, offering what seemed to be a ‘Key to All Mythologies,’ as Chatwin acknowledges in The Songlines:

He wanted to show how every aspect of Aboriginal song had its counterpart in Hebrew, Ancient Greek, Old Norse or Old English:

²⁸ See Jones, Philip. ‘Strehlow, Theodor George Henry (1908–1978)’. Australian Dictionary of Biography. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002. 16:333-336.

the literatures we acknowledge as our own. Having grasped the connection of song and land, he wished to strike at the roots of song itself: to find in song a key to unravelling the mystery of the human condition. (TS 69)

Strehlow's work is a grand attempt to unite the seemingly disparate western poetic tradition and that of the Aborigines, viewing the extant Aboriginal tradition as the last remaining echo of a common heritage: 'In Central Australian verse,' Strehlow writes, 'we find literary matter probably not unsimilar to the raw material from which poets like Homer's predecessors hammered out poetry as an independent medium of artistic expression' (657). Strehlow's ideas appealed so strongly to Chatwin in part because they echoed and supported the theories that the author had already tentatively expressed in "The Nomadic Alternative". In that work, Chatwin had put forward the notion that our narrative preoccupations emerged from common evolutionary experience on the plains of Africa:

The idea of the journey is, along with the Creation and Oedipus stories, one of the most persistent of all human myths. And for a band of wandering hunters – perhaps twenty five of them, perhaps fifty – walking unprotected through the wilderness, matching their footfalls to the progress of the seasons – from the water-hole to sources of food or on visits to their neighbour, savouring alternate phases of plenty or want, suffering the trials of youth and the debilities of age, life was quite literally a journey – and, in the light of palaeozoology, a dangerous and heroic one for all. Through life our ancestors walked through a sequence of initiations or new beginnings and correctly timed their appointment with death. [...] This archetypal sequence is rooted in the psychology of every individual. (36)

As has been seen in earlier chapters, Chatwin described in "The Nomadic Alternative" many religious and cultural systems of thought that hold a central preoccupation with journeying at their core. However, in that work, Chatwin's analysis was predicated on cultures and religions where the connection between preoccupation and everyday existence had been lost; the archetype had been rationalised and incorporated into ritual. Strehlow's work was significant

because it provided documentary evidence of a living culture that, though struggling with the impositions of modernity, continued to live a life in which the connections between movement, landscape and narrative were manifest and intact.

Chatwin drew from Songs of Central Australia the idea that the Aboriginal life represented the state of nature that he had proposed in “The Nomadic Alternative”: a life in absolute synchronicity with the landscape and environment, evidenced by the cultural association between land and narrative and predicated on a pre-eminent nomadism. This lifestyle represented for Chatwin the epitome of human evolution from which settlement and civilisation was an unfortunate aberration. The life of the Aranda offers the vision of a ‘moral universe – as moral as the New Testament – in which the structures of kinship reach out to all living men, to all his fellow creatures, and to the rivers, the rocks and the trees’ (70). The Aborigines are viewed – as are the Nemadi in Chapter 25 of the novel²⁹ – as representatives of a ‘Golden Age’ of nomadic life in literal harmony with their own territory, a golden age that disappeared in western culture with the advent of settled agriculture, which began to restrict individual freedoms:

People now took shelter in houses; their homes hitherto had been caves, dense thickets or brushwood fastened together with bark.
For the first time also the corn was sown in long ploughed furrows,
and oxen groaned beneath the weight of the heavy yoke.
(Metamorphoses 1:120–125)

Chatwin argues that the peaceful, nomadic lifestyle of the Aborigines offers evidence of a common state of nature that has been sublimated in modern

²⁹ Chatwin himself describes it as a novel, citing the Spanish notion of the *novela de viaje*, of which Don Quixote is an example.

life, but is still manifest in our cultural heritage: ‘I felt the Songlines were not necessarily an Australian phenomenon,’ he writes, ‘but universal’ (280). ‘All other successive systems were variants – or perversions – of this original model’, (280) he added. Strehlow’s work, in its expansive theorising and poetic descriptions of the interconnected nature of all human preoccupation, offered Chatwin the foundation upon which to propose the universal relevance of his totalising assertion that mankind’s heritage was one of peaceful nomadism in tune with the environment, or, as it is put in The Songlines, that ‘[n]atural selection has designed us – from the structure of our brain-cells to the structure of our big toe – for a career of seasonal journeys *on foot*’ (162).

The Songlines consistently expresses this idea of universal heritage in the perceived connection it draws, suggested by Strehlow, between the culture of the Aborigines and the tradition of western myth, referring to the songlines themselves as ‘a spaghetti of Iliads and Odysseys, writhing this way and that’ (13) and tying the notion of dreaming tracks to stories of national and cultural identity:

“Any species,” he said “can be a Dreaming. A virus can be a Dreaming. You can have a chickenpox Dreaming, a rain Dreaming, a desert-orange Dreaming, a lice Dreaming. In the Kimberleys they’ve now got a money Dreaming.”
 “And the Welsh have leeks, the Scots thistles and Daphne was changed into a laurel.”
 “Same old story,” he said. (12)

In the quotation above, Chatwin overtly invokes the compendium of western classical myth, Ovid’s Metamorphoses, in the narrator’s mention of the transformation of Daphne. This is the first of many allusions to classical mythology within The Songlines, and to Ovid’s poem in particular; the inclusion of these references speaks of the universal impulse of the text: ‘myths’, Chatwin writes towards the end of The Songlines, ‘are fragments of the soul-life of Early

Man' (216). One notices later in the novel that the story of the cuckolded Lizard man is referred to by the narrator as that of an antipodean Helen: 'The distance from here to Port Augusta as the crow flew was roughly 1100 miles, about twice the distance – so we calculated – from Troy to Ithaca. We tried to imagine an Odyssey with a verse for every twist and turn of the hero's ten year voyage' (107). Chatwin wrote in his notebook: 'I had an idea that Ovid's Metamorphoses would be the key book for this journey,' (Chatwin Archive Box 35) and Ovid's eclectic volume of tales, of which Arkady buys a copy for the narrator, certainly provides the author with a neat corollary to the songlines themselves:

Using my leather rucksack as a pillow, I leaned back against a tree-trunk and leafed through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The story of Lykæon's transformation into a wolf took me back to a blustery spring day in Arkadia and seeing, in the limestone cap of Mount Lykæon itself, an image of the crouching beast-king. I read of Hyacinth and Adonis; of Deucalion and the Flood; and how the 'living things' were created from the warm Nilotic ooze. And it struck me, from what I now knew of the Songlines, 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. (117)

The appeal to universality indicated by Chatwin's conflation of the Aboriginal notion of the songlines and western poetic mythology is reaffirmed by the authorial vision that acts as the apotheosis of the author's thematic explorations:

And here I must take a leap of faith: into regions I would not expect anyone else to follow.

I have a vision of the Songlines stretching across the continents and ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may, now and then, catch an echo); and that these trails must reach back, in time and space, to an isolated pocket in the African savannah, where the First Man opening his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him, shouted the opening stanza of the World Song, 'I AM!' (280)

The notion of the songlines thus becomes a universal metaphor, uniting and unifying the human species.

However, this appeal to the universal, whilst poetically stirring, resulted in some artistic controversy, for, as a result of Chatwin's global perspective in the work, one finds that the Aboriginal communities function in the novel more metaphorically than actually, an artistic decision which some have seen as negligent: 'The "Abos" are talked about endlessly; the Aborigine Problem is presented from a variety of sharp angles; but the people themselves wander like ghosts through the book, largely voiceless extras in a play supposedly dedicated to them, statues on which ideas are draped, not beings vibrant in their own right' (Andrew Harvey). Harvey here suggests that Chatwin is in some way negligent in his concentration on the philosophical aspects of Aboriginal culture, a criticism picked up by Michael Ignatieff:

Ignatieff: An accusatory voice would say, you've managed just enough entanglement with the Third World to get some fiction out of it, but you've never actually got involved.

Chatwin: *Now* you've caught me on tricky ground. (*Pause.*) If I had got involved, I wouldn't write the books I do. (34)

However, criticism of Chatwin's approach seems as short-sighted as that of Theodor Strehlow's work, resting, as Andrew Palmer points out, on the false 'presupposition that the "political" cause is the only real issue here, and that those ritual and spiritual aspects of Aboriginal life which Chatwin brings to the centre of his book are, in comparison, an unimportant, appendant concern' (93–94). *The Songlines* should be read not as a specifically Australian or Aboriginal novel, but rather one that uses the Aboriginal world as an example of a natural, nomadic state of humanity, providing a way 'of living concordant with our instinct for restlessness' (Palmer 100).

As has been seen above, the ideas he found in Australia leant Chatwin the

material he needed to cogently express his poetic theories around the best state of man. As is also clear, Chatwin had not in any way simplified those ideas in the intervening years; his philosophical system of nomadism remains relatively impenetrable to even the well-versed reader. In the following section, the focus of the chapter will shift to look at how Chatwin avoided the pitfalls that dogged “The Nomadic Alternative” and that were eminently present in his material on the songlines by deploying his key ideas in a sophisticated and accessible literary framework.

In “The Nomadic Alternative”, Bruce Chatwin had been unable to present his ideas around restlessness and nomadism in a cogent or satisfying way as a result of the unsuccessful fusion in that work of anthropological assessment of nomadic life and the analysis of the western phenomenon of the wanderer. The work was too diffuse to be taken seriously as an academic text, and too didactic to appeal to a general audience. The problem was not one of material – he had amassed a wealth of literature on his subject – but one of approach: ‘I had a go at laying down the law,’ he told Michael Ignatieff, in obvious reference to the aborted “The Nomadic Alternative”, ‘I can’t tell you how pretentious you sound’ (24). In The Songlines, though Chatwin does, as we have seen, overtly return to the intellectual territory of “The Nomadic Alternative”, he chooses to approach his material this time in a substantively different fashion.

At the point he began writing The Songlines, Chatwin was a successful and celebrated British author. His last book had been awarded a Whitbread prize, receiving ecstatic reviews and he was frequently talked of as one of the brightest young stars of the literary firmament; he was, in short, a very different,

far more confident intellectual being than the university dropout in his later twenties who had attempted “The Nomadic Alternative”. Chatwin realised that if he was to make his study of restlessness effective, he would be forced to abandon the academic pretensions of his previous work, playing to his strengths as a writer of the imagination. Chatwin has been criticised for the lack of academic rigour evident in The Songlines; however, the author simply didn’t see objective anthropological insight as the fundamental goal of his work, as his wife Elizabeth observes: ‘He didn’t try and be academic, because he knew he’d be accused of bad science, bad scholarship, of not being a proper academic’ (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin). Chatwin instead approached the work as a loose philosophical discussion of the fascinating – and at some times unrelated ideas – around restlessness that he had discovered over his years of research, forming, in the course of his work, a Songline of his own; a modern day version of the eclectic Metamorphoses.

Chatwin employed a number of literary devices and techniques in order to achieve this effect. Perhaps most notable of these is the selection of personal anecdotes, quotations and hypotheses which constitutes much of the latter third of the novel under the title ‘From the Notebooks’. This section recycles much of the material that Chatwin had assembled for “The Nomadic Alternative”, presenting a diverse and, frequently, only tangentially connected set of small sections. Chatwin covers material from Heidegger, John Donne, Herodotus, William Blake and many other diverse writers, as well as including authorial remembrances and philosophical musings, such as this account of an encounter with a hippie:

*In the People’s Park, I was buttonholed by a hippie, prematurely aged.
 “Stop the killing!” he said. “Stop the killing!”
 “You wouldn’t by any chance”, I said, “think of telling a tiger to*

chew cud?"
I got up, ready to run for it.
"Shit!" he shouted.
"Think of Hitler!" I shouted back. "Think of Rudolph Hess!
Always snooping in each other's veggie picnic-baskets." (237)

As has been described, Chatwin saw in the phenomenon of the songlines evidence of the natural state of human goodness and, in the 'From the Notebooks' section of the novel, he engages more fully with the notion, presenting in depth and breadth arguments, quotations and anecdotes around man as a naturally 'aggressive' being. Chatwin aims to contradict the assertions, raised by Raymond Dart and explored more fully in the first chapter of this thesis, that early human social systems were predicated on internecine violence, employing evidence he had sourced from Robert Brain's work The Hunter or the Hunted? which seemed to offer proof (since somewhat modified) that man's enemy was not himself, but was rather a large cat known by genus as 'Dinofelis,' who preyed on the sedentary *Homo Habilis*: '*Could it be, one is tempted to ask, that Dinofelis was Our Beast? A Beast set aside from all the other Avatars of Hell? The Arch-Enemy who stalked us, stealthily and cunningly, wherever we went? But whom, in the end, we got the better of?*' (253).

And how, according to Chatwin, did we get the better of the beast? '*We used our brains,*' he argues. '*Everywhere in eastern Africa, the more sedentary browsers gave way to 'brainier' migratory grazers. The basis for a sedentary existence was simply no longer there*' (247). Simultaneous to this development towards migration, *homo habilis* also seems to have developed the ability to construct language: '*Inside the mouth, too, there are major architectural changes, especially in the alveolar region where the tongue hits the palate. And since man is by definition the Language Animal, it is hard to see what these changes are about unless they are for language*' (249).

In the 'From the Notebooks' section, then, Chatwin proposes that our instinct for travel and our linguistic abilities developed concurrently in order to head off the threat of the big cat 'Dinofelis'. These assertions link into Chatwin's wider points around the idea of the songlines as echoes of a universal instinct for travel which is profoundly connected to our linguistic tradition, and also supports the argument of both "The Nomadic Alternative" and The Songlines that humankind is naturally good.

The argument that Chatwin presents, is not, however, didactic or particularly rigorous; it does not adopt the hectoring tone of "The Nomadic Alternative" at any point. Instead, the effect is impressionistic; I have constructed from Chatwin's novel what is (I hope) a cogent central argument, but the reader would almost certainly come away from the text with a rather more general sense of a poetic connection between land, song and travel. Chatwin's arguments are in no way watertight, often skirting around the specifics of *how* our wandering and our language are connected, and frequently conflating, as in "The Nomadic Alternative", separate tribal groups that have little in common aside from a tendency towards movement and away from the settled life. As Andrew Palmer points out: 'The Songlines glosses over the differences between hunter and nomad, while emphasizing the division between wanderers in general and settlers' (106). This lack of rigour is, however, part of the implied aim of the 'From the Notebooks' section, as has been described. No-one could think, coming away from The Songlines, that Chatwin had attempted a cogent and rigorous academic examination and failed; the work quite obviously and consciously does not conform to the generic expectations of such a work. The novel is rather designed to attain a sort of poetic assessment of why we, as a species, suffer from the anxieties of restlessness, as Colin Thubron

acknowledged: ‘I can’t say I believe the songlines literally,’ he told Nicholas Shakespeare. ‘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’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 487). This seems to have been Chatwin’s aim in putting together the ‘From the Notebooks’ sections, and it is certainly one of the main factors in the great commercial success of the novel, involving the reader, as it does, in a sophisticated and romantic hypothesis around humankind’s restless tendencies.

However, despite the positive effect of the notebooks section on most readers, the author’s original intention had been for this element of the work to have been somewhat shorter. In the novel, Chatwin describes the ‘From the Notebooks’ section as being assembled *in situ*, working in an air-conditioned caravan in Cullen. The description of the writing of this erudite and polymathic kaleidoscope of nomadism fosters an idealised vision of the authorial process: ‘There was a plyboard top which pulled out over the second bunk to make a desk. There was even a swivelling office chair. I put my pencils in a tumbler and my Swiss Army knife beside them. I unpacked some exercise pads and, with the obsessive neatness that goes with the beginning of a project, I made three neat stacks of my “Paris” notebooks’ (160). This trope of the author writing *in situ* has emerged as a defining characteristic of the modern travelogue, much emulated (and to some extent mocked as self-evidently artificial) in the genre³⁰, a fact for which Chatwin, who is constantly flourishing a notebook in The Songlines, must take at least partial responsibility:

My reference books are laid out in a line on the floor; the pads containing my library notes are open. Files full of photocopied

³⁰ See Grant 257 for further evidence of this trope.

articles lie piled up below the window; my pencils are sharpened and upended in a glass. A matchbox lies ready beside the paraffin storm lantern: the monastery generator is turned off after compline, and if I am to write tonight I will have to do so by the light of its yellow flame. (4)

The above passage is taken from From the Holy Mountain: A Journey among the Christians of the Middle East, by William Dalrymple, an author who so self-consciously emulates Chatwin that he began the writing of an earlier work, City of Djinns at the very desk at which Chatwin in part composed The Songlines. However, as so often with the apparently objective genre of travel writing, this vision of the creative process is a construct of the imagination, for Chatwin's assertion that 'From the Notebooks' was constructed whilst in Australia is a conceit. In fact, the notebooks section was assembled in the Chilterns under somewhat desperate circumstances, as disclosed in an article Chatwin wrote for the New York Review of Books, itself subject to some artistic license: 'In the summer of 1986 I completed my book *The Songlines* under difficult conditions. I had in fact picked up a very rare fungus of the bone marrow in China. Certain I was going to die, I decided to finish the text and put myself into the hands of doctors. My work would then be done. The last third of the manuscript was a commonplace book of quotations and vignettes intended to back up the main line of argument. I put this into shape on sweltering summer days, wrapped in shawls, shivering with cold in front of the kitchen stove. It was a race for time.' (The Songlines Quartet) Chatwin's rare bone fungus was in fact a manifestation of the disease that he concealed successfully for many years behind various exotic afflictions and of which he tragically died – AIDS. The debilitating effects of the disease led, inevitably, to artistic compromises in the course of writing the novel. Chatwin had never intended to make the notebooks section so entirely separate and so comprehensive. A hand-

written plan, stored amongst papers in the Bodleian library, shows the notebooks originally constituting far less of the total work than was the case upon publication.

For some, the extent of the 'From the Notebooks' section offers, as has been argued, a opportunity for the reader to make his or her own mind up. They provide, unedited, the bare bones of the secondary material that Chatwin had collected over the course of his research and thus allow the central thrust of Chatwin's interest in restlessness to be conveyed without dogmatically arguing a case. They also key into a Chatwin obsession; that of compendia such as Edith Sitwell's Planet and Glowworm. Chatwin talked admiringly of Walter Benjamin's assertion that 'the ideal book would be a book of quotations' (Interview by Michael Ignatieff 26). For others, however, The Songlines is not the book it would have been were Chatwin truly well. Susannah Clapp holds this view: 'It is sort of all over the place and not least because he had to put the notebooks largely un-edited into the rest of the material [...] I think he might have reconsidered it if he was fully himself' (Interview with Susannah Clapp).

Irrespective of the artistic merits or otherwise of this approach, the use of the quotations from the notebooks do undoubtedly help to position the work in a way that avoids the didacticism of an academic approach, softening the impact of this dense and often turgid material. The notebooks were only one part of the solution that Chatwin struck upon, however, in his plan to more accessibly present his amassed material on restlessness. Chatwin also drew formal elements of his work from the philosophical reading he had been undertaking in the course of researching the novel. Thus, alongside the work of Ovid, which provided a unifying model for the thematic narrative of the work, Chatwin

looked to Plato for his specific form of the whole text. He wrote to Elizabeth: ‘At last! I’ve found the right formula for the book. It’s to be called, simply, OF THE NOMADS – *A Discourse*. And it takes the form of about six excursions into the outback with a semi-imaginary character called Sergei during which the narrator and he have long conversations. [...] Needless to say the models for such an enterprise are Plato’s *Symposium* and *The Apology*. But so what? I’ve never seen anything like it in modern literature, a complete hybrid between fiction and philosophy’ (qtd. in Shakespeare 416). Chatwin’s specific choice of classical models is of interest, as The Apology is a rare Platonic work without strict dialogue (constituting Socrates’ speech in his defence during his trial) whilst The Symposium is a dialogue concerning romantic love which involves a number of people. Neither provide a cogent model for the work Chatwin seems to be conceiving in his letter to Elizabeth, of a strict two person dialogue.

Whatever the reason for this seeming aberration, Chatwin did indeed employ a dialogic model in The Songlines – one more related, it must be observed, to Diderot’s Jaques le Fataliste than to Plato – and which he described in the New York Review of Books as ‘an imaginary dialogue in which both narrator and interlocutor had the liberty to be wrong’ (‘The Songlines Quartet’). The two participants in the novel’s dialogue are the narrator named ‘Bruce’ and Arkady Volchok, an Australian of Russian descent who provides the answers to many of Bruce’s informed questions. Chatwin allows Arkady, along with other initiates into the Aboriginal world such as Father Flynn and Marian, to describe the songlines to the narrator, thus simultaneously both avoiding the didacticism which would result from Chatwin himself describing the complexities of Aboriginal culture to the general reader and also helping to lessen the political implications of his actions, as Chatwin himself acknowledged

to Michael Ignatieff: ‘The point of inventing a character like Arkady is that I was able to take a load off my back as an observer’ (34). Arkady was only one side of the dialogue, however, and in the ‘I-named-Bruce’ who forms the other side of the conversation, Chatwin constructed another useful figure; an admirable, erudite character who acts as a knowing ingenue into the Aboriginal world, asking all the right questions and supplying all the right answers:

“You know what our people call the white man?” he asked.
 “Meat,” I suggested.
 “And you know what they call a welfare cheque?”
 “Also meat.”
 “Bring a chair,” he said. “I want to talk to you.” (63)

This tendency towards narratorial idealisation is also demonstrated in the conversation described between Bruce and Konrad Lorenz:

All war propaganda, I went on, proceeded on the assumption that you must degrade the enemy into something bestial, infidel, cancerous and so on. Or, alternatively, your fighters must transform themselves into surrogate beasts – in which case men become their legitimize prey.
 Lorenz tugged at his beard, gave me a searching look and said, ironically or not I’ll never know:
 “What you have just said is totally new.” (221)

The Songlines sees Chatwin at his most mythomaniacal; it is this flamboyant persona that led Andrew Harvey to assert that ‘Nearly every writer of my generation 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.’ The Bruce of The Songlines, whilst an outsider to Aboriginal culture, is an initiate into the sophisticated world of auto-didactic intellectualism:

“So the land,” I said, “must first exist as a concept in the mind? Then it must be sung? Only then can it be said to exist?”
 “True”
 “In other words, “to exist” is “to be perceived”?”
 “Yes.”

“Sounds suspiciously like Bishop Berkeley’s Refutation of Matter.”
 “Or Pure Mind Buddhism,” said Arkady, “which also sees the
 world as an illusion.” (14)

Yet, Chatwin is also capable of self-deprecation in the presentation of his narrator. Arkady’s sometimes sceptical responses to Bruce’s far-flung ideas and pretensions help to soften the representation of the central protagonist:

I pulled from my pocket a black, oil-cloth covered notebook, its pages held in place with an elastic band.
 “Nice notebook,” he said.
 “I used to get them in Paris,” I said. “But now they don’t make them any more.”
 “Paris?” he repeated, raising an eyebrow as if he’d never heard anything so pretentious. (12)

It is through the combination of this humanised, yet idealised, self, with the insider figure of Arkady, in conjunction with the other techniques described above, that Chatwin is able to convey his ideas of restlessness and the human species with greater ease and far more humanity than was achieved in “The Nomadic Alternative”.

The preceding sections have detailed both the grand theory of The Songlines and the structural devices that Chatwin employed to make this theory more palatable to the general reader. However, The Songlines is not simply a book of ideas around restlessness, artfully presented. In the writing of the work, Chatwin adapted the techniques he had utilised in In Patagonia, embodying some of his touchstone concepts within the characters of those who populate the pages of the novel. The work thus has two separate layers in its presentation of the theme of restlessness; on the one hand, it is a non-fiction discourse around the key tenets of Chatwin’s theory of inherited instinct for travel and their relation to the Aboriginal concept of the songlines, whilst, on the other, it is also a novelistic interpretation of a journey through the outback of central Australia

which is freighted with Chatwin's key theme of restlessness. Chatwin employs the land of Australia, and those he finds at its heart, as allegories of the theories he concurrently expresses, embodying the fusion of the personal and the theoretical discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

The outback of Australia, which forms the backdrop to the action of The Songlines, was generally thought of in similar terms to the Patagonian desert; as wild, arid and generally unsuited to human habitation. This reputation of the outback as a blank, unreadable landscape has much to do with the early³¹ history of the continent. Like Patagonia, the nation of Australia was first inhabited on a mass scale by a migrant population. There was, however, a key difference between the early migration to Australia at the end of the eighteenth-century and that to Patagonia in the nineteenth, for this new land in the south seas was to be no refuge from tyranny or poverty. Australia was conceived as a three million square mile jail, intended to house the so-called criminal class of Georgian Britain. As such, Australia can claim – though it often wishes to forget – that it was the only country of the New World to be envisaged as a dystopia: ‘not Rousseau's natural man moving in moral grace and free social contracts, but man coerced, exiled, deracinated, in chains’ (Hughes 1).

As a result of this social experiment, settlement, in the early days of Australian immigration, tended to concentrate around the edges of the continent, for reasons of both ease (it was not feasible or desirable to convey large numbers of convicts to inland penal colonies) and uncertainty – no one knew what lay at the heart of this seemingly vast continent, whose mysteries were only comprehensible, it seemed, to a hardy and inscrutable indigenous population:

³¹ Early, that is, from a western perspective.

Settlement up here proceeded in frog leaps from one little coastal place to the next. Between lay tracts of country that no white man had ever entered. It was disturbing, that: to have unknown country behind you as well as in front. When the hissing of the lamp died out the hut sank into silence. A child's murmuring out of sleep might keep it human for a moment, or a rustling of straw; but what you were left with when the last sleeper settled was the illimitable night, where it lay close over the land. (Malouf 8)

The outback was consequently seen as unreadable, unreachable land, haunted by the spectre of death, littered with the bones of those who tried to make inroads to the centre of the unknown country, or, in the convict days those who set off from the penal colonies, striking out for China, which many believed lay just a short passage north away from Sydney: 'Once, treading through the bracken, his horse's hoof had struck against a human skull, probably that of some convict, escaped from the coastal settlements in search of the paradise those unfortunates used to believe existed in the North' (White 144). The Australian outback was a place of some terror; a repository of tales of Aboriginal sacrifice, of explorers' corpses picked clean by birds of prey, even, in a notorious case in Tasmania, of cannibalism amongst westerners. That particular gruesome tale was initially thought to be a fabrication, so astounding were the assertions of Alexander Pearce, the Irish convict escapee who recounted the story to the magistrate in Hobart after some one hundred days in the bush. They believed Pearce, who had escaped from Macquarie Harbour with seven other convicts, was lying to cover for his accomplices who, they assumed, were still living in the bush. In fact, every one had been eaten until only Pearce remained. Pearce was returned to Sarah Island, and it was only when Pearce escaped again with another convict, Thomas Cox, that the tale was proved to be tragically correct. Pearce was found some ten days after the escape with meat from Cox's body still

in his pocket; he had killed his accomplice despite the availability of other food. Pearce was subsequently returned to Hobart and hanged.³²

Even at the time of the visit of D.H. Lawrence, an author who had, like Chatwin ‘gone a long way from the English Midlands, and got out of the way of them’ (Kangaroo 42), the outback was a repository of unnamed and unnameable horrors, silently observing the imposition of the white man:

But the horrid thing in the bush! He schemed as to what it would be. It must be the spirit of the place. Something fully evoked tonight, perhaps provoked, by that unnatural West-Australian moon. Provoked by the moon, the roused spirit of the bush. He felt it was watching, and waiting. Following with certainty, just behind his back. It might have reached a long black arm and gripped him. But no, it wanted to wait. It was not tired of watching its victim. An alien people – a victim. It was biding its time with a terrible ageless watchfulness, waiting for a far-off end, watching the myriad intruding white men. (19)

The inscrutable Aborigines themselves were partly the cause of this fear, viewed as barbaric and ignoble savages. The nineteenth-century view held them as one of the ‘Irreclaimable Races’, which included ‘the Australian Aborigines, Patagonians, various African peoples, &c., just one rung up from the great apes’ (David Mitchell 507). Early settlers lived in fear of these unreconstructed natives, as Charles Rowcroft describes in Tales of the Colonies:

Within the trunk we saw standing up a native with his face turned towards us. The blackness of his colour assimilating with the charcoal of the burned tree prevented the body from being distinguished from the blackened trunk, until we got close to it, but the acuteness of the hound’s organs had enabled him to detect this object at a considerable distance. The sight of this native lurking within the body of the tree instantly filled us with the fear that there were more close at hand, and we expected every moment to receive a volley of spears from the hidden enemy; but none appeared, and all was silence. (113)

³² See Hughes, The Fatal Shore.

In his novel Voss, Patrick White depicts in the death of the priest Palfreyman the violent destiny that awaits the white man should he stray into this threatening environment:

Then one black man warded off the white mysteries with terrible dignity. He flung his spear. It stuck in the white man's side, and hung down, quivering. All movements now became awkward. The awkward white man stood with his toes turned in. A second black, of rather prominent muscles, and emotional behaviour, rushed forward with a short spear, or knife, it could have been, and thrust it easily between the white man's ribs. It was accomplished so easily. (365)

Bruce Chatwin does not share this vision of the outback as a blank and intimidating space populated by threatening natives. Not only does Chatwin embrace Aboriginal culture (as has been described) as something of a corollary to his own ideas around human restlessness, he also finds as he tours the outback that the landscape itself is filled with vibrant and restless characters.

Those who make their home in the Australian outback appear to be typical Chatwinesque wanderers and outsiders, some of whom could be plucked from the pages of In Patagonia. Amongst them is Rolf, the polymath store keeper of Cullen, who, like the Bruce of the novel, renounced the cosmopolitan life of the city for the solitude of Central Australia, retreating into intellectual seclusion in the desert: 'He belonged, on his father's side, to a lineage of Barossa Valley Germans – eight generations of Prussians, solid Lutheran with solid money, the most rooted community in Australia. The mother was a Frenchwoman who had landed up in Adelaide during the war. Rolf was trilingual, in English, German and French. He got a grant to go to the Sorbonne. He wrote a thesis on "structural linguistics" and later had a job as "cultural correspondent" for a Sydney newspaper' (148). This description has its origin in a note from one of the author's Moleskine notebooks that reaffirms Rolf's status as an outsider: 'red haired Lutheran 8th generation Australian yet indomitably

East Prussian. From the Barossa Valley. Father didn't speak English till he went to school' (Chatwin Archive Box 35). There is Father Terence, for whom 'the Desert Fathers had been his spiritual guide: to be lost in the desert was to find one's way to God' (63) and who had left Australia to make his home in a tumbledown hermitage, and also Hughie the barrister, born in New Zealand, schooled in England, plying his profession in the outback and questioning what he is doing there: 'I ask myself, my dear. Every time I brush my teeth, I ask the same question. But what would I do in London? Prissy little dinners? Pretty little flat? No. No. Wouldn't suit me at all' (47).

However, in terms of Chatwin's grand theme of restlessness, perhaps the most resonant character of the novel is Arkady, who embodies so many typically Chatwinesque traits that he functions essentially as the alternate side to Bruce's personality, as Salman Rushdie observes: 'Bruce is Arkady as well as the character he calls Bruce. He is both sides of the dialogue' (Imaginary Homelands 233). As in On the Black Hill, Chatwin has divided himself between two characters.

From the very opening of the novel, Arkady is immediately identifiable as a Chatwin protagonist. He is described in the early paragraphs of the novel as both 'a Russian' and 'an Australian citizen' (1), and this instability of nationality informs his seeming inability to locate a stable home. A visit to Europe leaves him, like Utz, 'feeling flat' (3), whilst his marriage disintegrates 'after a single summer' (3): 'Now that he lived alone he liked to spend most of his time "out bush". When he did come to town, he worked from a disused newspaper shop-floor where rolls of old newsprint still clogged the presses' (3).

Arkady's Russian provenance, coupled with his Chatwinesque neuroses, confirm him as one involved in a world, yet not part of it. As such, he and Bruce

are very much a pair:

The policeman's mouth shot downwards.
 "You're not Australian," he said to Arkady.
 "I bloody am Australian."
 "No, you're not. I can tell you're not Australian."
 "I was born in Australia."
 "That doesn't make you Australian," he taunted. "My people have lived in Australia for five generations. So where was your father born?"
 Arkady paused and, with quiet dignity, answered, "My father was born in Russia."
 "Hey!" the policeman tightened his forelip and turned to the big man. "What did I tell you, Bert? A Pom and a Com." (124)

Arkady shares with Chatwin a predisposition towards asceticism as well as, initially at least, an ambivalent attitude towards marriage: 'He had married, he told me, and had a daughter of six. Yet, preferring solitude to domestic chaos, he no longer lived with his wife. He had few possessions apart from a harpsichord and a shelf of books' (1). One striking element of the above quotation is the apparently inherent connection implied between domesticity and chaos, an attitude typical of Chatwin who had some reservations over the perceived restrictions of married life. One finds evidence of this in a number of his works, from the confused domestic situation of the two bachelor brothers in On the Black Hill to the existential angst of Francisco Da Silva in The Viceroy of Ouidah: 'The strain of living with her told on his nerves. The sight of her vacant smile made him pale with anger and tempted him to sink his fingers in her throat. He took to sleeping rough, hoping to recover his equilibrium under the stars' (62).

Marriage in Chatwin's work is generally represented as an inconvenient tie, restricting man's natural nomadic instinct, and is fairly infrequently depicted in any great detail. The Songlines marks the beginning, however, of a greater interest in heterosexual relationships, which culminates in the romance of the final section of Utz, with the marriage of the protagonist and his

housekeeper, Marta. In Chatwin's Australian novel, however, it is the relationship of Arkady and Marian that develops in the latter sections of the novel that denotes the author's increasing preoccupation with a domestic life, marking Chatwin's first assertion of the notion that some of the afflictions of restlessness might be somewhat alleviated by the consolations of love.

The depiction of female characters in The Songlines is markedly different from anything one encounters in Chatwin's other work. As was observed in the earlier chapter on The Viceroy of Ouidah, one can trace an element of homosexual indulgence in some of Chatwin's more exotic work, but rarely does Chatwin present females as either sexualised or attractive within the text. In The Songlines, however, Chatwin reverses this trend with his luxuriant description of Marian:

She had level blue eyes and looked very innocent and happy in a skimpy, flower-printed dress. There were crescents of red dirt under her fingernails and the dust had given a smooth bronze-like sheen to her skin. Her breasts were firm and her arms were solid and cylindrical. She slashed the sleeves of the dress to allow the air to circulate freely under her armpits. (32)

The narrator becomes preoccupied with Marian, with the implication that perhaps a romance will develop; the first such in Chatwin's oeuvre. Yet, in an unexpected development, Marian and Arkady get married, forming a romantic, if somewhat awkward conclusion to the novel:

We watched them go off to bed. They were two people made in heaven for each other. They had been hopelessly in love since the day they met, yet had gradually crept into their shells, glancing away, deliberately, in despair, as if it were too good, never to be, until suddenly the reticence and the anguish had melted and what should have been, long ago, now was. (284)

The romantic conclusion of the novel mirrors, to some extent, the affirmational process that was taking place in Chatwin's own marriage, as Salman Rushdie observed: "He said to me he'd fallen in love with his wife. I felt

it was genuine. How could it not be?” (qtd. in Shakespeare 428).

The sudden domestic sensibility that manifested itself in Chatwin’s later work was, in part, a reaction to the events unfolding in his life. The effects of his disease were having a debilitating impact on his lifestyle, and the nomadic existence he had become used to was now an impossibility: ‘I had a presentiment that the “travelling” phase of my life might be passing’ (TS 161).

Chatwin’s consequential return to Elizabeth – to whom the book is dedicated – and to a domestic life that he had previously dismissed forced his hand in the best way. His realisation that he was now unable to fulfil the demands of a nomadic life allowed him to complete the work that had preoccupied him for the majority of his life. Chatwin was well aware that The Songlines was the last opportunity he had to commit his grand theory to paper: ‘Everyone – ’ he wrote in a notebook ‘especially those over thirty-five has an idea – which kills them in the end’ (Chatwin Archive Box 35). Rushdie referred to the novel as the unloading of ‘the burden he’s been carrying all his writing life. Once he’s done this, I think, he’ll be free, he’ll be able to take flight in all sorts of directions’ (235). ‘It was a race for time’, (‘The Songlines Quartet’) he wrote in the New York Review of Books, and the novel certainly conveys a preoccupation with mortality, as demonstrated by the concluding passage which describes the visit paid by the narrator alongside Arkady to the dying relatives of the Aboriginal character known as Limpy:

Arkady folded his arms, and watched.
 “Aren’t they wonderful?” Marian whispered, putting her hand in mine and giving it a squeeze.
 Yes. They were all right. They knew where they were going, smiling at death in the shade of a ghost gum. (293)

This conception of death as simply the end of one journey and the possible beginning of another provides a personal conclusion to the grand

theoretical debate of the novel, particularly given the author's own precarious state of health at the time of completion: 'I wrote that last chapter about three old men dying under a gum tree, when I was just about to conk myself. It was done with great speed. Often I have to labour over sentences, but this time I just wrote it straight down on a yellow pad, and that was the end of the book. It did bring home how writing a fiction impinges on your life' (Interview by Michael Ignatieff 35). Chatwin draws the reader to thinking of the narrative arc of an individual life, and offers the idea that despite the complex theoretics of the novel's central conception, what the author has constructed in his Australian odyssey is perhaps nothing more or less than his own Songline.

Certainly, that Chatwin might have conceived his novel as such is implied by the early section of the work where the author outlines his own origins and story, establishing a framework for his innate restlessness. Chatwin, the reader is informed, is descended from a family constituted either of sedentary members of the professional classes or 'horizon-struck wanderers who had scattered their bones in every corner of the earth' (TS 6), whilst this genetic predisposition was exacerbated by the 'fantastic homelessness' (TS 5) of his early youth, part of which was spent with spinster aunts who initiated Chatwin's education in the imaginative history of the wanderer, beginning with Shakespeare and leading onto the poetry contained within The Open Road: A Little Book for Wayfarers, compiled by E.V. Lucas, who knew the 'virus of restlessness' (Steinbeck Travels with Charley 1) well himself. Chatwin's very name, indeed, seemed to predispose him to a preoccupation with travel, derived, as he asserts it was, from Chette-wynde, or 'winding path' in Anglo-Saxon: 'the suggestion took root in my head that poetry, my own name and the road were, all three, mysteriously connected' (9) the narrator observes.

Such a reading of the novel is extended by the central notebooks section of the work, where Chatwin weaves a tapestry of his central intellectual preoccupation over the period of his adult life and is, of course, served admirably by the ending that the author landed upon, concluding an account that both in narrative and actual terms spanned the course of a lifetime: “And what happens to that Old Man,” I asked, “when he gets to the sea?” “End of him,” said Walker. “Finish” (207–208).

Chapter Eight: ‘The Harlequin’

Certain aspects of human conduct seem at first glance not at all exceptional or mysterious. Yet on closer inspection we see that they can be quite perplexing and not easily understood. One such trait is collecting. Collectors themselves – dedicated, serious, infatuated, beset – cannot explain or understand this often all-consuming drive, nor can they call a halt to their habit. Many are aware of a chronic restiveness that can be curbed only by more finds or yet another acquisition. A recent discovery or another purchase may assuage the hunger, but it never fully satisfies it. (3)

Werner Muensterberger, Collecting: An Unruly Passion

Art is never enough. Art always lets you down.

Bruce Chatwin³³

The final full-length work of Chatwin’s career finds the author returning to creative methods in his presentation of his key subject of restlessness. Utz is a novel, like On the Black Hill, about sedentary existence; the lead protagonist of the work, the eponymous Kaspar Joachim Utz, though more mobile than Lewis or Benjamin Jones, is no Chatwin nomad, remaining, for the majority of the novel, in the same small apartment overlooking the Jewish cemetery in Prague.

Unlike On the Black Hill, however, Utz is not a novel which engages with the compensations of settlement. It is a work very much in keeping with the rest of Chatwin’s oeuvre in depicting the frustration engendered when one finds oneself stuck in a situation. Specifically, the novel deals with the restrictions imposed by the collection of precious objects; Chatwin depicts Utz, who has an insatiable desire for the celebrated porcelain of Meissen, as restlessly oscillating between an awareness that his large collection ‘held him prisoner’ (90) and the recognition that without it he felt dissatisfied. Utz thus embodies the pernicious effect of materialist desire, and the restless anxiety that results from it.

Chatwin knew well the afflictions associated with collection; he composed Utz at the end of a life that had been defined by a consistent determination to

³³ (qtd. in Ignatieff ‘On Bruce Chatwin’).

try to solve what the author referred to as the ‘tricky equation between things and freedom’ (AOR 183). His relationship with his possessions oscillated throughout his life between lustful preoccupation and iconoclastic fury, as is evident from a speech he delivered to a Red Cross charity auction:

[D]o we not all long to throw down our altars and rid ourselves of our possessions? Do we not gaze coldly at our clutter and say, “If these objects express my personality, then I hate my personality.” (AOR 170)

Chatwin’s ambivalent attitude towards material possession was intrinsically connected to his preoccupation with nomads and the travelling life. The arguments were all part of the same debate – if the nomadic life was the cure for man’s anxiety and restlessness, it followed that one must shed one’s superfluous possessions, as the nomads did: ‘Possessions are inimical to movement,’ observed Nicholas Murray, ‘the wanderer must travel light’ (112). Chatwin had latched on to this necessity in his earliest work “The Nomadic Alternative”, where he wrote that “Things hamper movement. Precious possessions tether their owner to a place. The nomad whittles them down as he asserts his independence of the economic system he has learned to despise’ (76). In The Songlines, Father Terence tells the narrator similarly: ‘Things filled men with fear: the more things they had, the more they had to fear. Things had a way of riveting themselves onto the soul and then telling the soul what to do’ (64). All of Chatwin’s works express this dissatisfaction with western materialism; it is a key tenet of his argument against settled, civilised life. He saw asceticism as essential to the good life, whether lived nomadically (as was his usual solution) or through the renunciation of the outside world (as described in On the Black Hill).

In his Red Cross speech, titled The Morality of Things and subsequently published in small numbers as a standalone volume, Chatwin related the story

of an individual who embodied to the author the correct balance between life and possessions. This individual travelled through the African continent every quarter as a representative of a firm of typewriter manufacturers. He had no fixed address and no possessions of any kind save for the suitcase he lived from and the clothes within, renewed on his occasional returns to London. The one permanent testimony to his past or present was to be found in a black tin deed box, locked in the company safe back in London, which contained mementoes from his childhood and reminders of his departed relatives. Also contained in the upper section of this box were objects brought back from his African travels. Each time the salesman returned, he would discard one object from his collection, to be replaced with a new, more resonant, treasure. Bruce Chatwin remarked of this man, whose life was entirely free of superfluous possessions, that: 'He seemed to belong to that nearly extinct species – the happy man' (AOR 182).

Throughout his own life, however, Chatwin struggled to live up to the ascetic example he perceived in this model of material renunciation, partly as a result of his upbringing and early adult life, during which time he developed a passion for collecting and *objets d'art* in general. In the autobiographical accounts of his early life, Chatwin's aesthetic desires are manifest: 'I lost teddy bears without a whimper,' he wrote in 1983, 'yet clung tenaciously to 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' (AOR 6). Whilst at Marlborough, this childhood tendency developed into an adolescent preoccupation, with Chatwin raiding local Wiltshire antique shops in a quest for hidden treasures. From one local dealer Chatwin bought a 'Piranesi etching of

the Antonine Column and a portrait in oils. He told his friend Richard Sturt: “I paid 10s and I believe it to be school of Rembrandt and worth an absolute fortune” (Shakespeare 78).

Chatwin’s youth appears, from textual and biographical evidence, to have been defined by two tendencies, one towards movement – emanating from the ‘fantastic homelessness’ (TS 5) of his years as a war baby, and described in detail in previous chapters – and the other towards acquisition. An important source for this preoccupation with collecting can be found in the young Chatwin’s obsession with the glass-fronted cabinet belonging to his grandmother, Isobel Chatwin. This cabinet – and the treasures it contained – were a source of profound fascination to the young Chatwin, and feature centrally in the author’s first work, *In Patagonia*, as has been described. As Andrew Palmer observes: ‘The moment when the young Bruce sees the sloth skin in his grandmother’s cabinet can be seen as another “poetic moment” like the ones described in the opening pages of *The Songlines*. Those in the latter book led Chatwin to restlessness, but the one in his first book led him to collect’ (135). Chatwin wrote in his proposal for *In Patagonia* of his ‘fetishistic obsession’ for the skin: ‘Whenever I came to the house I had to make sure the piece of brontosaurus was still there and screamed until I was shown it’ (Chatwin Archive Box 41). The skin was to form part of a nascent collection constructed in the author’s own image, as recounted in a passage ultimately cut from the published *In Patagonia*: ‘Already I had a museum, a cabinet with Roman glass, a miniature penknife, a Tsarist rouble, a real piece of eight and the skull of a field mouse, waiting only to receive its prize exhibit’ (qtd. in Clapp 33). Like the young Joachim Utz, whose affair with Meissen porcelain begins in the aftermath of his father’s death, these foundation blocks of personality, put down

in the early years of Chatwin's youth, would lead to difficulties later in life, as they began to form an irreconcilable dichotomy.

In the first of his adult years, at least, it seemed his tendency towards aestheticism would win out easily over any travelling urges. Chatwin joined the auction firm Sotheby's as a young provincial eighteen-year-old and, for a time at least, was seduced by the romance of the sales room. Chatwin was proud of his abilities in the field, and in particular his discerning taste. His talent at spotting objects of quality was apparently instinctive, as his colleague at Sotheby's, Marcus Linnell, told Susannah Clapp: 'Show him four things and ask him which was the best and he could always tell you' (79). Chatwin's own pride in this prenatural ability emerges in his autobiographical writing; in a short piece titled 'The Bey', Chatwin recounts with obvious pleasure the recognition of his talents: "Ha!" said the old gentleman. "I see you have The Eye. I too have The Eye. We shall be friends" (WAIDH 358). Chatwin would later come to dismiss his time at Sotheby's as something of a rite of passage, from which he emerged into enlightenment. Yet, despite his ultimate rejection of a career as an art expert, Chatwin was not able or willing to simply abandon this instinctive and uncommon ability to assess and appreciate precious objects. Despite his strongly held conviction that the nomadic life was the cure for restlessness, Chatwin was unable to fully convert over to the ascetic existence demanded by true nomadism.

He did, however, manage to hit upon a compromise position that would help to mollify, in theory at least, the restless anxiety engendered by collection and settlement; Chatwin could rationalise his acquisitive behaviour by simply exercising the taste he saw as intrinsic in the nomad aesthetic: '[I]n my late twenties,' he wrote in an essay on the architect John Pawson, 'I was sick of

things; and after travelling some months in the desert, I fell for a kind of “Islamic” iconoclasm and believed, in all seriousness, that one should never bow before the graven image. As a result, the things that have survived this iconoclastic phase are, for the most part, “abstract” (AOR 19). Chatwin had managed to hit upon what he believed to be a workable solution to the irreconcilable conundrum of how to maintain the appearance of travelling light, whilst still indulging his great passion and talent for collecting *objets d’art*. His purchases merely had to demonstrate the requisite degree of good taste and aesthetic purity. Acquisition was thus transmogrified from a sordid indulgence into a purer, more acceptable pursuit. In avoiding the brash ostentation of 1980s materialism, in favour of a simpler, though no less expensive style, Chatwin was able to reconcile the asceticism of the nomadic existence with the aestheticism of his private desire, constructing a sort of westernised nomad aesthetic, hence avoiding, to some degree at least, the restlessness-inducing effect of art collection that repelled Chatwin and that overwhelms Joachim Utz.

This tendency towards a minimalist, nomadic aesthetic is evident in much of his writing both in the specifics of his subject matter and the lapidary style of his prose, and bears important relation to the novel under consideration in this chapter. However, perhaps the most revealing assessment of this iconoclastic approach to art collection, and the ultimate failure of it as a solution, comes in a short story by Chatwin published first in the Saturday Night Reader in 1979 called ‘The Estate of Maximilian Tod’. This story, which carries its emulation of the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges almost to the point of pastiche – indeed Iain Stewart wrote an essay on the similarity titled ‘The Sincerest Form of Flattery’ – constitutes a revealing exposition of the possibilities and perils of Chatwin’s minimalist aesthetic. The story opens with a

statement of geographical and chronological specificity reminiscent of the first paragraph of Utz, which itself begins: ‘An hour before dawn on March 7th 1974, Kaspar Joachim Utz died of a second and long-expected stroke in his apartment at No.5 Široká Street, overlooking the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague’ (1).

‘The Estate of Maximilian Tod’ opens with the same trick of beginning with a statement of specific fact from a narrator who turns out to be fundamentally unreliable: ‘On 6 February 1975, Dr Estelle Neumann fell down a crevasse of the Belgrano Glacier in Chilean Patagonia’ (AOR 54). The story continues with an explanation of Neumann’s life and death by a colleague; the dead woman had been a glaciologist at Harvard University, researching a controversial topic: ‘She had proved’, the narrator observes, ‘beyond question that the injection of fossil fuels into the atmosphere had no effect whatever on the temperature of glaciers’ (55). This assertion had led to generous funding from petrochemical companies and the guaranteed continuation of the research undertaken by Neumann and the – at this point – unnamed narrator. This narrator does, however, bear a passing resemblance to the author himself; certainly, like Chatwin, he prides himself on his good taste – in contrast to that of his deceased colleague who, the narrator observes, ‘was addicted to “primitive” jewellery of the worst kind – Navajo turquoise, African bangles, amber beads. That morning a golden eagle of the Veraguas Culture was flapping between her breasts; I did not have the heart to tell her it was a fake’ (56). Chatwin himself was in the habit of joyously declaring inauthenticity, as Nicholas Shakespeare discovered when interviewing colleagues from the author’s days at Sotheby’s: ‘Bruce had been away on a trip at the wrong time of the year. On the first day of the sale this hurricane comes in and very grandly points at a Renoir drawing of a nude: “Oh, that’s ghastly, I even think it’s a

fake.” He looked around and said, “That’s a fake. That’s a fake. That’s a fake,” and walked on’ (101). Notions of authenticity were identified by Chatwin – both in his essay ‘The Morality of Things’ (“Is it a fake?” (AOR 172)), and in Utz, where the eponymous protagonist questions momentarily the authenticity of his piece ‘The Spaghetti Eater’ – as a central cause of the restless anxiety that afflicts the sedentary collector, constituting part of the psychopathological mania that afflicts those who put their faith in works of art. In ‘The Estate of Maximilian Tod’, there is no question as to the authenticity of the vast and tasteful collection belonging to the narrator; it is the character himself who proves to be a fake.

As the reader discovers, this narrator has been filtering off the funds supplied for research towards the construction of a Patagonian retreat, stuffed full of the most desirable books and antiquities and situated in a hidden valley which, like that housing the Washington mansion of Fitzgerald’s The Diamond As Big As The Ritz, has never been mapped. It emerges, that, in fact, the narrator and the Maximilian Tod of the story are one and the same, and that Tod was responsible for the murder of his colleague Estelle Neumann. In this valley the narrator finds a dwelling of stunning simplicity and good taste:

Mr Tod's house – for that was the name of the proprietor – was an airy pavilion built on a knoll about one hundred yards from the water. It was thirty-five feet square, aligned to the cardinal points, and had five sash windows on each face except for the north. [...] No structure could be simpler. It owed its severity and perfect proportions to the utopian projects of Ledoux and the houses of Shaker communities in New York State. (61)

Chatwin luxuriates in this description; one can feel an ambivalent sensual enjoyment emanating from his words. Indeed, Chatwin’s prose style in this section of the story is particularly notable given that Chatwin had previously professed a desire to construct such a refuge in the travelogue In

Patagonia, published just two years before ‘The Estate of Maximilian Tod’: ‘I pictured a low timber house with a shingle roof,’ Chatwin writes in the early pages of that work, ‘caulked against storms, with blazing log fires inside and the walls lined with the best books, somewhere to live while the rest of the world blew up’ (4). In ‘The Estate of Maximilian Tod’, Chatwin is simply extrapolating that reclusive vision to its limits: ‘A second path led over a cloud-blue bridge that arched over the stream into a pasture. A range of buildings showed up indistinctly from behind a smokescreen of white poplars. Nearby was the black neo-classical pigeon house where Mr Tod was in the habit of training his favorite birds to imitate the dances of Sufi dervishes in trance’ (63). Mr Tod (significantly, Tod is the German word for ‘death’) has amassed in this extraordinary dwelling place a collection of exquisite good taste which, despite the narrator’s observation that ‘[i]nventories make tiresome reading’ (63), is described at some length: a ‘Shang bronze fang-i with the “melon-skin” patina; a Nuremberg sorcerer’s mirror, an Aztec plate with a purple bloom; the crystal reliquary of a Gandharan stupa; a gold mounted bezoar; a jade flute; a wampum belt; a pink granite Horus falcon of Dynasty I and some Eskimo morse ivory animals which, for all the stylised attenuation of their features, seemed positively to breathe’ (63).

Like the author himself, however, Tod struggles with the implications of his mania for collection, unsettled by the idea that ‘man is the sum of his things’ (65). The narrator has attempted to escape the restrictions of art collection by paring down, like the author, his collection to a limited number of eminently tasteful objects for, as Tod observes – and Chatwin came to understand – ‘fortunate men are the sum of an absence of things’ (65). Ultimately, however, Tod admits that for all his efforts in constructing a

minimalist paradise, he has been forced away, seemingly by the anxieties of restlessness, from the place of settlement he so zealously guarded; the outcome all the more unsurprising given the presence of Baudelaire's poem 'Anywhere Out of The World' in his library. Like many of Chatwin's characters, Tod comes to realise that his settlement is a burden, even given the ascetic existence he emulated. His consolation can only come in moving on: 'I had intended to settle for ever in my valley; I have left it for others to pillage. I have left my young companion. I have left my things. I, who with bedouin rigour abolished the human form from my possessions ... I, who did everything to protect my retina from the visual affronts of the twentieth century, now I too am prey to hallucinations. Women with red faces leer at me. Wet lips slaver over me. Monstrous blocs of colour smother me. *Je dus voyager, distraire les enchantements assemblés dans mon cerveau*' (69). The story ultimately seems a commentary by the author on himself, an observation evidenced by the above reference to Rimbaud's Un Saison en Enfer: 'I must travel, to ward off the apparitions assembled in my brain', a quotation that reappears a number of times in Chatwin's writing on restlessness. The story's conclusion appears to confirm the impossibility – despite Chatwin's efforts – of finding a compromise position between aestheticism and asceticism through the exercising of a stripped down visual style.

This story offers evidence that Chatwin fundamentally understood that all materialist desires, however refined, betray the dictum he so passionately believed in at that point of his life; that one was happiest on the move, having shed all possessions. Yet, simultaneously the author's luxuriant descriptions of Tod's home and possessions introduce a sense of ambivalence to the piece, reflecting the absolute insolubility of the conflicting appeal of 'things

and freedom' for the author. When Chatwin writes in an essay on the problematic nature of collection: 'All civilisations are by their very nature "thing-oriented" and the main problem of their stability has been to devise new equations between the urge to amass things and the urge to be rid of them' (AOR 171), he truly writes from a personal, rather than social, perspective; he describes his own anxieties – anxieties that, in his own life, he never fully resolved.

The realisation that any collections of art – even those of eminent good taste – provoke feelings of restriction and anxiety in the individual collector is one that comes more unequivocally to Kaspar Joachim Utz. Like Maximilian Tod – with whom he shares a short, Germanic surname – Utz has devoted his life to the acquisition of an astonishing, single-minded collection, sourcing items of Meissen porcelain from around Europe and, also like Tod, he comes to realise that art is no substitute for life, and that the restlessness he feels, far from being cured by his relentless acquisition, is in fact provoked by it. However, whereas Tod, in Chatwin's story of 1979, can only find relief in travel, Utz – protagonist in a novel written by an author ten years older, and seriously ill – discovers happiness and ultimate relief from his restlessness in a quite different and unexpected place.

Kaspar Joachim Utz shares a number of similarities with Chatwin's other central protagonists; he is a childless male, unmarried and generally suspicious of commitment, a suspicion that results, in part, from his singular preoccupation with porcelain, comparable within Chatwin's oeuvre to Arkady Volchok's obsessive tracking of the songlines in the author's previous novel, the Jones twins' commitment to their farming in On the Black Hill or Francisco Da Silva's fixation with the slave trade. Utz also shares with Lewis Jones, Da Silva

and Arkady an anxious restlessness resulting from the overwhelming commitment demanded by these individual obsessions.

This obsession with porcelain originates in the character's early years, just as Chatwin's twin preoccupations of art and travel emerged from his formative experiences as a child. As Chatwin would stare entranced at the objects in his grandmother's cabinet of curiosities, so Utz becomes obsessed with one particular object in *his* grandmother's glass vitrine, a

figure of Harlequin that had been modelled by the greatest of Meissen modellers, J.J. Kaendler.

The Harlequin sat on a tree trunk. His taut frame was sheathed in a costume of multi-coloured chevrons. In one hand he waved an oxidised silver tankard; in the other a floppy yellow hat. Over his face there was a leering orange mask.

"I want him," said Kaspar. (17)

In the novel, Utz receives this piece in consolation for the death of his father; however, in George Sluizer's 1992 film adaptation of the work, the two events are exactly concurrent, with the young Utz stating his desire for the Harlequin in the immediate aftermath of the death of his father. The connection between tragedy in childhood and art collection is drawn out in Werner Muensterberger's book Collecting: An Unruly Passion, where the writer observes that:

Provoked by early, possibly unfavorable conditions or the lack of affection on the part of not-good-enough mothering, the child's attempt towards self-preservation quickly turns to some substitute to cling to. Thus, he or she has a need for compensatory objects of one or the other kind [...] In later life, this attitude leads to a biased weighting for more money or more possessions, as if they could provide magic protection and shield the individual from new frustrations and anxieties. (21)

Muensterberger's assessment is that collecting develops in the aftermath of childhood trauma as a way of shoring up against further difficulties, of building a protective environment where one cannot be threatened. Chatwin also sees the power of the collection as consoling in the face of early loss: '[T]he

work of art,' Chatwin writes, 'is a source of pleasure and power, the object of fetishistic adoration, which serves in a traumatised individual as a substitute for skin-to-skin contact with the mother' (AOR 174).

This belief in the collection as offering a physical replacement and consolation for parental contact in early life certainly appears to be applicable to Utz, who, as his collection develops in later life, comes more and more to closet himself in his flat, relying on the reassuring effect of his porcelain figures. Utz's life in Prague has narrow geographical and personal limits; his company constituted by his friend Dr Orlik and his maidservant and wife of convenience, Marta. For Utz, however, these characters play minor roles in his life compared to his porcelain figures.

This tendency towards emotional reticence is a key trait of the collector who fosters a relationship with objects 'which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value – that is, their usefulness – but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage of their fate' (Benjamin 62). This narcissistic relationship, Chatwin argues, is essentially unsatisfying, leading one to cut ties with the real world and real people: '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' (AOR 171). This analysis is certainly true of Utz; so profound is the relief he finds in the company of his collection that he begins to view his porcelain as actual living beings, his sole stalwart companions in the austere environment of Soviet-era Prague. The collection forms, in the narrator's words, a 'miniature family' (47). As Chatwin commented to Michael Ignatieff: 'He had shrunk his horizons down to those of his best friends, who were all porcelain figures seven inches high' (36). The reader first becomes

aware of Utz's conception of his collection as alive in a passage quoted from a fictional journal article written by the character: 'An object in a museum,' he writes, 'must suffer the de-natured existence of an animal in the zoo. In any museum the object dies – of suffocation and the public gaze – whereas private ownership confers on the owner the right and the need to touch' (20). This suggestion is expanded upon in a later conversation between the narrator and Utz, in which the collector spells out his belief in the life inherent in his figures: "So you see," said Utz, "not only was Adam the first human person. He was also the first ceramic sculpture." "Are you suggesting your porcelains are alive?" "I am and I am not," he said. "They are alive and they are dead. But if they were alive, they would also have to die, is it not?" (42).

From their initial compensatory position, however, offering the young Utz reassurance and control in the aftermath of his father's death, the Meissen collection develops as a screening device against the realities of the outside world. Utz's collection offers similar consolation to that provided by the borders of Lewis and Benjamin Jones' farm – for Benjamin at least. It provides a 'strategy for blocking out the horrors of the 20th century' (qtd. in Shakespeare 478). The political realities of Communist-era Prague are mollified for Utz by the constant and reassuring presence of his collection: 'I realised', the narrator observes, 'as Utz pivoted the figure in the candlelight, that I had misjudged him: that he, too, was dancing; that 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 the events of this sombre century – the bombardments, blitzkriegs, putsches, purges – were, so far as he was concerned, so many noises off' (114). This compares directly to Benjamin Jones' observation on the bombing of Coventry during the Second World War: "And a

good job t'isnt we!” (192), he observes before retiring to bed.

Utz's faith in the life and companionship offered by his porcelain has particular resonance, given the setting of the novel. Prague is a city that has a history when it comes to living sculptures, with its famous story of Rabbi Loew's animatronic Golem: 'that man-made being that long ago a rabbi versed in the lore of the Cabbala formed from elemental matter and invested with mindless, automatic life by placing a magic formula behind its teeth' (Meyrink 42).

The Golem, shaped from the clay of the River Moldau, was designed to be an aid to Rabbi Loew, created as 'a servant to help him ring the synagogue bells and do other menial tasks' (Meyrink 56). Yet, in the Jewish myth, the Golem ultimately went out of control one sabbath, running amok in the streets, causing damage and creating much panic until subdued by his creator. The Golem became a burden to Loew, just as Utz discovers that his porcelain figures, infused, in his conception, with the light of consciousness are ultimately a burden, inhibiting the protagonist from living his own life. Significantly, the ultimate fate of the Golem, like that of Utz's porcelain collection, remained a mystery.

It is the intransigence of the Communist regime that brings Utz to the realisation that his figures are weighing him down. Utz is visited by representatives of the regime who insist upon photographing and cataloguing his collection with the expectation that the items will be donated to the national museum on the death of their owner. The protagonist is deeply unsettled by the intrusion of the outside world – of the very forces his collection was intended to protect against – into his hermitage: 'He felt abused and assaulted. He felt like the man who, on returning from a journey, finds his house has been burgled' (47). In the aftermath of this process, Utz begins to speculate on the

possibility of a life free of his current ties: '[C]ould he bring himself to leave the collection? Make a clean break? Begin a new life abroad? He still had money in Switzerland, thank God!' (47). Even in the face of the prospect of escaping his burden, the psychopathology of the collector shows through: 'Who could tell? In Paris or in New York, he might even begin to collect again. He decided, if he could get out, to go' (47). Typically of a Chatwin character, Utz, in the face of anxieties, resorts to travel as a means of curing his restlessness.

Utz travels to Vichy, via Geneva where he is met at the station by his banker. However, as is the curse of the terminally restless, Utz finds no relief in France, which, rather than offering an indulgent alternative to the rigours of Czechoslovakia, simply leaves the character nostalgic for the simplicities of the Communist regime: 'luxury,' Utz concludes, 'is only luxurious under adverse conditions' (65). The easy availability of that which he has previously craved renders Utz desensitised to its appeal: 'The meal failed to match his expectations. Not that he could fault its quality or presentation: but the soup, although exquisite, seemed savourless; the trout was smothered in a sauce of Gruyère cheese, and the sucking-pig was stuffed with something else' (64). Utz gradually realises that in leaving Prague he has achieved no greater happiness than he felt when trapped by his porcelains; "What am I doing here?" (86) Utz asks himself – an echo of Rimbaud's question from *Un Saison en Enfer* that lends its title to Chatwin's last published book. Returning to Czechoslovakia, Utz is initially depressed by the 'lines of barbed wire and sentry boxes' that greet him on the border. He notes, however, 'with a certain relief that there were no more advertising billboards' (88).

Utz's motivation to return does not solely result, however, from his restless dissatisfaction with Western Europe. In a revelation that comes to the reader

with the same force of insight with which it strikes the character himself, Utz realises that it is not his collection of porcelain figures that he misses; rather he pines for his maidservant Marta: ‘He was desperately homesick, yet hadn’t given a thought for the porcelains. He could only think of Marta, alone, in the apartment’ (67). As Kerry Featherstone observes: ‘the importance of the collection diminishes in the light of the first genuinely affectionate relationship that the adult Utz experiences’ (253). Six weeks after this first trip to Vichy in 1952, Utz and Marta are married, partly from convenience – Utz would have lost his apartment were he to have remained single – but also partly from his realisation of the intrinsic part each played in the other’s life: ‘He felt remorse for having left her: the poor darling who adored him; who would lay down her life for him; her passionate heart that beat for him, and him only, concealed under a mask of reserve, of duty and obedience’ (68).

Through this union, Chatwin sets up the final resolution – and the final mystery – of the novel. In the face of his real love for Marta, Utz comes to see his collection as ‘bits of old crockery that simply had to go’ (152). In George Sluizer’s film of the novel, Utz has Marta destroy the collection piece by piece as he lies watching from his bed in a scene which has an undeniably transgressive charge, whilst, at the end of the manuscript of *Utz* which resides in the Bodleian library with the rest of Chatwin’s archive, one finds a telling detail omitted from the work as published: ‘I do, however, have one further insight, based on a snippet from Ada Krasova: that an archaeologist, excavating Utz’s grave in the Vinohrady Cemetery, would find, clasped to the pelvic region of the skeleton, a Meissen figure of Harlequin with a grinning orange mask’ (Box 17 184). In *Utz* as published, however, the ultimate fate of the collection is unknown; one is never sure whether the collection has been destroyed or smuggled out – its fate,

like that of the Golem, remains a mystery.

In comparison, the fate of the protagonists seems relatively clear cut. Utz himself is cured of his restlessness by his acceptance of his relationship with Marta; love conquers all. This conclusion may come as a surprise to the reader; Chatwin's characters tend to search unsuccessfully throughout a lifetime for resolution to their anxieties, either forever travelling or uncomfortably suffering the frustrations of settlement. However, the attentive reader will have observed the conclusion of Chatwin's previous work, *The Songlines* with an interest developing to understanding in the final pages of *Utz*. For in both of these last two works, written when Chatwin was struggling to come to terms with the spectre of his own mortality, the central characters emerge from wilful isolation to re-engage with the human world. Arkady renounces his dusty, book-lined bachelor pad in Alice Springs for Marian, whilst Utz forsakes the companionship of his porcelains for the real love of Marta: 'My revised version of the story is that, on the night of their wedding in church, she emerged from the bathroom in her pink art-silk dressing gown and, unloosing the girdle, let it slide to the floor and embraced him as a true wife. And from that hour, they passed their days in passionate adoration of each other, resenting anything that might come between them' (152).

Yet there is a complication to this happy ending, made explicit in the opening sentence of the previous quotation. How seriously is the reader to take this dramatic and surprising revelation, given that the details of these events are constructed – on, the reader discovers, a fairly slight foundation – by the Borgesian narrator of the tale? Chatwin certainly gives the reader cause to doubt the sincerity of this final solution to the affliction of restlessness. As in 'The Estate of Maximilian Tod', the narrative begins with a remarkably specific

account – in this case of Utz’s funeral – that seems to offer the reader the security of an omniscient, trustworthy narrator. This trust, however, is soon betrayed as the reader comes to the realisation that this central narrative voice is fundamentally unreliable: ‘Did he have a moustache? I forget. Add a moustache, subtract a moustache: nothing would alter his utterly nondescript appearance. Supposing, then, we add a moustache?’ (23). Significantly, the reader understands that this suspect narrator already has a specific framework for his narrative worked out when he visits Prague; he is looking for a subject to fit his analysis of compulsive collection as psychological aberrance:

The editor of a magazine, knowing of my interest in the Northern Renaissance, had commissioned me to write an article on the Emperor Rudolf II’s passion for collecting exotica: a passion which, in his later years, was his only cure for depression. I intended the article to be part of a larger work on the psychology – or psychopathology – of the compulsive collector. (12)

As the novel progresses the reader comes to understand that much of Utz’s story has in fact been constituted by nothing more than speculation on the part of the narrator. Like the Golem itself, *Utz* has been shaped out of the raw clay of supposition, hearsay and invention that is the medium of all true storytellers. The novel’s narrator has played an elaborate trick on the reader – one comparable with the magical disappearance of Utz’s porcelain. All that has passed in the novel – with the exception of the narrator’s first meeting with Utz – has been based either on the accounts of others or the speculation of the narrator himself, so Chatwin informs us. On the occasion of his death, the slight basis for this biographical narrative is revealed, as the reader is made aware that this supposedly authoritative narrator has known Utz for only ‘nine and a quarter hours, some six and a half years earlier’ (117).

There are, of course, levels of fictionality at play here, with Chatwin as author overseeing all of them; there is no ‘truth’ in this story – only degrees of

falsehood. The introduction of the unreliable narrator must, however, lead to questions over the sincerity of the final solution to Utz's restlessness that Chatwin presents. Can Utz's final realisation of the curative power of love really be seen as more than simply an easy concluding idea from a fundamentally lazy and unreliable narrator? Was Chatwin, in his utilisation of this Borgesian chronicler, self-consciously subverting the novel's happy ending? It is, of course, futile to speculate given the degree of trickery at play here. One might well wish – given the biographical context of this piece of writing – that Chatwin had stumbled upon a panacea for compulsive restlessness in the affirmation of the human. However, it is perhaps right and fitting that at the point of resolution in a debate that has raged throughout Chatwin's work, the author should suddenly turn off the straight and narrow path, back into the mists of uncertainty. The reader cannot help but align the authorial figure with Utz's most precious porcelain character, and the recurrent motif of the novel: 'And Harlequin...*The Harlequin*...the arch-improviser, the zany, trickster, master of the volte-face' (94).

Utz was to be Chatwin's last completed novel; published in 1988, it was nominated for that year's Booker Prize, though it ultimately lost to Peter Carey's equally idiosyncratic Oscar and Lucinda. Chatwin managed to complete work on one further book before his death; the collection of writings What Am I Doing Here (the question mark omitted for – what else – aesthetic reasons). This work was mainly an editorial job; there were only three new pieces included in the collection. When Michael Ignatieff visited Chatwin at his home

in Oxfordshire, he found the author suffering from his developing illness, but hopeful of recovery and a return to writing:

[T]he bed was still covered with books. He would still toss odd and unfashionable treasures at you and say, Had you read that? In a weak but excited whisper, he would sketch out scenes from a projected novel. On good days, the best scenes, set in the all-black apartment of a bizarre Russian painter, came alive as vividly as his written books. If you ventured to hope he would soon be able to dictate, he would snap—blue eyes flashing—that he was not going to dictate anything. He was bloody well going to write it, on his yellow pads. ('On Bruce Chatwin')

Chatwin related his plans for this long novel in detail to Tom Maschler, and to his wife Elizabeth, who recounts some of the details:

He had this plan for a Russian novel which was based partly on an artist he met in New York who had used an American woman to get to New York. I knew it was based on this French-American family, and the father wanted to take them out of France as the war was about to begin – the Germans were about to invade. And that was the very beginning of it and they didn't go, he perhaps went, but they didn't go and he then never lived with the mother again [...] I don't know where the artist came in – I just know that it had that beginning when the Germans were about to roll in to Paris. (Interview with Elizabeth Chatwin)

In Chatwin's last notebook, one finds jottings for another possible project, to be called The Sons of Thunder. The title is taken from Mark 3:17 and relates to the name bestowed upon the disciples James and John by Jesus. 'That's it,' Chatwin wrote. 'Now I know where to start. The title can be everything' (Chatwin Archive Box 34). The book was seemingly to relate to the power of these disciples to heal, as mentioned in the previous verses of the passage: 'And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils' (KJV Mark 3:14). Chatwin wrote of this idea, whilst seriously ill himself: 'It's decided then. I will if I get the strength, write about healing' (Chatwin Archive Box 34).

The subjects of these new projects seem to confirm Salman Rushdie's observation that the publication of *Utz* marked a new beginning for Chatwin, having cathartically freed himself in *The Songlines* from what Rushdie referred to as 'the burden he's been carrying all his writing life' (235) – namely his amassed theories of nomadism. 'Once he's done this, I think, he'll be free,' wrote Rushdie, 'he'll be able to take flight in all sorts of directions' (235). Certainly, his prospective projects seem to reflect new literary preoccupations for the author, moving away, perhaps, from a recurrent interest in the subject of restlessness and its possible solutions.

Biographical facts seem to indicate, however, that Chatwin was still subject to the same complicating impulses he had suffered from throughout his life. In an interview conducted towards the end of his life, the author told Michael Ignatieff that 'all my plans are geared to the idea of the road,' and that, despite his illness, 'I shall be off again' (36). Yet, simultaneously, Nicholas Shakespeare relates that Chatwin had begun to amass a collection of his own, to be bequeathed to Elizabeth at the time of his death. The 'Homer Collection', named after the house in Oxfordshire that constituted a home base for Chatwin, was a typically Chatwinesque undertaking, with the author liberally exercising his long suppressed instinct for acquisition. On one shopping trip with the composer Kevin Volans, 'Bruce bought a Bronze Age arm band for £65,000, an Etruscan head for £150,000, a jade prehistoric English cutting knife, a flint Norwegian hand-axe and an Aleutian Islands hat. He could not sit waiting for the objects to be wrapped. They were shoved into plastic bags and attached to the back of his wheelchair' (qtd. in Shakespeare 513). Chatwin, notes Shakespeare, had begun his 'eerie transformation into Utz' (512). Given the precarious state of Chatwin's health at this time, it is perhaps not fanciful to

speculate that, just as Utz saw porcelain as an ‘antidote to decay’ (112), so perhaps the Homer Collection was Chatwin’s own attempt to shore up against the ravages of mortality.

Chatwin, of course, survives through the intangible quality of his works, rather than the taste of his collection. Ironically, however, part of his literary legacy was the creation of a legend surrounding the fate of the porcelain documented in Utz. Chatwin had based the character and collection on a Czech collector he had met in 1967, and in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution – an event Chatwin did not live to see – two young dealers from Sotheby’s visited Eastern Europe to see if they could track down the missing pieces. The owner, and model for Utz, Rudolf Just, had died in 1972, and Chatwin understood that the collection had been destroyed; however, the two Sotheby’s dealers, Sebastian Kuhn and Filip Marco, managed to track down the pieces, which, in the intervening twenty years, had become a true burden to the family, even leading to the murder of Just’s grandson by criminals intent on stealing the collection. In the October 17th 2001 edition of the New York Times, the paper’s correspondent, Alan Riding, reported that the collection had been found, more or less intact, in a fifteenth-floor apartment on a Bratislavan housing estate. The pieces were to be auctioned at Sotheby’s that December, and the whole collection was expected to fetch \$1.45 million for the family.

Conclusion

“The longest journey, this one, and he always loved journeys.”

Leo Lerman (qtd. in Shakespeare 536)

You may paddle all day long; but it is when you come back at nightfall, and look in at the familiar room, that you find Love or Death awaiting you beside the stove; and the most beautiful adventures are not those we go to seek. (92)

Robert Louis Stevenson, An Inland Voyage

[E]very poet has his private mythology, his own spectroscopic band or peculiar formation of symbols, of much of which he is quite unconscious. (115)

Northrop Frye, Fables of Identity

Bruce Chatwin died on the 18th January, 1989 in a hospital in Nice. He had reached the point in his own life that had so frequently formed the subject of his elusive and grand theories, returning from a career of wandering to die at his appointed time. He was young – only forty-eight – but, as he wrote in “The Nomadic Alternative”, one’s quality of life is not strictly determined by the number of years lived: ‘The aim is to live out each stage to the full, and it is immaterial whether the life journey takes fifty or a hundred years to complete’ (224). Chatwin was one of the first high profile victims of AIDS, though, ever the aesthete, he preferred to attribute his illness to a rare fungus of the bone marrow picked up, he variously argued, either from Chinese peasants, a 1,000-year-old egg, or the carcass of a dead whale. Whilst this was not pure invention – Chatwin had indeed become the victim of a rare fungus – he was only susceptible to its onslaughts as a result of the underlying immunodeficiency that ultimately killed him.

Chatwin left behind him six completed works, which would be supplemented in the coming years by the collection of writing titled Anatomy of

Restlessness³⁴, as well as two separate coffee-table books of Chatwin's photographs, which seem to have become almost as influential as his literary texts; Chatwin's photographic preoccupation with surface and colour is particularly evident in the recent collection of photographs from his friend Jonathan Miller, even the title of which – Nowhere in Particular – is suitably Chatwinesque. His public profile was bolstered in 1999 by the publication of Nicholas Shakespeare's long-awaited biography, Bruce Chatwin, which achieved widespread acclaim, and refocussed attention on Chatwin as a public figure. Random House, who now oversee Jonathan Cape's portfolio, publishing paperback editions of Chatwin's work under the 'Vintage' imprint, continue to reissue his books, with regular cover redesigns attesting to the fact that his work still sells well³⁵, whilst in America, In Patagonia has been bestowed the honour of becoming a Penguin Classic.

Chatwin, then, retains a place in the public consciousness, despite almost two decades having past since his death. Whilst it might be hoped that this continuing preoccupation with the writer was purely a product of the high quality of his works, it is striking that perhaps the most consistent and pervasive of all Chatwin's contributions to contemporary culture is found in his totemic position as a *soi-disant* nomad. The mythology he created in his works – in particular The Songlines – and which was extended to a degree in Shakespeare's biography has now transmitted unmediated into popular culture, invoked by everyone from the pop group 'Everything but the Girl', who wrote, in their song 'One Place':

³⁴ Named, of course, after his proposed first work; Matthew Graves and Jan Borm, wrote that they felt the title fitting 'for a selection of texts that so admirably expresses Bruce Chatwin's enduring fascination with restlessness.' (ix)

³⁵ Copies sold of UK editions now exceed one million.

And you know that I have found
 That I'm happiest weaving from town to town
 And you know Bruce said
 we should keep moving 'round

to the popular world music magazine entitled Songlines.

However, Chatwin's place in popular culture is perhaps most strongly evidenced by the cult phenomenon of the Moleskine notebook. Chatwin used these notebooks for much of his life – the bulk of those found in the Bodleian are the Moleskine style³⁶ – though he recounted in The Songlines that production had ceased, and that he was unable to source them from his usual stationers: 'The manufacturer had died', Chatwin wrote. 'His heirs had sold the business. She removed her spectacles and, almost with an air of mourning, said, 'Le vrai moleskine n'est plus' (161). The brand was resuscitated in 1998, and the company that makes the Moleskines now sells millions every year. Chatwin's word and image are heavily used in the promotion of the notebooks³⁷ – they are sold as the pad of choice for Hemingway, Picasso and Chatwin – and are explicitly associated with the notion of Chatwin as a modern nomadic writer, whose lifestyle it is apparently possible to emulate by cultivating the correct image and using the correct notepad.

The public perception of Chatwin is now rooted in his writings around the subjects of restlessness and travel. Those who cite him as a literary influence, such as Richard Grant and William Dalrymple, tend to concentrate on this aspect of his work, citing him as something of an authority on the peripatetic life. He has become an emblem of a certain means of existence, a high priest of restlessness, and it is as a consequence of this public perception

³⁶ Chatwin's notebooks were, however, substantively less plush than those now manufactured in his name, with far shinier, less robust covers and thinner sheets of paper. The development reflects the change in usage – from a writer's tool to a mark of status.

³⁷ Without, it must be added, anything other than tacit approval from Chatwin's estate.

that this thesis has addressed the subject so intensively and consistently. The work is intended to give a firm footing to those exploring Chatwin's sometimes nebulous ideas around the subject of restlessness, exploring the sources for his preoccupation and outlining the mechanics of how the author went about presenting his grand subject.

Chatwin's treatment of the theme of restlessness remained remarkably consistent over the twenty-five years of his writing career. His essential argument, that humans were happiest at a distance from civilisation, living a life free of possessions and constantly on the move, barely altered from its first expression in "The Nomadic Alternative". His literary approach changed significantly over this time, but his treatment of his main subject remained oriented around its key tenets.

This consistency leads to questions around how conscious Chatwin was of the centrality of the subject in his work. The introduction to this thesis argued that Chatwin's work addressed the topic of restlessness both in the delivery of his grand theory and in his concentration on the personal effects of the affliction on his characters. For those works that obviously attempt explanation of the subject of restlessness – "The Nomadic Alternative", The Songlines and, to some extent, In Patagonia – Chatwin was clearly fully cogent of his approach, and the manuscripts and notebooks from these works make clear that the author was fully focussed on his subject. In his other works, The Viceroy of Ouidah, On the Black Hill and Utz, it seems less certain that Chatwin consciously chose to make these works 'about' restlessness. Certainly, archival material from those works do not indicate any premeditated desire to include the subject of restlessness;

his notebooks, in particular, rarely mention the subject during the period of his writing the above works. In these texts, it is as if the topic was so ingrained in the author's consciousness that it could not help but slip out, sublimated, in his descriptions of individual character.

The significance and importance of Chatwin's work is not, then, that it offers a premeditated and clearly explicated 'Anatomy of Restlessness'. Rather, it builds a sense of the concept through its consistent engagement with the effects of restlessness, and through its clear personal significance to its author. Chatwin's work constructs what has perhaps best been defined by John Verlenden as 'a lyrical mythos. This mythos combines anti-materialism with the idea of wandering to produce a potent metaphor for the better life.'

Chatwin's great achievement is the sense of inclusiveness that his treatment of the subject of restlessness conveys, suggesting to the reader the sense that their individual struggles and frustrations are part of some grander scheme. This idea relates to both the author's theoretical dealings with the topic of restlessness, and his character based depictions. In Chatwin's characters, the reader sees one's own frustrations and anxieties reflected back, offering the solace of communion with a more romantic literary version of the self, whilst the author's theoretical vision presents the argument that the individual feeling of malaise with domestic and sedentary life is not, as it may seem, some prosaic and minor side-effect of settlement, but is rather the result of a genetic impulse derived from our evolution as a species. Chatwin dresses up our most prosaic dissatisfactions and offers them as proof of our humanity.

Chatwin's treatment of restlessness has, however, had the effect of encouraging a permissive sense of indulgence in the travelling life. The arguments of Chatwin's work legitimise peripatetic existence as a main solution

to restlessness and, if not directly a contributory cause, certainly mirror the development of the world into a place of rampant internationalism. Chatwin can be seen as the last antecedent of the touristic age: 'The whole of Chatwin is a How-to book for disgruntled, would-be money culture dropouts,' writes John Verlenden.

It is a definition that Chatwin would perhaps have struggled to come to terms with. Chatwin's work, as has been seen, treats restlessness as an 'affliction', despite the noted ambivalence of the definition. This affliction is cured by the profound spiritual effect of travel, which he saw in terms close to its etymological source in the French 'travail': 'It means hard work, penance and finally a journey,' he told Michael Ignatieff. 'There was an idea, particularly in the Middle Ages, that by going on pilgrimage, as Muslim pilgrims do, you were reinstating the original condition of man. The act of walking through a wilderness was thought to bring you back to God' (27). Travel for Chatwin has a metaphysical aspect, demonstrated time and again in the preceding chapters, that is absent from many modern, more hedonistic journeys.

In his review of James Pope Hennessy's biography of Robert Louis Stevenson, Chatwin seems to be offering a submerged analysis of his own position when he comments of the Edinburgh author's status as the 'forerunner of countless middle-class children who litter the world's beaches, or comfort themselves with anachronistic pursuits and worn-out religions. Travels with a Donkey is the prototype of the incompetent undergraduate voyage' (AOR 132).

Yet whatever Chatwin's reservations about the ultimate effect of his depiction of the modern phenomenon of restlessness, his work continues to offer the reader something of importance and value; namely, the possibility of escape, both in literary and actual terms, extending the existing mythology of

restlessness and related travel that Chatwin identified in “The Nomadic

Alternative”:

The words “progress”, “way”, “journey”, “road”, “path”, “pilgrimage”, “travel”, and “wander” call to some deep-seated bed of consciousness and we answer them with an emotional response. For all pertain to that great intangible – the idea of freedom. We have the cliché “Life is a Journey”, the *voyage imaginaire*, the Archetypal Journey such as the Odyssey, the Afterlife or Metaphysical Journey, such as *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the Revolutionary Journey and the Road of Peyote. For the Chinese the *Tao* was the Way of the Universe; Muslim Sufis spoke of themselves as “Travellers on the Way”, and the American Way of Life is held as a religious principle. Little boys take great pleasure in ‘ways’ of any kind, be they hoofprints, railway tracks, or the Méséglise or Guermantes Ways of Proust. The construction of unnecessary motorways and the revival of interest in the “Old Straight Track” belong to the same level of mythopoeic thought. Up is good, down is bad, whether this applies to the health of the body, Heaven, Hell, Snakes and Ladders or the Dow Jones Index. We have the Descent of Orpheus and the Ascension of Mount Carmel. On a psychological plane we have the good or bad “trip”, on an economic one the success or failure of the Five Year Plan. The connection of all or any of these I leave open, except to note that the human mind is passionately interested in the idea of the Journey and the direction of the Path. (17–18)

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