

# Striving for Honesty: A Travel Writer in Brazil

## Volume Two

### Playing God: the Travel Book and its Potential to (Re)design the World

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# Abstract

## **Striving for Honesty: A Travel Writer in Brazil**

The thesis comprises a book-length, market-orientated, non-fiction account of Brazil written from the perspective of an Australian woman who travelled in that country in the period leading up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, together with a related exegesis that investigates the reader's expectations and other literary and ethical considerations associated with the sub-genre of the 'travel book'.

### **Major Work: 'In Good Faith'**

On a number of trips, between 2006 and 2013, the author travelled to and across Brazil. This experience forms the basis for the major work, 'In Good Faith', which explores elements of the culture that unify and diversify Brazilians in an attempt to better understand this colourful and contradictory nation. Through an exploration of what and how Brazilians celebrate and what and who they do (and don't) commemorate, the author seeks to 'know' Brazil, to find out what makes Brazilians Brazilian and present her findings to her audience. She seeks to show how Brazil's people make meaning and sense of the world. The resultant text draws on history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, the travel writing of others and travel writing theory to help explain and bring to life the events and encounters she experienced in small backlands towns through to the biggest Brazilian cities.

### **Exegesis: Playing God: the Travel Book and its Potential to (Re)design the World**

The accompanying exegesis explores the question of whether honesty — and thus authorial integrity — is possible for the travel writer. Over recent decades there has been polarising debate about the role of, and the border between, fact and fiction in creative non-fiction in general and the travel book in particular. What is it that the reader of a 'travel book'

reasonably expects? After examining a range of definitions of travel books and applying a modified version of Philippe Lejeune's definition of, and criteria for, a work of autobiography, the exegesis shows that the 'simple authorial promise' from the writer of a travel book to her reader is that the writer aims for factual accuracy. But there are more complex promises to be found in modern travel books (and works of creative non-fiction generally), it is argued, that allow for deviations from factual accuracy or presenting characters, events and other details in ways other than how they happened.

The exegesis explores the circumstances that allow the travel book to be included in the category of creative non-fiction while not confounding the reader's expectation that she is reading an honest, if not factually accurate, account. It examines some of the misrepresentations notoriously told by travel writers over the centuries both intentionally and unintentionally. The paratexts of classic travel books by Robyn Davidson, Bill Bryson, Robert Byron, and Bruce Chatwin are considered while working through these issues. The author's own practice-led research on this question is demonstrated in her major work, 'In Good Faith'. The exegesis considers the grounds on which the deviations from factual accuracy — the fictions — that can be found in 'In Good Faith' should be regarded as legitimate or not.

# Candidate Statement

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Signed .....

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Author’s Note: The two volumes of this thesis use different referencing systems. Volume One (major work), as submitted, is a modified version of the book published as *In Brazil* by Scribe Publications in February 2016 and, as such, uses the same informal and house-style referencing system as that publication. In keeping with its more scholarly nature, Volume Two (exegesis) uses an academic referencing system.

Exegesis

**Playing God: the Travel Book and its  
Potential to (Re)design the World**



# Introduction

## In the Beginning

This exegesis, and the accompanying major work, ‘In Good Faith’, took root a year or two after 1987. It was in that year that *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin was first published. I took down my father’s Picador paperback edition from the wooden bookshelves beside the roll-top desk that had belonged to my grandfather. Reading it spurred me on to explore some of Chatwin’s other work but it was the two travel books, *The Songlines* and *In Patagonia*, which have had the most influence on me. In short, I loved them. I’d like to be able to report that it was those two titles that led me to discover my other favourite travel writers such as Jonathan Raban, Robert Byron, and Robyn Davidson — the romance of such a notion is attractive. It would make, in the context of this exegesis, a better story. But, committed as I have become to factual honesty, I am not certain that it is accurate to state that Chatwin came first. It was, I do remember, around about that time that I solemnly announced to a friend that one day I would become a travel writer myself, and those two books of Chatwin’s certainly influenced that vow.

It wasn’t until sometime later that I became aware of the controversy sparked by *The Songlines* and the suggestion that events, characters, conversations and other details I had assumed to be factually accurate — perhaps naïvely — hadn’t taken place as they were represented on the page.

I had read the book as a work of non-fiction and taken the text (more or less) literally. Perhaps like former *Granta* editor Ian Jack, ‘when I first read writers such as Chatwin and Theroux I needed to believe that the account was as honest a description of what happened to the writer, of what he or she had seen or heard, as a writer could manage’. But there was, as I shall show in this exegesis, nothing included in the package that comprised the originally published book to suggest that readers do otherwise. Sure, it was entertaining and beautifully written, but one of my major expectations of it — that it was factually accurate — was, it became apparent, misplaced. This offended me deeply — curiously deeply considering I didn’t have any personal stake in the text. My twenty- (or so) year-old self, finding that Chatwin had made things up, to the extent that he apparently did, without telling me, was upset. I felt, in a way, jilted.

Embarking on what would become my first travel book, I solemnly declared to tell ‘the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth’. I didn’t want to leave any possibility that my reader would be offended, as I was — and others were — by Chatwin. I would be, I swore with uncharacteristic zealotry, factually accurate.

But I quickly found that writing creatively — unlike journalism, writing reports, or writing for an academic audience — can benefit greatly from the inclusion of certain fictions. Some, I found, were even necessary or unavoidable for my creative work. Along the way, I became less concerned about telling ‘the truth, the whole truth and nothing but’ and more concerned to present events, characters, and other such details in my text as *honestly* as I could.

Imagine, there I was, trying to write a very specific book, a book no one else had written (nor, because of its personal nature, could write): a book-length, market-orientated text about my travels as an Australian woman in Brazil, for commercial publication in time for the 2016 Olympics. To achieve this goal — which was no longer merely a personal goal, but a legal

obligation in that I had enrolled as a PhD candidate and a version of the book was to form the major work — I needed to choose what to include from the rather massive amount of research material I was gathering (both from my personal experience and from secondary sources that the university rather impersonally calls ‘data’). I needed to fashion these ‘data’ in ways that a reading audience would find engaging, while ensuring the text remained informative. My writing had to be interesting, preferably entertaining. My then PhD coordinator reminded me that her department wasn’t called simply ‘English and Writing’ but ‘English and *Creative Writing*’; thus, my project should not result in a journalistic-style report but a creative work — something that students engaged in writing in non-fiction genres sometimes forgot.

The ‘fictions’, the creative devices that creative nonfiction writers can — and in some cases, must — use, I discovered, include: constructing or reconstructing dialogue, creating composite characters, crafting chronologies, omitting details, changing names, using imagination and more. But how could I utilise such tools and devices and yet not mislead my reader in the ways I felt that Bruce Chatwin had misled me? That has become the central question of this exegesis: is it possible to be an honest travel writer? If so, how? My negative feelings stemmed, I have concluded, from the fact that Chatwin had not been honest with me. I felt let down by him (while still loving his work) because the author hadn’t told me he was deviating from factual accuracy (or, indeed, the genre, as I shall soon show). So, if I couldn’t tell the ‘whole truth and nothing but’ — or if my narrative wasn’t best served by being entirely factually accurate — then I had better say so. If ‘In Good Faith’ wasn’t wholly factually accurate then at least it could be factually honest.

## **Overview**

It has long been accepted that there is a contract between the writer of a text and the reader of that text. The labels vary. Philippe Lejeune calls it a ‘pact’. John Hersey calls it a ‘licence’. No matter the terminology, in this exegesis I want to show that it doesn’t matter what the

writer promises, or thinks he promises, but rather what the reader *thinks* he has promised to her. What matters for a ‘travel book’ (or any work of creative non-fiction) is fulfilling what I shall call the ‘reasonable expectations’ of the reader.<sup>1</sup>

The attempt to answer the question of how I could use fictions in a work of non-fiction without betraying or confounding my reader’s expectations raised numerous other questions that this exegesis will discuss. What is a ‘travel book’? How does the reader know that what she holds in her hand is, indeed, a travel book? What is the promise of a travel book in general, and what is the promise of this particular travel book, the text in the reader’s hand? Who makes that promise? How is the promise conveyed to the reader: that is, how are expectations formed in the reader’s mind?

In Chapter One we shall see how, with a slight modification, Philippe Lejeune’s definition of autobiography can apply to the travel book. It follows that the promise made by the travel book author to her reader — and on which the reader bases her expectations — is (to aim) for factual accuracy. I will examine what Gérard Genette calls the ‘paratext’ to see how it can influence a reader’s expectations of a book. We will see that the author, in presenting a work as a travel book invites the reasonable reader expectation (with certain possible exceptions as I shall show) that, to quote Ian Jack again, ‘[T]he travel writer ... *did not make it up*’ (xi original emphasis).

Chapter Two will identify some of the sorts of fictions that can and have been included in travel books, either intentionally or unintentionally, by their authors. I will ask if the authors of those fictions indicated, or should have indicated, to the reader that she should modify her expectations so as not to find them confounded. And if that message was, or should have

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, contracts between author and reader apply for, and readers have certain expectations of, fiction as well; however, the terms are different.

been, sent by the author how that was or might be achieved. That is, how can the author convey the message that characters, events and other details might not be as they actually happened. In what ways might the reader be prepared for factual inaccuracies? I will look briefly at *Tracks* by Robyn Davidson, as an example of an author who delivers on what I call the ‘simple authorial promise’ and Bill Bryson’s *In a Sunburned Country* as a case where the reader’s expectations were successfully modified so that she didn’t expect literal factual accuracy.

Chapter Three will examine a more complex case wherein the author’s messages are mixed: Robert Byron’s *The Road to Oxiana*. In this chapter I consider a travel book’s intentional factual inaccuracies to ascertain whether those ‘fictions’ are legitimate (or not). Legitimate fictions do not confound the expectations of the reader and potentially (re)design the world (inaccurately and materially) in the mind of the reader.<sup>2</sup>

In Chapter Four, some of the fictions that have been found in *The Songlines* and *In Patagonia* will be examined. Whether these fictions have a legitimate place in these texts will be tested against criteria identified in previous chapters, allowing me the opportunity to identify just how and why Chatwin confounded my own expectations.

### **The Simple Authorial Promise**

In his seminal study of travel books, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*, Paul Fussell defines the travel book thus:

Travel books are a sub-species of memoir in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data, and in which the narrative — unlike that of a novel or a romance — claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality (203).

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<sup>2</sup> I shall make clear what I mean by (re)design when it is discussed further in Chapter Two.

Breaking this definition down, it seems clear that if a text is presented as a travel book then the author is contracting with or promising the reader to deliver non-fiction:

a) ‘This is a travel book’ (if indeed it is): it is, therefore, an *autobiographical narrative*, that is, the telling of the author’s *own experiences*;

b) As a travel book, the narrative ‘arises from the speaker’s [the writer’s, as we shall see in the next chapter] encounter with distant or unfamiliar data’ (ibid.); that is, the places and people *as actually* encountered by the writer;

c) The narrative (constantly) refers to actuality.

In his study of the genre, *Travel Writing*, Carl Thompson defines the travel book as ‘the first-person narrative of travel which claims to be a true record of the author’s own experiences’ (27). In the same volume he calls it ‘almost invariably a retrospective, first-person account of the author’s own experience of a journey, or of an unfamiliar place or people’ (14). Like Fussell, he deems that the contract with the reader — the simple authorial promise — is set by genre: ‘the generic “contract” that exists between the authors and readers of novels is usually significantly different to that which operates between the authors and readers of travel books’ (Thompson 16). It seems clear that if the book the reader is holding has been presented as falling within the travel book genre, then she is entitled to expect it to be a work of non-fiction: that is, for the experiences and events it relates to be factually accurate or reasonably so.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For reasons of space, I must skate over the complex relationship between representation and reality. Stephen Greenblatt points out, in *Marvellous Possessions*, that books are ‘mimetic capital’. They can describe, reflect, or represent reality (or certain realities) but they are not reality (see, for example, 6–7).

# Chapter One

## Categories and Clues: Sending the (Right) Message

*But how are readers to discern between fact and invention in neo-historical fiction? What is the status of the facts deployed in these texts?*

Christopher Kremmer ('from Dialectics to Dialogue')

### **Factual Status**

For readers to effectively process the text they are reading they need to know what it is. Eric Heyne and John Searle are two theorists who point out that our understanding of the kind of statement being made by a writer is dependent on, in Heyne's words, 'our perception of the kind of statement being intended' (480). The reader needs a basic map of the terrain or they might get lost, if you like, because 'the proper response is indicated by the type of story we think we are being told' (ibid.). Thus, Christopher Kremmer's question, the quote that opens this chapter, is even more applicable to travel books (since it is assumed that fiction-writers do make things up).

Whether a text is fiction or not is what Heyne calls its 'factual status'. He distinguishes this from 'factual adequacy' or 'good or bad fact' (that is whether a fact is, indeed, 'correct' or 'accurate'). The reader needs to know the factual status of a text because 'different sorts of responses are appropriate for fiction and nonfiction' (Heyne 480). The factual status of a text influences the reader and can, in turn, influence the world. While all manner of texts can influence the world, those texts presented as 'true' are more likely to do so.

*The Bible*, for example, has been presented for centuries by some proponents as non-fiction. Had it been presented as fiction it would have had a different response from readers and almost certainly a different kind of power. There are, I suggest, three types of readings of *The Bible*: as literal, as parable or as mainly fiction. Since it became a book, the texts that comprise *The Bible* have been largely presented as not fictional and, as such, have hugely influenced the world with millions of people following its teachings.<sup>4</sup>

Another example of the power of a text to influence people when they believe that it is non-fiction — albeit with a briefer span and sphere of influence — is H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. When the novella was dramatised as a series of news bulletins on radio in the US, it 'frankly terrified many of its listeners' (Schwartz no pp.). Assumed to be reporting on real events by many listeners, it reputedly sparked a panic about alien invasion. The creative non-fiction specialist Lee Gutkind and his co-writers, focusing on eye-witness texts, and memoir in particular, say 'memoir can ... have the power to change the world' (139). That is, books can change the way readers think about the world; they can have effects on real-life events.<sup>5</sup>

Marco Polo's *Travels* is another example of a text that was presented as non-fiction and as such had enormous influence. In filling in the map — re-drawing it even — with parts of the world previously unknown to readers, it came to represent that part of the world. Marco Polo's China, for example, became 'China' in his readers' minds (even though it was far more substantial in actuality than presented by Polo). The book was advertised to readers in the thirteenth century as a 'Description of the World', as stated in the introduction to my Penguin Classics copy (Latham 7). On the very first page of the text, its authors declare it to be 'an

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<sup>4</sup> Although I am not suggesting that had the texts been presented as purely fictional that they would have had no influence.

<sup>5</sup> An Australian example is John Bryson's *Evil Angels*. The book is often credited as helping to expose a miscarriage of justice.



accurate record, free from any sort of fabrication' (Polo 33).<sup>6</sup> This was not merely a storyteller's trope; the text was taken as factually accurate. As such, and in a world that was still finding itself, the discoveries and 'information' Polo brought home to Europe were highly significant. It was, amongst its other 'firsts', the first time a European had made detailed and public reports of the Orient. 'The claim put forward in the prologue, [was] that its author had travelled more extensively than any man since Creation' (Latham 7). 'Historically, the importance of Marco's book is hard to exaggerate' Peter Whitfield confirms in *Travel: A Literary History* (29). Christopher Columbus carried with him a copy of Marco Polo's *Travels* and 'believed it absolutely' (Whitfield 29; see also Clark (ed.) 249). He was reputedly searching for another route to Polo's China when he came across the Americas. In this way, Polo's work had a hand in the discovery of the Americas.

William Dampier's account of his travels also had repercussions in the 'real world' despite being, as Peter Whitfield, points out, in the 'borderland ... between fiction and fact' (121). Posing on the page as an explorer and not as the pirate he was, Dampier presented his tales 'plausibly disguised as exploration, in his *A New Voyage Round the World* in 1697, to such good effect that he was appointed to command a government reconnaissance expedition' that resulted in him leading the party of Englishmen to first step on Australian soil (Whitfield 121).

William Bligh's account of his travels was another influential explorer's travel text: it played a part in three of his crew being sentenced to hang; Bligh himself was absent from the trial (Adams 173).

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<sup>6</sup> 'Authors' because Polo apparently dictated his stories to a scribe called Rustichello when they were in gaol together in Genoa.

## **How does the Reader Know?**

The above examples don't merely illustrate the perhaps mundane point that books — especially books purporting to be non-fiction — influence the world. The examples emphasise the point that the reader needs instruction as to whether to read the text as fiction or non-fiction. In 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse', John Searle succinctly explains that there is no certain way for an author to know if the text she is reading is fiction or non-fiction from the text itself. 'There is no textual property, syntactical or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction' (Searle 325). Some listeners were unable to tell that *The War of the Worlds* radio play was not a presentation of real events from just listening to the dramatisation. From the text itself, readers weren't to know whether the famous Australian hoax-text, Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* was fiction or non-fiction — it could have been read as either; (it was, in fact, fiction presented by the author as non-fiction as will be further explored below). Although the label fiction or non-fiction, on the bookshop shelf upon which the reader finds a text, plays a part in how the reader knows what sort of text she is picking up, it is not the sole clue.

If our perception of the kind of statement being intended is important, how is that perception constructed? That is, if it is important for the reader to understand the factual status of the text, how is she to know this? The answer has been provided by Philippe Lejeune and extrapolated, in depth, by Gérard Genette. A book, they point out, does not usually consist solely of the text. In addition to the text, are the peritext and the epitext that together form the paratext and provide clues — indeed promises — about its factual status.

### **The Paratext**

The peritext comprises those elements that surround, or are inserted into, the text itself; elements created by the author and the publisher, which comprise the physical book. The

peritext generally includes the author's name (or pseudonym), the title, preface, table of contents, notes, and the like. The epitext is created outside the book, elements of which might come to the attention of the reader and might influence the reading of the text, such as correspondence, interviews, advertisements, publicity material, word-of-mouth, prizes awarded and so on. Together they make up the paratext which forms, according to Genette, the 'zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*' (2 original emphasis).

While elements of the epitext that a reader is exposed to (whether by searching them out or stumbling across them) might influence the reading of the text, no reader is likely to be exposed to every single piece of the epitext surrounding a book. Genette says, for example, if the reader knows the age or gender of the author this information might influence the reading of the text. 'Do we ever read "a novel by a woman" exactly as we read "a novel" plain and simple, that is, a novel by a man?' he asks (7). Similarly, we might read a text by a teenage author differently to one by an author in her fifties. For Genette, such paratextual material has 'factual value': it 'provides some commentary on the text and influences on how the text is received' (7). Such facts are not necessarily included in the peritext. And, plainly, if these facts are not known then they have no factual value — no impact — at all.

Because there is no way to ensure that the reader will be exposed to all elements of the epitext, the epitext cannot be relied upon to provide the appropriate clues to the reader as to the factual status of a text. It is the peritext that offers the only reliable manner by which to convey the factual status of a text. It instructs the reader how to read the text by establishing the writer-reader contract or authorial promise.<sup>7</sup> The peritext, Lejeune says, 'in reality, *controls* the entire reading' (29 original emphasis).

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<sup>7</sup> Reliable but not foolproof: a reader might occasionally come to a text unadorned by peritext (such as a photocopy or some pirated text-only edition). The author cannot, in these cases, be held responsible for not conveying the terms of the contract or what the authorial promise is.

## The Power of the Peritext

The power of the peritext can be demonstrated by examination of paratexts that made promises to the reader that the authors did not intend to keep. The paratexts of two famous Australian literary hoaxes are useful here: *Forbidden Love*, purportedly a memoir by an author named Norma Khouri and *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, posing as a novel based on the true story of her ‘Ukrainian’ family by ‘Ukrainian’-Australian author Helen ‘Demidenko’.

In 2003, *Forbidden Love* was published to acclaim as an autobiographical work. The text, according to the peritext (and the original epitext), told the story of events that took place in Jordan, surrounding the murder, the ‘honour-killing’, of the author’s best friend Dalia, a young Muslim woman who had fallen in love with a Christian. The book soon achieved best-seller status in Australia and elsewhere. It was later proven that the events the author and the peritext (and the original epitext) presented as non-fiction had not occurred; the text did not relate the actual (or even embellished) experiences of the author.

In addition to the fact that my Bantam edition clearly categorises the text as ‘non-fiction’, it is entirely obvious from the peritext (and the original or ‘pre-exposure’ epitext) that the author (and her unwitting publisher) always fully intended to instruct her reader to read *Forbidden Love* as not fictional. The subtitle confirms this: *A Harrowing True Story of Love and Revenge in Jordan*. The copyright page includes a list of suggested library categories, promoting the seriousness of the text. The back-cover quote: ‘[t]his extraordinary true story ...’ directly claims its factual status. The brief biography inside the cover of *Forbidden Love* tells the reader that the manuscript was ‘written secretly in an Internet café’ after ‘she was forced to emigrate to Athens’, lending credence — and no little drama — to the story.

Like the peritext of *Forbidden Love*, the peritext of *The Hand that Signed the Paper* is extensively persuasive.<sup>8</sup> Although categorised as ‘fiction’ the novel is presented to the reader as ‘based on a true story’: that ‘true story’ being based on the author’s life and her family’s ‘Ukrainian’ history. Inside the cover, above a brief biography of the author, there is an ‘author photo’, where she appears with white-blond hair, arguably a marker of Northern European (Ukrainian) heritage.<sup>9</sup> The biography tells the reader that the author was born in Brisbane and educated at the University of Queensland. This serves to indicate that the author is ‘a real person’ and correlates that identity with the text’s present-day narrator/protagonist who was also born in Brisbane and educated at the University of Queensland and is of Ukrainian heritage.

The author of *The Hand that Signed the Paper* went further to ensure her text was read as ‘true’: she included in the peritext an ‘Author’s Note’. This ‘Author’s Note’ performs the same function as what Genette termed an ‘original authorial preface’ which ‘has as its chief function to *ensure that the text is read properly*’ (197 original emphasis). That is, to align the reader’s expectations with the author’s intentions. In the original ‘Author’s Note’ she claims, somewhat disingenuously: ‘What follows is a work of fiction. The Kovalenko family depicted in this novel has no counterpart in reality.’ She follows this with: ‘Nonetheless, it would be ridiculous to pretend that this book is unhistorical: I have used historical events and people where necessary throughout the text’ (Darville vi). For the third edition, after her hoax was exposed, the latter sentence was expunged and the author name changed to Helen Darville.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it is the benefit of hindsight that conjures Shakespeare when he wrote of Lady Macbeth ‘The lady doth protest too much, methinks.’

<sup>9</sup> She was, according to Therese-Marie Meyer, ‘naturally brunette’ (Meyer 113, note 99).

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly a search of the National Library of Australia database records no author by the name of Demidenko, only Darville with the same ISBN as the ‘Demidenko’ edition.

These two hoaxes demonstrate the power of the peritext as a tool for instructing the reader as to how to read the texts. It is the main — and extremely effective — medium for communicating the authorial promise. Both these authors — unwittingly abetted by their publishers — went to a lot of trouble in constructing convincing peri- and epi-texts that promised their readers autobiographical works. In the next chapter I shall return to the peritext to see what other functions it can perform. In the meantime, it will become apparent these two hoaxers didn't necessarily need to construct such elaborate peri-and epi-texts to suggest to readers that their works were autobiographical. They needed only a single element of the peritext to convince a reader to interpret their texts in that way: the purported author names on their texts' covers. But first let us look further at what defines a work as an autobiography or a travel book and then locate both within what Peter Hulme calls the non-fiction 'metagenre' (11) to see what promise is being made to the reader by the author.<sup>11</sup>

### **Metagenre: the Author's Choice**

In a close examination of the genre of autobiography in his chapter 'The Autobiographical Pact' in *On Autobiography*, Phillipe Lejeune defines that genre and clearly locates it in the metagenre of non-fiction. Lejeune's definition and criteria will help us to locate the travel book in the same category, that is, as non-fiction.

Lejeune defines autobiography as: 'Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality' (4). He goes on to list the essential criteria and elements required for a text to be declared autobiography:

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<sup>11</sup> Fiction being the other 'metagenre'.

1. *Form of Language:*
  - a. Narrative
  - b. In prose
2. *Subject treated:* individual life, story of a personality
3. *Situation of the author:* the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical
4. *Position of the narrator:*
  - a. The narrator and the principal character are identical
  - b. Retrospective point of view of the narrative.

According to this definition and criteria, travel books are not ‘autobiography’ because they do not fulfil category two: they do not treat *as their subject* an individual life.<sup>12</sup> Although travel books are not strictly ‘autobiography’, they are, I would suggest, ‘autobiographical’ in that they narrate the author’s own experiences or a part of his or her life.<sup>13</sup> In order to appropriate Lejeune’s definition and criteria for my purpose (to prove that it is the author who chooses to present her text to the reader as a travel book and, as I shall show later, in making that choice the author presents it as non-fiction) we need to modify Lejeune’s category 2, ‘subject treated’. If we substitute ‘individual life, story of a personality’ with Fussell’s ‘the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data’, (*Abroad* 203) it would appear we can use Lejeune’s criteria to test whether or not a text is being presented as a travel book or not.<sup>14</sup>

It is, at the outset, the author who chooses to fulfil these criteria (or not) and thus chooses (or not) to present her or his work as autobiography or a travel book (or neither). In so choosing the author presents the text to the reader to be read in a certain way — for the purpose of Lejeune’s study, as autobiography.

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Lejeune points out that ‘memoir’ does not fit his criteria strictly either, that his criteria would need to be modified slightly to fit memoir (4).

<sup>13</sup> And what separates the travel book from the travel guide, according to Fussell, is that guidebooks ‘are not autobiographical and are not sustained by a narrative exploiting the devices of fiction’ (203).

<sup>14</sup> We could equally substitute Holland & Huggan’s ‘the trajectory of the series of selves in transit’ (14).

Searle makes the point again and again: ‘Roughly speaking, whether or not a work is literature is for readers to decide, whether or not it is fiction is for the author to decide’ (320). ‘The identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of necessity lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author’ (325). And further: ‘to identify a text as a novel, a poem, or even as a text is already to make a claim about the author’s intentions’ (ibid.). The importance of intention is central for Searle: it is the author who chooses either to ‘pretend’ (or not) because ‘pretend’, as a verb, has ‘the concept of intention built into it’ (ibid.). That is, the decision regarding the quality of the work is up to the reader but the decision about which metagenre the text should be read as is up to the author. Authorial intention is a topic that is returned to in the next chapter.

But if it is the author who chooses the metagenre (and within that, their genre) and in doing so makes claims for her text that form the instruction to the reader on how to read the text — what the simple authorial promise is — how is the choice of genre conveyed? We have seen that a text is rarely presented or published on its own; it is usually accompanied by other elements that affect the reading. The paramount clue that the peritext provides, according to Lejeune, is the author’s name. The author’s name is the author’s declaration as to which genre they are presenting to the reader.

In autobiography, as in the travel book, ‘the identity of the *narrator* and the *principal character* ...’ says Lejeune, ‘is marked most often by the use of the first person’ (5 original emphasis). Freya Stark, Robert Byron, Bruce Chatwin, Dervla Murphy, Bill Bryson, Pico Iyer, Paul Theroux, Michael Palin, V.S. Naipaul, Jonathan Raban (I could, of course, go on) write their travel books in the first person. Like all good rules there are exceptions if one includes in the definition such travel books as Homer’s *The Odyssey* Herodotus’ *Histories* and Marco Polo’s *The Travels*. These are written in the third person (the latter shifts between first



and third) but generally the modern travel book is written in the first person, and is narrated by the principal character.

Of course, the examples of works of fiction that are narrated by the principal character are many: *Moby Dick*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (I could, of course, again go on). Further, there are numerous novels narrated in the first person that begin with a direct claim that the narrator and the principal character are the same person. In *My Brilliant Career* the narrator states in the introduction, ‘this story is all about myself’ (Franklin 1). In the first line of the prologue to *Dark Places* the narrator states, ‘This is Albion Gidley Singer at the pen, a man with a weakness for a good fact’ (Grenville 1). *We have Always Lived in the Castle* begins with ‘My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood’ (Jackson 1). As Searle pointed out: ‘There is no textual property, syntactical or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction’ (325). So how is the reader to know whether they are to read the text as fiction or non-fiction, as a novel or an autobiography or a travel book?

### **The Name of the Author**

The first and primary clue is the name of the author. If the name of the author as identified is the same as that of the narrator and the protagonist, then the reader can identify the text as autobiographical. This is a crucial point for Lejeune. The authors of *My Brilliant Career*, *Dark Places*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Heart of Darkness* and many other such texts are identified by a name different to that of the narrator/protagonist. The authors of those books have chosen not to identify their texts as non-fiction (autobiography or, in the case of the latter, travel). Freya Stark, Robert Byron and Jonathan Raban, for example, are identified as the authors of the texts in which their names are the same as their narrator/protagonists (although, as I will discuss further, not always are they full names: in Byron’s case, the initials of his protagonist are the same as those of the author).

The power of the author's name can be seen in examples of the hoaxers 'Norma Khouri' and 'Helen Demidenko'. The reader was instructed to read these texts as 'true' by the names on the covers of their texts. 'Norma Khouri' is a straightforward case: both the name that the narrator's friend Dalia calls her (e.g. 16) and the name of the beauty shop the narrator runs with Dalia (called 'N & D' which the reader assumes stands for 'Norma & Dalia') indicate that the narrator's name is Norma. The case of Helen Demidenko is a little more complicated, but only on the surface. The main narrator/protagonist in the published text is called Fiona Kovalenko, differing from that of the author. But as pointed out by Melinda Denham in her master's research thesis, Helen Demidenko was 'sufficiently Ukrainian-sounding to fool most mainstream commentators (21).<sup>15</sup> They have a strikingly similar sound and rhythm (at least to my ear). But the clinching piece of evidence showing that the author intended to present her work as 'true' is that the main narrator/protagonist's name in the original manuscript was the same, 'Helen Demidenko'.<sup>16</sup>

Lejeune is unequivocal about what promise is being made to the reader, or how the reader is being instructed to read a work, where the name of the author is the same as the name of the narrator/protagonist. He developed a test (shown as a chart outlining the various possibilities) in which he states: '*Name of the protagonist ≠ name of the author*. This fact alone excludes the possibility of autobiography' (15). '*Name of the protagonist = name of the author*. This fact alone excludes the possibility of fiction' (17). The author's and the protagonist's names are the mechanism by which the author conveys to the reader the simple authorial promise, or the broad instruction regarding how to read the text. The coincidence of the author's name

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<sup>15</sup> Denham's thesis, to which I am indebted, asks the question 'How can a novel come to be read as if it were an autobiography?' (4). She examines Demidenko's 'novel' as presented by the author, applying both Lejeune's theory of autobiography and Genette's exploration of the peritext.

<sup>16</sup> According to Robert Manne, it was submitted to the Vogel Award (for an unpublished work by an author under thirty-five), with the names of the main characters being 'Demidenko' but he does not say why (29–30).

with the narrator/protagonist's is how Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact' is formed. And if the 'autobiographical pact' is in play, so too, Lejeune says, is the 'referential pact'.

### **The Referential Pact**

The 'referential pact' promises, Lejeune says, a text's 'resemblance to the truth'. Referential texts 'claim to provide information about a "reality" exterior to the text and so submit to a test of *verification*' (22 original emphasis). Most readers do not bother to verify; they merely accept that the text is 'true'. He goes on to say that the 'formula', or the standard, for such texts is: 'I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'. That is, 'exactly like scientific or historical discourse' (22). Lejeune does qualify this rather stark (and possibly unattainable) promise as 'a supplementary proof of honesty to restrict it to the *possible* (the truth such as it appears to me, inasmuch as I can know it, etc.)', a topic I shall discuss further in the next chapter (22 original emphasis). And so, we can see that because in the modern travel book the author and the narrator/protagonist have the same name, then the broad instruction given by the travel author is also to read the travel book as autobiographical, as non-fiction. What I term the 'simple authorial promise' is in play, that is, to deliver factual accuracy to the best of the author's ability.<sup>17</sup>

John Searle believes the default instruction for *all* texts is for the reader to read the text as non-fiction. In his examination of what makes fiction possible, he identifies a set of rules applicable to all texts. He thinks of them as 'vertical rules that establish connections between language and reality' (326). That is, these are not rules between language and un-reality or pretence; the 'normal requirement' is for language to represent reality. Unless, of course, the author indicates his 'fictional intent', which Lejeune has shown is indicated if the author's name is not the same as the protagonist/narrator.

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<sup>17</sup> With, especially in the case of travel books, the author as 'eyewitness'. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, the role of the eyewitness confers an authority; the eyewitness 'possesses the truth' (129).

For Searle, what makes fiction possible ‘is a set of extralinguistic, non-semantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world established by the rules’; that when those conventions are invoked they ‘suspend *the normal requirements* established by these rules’ (326 my emphasis).

How does the reader know that the author is invoking the conventions that break ‘the normal requirements’ for ‘truth’ and thus that the intention of the author is to write fiction? After all, ‘the utterance acts in fiction are indistinguishable from the utterance acts of serious discourse, and it is for that reason that there is no textual property that will identify a stretch of discourse as a work of fiction’ (Searle 327). Searle answers himself thus: ‘The author will establish with the reader a set of understandings about how far the horizontal conventions of fiction break the vertical connections of serious speech’ that is, how much is fiction and how much is truth (331).

Applying Searle’s criterion to travel books, it is clear that the simple authorial promise — or default state — for the travel book is to ‘represent reality’. If she is to legitimately do other than represent anything in a factually accurate manner in her travel book, the author needs to signal her ‘fictional intent’. She needs to make it clear to the reader how much and in what way she might deviate from the simple authorial promise of factual accuracy.

Travel book theorists support the contention that the default state, or the simple authorial promise, for travel books is for factual accuracy or to ‘represent reality’. Repeatedly, they have said that travel books are not fiction. As was seen in the introduction to this exegesis, inherent in Paul Fussell’s definition of a travel book is that ‘the narrative — unlike that of a novel or a romance — claims literal validity by constant *reference to actuality*’ (*Abroad* 203 my emphasis). Carl Thompson uses the words ‘*a true record* of the author’s own experiences.’ (27 my emphasis). Peter Hulme is equally unequivocal: ‘Fiction and non-fiction

are not in themselves genres: they are better described as metagenres, which establish their relationship with readers largely through explicit or implicit reading contracts ... travel writing is a non-fictional genre' (10-11).

In this chapter we have seen that the author who chooses to write in the genre of autobiography or travel, and signals such by giving the protagonist the same name as the author 'signs' (by virtue of putting her own name on the cover), swears, as Lejeune states, 'to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth' (22).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lejeune also states that there is no clearly-stated pact in the cases of anonymous or pseudonymous texts (see pages 12-13 and 19).



## Chapter Two

### Fictions, Fabrications and Lies:

#### Exceptions to the Promise

*I always tell students that it's a slippery slope from the things your stepfather didn't actually do to the weapons of mass destruction Iraq didn't actually have. If you want to write about a stepfather who did things your stepfather didn't, or repeat conversations you don't actually remember with any detail, at least label your product accurately.*

Rebecca Solnit ('How to be a Writer')

#### Deviating from Factual Accuracy

The simple authorial promise — the requirement of the genre — might call for factual accuracy or in Lejeune's terms 'the whole truth' but, in fact, there are myriad ways that authors deviate from factual accuracy in their autobiographical texts in general and in travel books in particular. Some of these deviations are legitimate, by which I mean they do not confound the reader's expectations (they are expected or accepted by the reader in certain circumstances). This chapter examines some of the 'fictions' that can be, and have been, found in travel books and explores the conditions under which they might be legitimate exceptions to the simple authorial promise. These fictions fall into two broad categories: the unintentional and the intentional. First let us look at those included in travel books by the author unintentionally.

Since they first began travelling, travel writers have been getting it wrong. Of all the written genres, travel writing is arguably that most likely to be riddled with mistakes, misunderstandings and misinterpretations; it is, after all, concerned with what Fussell terms ‘distant or unfamiliar data’ (*Abroad* 203). Philippe Lejeune assures that allowances are made ‘for lapses of memory, errors, involuntary distortions, etc.’ (22). And so, we return to the concept of authorial intention. To repeat John Searle: ‘[T]he identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of necessity lie in the illocutionary *intentions* of the author’ (325 my emphasis). An unintentional deviation from factual accuracy in a work of non-fiction does not confound the expectations of the reader; it does not disqualify it from being legitimately presented (or read) as such a work. After all, it is up to the reader to gauge the factual adequacy of the text. Unintentional fictions fulfil the requirement of creative non-fiction that Donna Lee Brien pinpoints when she writes that they do not ‘*seek* to subvert in any way the truth-telling aspirations of nonfiction’ (Brien no pp. my emphasis).<sup>19</sup>

Of the unintentional fiction, mistake is, perhaps, the most obvious. Marco Polo made mistakes that appeared in *The Travels*. He mistook the Volga River for the Tigris, for example (Polo 35). He reported the wrong name for at least one of Kublai Khan’s sons.<sup>20</sup> For Polo, travelling at a time when traders, messengers and emissaries were only just beginning to travel west to east, the data were especially unfamiliar. Prior to the thirteenth century, most travel was performed by displaced peoples or by pilgrims, and stopped well short of the orient. But if the mistake is ‘honest’ the reader will in many cases forgive it (assuming it is recognised as a mistake or error).

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<sup>19</sup> However, the author does have a duty to try to take the utmost care with the ‘facts’. The reader expects the author to ‘do her best’ not to get things wrong thus the expectations of the reader may be confounded by sloppy work. ‘Creative nonfiction writers, like scientists,’ say Gutkind et al., ‘cannot give up on the rigors of scholarship’ (Gutkind et al. 55).

<sup>20</sup> According to his translator, Polo claimed the son was named ‘Chinghiz’ (for Genghis) but he was actually called ‘Chinkim’ (see note Polo 123).



As inevitable as the mistake, perhaps, is misinterpretation by the travel writer. A traveller — and most especially a travel *writer* — is an interpreter, translating experiences into language her readers can understand. The places and peoples — the ‘distant and unfamiliar data’ — she encounters, require interpretation and translation into words on a page. Cultural differences, foibles, previous experiences, prejudices, beliefs etc., necessarily influence the way in which writers interpret. It is a common enough notion, one that many theorists and travel writers have tackled but an important one here: people interpret differently.

Eric Leed writes in *The Mind of the Traveller*:

Francis Bacon established a theology of observation and the basis of modern empiricisms by asserting that the senses are a natural channel between the human mind and the world, but one corrupted and occluded by ... culture: everyday speech, popular opinion, the worship of tradition, ... which leaps to conclusions on the basis of insufficient evidence (182).

Carl Thompson puts it thus:

[T]he conclusions ... [authors] reach will inevitably be to some degree subjective, reflecting their own personal tastes, interests and attitudes. Simultaneously, this subjective viewpoint will always be to some extent an ideological aspect, being the expression of attitudes, assumptions and aspirations inherited from the larger culture or subculture of which the traveller is a part (71).

Donna Lee Brien writes about creative non-fiction in general: ‘[It] is thus the perfect vehicle for the writer who wishes to reveal the impossibility of any immaculate objectivity when it comes to writing nonfiction’ (Brien no pp.).

The individualised nature of translation is a topic I touch on in my major work via a point raised by Milan Kundera. It is also valid here. In his collection of essays, *Testaments Betrayed*, Kundera examines a number of translations into French of a passage from *The*

*Castle*, a novel that Franz Kafka wrote in German (105). Kundera, Czech himself, is fascinated by the ways in which translators impose their own assumptions, prejudices and foibles on a work. According to Kundera's study, even when a literal translation is possible the translator often deviates from it. In one example, Kafka had made deliberate repetitious use of a word that should (says Kundera) be translated as 'strange'. All three translators of Kafka chose to avoid the repetition of 'strange' as deliberately used by the author. All three changed Kafka's meaning and all three interpreted the word 'strange' differently. So, even when something seems quite straightforward misinterpretations can occur. Foibles, preferences, prejudices and beliefs can influence the travel writer. As Thompson says, some 'accounts simply reiterate and reinforce many of the prevailing stereotypes and prejudices already circulating in the traveller's culture' (92).

Marco Polo, for example, interpreted an animal he saw as a unicorn. He identified it thus because it had 'a single large, black horn in the middle of the forehead' (253). He was, as Thompson points out, probably describing 'the creature that modern zoology would label the Sumatran rhinoceros' (69). But Polo (presumably) didn't intentionally misinterpret; he would, most likely, have thought that he was confirming the existence of unicorns in the world.

In short, the simple authorial oath allows for unintentional fictions. They fall under the contractual clause 'reader beware', if you like. These sorts of non-intentional fictions in travel books are not, as Lee Gutkind has said, 'a violation of the promise inherent in all nonfiction' (Brien and Gutkind no pp.).

If unintentional deviations are allowed for under — inherent in — the simple authorial promise of factual accuracy, the promise becomes 'factual accuracy (to the best of my ability)'. Does it follow, then, that all intentional fictions are illegitimate in the travel book? Do all fictions confound? Are they all contradictory to the reader's expectations?

## Epistemological Decorum

Readers bring their own beliefs, prejudices etc. to the text too. Whether a fiction is acceptable (or, indeed, accepted as ‘good fact’ by the reader) can depend on the period in which the text is read. For Lejeune, ‘it is a supplementary proof of [the author’s] honesty to restrict it to the *possible*’ (22 original emphasis). Even beliefs as to what is ‘possible’ can change depending on the time the text is read. Carl Thompson borrows a term from science to explain this: ‘epistemological decorum’. ‘That is to say, if travelogues are to be credited by their readers, they must meet contemporary audience expectations as to what denotes reliability and plausibility in the travel account’ (72). Not only was Polo’s misinterpretation unintentional, it would likely not have confounded the expectations of his reader. It is further likely that it was regarded as ‘good fact’ to his contemporary reader because unicorns were regarded as actually existing according to the beliefs of the time.

Some stories that today would be regarded as ‘tall tales’ or read as pure allegory (that is, fiction) were quite acceptable to the contemporary reader; they were relied upon for information — facts — and as such taken literally by some. *The Voyage of St Brendan* is one such text; it was ‘composed at some unknown date after the year 600’, says Peter Whitfield before noting that ‘to modern ears, St Brendan’s voyage sounds closer to that of Edward Lear’s “Jumblies” or “The Owl and the Pussycat” than to any historical narrative’ (17-18).<sup>21</sup>

*The Voyage* is narrated in the third person, as was common to the then-contemporary travel book and generally accepted to be a travel book. In the Moran translation, the author reports St Brendan’s boat party landing on ‘a fish, the largest of all that swim in the ocean’ (sec. x). He encounters birds with the power of speech (and able to sing hymns) (sec. xi), and,

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<sup>21</sup> Mackley dates the earliest version as most likely around the ninth century (1).

conversing with God, asks why the sheep he saw that day were ‘larger even than oxen’ to which God replies that they were never milked (sec. ix). Presumably the original author intentionally deviated from factual accuracy in ‘reporting’ the details of the voyage.<sup>22</sup> But his contemporary audience read texts like St Brendan’s accepting that they described and defined ‘not only the known world but also what was knowable in the world, and what was likely to be true’ (Thompson 73). In a study of various translations of the text, Jude S. Mackley says ‘the popularity of the legend ... suggests that the various audiences of the *Navigatio* believed, or wanted to believe, in Brendan’s legends’ (55).<sup>23</sup> Many of his ‘fictions’ were of the accepted order. For example, as Mackley notes, St Brendan’s ‘audiences ... would probably have believed in visitations by angels as they were substantiated by Biblical authority’ (83).

It was not only lay readers who relied upon such travel accounts for knowledge. In his own study of the St Brendan’s navigations, W. H. Babcock says that the famous explorer Humboldt took at least some of Brendan’s reports as evidence: ‘So greatly was Humboldt impressed ... by the insistence on the Isle of Sheep, which he identified with the Faroes, that he restricted in theory the saint’s navigation to high latitudes’ (39). National Geographic magazine suggests that *The Voyage of St Brendan* ‘was known widely in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, to the extent that Christopher Columbus used it as a reference to guide and support his assertion that lands were reachable across the Atlantic’ (Howley no pp.).

Whitfield writes that it ‘was taken seriously for centuries, and chart-makers ... felt compelled to place Brendan’s islands in the empty spaces of the North Atlantic’ (18).<sup>24</sup> So, despite including fictions that presumably were intentional — fictions that would confound a reader’s

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<sup>22</sup> Because the authorship of such texts is questionable — there were numerous copies rewritten by different hands over the centuries — it is probably more relevant to discuss how the texts were read rather than how they were written.

<sup>23</sup> The *Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbitis* is the *Voyage* in its original Latin (Mackley 1).

<sup>24</sup> This is supported by the studies of both Mackley and Babcock.

expectations of a modern travel book — *The Voyage of St Brendan* likely didn't confound the contemporary reader's expectations.

### **(Re)designing the world**

As stated in my introduction, the travel book is not the same thing as the travel guide. It is a 'creative' genre: many travel writers use creative devices, those most common to the fiction genre. Neither is the travel book news reporting. 'We read a newspaper differently from a magazine, and we read a magazine differently from a book' (Bissell 99). Travel writers are in the business of being creative, even providing entertainment as well as being 'truthful' and can employ a range of tools to help them include fictions — deviations from factual accuracy — in their texts that are legitimate. But how can an author intentionally deviate if the authorial promise is (to aim) for factual accuracy? The answer is factual honesty: if the reader knows the author has deviated from the simple authorial promise — and has not misrepresented the world in material ways (points I shall extrapolate further) — then the reader's expectations will not be confounded.

As there are two types of fictions — intentional and unintentional, and we have seen that unintentional fictions do not break the simple authorial promise because they do not confound (are allowed for in) the reader's expectations — so too, there are two types of intentional fictions: the not-unexpected (employing the double-negative best describes these) and the unexpected.<sup>25</sup> That is, those that need *not* be flagged by the author because they are an accepted (not-unexpected) feature of the genre and those that *should* be flagged because unless they are sign-posted as a fiction, their inclusion in a travel book have the potential to confound the reader's expectations. Unexpected fictions might not be recognised as fiction and then they have the power to (re)design the world in the mind of the reader.

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<sup>25</sup> I word this distinction in this unwieldy manner because the reader doesn't necessarily *expect* certain devices such as composite characters but under certain circumstances, as we shall see, the presence of such fictions is not unexpected.

By (re)design, I mean that the reader comes to believe something false about the world, or events that (supposedly) happened in the world, because the author has represented an event, detail, character etc. on the page in a way that it was not in actuality and the author has done nothing to indicate to the reader that this is what they've done. (Re)design can occur when the reader is presented with 'misinformation' posing as 'information'. The term contains implicit and intentional reference to 'intelligent design' because, it seems to me, the author who does this is (at the very least) in danger of 'playing God'. If one accepts, if solely for the purpose of this discussion, that God was — or gods were — the original designer(s) of the world then the use of 'redesign' seems appropriate. The addition of brackets is not merely a flourish: it allows for the inclusion of those of us who might not accept the concept of 'intelligent design' who can read the term as, simply, design. Of course, there are many synonyms I could (and will) use, such as reinterpret, misinterpret, invent, and reinvent. No matter how you choose to read this term, my point is that when an author purposefully includes unflagged fictions in a work presented by him as non-fiction, he can 'intelligently' (re)design the world.

### **The Not-Unexpected**

In the first category of intentional fictions — the not-unexpected — are certain creative devices commonly used in creative non-fiction that are acceptable to the reader and some that are just plain necessary. But for authorial integrity to remain intact, an unflagged fiction cannot be misleading in any material way — it must not potentially (re)design the world in the mind of the reader. In including any fiction or using fictional devices in her travel book, the author must still avoid what David Lazar calls 'the creation of false experience' (in Borich 11). Numerous practitioners and scholars have also warned the creative non-fiction writer about the creation of false *fact*. That is, a 'fact' that has the potential to (re)design or change the world in the mind of the reader which can then potentially have repercussions in the 'real' world. 'Making things up to enhance the narrative is unacceptable,' says Gutkind (Brien and

Gutkind no pp.). ‘Don’t add and don’t deceive. If you try something unconventional, let the public in on it,’ are the words of Roy Peter Clark (no pp).

Let us look at some of the ‘fictions’ that might not be unexpected by a reader of the genre. Some fictions, or fictional devices, that the author hasn’t let the reader in on, can and have been used in travel books yet do not confound her expectations.

**Reconstructed dialogue:** Conversations are not always written on the page exactly as they occurred in actuality. Travel writers don’t (always) walk around with a machine (switched on) recording every conversation they have: they commonly reconstruct dialogue. Even of the most factually accurate or ‘whole truth’ — or perhaps least-embellished — travel books such as Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks* or *American Journeys* by Don Watson, the reader doesn’t expect the dialogue to be word-for-word ‘as it happened’. Rather, she trusts that the author is (trying to be) honest in her representation of what happened and the reconstruction reflects what was said. That is valid so long as the reconstructed dialogue is not misleading the reader in a material way. All the conversations and dialogue in my major work were reconstructed, usually from notes I made soon after the event. Lee Gutkind et al. point out that ‘readers make allowances for this’(130). Dialogue ‘will sometimes be rendered directly, as if the writer remembered the exact words spoken in a conversation, although this is of course highly unlikely unless the traveller was simultaneously taking notes, or ... using some sort of audio or video device’ acknowledges Thompson (28). Reconstructing dialogue is an intentional fiction that constitutes a legitimate exception to the simple authorial promise; it is acceptable within the genre. Writing of creative non-fiction in general, Fern Kupfer puts it thus: ‘We need to give memoir writers permission to lie, but only when the reconstructed version of the story does not deceive the reader in its search for the aesthetic truth’ (Kupfer 22).

**Omission:** An inevitable deviation from factual accuracy is by way of omission. Travel writers can't possibly describe every step taken, meal eaten, person met or the text would take as long to read as the real-time research taken by the traveller and impede narrative drive. Yet in Fussell's definition of a travel book, there is a requirement that it 'claims literal validity by *constant* reference to actuality' (*Abroad* 203 my emphasis). Omission of details in the travel book can be a legitimate intentional factual inaccuracy, and a necessary one, but is a tool that must be handled with care. Authors intentionally omit and unintentionally omit. Omission, in itself, doesn't confound the reader's expectations. The trick for the travel writer is to not omit characters, events, transits etc. in a way that misleads the reader or impedes the factual integrity of the text because, as Kim Mahood writes: 'the truth can be distorted as much by what a writer leaves out as by exaggeration or invention' (no pp.).

Omissions can steer the reader in different directions depending on what is omitted. What to omit is a subjective decision. Hersey notes 'The minute a writer offers nine hundred ninety-nine out of one thousand facts, the worm of bias has begun to wriggle' (2). Tom Bissell, in his examination of truth and fiction in Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana*, discusses the difficulties inherent in omitting details when describing a person. After a long and detailed description of a cowboy he writes: 'What to mention? What not to mention?? ... If you write only about our imaginary cowboy's smell of cow dung and badly shaven face, you have a distasteful rube. If you mention only the black eye and sunglasses, you have a brawler. Mention the smile and you have a charming brawler' (110). The trick is not to deceive or mislead.<sup>26</sup> Unflagged omissions that are misleading can confound the reader's expectations and they have the potential to misrepresent the world in a material way and must be handled with care.

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<sup>26</sup> This is often not easy. When he illustrates this point, Lee Gutkind raises the case of Janet Malcom who compressed several interviews into one and carefully selected what to include of her subject's quotes and what to omit only to find herself being sued for ten years by her subject (see, for example, Gutkind et al. 42-45). Many small careful changes can produce one large distortion. And the law is quite literal.



There are other fictions that can be unflagged yet acceptable within the simple authorial promise, that is, they do not confound the reader's expectations. Metaphor is one such and composite characters another, as I shall discuss in the next chapter. First, I want to examine the ways in which intentional fictions can be flagged. To do so, we need, initially, to return to the peritext. It is one of the tools the author can use to help the reader recalibrate her expectations so that they are not confounded by unflagged fictions.

### **Formal Flagging**

How can the author signal to the reader that she is deviating from the simple authorial promise of (aiming for) factual accuracy? The peritext is a vital tool with which the author can indicate — formally flag — what the reader can reasonably expect from an individual travel book, the one in her hand. There are certain ways *within* a text that a writer can indicate to the reader her 'fictional intent', that what she is doing may be depicted not quite as it happened in actuality (which I shall get to soon); these I regard as informal flagging. The peritext is a simple tool that can help the author set — or, rather, reset — the reader's expectations if there are to be variations to the simple authorial promise of (aiming for) factual accuracy.

Let us take a brief look at some travel book peritexts and see how they can reset the reader's expectations. Firstly, I have chosen two travel books the authors of which have, via their peritexts, promised the simple authorial oath with no variations and they (seemingly) deliver such: *American Journeys* by Don Watson and *Tracks* by Robyn Davidson.

In, and on, both examples the peritext proclaims the author's name in all the customary places: on the cover, spine, title page and in the copyright notice. In both cases the author's name is the same as the (first person) narrator/protagonist (if not named in the text itself then confirmed by the peritext via the book's blurb) thus, as we have seen from Lejeune,

‘exclud[ing] the possibility of fiction’ (17).<sup>27</sup> Therefore we don’t really need the category ‘Non-Fiction’ on the back cover of my paperback edition of *American Journeys* to inform us that it is. The category on the back of *Tracks* is announced as ‘Travel’, and as we know from our definitions of travel books, it will or should (aim to) deliver factual accuracy.

The covers of both books, in their various editions, contain nothing that indicates to the reader that she should reset or modify her expectations that the simple authorial promise is in play. The first edition cover of *Tracks* illustrates the subject matter and bolsters the promise of factual accuracy by including a seemingly documentary photo that one assumes is the author on her camels taken during her journey (this is confirmed in the text by the appearance of the photographer who took those photos). A later edition features an artist’s drawing of the author and her camels and an endorsing review quote.

The first edition hard cover of *American Journeys* offers an iconic American image (a President’s face carved into the side of Mount Rushmore) while the Australian paperback cover is solely graphics: some stars, title, author’s name, prizes won, awards for ‘non-fiction’ and an endorsing review quote. Once again there is no indication that the author intends to deviate from the simple promise. Inside the covers of these books are maps, tables of contents, dedications, epigraphs, acknowledgements, references etc. with no preface indicating deviations from or variations to the simple authorial promise.

These two peritexts offer no indication to the reader that the texts are anything other than what they do turn out to be: fine examples of the serious modern travel book, the result of the writer’s ‘encounter with distant or unfamiliar data’ (*Abroad* 203).

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<sup>27</sup> And which I happen to know from epitextual sources refer to real people.

Some peritexts do formally flag deviations, they help to modify the reader's expectations as to what the author will deliver regarding factual accuracy. Such peritexts help the author be factually honest with the reader while intentionally including 'fictions' in her or his travel books. One example of this is Bill Bryson's *In a Sunburned Country*.<sup>28</sup>

*In a Sunburned Country* is presented as non-fiction. The narrator/protagonist is first identified as 'Bill' on page 39; on page 77 he introduces himself to a motel owner: 'Well G'day there Bruce,' I stammered uncertainly. I'm Bill'. Although named 'Bill' in only two scenes, the narrator/protagonist is identified by others eight times as 'Bryson'. 'Bill Bryson' is also identified as the author in all the usual places in the peritext. It is clear that the 'autobiographical pact' is in play and thus the 'referential pact'—that which 'claim[s] to provide information about a "reality" exterior to the text, and so to submit to a test of verification' (Lejeune 22 original emphasis). But not everything Bryson asserts would survive a 'test of verification' for either Lejeune's standard of 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth [to the best of my ability] (22) or my 'simple authorial promise' of (aiming) for factual accuracy. Take the following:

One of the more cherishable peculiarities of Australians is that they like to build big things in the shape of other things. Give them a bale of chicken wire, some fibreglass, and a couple of pots of paint and they will make you, say, an enormous pineapple or strawberry or, as here, a lobster (133).

Clearly this is a generalisation, an exaggeration, and not a literal truth. I, for instance, am an Australian who does not have this 'peculiarity', who does not like to 'build big things'. But, the reader knows that Bryson does not precisely mean 'every single Australian' is inclined — or even able — to build big things. This is, as Carl Thompson terms it, 'an amusing comic

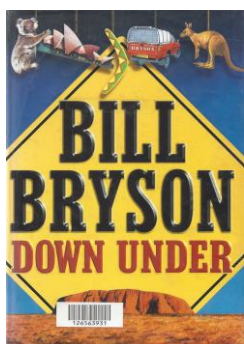
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<sup>28</sup> Published also as *Down Under*.

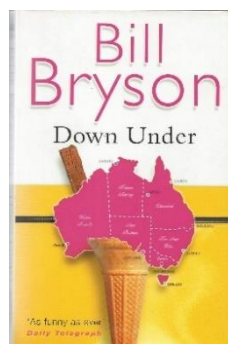
riff’ as well as a generalisation (89). ‘Travel writers are notoriously prone to summing up whole cultures, and passing sweeping judgements on other peoples and places, on the basis of a few personal impressions ’ Thompson notes (90).<sup>29</sup> And that is acceptable to the reader who has chosen to be entertained rather than (merely) factually informed. But how does she know that the author may (or will) include such fictions in his travel book? Why does she find them not-unexpected? She does know not to take Bryson’s representations literally and so they don’t (re)design the world in her mind. She knows that she is choosing ‘entertainment’ over (mere) factual accuracy: but how? The answer is that Bryson (and his publishers) provide plenty of peritextual clues that modify the reader’s initial entitlement to expect — because she has picked up a travel book — that the author will aim for factual accuracy. She knows she might read certain things that she can’t — shouldn’t — take literally.<sup>30</sup>

### Flagging via the cover:

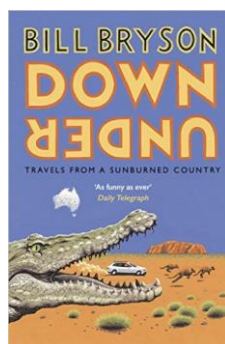
Taking four editions of this work, let us examine their covers:<sup>31</sup>



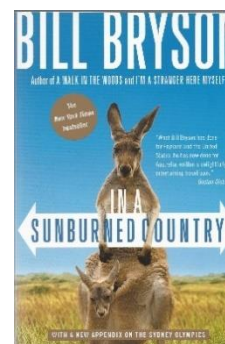
2000 UK & Australia



2000/2001 UK



2015 UK



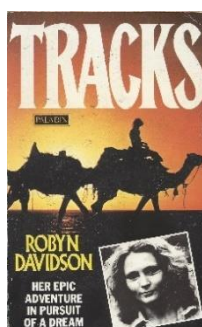
2001 US

<sup>29</sup> Bryson’s travel books fall firmly within this relatively new ‘comic’ sub-genre. *The Road to Oxiana* by Robert Byron was an early example. As we shall see in the next chapter, Byron was so early that how to formally flag the sub-genre, it would appear, had yet to be worked out.

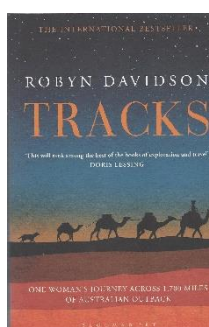
<sup>30</sup> The signals used on peritexts can vary from culture to culture. A quick check on the Internet shows me that the cover of the Italian translation of *In a Sunburned Country. Australia*, for example, doesn’t give me the same message that the author might deviate from (mere) factual accuracy. The blurb does seem to provide signals (taking into account the vagaries of Google Translate): ‘All told with the emotional involvement, the stylistic joy and humour that made Bryson travel writer most widely read, and fun, to the world’ (from <[https://www.amazon.it/paese-bruciato-dal-sole-LAustralia/dp/8850235682/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1473814449&sr=8-4&keywords=bill+bryson](https://www.amazon.it/paese-bruciato-dal-sole-LAustralia/dp/8850235682/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1473814449&sr=8-4&keywords=bill+bryson)>).

<sup>31</sup> There have been numerous editions with different covers and ISBNs, here I only examine three but none that I have found contradict my point: that the reader is differently prepared by these than from the way she is by the cover of, say, *Tracks*.

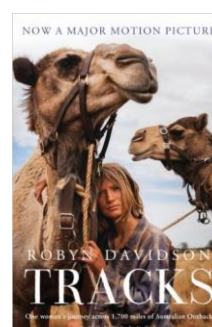
And compare them to three covers of *Tracks*:



1982 UK



2012 UK



2013 UK film tie-in

The covers of Bryson's English language books clearly are not literal; they are not even *possible*, in the Lejeunian sense (22). The covers of *Tracks* are all *possible*; even the middle stylised and romantic illustration depicts the possible, 'real life', if you like. The latter covers are 'straight' and sombre and indicate the presence of the simple authorial promise.

The reader suspects — even assumes — from looking at the covers of Bryson's books, she should not take his text as a literal reflection of the 'truth'. That is not to say that Bryson is not reflecting 'truth' at all. 'Truths', of course, can be conveyed by un-literal representations. There are other peritextual clues that indicate that the reader should not expect literal truth when reading *In a Sunburned Country*. I can't go into detail about them all within the confines of this exegesis but further indications appear on the back-cover blurb and other marketing material which include the words 'humour', 'entertaining', 'deliciously funny' and the like. Even the maps that precede the text within the volume are drawn with a sense of fun rather than in a scholarly vein. Bryson provides us with an example of a travel book in which the author intentionally includes fictions and where, by formally flagging their possible presence in the text, he has appropriately modified the reader's expectation that only the simple authorial promise will apply. Now that the reader expects such fictions they won't (re)design the world in her mind.

We have seen that travel writers can deviate from factual accuracy both unintentionally and intentionally. Unintentional deviations are allowed for under the terms of the simple authorial promise. The peritext is an effective tool that can help to reset or modify the reader's expectations that a travel writer will not intentionally deviate from factual accuracy. In the next chapter I will examine an example of a travel book that intentionally doesn't deliver on the simple authorial promise, and where modifications to it are not formally flagged.

## Chapter Three

### Flying the Flag: Sending (Mixed) Messages

*To make something up in a book that purports to be true is a serious breach of readerly trust, and, on its surface, a seemingly unforgivable one.*

Tom Bissell ('Truth in Oxiana')

Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana*, a vivid account of his travels in Persia, is, perhaps, one of the finest examples of creative non-fiction. After establishing that the narrator/protagonist has the same name as the author, I will examine some of the ways in which Byron intentionally deviates from factual accuracy and then identify and discuss the way in which the author has flagged those deviations within the text and thus reset the reader's expectations (or not).

#### Robert Byron's Reader's Expectations

Recognised as a masterpiece within the travel-writing genre, *The Road to Oxiana* is presented as a first-person account of the narrator's journey to Persia and Afghanistan. The identity of the narrator/protagonist is clear from the text. First via this scene:

At Tabriz the police asked us for five photographs each (they did not get them) and the following information:

*AVIS*

*Je soussigné* {Robert Byron

{Christopher Sykes

*Sujet* {anglais

{anglais

*et exerçant la profession de* {peintre

{philosophe





does not. Byron exaggerates and generalises; he crafts scenes, reconstructs dialogue, and, at times, outright lies. Let us examine some of these fictions, and ask if the author has sufficiently modified the reader's expectations to ensure that what Tom Bissell calls '*Oxiana's* liberties with the facts' (103) do not, in her mind, (re)design the world. First, however, let us take a quick look at the original peritext. It contains little (if any) indication that the author will deviate from the simple authorial promise.



The First UK Edition (1937)

The cover above provides little by way of signals at all. To my mind, the front flap blurb reads as though it offers the reader a more scientific study than generally conforms to the simple authorial promise. To quote it in part:

Mr Byron describes its monuments, its people, its flocks, its rivers, pastures and flowers in the glory of early summer. Crossing the Hindu Kush, he inspects the Buddhist caves of Bamian and the Towers of Ghazni.

It is not what the traveller sees that matters but how he sees it ... The book is full of dialogue, giving vivid actuality to all types of society in Mohammedan Asia.

This blurb does not tell the reader that her expectations should be reset; it does not say that there are any variations to the simple authorial promise in the text. 'It is not what the traveller sees but how he sees it' might, by some, be taken for a signal that Byron might be a little 'creative' in his text but it's not much to go on. Indeed, as we shall see, the publishers of later editions sought to provide the reader with more peritextual clues to modify the reader's expectations. Turning now to the text itself I shall examine some of Byron's fictions and try to

determine whether or not they are legitimate, whether they confound the reader's expectations.

### **Byron's 'Fictions'**

**The 'comic riff':** Like Bill Bryson, Byron exaggerates and generalises. Both devices are used creatively, and are entertaining. Take this, where Byron is haggling with a hotel-owner:

'Four hundred piasters for *that* room? *Four hundred* did you say? Good God! Call the car. Three hundred and fifty? *One* hundred and fifty you mean. Three hundred? Are you deaf, can't you hear? I said a hundred and fifty. We must go. There are other hotels. Come, load the luggage.'

(30)

And the following exchange that purportedly took place in Persia between Byron and his companion Christopher:

I remarked to Christopher on the indignity of the people's clothes: 'Why does the Shar make them wear those hats?'

'Sh. You mustn't mention the Shar out loud. Call him Mr. Smith.'

'I always call Mussolini Mr. Smith in Italy.'

'Well, Mr. Brown.'

'No, that's Stalin's name in Russia.'

'Mr Jones then.'

'Jones is no good either. Hitler has to have it now that Primo de Rivera is dead ... We had better call him Majoribanks, if we want to remember whom we mean.' (41)

**Consistency and Coherence:** How does the reader know not to take these scenes as (entirely) factually accurate? Why are they not misleading? Here I take small issue with Searle's assertion that 'there is no textual property, syntactical or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction' (325). This may be true of an entire work but within a work clues can be provided that indicate the author is making a modification to the simple authorial promise and

Searle himself provides the answer as to how and why this can happen. The key is Searle's theory of the 'horizontal' (fictional state) coming across the 'vertical' (non-fictional state) rules.

'The author will establish with the reader a set of understandings about how far the horizontal conventions of fiction break the vertical connections of serious speech. To the extent that the author is *consistent* with the conventions he has invoked ... he will remain within the conventions ... *coherence* is a crucial consideration' (331 my emphasis).

Despite there being no flag on the cover or in other elements of the peritext of the early editions to signal to the reader that Byron is invoking the convention of the comic generalisation or 'riff', he coherently and consistently generalises and exaggerates and so the reader's expectations are recalibrated.

Key to the concept of 'coherence', as Searle has said, is consistency. The generalisation about 'all' Australians liking to build big things is consistent in Bryson's *In A Sunburned Country*. Byron, like Bryson, generalises: 'Since our arrival on these coasts, Christopher and I have learned that the cost of everything from a royal suite to a bottle of soda water can be halved by the simple expedient of saying it must be halved' (Byron 29-30). While Byron's generalisations and his comic riffs are consistent in *The Road to Oxiana*, neither of those approaches would be expected (consistent) in Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*. Those sorts of fictions would not fit with Davidson's persona or tone and there are no similar devices in her text to contextualise them.

Byron's deviations from the simple authorial promise of (aiming for) factual accuracy are obvious. Compare the generalisation/exaggeration about haggling and Byron's comic

dialogues (which I shall examine further shortly) with his description of the architecture of the Tower of Kabus:

A tapering cylinder of café-au-lait brick springs from a round plinth to a pointed grey-green roof, which swallows it up like a candle extinguisher. The diameter at the plinth is fifty feet; the total height about a hundred and fifty. Up the cylinder, between the plinth and roof, rush ten triangular buttresses, which cut across two narrow garters of Kufic text, one at the top underneath the cornice, one at the bottom over the slender black entrance (Byron 230).

There is nothing to indicate that this is the beginning of anything other than a passage of as accurate or ‘true’ (and lyrically vivid) description of the tower as Byron can provide. It is far more consistent with the impression projected by the front-flap blurb of the original 1937 edition. It is, as Colin Thubron has said, ‘almost scientifically precise’ rather than broad-brush (viii). It is slow and considered rather than rushed and gesturing; it uses technical terms for the architectural parts of the tower reinforcing its preciseness. This contrasts markedly with the seemingly tossed-off remark about prices in the haggling scene that moves as fast as an avalanche down a mountain, gathering speed as it falls and stumbling over — and gathering up — all in its path.<sup>33</sup> The promise offered by the author via the tower description is an obviously different promise from that offered in the generalisations, the exaggerated scenes or the comic dialogues. But all have one thing in common: they are (probably) *representative* of the author’s experience. And being representative of the author’s experience is another necessary condition for a fiction not to be illegitimate in a travel book, for it not to confound the reader’s expectations and, in my terms, for it not to (re)design the world.

**Comic dialogues:** Of the dialogues in *The Road to Oxiana* the most memorable are the some twenty of what Fussell calls ‘comic dialogues’ or ‘playlets’ ‘of impressive finish and

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<sup>33</sup> Ian Jack allows the ‘obviously playful’ as a legitimate exception to his requirement that travel writers ‘*did not make it up*’ (xi original emphasis).

point'(*Abroad* 108). Colin Thubron calls them 'farical conversations'(v). In his text, Byron provides clues to the reader that his dialogue might be 'made up' in a variety of ways. Some of his 'playlets' have stage directions, and others have musical dynamics such as here. The example below is his recounting of a trip to the opera with the Afghan Ambassador, Shir Ahmad, who Byron has earlier described using simile (another device with fictional qualities): he 'looks like a tiger dressed up as a Jew' (47). Some dialogues have stage directions, and even musical notations:

*(m)* Italian lady she sit beside me. She is *(eyes blazing ff)* big lady, yah! great? no, fat. *(mf)* She more fat than Madame Egypt [the Egyptian Ministress] and her breast is *(cr)* too big. *(mf)* It fall out of box, so. Much diamonds and gold on it *(pp)* I am frightened. I see if it shall be in my face *(f)* I suffocate (Byron 145).

Byron has set up Shir Ahmad consistently throughout the text to play the 'role' of the 'typical', if exaggerated, Afghani bureaucrat.<sup>34</sup> He roars or whispers, his gestures are large. Tom Bissell writes that Shir Ahmad 'is undoubtedly exaggerated, but most likely he was an exaggerated man, given to bursts of Afghan grandiosity ... the Shir Ahmad playlets struck me as perfectly representative of certain aspects of the Afghan character' (108). His exaggeration is coherent, obvious and based on the author's experience and so does not mislead the reader, even if it is a stereotype.

Here is the beginning of another 'playlet', which is set in Teheran:

Christopher called on Shir Ahmad this morning.

*Shir Ahmad (mf):* You stay a long time in Teheran?

*Christopher:* I am leaving in a fortnight, and apart from the pleasure of seeing your Excellency *(both bow)*, I came to ask permission to leave by Afghanistan.

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<sup>34</sup> It is tempting to do an examination of Shir Ahmad as Shakespearean fool but space lacks here.

This scene, for me, is more problematic: Byron wasn't witness to it yet he recounts it as if he were. 'Creative nonfiction should be reliably factual, firmly anchored in real experience, whether the author has lived it or observed it or recorded it', according to founding editor of the literary journal *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* Michael Steinberg (Brien and Steinberg no pp.).

Here, I suggest, Byron took his formally unflagged fictions a step too far. Steinberg's list does not include (merely) 'being told about it'. Of course, hearsay is acceptable if the author makes it clear to the reader that he was (merely) told about it. In this scene, however, it is not clear enough — it is not obvious — that Byron wasn't there. All it would have taken was for Byron to introduce the scene with 'Christopher called on Shir Ahmad this morning; he recounted the scene to me', or words to that effect. The reader then has the proper information to gauge factual adequacy. Is it misleading? Byron doesn't actually say he was there but by omitting his absence the recounting moves away from being 'a true record of the author's own experiences' (Thompson 27). The author's own experience was, presumably, to hear it recounted by Sykes (as Sykes heard the recounting of Shir Ahmad's meeting with the Shar).

If Byron did cross the line, the next question is: does it matter? Do I care? Is it material? If I did think he was there would that (re)design the world in my mind? Does it offer the reader inaccurate information about the world? Not in any way that I can see. No, it confused me for a moment (when I did read the text closely enough to realise he wasn't there) but it didn't confound my expectations because it was not material. I find some of Byron's fictions misleading and material, but this is not one of them — it just disconcerts me a little. It makes me wonder what other 'liberties' he has taken, but I don't think it misinforms me about the world.

**Metaphor and simile:** Other fictions that can legitimately be found in travel books are metaphor and simile. When, in *Oxiana*, Robert Byron describes Afghanis at a bazaar in Herat as '[h]awk-eyed and eagle-beaked' (88), the reader understands the men did not *in actuality* have the eyes of hawks and beaks on their faces but, rather, were similarly sharp-featured and alert. Searle calls the use of metaphors in non-fiction 'non-literal' utterances (320). These creative devices the reader knows not to take literally, they are used to better represent the author's experience to the reader and as such are not misleading.

**Craft and chronology:** A major inaccuracy in *The Road to Oxiana* is the form and chronology that its author presents on the page. The text is presented as diary entries — as dashed-off, more-or-less daily, written at the time of (or soon after) the events they recount. In the words of Fussell, *The Road to Oxiana* is 'an artfully constructed quest myth in the form of an apparently spontaneous diary' (*Abroad* 95-96). Each 'diary' entry is dated and the action placed ('Teheran, April 4th' for example), each contains an apparent recap of the day's activities and experiences. In the final entry Byron describes his arrival at Paddington station where he delivers 'the whole record' to his mother, right there on the platform as his dogs excitedly greet him (333). But Byron has misled us. In fact, *The Road to Oxiana* took him three years to write as his travelling companion Sykes confirms: 'So conscientiously is it disguised as a book of hurried entries into a diary that a reader may easily and pardonably read it too quickly, mistaking it for an amusing record of an amusing trip and no more' (Sykes 128-129). This intentional fiction is not flagged formally or informally. There is nothing in the original peritext to indicate that the book took three years to construct and was not, in fact, handed to his mother on the train platform. This is not apparent in the text itself, and thus is misleading, and is not representative of the author's experience — but is this material?

Byron has gone to a great deal of effort to persuade us that his travel account has, in Thompson's words, 'undergone as little re-organisation or embellishment as possible in the

translation from journal to print' (78). This is common to the 'naïve empiricist' author. 'This attitude of "naïve empiricism" assumes that the most accurate and trustworthy of travel accounts are those that present themselves as fairly direct, unmediated transcriptions of the traveller's original travel notes' (Thompson 78). Regardless of whether Byron presented his work in this way for this reason, the effect of it is that it confers on him a great deal of authority. Holland and Huggan point out that 'Contemporary narratives rely upon the authority of the eye-witness ... As Greenblatt reminds us, the eyewitness, real or not, functions as a rhetorical strategy to persuade the reader of the "authenticity" of what is reported' (16).

Those three years afforded Byron time to carefully research his topic too. During his travels Byron appears quite knowledgeable about the region but some of the knowledge that appears to have been at his command while travelling in Persia was, in fact, the result of careful post-trip research during those three years. This further adds to his authority and helped to ensure that I, for one, read the text with a growing sense of astonishment (and no little envy) that someone could create such a knowledgeable and literary masterpiece so quickly — on the spot as it were. But that does not mean that the fictions presented by Byron change the world that the writer is writing about. These fictions can influence the reader's ideas about the author, perhaps, but not necessarily her impressions of Oxiana.

As a reader, however, I would feel more comfortable if a fiction such as the time it took to write the book was flagged in some manner. The authors of the prefaces included in recent editions of *The Road to Oxiana* appear to agree.<sup>35</sup> The critical prefaces flag to the reader the fact that the text, in truth, took three years to write and wasn't handed to Byron's mother upon the author's return. Paul Fussell's preface, a lightly reworked version of his chapter on Byron

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<sup>35</sup> The exception is the 1981 edition. It included an introduction by Bruce Chatwin that is not a critical preface but rather part hagiography, part account of Chatwin's own travels in the region.



in *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*, was published in a new edition of Byron's book in 1982. Fussell foreshadows the text's 'imaginative genius' in the first paragraph, and shortly after spells out 'writing *The Road to Oxiana*, which seems a collection of ad hoc, effortless diary notes, occupied Byron for three years' (Introduction *Oxiana* no pp.). Such a radical departure from convention was Byron's book, that Fussell commented: that it 'may invite us to re-define the genre "travel book"' (ibid.).

In his introduction to the 2000 edition of *The Road to Oxiana*, English writer Geoffrey Moorhouse also warns the reader that things might not be what they seem, that Byron 'wish[ed] to give the impression that the published text consisted of nothing but what he had set down at the end of each day' (15). He goes on to formally flag this and other fictions with words such as 'illusion', 'contrived', and 'painstaking'.

In his introduction to *The Road to Oxiana* in 2007, Colin Thubron also sees it as necessary to modify the reader's expectations. In his third sentence, Thubron draws the reader's attention to the fact that the text is 'composed in the form of a random diary, its deceptively conversational tone was, of course, the result of meticulous craft' (v).

The year before the Thubron preface appeared, an edition of *The Road to Oxiana* was published that includes both Fussell's earlier introduction and a preface by a more contemporary travel writer, Rory Stewart. This preface, too, includes an acknowledgment that the text might be 'misleading' (as well as disturbing, elegant, infuriating, provocative ... [and] addictive') (Stewart Preface *Oxiana* 2006). Further on, Stewart identifies another of Byron's fictions and spells out a warning to the reader: '[Byron] writes a comprehensive paragraph on the Sassanian relief at Takht-e-Bostan — implying that he immediately grasped its stylistic components — whereas, in fact, his diary proves that he failed to identify it and pasted in the description from subsequent research' (ibid). This would be less problematic if Byron hadn't

presented his text in spontaneous diary form. As I suggested in Chapter One, readers accept that there may be — needs to be — a certain amount of ‘crafting’, or fashioning of a travel text to make it readable, using devices such as reconstructing dialogue. In the later (but not the earlier) editions the extent of Byron’s crafting has been formally flagged so the reader is not misled, her expectations are not confounded (assuming, of course, she reads the preface).

Although all the authors of the prefaces to *The Road to Oxiana* are enormous fans of the text (as am I), and all acknowledge it to be a seminal example of the modern travel book (as do I), the above-mentioned preface-writers appear to be uncomfortable enough with the authority conferred on the text, due to the diary form, that they caution the reader. These cautions are effective, conveying to the reader variations to the simple authorial oath. Byron himself, however, did not present any such variations and because of this, although perhaps not materially, he was in danger of misleading his reader.

**Omission:** Another fiction in Byron’s text is his omission of translators. Byron’s travelling companion Christopher Sykes, in his chapter on Byron and their travels together in *Four Studies in Loyalty*, notes that Byron was apparently a ‘very poor’ linguist and ‘all the non-English conversations recorded in his book are invented’ (in Fussell *Abroad* 108). On page 82, Sykes writes that Byron spoke Greek poorly, yet in *The Road to Oxiana* Byron recounts a meeting with a monk: ““Hail,” said I *in Greek*. “You come from Mount Athos?”” (Byron 18 *my emphasis*). Byron asserts that the conversation happened in Greek and his linguistic ability on the page appears expert.<sup>36</sup>

Fussell thought Byron’s lack of linguistic ability important enough to flag it to the reader in his introduction. On my first reading of *Oxiana*, I took Byron to be as expert in the local

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<sup>36</sup> Byron did study Greek for a time but Sykes appears to regard his endeavours as not very successful.

language as he appears to be about architecture and was later surprised to read that Byron spoke only English. It seemed so *possible* that he spoke Greek and Persian. He was, after all, a product of his English class and university education and was much travelled. I had not grasped the significance of Byron referring to a translator when he has a letter of introduction translated by a Persian clerk (191). Byron himself writes of one of his traveling companions: ‘Rutter, who once spent nine months in Mecca disguised as an Arab, *may be supposed* to have translated with sufficient accuracy’ (35 my emphasis). That is, Byron states that because his friend spent nine months in a region his ability to speak the language should not be questioned. Was he, I wonder, aware of the irony of this claim. Byron spent nearly eleven months in the region and I hadn’t questioned his ability in Persian. Nor, when he claimed to have conversed with the Greek monk in what comes across as reasonably fluent Greek, did I question his ability to speak that language — but perhaps I was merely naïve.<sup>37</sup>

This fiction is material: the inference of linguistic ability further confers upon Byron a greater authority and understanding of the region and its people than he had. It also doesn’t flag that there might be an extra layer of subjectivity — that of the translators — in his representations. By omitting to state that he had translators everywhere he went, Byron has made a material omission. It is not obvious that his linguistic ability is a ‘fiction’ and it is material because the reader has not been provided with the right tools, if you like, to recalibrate her expectations, and thus to accurately assess the factual adequacy of the text. I am not suggesting that Byron should have included his translator(s) in every scene but if he’d either written an authorial preface formally flagging that he used translators (as some of the non-authorial preface-writers have done) or included translators in a few scenes at the beginning of the text to get

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<sup>37</sup> Of course, it is quite common for translators to be left off the page or cut from travel television programs. The Joanna Lumley BBC series ‘Trans-Siberian Adventure’ is a recent example of the cutting out of translators and facilitators.

the reader used to the idea that translators were a part of his travels, then the omission of them would be less misleading and material.

The effect of omitting translators does not just speed up the narrative, it has more profound effects. The omission of translators is commonly found in the works of 'English Gentleman Travellers', a school of travel writers identified by scholars. These works promote the impression of the traveller's 'expertise', and, as in Byron's case, his 'honesty and courage, his sense of fair play' (Holland and Huggan 6).<sup>38</sup>

Through this examination of some of the factual inaccuracies in *The Road to Oxiana* we can see that for a fiction not to be illegitimate in a travel book, for it not to confound the reader's expectations and possibly (re)design the world, it must meet several conditions. It must not be intentional and unflagged (formally or informally), misleading and material. In the next chapter I will test certain of Bruce Chatwin's fictions to see if they meet these conditions, that is, to determine whether they have a legitimate place in a travel book or not.

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<sup>38</sup> Albeit, in Byron's case, often with his tongue in his cheek.

## Chapter Four

### Bruce Chatwin: Legitimate Creativity or (Re)designing the World?

*The representation of Central Australian Indigenous cultures  
is among the primary attractions and innovations of [The] Songlines,  
as well as an enduring source of controversy.*

Robert Clark ('Star Traveller')

In the previous chapter, we saw how fictions can have a legitimate place in a travel book if they are unintentional (where the reader decides the matter of acceptability) or they are flagged in some way, and are not misleading and material. Arranged in the style of a 'test', as Lejeune might do, and using Byron's generalisation as an example, such a test could be presented as below:

<b>Factual inaccuracy</b>	<b>Author = N/P</b>	<b>Intentional</b>	<b>Unflagged</b>	<b>Misleading</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
Byron's generalisation 'the cost of everything from a royal suite to a bottle of soda water can be halved'	Same (therefore excludes 'the possibility of fiction' (Lejeune))	Yes	Yes (informally, coherent and obvious)	No (creative representation of the author's experience)	No (not misleading therefore not material)	Legitimate (does not confound the reader's expectations because they have been recalibrated)

I now want to apply these criteria to some of the fictions that various writers and scholars have identified in two texts by Bruce Chatwin: *In Patagonia* and *The Songlines*. First, let us look at how these texts have been presented to readers.<sup>39</sup>

### **In Patagonia**

Although nowhere in *In Patagonia* is the narrator and protagonist identified as ‘Bruce’, ‘Chatwin’ or ‘Bruce Chatwin’ (he is not formally identified at all), had the author wished to make a fictional pact with the reader all he had to do, as shown in Chapter One, was identify the protagonist as, say, ‘David’, ‘Christopher’, ‘Bill’ or ‘Andy’. The narrator is, instead, identified as an Englishman three times and his characteristics appear so similar to the author’s that it is difficult — perhaps impossible — to escape the conclusion that the author is the same ‘person’ as the narrator/protagonist (*I.P.* 31, 36 and 116). That he is unnamed could leave the situation ambiguous, in Lejeune’s terms, unless ‘the author has declared explicitly in an initial pact that he is identical to the narrator (and thus to the protagonist, since the narrative is autodiegetic)’ (Lejeune 17). But it is unambiguous in this case: outside the text Chatwin has clearly (also) signalled to the reader that he ‘is’ the narrator/protagonist and that the text will fall under the terms of the simple authorial promise, that is, he invites the reader to expect he will (aim to) be factually accurate. All the usual peritextual clues suggest this to be the case.

The back-cover blurb on the Penguin Classics edition, for example, proclaims the text as ‘Bruce Chatwin’s exquisite account of his journey through Patagonia’. A different Penguin edition says the text is ‘Bruce Chatwin’s classic account of his journey’. The accompanying maps, photographs and a list, ‘Some Sources’, reinforce the reader’s expectation that she will be reading the ‘truth’.

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<sup>39</sup> It is neither my aim here (nor likely within my ability) to examine every one of the paratextual elements surrounding the chosen texts. This would involve examining every edition in every language ever produced of each text, which is theoretically possible but not within the restrictions placed on this exegesis.



First UK edition 1977

The first UK edition sends the same message to the reader. The cover is stark; it shows a part of a (real) glacier. The maps, photographs and source-list reinforce the impression that the simple authorial promise is applicable. The inside cover flap makes it clear that the author and the narrator/protagonist are one and the same but admits that '*In Patagonia* defies classification' as other editions have not. The words 'at once adventure story, historical investigation and romance', could be seen as an attempt to modify the reader's expectations but their effect is to suggest there is a narrative, and do little to prepare the readers for the deviations from factual accuracy that have been found in this text.

**Omission:** What Chatwin omitted from his texts has been a regular point of contention. Paul Theroux has complained about what Chatwin left out of *In Patagonia*: 'How had he travelled from here to there? ... How had he met this or that person?' (Shakespeare Introduction *Patagonia* xv-xvi). But the reality, of course, is that an author can't include everything and the promise doesn't call for the author to include everything. I shall discuss Chatwin's omissions further in my discussion about *The Songlines*. Here, however, Theroux's complaint does not point to a misleading and material fiction, merely a difference in stylistic preference.

**Mistakes:** Chatwin famously got things wrong. *In Patagonia* contains 'errors of fact that had Chatwin known about he would surely have corrected', according to his biographer Nicholas Shakespeare in the introduction to *In Patagonia* that appeared in 2003 (Introduction *Patagonia* xxii). Shakespeare goes on to list some of them: Like Marco Polo, he gets names

wrong. For instance, ‘Father Pistone instead of Father Juan Silvestro’ for a murdered priest, and geographical errors such as ‘Patagonia is generally understood to begin not at the banks of the Rio Negro, but 120 kilometres north at the Rio Colorado’ (B.C. 318). To this list, I would add calling Patagonia a ‘country’ rather than a region as Chatwin does on the first page of *In Patagonia*. But presumably Chatwin didn’t willfully make mistakes and so they do not confound the reader’s expectations.

**Misrepresentation:** Let us look at some examples of Chatwin being what one can only assume was intentionally misleading. These fictions are not about creativity, or honestly representing the author’s experience. These are factual inaccuracies — myths — that can and have had an impact on the lives of others and are thus material.<sup>40</sup>

**Name changes:** Writers of non-fiction change the names of real people in their texts all the time. There are various schools of thought about whether this should be ‘allowed’ in non-fiction at all. Lee Gutkind et al. say of name changes: ‘The key is to let readers know what you are doing and why. Sometimes a single footnote is enough to maintain the contract between writer and reader, something like “I’ve changed names and identities to protect the privacy of friends and family ”’ (40). There are various places such flagging can be done: in a preface, footnote, or as an explanation otherwise woven into the text.

By not flagging name-changes, the reader assumes that the names in the text are as the author encountered them. Unflagged name-changes can be material because they have potential implications for the reader in the real world. It is conceivable that scholars, for example, using the text as a resource might be misled by unflagged name-changes. Backpackers use *In*

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<sup>40</sup> Of course, certain factual inaccuracies in some genres of fiction have the potential to (re)design the world in the mind of the reader. Writers of realist fiction, for example, need also to take care with their ‘facts’.



*Patagonia* as a 'guide' (as witnessed by Holland and Huggan 9), searching out characters only to find their names have been changed.<sup>41</sup>

Other of Chatwin's misrepresentations in *In Patagonia* have impacted upon the lives of real people. 'Though he changed most of the names, Bruce left a trail of offended people in the Welsh community', points out Shakespeare (*B.C.* 313). The 'narrative ... has become, for foreign visitors, their favourite guide-book'. One bitter resident is quoted as saying, 'It's their bible' (*B.C.* 314).

**Constructed scene:** Towards the end of *In Patagonia* Chatwin has written a scene that is reportedly a total construction. He takes an encounter referred to in his grandmother's cousin, Captain Milward's, diary and totally refashions it and in doing so accuses an acquaintance of Milward's (now deceased) of being behind a murder. In the diary entry, writes Nicholas Shakespeare, Milward reports he spotted a human skull on a wall of a farmhouse owned by a man called Hobbs. Hobbs told him of how the Ona Indian had been shot by 'tame' Indians working for Hobbs. Milward wrote: 'Hobbs, of course, took no part in the killing' (*B.C.* 316). But Chatwin makes up dialogue between Milward and Hobbs and has Hobbs admitting to Milward that he instigated the murder that resulted in a skull mounted on the wall of Hobbs' pigsty. The scene is not only total fabrication but Milward directly refuted its implications when he wrote that Hobbs didn't have any part in the killing.<sup>42</sup> Instead, Chatwin puts Hobbs on the scene and has him 'sending out spies to report their strength ... [arming] my tame Indians ... with old guns and revolvers', riding with them to the Ona camp and watching the killing (*I.P.* 176). This fiction had consequences in the real world. It is, to paraphrase Barrie

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<sup>41</sup> Although it is worth pointing out that the changing of names hasn't stopped some of those who use *In Patagonia* as a guide from finding many of the people Chatwin met according to Shakespeare.

<sup>42</sup> Of course, it is possible that the man did instigate the murder and didn't tell Milward. Europeans killing indigenous inhabitants at that time was far from unknown (not just in Patagonia) but Chatwin does not appear to have had any evidence to show that this particular man was responsible for this particular killing.

Jean Borich, who warns against doing such, a myth claimed as actuality (14). The man's family is still incensed. His daughter-in-law told Shakespeare she would "put my hand in the fire" to defend her father-in-law from a charge of Indian killing' (*B.C.* 316). Her sister tried to take legal action against Chatwin 'only to be advised that you cannot libel the dead' (*B.C.* 315).

'Charley' Milward's daughters also accuse Chatwin of 'conjecture and half-truths' in a letter to Chatwin's publisher (Chatwin, Chatwin and Shakespeare 278). They felt betrayed by the author they welcomed into their homes and lives. They were horrified by many breaches of trust in his fictions.<sup>43</sup> Chatwin called their father 'Charley' although he was only ever 'Charles' or 'Captain Milward' in real life. One daughter, Lala, told Shakespeare '[Chatwin] described my father as tall, having startling blue eyes and black mutton chops, with sailor's hat at a rakish angle. He was short and red-headed and bald by the time he was 30 ... [a]nd he was not this sickly old man. He died very suddenly of a heart attack' (*B.C.* 317).<sup>44</sup> In creative non-fiction, including the travel book, 'making things up to enhance the narrative is unacceptable', to quote just one theorist/practitioner (Brien and Gutkind no pp.). Chatwin has clearly done that. These fictions do not represent the author's true experience, and are unflagged, thus they are misleading; they have had implications in the real world by their impact on Chatwin's cousins and have the potential to mislead others in the real world, and so are material.

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<sup>43</sup> Monica claimed she gave Chatwin access to Milward's diary but asked him not to take it from her house; she had plans to use it as the basis for her own book, and she wrote to Chatwin as reported by Shakespeare: 'I never dreamed that you were copying portions of my father's 'Journal' with the intention of inserting them in your book ... I never gave you permission to photograph the 'Journal' (*B.C.* 317).

<sup>44</sup> One wonders whether — intentionally or unintentionally — Chatwin changed the name to 'Charley' to signal his 'fictional intent'. The most effective name change would, of course, have been to call the narrator himself 'Charley'.

Here is one last example of the potential power of Chatwin's words to change lives in *In Patagonia*. In the Welsh town of Gaiman, Chatwin met a man he calls 'Euan'. Shakespeare tells us the man called 'Euan' 'took intense exception to the few lines Bruce wrote about him. It is not too much to say they changed his life' (B.C. 293). Chatwin had implied that 'Euan' had a homosexual relationship with a musician Chatwin calls 'Anselmo'. In fact, as Chatwin later admitted, it was he who had a sexual encounter with the musician. The fiction 'was especially damaging and misleading' says Shakespeare (B.C. 293). In Argentina homosexuality was then (and still is for many Argentineans) a stigma. Implying this of a man in Argentina did indeed have the power to change his life.

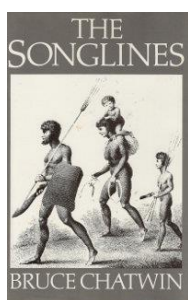
Chatwin claimed that he never intended *In Patagonia* as a travel book. '*In Patagonia* isn't meant to be a travel book' he wrote to Indian journalist Sunil Sethi (Chatwin, Chatwin and Shakespeare 286). According to Shakespeare, Chatwin drafted a letter to his agent 'requesting that the book be taken out of the travel category' (B.C. 311).<sup>45</sup> He called it 'a modern WONDER VOYAGE' and 'this "peculiarly dotty book"' (Chatwin, Chatwin and Shakespeare 275 & 277). In a recently added preface to *In Patagonia*, Nicholas Shakespeare sees the need to flag some of the text's idiosyncrasies, better preparing the reader's expectations of the book she is holding in her hand (as well as cementing its status as a 'classic'). Shakespeare writes in the preface: 'Was it travel writing? Was it historical fiction? Was it reportage? And was it true — and, if not, did it matter?' (Introduction *Patagonia* xiv). But it can matter. As John Russell has written of what he calls the 'non-fiction novel' these works 'develop in idiosyncratic directions — meditative, confessional, rhetorical, dramatic — that they begin to merge with the imaginative forms of literature usually connoted by the word "fiction"' (2). *In Patagonia* is a wonderful book but it does contain some fictions that confound — or at least

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<sup>45</sup> The letter to his agent as it appears in *Under the Sun: The letters of Bruce Chatwin* does not, in fact, ask that it be taken out of the travel category; it asks to make some clarifications via a new blurb. It is also not clear from either the biography or the collection of letters whether Chatwin actually sent this letter to his agent or whether either his agent or he wrote to the US publishers about the issues he raises in the draft letter. This might suggest he didn't feel all that strongly about his objection (see Chatwin, Chatwin & Shakespeare 276-278).

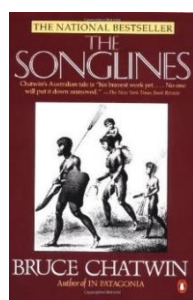
challenge — the expectations of the reader who has reasonably expected Chatwin to deliver on the simple authorial promise of (aiming for) factual accuracy. There were real-life consequences for real people. Shakespeare puts it thus: ‘Bruce upset the little people, those who could not answer back’ (*B.C.* 293). But all he had to do, to disengage *In Patagonia* from the travel genre, was change the name of the narrator/protagonist. He might have blamed the publisher for labelling the text as a travel book but the power to more faithfully, more reasonably, (re)set the reader’s expectations, in fact, lay with him.

### The Songlines



UK first edition

1987



US reprint<sup>46</sup>

1987



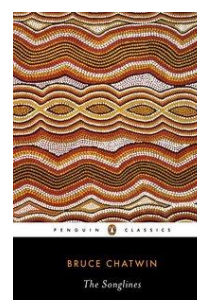
UK Picador

1988



UK Vintage<sup>47</sup>

1998



US Penguin

Classic 2012

Let us turn now to Chatwin’s *The Songlines*. The peritext of all five of the copies that I have examined identifies the author as ‘Bruce Chatwin’ in the accustomed places. That is, on the covers where the author is named (as did all the covers I found via a Google image search), the title pages and the spines. The copyright notices were also in the name of ‘Bruce Chatwin’.

The narrator/protagonist is identified in the text as ‘Bruce’. He is introduced as such five times by one character to another. On page 4, for example, Arkady introduces him as ‘a Pom

<sup>46</sup> Already branded a ‘National Bestseller’.

<sup>47</sup> It is interesting how the first cover of *The Songlines* laid claim to an almost anthropological authority but the covers have become more ambiguous over time (as Chatwin’s ‘fictions’, as we shall see, were identified). The 1998 cover is especially ambiguous.

by the name of Bruce.’ He makes friends with an ‘other Bruce’ and the two Bruces call each affectionately (and often morosely) ‘Bru’. Indeed, the recurrence of people with the moniker ‘Bruce’ encountered by the narrator becomes something of a running gag.

There is little doubt that using Lejeune’s test of autobiography, with the modification I made in Chapter One, that *The Songlines* has been presented — to the reader by the author — as a travel book as a quick review of that test shows:

1. *Form of Language:*
  - a. Narrative **check**
    - a. In prose **check**
2. *Subject treated:* ‘the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data’ **check**
3. *Situation of the author:* the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical **check**
4. *Position of the narrator:*
  - a. The narrator and the principal character are identical **check**
    - a. Retrospective point of view of the narrative **check**

According to Lejeune’s criteria, the author of *The Songlines* ‘excludes the possibility of fiction’ (17). Let us test some identified fictions in *The Songlines*.

**Omission:** On one of the trips Chatwin made to the Northern Territory, author Salman Rushdie accompanied him. Chatwin omitted Rushdie’s presence in the text. It was intentional, unflagged and misleading (in that it didn’t represent the author’s actual experience) but this isn’t, I would suggest, a materially misleading fiction. If Chatwin had pretended he travelled entirely unaccompanied, it would be material. That would have been a misrepresentation of the author’s experience rather than a mere omission and would have confounded the reader’s expectations. The experience would have been entirely different if Chatwin had purported to

travel alone, but he didn't make out that he did. As he needed to make some omissions, I suggest this omission is valid.<sup>48</sup>

**Created or composite character:** Chatwin spent three days with a man called Toly Sawenko who showed him around Alice Springs a bit and introduced him to various people. In the text Chatwin created 'Arkady', his 'guide' character, based on Sawenko. Not only did the author not tell the reader that 'Arkady' was what Sawenko himself has called a 'created character', he didn't tell Sawenko that he was even writing a book. 'I was completely floored by *The Songlines*. I had no inkling before during or after that Bruce had chosen to write a book about his adventures in Alice Springs ... He didn't [even] send a copy' (Shakespeare *B.C.* 489-490).<sup>49</sup> Here the reader's expectations were not recalibrated by Chatwin to include created or composite characters — 'people' he didn't meet. It is a misleading fiction — there was no guide called 'Arkady' and he is not Toly Sawenko. This is no mere change of name and the fiction had material consequences: 'What was only a three-day journey has become an unauthorised biography', said Sawenko. 'Since 1987, Sawenko has had to endure a stream of back-packers knocking at his door' (*B.C.* 490).<sup>50</sup>

Sawenko himself has pointed out that 'Bruce doesn't do anything to make the reader think [Arkady] is a created character. He says of the narrator this is Bruce who grew up in

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<sup>48</sup> Robyn Davidson did not omit the National Geographic photographer who at times joined her to visually record her journey although one suspects she may have been tempted to. Had she, the omission would have been material.

<sup>49</sup> Admittedly it would not have taken much by way of imagination to think that a writer might write something about his travels. Robyn Davidson, who introduced Chatwin to some of the Territorians, reportedly told them 'he'll write a beautiful book' (Shakespeare *B.C.* 489). To some he represented himself, says Shakespeare, as writing a 'serious academic study' (*B.C.* 414).

<sup>50</sup> But for all the rest of the supporting evidence, one might wonder if the differences between Sawenko and 'Arkady' could be put down to the difference between the author's impression of Sawenko versus Sawenko's impression of himself. Shakespeare says the character is 'at best an embellished version of Sawenko' (*B.C.* 417). Chatwin used numerous other people whom he met as the basis for fabricated characters for example Philip Toyne was used as the basis for two fictitious characters: the host of a barbecue and a 'gym bore' (see *B.C.* 418).

Sheffield. He's just paying lip service to the notion of fiction because the characters are so recognisable' (B.C. 490).

Sawenko identifies other unflagged factual inaccuracies in *The Songlines*. Chatwin was creative with his chronology. He spent only three days with Toly Sawenko but 'Arkady' appears often in the textual time-span from the first to the final page. The author repeatedly describes 'himself' making notes in notebooks 'on the spot' as it were, but Toly Sawenko says he never saw a notebook (notebooks that were 'black, oilcloth-covered' no less) (B.C. 414).<sup>51</sup> The claim of note taking serves to bolster Chatwin's authority.

**Changing events:** It wasn't only the people he met whom he fictionalised. According to the Territorians, it is Chatwin himself who is least recognisable. Chatwin changed events that fictionalised his own 'character'. On the page 'Bruce' is not afraid of snakes as Chatwin himself made clear to the Territorians he was in life. He writes: 'For myself, I rigged up a "snake-proof" groundsheet to sleep on, tying each corner to a bush so its edges were a foot from the ground' (T.S. 104). In fact, he appropriated this action: it was his Aboriginal companions who 'snake-proofed' the sheet for Chatwin when it became apparent he'd have trouble sleeping on the ground for fear of them slipping into bed with him. In another scene, he represents himself as a welcome guest at a barbecue when he was anything but. Shakespeare writes, '*The Songlines* ... is about Bruce inventing himself as his best, most achieved character: intrepid and practical traveller, humble, sage, sharp-witted inquisitor ... But as Jenny Green says: "He murdered people with talk"' (B.C. 420).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> One might suggest that if Chatwin was keeping his project secret from Sawenko then he would not want to be whipping out a notebook every five minutes and we know from scholars of his estate that he was a prodigious notebook user.

<sup>52</sup> The differences between the author and the narrator-as-presented may appear initially, to challenge Lejeune's point 3: 'Situation of the author: the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical' but the *situation* of the two remain identical: both are Poms and both are named Bruce. A reader who does not know the author has nothing to indicate that 'Bruce' on the page is quite different to the author in actuality.

**Metaphor:** Despite being what Robert Clarke calls a ‘misappropriation of Aboriginal spiritual belief’, Chatwin’s central and conceptual metaphor, the ‘songlines’, has been perhaps one of the most influential metaphors in literature set in Australia (243). In his 2010 introduction to *The Songlines*, Shakespeare calls it a ‘device’, one that Chatwin himself didn’t understand, and ‘a metaphor for each of our trajectories through life’ (Introduction *Songlines* xv). It is a metaphor with just enough basis in reality that his misuse and misunderstanding of the concept further upset a good many Territorians and Indigenous Australians all over the country. Chatwin tried to ‘test his theory of the songlines,’ on Salman Rushdie who was suspicious of the anthropological basis for it. ‘His thesis is nutty ... but in a funny way it doesn’t matter because it has a poetic truth, a mystical validation’ (Shakespeare *B.C.* 435). But the author didn’t tell the reader it was any kind of ‘device’ or ‘metaphor’ or that its ‘truth’ was solely poetic. And because, according to his friend, travel writer Robyn Davidson, he didn’t understand it ‘he had to make it up’ (Shakespeare *B.C.* 491). The closest he comes to any admission is that he may not get to the ‘heart of the matter’ (*T.S.* 12). Because the metaphor is so central to the text, and because its metaphorical or anthropologically unstable nature wasn’t flagged, the author has misled the reader. He presented his ‘poetic truth’ as factually accurate to the reader — as anthropologically sound — and managed, in doing so, to (re)design the world not only in the mind of this reader but in the minds of many others who have not read the text.

Before Chatwin’s book was published, the term ‘songlines’ was a little-used term for ‘dreaming tracks’ that are ‘not translatable in any sense’ says Shakespeare (*B.C.* 411). Due to Chatwin, it is now a commonly used term (if not an accurately described one).<sup>53</sup> Chatwin wanted ‘to imagine that the meaning of a country could be established by the stories

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<sup>53</sup> There can be little doubt that the metaphor is powerful and effective. It is arguably one of the most powerful (and now influential) metaphors of all time, possibly because Chatwin presented it in terms that Western readers could latch on to; he linked it with the traditional (Western) concepts of ley lines and trade routes. But he presented ‘the songlines’ concept as if it were an anthropologically accurate concept.



composed across its landscape' (Shakespeare Introduction *Songlines* viii). He created the 'vision', 'device', or 'metaphor' and because many readers took the text literally — as I did — many readers read the metaphor literally. In his introduction to *The Songlines* Shakespeare reports that the French Foreign Legion asked for copies of maps so they could 'walk the songlines' (Introduction *Songlines* xvi) and that and Mario Vargas Llosa 'read the book "believing it was an anthropological work, like [Jorge Luis ] Borges"' (Introduction *Songlines* xv). Janet Wolff writes 'Like many other people, I had read Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* ... when it first came out. Also like many of its readers, I found it a compelling *journal* of its author's travels in Australia' (Wolff 228 my emphasis). His neglecting to flag either that it is a metaphor or his lack of understanding, confounds the reader's expectations. This is misleading and material: the 'songlines' don't exist as a factually accurate anthropological concept — or as recognised by Indigenous Australians — as Chatwin presented them on the page. In the words of anthropologist Geoff Bagshaw, 'I'm not saying he didn't have some understanding, but *The Songlines* is the fictionalisation of a reality ... and presented as solid fact' (B.C. 412).

**Misrepresentation:** Another (and linked) factual inaccuracy Chatwin presents as 'true' is his presentation of the Australian Aborigines as nomadic. The Oxford Dictionary defines a nomad as 'a member of a people that travels from place to place to find fresh pasture for its animals and has no permanent home'. This definition does not describe Indigenous Australians. Traditionally they were peoples who moved around but did not seek pastures; they generally did not 'own' animals and especially those that required pasture or care. And the Indigenous Australians who Chatwin encountered were 'settled and politicised' (B.C. 412). Indeed, Chatwin's version of the concept of 'nomadism' is another example of the author twisting 'reality' to 'be' as he wants it — of writing about what he wanted to find and not accurately about what he did find. He engaged only with a version of nomadism that suited him and this has led him to be (surely) more factually inaccurate than he'd want to be.

His romanticised version of nomadism is more a restless quest, a spontaneous wandering, following a trail to see where it leads him. His own restless quests are also a response to broad questions: what are ‘songlines’? or, in the case of *In Patagonia*, where did the piece of skin in his grandmother’s glass cabinet, and purported to be from a brontosaurus, come from? Nomadism is not the most appropriate concept to describe the movements of Aborigines traditionally or (for the most part) their lives presently. Traditionally Aboriginal peoples moved with precision and purpose — they knew where they were going (and why) as the ‘songlines’ themselves show. This ‘fiction’ has potentially (even likely) (re)designed the world in some readers’ minds. It is a factual inaccuracy that has no place in a travel book.<sup>54</sup>

**Sleight of hand:** Chatwin wrangles characters, characterisations and events to suit himself and in doing so breaks the promise he made to the reader when he named his narrator/protagonist ‘Bruce’ in *The Songlines*: that he would aim for factual accuracy. This is especially evident in how he appropriates events and experiences to make ‘Bruce’ seem more skilled in the desert, more knowledgeable than he was, and in doing so he portrays the Aboriginal people he encounters as weak, child-like and powerless. Take the scene around the ‘snake-proofed’ groundsheet. Chatwin not only lies about who had the ability and power to snake-proof the groundsheet, he lies about who feared snakes. He has his Aboriginal characters becoming ‘hysterical’ and ‘twitchy’ when they see a snake trail in the sand, while presenting himself as unconcerned, even indifferent. In reality, Sawenko reports (and it seems more plausible), that it was Bruce who was constantly fearful of snakes and his Aboriginal companions who had the ability to live tolerantly with them and had the knowledge and skill to ensure that Chatwin could sleep that night: it was they, not him, who rigged up the ‘snake-proof’ groundsheet so he could sleep with less worry. These intentional inaccuracies haven’t been flagged in any way to the reader and provide a total misrepresentation of a people.

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<sup>54</sup> Or even, I would suggest, in fiction.

There are other ways that Chatwin misrepresents people in *The Songlines*. He shows a gallery owner in Kintore, a town in which Chatwin stayed for two weeks, as an ‘exploitative and very determined woman’ ripping off a local artist by offering him less than a tenth of the price she puts on his paintings in the city. While there seems little doubt that this scene might be representative of how some gallery owners treat local artists, this particular woman was misrepresented. In actuality, she wasn’t a ‘gallery owner’, she ran a cooperative for Indigenous artists with the Indigenous community paying her wage and any profits reinvested in the business (Shakespeare *B.C.* 436). It is unclear whether this is another constructed scene or a composite character but either way it is unflagged to the reader and has upset locals.

One such local, shopkeeper Rob Novak, was also upset about Chatwin’s lack of interaction with Aborigines and his omitting to acknowledge that the Indigenous Australians around Alice Springs ‘laugh the whole time’ (*B.C.* 436). This changes their characterisation and, I suggest, disempowers the local people (further) in the mind of a reader. It is, of course, entirely possible that this example of Chatwin’s misrepresentations was not intentional and thus it falls to the reader to decide the ‘factual adequacy’ of Chatwin’s work. The omission of laughter does, however, demonstrate the need for an author to take care with what she omits, a point I raised in Chapter Two. It also — to my mind at least — demonstrates the lack of care Chatwin took with his ‘research’ and writing given that he, as shown, presented *The Songlines* as a travel book.

Despite his presentation of it as a travel book, ‘[t]o the bafflement of his publisher and of many critics and booksellers’, Chatwin claimed that *The Songlines* was meant to be fiction (Shakespeare Introduction *Songlines* xiv). It is worth noting that he only made this claim obliquely, in the epitext, and not in the peritext or text itself, where he could be more certain his reader would be aware of the claims. But the claim itself is, as his biographer points out, ‘disingenuous’ (Introduction *Songlines* xiii). Reader after reader has, like me, taken issue with

Chatwin's fictions as confounding their expectations. 'Unrelated to everyday life,' deemed anthropologist Ruth Brown (Brown 12). Shakespeare quotes others who agree: 'A tremendous misuse of poetic licence,' according to a review by Christopher Pearson. 'One wonders where truth ends and fiction begins', Patrick White is quoted as saying. 'It doesn't go far enough to take on the true liberation of fiction writing,' said Philip Toynne who found himself the basis for two characters in the text. Robert Hughes observes: 'I don't think it matters in the least, as long as you grant that some of it is made up' (B.C. 489). But, to grant such, a reader needs to know what to grant and Chatwin's reader here does not.

Chatwin himself knew there was a line. His (travel) novels are based on true stories and Chatwin's own travel-research but are clearly presented by the author (and his publishers) as fiction. His first novel, *The Viceroy of Ouidah* — based on the life of a Brazilian called Francisco Manoel de Souza (himself a wanderer) — is narrated in the third person and Chatwin has changed the name of his real-life model to Francisco da Silva. Although Chatwin could have presented this novel as autobiographical (via an account of his own travels in Brazil and Benin), he chose to present it as fiction as evidenced by both the third-person narration and the changing of the name of the main character. He could have told the story as a travel book. He chose not to.

Chatwin's most-lauded novel, *On the Black Hill*, is also presented as a novel despite its population of characters and events with identifiable bases in 'real life'. Shakespeare lists some of them in *Bruce Chatwin*. His mother is 'cast' as Jo Lambert (21); his aunt as Miss Catherine Tuke (25); 'His teacher was Miss Clifton' (53); 'Bruce's headmaster is recalled in the character of the preacher Gomer Davies' (59); Penelope Betjeman ... is the Philippa of his Welsh novel' (377).

Events rooted in reality abound: ‘Bruce wrote the incident into his second novel *On the Black Hill* (138); ‘Bruce recalled his winter at Ozleworth in *On the Black Hill*’ (243). The landscape, too, is recognisable: ‘The ridge narrows along Offa’s Dyke into the escarpment known in the novel as the Black Hill’ (377).

The twins who are the protagonists of *On the Black Hill* were modelled on Jonathan and George Howell, Welsh brothers Chatwin spent time with. He was captivated by the idea that they ‘wander in their imagination’ and moved into lodgings nearby to mine their imaginary riches. The Howells themselves refused to recognise themselves in the twins.<sup>55</sup> Their nephew, Vivian, did: ‘Bruce sat with his back to the piano and said he was a writer. He didn’t say he was going to write about *them*’ (B.C. 379). Chatwin knew there were works a writer should present as fiction and presented these two texts as fiction when they appear to have about as much basis in reality as his travel books. It was not even the case that the complaints of readers caused him to ‘mend his ways’: he went on, after *On the Black Hill*, to write *The Songlines*, to present that text to the reader as if it were not fiction and then claimed to be surprised about the reaction of those who felt ‘jilted’ as I did.

Christopher Kremmer, in a study of historical fiction, writes ‘when the fictional narrative is constitutively indebted to historical referents, and intended to recreate the particularities of a specific historical period and its people, then to say “I made it up” seems at best irresponsible, and at worst disingenuous’ (9). But intentional factual inaccuracies — ‘fictions’ — in travel books have the potential to be more than disingenuous, as this study of some of Chatwin’s ‘fictions’ shows.

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<sup>55</sup> And why would they? ‘Novel is of *incest* ... Twins — one queer the other not’ is how Chatwin described it in his notebook (Shakespeare B.C. 383).



## In Conclusion

For the Creative Component of this thesis, I was charged with the task of writing a full-length market-oriented, non-fiction travel narrative; a work of creative nonfiction. More precisely, I wanted to write a ‘travel book’. I wanted — needed — to be ‘creative’, that is to use some of the techniques common to fiction such as ‘writing in scenes, using description, dialogue, specificity of detail, characterisation and point of view’ as Gutkind has listed (Brien and Gutkind). And I wanted to use my imagination. This led me to the question asked and answered by this exegesis: whether honesty — and thus authorial integrity — is possible for the travel writer: it is. To keep faith with my reader I needed to aim for factual accuracy. Those instances when I intentionally deviated from such, it was necessary to alert the reader to what I was doing so to not confound her expectations; I needed to be honest with my reader, I was, after all, writing a work of (creative) non-fiction. The more I researched travel writing by others, and especially those writers whose work is discussed herein, the more I became convinced of the importance of this issue despite being only able to examine the work of two travel writers in any depth.<sup>56</sup>

There can be ramifications if the author is other-than-honest in a work of creative non-fiction, as explored in this exegesis. The writer can confound reader-expectations. If the reader feels that the ‘pact’ between writer and reader has been broken, she, like me, can feel somehow jilted — that a promise has been unfulfilled. Further, fed misinformation, the reader can come

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<sup>56</sup> It would be interesting to apply the ‘test’ developed herein to the work of other travel writers such as Redmond O’Hanlon — a pseudo-scientific travel writer — or even entire travel ‘industries’ or cross-media travellers such as Michael Palin.

to believe the world is other than it is. In my terms, the world can be (re)designed in the mind of the reader.

In the late 1980s, when I returned my father's Picador paperback copy of *The Songlines* to its spot on the alphabetised bookshelf marked 'travel literature' (I like to think it sat between *The Road to Oxiana* and *Tracks*), it didn't occur to me that the author could have been striving for anything other than factual accuracy. After all, Chatwin hadn't indicated that he had anything else in mind. Aware now of at least some of the deviations from factual accuracy I, like Rory Stewart, feel that 'passages, suffused with symbolic and literary resonances, that once seemed most impressive, no longer seem the most satisfying ... even his prose ... less hypnotizing' (Introduction *Songlines* xx). Of course, Chatwin has helped me. Studying his (and others') travel books while I was writing 'In Good Faith' aided me in identifying what it was about Chatwin's travel books that offended me. That, in turn, made me determined to try not to offend my own reader in the same way; I should at least be factually honest. Of course, whether I have been successful in clearly flagging any intentional deviations from factual accuracy is, ultimately, up to my reader.

Now here I am in 2016, still a little obsessed with Bruce Chatwin. Wanting to confirm the accuracy of the above quote by Rory Stewart, I take down from the pile of books crammed onto my stacking book-tower one of my own editions of *The Songlines*. In his introduction I find that Stewart (also seemingly obsessed with Chatwin) goes on to conclude that Chatwin 'remains a great writer, of deep and enduring importance' (Introduction *Songlines* xx). And I agree. I just wish he'd called his narrator, say, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.



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