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Going to nowhere : narratives of Patagonian exploration

Mark W. Bell

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Abstract

Since its discovery on Magellan's circumnavigation, Patagonia has been treated differently than any other region in the world. Effectively, Patagonia has been left empty or vacated by the North. But this emptiness and blankness have compulsively attracted curious travel writers who have filled the emptiness of Patagonia with self-reflexive projections. From Charles Darwin and W.H. Hudson to Bruce Chatwin and Paul Theroux, Northern commentators have found in Patagonia a landscape that accommodates their desire for self-reflexivity and self-consciousness. Thus, Patagonia has been simultaneously filled and evacuated by the Northern mind. As a result, Patagonia has become increasingly about the self and less about the physical place to the point where Patagonia as a concept has been abstracted and made into a trope or condition. This paper examines the history of Patagonia in literature in English and analyzes how Patagonia has evolved into its modern signification.

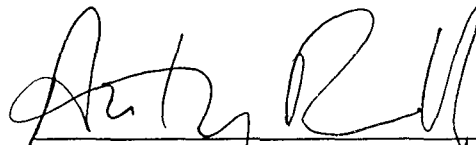
I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



John Marx, *Thesis Advisor*



Thomas Allen



Anthony Russell

GOING TO NOWHERE:
NARRATIVES OF PATAGONIAN EXPLORATION.

By

MARK WILLIAM BELL
B.A., University of Virginia

A Thesis

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Going to Nowhere: Narratives of Patagonian Exploration

During the first circumnavigation, Magellan's crew encountered people at the southern tip of South America that appeared unlike anyone Europeans had seen before.

Magellan's official chronicler, Antonio Pigafetta, describes the encounter this way:

But one day (without anyone expecting it) we saw a giant who was on the shore, quite naked and who danced and leaped and sang, and while he sang he threw sand and dust on his head...And when he was before us, he began to marvel and to be afraid, and he raised one finger upward, believing that we came from heaven. And he was so tall that the tallest of us only came up to his waist. (46)

These so-called giants covered themselves in full animal skins and had habits and mannerisms that seemed very peculiar and bizarre to the Europeans. The conditions and climate of the region in which they lived added to the peculiarity of their situation. They inhabited a bleak end of the continent with scant vegetation and volatile weather. Over the history of exploration to this area, this land and the people who lived there gained a mythic status as treacherous, barbaric, and inhospitable. Land and inhabitants became intertwined; one became emblematic of the other. Thus, in the Northern¹ mind, *Patagoni*,² the name Magellan gave to the territory and its inhabitants, acquired a reputation as the ultimate land of mystery, the place at the end of the world where humans are almost not human.

Several hundred years later, Northern writers are still fascinated by the mystique of Patagonia. The Preface to Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* invites the reader to look

¹ I will use the term "Northern" and "The North" rather than "Western" and "The West" for the purposes of this essay for several reasons. Because Patagonia is geographically part of "The West," using such a term is unnecessarily complicated. Also, Patagonia has been treated by the writers I have researched as the ultimate Southern tip of the world, or the bottom of the globe, and in such treatment, the condition of North versus South has taken prominence.

at the book “with the eyes of a Patagonian for whom all that is sacred and taboo in our world is meaningless.”³ (xxxiii) The author advises the reader to reject the conventions of modern life in order to grasp the novel, and implies that perhaps this is how one should view day to day existence as well. Miller never traveled to Patagonia, but he clearly had a concept of what a Patagonian seemed like. Karl Shapiro writes in the Introduction to *Tropic of Cancer* that Miller liked to be called a Patagonian, though neither he nor his editor knew what one was. “What is a Patagonian?” Shapiro asks. “I don’t know, but it is certainly something rare and *sui generis*. We can call Miller the greatest living Patagonian.” (vi) A Patagonian no longer has anything to do with the geographical region the name is attributed to, or so Miller and Shapiro make it seem. Apparently, one does not actually need to know what a Patagonian is in order to use the name. Instead, as Miller uses it, the term appears available for appropriation by anyone eager to evoke some more visceral, carnal, and sensual experience.

What is striking about these two anecdotes is how the myth of Patagonia has developed from its initial inception to its modern signification. It has evolved from the name given to a specific group of alien people to a seemingly arbitrary signifier whose referent is totally contingent on the circumstance in which it is applied. Although the terms of the Patagonian mythology have remained consistent, they have over time been increasingly abstracted from the geographical region Patagonia and become more or less unlocalized and free-floating. Over the course of time, Patagonia has alternately been demonized and idolized, but what has made it so ripe for mythology is that nearly five

² According to R.A. Skelton, “the name bestowed by Magellan exists, with the sense of ‘dogs with large paws,’ in various romance languages: Spanish *patacones*, Portuguese *potos de cao*, French *patauds*.” (Pigafetta 154)

hundred years after Europeans first arrived off the coast, Northern commentators' perceptions of Patagonia remain as vague and impressionistic as those of Magellan and his crew. The geography of the region, with some exceptions, has been "discovered" and "explored." It has even to an extent been colonized. Still, an inability to conceive of Patagonia as anything remotely resembling a specific geography or possessing a people with anything like a specific ethnography persists. Such vagueness indicates the limits of Northern conceptualization as it tries to write a version of Patagonia in Northern terms.

In his classic study *Orientalism*, Edward Said helps us to recognize that it is far from uncommon to find Northern writers projecting their fears and desires onto the peoples and places of the South. As Said writes, the Middle East that we have inherited from European writers with all of its elaborate traditions and rituals, its religions and habits is more or less a projection. As he says, "that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient." (876) The West seeks to contain the Orient on Western terms so that "[t]he essential relationship [between the two], on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, [can be] seen in the West...to be one between a strong and weak partner." (880) The result is more a case of a relationship of mastery and slavery than any kind of genuine interest in the Orient for itself. In other words, Said considers "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." (873)

Like the Orient, the Patagonia we have inherited from explorers is best understood as a projection. Unlike the Orient, Northern writers have not tried to 'dominate, restructure, or have authority' over Patagonia. As evidenced by the example

³ Anais Nin is credited with writing the Preface to *Tropic of Cancer*, but at least one critic claims Miller actually authored it. (Dearborn 171)

from Miller used above, Northern commentators have not secured a consistent conceptualization of Patagonia. While on the one hand Patagonia is to an extent represented and dominated by the North through means such as Said describes, the North seems interested in treating Patagonia differently. The construction of a calculated kind of vagueness and mystery around Patagonia never gets elevated to the kind of system Said describes. Said talks about “the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient.” (873) Surely the same cannot be said of the North’s relationship to Patagonia. Whereas, Said argues, “because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action,” Patagonia is precisely a ‘free subject of thought and action.’ (873) Patagonia, unlike Said’s version of the Orient, is attractive to Northern writers by virtue of its availability and possibility. Patagonia is the point where Northern authority ends and mystery becomes the presiding characteristic. Patagonia differs from the Orient because it is unknown. Said states that “every writer of the Orient assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies.” (874-5) Writers of Patagonia, on the other hand, do not have available such stability or precedence on which they may rely in their treatments of Patagonia, thus a consistent or demystified depiction of Patagonia is not possible. Said argues that “Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West.” (875) Because Patagonia has no real or established sense of an internal identity there exists no possibility to display an “exteriority” in the way that can be said of the Orient. Patagonia is instead a place that has nothing but mystery to offer. In

seeking to escape the mundane and familiar, explorers have found in Patagonia a place of uncertainty and unconformity. Patagonia has become a paradox, a place seemingly left hollow on purpose. In short, Patagonia is an evacuated Orient. This paper will examine this paradox and address the reasons why the North has constructed Patagonia into an evacuated Orient and treated it differently than anywhere else.

In this paper, I recount the history of Patagonia's emptiness. Throughout its existence, Patagonia has remained a distant, inaccessible, and seemingly useless place. Despite a long association with nothingness, however, it has invariably attracted the curious. It is this paradoxical quality of Patagonia as both empty and appealing that has afforded it such a malleable and dynamic role in literature in English. Patagonia has provided the evacuated space for writers in search of a *tabula rasa*. Patagonia is not as useless as it may seem. As Miller shows us, Patagonia helps to legitimize or concretize a literary author, or even provide an identity for a particular sense of self.

In writing a history of Patagonia, this "no place," one faces a unique quandary. In an effort to separate fact from fiction, the historian could conceptualize Patagonia in terms of its geographical features, but these have become almost completely bound up with the symbolic representation of Patagonia.⁴ Its treacherous mountains and empty plains have become part and parcel of the Patagonia that has transcended place and become mythologized. Patagonia has become the ultimate land of mystery. One might even say that it is possible to visit Patagonia without *actually being there*. To historicize

⁴ The land of Patagonia itself is almost impossible to determine as a specific locale. It is generally thought of as the lower fifth of South America. On the Western edge along the Pacific Coast is the "land of tempest." The Andes Mountains extend through this area and sit in the rain shadow of New Zealand, creating a brutal and unpredictable climate. On the Argentinean side to the East is the Pampas, a stretch of plains and desert that are as barren and empty as the East portion is violent and dynamic. The Southern end of Patagonia is the glaciated area of Tierra del Fuego. There are some parts of Patagonia so remote they

Patagonia, therefore, requires us to capture the mystique that attracts the curious who look at this land in a way that defines it. Over the course of this paper, I will trace how the emptying of Patagonia has helped to produce a particular kind of Northern traveler, one who finds himself confirmed by the profound no place of Patagonia.

I. Patagonia in the Age of Exploration

During Magellan's five-month stay in the land he called *Patagoni*, his chronicler Pigafetta writes that "many strange things befell us." (50) Magellan and his crew witnessed flying fish and other marvels as they plied a treacherous course through a strait "in length one hundred and ten leagues, which are four hundred and forty miles, and in width somewhat less than half a league." (51) The strait cut through a land of snow-capped mountains and fed into the Pacific Ocean. *Purchas His Pilgrimes* includes a seventeenth century translation of Pigafetta's account into English that embellishes somewhat this description of the strait: "They thinke, that there is not a fairer Strait in the World." (90) Even in these thin descriptions, the land of *Patagoni* seems readily available to myth.

The people inhabiting Patagonia are as, if not more, curious and intriguing to these writers of early modern exploration than the land itself. In the early narratives on Patagonia, the people who lived near the Straits of Magellan are shown as guarding it with a ferocity and tenacity that only furthered the burgeoning myth of the area as dangerous and mysterious. As Patagonia developed a reputation and mystique as being

have never been mapped, much less explored, while some places are now so commercialized cruise ships can take tourists right up to glaciers ten stories high and watch them crumble into the sea.

hellish, its inhabitants, likewise, were regarded as demonic by travelers.⁵ The sight of the fires that inspired the name for Tierra del Fuego could have also triggered in the superstitious religiosity of Magellan and his crew a connection with hell. In this instance, they project onto the emptiness of Patagonia the perception of it as an earthly inferno. This perception, along with the perception of the Patagonians as somewhat inhuman, may very well be the source of the treatment of Patagonia in literature as hellish.

Pigafetta describes how Magellan captured two of these “giants” in order to take them back to Spain as gifts for the King and Queen. Magellan selected two unarmed *Pathagoni* and distracted them with possessions while iron fetters were placed around their ankles. Upon realizing their capture, “they began to blow and foam at the mouth like bulls, loudly calling on *Setebos* (that is, the great devil) to help them.” (Pigafetta 49) Magellan succeeds eventually in converting one of these “giants” to Christianity: “When this giant was sick, he asked for the cross, and embraced and kissed it often. And he wished to become a Christian before his death. And we named him Paul.” (55) These accounts of the early encounters with the *Pathagoni*⁶ are examples typical of early colonialist discourse, and their influence on later writing is substantial. These encounters set the tone for European intercourse with the natives of the New World. Stephen Greenblatt in *Marvelous Possessions* describes how the elements of the New World, its

⁵ Allow me to note here an idea that Theroux and Chatwin discuss in *Nowhere is a Place* in which Patagonia in a way replaces the medieval and Dantean conceptualization of hell and Mount Purgatory being located in the Southern hemisphere, diametrically opposite of Jerusalem, the center of the Northern hemisphere. In this sense, Patagonia fills a role in the Northern consciousness of the geographical representation of the afterlife. Chatwin notes the remarkable similarities in the physical descriptions of Dante’s trip with Virgil from hell to Purgatory. In this account, they are guided across a body of water from hell to the mountain. Compare this image with the image of Magellan negotiating the straits with Tierra del Fuego (the “land of fire) on one side and the glaciated terrain on the other. Chatwin also notes that in traveling to such a place, Magellan became a Ulyssean figure in the Northern consciousness. (NP 90)

⁶ Pigafetta calls the land *Patagoni*, the people *Pathagoni*, and the individual person *Pathagon*.

inhabitants especially, were a spectacle for the Europeans who saw them as possessions they desired to secure and return with to European audiences. (122) There was considerable interest among Europeans in ‘witnessing’ these ‘artifacts’ of the New World. By removing the native inhabitants from the New World—Patagonians in particular—Northern explorers, in effect, began the process of abstraction. These figures were extracted from their environments and treated as isolated oddities, furthering the growing dislocation between place and name. This process is complicated by what Greenblatt terms “cultural transparency” in which the Europeans failed “to comprehend the resistant cultural otherness of New World peoples.” (95) As is the case with Orientalism, these early explorers looked to secure the New World by projecting a culture onto it meanwhile disregarding its existing characteristics. They simultaneously demonstrate both a tendency to imagine Indians as culturally naked as well as imagine Indians as “virtual doubles, fully conversant with the language and culture of the Europeans.” (MP 95) Such complicated perceptions are evident in the writings of the travel chroniclers of this period. In Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, we can see how these contradictory treatments of Indians filtered into literature. In Renaissance literature, particularly in the theater, European audiences could “witness” (what Greenblatt considers the key to “the European dream of possession”) these peculiarities and curiosities of the New World. (MP 122) Through such a process, the influence of travel chroniclers such as Pigafetta is apparent in shaping the perceptions of the New World.

Almost a century after Magellan’s voyage, *The Tempest* was first performed at Whitehall featuring the remarkable character of Caliban, in what Greenblatt calls “perhaps the profoundest literary exploration of these themes in the Renaissance.” (LTC

23) To an extent, Shakespeare recreates in Caliban the encounters between Magellan's crew and the *Pathagoni*. Compare the initial encounter between Magellan and the Patagonian who danced on the shore and pointed to the sky quoted at the beginning of this paper with Caliban asking Stephano and Trinculo, "Hast thou not dropped from heaven?" (II.2.134) Allow me to state here that there is no way to specifically identify Shakespeare's sources for *The Tempest* or for Caliban, or to argue with absolute certainty what Caliban represents. I think it is safe to say that Caliban is an amalgam of all sorts of different ideas, or, as one critic states, "it seems improbable that Shakespeare depended, in devising his characters and story, upon anything other than a quite unlocalized consciousness of certain motifs and story patterns widely distributed through the literature of the world." (Righter 24) However, as another critic has shown, Pigafetta's chronicle is clearly operating in *The Tempest*. (Vaughan 37) For instance, Setebos is the god Caliban's mother, Sycorax, worshipped and is also the god whom the captured "giant" cries out to in Pigafetta's narrative. As Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan state, "Shakespearean scholars since the late eighteenth century have been virtually unanimous in attributing the name of Sycorax's god Setebos to Pigafetta's narrative." (38) While it was certainly not Shakespeare's only source, Pigafetta's account and the story of Magellan's voyage were influential in the creation of Caliban and *The Tempest*.⁷ The account of Magellan's manipulation, deception, and eventual capture of the Patagonians constituted a model of treatment of the native inhabitants of the New World that Shakespeare, to an extent, adopted in his creation of Caliban and his relationships with the Europeans on the island.

⁷ Shakespeare may have read or been exposed to Robert Eden's translation of Pigafetta's chronicle in his well-known *History of Travaile* published in England in 1577.

In his *In Patagonia*, Bruce Chatwin states that into “the mouth of Caliban, Shakespeare packed all of the bitterness of the New World.” (97) Between his own words and the way in which he is treated, Caliban becomes the embodiment of the dispossessed and overrun native inhabitant of the New World. He is called a “monster,” “strange beast,” “devil,” and “thing of darkness.” Prospero introduces the audience to Caliban before they get a chance to see him: “Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!” (I.2.319-320) Stephano initially speculates on the value of returning with Caliban to Naples as a gift for the King. Trinculo describes Caliban as a “puppy-headed monster” (II.2.151), perhaps an association with the root of the word ‘dog’ in the name *Pathagon*. In any case, the physical impression of Caliban is that—like the Patagonians Magellan and his crew encountered—he is almost not a human. Physiologically there is something so odd about Caliban that it is hard for the other characters to conceive of him as a fellow human. But there is also something endearing and harmless in the term “puppy-headed” that implies a certain curiously attractive aspect to Caliban’s character and appearance, making him at once odious and threatening as well as intriguing and innocent. And like a puppy, Caliban is available to being subjected and adopting a master. Caliban’s mother, Sycorax, apparently conceived him with a devil. Whether that devil is the same devil Caliban cries out to in Act V when he says “O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed!” is unclear. (V.1.261) Here, Caliban’s words have a direct connection with Pigafetta’s account.

In addition to its native inhabitants—Caliban, Ariel, and the other spirits—the island in *The Tempest* has other enchanted and surreal qualities. Caliban describes the island as:

...full of noises,
 Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices
 That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again... (III.2.136-141)

Ferdinand describes the island as a paradise upon seeing the play performed by the island's spirits: "Let me live here ever!/So rare a wondered father and a wise/Makes this place Paradise." (IV.1.122-124) The characters' perceptions of the island help to create a dynamic and even somewhat paradoxical depiction of the island. It has the treacherous and unsettling qualities of inclement weather, isolation, and curious native inhabitants, similar to those described in Pigafetta's account as well as other early modern exploration accounts of the Patagonian region and the Straits of Magellan. But the island is also in a way fantastically paradisiacal. The ambivalent perceptions of the island reveal its constructed composition and inherent emptiness that allow for it to at once assume both the hellish characteristics associated with pre-modern conceptions of *Patagoni* as well as the Edenic vision of a "brave new world." (V.1.183)

The island, in effect, becomes a paradox as it encompasses both hell and Eden as the qualities that make it hell for one make it Eden for another. One critic notes that it "seems to change character bewilderingly according to the nature of the person regarding it." (Righter 35) For the characters of the play, the island, in the beginning at least, becomes what they want it to be as their impressions of the island reflect their motivations. Adrian's first impressions of the island are that it "seems to be desert...Uninhabitable, and almost inaccessible." (II.1.37-40) Meanwhile a few lines later, upon surveying the same place, Gonzalo declares: "Here is everything advantageous to life...How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!" (II.1.52-56)

Later in the scene, Gonzalo offers a speech in which he envisions a return to a Utopian age of innocence on the island. Gonzalo has a grand vision of the New World that would allow for an escape from the old order, suggesting possibility and opportunity otherwise unavailable; it is a view that opposes the dismissive and contemptuous view Adrian expresses. With the island, Shakespeare creates a model for the New World that is compelling to the curious and characterized in terms of how it is regarded.

Patagonia is the “puppy-headed monster” that is simultaneously threatening yet appealing. It is this model that serves Patagonia in the modern era. Patagonia is overlooked and left empty, and this emptiness or blankness attracts the curious. Imperialists, like Adrian, see very little of value in Patagonia, while the curious, like Gonzalo, see an infiniteness in its isolation and emptiness. The potentiality of this vision of the New World that Shakespeare creates through the island in *The Tempest* only remains, by the twentieth century, in the concept of Patagonia. Whereas the rest of the New World has been colonized and ordered, Patagonia is the only place that continues to resemble the model of the New World Shakespeare constructs with the island in *The Tempest*.

II. Science and the Self

Three hundred years after Magellan visited Patagonia, Charles Darwin, as the naturalist aboard the H.M.S. Beagle, explored the region in 1834. Darwin reiterated the adventure motif Magellan initiated of travelling to Patagonia but explored under the auspices of science rather than geography. Even though his intentions as a naturalist and a scientist introduce new thematic material into the research he conducts in Patagonia,

Darwin's discoveries and impressions are more or less a revision and a reconfiguration of the rhetorical structure that Magellan and Pigafetta relate from the place called Patagonia and that Shakespeare employs for his unnamed island in *The Tempest*. Darwin's characterization of Patagonia is consistent with the others in that he perceives the place to be at once threatening and inhospitable as well as infinitely intriguing and awesome. How Darwin describes his extended stay in Patagonia is a study in oppositions: scientifically uninteresting yet curiously stimulating, enchanting yet desolate.

Like Pigafetta, Darwin finds the landscape itself barren and empty: "The country remained the same, and was extremely uninteresting. The complete similarity of the productions throughout Patagonia is one of its most striking characters...The curse of sterility is on the land." (193) But, Darwin's characterization of the land is not limited to just desolation. As with the previous depictions of Patagonia in travel accounts, there is an imminent sense of danger to combine with the sense of desolation. Not only is Patagonia a place that is barren and scarce, it is potentially treacherous. It is a place characterized by the palpable presence of death, as Darwin illustrates: "The entangled mass of the thriving and the fallen reminded me of the forests within the tropics—yet there was a difference: for in these still solitudes, Death, instead of Life, seemed the predominant spirit." (225) But Darwin is able to marry the opposing forces that characterize Patagonia, at once presenting it as a place of termination and potential, as though this sterility were an incubator for the infinite:

There was a degree of mysterious grandeur in mountain behind mountain, with the deep intervening valleys, all covered by one thick, dusky mass of forest. The atmosphere, likewise, in this climate, where gale succeeds gale, with rain, hail, and sleet, seems blacker than anywhere else. In the Strait of Magellan looking due southward from Port Famine, the distant channels between the mountains appeared from their gloominess to lead beyond the confines of this world. (226)

Not only does the sterility of the land itself act to make Patagonia intimidating, its location at the 'end of the earth' also makes it threatening. However, this 'cursed' land is also the same place that inspires Darwin to state: "A single glance at the landscape was sufficient to show me how widely different it was from anything I had ever beheld." (219) Darwin echoes the words of Gonzalo as he initially reflects on Patagonia with an ambivalence towards something that is at once desolate and appealing.

Darwin's own impressions of Patagonia show us that an element of adventure is not out of place in science as he demonstrates both the austere objectivity of a scientist and the imaginative subjectivity of an artist. As a scientist, he sees the land as an unremarkable place of undifferentiated nothingness: "Everywhere the landscape wears the same sterile aspects; a dry gravelly soil supports tufts of brown withered grass, and low scattered bushes, armed with thorns." (79) But he is at the same time intrigued and captivated by the unrestricted opportunity Patagonia offers him to indulge his adventurous impulses as he describes the life of the gauchos of Patagonia: "There is high enjoyment in the independence of the Gaucho life—to be able at any moment to pull up your horse, and say, 'Here we will pass the night,'" and "With the sun for their guide, mare's flesh for food, their saddlecloths for beds,—as long as there was a little water, these men would penetrate to the end of the world." (80 and 114) Darwin suggests that the freedom Patagonia offers is contingent on its desolation, that what makes it so treacherous is precisely what makes it so abundant in opportunity.

One way in which Patagonia is different for Darwin than for Magellan is that over the course of three centuries it had been tamed to an extent by Northern exploration. While Patagonia retains much of its remarkable mystery despite this exploration, there

had been over the course of three hundred years a process of re-presentation that altered perceptions of it. For instance, Darwin's impressions of the native Patagonians are not like those of the pre-modern explorers who characterized the Patagonians as barbaric and dangerous. Instead, Darwin describes his encounter with "the so-called gigantic Patagonians" as a "cordial reception." (248) He goes on to say that they are not really as tall as legend suggests and says that they have had so much communication with Europeans that they can speak European languages and "are half-civilized, and proportionately demoralized." (248) Darwin concludes this description by saying, "It was an amusing scene, and it was impossible not to like the so-called giants, they were so thoroughly good-humored and unsuspecting: they asked us to come again." (79) Darwin appears to genuinely like the Patagonians and does not sense an imminent threat from them, which distinguishes him from Magellan and his superstitious crew as well as those on Shakespeare's island seeking to control Caliban. However, Darwin's treatment of the Patagonians still aligns him with the others who are both attracted to and apprehensive about the natives. Just as Caliban is called a "puppy-headed monster," a term suggesting both cute and grotesque qualities, Darwin likewise considers the Patagonians "curious and interesting" (220); but it is their inhabiting such a remote and desolate place that is disconcerting to him. He wonders why a group of people would leave the more hospitable areas of the rest of North and South America in favor of such a "miserable country." (232) For Darwin, the land and people of Patagonia offer a sublime composite of being simultaneously threatening and engaging.

As he concludes his account of his voyage on the *Beagle*, Darwin returns to his experiences in Patagonia:

In calling up images of the past, I find that the plains of Patagonia frequently cross before my eyes; yet these plains are pronounced by all as wretched and useless. They can be described only by negative characters: without habitations, without water, without trees, without mountains, they support merely a few dwarf plants. Why, then, and the case is not peculiar to myself, have these arid wastes taken so firm a hold on my memory? Why have not the still more level, greener and more fertile Pampas, which are serviceable to mankind, produced an equal impression? I can scarcely analyze these feelings: but it must be partly owing to the free scope given to the imagination. The plains of Patagonia are boundless, for they are scarcely passable, and hence unknown: they bear the stamp of having lasted, as they are now, for ages, and there appears no limit to their duration through future time. If, as the ancients supposed, the flat earth was surrounded by an impassable breadth of water, or big deserts heated by an intolerable excess, who would not look at these last boundaries to man's knowledge with deep but ill-defined sensations? (530)

Darwin suggests that the emptiness of a place characterized by such negativity, a place that is otherwise so useless it is essentially uninhabitable, needs to be filled by imagination. Patagonia has, for Darwin, become symbolic of the extremities of man's world and thus his consciousness. For Darwin, as I suggested earlier in this paper, Patagonia is a place ripe for imagination. Effectively, Darwin introduces an element of self-consciousness into the literary tradition of Patagonia. This self-consciousness and self-reflexivity seems to dominate the later texts about travel to Patagonia, culminating in the most extreme example, Chatwin's *In Patagonia*. Darwin introduces the presence of the self in Patagonia ("Why, then...have these arid wastes taken so firm a hold on my memory?") while still maintaining the rhetorical structure of Patagonia as a place both hellish in terms of its physical qualities ("described only by negative characters") and Edenic in terms of its potentiality ("the free scope given to my imagination"). For Darwin, Patagonia is a landscape that allows for a projection of the self too intense and complicated to summarize articulately ("I can scarcely analyze these feelings"), an idea that resonates in later texts about Patagonia, and immediately with Hudson's *Idle Days in*

Patagonia, published in 1893. The emptying of Patagonia facilitates a sense of identity that draws the traveling self to it.

In *Idle Days*, W.H. Hudson uses Darwin's closing thoughts on Patagonia as a launching point for his own romantic quest for solitude and insight into human nature. Early in the narrative, once he has arrived in Patagonia, Hudson writes:

At last, Patagonia! How often had I pictured it in my imagination, wishing with an intense longing to visit this solitary wilderness, resting far off in its primitive and desolate peace, untouched by man, remote from civilization! There it lay full in sight before me—the unmarred desert that wakes strange feelings in us; the ancient habitation of giants, whose footprints seen on the sea-shore amazed Magellan and his men and won for it the name of Patagonia. There, too, far away in the interior, was the place called Trapalanda, and the spirit-guarded lake, on whose margin rose the battlements of that mysterious city, which many have sought and none have found. (4 and 5)

Hudson begins his book by insisting that the individual engaging his imagination is a necessary part of the Patagonian experience and he demonstrates a clear understanding of Patagonia's past and mythology. Unlike any of the writers who have to this point written on Patagonia, Hudson recognizes Patagonia as a place with a geography and a history as well as being mythical and imaginative. His reference to the myth of Trapalanda as a place that may possibly still exist reveals the differences in Hudson's approach from those of Magellan and Darwin as well as the existence of a burgeoning mythology associated with Patagonia. Whereas such imagination is absent in Magellan's exploration and is a secondary aspect to science with Darwin, Hudson demands that imagination and mythology be accounted for in the Patagonian experience.

Hudson published *Idle Days* in London, about thirty years after his extended visit to Patagonia. As Chatwin writes, "In the 1860s W.H. Hudson came to the Rio Negro looking for the migrant birds that wintered around his home in La Plata. Years later he

remembered the trip through the filter of his Notting Hill boarding-house and wrote a book so quiet and sane it makes Thoreau seem a ranter.” (*IP* 15) His motivations, at least those he reveals in his narrative, may have been ornithological, but these are quickly surpassed by the hidden presence of a more profound reason for going to Patagonia, a reason that is too personal and subjective for Hudson to explicitly mention. Such unspoken motivations are evident in the early stages of the book. Like in *The Tempest*, the narrative begins with Hudson’s ship almost abandoned by the crew in a brutal storm that would have surely sunk a crewless vessel. Once Hudson safely reaches the shore of Patagonia, he scrambles up the dunes and utters the exclamation “At last, Patagonia!” There are other elements of the novel that also indicate it is not a novel simply about scientific study. Hudson shoots himself in the knee on a bird hunt, crippling himself, and forcing him to extend his stay in the Patagonian wilderness to recover. The implicit suggestions of the injury are that it is artificial and a metaphorical crippling of the self. In addition, his rehabilitative stay and recuperation appear to be for more than just a wounded knee. Hudson’s Patagonian experience is a journey and an exploration, like Darwin’s and Magellan’s; but Hudson further develops Darwin’s contribution of the reflexive self to the discourse by intensifying the self-directed and introspective journey facilitated by Patagonia and its solitude.

However, Hudson marks a transition in Patagonia’s treatment in literature in English that de-emphasizes the imminent danger associated with Patagonia. Over the course of his stay in Patagonia, Hudson realizes that in the thirty years since Darwin had traveled to Patagonia, the land had undergone intense exploration and colonization that had dispelled some of the mysteries and myths of the land. By the time Hudson visits

Patagonia, all that is left is its inherent desolation. Hudson elaborates on these ideas in a long response to Darwin's closing remark from *The Beagle*, quoted above:

That he did not in this passage hit on the right explanation of the sensations he experienced in Patagonia, and of the strength of the impressions it made on his mind, I am quite convinced; for the thing is just as true of to-day as of the time, in 1836, when he wrote that the case was not peculiar to himself. Yet since that date—which now, thanks to Darwin, seems so remote to the naturalist—those desolate regions have ceased to be impracticable, and although still uninhabited and uninhabitable, except to a few nomads, they are no longer unknown. During the last twenty years the country has been crossed in various directions from the Atlantic to the Andes, and from the Rio Negro to the Straits of Magellan, and has been found all barren. The mysterious illusive city, peopled by whites, which was long believed to exist in the unknown interior, in a valley called Trapalanda, is to moderns a myth, a mirage of the mind...The traveler of to-day really expects to see nothing more exciting than a solitary huanaco keeping watch on a hill-top, and a few gray-plumaged rheas flying from him, and, possibly, a band of long-haired roving savages, with their faces painted black and red. Yet, in spite of accurate knowledge, the old charm still exists in all its freshness; and after all the discomforts and sufferings endured in a desert cursed with eternal barrenness, the returned traveler finds in after years that it still keeps its hold on him, that it shines brighter in memory, and is dearer to him than any other region he may have visited. (201)

Hudson suggests that Darwin is wrong to look for something in Patagonia and that one should look for nothing at all. Hudson sees the barren plains of Patagonia as ripe for such an experience as he desires because their desolation offers no distractions that could engage or distract the senses or stimulate thought as a much busier landscape could. In a process that begins with Darwin's closing remarks in *The Beagle*, Patagonia becomes something that is as much a part of the beholder's mind as it is a place. Hudson's narrative is an attempt to resolve the questions Darwin raised at the end of his chronicle. Hudson is in search of what it is about the barren plains of Patagonia that arouses their beholder's imagination in such a way. As Hudson suggests at the end of this passage, it is precisely Patagonia's blankness and desolation that make it fertile ground for intense self-reflection.

Hudson's venture into the untamed wilderness of Patagonia serves, in effect, as the metaphorical equivalent of a journey back into the untamed nature of man. In the novel, he offers several extended discussions on human nature and the more primal elements of the human condition that are evoked by a place such as Patagonia. Towards the middle of his stay in Patagonia, Hudson notices a change in his perspective and state of mind:

How had I spent those fifty or sixty days, I asked myself, and from what enchanted cup had I drunk the oblivious draught which had wrought so great a change in me? The answer was that I had drunk from the cup of nature, that my days had been spent with peace...the lesson nature taught me in that lonely country was not wholly wasted, and while I was in that condition of mind I found it very agreeable...Things about which I had hitherto cared little now occupied my thoughts and supplied me with a pleasurable excitement. (73-74)

The desolation and emptiness of Patagonia afford Hudson an opportunity for deep reflection and intense introspection. Even at this point, he is explicitly aware of the Patagonian tranquility's impact on his own composure. Hudson's narrative becomes a forum where he can elaborate on the change to his "condition of mind" that he experiences in the passage quoted above.

By the end of the book, Hudson is more than convinced that it is the desolation of Patagonia and the isolation experienced there that makes such a change to his perspective possible. As he states:

Such changes in us, however brief in duration they may be, and in most cases they are very brief, but which so long as they last seem to affect us down to the very roots of our being, and come as a great surprise—a revelation of an unfamiliar and unsuspected nature hidden under the nature we are conscious of—can only be attributed to an instantaneous reversion to the primitive and wholly savage mental conditions. (210)

The Indians he encounters or hears about on the plains of Patagonia become a model for reverting back to the "primitive and wholly savage mental conditions" he is so desirous to

obtain. Hudson suggests that the permanence of the scenery of the Patagonian plains is responsible for this reversion because the starkness is so severe it is an image less likely to fade away from memory. Thus, the Patagonian landscape becomes the vehicle through which Hudson can attain his goal of a reversion to a primitive condition:

It was elation of this kind, the feeling experienced on going back to a mental condition we have outgrown, which I had in the Patagonian solitude; for I had undoubtedly *gone back*; and that state of intense watchfulness, or alertness rather, with suspension of the higher intellectual faculties, represented the mental state of the pure savage. (216)

Hudson believes that it is precisely the monotony and desolation of the barren plains, the absence of anything to distract the eyes that “leave the mind open and free to receive an impression of visible nature as a whole.” (221)

Even though Hudson revels in the exuberance inspired in him by the Patagonian desolation, he is not entirely neglectful of the dangerous elements of Patagonia. He does not forget the tropes of danger that have long been associated with Patagonia. He acknowledges the permanence of this Patagonian desolation and that it is contingent on the land being permanently barren. Any attempt to encapsulate or ‘colonize’ Patagonia, Hudson acknowledges, would be futile. Its desolation necessitates that its inhabitants are transient and not permanent. Hudson engages in a fanciful description of a drama in which Nature attempts to run off a potential settler with volatile weather and inhospitable agricultural conditions. But the contented settler is not to be deterred and carries on with his attempts to settle in Patagonia. Eventually, the man “finishes his course by a fall from a horse” or “is swept away and drowned when fording a swollen stream,” but nonetheless, he has still, “in most cases, spent a happier life than he who dies of apoplexy in a counting-house or dining-room.” (89) Hudson is fully conscious of the condition of

Patagonia in that what makes it so beautiful is exactly what makes it so inhospitable and dangerous. It is, in the sense that Edmund Burke employed the word, sublime. In "Of the Sublime," Burke writes: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling." (Adams 305) It is in experiencing this emotion that Hudson feels real and animate. The elements of unknown and uncertainty fused with the potential for danger make Patagonia a place that is implacably terrifying. Such awareness and comprehension on Hudson's part serve to make Patagonia even more appealing to him. This "sublime" experience the Patagonian traveler feels makes Patagonia compelling for Hudson and lays the groundwork for what will later on lure Paul Theroux and Bruce Chatwin to Patagonia.

For Hudson, it is this desolation and sublimity in Patagonia that is so inspiring. His deep personal introspection and reflection are born out of the Patagonian solitude. But despite his efforts to contemplate what he experiences in the Patagonian solitude, Hudson, like Darwin, cannot sufficiently pin down or identify what it is that stirred such an intense and profound reaction in him:

Judging from my own case, I believe that we have here the secret of the persistence of Patagonian images, and their frequent recurrence in the minds of many who have visited that gray, monotonous, and, in one sense, eminently uninteresting region. It is not the effect of the unknown, it is not imagination; it is that nature in these desolate scenes, for a reason to be guessed at by-and-by, moves us more deeply than in others. (203)

Hudson also acknowledges that such a reaction is the result of an entirely subjective process that requires a certain type of individual who is likewise stirred by the overwhelming desolation and monotony of the Patagonian solitude. He understands that

it requires a beholder who is willing to engage such a response, someone who would allow himself to be moved in such a way by these sort of experiences: “Doubtless we are not all affected in solitude by wild nature in the same degree; even in the Patagonian wastes many would probably experience no such mental change as I have described.” (221-222)

Ultimately, for Hudson, Patagonia transcends place. Patagonia is more about the individual and the quality of solitude than the “universal unrelieved grayness of everything” in Patagonia. (220) In other words, many people would only see Patagonia for its wastedness. In order to experience Patagonia in such a way as Hudson has requires a conscious effort on the part of the individual. Towards the end of the novel, Hudson describes smelling a flower in an English garden and returning to Patagonia:

For a space of time so short that if it could be measured it would probably be found to occupy no more than a fraction of a second, I am no longer in an English garden recalling and consciously thinking about that vanished past, but during that brief moment time and space seem annihilated and the past is now. I am again on the grassy pampas, where I have been sleeping very soundly under the stars,— would that I could now sleep as soundly under a roof! (222)

While Hudson treats Patagonia in some ways similarly to how the previous writers have treated it, he also reconfigures how Patagonia is conceptualized and what it signifies. By beginning with Darwin’s description of Patagonia engaging an aspect of his imagination too profound to articulate, Hudson furthers the process and transforms Patagonia into an arbitrary location. The desolation and solitude he celebrates exemplifies how it is the remoteness of Patagonia that is really of importance for Hudson. The place at the end of the world that Darwin becomes intrigued with becomes an obsession for Hudson as he conflates the literal and figurative senses of Patagonia into a location defined by its solitude.

III. Solipsistic Explorers to “Nowhere”

Hudson’s influence in making Patagonia a metaphoric as well as a physical destination is clearly evident in its effect on the modern perception and treatment of Patagonia. More than a century after Hudson’s trip to Patagonia, Bruce Chatwin and Paul Theroux each traveled to Patagonia and each produced narratives that continue the “genre” of Patagonian adventure narratives. Chatwin’s *In Patagonia* is a montage of legends, myths, and personal histories he collects as he travels south through Patagonia. Theroux’s *The Old Patagonian Express* is the personal narrative of the author as he attempts to ride a train all the way from Boston to Patagonia, where he considers to be “nowhere.” Chatwin and Theroux, in different ways, use Patagonia as a medium for intensely personal, solipsistic journeys. Whereas Magellan, Darwin, and even to an extent Hudson went to Patagonia for other reasons, namely exploration and science, Chatwin and Theroux travel to Patagonia to solidify a sense of self. As Hudson demonstrates in *Idle Days*, Patagonia has become abstracted so that it is less about the place and more about the self. Indeed, Chatwin and Theroux travel to Patagonia because effectively it is the place that best accommodates their need for solipsism. Patagonia, by the twentieth century, has become increasingly self-reflexive and self-conscious. As the differences between Magellan’s and Miller’s uses of Patagonia indicate, the self has increasingly become what Patagonia is about.

Chatwin begins *Nowhere is a Place*⁸ by stating: “Since its discovery by Magellan in 1520, Patagonia was known as a country of black fogs and whirlwinds at the end of the habited world. The word ‘Patagonia’, like Mandalay or Timbuctoo, lodged itself in the Western imagination as a metaphor for The Ultimate, the point beyond which one could not go.” (21) For Chatwin, Patagonia represents the extreme destination for wanderers, a place that attracts compulsive roamers, perhaps for the precise reason that they cannot settle in Patagonia and are forced to roam. This is undoubtedly one of the elements that attracted Chatwin to Patagonia, since restlessness and nomadism are two dominant features of his writing. His editor, Susannah Clapp, says that Chatwin was obsessed with the idea of human restlessness and preoccupied with the question of “Why do men wander rather than sit still?” (WC 26) One Chatwin critic describes Chatwin’s “theory about the Edenic condition of nomadic wanderers” in which “settlement invariably leads to a fatal cleavage between the human and the natural” and that “the real nature of the Fall” occurred when man ceased his nomadism and settled. (Meanor 30-31) Patagonia was a place for Chatwin that not only encouraged human restlessness but even required it. As he once told an Argentinean journalist, “There is some way in which Patagonia is the ultimate symbol of restlessness for the human condition.” (N. Shakespeare 306)

Chatwin’s journey in his *In Patagonia* is a type of quest, a “ridiculous journey” through Patagonia in which he spends as little time as possible in one place. (194) He is constantly moving, working his way south towards Tierra del Fuego and the Mylodon’s cave. Chatwin’s journey takes the shape of a mythic quest, a parodic reenactment of the

⁸ The text to *Nowhere is a Place* was first given as a speech by Bruce Chatwin and Paul Theroux to the Royal Geographical Society Hall in London. It was first published as a book under the name *Patagonia Revisited* in Britain in 1985 and in the United States in 1986. In 1992, after Chatwin’s death, it was

myth of the Golden Fleece. The Golden Fleece for Chatwin is the “brontosaurus” skin in his grandmother’s cabinet he admired as a child that a distant relative had sent her as a marriage present from Patagonia, “a country in South America, at the far end of the world.” (*IP* 1) The skin is actually that of a Mylodon, an extinct giant sloth, and was found in a cave outside the town of Punta Arenas. But the mythic allusions for Chatwin’s quest are not limited to the object of his quest. In discussing the origins for the name “Patagon” and where Magellan may have first heard such a word, Chatwin introduces the medieval romance *Primaleon of Greece*, a story whose hero must overcome the “Patagon,” whom Chatwin describes as “a latter-day equivalent of Grendal.” (*NP* 65) But the conventions of the quest romance really only serve to form a kind of framework for the story. Even though the narrator is distant and at times obscure, we as readers know the narrative is ultimately about Chatwin himself. Like Hudson, Chatwin’s reasons for going to Patagonia are deeper and more personal than those he explicitly offers.

Similarly, Paul Theroux’s journey to Patagonia in *The Old Patagonian Express* is a quest in that he wants to find somewhere to escape his busy life in suburban Boston. The object of Theroux’s quest is “nothing.” But for Theroux, “nothing” is something in that it is a condition one may find. As the second title of his collaboration with Chatwin indicates, “nowhere” can be a place, and, in the same sense, “nothing” can be a state of being or a condition. Once he reaches “nowhere,” Theroux hopes to find “nothing.” The place Theroux has selected to be the destination of his journey, Esquel, a tiny town in Patagonia, is admittedly an “arbitrary destination.” (*OPE* 337) Theroux’s journey is not structured or supported by any mythic accounts, as Chatwin’s is. And unlike Chatwin,

published again under the title *Nowhere is a Place* and included an introduction by Theroux entitled “Chatwin Revisited.”

Theroux openly discusses his motivations for traveling to Patagonia. In 1997, twenty years after his trip to Patagonia, Theroux wrote:

I was seeking an adventure when I took up the trip that became *The Old Patagonian Express*. I wanted to leave my front door in Medford, Massachusetts, and head for Patagonia, and to do so without leaving the ground. I wished to get, by degrees, from the cozy, homely place where I was born to the distant and outlandish—so I thought—area in the southern part of South America. I wanted to make a connection between the known and the unknown: to go as far as I could from home and yet still remain in the Western Hemisphere. (*OPE* xii)

In fact, for Theroux, it was not Patagonia as a place that necessarily attracted him. It was its quality of being the opposite, physically and metaphorically, to his life in suburban Boston. Whereas Chatwin had always kept an image of Patagonia in his mind and felt a personal connection with it, Theroux was ambivalent. In *Nowhere is a Place*, Theroux states:

Patagonia has not been widely photographed. I had no mental image of it, only the fanciful blur of legend, the giants on the shore, the ostrich on the plain, and a sense of displaced people, like my own ancestors who had fled from Europe. When I tried to call up an image of Patagonia, nothing came and I was as helpless as if I had tried to describe the landscape of a distant planet or paint the smell of an onion. The unknown landscape is justification enough for going to it. (26)

For Theroux, Patagonia's attraction rests in the idea of its role as the unknown place at the end of the world. The word Patagonia, for Theroux, signifies the great unknown, the great other that opposes the condition of his familiar life in suburban Boston.

Theroux sums up the differences between *In Patagonia* and *The Old Patagonian Express* rather accurately when he writes:

I had told him (Chatwin) that I had always wondered how he had traveled to Patagonia—he had left that out. He had written about being there, but I wanted to write about getting there. This thought was always in my mind, and it made me meticulous about my own trip. I knew that as soon as I got to Patagonia I would simply look around and then go home. Mine was to be the ultimate book about getting there. (*OPE* xiii)

While the focus of Theroux's narrative is on the journey there (only the action of the final chapter actually takes place in Patagonia), Chatwin's narrative offers no explanation for either when or how he got to Patagonia; like the title suggests, his book is set 'in Patagonia.' Another remarkable difference between the two narratives is the visibility of the narrator. Theroux's narrator is highly visible and ever present; the spotlight of his narrative is always focused on himself. On the other hand, Chatwin's narrator is vague, for the most part invisible, operating in a "distantly interrogative somewhere." (Cowley 311) Even though the narrators are ultimately the main subjects of each novel, they are invoked and present in strikingly distinct ways.

Theroux is looking for the condition of "nothing" to be found in "nowhere," while, as I have said, Chatwin does have a specific physical location in mind even though this destination is not the most significant purpose of the narrative. Theroux's depiction of Patagonia is virtually unchanged from his expectations of it, a place of extreme desolation and emptiness, not unlike the Patagonian landscape Hudson describes. In Buenos Aires, Jorge Luis Borges tells Theroux that Patagonia is a "very dreary place." (*OPE* 374) They continue their conversation about Patagonia and Borges continues to insist that going there is a waste of Theroux's time:

"But one of these days I have to go to Patagonia."

"We don't say Patagonia," said Borges. "We say Chubut or Santa Cruz. We never say Patagonia."

"W.H. Hudson said Patagonia."

"What did he know? *Idle Days in Patagonia* is not a bad book, but you notice there are no people in it—only birds and flowers. That's the way it is in Patagonia. There are no people there. The trouble with Hudson was that he lied all the time. That book is full of lies. But he believed his lies and soon he couldn't tell the difference between what was true and what was false." Borges thought for a moment, then said, "There is nothing in Patagonia. It's not the Sahara, but it's as close as you can get to it in Argentina. No, there is nothing in Patagonia."

If so, I thought—if there really is nothing there—then it is the perfect place to end this book. (OPE 377)

Patagonia appeals to Theroux for the same reason Borges thinks his going to Patagonia is futile. Theroux is captivated by the Hudsonian images of Patagonia as an empty space, a place where he can escape from it all, from his busy, suburban existence in Massachusetts: “Nothingness, I had been told, was the prevailing feature of Patagonia.” (OPE 381) Theroux wants to find a sense of liberation in this vacuity. His accounts of the peoples and cultures of the places he passes through, in addition to what he leaves in the first place, evoke an overwhelming desire to escape. Over the course of his journey, the layers of his existence in suburban Boston are peeled away. The trains become smaller, the towns and countryside more remote, and fewer people are on board for him to talk to. The journey itself becomes a way to exorcise the elements of his suburban existence in order to prepare him for the “nothingness” of “nowhere.” As one critic notes, Theroux is interested in “setting the traveler free from cultural determinants.” (Youngs 85)

By the time he reaches the deserts of Patagonia, Theroux feels the effects of the landscape. Whereas earlier in the novel, the cities and people he encountered had infused him with some sort of reaction, Patagonia drains it from him: “It was not dreary. It was hardly anything. There was not enough substance in it for it to have a mood. A desert is an empty canvas; it is you who give it features and a mood, who work at creating the mirage and making it live. But I was incurious, the desert was deserted, as empty as I felt.” (OPE 384) As with Hudson, the landscape itself does not engage Theroux’s mind, it does not have any busy qualities to distract him. But unlike Hudson, Theroux is not invigorated by the landscape, his enthusiasm depleted by the four-month train ride.

Theroux's narrative is more about the experience of *going to* Patagonia whereas Hudson and Chatwin deal with their experiences *in* Patagonia. Theroux's book is a social one, offering detailed accounts of the people he meets, the conversations that pass between them, and what he thinks about them. He offers commentaries on the towns and cultures he encounters on his journey. But when he is finally confronted with a place that is devoid of people, a place that is not filled with but even evacuated of cultural meaning, he can offer no response.

Theroux does, however, change his tune somewhat by the end of the narrative to offer some thoughts on the emptiness of the Patagonian landscape. He becomes interested in the nothingness of the landscape itself that he had sought: "But this landscape taught patience, caution, tenacity. It needed to be studied to be seen. A glimpse of it told nothing." (*OPE* 401) When placing his present location in the context of his journey, Theroux offers these thoughts: "I knew I was nowhere, but the most surprising thing of all was that I was still in the world after all this time, on a dot at the lower part of the map. The landscape had a gaunt expression, but I could not deny that it had readable features and that I existed in it. This was a discovery—the look of it. I thought: *Nowhere is a place.*" (*OPE* 403) He ultimately finds what he was looking for: nothingness. If the nothingness that Theroux claims to have found is a condition that is empty of cultural meaning, then he has found it. As he writes in his introduction, quoted above, "I wanted to make a connection between the known and the unknown." (*OPE* xii) In the end, Theroux tries to insist that he has made this connection, suggesting that he rode here on one long continuous train ride: "I had arrived in Patagonia, and I laughed when I remembered I had come here from Boston, on the subway train that people took

to work.” (*OPE* 404) Actually, his journey by train had several interruptions because such a trip cannot be taken altogether by rail. But Theroux insists that his journey has been a consistent link between known and unknown, somewhere and nowhere. Theroux persists unsuccessfully in his attempt to show that Patagonia, his ‘nowhere,’ is actually something concrete, something that one can simply travel to physically.

As he concludes his thoughts on his experience in Patagonia, Theroux writes about “the Patagonian paradox,” an idea he more articulately revisits in *Nowhere is a Place*: “tiny blossoms in a vast space; to be here, it helped to be a miniaturist, or else interested in enormous empty spaces. There was no intermediate zone of study. Either the enormity of the desert or the sight of a tiny flower. In Patagonia you had to choose between the tiny or the vast.” (31) This concept of being a miniaturist is another of the fundamental differences between Theroux and Chatwin. Theroux’s narrator is entirely self-consumed, in effect, bringing with him to Patagonia the idea of a search for ‘nothingness’ and finding ‘nowhere.’ He is not a miniaturist who, as he says, is interested in “tiny blossoms in a vast space.” Chatwin, on the other hand, plays the part of the miniaturist, noting minor details and retelling the modest stories of others.

Unlike Theroux, Patagonia for Chatwin is not a place to be described in terms of its physical features but, rather, in its rich and plentiful composition of stories and legends, and people who each have something to tell. The minutiae of the individual tales and accounts come together to form a composite of Patagonia for Chatwin. This attention to minute descriptions is another example of the narrative’s solipsism in how it reveals the interests and perceptions of the narrator. One critic calls Chatwin’s Patagonia a “cabinet of curiosities” that is told through a “highly intertextual” text composed of

smaller “pretexts” that “do not just enrich Chatwin’s perceptions of Patagonia with further information, they are themselves part of the object perceived. *In Patagonia* is at least as much about the fantasies about Patagonia as it is about Patagonia itself. Or, to go one step further, it claims and demonstrates that Patagonia as a *Ding an sich* does not exist.” (Pfister 262, 258-59) Indeed, Clapp states that Chatwin intended to give a “cubist picture” of Patagonia. (WC 31) He accomplishes this through a collage of legends and stories and people, all composing a portrait of Patagonia. As Chatwin’s official biographer, Nicholas Shakespeare, writes, “His achievement (with *In Patagonia*) is not to depict Patagonia as it is, but to create a landscape called Patagonia—a new way of looking, a new aspect of the world.” (336) Whereas Theroux attempts to bring a concept of what Patagonia should be with him on his journey and to show how that is connected to his own culture, Chatwin treats Patagonia as its own object. Chatwin is not interested in specifically showing how Patagonia relates to the rest of the world, even though he does often point out such connections when available. Chatwin’s purpose on his journey is to discover and portray Patagonia as it appears to him.

Another way in which Chatwin distinguishes himself from Darwin, Hudson, and even Theroux, in how he represents Patagonia is that he offers a notable lack of descriptions of the physical landscape. Towards the beginning of the narrative, Chatwin offers a short description of the land: “The Patagonian desert is not a desert of sand or gravel, but a low thicket of grey-leaved thorns which give off a bitter smell when crushed. Unlike the deserts of Arabia it has not produced any dramatic excess of the spirit, but it does have a place in the record of human experience.” (IP 15) The description of the land itself falls in line with the general description of Patagonia’s

grayness and its barrenness. But even in this description, Chatwin turns the emphasis of the landscape away from the physical and towards “the record of human experience.” With *In Patagonia*, Chatwin offers an account of that record as it relates to Patagonia. Chatwin is enticed by and focuses on this landscape of stories, legends and people, a different version of the absorptive solipsism of Darwin, Hudson and Theroux. Whereas the narrative discourse Darwin, Hudson and Theroux work within places the narrator in the desolation and barrenness of the Patagonian desert, Chatwin’s narrator finds himself in a landscape of legends and stories that is distinctly alive and fertile. The solipsism Chatwin demonstrates is one that situates the narrator amid these fascinating tales and accounts that excite his curiosity and imagination. Chatwin is carried away with the story of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid retiring to Patagonia and creating more legends for themselves there. He is particularly interested in the large numbers of Welsh who migrated to Patagonia in the nineteenth century because it was one of the few places in the world outside of British influence and because of “its absolute remoteness and foul climate; they did not want to get rich.” (*IP* 21) And of course, there is the story of Charley Milward, Chatwin’s distant relative who sent his grandmother the piece of “brontosaurus” skin, the figure from his childhood imagination who looms over the entire book and whom most of the latter quarter of the narrative is devoted to.

Chatwin’s interest in Patagonia has less to do with it being a place and he demonstrates that “Patagonia” is increasingly becoming extinct in its relation to the physical region. It is not the end of the world anymore, the place beyond the last frontier, like was once thought. Chatwin eloquently and poetically sums up this process as he compares his vision of Tierra del Fuego with Magellan’s first observation of the land:

“The Fuegians are all dead and all the fires snuffed out. Only the flares of oil rigs cast a pall over the night sky.” (*IP* 111) For Chatwin, Patagonia as a thing in itself does not exist. Patagonia is a place to be experienced by the self in its myths and legends.

IV. Why We Still Need Patagonia

In *Nowhere is a Place*, Chatwin writes that: “it’s hardly surprising that, when law and order settled in, like a blight, over the American West, some of the more enterprising spirits came down to start a New West in the Absolute South.” (46) Indeed, much of what was attractive about the Old West applies to Patagonia. The sense of endless expanse that once was the lure to the Old West also applies to Patagonia. The Old West was a place to escape civilization, where one could outrun the advancements of civilization and not have to worry about running out of space; it was a new setting for the “myth of the garden” and was viewed with “an optimism that was all but blinding.” (Worster 8) The Edenic myth certainly applies to Patagonia as well. Theroux writes, for example, that Hudson “had found in Patagonia an American Eden.” (*NP* 42) The contrasting qualities of Patagonia I have emphasized in this essay of it being both Edenic and hellish could be also said, in a way, of the Old West. But the Old West ended in the 1890s, as the historian Patricia Nelson Limerick has shown, and a “New Western History” has emerged to supplant the old image and offered an unromanticized and multi-dimensional view of the West. (Limerick 83 and Worster 6-7)

In one sense, with Chatwin and Theroux, Patagonia becomes the New Old West. Theroux’s train ride from Boston begins westerly across the United States, suggesting the pattern of the familiar transcontinental expedition, before he boards a train in Chicago

that heads due south towards Patagonia, plunging evermore south until he can go no further by rail. Chatwin follows the legends of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid who re-create their lives from the American West in Patagonia. Chatwin also tells the story of a turn of the century American adventurer “who styled himself sheriff and wore a star and a sheriff’s hat to prove it” and “persisted in the illusion that Patagonia was an extension of the Old West.” (*IP* 39)

But it is just that, an “illusion.” New Western History now demonstrates how the Old West was predicated on illusions and myths. The idea of the “frontier” can no longer be said to exist since it is “in essence, the area where white people get scarce” and “when cleared of its ethnocentrism, the term loses an exact definition.” (Limerick 85) Chatwin accomplishes this same technique in his depiction of Patagonia as he offers a portrait that disregards “frontiers.” While Theroux seeks to go beyond a “frontier,” insisting that “nowhere” can be reached by rail, Chatwin rejects such an idea of a border one must pass through. The historian Gerald Thompson offers an alternative way to look at frontiers and border and suggests that regions are separated by psychological rather than physiographical borders. (91) Ultimately, this is also the stage where Patagonia has evolved to in literature in English: a psychological condition, a trope, and not a thing in itself.

Magellan initiated this discourse of narratives when he discovered Patagonia and what he effectively accomplished was to erect psychological borders around Patagonia. In his accounts and treatments of the people and the land, Pigafetta established a concept of Patagonia that identified it as a place that demanded to be treated differently. The Northern collective consciousness acknowledged these conditions about Patagonia and it

was in turn regarded uniquely. In effect, Patagonia was regarded so uniquely that it was deliberately left vacated and, as a result, mysterious. Darwin reinforced these psychological borders when he wrote about his visit to Patagonia and added the element of self into the discourse. Hudson, in turn, broadened the scope of the psychological borders by filtering them through the self and suggesting that these borders are arbitrary in the sense that they can be penetrated from any physical location. These borders that isolate Patagonia are actually psychological distinctions one can visit in one's mind. By suggesting that he could return to Patagonia from his English garden through his imagination, Hudson implies that rather than being the region at the far end of the world Patagonia is more of a state of mind. Patagonia becomes, then, a subjective experience that one discovers internally; the journey and the land are symbolic. This is the condition that Patagonia has evolved into by the Twentieth century when Chatwin and Theroux write about their journeys to Patagonia. Patagonia is the place for the ultimate solipsistic journey. It is the place where traveling into the land and into the self are one and the same. Patagonia has become the "nowhere" the restless and solipsistic traveler is compulsively attracted to.

Such a transformation in the treatment of Patagonia in literature from the physical to the psychological sheds more light on the conflict I began this paper with. Over the course of the last five hundred years since its discovery, Patagonia has nestled itself into the Northern consciousness as an indefinite and ultimately mysterious place. The paradoxical characterizations of Patagonia have allowed it to escape encapsulation, yielding it contingent on its beholder. It has also allowed Patagonia to become somewhere one need not travel to nor, as Miller demonstrates, know much about to use

its name. Thus, Patagonia has been simultaneously filled and evacuated by the Northern collective consciousness. As Patagonia nestled itself into the Northern consciousness, the Northern consciousness in turn became increasingly reliant on Patagonia as a place where a new self emerges. In an age after exploration, Northern narrative seems to depend on keeping some places undiscovered. Places like Patagonia, such “nowheres,” become necessary in that they offer somewhere and something that is undiscovered and is out of the modern—the familiarized world of the North. In doing so, they provide somewhere and a condition that is primarily self-reflexive and self-conscious, inventing a new sense of self.

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M.W. Bell was born in Durham, North Carolina and grew up in Pensacola, Florida. He earned the International Baccalaureate diploma in 1995 while attending Sevenoaks School in Kent, England. In 1999, Mr. Bell graduated from the University of Virginia with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. In 2001, he received Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Richmond. Mr. Bell travels frequently and has spent extended periods of time in Patagonia and Guatemala. He teaches high school English and shares time living in Richmond, Virginia and Pensacola, Florida.