To Patagonia in Leak-Proof Shoes:
A Critical Interpretation of *The Old Patagonian Express*

by

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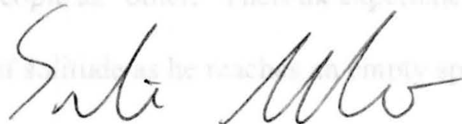

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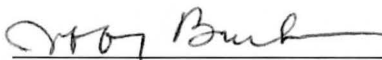

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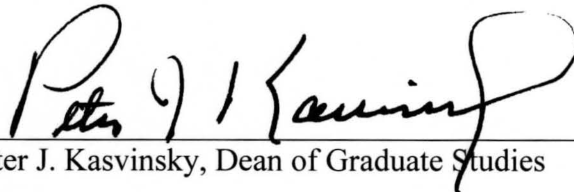

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# ABSTRACT

*The Old Patagonian Express* is author Paul Theroux's most important work, for the self-revelation it contains, and it is an important American text, because it contains the story of an American who resists his country's colonialist past. *Patagonian* is different from other travel narratives because it is a realistic account of a traveler's experience. Travel is defined as the journey between places, including each day's details, rather than only the occurrence of traversing space. A travel narrative functions like a work of fiction, following the conventions of narrative. Travelers' goals are defined as escape, adventure, and contemplation. The author of a travel narrative functions as authority over the text and over his or her experience of travel. In *Patagonian,* Theroux defines people of other countries in terms of national identity, but he often ignores his own American identity. He colors his experience of travel with interpersonal encounters, and he constructs foreign places and people as "other." Theroux experiences poverty on a large scale, and deals with feelings of solitude as he reaches an empty space at his journey's end.

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# Introduction

In a formal literature analysis, we study texts for their degree of conformity to certain guidelines about character, plot, and setting. We question characters' motives, identifying what they stand for and with whom they are in conflict. We follow the plot of a text, determining whether to label it Aristotelian, searching for predictable or undeterminable outcomes. We analyze the setting, making it almost a character itself, calling into consideration historical and cultural contexts from which to view the text. We even spend time deciding whether to consider the author and his or her biography in our analysis.

But what if the author actually were a character in the text? And what if the plot were not so much contrived, but taken from experience? What if many of the characters were introduced on one page, only to be left behind in the next, and what if the setting changed with each chapter? In this case, we would have a travel narrative: a text that in many ways functions like a work of fiction, following the conventions of narrative, but which in others is a text that at times analyzes itself, for its author is ever-present, and we have no choice but to consider him.

In the case of Paul Theroux's *The Old Patagonian Express,* a travel narrative has been constructed that is at once traditional and contemporary, formulaic at times and revolutionary at others. *Patagonian* is one of many travel narratives Theroux has written, yet it is perhaps the most important of his, and one of the most important texts in American travel writing in the last half of the last century for its ability to tell the tale of an American traveler who subverts America, resisting the colonialism that is a part of our country's past.

The journey and accompanying self-reflection in *Patagonian* are central to Theroux's experience of being a travel writer. It is in this particular narrative that the author learns the most about himself and in this text that he most effectively portrays the correlation between finding himself and finding new places to explore. In *Patagonian,* Theroux is reclaiming the experience of going into a blank space that is no longer available in America, much like the explorative journeys into the Wild West. In *Patagonian,* we witness a traveler moving in on the blank space of Central and South America. This is especially important because Theroux is American, and his explorative journey south can be said to represent the colonialist movements of his Western forefathers. Theroux, however, does not act as a neo-colonialist. Instead, he works to separate himself from other Americans in order to resist his country's colonial history.

Theroux is, in most regards, a typical American. Aside from the fact that his books have made him wealthy, he displays in *Patagonian* ideals similar to most middle-class citizens of North America. Theroux is a middle-aged, white American man who possesses all the facets of an imperialist traveler yet few of the presuppositions. He does not set out south with intentions to conquer; he only wishes to travel and write what he sees.

For readers, Theroux's journey is particularly significant in travel writing. He chooses to go all the way to the tip of South America because it is as close as one can possibly get to an antipodean experience in the Americas. Patagonia is as far as Theroux can get from what is normal; by traveling to the bottom of South America, every thing he encounters is out of the ordinary—even the seasons are reversed. Theroux has found a place still within the Americas that differs completely from his own version of them.

But it is not just Theroux's choice of path that makes *Patagonian* worth studying. Instead, it is the way in which Theroux has written about this journey—coloring each day's worth of travel with detailed, realistic accounts of a traveler's experience—that sets his narrative apart from most others in the field.

*Patagonian* contains all the information we would expect in a travel narrative—description of the landscape, snatches of brief conversation with locals—coupled with so much more that most travel narratives do not contain—tales of altitude sickness and leaking shoes, and entire conversations with people of numerous nationalities, from the Americas, and from abroad. Theroux's writing has a personal tone, one of an author sharing an experience with friends, rather than that of a study conducted for the purpose of garnering data minus its accompanying experience. Theroux does not carry a camera or voice recorder, and yet he claims to have taken notes frequently while on his journey and that doing so has resulted in his remembering much to include in his narrative.

On the following pages, I have examined *Patagonian* as a travel narrative, a story of new places and a story of one man's journey of experience. The analysis here examines travel writing in light of what Theroux has accomplished in *Patagonian* while also regarding critical opinion of the genre and the works it has produced. Theroux offers a fresh and often sardonic take on what it means to be a traveler to a genre heavily wrought with pedantic narratives of the world's pathways. Though his narrative is by no means impartial, it certainly invites critical dissection, for it contains not just an outsider's view of a third-world passage, but that of a writer, a reader, a thinker, and an American.

This multifaceted perspective from which *The Old Patagonian Express* is written exposes multiple angles of travel. I argue that travel is not merely the occurrence of going from one place to another or the event of traversing some area of land but an actual real-time journey, where each minute of each day factors into the realization of new places, new customs, and new encounters. The writing of travel, then, is in many ways like a Virginia Woolf novel: the writer wants to tell a story but simply cannot help but share every last detail of each hour involved in the experience.

Theroux has held back some details, of course. His trip from Boston to the southernmost region of South America spans months and thousands of miles, yet his narrative of this voyage hovers at the four-hundred-page mark. Reading it, though, we get the sense the author could have easily written for another four hundred pages. Theroux shows us that travel is more than the missing train tickets, unruly weather, and sore feet that accost us along the way. Likewise, travel cannot be accounted for in only a few postcard snapshots or mere tidbits of description. For Theroux, travel is everything—every tidbit of every sensation accosting him physically and mentally.

In this thesis, Chapter 1 explores our reasons for travel and Theroux's goals in *Patagonian* along with the existing friction in the genre between monikers of traveler and tourist. Chapter 2 examines travel writing's tendency toward the visual and the author's inherent authority, a power reminiscent of colonialism. Here, also, is a discussion of the travel writing genre's tendency to blur fact and fiction and the connection between gender and travel writing. In Chapter 3, ideas of national character are explained in conjunction with Theroux's tendency to summarize the countries in which he travels, and interactions with other people are analyzed here along with notions of representation and

the construction of an "other." Finally, Chapter 4 visits the boundaries in *Patagonian* and the experience of crossing borders between places, classes, and times; Theroux's use of magical realism and his realization of travel as a lonely experience; and *Patagonian* as a postmodern text.

Trinh T. Minh-ha calls travel "the unfolding of a poetic" (21). This is true, for Theroux's journey itself is like writing: just by traveling, he creates a space characterized by new experiences in his mind. And, by writing and aestheticizing this experience, he has allowed us to share in this created space. Theroux's journey south is beautiful for the newness and raw reality it brings us, and his detailed approach to writing this journey is worthy of our consideration. In the following pages, I have analyzed *Patagonian* and the travel writing genre through a variety of topics, revealing how travel, specifically as portrayed through travel writing, is a journey where each minute on the road, each page turned in boredom, and each passing conversation on board a train is as important as the realization that other parts of the world are so different from ours and the revelation in these parts' beauty.

Chapter 1: Defining Travel and Traveler through Theroux

*Patagonian* is a travel narrative in which Theroux shares the story of his journey from his home in Boston to the southernmost region of South America, Patagonia. He travels by train whenever possible, which amounts to roughly seventy-five percent of the time. From Massachusetts, he travels southwest through Texas, then south through Mexico and Middle America before snaking his way through South America. He stops in over eighty cities along the way and takes in various forms of culture and multiple degrees of poverty during his journey.

The premise of *Patagonian,* like others in the travel writing genre, is travel itself. That an entire literary genre would be created from travel, though, raises a few questions. To understand travel writing, we must first understand travel by defining why people travel and who these people are who call themselves travelers. When Paul Theroux sets out to go south through the Americas by train and to record his journey in a narrative, he does so under the assumption that his readers are united in their conception of what travel is, but this is far from the case. Instead, readers and scholars alike have amassed numerous notions of how travel is defined and why people leave home to travel. Though Theroux is explicit about *how* he travels, he only occasionally alludes to *why* he travels. Hence, his journey requires analysis to discover how it represents travel by Americans as a whole.

As a prominent travel writer, Theroux leaves home in the late 1970s with the intention of traveling to compose another travel narrative to add to his repertoire; before writing *Patagonian,* he received immense acclaim for *The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia,* in addition to nearly a dozen books of fiction. At this point in his

career, Theroux can be sure of his narrative being successful, and thus, he is paid to travel and to report back what other countries and their people are like. This makes his journey quite different from that of most Americans, few of whom travel with this goal in mind. Theroux has other goals, however, that correlate with why people in general chose to make a journey away from home.

Much travel is done with a specific goal in mind: a business meeting, or a visit with relatives. It would be unrealistic, however, to think one clear-cut motive propels an individual to pack up a few weeks' worth of clothing and hit the road. Even when a person leaves for a business meeting, he or she often has additional motives in mind, such as sightseeing, or catching up on recreational reading on the plane. Likewise, Theroux leaves home at the start of *Patagonian* with a goal in mind—to reach Patagonia—that is hardly characteristic of his motives for the journey. As Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan explain in *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*, Theroux is similar to many other contemporary travel writers in that he travels for "both adventure and contemplation" (121). This complex motive allows room for change—were Theroux to find his journey boring and, therefore, unadventurous, he might still be able to fulfill his contemplative aims. Theroux's journey does transpire in a quite adventurous manner, though, allowing the author to fulfill a common goal of travel.

A good deal of travel, especially travel that finds its way into print, often begins in a desire for adventure, or for some stirring up of the mundane events of home. Adventure is an integral part of *Patagonian*; the out-of-the-ordinary events Theroux experiences on his journey and then includes in his text characterize his traveling experience as adventurous while simultaneously holding our attention. *Patagonian* is the

tale of an adventurous quest, with Patagonia its destination and Theroux its valiant knight. This correlates with what Janis P. Stout explains in *The Journey Narrative in American Literature: Patterns and Departures* when she writes, "The quest is, first, a journey of search, a pursuit of the unknown. Its goal is both radically uncertain and radically significant, beyond definition or rational assessment" (88). The significance of the goal in Theroux's quest is simple; when he reaches Patagonia, he will have obtained his goal and, subsequently, have obtained fodder for a new travel narrative. Though his goal is obtainable, it is not guaranteed because uncertainty, too, plays a part in his quest.

Theroux is journeying to a land where he has never before been, along a self-plotted route he has never before taken. Though his ultimate goal is to reach Patagonia, his entire journey is broken down into lesser goals—simply reaching a train station on time, for example, is an achievement. Thus, the journey becomes a quest, where the destination is at times overshadowed by perils along the way.

On one train ride, en route to Zacapa in Guatemala, Theroux becomes increasingly frightened the train will break down miles from civilization and he will be left to fend for himself in the wilderness. He sits at the window, watching a desolate landscape go by, and silently hoping to reach the destination safely. Theroux's fears escalate when he sees a man from the train window. He writes, "I saw a skinny man, like the Angel of Death, watching us from the rag of a cactus's shade" (*Patagonian* 123). He does reach his destination without enduring any treacherous experiences, but his uncertainty in transit brings a new level of trepidation to the journey. This fear bred of uncertainty allows Theroux's quest to take on a real-life adventurous quality. The larger uncertainties of travel, such as fear of not reaching the destination safely, mingle with

Theroux's lesser difficulties; his smaller achievements along the way waver between putting up with leaking shoes and coming to terms with staggering poverty rates.

While Theroux's small goals waver from trivial inconveniences to more fundamental conceptions of human existence, his ultimate goal begins to waver as well. As he forges his way south, Theroux's goal becomes less a physical destination and more the strengthening of character that comes with the ability to reach this destination, rendering the destination less important than the journey there. This transformation leaves the ultimate goal somewhat vague, a quality common to quests of adventure. Stout explains, "The goal of the quest may be either proximate or ultimate—proximate in the sense of a materially real, obtainable object, however magical or totemic; ultimate in the sense of an abstraction such as Truth. In either case, it is deeply involved with the self-realization of the questing hero, who proves and finds himself in the course of his journey" (88). Reading Theroux's narrative, we find it hard to grasp which is the author's greater priority—simply reaching his destination, or drawing a novel, sweeping conclusion about human life along the way. A quest, as Stout specifies, is both a physical and a mental journey, one that is trying to both the body and the mind (90). Theroux is aptly challenged in both regards and is at intervals annoyed and inspired by the challenges. Engaging in such a journey, one that bridges the goals of physical destination and heightened cognition while taxing both faculties of the traveler, allows Theroux the opportunity to achieve a variety of goals.

In achieving these goals, Theroux does more than participate in an adventure, a goal whose fulfillment depends on the events that transpire along the way. He also achieves goals that go naturally with travel. One goal that travel innately fulfills is

escape. For example, by simply leaving home, an individual has "escaped" his normal routine and fulfilled a motive that is common fuel for much travel done by writers and businessmen alike.

Travel as a means of escape is perhaps the most frequently refrained reason as to why a person chooses to leave home. Rather than leaving to go to a destination, with escape as a motive, the traveler leaves simply to get away from where he or she is. Stout calls travel a form of escape in itself (31-2), and she is joined by other scholars, such as Jenny Mezciems, who, in *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing*, who ups the ante by calling travel "a means of escape or of advantage" (5). This advantage is the sense of freedom inherent to travel; by leaving home, an individual leaves behind numerous responsibilities, such as a job, upkeep of a house, or care for a family. By escaping through travel, an individual grants himself permission to be free from normal responsibility and, in turn, often awards himself extra luxuries not normally available at home, such as eating out or sleeping in.

In *Patagonian*, Theroux's escape is twofold. First, he escapes the ordinary routine of home by traveling, and, second, he chooses an unpopular route and destination—via train to the southernmost tip of South America—that gives him the advantage of not encountering tourist hordes that would be found at more popular travel destinations, such as Disneyland, or by more popular routes, such as highways or airports. Theroux specifies that he purposely seeks to travel to desolate places rather than cities that resemble those in America. He explains his reasons, writing, "In the wildest place, everyone looked so marginal, so temporary, so uncomfortable, so hungry and tired, it was possible as a traveler to be anonymous or even, paradoxically, to fit it, in the same

temporary way" (*Patagonian* 192). Theroux finds the people he encounter to look "marginal" and "temporary" because he is having liminal experience himself. By traveling, Theroux is attempting to position himself on the outskirts of normal experience; during the few months traversed in *Patagonian,* he sees everything as marginal, because all of it is as such in relation to his regular life at home. The advantage in Theroux's method of travel resides in the choices it presents; if he chooses to, he can blend in with the people around him, or he can keep entirely to himself. Theroux's comment is evidence of the contemplative nature of his travel as well. The fact that he is concerned with opportunities to be alone or to go unnoticed further strengthens Holland and Huggan's argument that Theroux uses travel for the chances it offers at contemplation.

A separate goal of travel acts in accord with Theroux's desire for contemplation. Like escape, which is achieved in travel itself regardless of events, a goal of authority is not dependant on the journey's course. Travel often begets a sense of authority or self-actualization, regardless of what events transpire. As Melanie R. Hunter explains in an article on travel writing, "The enigma of the journey—the underlying, often unacknowledged impulse for travel abroad—is transformed into, or transposed as, the autobiography of the traveler, the search for origins and identity, the revealing of the various attempts to construct and confirm *authority*, in terms of both authorship and ownership" (29). As Hunter shows, travel allows Theroux the opportunity to contemplate his place in the world and, by doing so, to affirm his existence as human and his position as his own life's authority.

Travel allows Theroux these options for two reasons. First, by leaving his home, he gets a new perspective from which to view and analyze his life. Second, by forging his own path along the journey, he develops a sense of accomplishment that translates into authority of his own life; because he can define a route by train and also travel it even in adverse conditions, Theroux has a degree of control over his life and actions, making him their authority.

Additionally, because Theroux travels alone, he is without question the authority of his journey. While an individual at home may share authority with a spouse, a boss, coworkers, or neighbors, an individual traveling alone is privileged to a sense of control he does not normally possess. Such is the case with Theroux, as elucidated in Hunter's continued analysis. She writes, "Theroux deems himself the sovereign of his journey [...] because he presents himself as the prince, [so] it is then *rightfully* his to possess. [...] He travels, and writes about travel, in order to *know himself*, in order to tell his own story." Hunter continues, writing, "Theroux, the sovereign, seeks out authority—authorship, in the guise of autobiography, and ownership—in and through his travels" (34). By seeking this sense of authorship through travel, Theroux aims to fulfill the motive of contemplation in a complex manner. In his contemplation, he achieves a sense of authority and therefore comes to terms with himself and his place in the world.

This discovered sense of authority, along with a coming to terms with the self, complements Theroux's sense of adventure in *Patagonian*. Adventure is not necessarily guaranteed while on a quest, but contemplation is inevitable. In Theroux's case, both goals are fulfilled because much of his journey is spent experiencing new situations and encountering unforeseen twists in his plans that allow for adventure, while quite a good

deal of his time on the train tracks is spent in contemplation. Each motive serves to fuel the other, and Theroux's motives for travel as identified by Holland and Huggan are satisfied.

Yet the reasons why we travel are not the only goals to be satisfied in *Patagonian*. Theroux also has a purpose for going where he goes, and he makes the reason for his destination clear: "Travelers do not belong in the suburbs, and the most civilized places tire the eye quickest; in such places, the traveler is an intruder" (*Patagonian* 200). Because Theroux considers himself unwelcome in suburbian, "civilized" regions, he chooses to travel in regions where poverty is prevalent, and where he will be more welcome, if only for the money he may spend on food and lodging. Theroux's opinion on comfortable locations—Disneyland, for example—propels him to ignore them in favor of riding the train with the poor through Peru and sleeping between the damp walls of La Oroya. Theroux takes the unpopular route to Patagonia on purpose, so he can be alone and unbothered while experiencing a kind of third-world culture most Americans do not encounter. He writes, "I found I was always traveling to a popular place by an unknown route. I seldom had any idea of how much it would cost, or how long it would take, or even whether I would arrive. This made for a certain anxiety, since I was always presuming or drawing my own conclusions from the thin black line that signified a railway on the map" (*Patagonian* 237-8). Because Theroux chooses the unpopular route, he is frequently sick and often uncomfortable. But, because of his choice, he experiences a side of the Americas that is a more realistic experience of life than he would experience in a popular tourist spot or exotic resort location.

Theroux does not need to search for long to find this reality, because he has included it in his itinerary. Traveling by train, finding lodging in small, often poverty-stricken towns, and eating with locals, Theroux has intentionally embedded his quest with real people and experiences intentionally, so as not to miss out on anything the Americas have to offer. This intention functions especially in his chosen method of travel, the train. The train was the only logical choice according to Theroux, given "the hopelessness of air travel." He explains "how futile it would be if every arrival and departure were recorded in the out-of-the-window glimpse" and continues, writing, "If I were to travel, it would be overland, where every sight and every place had its own smell; and I knew that if I wrote about what was minuscule out of the window of a jet, I would sound like a man on the moon" (*Patagonian* 288). Were he to have flown, Theroux would have missed the personal encounters his unpopular route allows. He would not, for example, have had the pleasure of meeting Nicky, a woman who "bore such a close resemblance to the stereotype of the American woman who occurs so frequently in Tennessee Williams's plays and Mexican photo-comics: the vacationer with a tormented libido and a drinking problem and a symbolic name who comes to Mexico in search of a lover" (*Patagonian* 72). Likewise, he would not have met Mario and Alfredo and been whisked off among thieves and raucous fans to a football game in El Salvador (135-41). The people Theroux meets on trains are not the businessmen and vacationers who fill the seats on airplanes. They are people who are struggling to make their ways in life, they are often poor, and they are more than willing to converse with an American. On trains, Theroux discovers people who live as many in the Americas do, in poverty, and he enjoys the experience for the opportunities it affords him to have friendly arguments and learn new customs. Were

he to take a brief flight south, he would be denied the chance to get to know his fellow passengers, a chance readily available on the tedious train rides he experiences.

The experience Theroux has on trains with the people of Central and South America is only one facet of what travel is. Having examined the different reasons that propel an individual to travel, we have yet to define travel itself. Travel, the word, is often understood in two ways: as a means of getting to a destination, or as the experience of the journey along the way. Or, in Theroux's words, travel can often become "a form of idleness," an irony stemming from his comment that "When strangers asked me where I was going, I often replied, "Nowhere"" (*Patagonian* 231). He claims the vague response to warded off further questioning, sparing him the awkwardness of explaining that he was traveling just for traveling's purpose. And, as he explains in the narrative, telling a fellow traveler he was going to Patagonia would only cause confusion, as no one could imagine why he would choose such a destination. But despite his vague answer, the author does have a destination in mind.

The destination Theroux aims for in *Patagonian* is constructed as a space at which he can arrive only after leaving the space of his home and traveling through other vague spaces along the way. Much of travel's definition centers on the notion of space, in that travel from one place to another requires an individual to move between spaces. As Syed Manzoorul Islam explains in *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka,* "The events we call travel can be said to be composed of movement between spatial locations: leaving one spatial marker and arriving at another. The presumed departure and arrival, in the very process of their movement, paradoxically stages the threshold to be crossed, and enacts 'the between' that divides and joins spatial locations" (5). Islam

argues that an individual becomes a traveler only when he or she has crossed a boundary between spaces and traversed the "between" that occurs after leaving one space and before entering another (5). It is in the "between" that Theroux spends most of his journey, experiencing the Americas' realities, but it is the spaces at the beginning and end of his journey and all others that define travel.

The spaces that define travel occur at the beginning and end of a journey and are most simply characterized as home and away. In other words, travel happens when an individual leaves his home for an "away"—any destination that differs in location from his home. As Islam stipulates, "For travel to take place, one has to forget the memories of the *same*, and encounter the other" (37). The dichotomy between the same and the other is parallel to that between home and away in travel. According to this definition, then, travel is not merely when a person moves from one space to another, but when he or she moves from a space regarded as home to another space that differs entirely from home.

This definition of the move from home to away that is so characteristic of travel is further explained by Terry Caesar in *Forgiving the Boundaries: Home as Abroad in American Travel Writing*. Deriving part of his explanation from a fellow scholar, Caesar writes:

> Jonathan Raban has the following salutary words about the experience of travel: "To travel is *not to be at home*. In Freudian translatorese it is deliberately to orient oneself badly in one's environment, and thereby to open oneself to the odd and the uncanny. The famous sharp eye of the traveler—the capacity to notice everything that Henry James named as the first qualification of the novelist—is the result of a fundamental

> maladjustment between traveler and the world he passes through." Without this maladjustment a traveler might as well stay home. Hence, for example, Paul Theroux, just over the Mexican border from Texas, at one point is moved to accuse his train conductor of being a smuggler. The man then "accuses" Theroux of being a tourist. Who is Theroux in fact? Perhaps an impossible combination of smuggler-tourist, except that he is neither, because he is away from the coordinates that normally define him as what he is. (6-7)

Caesar takes the notion of leaving home a step further, explaining that once an individual has left home, he or she is no longer able to fall back on the defining parameters there. When individuals of any variety leave a home space, be they doctors, writers, teachers, or children, they make the choice to leave their definitions behind. These individuals, going in a direction away from home, are no longer defined by their occupations. Instead, they are reduced to the common denominator of "traveler." As Caesar explains, though, this disorientation is a necessary part of effective travel. For a traveler to experience and comprehend a space other than home, he or she must leave home. Likewise, for Theroux to write a narrative of his journey through the Americas, he has no choice but to leave the defining parameters of his home space and take to the road, defined only as a traveler.

When a traveler leaves his home space, he or she leaves behind that space's defining parameters, but not knowledge of that space. Therefore, a traveler, though out of his or her element, will always have the ability to compare what he or she sees and encounters to the way things work at home. As Kristi Siegel writes in the introduction to *Issues in Travel Writing: Empire, Spectacle, and Displacement*:

> Travel writing often implies the view from home. Travel implicitly calls the notion of "home" into question because that is typically the standard from which experiences are measured. By definition, then, exotic would be "other than home." In journeys outward—away from home—other landscapes, countries, and cultures are often viewed in terms of how they compare to one's home. (4)

This "view from home" is a product of the traveler's knowledge of a home space, a knowledge that will go with him or her even outside the home space, where definition by usual parameters is no longer available. By taking this view along, the traveler characterizes what he or she sees in terms of its similarity to or difference from the customs or experiences remembered from home. Having established that travel is the traversed experience from one space to another and specifically that between home and away, we must look at the individual who makes this journey. Because the parameters of home no longer characterize the traveler, other facets must step up to define this individual. Islam argues that "each object of quest defines a traveller" (56). By this definition, Patagonia itself defines Theroux. It would be too thin an association to say that Patagonia, the region, defines Theroux directly; instead, we could make the connection between what Patagonia as a difficult and rather undesirable destination says about Theroux as a traveler. By choosing to travel to this unpopular location, Theroux has characterized himself as determined to prevail against the odds while acting as an individual.

Other scholars disagree with Islam, claiming a traveler's definition is far greater in scope than a simple association with its goal. In "Home and Identity," for instance,

Madan Sarup argues that travelers come in many kinds, each differently defined. She writes:

> There are many sorts of travelers; some live on the borderline, the border between two states. The states could be feeling and thought, private and public, or Polish and English. One often hears the remark, 'They have a foot in each camp'. These may be migrants who don't want to give up their own culture or assimilate with the new group. The borderline is always ambivalent; sometimes it is seen as an inherent part of the inside, at other times it is seen as part of the chaotic wilderness outside. (98-9)

Indeed, as Sarup points out, many travelers oscillate between definitions. Theroux, for example, is at times a traveler simply enjoying the view and at others a traveler making friends and sampling new foods. On top of these definitions, he is at all times a writer, soaking up as much of the Americas as possible so as to put them down in print. Theroux moves between wanting to be alone and wanting to fit in, and through his multiple definitions, he acts as Sarup describes, crossing borders between ideas and feelings.

In defining a traveler, we have brought under examination notions of space and self-definition. One lone word, though, stands as something scholars abhor in the discussion of what a traveler is: tourist. The debate between the definition of a traveler and that of a tourist is endless, and Theroux has not fallen short of making his opinion available. Throughout *Patagonian*, we see that Theroux considers himself a traveler and that he considers this status entirely different from, if not superior to, that of a tourist.

In one instance, on a train, Theroux encounters another foreigner, and the two begin talking. Before long, Theroux and his fellow traveler are involved in a face-off,

debating whose travel plans are more virtuous and less tourist-like. "He was French. He had a sore throat," writes Theroux. "A French traveler with a sore throat is a wonderful thing to behold, but it takes more than tonsilitis to prevent a Frenchman from boasting." In the words that follow, the Frenchman calls Theroux "tourist" and the author soon returns the insult as each takes turns attempting to revoke the moniker, mentioning uncommon routes he has taken and therefore upstaging the other (*Patagonian* 244-5). Though Theroux relays the incident in a humorous light, his and the Frenchman's accusations are quite vitriolic; each is so determined his quest is more dignified than the dime-a-dozen vacationers who leave their homes for two weeks each year, that he will insist at all costs he is a traveler, not a tourist.

This debate surfaces in nearly all discussions of travel and travel writing, as it does in Caesar's insistence that a travel writer usually aims to be anything but a tourist. He argues that in *Patagonian*, Theroux "has designed his entire trip—by train from Boston to Patagonia—precisely not to be a tourist. Yet we may find that his careful, individual effort to avoid tourism only proves its totalizing power" (75). This comment runs parallel to Eric Leed's sentiment in *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism:* "The most characteristic mark of the tourist is the wish to avoid tourists and the places they congregate. But this is merely evidence of the fact that travel is no longer a means of achieving distinction. It is a way of achieving and realizing a norm, the common identity we all share—the identity of a stranger" (287). Both remarks illustrate how Theroux goes to such pains to avoid being labeled a tourist and yet, because he feels he must make the distinction, he is labeled a tourist nonetheless. Caesar and Leed have

acknowledged the fact that any persons traveling away from home, whether calling themselves tourists or travelers, are grouped together nonetheless.

Yet while the traveler and the tourist are united in their status of being away from home, they are divided on other counts. What does distinguish Theroux from the tourists who go to Disneyland is precisely that: he has chosen not to go to Disneyland, but instead to take an unpopular route to an unpopular place. As Harry Liebersohn points out an article on travel writing, "Travelers beckon us to join them in a superior form of contact with foreign lands, in contrast to the tourists who are turning round and round in the safety of the beaten track." Yet, he stipulates, this distinction is not readily clear. Liebersohn writes, "Yesterday's traveler is today's tourist; once mentioned, the little town or the special view gets absorbed into the routine. Western literati search for an experience that will differentiate them from the madding crowd of industrial society, but their wanderings become the paths of standardized culture" (622). By Liebersohn's agenda, then, a region such as Patagonia will become increasingly more popular the more often writers such as Theroux go there for the purpose of its being unpopular.

Theroux resists the moniker "tourist" in part because he wishes to be seen as different and primarily because this label is regarded as inferior to that of "traveler." "By implication the tourist's gaze is that of an amateur," write Siegel and Toni B. Wulff, who cite in "Travel as Spectacle: The Illusion of Knowledge and Sight" an "implicit dichotomy" in which the tourist and the traveler are both contained. They write, "If the tourist's gaze is marked by superficiality, kitsch, and inauthenticity then surely there must exist "something else," a gaze that would somehow be different from that of a tourist. Commonly, distinctions are drawn between a tourist (the gauche novice) and the traveler

(the knowing connoisseur)" (113). Siegel and Wulff continue, writing, "Among the many issues evident in the various analyses of tourists and travelers [...] is the question of *power*. At heart, the tourist is led while the traveler leads, the tourist is timid while the traveler is adventurous, the tourist cannot properly "see" the journey while the traveler is erudite and knowledgeable" (115). It is precisely this distinction that Theroux makes clear to his fellow travelers when questioned: as a traveler, and, more so, a travel writer, he is a connoisseur of the journey.

While scholars support the notion that the traveler is the more cultured of the two, many laugh at the idea that the traveler considers himself or herself to be more beneficial than the tourist to the lands in which each travels. Holland and Huggan comment on the supposed distinction, writing that the difference between traveler and tourist is "highly specious: travelers, unlike tourists, are "nonexploitative" visitors, motivated not by the lazy desire for instant entertainment but by the hard-won battle to satisfy their insatiable curiosity about other countries and peoples" (2). Though a weak argument, this line of reasoning allows travelers to put their guilty consciences to rest, knowing it is not they but their lesser breed, the tourists, who have defaced the lands on which they trod. When travelers, as Holland and Huggan explain, "see themselves as contributing to the well-being of those cultures rather than as exploiting them for their own benefit," they are able to place the blame on tourists (3). While Theroux does not go so far as to blame tourists, he does make sure at all costs to not be associated with them.

The way in which Theroux makes sure to establish himself as a traveler rather than a tourist is only one characteristic of how his journey illustrates American travel as a whole. Individuals, and, specifically, Americans such as Theroux, travel for a variety of

reasons. Their travel is fueled by a desire to escape and often a desire for adventure. Additionally, as is the case with Theroux, travel is seen as the perfect chance to do some good thinking. Though individuals have multiple reasons for travel, their travel is characterized in the same way: going from one place, specifically the home, to another. And finally, we see that Americans such as Theroux are quick to distinguish themselves as the better breed of traveler: the traveler, not the tourist. Having set definitions to travel and its participants, we can now move forward to look at the writing of travel, the craft for which Theroux moves from one place to another and insists on his status as traveler.

## Chapter 2: The Writing of Travel and the Author as Authority

It would be simple to say that travel writing is the writing of travel; that when a person goes from one place to another and writes about it, travel writing happens. And yet this would not do justice to the genre. When this person, this writer, traverses physical space and chooses to record the journey, the destination, or both in print, he or she drags a brush across the wet paint boundaries of genre, blending creative non-fiction with the terms of anthropology, geography with the study of sociology, tour-book trivia with the discourse of colonialism. For a travel narrative takes us, by way of the author's slant, into cultures with which we are not familiar and through physical places and social interactions in spaces other than our own. And most significantly, the author enmeshes in a myriad of remarkable facts about an unfamiliar place the tale of moving in on this place, of becoming an authority figure by transcribing this "place" onto paper.

So much of travel writing is visual—the author sees it, thinks about it, and writes it down, sometimes even skipping the middle step—that it becomes easy to assume that what the author sees, or says he or she sees, is what there is. This warrants discussion of why visual observation is such a large part of travel writing to begin with and, in turn, how the narrative methods at work in the genre affect its readers. Narrative methods such as the use of fictive techniques in non-fiction writing, an established metaphor of colonial and native, and the author's "authority" over the text affect the degree to which readers subscribe to the author's depiction of a journey or a place and the discourses that depiction perpetuates.

The heart of this discussion of travel writing is its pertinence to *Patagonian,* so we must look at how Theroux functions as an authority in the writing of his journey and

how critics receive his narrative strategies. Additionally, Theroux's status as a white male affects his stance as a writer. We will examine what he is trying to accomplish in writing *Patagonian* and how his status contributes to these accomplishments.

As Islam writes, "taken at its simplest, the narrative of travel unfolds the events of trekking space" (5). Were this so, a story that charts a man walking from one side to another of his own backyard, and hence "trekking space," would classify. Yet the travel narrative is much more than simply "the events of trekking space," or, rather, these events warrant further specification. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the spaces traversed qualify travel; the man walking across his backyard is not traveling, because he has not gone to a space deemed "away," but has instead simply moved about within the space of home. Theroux, however, certainly moves to an "away" space, and his narrative does chart the events of his trek. The distinction between Theroux's journey and the non-travel journey the backyard man takes is a fine one when projected on travel writing as a whole. While Theroux's journey from Boston to the tip of South America merits consideration in a travel narrative, a man's trek across his backyard (non-travel), to the opposite end of his hometown (which could be considered travel or non-travel), or from his home to his cousin's home three states away (travel) may not at first warrant such consideration due to the fact these situations are seen as routine and perhaps petty.

The distinction between which journeys merit travel narratives and which do not feeds criticism of the travel writing genre. According to Holland and Huggan, the genre survives, yet under a great deal of scrutiny. The genre, they write, "has always had a mixed reception, being seen by some as essentially frivolous" (vii). A man's trek across his hometown, for instance, would raise claims of frivolity. The genre has sustained, the

authors argue, because "travel writers have always had a knack, in any case, of capitalizing on negative publicity; sensation mongering might be anathema to their critics, but it is integral to their genre" (vii). In other words, travel writers have capitalized on the saying that any publicity is good publicity, as even negative criticism puts the genre in the realm of discussion. This negative publicity has made the genre somewhat ambiguous, because those who consider travel writing inconsequential, for example, label it as the writing of tour books or unresearched social commentary, while those who support the genre as intellectually viable consider it a version of anthropology and an ethnographic practice.

Holland and Huggan agree that travel writing is increasingly difficult to define, primarily because it bridges so many genres. They write:

> Travel narratives run from picaresque adventure to philosophical treatise, political commentary, ecological parable, and spiritual quest. They borrow freely from history, geography, anthropology, and social science, often demonstrating great erudition, but without seeing fit to respect the rules that govern conventional scholarship. Irredeemably opinionated, travel writers avail themselves of the several licenses that are granted to a form that freely mixes fact and fable, anecdote and analysis. (8-9)

As Holland and Huggan make clear, travel writers subscribe to the claims that their work blends multiple genres and work with this idea to their benefits. As we will discuss later, Theroux allows himself the luxury of working fictive writing techniques into his non-fiction writing to enhance his travel narrative. The claim that travel writers are "irredeemably opinionated" is debatable; though not a universally held maxim about the

genre, Holland and Huggan's opinion is shared by various other travel writing critics. This claim is not entirely unfounded, because the position of authority a travel writer holds in the text can lead us to believe he or she feels a sense of entitlement to being in charge and to perpetuating his or her opinion.

Though some critics dispute the validity of travel writing as a literary genre, critics as a whole have paid the genre a good amount of attention. At the heart of travel writing lies the desire to share with readers a place, a journey, and the experiences transpired in leaving home and experiencing something new. As William Zinsser explains in the introduction to *They Went: The Art and Craft of Travel Writing,* "Indebtedness is at the heart of travel literature. Writing well about a place goes back at least to Herodotus, and the best practitioners usually know and love what has gone before" (10). Zinsser, far more so than Holland and Huggan, views the genre as one of merit, a field of writing with a laudable history from which writers draw inspiration and the desire to pursue the craft. He continues, attesting that travel writers have a "crucial gift" to share: "the sense that they were there" (15). Indeed, the purpose of a travel narrative is to show us what went on during a journey, what a new place looks like, and what the nature of customs and cultures of people other than ourselves are, so that we might be able to share in the experience.

A travel narrative is similar to a novel in that it transports us to another world, and it is similar to a cultural studies text in that the world is a real one, simply one we may not have had the chance to encounter. With this said, the travel writer's job is rather daunting; to make us understand a place and the real-time journey there is no easy task. It is for this reason that Zinsser calls travel writers "prisoners of a particular time and place"

(12). Travel writers choose enslavement to that time and place and to the commitment of bringing that sliver of life back intact to their readers in a realistic, yet enticing manner.

The most obvious way in which a travel writer shares his journey with us is by writing down what he or she sees. This comes as no surprise. Imagine that your aunt just returned from the Grand Canyon. You ask, “What was it like?” having never been there. She is sure to describe the sights—the vast openness, the colors of piled silt—for several minutes before she even mentions the wind whistling across the desert plains or the feeling of wholeness the canyon begets, if she even goes so far as to do so.

Our conception of places, along with many of life’s experiences, centers on the sense of sight. We describe future mates in terms of what they look like—blond hair, blue eyes—rate favorite items in terms of their physical attributes—it’s the shiniest red car you’ve ever seen—and make plans according to visuals—look for me, I’ll be the one wearing a purple shirt. The concept of “seeing” even extends past its literal meaning to a connotation of understanding. As Siegel and Wulff explain, “The importance of vision—as opposed to our other senses—dominates modern culture. Not speaking may be viewed as wisdom, while not seeing—blindness—surfaces instead as a metaphor for not understanding or even lacking in intelligence” (109). Siegel and Wulff point out that we use vision to describe and remember our experiences visually, and we also use it to convey understanding, as in the phrase “I see” or “Don’t you see?”

This heavy reliance on vision propels travel writers to describe the sights of a new place before anything else. Sure enough, some of the most vivid passages in *Patagonian*, such as, “There were brilliant orange flowers on the branches of tall trees, and in fields near these trees rows of ripe tomatoes, peppers, and beans. […] Here, most of the

tomatoes had been picked, the vines had started to wither, and some of the fields were yellow dry," are those in which Theroux describes what he sees from the train car (193). Reading a travel narrative, we presume without thinking about it that the author's description fits the scene, that were we to visit the same location, we would "see" the same picture. Siegel and Wulff point out, however, that vision is subject to interpretation. "We assume," they write, "that sight is our most important sense and often fail to realize that what we see is not universally equivalent or even necessarily shared within a culture" (109). As these two scholars acknowledge, an author's vision is biased in the same way any other individual's would be. For example, a writer who has just eaten a wonderful meal on the train and has retired to a phenomenally comfortable train car might look out the window and perceive a flowered field as spectacularly gorgeous. Another writer, or the same writer on a different day, who has eaten a stale sandwich and found his bunk infested with fleas could look at the same exact scene and declare the view ghastly. The problem with a travel narrative's accuracy lies in its reliance on visual description; because we take at face value what a writer such as Theroux "sees," we assume his visual description represents reality. This is misleading because, as Siegel and Wulff explain, "A culture's "reality" appears seductively accessible via vision, [but] the traveler's view is always partial and biased. The vast number of unconsciously learned and assimilated beliefs, values, and norms that make up cultural patterns, the "mental programming" of any culture, remain veiled" (110). The view a person takes away from a place, then, results from more than simply seeing it. Each person's believes and experiences shape what he or she "sees."

Siegel and Wulff have expanded the realm of vision to include description of not

only the landscape of a place but its culture, as portrayed through its scenes. While it is entirely possible that a reader's view of a place would fit exactly with a writer's, it is unlikely that a world of readers would view a place in the same manner and therefore illogical to consider a travel writer's view real.

In addition to visual discrepancies, other factors skew a travel writer's view of what is real. Because the travel writing genre has often indistinguishable boundaries, travel narratives tend to incorporate many of the same techniques as fictive works. In *Road-Book America: Contemporary Culture and the New Picaresque,* Rowland A. Sherrill argues that "travel literature is often thought of as a form of "the literature of fact" for the very reason that it proposes to deliver to readers objective, realistic, and thus, "authentic" renditions of real places and people, natural landscapes and human culturescapes, customs and behaviors." However, he writes, difficulties in determining what is fact and what is fiction in travel narrative arise because the entire narrative is constructed in the first-person (73). This first-person construction is faulty for the same reason visual description is faulty: the "view" is that of only one person, and surely that of others would differ. In any type of narrative, Sherrill points out, genres tend to blur. In the case of the travel narrative, the genres of fact and fiction are often indistinguishable (58).

This genre blurring between fact and fiction is even more prevalent in Theroux's work because he is both a travel writer and a novelist, a status that makes it all the more likely for him to place a dose of one genre into his creation of a work in the other (73). For example, portions of Theroux's travel writing that involve interactions between the author and other people take on the quality of a novel. When Theroux interacts with

another person, we get the sense of reading a constructed conversation rather than an actual one. The sentences in these exchanges seem contrived and hardly informal, as fellow passengers quip "I'm going home. I will be inside my house tonight" and Theroux interjects doses of equally well-thought-out dialogue such as "I have never read a single word of any of them" and "I think I should go to bed" (254, 331). Rather than convincing us that the conversations took place as portrayed, these passages enforce the notion that Theroux has remembered bits of his journey and constructed scenes and stories after the fact.

This sense of fictionalization comes from what Holland and Huggan cite as the "self" being the entity "most obviously "indulged" in travel writing." A writer such as Theroux, they explain, takes every bit of himself along on his trips—emotional baggage included—and, therefore, each last piece of the author becomes woven into his narrative. However, this placement of self in the story is often done in a fictional light, the authors explain, causing Theroux's writing about himself and those he encounters to be presented as "characters in fictions or as actors on the stage" (175). Because each piece of Theroux is a part of *Patagonian's* narrator, the narrator himself becomes a well-rounded "character." Theroux is not just a voice telling a story, but an actual person, whom we come to characterize mentally as a participant in the book. Often, then, this characterization causes the Theroux we witness interacting in his own narrative to be a character, a fictionalized version of the author, who functions as the narrator in the text.

For example, in the text, Theroux visits the writer Jorge Luis Borges at the writer's home.[1] The same characterization occurs in this scene, as Holland and Huggan

[1]Theroux may be making a political statement by visiting Borges, who was an extreme conservative, but he makes no mention of the political weight of this visit within his text.

contend. These authors write that the encounter between Theroux and Borges does not convey the feeling of an interaction between two individuals, but it instead seems to be an interaction between two characters: "Paul Theroux," the traveling writer, and "Jorge Luis Borges," a character version of the real-life writer. Holland and Huggan explain further:

> Theroux does not so much "inject his fluctuating biorhythms" into his travel tales as hide *and* disclose them in a series of (mock-) fantastic episodes. Theroux's fictive/autobiographical fantasies, however, do not emerge as part of a project to dissolve the self; quite the reverse, they reaffirm the authority of the self through the act of shaping the episode, inventing its details, characterizing its agents, and masking its fictionally fantastic producer by blurring the boundary between "fact" and "fiction." Theroux invites us to speculate about who he "really" is, but not *that* he really is. (176)

The creative ability Theroux allows himself as purveyor of such characters and scenes translates into the authority a writer holds over his/her text, which will be discussed shortly. In relation to Theroux's characterized self, as Holland and Huggan argue, the travel writer can make the character Paul Theroux as similar to or different from himself as he chooses; because the narrator takes on the qualities of a character, it would not be unreasonable for, say, his height to be different than it is in reality. On the other hand, because the narrator is conveyed as such, Theroux would most likely have no qualms about creating this "character" in his own image, faults and all, because the character does not seem to be aligned with the author as being the same person.

This construction of the narrator as a character in a travel writing book is not unusual, according to Elton Glaser, who writes in "Paul Theroux and the Poetry of Departures" that Theroux writes about his travels for the main purpose of telling a story (153). "[An] element that the travel book shares with many novels," writes Glaser, "is the foregrounding of the narrator. The travel writer, telling the story of his journey, becomes the central character in the book; we respond as much to his personality as to the details of the journey that he reports to us. Otherwise, we might as well be sitting through another droning slideshow on Tahiti or the Taj Mahal" (154). The characterization of the narrator functions to enhance the travel narrative's interest—its entertainment quotient, in other words—and it is only one way a writer such as Theroux performs such an enhancement.

Travel writers employ multiple narrative techniques to enhance their work, making a travel journey more of a story and less of a bore. As Ian Frazier explains in "Carving Your Name on the Rock," travel books often chart a journey that begins in the beginning and moves chronologically to the end, mimicking the way stories are told. Travel tales that use narrative strategies while not forsaking details, however, are even more interesting to readers than those that give a cut-and-dried version of what happened. Frazier finds the typical narrative method pedantic, favoring narratives that play with chronology. He argues that travel narratives are more interesting to read when the writer describes visiting a place, moving on, then perhaps returning later. In these instances, when authors do not subscribe to strict chronological order when describing their journeys, we get a more accurate picture of what traveling is like (46-7).

It is to avoid this boredom of chronology, Frazier argues, that the best travel

writing includes all the details, even those that do not relate directly to the journey. Frazier continues:

> Sometimes I'm reading a book and the author is in some exotic place and he's keeping the exotic atmosphere perking along and I know for a fact that someplace along in there the guy called his accountant back in the city and had a three-hour conversation about his Keogh plan. Or that at some point he went to a Holiday Inn and watched MTV and was nowhere at all for sixteen hours. […] I'm not saying a writer should always put that stuff in—should yank the reader back to his armchair from the Shangri-la he has transported him to. But I think the writer should at least consider it. (47)

Theroux's writing in *Patagonian* adheres to nearly all Frazier wishes for in a travel narrative. While his narrative is recounted chronologically—the author starts in Boston and moves southwest toward Mexico in increments, then continues south all the way to Patagonia without backtracking—such chronology seems to have a purpose. Theroux's journey is long, and this chronological narrative path forces us to keep the destination in mind.

Aside from chronology, Theroux has, in *Patagonian*, constructed a narrative in a way Frazier would appreciate: including small and seemingly insignificant details that color his tale with reality. For example, we know when Theroux is sick, when he has a bad lunch, and when he doesn't feel like getting out of bed. By writing this way, Theroux uses narrative strategies to his benefit, weaving his journey like a story to hold our attention, while creating a story grounded enough in everyday life to be accepted as

having happened.

A good deal of what makes Theroux's work stand out from that of other contemporary travel writers, in fact, is his use of the narrative techniques Frazier is so fond of. For example, as Theroux's critics point out, his travel narrative style is heavily dependant on interviews and the "personal encounter" (Holland, Huggan 210). While traditional travel writing attempts to bring a new place to readers as accurately as possible, Theroux's work goes against this grain, using fictive techniques to color his descriptions, making them both accessible and interesting to us. Mezciems argues that traditional travel writing happens as "fiction pretends to be fact in a new way." He continues, writing, "The standard is a narrative of observation without surprise or judgment: it becomes scientific, unemotional, and amoral" (15). Theroux, however, consciously rebels against this convention. As Biographer Samuel Coale contends, "Theroux works diligently to discover sharp revealing images or snatches of dialogue that bristle with a clear-eyed irreverence, thus avoiding that kind of sentimental reverence found all too easily in most popular travel writing" (30). Some critics perceive Theroux's writing as putting too much in, such as every single snippet of train conversation, but he includes as much intentionally.

Theroux writes that thinking about travel writing before becoming a travel writer, he despised those "bores" who called themselves "armchair travelers" and read travel writing written by other "bores." He explains:

> It annoyed me that a traveler would suppress his or her moments of desperation or fear or lust. Or the time he or she screamed at a taxi driver, or was picked up by a plausible local, or slept until noon. And what did

> they eat, what books did they read to kill time, and what were the toilets like? I had done enough traveling to know that half of travel was delay or nuisance—buses breaking down and hotel clerks being rude and market traders being rapacious. The truth of travel was unexpected and off-key, and few people ever wrote about it. (*Ends of the Earth* xv)

Theroux wants to share with his readers his hours of doing nothing in a hotel room, and he guesses his readers wants to know about them. As he writes, "When something human is recorded, good travel writing happens" (xvi). Theroux also contends that "every trip is unique. My travel book is about my trip, not yours or anyone else's" (xx). Though Theroux does not explicitly say in *Patagonian* that someone else's experience on the same journey would most likely differ from his, he shows that his journey is unique by including all the little details that make it his own.

Along with including numerous small details, travel writers combine narrative strategies with fictive techniques to enhance their work. Travel narratives are fictionalized in that when a writer attempts to log an entire journey, or everything about a place, on paper, he or she inadvertently changes details in the process. Siegel and Wulff argue:

> Just as the initial perception of travel is partial at best, the journey's recollection, i.e., the "stuff" of travel literature, becomes distorted by the degree our cultural lens blinds us to the journey initially, the amount of time we can spend within a culture, our imperfect memory of the journey itself, and the changes that will occur once our memories have been exposed to the shaping forces of narrative. (119-20)

Theroux does write in *Patagonian* of taking extensive notes during his journey. It is unrealistic, however, that his narrative could comprise only notes taken at the moment of experience. As Siegel and Wulff specify, it is only possible for a person to remember and accurately record so much. Therefore, some, possibly a great deal, of the material that makes up a travel narrative is based on imperfect memory, on fictive reorganization of a journey after the fact.

This fictive reorganization is often unintentional. As Robert Packard writes in *Refractions: Writers and Places*, it is the "writer's imagination" that causes a place to "alter" (5). According to Packard, the fictive reach of a travel writer's words extends beyond changing the facts of a journey to information that is indistinguishable as fact or fiction. Not only does the travel writer make it difficult for us to be sure whether his or her descriptions are accurate, he or she causes us to develop our own images in accordance with these descriptions. In other words, the way a travel writer constructs a place on the page for the reader manipulates the place's actual construction, because the written description is often the only description the reader has. The writer's description, regardless of how fictionalized, becomes fact in our interpretation of what a place or a journey is.

Many critics use the fact that travel narratives contain fictive elements to criticize travel writers. While numerous critics accuse travel writers of fictionalizing encounters so as to make them more pleasurable to read, Holland and Huggan disagree. "To condemn the travel writer for one form or other of artful dodgery," these critics argue, "is to forget that the genre has a long history—a license—of entertaining fraud." They continue, specifying that travel writing becomes more appealing when the reader is not quite sure

what is the absolute truth and what has been tinkered with (7). By this theory, travel writing introduces a spectacle to reading that even fiction itself lacks—when a reader cannot assert that everything in a text is made up, nor can he or she declare the opposite, the resulting mystery makes a text even more interesting.

Though Holland and Huggan disagree with the claim that travel writers try on purpose to beef up the interest quotient of their writing, this claim is entirely plausible. In *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, David Spurr describes the way aestheticization comes into play in journalism, a way similar to how it works in travel writing. Spurr explains how in newspaper writing, the newspaper is aesthetically pleasing and diverse: the newspaper, which presents its reader with a variety of subject matter and encourages the reader to pick and choose of his own accord, works towards maintaining readers' interest aesthetically just as it works to maintain the same interest informationally (41). This aestheticization of the newspaper translates to the aestheticization of the travel book. When a travel narrative is packaged in a hardbound casing and advertised for its adventure and suspense, it resembles a novel and, therefore, attempts to garner the same attention a novel would.

Aestheticization in travel writing further parallels that in journalism, explains Spurr. He writes:

> The temporal dimension of the journalistic aesthetic lies in its narrative approach to reality. The press treats events in a primarily episodic manner which follows a characteristic narrative form: an episode or "story" typically begins with a revelation, introducing a dramatic situation and a

> series of characters. The second stage is devoted to development: the expansion or explication of elements in the original discovery, the chronicling of changes that advance the action, the heightening of tension and pathos. The final stage brings about a resolution, as the action plays itself out and stabilizes, while an appropriate response to the action is produced. (44)

Travel narratives such as *Patagonian* work the same way. In this narrative, Theroux approaches reality—an actual journey to an actual place—from a fictive standpoint by telling of the journey and describing the place in the form of a narrative. It is no coincidence that this aestheticization is done in journalism and travel writing for the same reason, to make stories more interesting and accessible to readers.

The writer's position as author of his or her text enables him or her to control the conceptualization of a journey and a new place that is passed to readers through a travel narrative. As explained earlier, what we read in a travel narrative is a close-to-reality representation of a place, which may be swayed in different directions due to an individual author's viewpoint. Understandably, Theroux's interpretation of his journey to Patagonia would not be identical to another traveler's interpretation. Because Theroux is the author of *Patagonian*, however, his is the interpretation we have, so his construction of the journey is the one we adopt as our knowledge of this particular voyage.

An author's job inherently encompasses an immense amount of power. For readers who have never traversed Mexico, say, Theroux's description of Nuevo Laredo is not merely one man's opinion but the way things actually are. When Theroux writes, "The smell of Nuevo Laredo rises. It is the smell of lawlessness; it is smokier, scented

with chilis and cheap perfume," we are under the impression that upon setting foot in Nuevo Laredo, all travelers are accosted by distinct smells of chilis and perfume (*Patagonian* 42). But Theroux's view is understandably tainted. As a writer passing through, he wants to remain detached from Nuevo Laredo's debauchery. Were he perhaps looking to meet a woman, he might have described the smells of the city in terms of possibility. It is not so important to understand how or why Theroux's representation of his journey is subjective but to simply acknowledge that it is so. As Packard explains, travel writing is like light's refraction. "Just as a ray of light bends as it passes obliquely from one medium to another," he writes, "the image of a physical place passing through the prism of the writer's imagination changes to become the literary place" (3). Packard insists there is a difference between an actual place and its representation in a travel narrative, a difference that an author's particular interpretation causes. Packard continues, writing, "It's anyone's planet. Each one of us carries in his mind a view of the world based on an individual variation of the external model. But unlike most of us, writers give their worlds perceptible substance" (6). When writers give their worlds substance—their interpretations of how the events of a journey unfolded, or what a new place looks like—they exercise their ability as authors to be authorities over a text and the representations that text creates.

As author of his text, Theroux, like any writer, is the sole authority over what happened on his journey and what he saw in Patagonia. No one in the text steps forward to say that Nuevo Laredo smells nothing like chilis and cheap perfume, so Theroux's version stands. That the facts of a travel narrative are based on interpretation would be a mute point if travel writers interspersed disclaimers in their work stating, "But, you

know, this is only the way I see things. You might have found them to be different." Yet, because travel narratives are constructed in the first person, with the author as our only starting point from which to view a journey and a new world, we have no choice but to become immersed in the narrative details as realistic depictions of the journey. Because the author positions his or hers as the text's sole opinion, then, he or she establishes himself or herself as an authority on the journey and on a particular place.

In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,* Mary Louise Pratt contends that the travel writer establishes authority by declaring himself or herself as the "monarch of all I survey" (201). In other words, by writing a narrative in the first person that brings the Patagonian journey to readers, Theroux becomes the authority of this journey. Because he brings Patagonia to us through the text, he creates this new place for us by describing it. Indeed, Pratt asserts that a travel narrative actually "produces" other parts of the world for its readers (5). Theroux, then, is the purveyor of Patagonia from our perspective. Because Theroux is in charge of Patagonia and the journey there, we take everything he includes in his narrative as accurate and necessary. Likewise, anything he may have left out would have been unnecessary, because Theroux decided it to be so.

Travel writers further enforce authority over the depiction of their journeys by, as Neil L. Whitehead explains in an article about travel narratives of South America, showing us they know what they are talking about. He writes, "Although these writers make no claim to systematic presentations of scientific data they do display a knowledge of professional literatures which serves to legitimate their observations and to place them in a superior position with respect to the mere jottings of 'tourists'" (135). For example, Theroux is able to fill in the spaces where his narrative lacks authority by name-dropping,

calling in other sources to make himself more credible. When he nears Patagonia, for instance, numerous fellow travelers have begun to question his motives. As a result, we begin to question them as well, wondering what self-respecting travel writer would choose to visit such a place of nothingness. At this point in the text, Theroux brings Borges into play. He does not use Borges to legitimize his destination—Borges, too, thinks a trip to Patagonia is foolish—but by bringing an eminent author into the narrative, Theroux shows us that he holds enough clout to be able to drop in on literary bigwigs, an authority which translates onto his journey.

Another aspect of Theroux's journey that allows him, as author, to assert authority over his narrative and resultant text is the fact that he travels alone. With no companion travelers to contest his opinion, Theroux has the ability to set his own thoughts forth in writing as the only thoughts we should consider. A popular claim in travel writing theory, the concept of travel writer as self-imposed authority, stems partially from the fact that travel writers are often solitary. As Spurr explains, a travel writer's "commanding view" situates him as purveyor of entertainment and information. Spurr writes:

> This combination of pleasure and power gives the commanding view a special role in journalistic writing, especially in the colonial situation, for it conveys a sense of mastery over the unknown and over what is often perceived by the Western writer as strange and bizarre. At the same time the commanding view is an originating gesture of colonization itself, making possible the exploration and mapping of territory which serves as the preliminary to a colonial order. (15-6)

Spurr aligns the solitary traveler's viewpoint with the discourse of colonialism, but such an alignment does not pertain to Theroux in *Patagonian.* While the author does travel alone, which lends authority to his narrative, he works against colonialist discourse by aiming to simply share places with his reader, rather than claim them in any way. In fact, Theroux spends a great deal of his trip trying not to be noticeable—trying to record what he sees without being an intrusion. On the final train of his journey, Theroux is finally able to fully accomplish this and to blend in with his fellow passengers, and he is relieved to not be singled out as being American. He writes, "On this train, the Old Patagonian Express, I looked like everyone else; slightly unshaven, fairly presentable, with a battered suitcase, vaguely European, mustache drooping, scuffed leak-proof shoes. It was a relief. I was, at last, anonymous" (398). But, as Spurr contends, Theroux's description of each situation and experience on his journey does map out for us all that is new and unfamiliar.

By recording his journey's places in narrative, Theroux maps out these new places for us, along with the people who inhabit them. Although he records what he sees, however, Theroux does not propagate the discourse of colonialism, which may be easily done in other situations that contain a traveling American. The author does not, as Spurr contends, hold a "commanding view" over the lands and peoples he writes about. Instead, Theroux works to actively avoid the thread of colonialism that follows all Americans abroad. He does so by separating himself from other Americans, and, therefore, removing himself from alignment from America's colonialist past.

When Theroux encounters fellow travelers who have little good to say about America, he does not argue with them. To defend his country in comparison to the

poverty-stricken countries he travels in would be an admission of colonialist impulse; instead, Theroux resists by letting these individuals' claims go unchallenged. In one instance, Theroux asks a Chinese man living in Costa Rica what he thought of the United States when he traveled there. The man replies, "I went all around it. Maybe it is a good country, but I didn't think so. I could not live there." Theroux gives no reply. Additionally, there is no indication in the conversation that the man even knows where Theroux is from (159).

In another instance, Theroux engages in a friendly argument with a man about which of two places is more beautiful: Costa Rica or Oregon. Theroux argues in favor of Costa Rica (171-2). In addition to leaving any sense of patriotism for his own country behind in conversation, Theroux is also reluctant to align himself with America by talking to other American travelers. When a Costa Rican man points out another American on one train and tells Theroux to go talk to him, Theroux's response is a curt, "No, thank you" (174). Each incidence of Theroux's passing up the chance to defend America or to align himself with his country or its people signifies the author's resisting what America and its past stand for. By disengaging himself with America, Theroux simultaneously leaves behind any notion of being a traveler participating in a colonialist discourse.

The author also intentionally separates himself from travelers who have come before him, many in as neo-colonialists. Theroux shares bits of what they thought about their journeys and then denounces their views, effectively setting himself apart from the pack. He calls the methods of one former traveler, William T. Brigham, another American who visited Guatemala, "typical curmedgeonly snobbery" and relays an

embarrassing episode of a different trip of Brigham's, on which he "nearly electrocuted himself" on a Hawaiian magician's stick (99). In another instance, Theroux criticizes past travelers who have belittled Guatemalan church services by calling them "barbarous" and "frenzied," saying anyone who thinks this way should simply look at religious ceremonies in Boston to realize that such displays are not outlandish (107-8). By separating himself from these past travelers, Theroux enforces the difference between an American neo-colonialist traveler—who remains entrenched in methods of conquering lands, whether physically or metaphorically—and himself—a traveler who is aware of the possibility of his position as an American to connote colonialism and who actively strives to resist this notion.

Theroux further distances himself from America's colonialist past by traveling with the poor and, in turn, acknowledging a class of people often ignored. Though he could easily afford a more comfortable method of traveling, he chooses to ride trains that are full of "the noise of banding doors" and "bulbs on the ceiling [that] were too dim to read by, too bright to allow me to sleep." On one train, he writes, "The spiders and ants I had noticed during the day, crawling in and out of the horsehair of the burst cushions, had begun biting me" (79). Accompanying this trying method of traveling is the experience of traveling along side the poor. As Theroux moves from train to train over the course of his journey, many of his fellow travelers begin to look the same to him: women and children with worn-out clothes and, often, no shoes, and men overtired from labor-heavy jobs. In addition to poor fellow travelers, Theroux finds that it is not uncommon for the poor to board a stopped train to sell things or ask for help. In one instance, he writes, "There were many more people who boarded to beg—an old woman with an infant in her arms, two

skinny children—and food sellers—children with jugs of coffee, basins of fitters, women with bread and bony fish" (84). Theroux is a wealthy American who has chosen to step outside the boundaries of America's colonialist history—best exemplified on plane trips to resort locations, for example—and experience the Americas with the poor by riding their trains and staying in their hotels in tiny cities. By putting himself in this position, Theroux at once separates himself from the colonialist discourse that often trails travel writers and affords himself the opportunity to share with us a side of travel not often explored. Also, the fact that being among the poor is a choice for Theroux rather than a necessity additionally contributes to his status of authority of his journey.

In establishing himself as the authority over his own experience of travel, Theroux has one additional attribute that helps enforce this authority—he is a man. A great deal of a travel writer's authority stems from his or her position as a solitary, adventurous individual. And in turn, a great deal of what constitutes an adventurous individual is aligned with the male gender. As scholar Susan Bassnett asserts in "Travel writing and gender," there is an assumed connection between travel and gender, one which characterizes a man as a "heroic risk-taking traveller" (225). Or, as Holland and Huggan argue, "Travel itself is a thoroughly gendered category. The rhetoric of travel is shot through with metaphors that reinforce male prerogatives to wander and conquer as they please" (111). Though the travel writing genre abounds with writers of both genders today, the male holds the position as whom we stereotypically expect to travel, because the male gender is stereotypically aligned with journeys away from the home, while the female gender is stereotypically aligned with domesticity.

Travel narratives, today's nonfiction version of adventure tales, enforce the stereotype of men holding the role of the more adventuresome gender. As Martin Green explains

in *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire,* the adventure tale, functioning as an instruction manual of sorts for its male readers, has "been the main literary means by which males have been taught to take initiatives, to run risks, to give orders, to fight" (1). Adventure, he writes, is a "ritual in the religion of manliness," which "was the unofficial religion of the nineteenth century, if not of the twentieth" (6). Green also cites the adventure as a tale of "personal self-proving" (222). The adventure tale, and the travel narrative in turn, is aligned with the masculine gender primarily for its connotations of authority. This alignment makes it incredibly easy for us to mentally connect "travel" with "man," and, as a result, "man" with "authority."

In addition to travel, writing itself is also assumed to be a man's realm, a notion that further enforces Theroux's position of authority. Again, writers today are male and female alike, but the concept of writing as a male area of expertise remains. For instance, in an article in *Boys Don't Cry?: Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S,* Milette Shamir discusses Henry David Thoreau, who muses in *Walden* on the nature of masculinity to dictate emotionally silent men and who, in turn, contends that writing is more male-appropriate than other forms of communication. As Shamir explains:

> Thoreau mistrusts speech (and regards it as feminine and maternal) because, immediate and transitory, it always risks exposing on the personal and slipping into "slander" and "gossip." Writing, on the other

> hand, is "our father tongue, a reserved and select expression." Writing—indeed, "silent" speech—is paternal and masculine because of the writer's control over its contents, his ability to check and edit himself rather than be swayed by the personal contingencies of the moment. (80-1)

By way of Thoreau's example, Shamir does not exclude the feminine gender from writing in any way. Instead, her argument simply illustrates how writing is a controlled form of communication, allowing for editing prior to being shared, that is aligned with the masculine gender because of the authority with which it provides its executor. Theroux, then, has already established himself as an authority over his journey and his destination simply by going there and communicating it to us. This authority is further solidified, however, by the medium in which he chooses to communicate the journey and destination—writing.

Gender intersects the travel writing genre in another way as well. In addition to allowing a male travel writer to further establish himself as an authority over his text, gender provides a potential reason for why men travel, a reason bred from our notion of what it means to be a man. As Shamir explains, American history created an ideal woman, one who was expected to be emotionally expressive, and, in turn, "the same market realities that "feminized" the middle-class home bolstered an affianced but opposite masculine ideal of stringent individualism and aggressive competitiveness" (65). These characteristics of individualism and competitiveness, with others and with one's self, are brought to light in travel narratives, as authors strike out for new places alone and forge paths through new situations. In addition to characteristics such as these, our male ideal also contains a set of emotional rules. As Shamir explains, this male ideal is

characterized by "an ethos of privacy, bounded self-containment, affective restraint and reticence, at the expense of emotional expressivity and intimacy" (65). Shamir explains further, in a separate article with Jennifer Travis, that recent gender studies have put the male under scrutiny. According to Shamir and Travis:

> As the American male is increasingly on display and under analysis, particularly he to whom Erving Goffman has referred as "the complete unblushing male"—white, heterosexual, middle-class, Protestant, northern, urban—we tend to cling hard to some of the most well-entrenched truisms about masculinity: that it connotes total control of emotions, that it mandates emotional inexpressivity, that it entraps in emotional isolation, that boys, in short, don't cry. (1)

This is not to say that males literally do not cry, but to say that our male ideal dictates American males as not overly emotional; in other words, that males are expected not to cry. While it would be understandably quite difficult to live a life devoid of all emotional expression, males are often characterized as trying to find other ways to handle their emotional needs. Shamir and Travis turn to fellow scholar Michael Kimmel to explain how males handle the desire for emotion: ""Men try to *control themselves*, […] and when feeling too pressured, they attempt an *escape*"" (1, emphasis in original). In the case of a male such as Theroux, travel serves as the perfect escape. For a male, travel out of his home space and into an away space, particularly an away space that does not conform to his home space's social ideals, means the chance to escape North America's rules of how to be a man. Once he has left home, Theroux must no longer worry about his emotional

displays or how manly he appears. Instead, alone in another country, his authority over his voyage allows him to also authorize how he can and cannot act.

It is also interesting to note that the relationship between gender and travel writing works on two levels. First, because travel writing is inherently connected with the male gender, the relationship helps male travel writers maintain authority over their subjects and their texts. Second, the very placement of a male traveler as the narrator of a text further entrenches a stereotypical male ideal into North American society. In *Writing Masculinities: Male Narratives in Twentieth-Century Fiction,* Ben Knights writes, "Masculine identities and (stereo)typically male ways of being and acting are constantly being reinforced and re-enacted through social practices of communication among which narratives both oral and written, in speech, in films and on paper, figure prominently" (17). In turn, Knights argues, these ways of being and acting become established more strongly in our ideas of what it means to be masculine. He continues, writing that "any text promotes 'theories in use,' implying working theories about, say, what it means to be male, how you should act, what ideals you should aspire to, where you would look to for authority" (34). Knights explains that it is common for literature, narratives in particular, to perpetrate stereotypical ideals of what it means to be a man (49). When we read the narrative of an adventurous male traveler, then, the image of adventurous travelers as male is further enforced. By simply being male and writing about a journey, Theroux has propagated the very stereotypical male ideal he may have been attempting to escape when he set out for Patagonia.

Though Theroux's status as a male aligns him with stereotypical masculine ideals, he does not function as a dominating male figure in his narrative. At its heart, *Patagonian*

is the tale of an average North American who just happens to be white and male traveling for the sake of traveling and writing about it. Because Theroux is a contemporary writer and is writing from the viewpoint of an average North American, is it easy to presume that our view of his journey would be similar to his. Likewise, this same stance makes his work worthy of critical study. Unlike North America's colonial ancestors and its adventuring discoverers, Theroux is writing from a contemporary standpoint, one that sheds light on how we view travel today. The travel writers of Theroux's era belong to a category Casey Blanton credits Paul Fussell with naming "post-tourism." Blanton explains that "these travel writers have not abandoned hope of discovering "something" out there—whether it be the daily habits of the Brazilian Indians or the roots of Aboriginal Songlines. Yet the awareness of the questionability of such exercises gives post-tourism "a tendency…toward annoyance, boredom, disillusion, even anger"" (25-6). This combination of adventurous enthusiasm and world-weariness is something those adventuring forefathers could not have achieved. Theroux's position is truly contemporary.

This contemporary approach to travel writing has earned Theroux accolades while simultaneously provoking critical disdain. Holland and Huggan label his writing "sardonic" and, while some critics appreciate the dialogue Theroux recounts in his narratives, they condemn him for it (1). As Holland and Huggan assert, writers such as Theroux "spend less time recounting their own experiences than garnering the apocryphal stories of their colorful "informants"" (13). Other critics cite Theroux for committing the very crime he most despises—being a tourist. Paul Lyons, who calls Theroux's work "commercial anthropology" in "From Man-Eaters to Spam-Eaters: Literary Tourism and

the Discourse of Cannibalism from Herman Melville to Paul Theroux," writes:

> Such writing [as Theroux's] is touristic, both because it proceeds through a sequence of socially organized quick-perceptions, and because it works to preserve a sense of the world as divided into zones of difference for touristic consumption. It is "literary" through its interaction with the generic conventions regulating the artful re-presentation of the *actual*, anthropological in its "scientistic" emphasis on cultural difference, and commercial in its commodified relations to object and audience. (69)

While Theroux tries to capture the essence of a journey and a new place by collecting specific details and recounting individual events, his critics say that this compartmentalizing of his narrative lends it less to quality literature and more to tour-guide writing.

Coale, however, thinks differently about Theroux's anecdotal inclusions. As Coale writes:

> Theroux's strategy is physiognomy, not that luminous detail that will reveal some cosmic truth but that precise look or incident or odd motion that may reveal a culture, a character, or an entire landscape. Details suggest the whole; they emerge as emblems of his character in his fiction or of his landscapes in his travel books. He pursues them intensely, piles them up, orchestrates them in such a way that they will suggest a way of life or a character's developing personality. (15)

Coale acknowledges the fact that much of Theroux's narrative is made up of little incidents but feels it is precisely this abundance of detail that aids the travel writer in characterizing a new place and its people.

Numerous critics accuse Theroux of a dull and simultaneously condescending tone in his travel narratives. "Irony," writes Coale, "spills over into sardonic and shrill namecalling. Irony presents an often thin wire on which to perch; one lapse in the tone, and the detachment, the balancing act, is lost" (24). Theroux's reaction to this is simple. He writes, "I am often told that I seem self-assured in my travel writing," writes Theroux, "but that is usually by way of whistling to keep my spirits up" (*Ends of the Earth* xx). And we can hardly blame him. After all, he is alone and saddled with the job of describing a new world in words. Theroux further justifies his reasons for writing as he does:

> I had been traveling for more than ten years in Europe, Asia, and Africa—and it had not occurred to me to write a travel book. I had always somewhat disliked travel books: they seemed self-indulgent, unfunny, and rather selective. I had the idea that the travel writer left a great deal out of his or her book and put all the wrong things in. I hated sight-seeing, and yet that was what constituted much of the travel writer's material: the pyramids, the Taj Mahal, the Vatican, the paintings here, the mosaics there. In an age of mass tourism, everyone set off to see the same things, and that was what travel writing seemed to be about. (xv)

It is fair, then, to say that Theroux's claim of "traveler" rather than "tourist" status is well-founded. His history of travel, coupled with his determination to be educated on a

new place, makes his writing informed. As Coale discovered in an interview with Theroux, the travel writer insists on knowing as much as possible about his subject. Theroux tries to "practice precision," a practice that, according to Coale, "matches in intensity his focus upon the telling detail, the revealing incident" (22). The very idiosyncrasies for which Theroux is criticized are those traits he most deliberately tries to achieve in his travel writing. Though critics put down his use of trivialities to color the description of a journey and a place, Theroux chooses to include these very trivialities with the purpose of presenting the most accurate and enticing picture possible.

In *Patagonian,* Theroux is doing just this—capturing all the trivial details with less-than-trivial intents—to an extreme extent. His goal in this text is to find the details that characterize each of dozens of little towns and as many train rides between Boston and the tip of South America. Coale notes that when Theroux composes a travel narrative, he arrives at a place, discovers all possible details about it, then moves on (15). This is accurate in relation to *Patagonian,* for during his journey in the text, Theroux stays at each location for the shortest amount of time possible before moving toward the next. Theroux comments on his brief stays in each city and country, saying, "I knew I was merely skimming south, a bird of passage generalizing on the immediate. But because I had no camera and had written so much, my impressions of what I had seen were vivid" (337). Indeed, while his stops are brief, his journey is so long that they compose weeks of travel to reach his destination.

These brief stops and miniature characterizations of individual towns add up to a quite descriptive picture of the varied people of the Americas. Theroux fits into the category of travel writers as Zinsser describes them, having "a curiosity to find out what

makes a country or a city or a town or a trivial village unique and to bring the information back" (17). It is this curiosity, and the fruits of its labors, that separates travel from travel writing. As Theroux writes, "Travel is a vanishing act, a solitary trip down a pinched line of geography to oblivion. […] But a travel book is the opposite, the loner bouncing back bigger than life to tell the story of his experiment with space" (*Patagonian* 3-4). And, in this story, the details are what Theroux considers most important. He focuses on the travel itself, rather than just the destination in *Patagonian,* which is a conscious decision. As Theroux asserts in his narrative, in the "getting there" is the real adventure.

## Chapter 3: American National Identity, Interactions and Othering

When an American is abroad, he or she is easily labeled. The person, for example, who cringes at the lewd window displays in Stockholm's red-light district can be labeled "American" for being shocked at a view of sexual liberation not seen as often in our country. Or, the person who gapes at millennia of history in the Roman Forum's ruins disbelieving something so old is still standing can be labeled "American" both for ignorance and lack of a rich history with which to identify. It is easy to label Americans from the outside—in sweeping generalities that focus on our consumer culture and fast-paced lives—but difficult to assemble a true definition of what an American is.

It is difficult to pin down an American identity shared by people throughout the country. The reasons for this difficulty are many; the fact that Americans descend from multiple nationalities and cultures, for example, is one. Another is simply geographical. It would be unreasonable to think that a person living in the dry Arizona desert would lead the same lifestyle as one living in Alaska's cold, or that a person landlocked in Montana would have the same job opportunities as one on Maine's coast. With our people so spread out geographically, in addition to being so great in number, their differences are many, making their similarities often seem few.

But yet we in America are identified by the people of other countries as sharing traits just as readily as we identify them ourselves—shopping malls, fast food, apple pie, patriotism—things that we consider part of our national identity.

I asked my father, who is Italian-born but who has lived in America for more than sixty years, what America's national identity is. He said he considers our common identity to center on the values we consider American—democracy, for example, and

freedom. Our national identity in America, he said, consists of "living in a country of democracy with rights for every individual, allowing him to pursue what the Declaration of Independence [stipulates]—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Then I asked him what the rest of the world thinks it is. He said that people in other countries "see America as a superpower that wants to dominate its own policies throughout the world." Also, he added, people in other countries have "the concept of the "ugly American" who is an exploiter, taking oil from other countries for their own benefit." The difference between what Americans consider American and what the rest of the world considers characteristic of us is striking.

It is debatable whether an American national identity can be defined, but it is true that individuals are constantly trying to define it, as they are national identities of the people of other countries. Lynn Altenbernd comments on this topic in her article "The Idea of National Character: Inspiration or Fallacy?" She cites the challenges posed to the idea of America having a national character, writing, "Even Mark Twain, who was jingoistic and cosmically humane by turns, denied that it was possible to sum up so vast a nation as the United States in a single work" (13). Yet, given this obvious difficulty, writers still attempt to characterize nations in texts. As Altenbernd explains, there has existed a tradition of traveling writers who record the "national character" of the people they encounter, because the assumption stood for so long that such a character did exist for every group or territory of people. She writes that:

> That assumption may well have been conscious; more likely unconscious—unquestioned because unquestionable—was the assumption that every nationality has an ascertainable national character. The idea was

> endemic in the nineteenth century, through it was not invented in that otherwise fertile age. It appears in the world's oldest literature, and may well have had its origins in preliterate times. In the rivalries between tribes and city-states and ultimately nations, every people who have left a record of themselves appear to have elaborated collective character portraits of their enemies, their friends and themselves. (9)

As Altenbernd shows, writers use descriptions of national identities—depictions of entire countries full of people accomplished in a few characterizations—to convey to readers what these other countries and their people are like. Understandably, not all travel writers are conscious of how their brief descriptions serve to depict entire countries to their readers. Still, when a writer such as Theroux provides only a few brief descriptions after having traveled through a country, his or her descriptions represent that country in its entirety to readers. Theroux most likely does not intend to represent an entire country in a few sentences, but by providing only these sentences, he has done so. Because it is so difficult to sum up a country's national identity, especially a country as large and diverse as America, such characterizations may be inaccurately generalized.

When Theroux sums up an entire country he encounters on the road, then, we cannot be sure his summary represents an accurate portrayal of a country's national identity, for some such countries may be just as diverse and difficult to sum up as America. However, we must acknowledge that just as all other people do, writers will always make generalizations about America, so too will they do so for other countries. With this in mind, Theroux's characterizations of the countries through which he passes is acceptable—admirable, even—for he squelches the question of whether the ability to

make national identity generalizations exists and accomplishes the task, bringing his readers clear and compact depictions of countries he passes through.

Altenbernd supports the notion that national characters do exist, even if only on the basis that people are different from one country to the next. For example, though we find it difficult to define "American," our character is definable simply because it is different from "Italian" or "Chinese." As Altenbernd explains:

> Character is a product of culture, the social scientist argues; cultures are demonstrably different from one another; hence national characters must differ. One might properly add, I think, that a persistent and powerful subjective sense of national difference, felt by virtually all who travel abroad, has persuaded behavioral scientists and humanists alike to persist in efforts toward an acceptable and defensible theory of national character. (14-5)

This further exemplifies how Theroux is in the right by characterizing a country's people in a few sentences, examples of which will be examined later. Theroux chooses to sum-up a country in his writing in order to distinguish it from the next and, in doing so, creates capsulated descriptions of a country's national character.

Perhaps some of this tendency to generalize—a belief in the existence of national characters—stems from the chronological location of Theroux's upbringing. He was born in 1941 and grew up in an era when strident masculinity was required of young American men. Coale, who allows the travel writer to explain this upbringing, writes:

> The 1950s, according to Theroux, prescribed certain attitudes about manhood, adulthood, and growing up that he despised. For him, being a

> man in 1950s terms meant being ""stupid, […] unfeeling, obedient [and] soldierly." Such a position "denies men the natural friendship of women. […] The quest for manliness [was] essentially right-wing, puritanical, cowardly, neurotic and fueled largely by a fear of woman." (3)

Because Theroux experienced a defined idea of "American" as a young man, he would be more likely to presume such a character existed for every country. Also, the character Theroux experienced was specific; he grew up with a constricted sense of what it meant to be an American man in the 1950s, which in turn would make his characterizations of other countries equally specific, taking into account gender and time period as well as nation.

Theroux, however, resists categorization as an American. His American identity, however, is evident in his writing. He approaches each country in which he travels as an obvious outsider, and the home from where he comes causes him to view situations in terms of their degree of similarity to America. As Coale explains, Theroux's travel writing is "the motion of travel for its own sake, the notions of progress and optimistic discovery, the sensation of flight and escape, [and] the loner experimenting with space" (27). These traits, writes Coale, characterize Theroux as American.

As Theroux travels south country by country, he records these countries for us by attributing to them characterizations that sum up what they and their people are like. When he does so, he shows how each country is different from America. In addition, by depicting a country other than our own, Theroux creates an "other" through which America, or his American readers, can acknowledge itself. This othering is not arise from a colonialist standpoint, but from the standpoint of an individual searching to understand

who he is by understanding who other people are and how they differ from him. As Caesar explains, travel writing about other countries allows America to formulate its own identity as a nation. Likewise, Americans solidify this group identity by sharing similar experiences (8). Theroux's readers identify with this "other" by doing as Theroux has done—comparing the country and its people to their own—and the country is made accessible to them through the travel writer's portrayal.

One way that Theroux constructs an "other" out of a place for his readers is by showing how drastically it differs from America. On a train in Mexico, for example, he watches "slums" go by, and relays that the train conductor considers them "very tranquil." Theroux describes one living arrangement in this slum, writing, "It was not a house. It was a shack of cardboard and rusty tin. Holes had been punched in the tin to make windows, and broken bricks held bits of plastic over the leaky roof" (66). Although similar poverty exists in America, we can assume that most of Theroux's audience—travel narrative readers—is unlikely to encounter it on a first-hand or even daily basis. Therefore, by describing this Mexican slum as something so different from his readers' lives, Theroux creates out of it an "other" that in turn allows his readers to understand Mexico as different from America.

Theroux can easily construct another country as "other," because he has, as with any American writer, such a strong sense of our own country as a defined place. As Coale explains, American travelers are satisfied with the stability of their home country and are associated with a "place" of home. Although American travelers do live comfortably at home, they travel to self-educate and, in some cases, to escape and find, in Theroux's words, "relief on the road" (2). This relief serves many purposes, including those

discussed in Chapter 1. It also, however, allows Theroux to create an "other" through which he can further understand and acknowledge the existence of and national character of his own country.

Though an American writer abroad is conscious of the differences between a foreign country's character and that of his or her own, he or she may not exhibit this difference, or even knowledge of it. In Theroux's travel narrative, for example, he constantly comments in writing about the obvious differences between foreign countries and America, but he rarely seeks to show himself as an American. When asked, Theroux does not deny his American identity to fellow travelers, but he also does not go out of his way to acknowledge it. Instead, he often ignores the question. In one conversation, a man is explaining a statue to Theroux and then asks the author, "You are an American, no? Many Americans come here." Theroux answers, "I have never seen anything like it before," completely disregarding the man's question (110). Theroux's reluctance to display his American label plays with notions of what a traveler is. For when Theroux travels, he seems to see himself as simply "traveler," not "American" or even "American traveler."

The fact that Theroux does not exhibit himself as American does not detract from the othering he performs with countries in which he travels and the validating result of this othering he presents to his readers. Caesar wrestles with this notion, asking:

> If the essence of modern travel lies in the common identity of people who come together from—in effect—nowhere, what significance does the very idea of home have for a travel text? Can travel writing still be explained as a national project in a time when tourism appears to require [...] the loss

> of home in order to stage itself as fully modern, and global? It may *only* be possible to write travel if it is distinct from tourism. But when tourism, in turn, has become virtually indistinguishable from the very structure of the modern world, what necessity does writing travel have as an affirmation of national boundaries? What, in fact, *is* a national boundary in an age when the fact of travel itself is primarily available as a figure of representation for how boundaries of any sort can be rewritten? (70)

Though Caesar makes a fair point in saying that tourism, or travel in general, requires a "loss of home," he subscribes to this rule to a ridiculous degree. True, a traveler must leave home to travel and must in turn abandon the parameters that define him or her at home in order to be defined by the parameters of "traveler." But Caesar is wrong in saying travelers must abandon all notions of home, as most travelers are constantly comparing new places to home while on the road.

Caesar creates a false identity of travelers as a group of closely linked people experiencing new places together, when in fact travelers are linked only by their moniker. A traveler in Theroux's position, for example, experiences group sentiment with fellow travelers no more than he would with fellow subway riders in America—they are all in the same situation, but this identity rarely if ever progresses into group camaraderie. Caesar fails to acknowledge that while a traveler has left his or her home to travel, this home maintains every significance in a travel narrative, for it is the reference point of all descriptions, and resultant comparisons, of both places and peoples.

Theroux often compares what he encounters to the way things work in America. When he arrives in Mexico, for example, he encounters a garlic merchant screaming

advertisements for his wares and shaking bunches of garlic in the air. Theroux comments that a street salesman in America would act differently, writing, "What distinguished him as the way he carried his merchandise." Describing the "clusters of garlic bouncing on his body," Theroux writes, "Was there any better example of cultural difference than this man?" Theroux points out that for the other Mexicans, the way the garlic merchant showed off his products was nothing extraordinary. For him, however, it was remarkable. He finishes describing the episode by noting, "I would not have noticed if I hadn't been an American" (43).

In another instance in *Patagonian,* a Costa Rican train passenger asks Theroux why he isn't talking with another man on the train who is also American. Theroux's explanation is that "I did not want to see things with anyone else's eyes" (*Patagonian* 174). This sentiment reflects Theroux's desire to travel alone and in turn to develop opinions and portrayals of foreign places of his own accord. Caesar, however, stipulates that Theroux does not want to regard his home country at all. He writes, "The point of deviancy is for the traveler to see with his own eyes. It does not matter what. The more unglimpsed back home, perhaps the better (and certainly the more individual); abroad, Americans often express their dislike of other Americans" (17). It is not that Theroux wishes to ignore where he has come from, however, but simply that he wishes to maintain his own idea of America so that his depictions of other countries and how they relate to American might be fully his own.

This is not to say that Theroux does not interact with other individuals while traveling. He often engages in conversation with people living in the countries he visits, and this conversation often includes talk of what their country is like, which Theroux

then views in terms of how it differs from his country. He interacts with fellow travelers as well, usually not from a standpoint of traveler camaraderie, but from one of a situation in which two people converse, regardless of origin and current placement.

For example, Theroux engages a man named Mr. Thornberry in conversation, an interaction that consists mainly of Mr. Thornberry's description of the scenery from the train window. Mr. Thornberry says, "This scenery, it blows my mind" and Theroux writes, "Lots of things blew Mr. Thornberry's mind: the way the river thundered, the grandeur of the valley, the little huts, the big boulders, and the climate blew his mind most of all—he had figured on something more tropical" (175). The amount of personal information Theroux discloses is minimal, Mr. Thornberry's to a slightly greater degree, and yet the resultant interaction provides Theroux with more material for his narrative.

Theroux uses these interactions as fodder for his descriptions of countries and to further the othering of these countries. Through his recorded conversations with people living in these other countries, he colors his portrayal of national characters throughout Middle and South America. Holland and Huggan comment that when Theroux encounters other people and engages in conversation, he does not reflect on the interaction in sentimental terms. He instead "disarm[s] the episode of sentimental potential," cutting off its ability to develop into a feel-good experience before it starts the process (211). As a result, his interactions with other people become vignettes for dissection—small transactions laid out before his reader as further evidence of what people from other parts of the world are like.

Theroux allots quite a bit of space in his narrative to interactions with Andy Ruggles, a fellow passenger. Andy is not from any of the countries Theroux is traveling

through, so descriptions of his words and his character do not serve to characterize these nations. These glimpses into the life of another person instead characterize the nature of travel as seen through the eyes of another traveler. Theroux utilizes Andy to show that not all travelers view travel in the way he (Theroux) does; some individuals see a voyage as the sum of all its unfortunate parts. Theroux shares Andy with his readers, writing:

> As the days wore on, Andy became dispirited. Each time I saw him, he had the same complaint. "I hate this place. I don't know what it is, but I can't fight it. I change hotels so I can take a hooker in, and I ask for a quiet room. They put me in the front. Sort of louvered windows, permanently open, like the front of a Ventura. The horns, the motorcycles, the exhaust fumes—they're driving me batty. I can't close the windows, I can't sleep—I haven't even brought a girl up. I wouldn't bring a girl in there. Listen, I don't even think these girls are pretty, do you?" (*Patagonian* 191)

While Andy, who, like Theroux, is traveling by choice, views these inconveniences as unbearable, Theroux sees similar setbacks as more writing material. With Andy, Theroux does a great deal of listening, and the conversations that result aid him in showing us another type of traveler, one who is trying to escape the dullness of home only to suffer at the hands of a journey's unpredictable circumstances.

Theroux encounters many people who are native to the countries in which he is traveling, though, who provide conversations far different than those with Andy. In one instance, Theroux converses over dinner with a Panamanian architect who becomes quite enraged in his description of how the Panamanian National Guard commander has ruined his country by selling out to America. The architect explains, "Do you want to know

what Torrijos [the commander] is really like? He is like a boy who has crashed his first car. That car is our republic" (*Patagonian* 217). Again, Theroux's interaction provides material for his narrative, but this time the material helps describe the people of Panama and their sentiments over the current political situation.

Though Theroux does not readily advertise himself as American, when he interacts with people of other nations, his own American identity comes up against the identities of other cultures. These encounters make comparison between cultures easy and aid Theroux in constructing "others" out of foreign places or their people. It is also these interactions of cultures that enable Theroux to sum up other countries in short characterizations, which he takes directly from his interactions.

To fully understand how Theroux sums up a place in a description, let us examine a few instances of this in *Patagonian.* When the author travels in San Jose, for example, he sees the city as bustling with regular activity and depicts for his readers a place where people go about their business day in and day out, with no evident regard to matters elsewhere, least of all for travelers such as Theroux. He writes:

> San Jose was not really vicious, only superficially so. And yet I felt excluded from the serious, peaceable life of the city; it made my stay here seem odder than what I had experienced in Limon. It was odd in any case to be a traveler in a place where people were busily occupied: going to the dentist, buying curtains, searching for motor spares, taking their children to school, leading their lives in dedicated and innocent ways. [...] As a traveler in this settled society, I was an intruder, a stranger watching

> people go through familiar motions that I could not affect or enter into. (*Patagonian* 191)

Theroux calls San Jose "settled" in comparison to other cities he has visited on the same trip, where people have seemed restless or dissatisfied. The people of San Jose, though, seem content, and Theroux's commentary that they are as such makes sweeping generalization about the city's people. Were a traveler to America to see a great deal of obese people, his or her resultant description to a home country might result in that home country's people constructing an image of Americans as all obese. Likewise, our imagined picture of San Jose and, in turn, all the people of Costa Rica, contains only people who are content and task-oriented.

As mentioned earlier, this method of Theroux's summing up a place in a brief description may not be the most accurate method of portraying such a place to readers, but it is surely the most readily accepted. I visited Europe a few years back and saw so many average-sized women wearing tight, midriff-bearing shirts—shirts that in America are only worn by stick-thin girls—that I returned convinced that no European women loathe their bodies. While this is most likely untrue, it is an expected, encapsulated summary favored by travelers. A traveler to America would certainly make broad generalizations about the people here, and, likewise, Theroux's summaries are not uncalled for.

Coale sees these summaries in a softer light, writing, "The American romantic faith lives in Theroux's sense of travel and the self. The American Puritan tradition lives in his precise faith in language, in the ability of words to conjure up a place, a people, a continent, and attach significant meaning to them, to make them ultimately signify" (27).

Though Theroux's brief summaries might be a bit shy of conjuring, their descriptive language does serve to aptly illustrate places for his readers.

Theroux is able to easily sum up other countries because of the differences he sees there in comparison to the places he is familiar with. When his culture comes up against another, Theroux is in what Pratt calls a "contact zone," or the "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4). Pratt's term is applicable to multiple situations and is appropriate for the juxtaposition of Theroux's Americanness against the other national identities he encounters.

It is in the contact zone that othering occurs. When Theroux encounters another culture, his acknowledgement of this other culture as different from and therefore separate from his own enables him to distinguish it as "other," and in turn to use this construction of "other" to validate the existence of his own country's identity. Pratt further explains this, writing, "The term "contact zone" [is what] I use to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). Pratt's contact zone in relation to Theroux's journey in *Patagonian* is the arena in which he experiences his own American culture coming face-to-face with another culture, such as that of obvious colonialism in Colon. The city of Colon, located in the Panama Canal Zone, was under American rule at the time of Theroux's visit. He writes:

> Colon had a divided look I could never grow used to. It was colonial in such a naked way: the tenements of the poor on one side of the tracks—what passed for the native quarter—and the military symmetries of the imperial buildings on the other side, the yacht club, the offices, the houses set in gardens. Here, the governors, there, the governed. It is the old form of colonialism because, unlike the equally grasping multinational corporations that are so often invisible, you can see at a glance from the appearance of things that you are in a colony. (*Patagonian* 225)

This encounter is simple: Theroux acknowledges a colonialized structure in Colon, recognizes that this way of life differs from his own, and therefore establishes the people of Colon as "other" to his own "self" and the place of Colon as "other" to America. It is particularly interesting that the city's name is not only a form of the name "Columbus," but also the root from which the words "colonial" and "colonialism" are derived.

In Pratt's continued explanation of the contact zone, she writes:

> "Contact zone" in my discussion is often synonymous with "colonial frontier." But while the latter term is grounded within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is a frontier only with respect to Europe), "contact zone" is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. […] It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and "travelees," not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence,

> interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (7)

Pratt's description of the contact zone could be easily misread to mean more than it intends. When she describes "subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures," it is easy to envision this separation as something forced. For example, a topical reading of Pratt's theory might lend us to think she means "contact zone" to refer to persons intersecting who were previously not permitted to do so. Instead, this separation is just that—a separation—not brought about by force, but simply in existence. Theroux, for example, has been "separated" from the people of Colon for all his life. No one has held him back from visiting these people, nor have the people of Colon been forbidden from visiting Theroux in Boston. He simply has not visited their city before, nor they his, so the two have never encountered each other. Their meeting, therefore, creates a contact zone, in which Theroux, as the writer whose perspective we are entitled to, constructs of the people of Colon an "other."

Once a writer such as Theroux has encountered another culture in a contact zone, he has the opportunity to construct an "other" out of the people or places of this culture. This construction happens through representation, the actual description of a person or place through, in Theroux's case, writing that, as Caren Kaplan writes in *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement,* "produce views of the world" for readers. Kaplan explains, "Critics of ethnographic practices have maintained that writing is a kind of technology of power that exercises dominant relations through representation." This occurs, writes Kaplan, through "representational practices of all kinds, from ethnographies to popular films to postcards" (61). Following the concept of

an "other," which is understood as a validation of the self through an acknowledgement of someone, or something, who is not the self, Theroux creates descriptions that represent places for his readers that in turn foster the creation of "others" out of these places.

The person or place constructed as "other" in relation to the traveler is represented in whatever way the traveler chooses. Othering is tied closely to representation, both a precursor to and a product of it, in that a traveler has the upper hand by choosing the ways of representation of the "other." Islam writes:

> The other, positioned in the economy of need, can only emerge as an effect of othering. The true locus of this othered-other is the discursive monologue of the *same*. [...] Apart from playing the specular foil to the self-mastering subject, the othered-other, being a plastic figure without resistance, can assume any form to suit the requirement of the master. It would not have been that terrible if the othering of the other were no more than the forlorn pleas of the master for the recognition of his selfhood. (78-9)

When Theroux chooses to describe San Jose, for example, and to call it "settled," he represents this city in a way that might be obvious to only Theroux's eyes but that, through his description, becomes what we regard as an accurate portrayal of San Jose. In accordance with Islam's theory, San Jose is at Theroux's mercy; because the writer has the ability to represent a city to his liking, San Jose becomes Islam's "plastic figure without resistance," a city portrayed to Theroux's readers, and therefore constructed as "other" by Theroux and his readers, entirely based on one writer's description.

Critic Subramanian Shankar also theorizes on how travel narratives produce an

"other."

In *Textual Traffic: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Economy of the Text,* Shankar argues that

travel writing is a virtual breeding ground for sentiments of an "other." In these narratives, writes Shankar, a foreigner that the travel writer encounters is constructed as "an object to be studied" (53). Those whom Theroux encounters are indeed constructed as such, for the travel writer uses records of his interactions with these individuals to color his description of the places they call home. Shankar explains that the occurrence of othering within travel writing is not surprising, writing, "to travel [...] is most often to find oneself among Others who are already codified as different" (53). In other words, Theroux does not pass through San Jose expecting to see a city akin to Boston. By the simple fact that he is in a different city, country, and continent, Theroux expects what he sees to be different from the culture he knows at home.

Edward Said is yet another critic who often comments on the notion of representation. In an interview with Jonathan Crary and Phil Mariani, Said explains:

> Certainly representation, or more particularly the *act* of representing (and hence reducing) others, almost always involves violence of some sort to the *subject* of the representation, as well as a contrast between the violence of the act of representing something and the calm exterior of the representation itself, the *image*—verbal, visual, or otherwise—of the subject. Whether you call it a spectacular image, or an exotic image, or a scholarly representation, there is always this paradoxical contrast between the surface, which seems to be in control, and the process which produces

> it, which inevitably involves some degree of violence, decontextualization, miniaturization, etc. The action or process of representing implies control, it implies accumulation, it implies confinement, it implies a certain kind if estrangement or disorientation on the part of the one representing. (Crary, Mariani 40-1)[2]

Said argues that people and places that are represented are affected and even changed by the process of representation. In *Patagonian,* there is a certain degree of force inherent in his ability to represent places and people in a text. This force is tied in with authorial power; simply by authoring a text, Theroux is able to construct places as he chooses, and the result does, as Said says, have a degree of control inherent in it. Said explains, though, that regardless of its negative connotations, representation is an undeniable by product of being human. He says:

> Representations are a form of human economy, in a way, and necessary to life in society and, in a sense, between societies. So I don't think there is any way of getting away from them—they are as basic as language. What we must eliminate are systems of representation that carry with them the kind of authority which, to my mind, has been repressive because it doesn't permit or make room for interventions on the part of those represented. (Crary, Mariani 41-2)

It is here that Theroux's representation digresses from the norm. Though the travel writer does represent the people and places he encounters of his own accord, he does allow for a certain degree of "intervention on the part of those represented." Theroux records conversations and interactions with the people he meets in *Patagonian,* and he does so in

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[2] See Edward Said's *Orientalism* for a full discussion of representation.

a fair manner. Never do his representations appear to construct “others” in a demeaning context. Theroux often describes places in their own terms, using native words to show what a particular experience is like. For example, on a Mexican train called the “Jarocho,” Theroux explains that the name means “a boor, a rude person,” but clarifies that “it is what the Veracruzians call themselves” (63). As opposed to constructing “others” for the purpose of demeaning them, Theroux’s writing has a tone of honesty to it; when he describes San Jose as settled, for example, we can rightly assume that it appeared to him as such.

We have seen, then, how representation functions integrally with constructing of “others” and how othering can be done in regards to both people and places. Though Theroux constructs “others” out of what he encounters on his journey to Patagonia, he does so from a common standpoint. Theroux’s representation serves to bring ideas of the national identities of these countries back to his readers, not to devalue them or place them in a position of subjugation. In turn, we have seen that writers such as Theroux do and will continue to characterize other countries’ national identities even though we in America resist a national identity characterization of our own. When individuals travel, contact zones are formed as different cultures intersect for the first time, and, in Theroux’s case, as America’s identity abuts that of other countries. It is important to note Hunter’s commentary on boundaries, such as those between cultures and those within a contact zone. She argues that boundaries are important in a physical sense, but even more so in a conceptual sense (36). It is these conceptual boundaries that create “others” out of foreign countries and their people and that allow Theroux’s readers to establish their own national identity by comparison to those from whom they are different.

## Chapter 4: Crossing the Borders of Geography, Poverty, and Emptiness

If I leave my home and travel twenty minutes east, I can reach Sharon, PA, a little town known for the World's Largest Shoe Store, the World's Largest Off-Price Fashion Store, and Quaker Steak and Lube, where you can find the Best Wings in the USA. There are two routes to get to Sharon, and we usually take the highway on wing nights. Halfway there, a large sign on the side of Route 82 welcomes us to Pennsylvania, followed shortly by an advertisement for the Lube.

One weekend, though, we took the scenic route. When the road crested, revealing the city of Sharon, my fiancé looked from side to side. "We're here already? I didn't see a "Welcome to Pennsylvania" sign!" There hadn't been one. On the scenic route, with its lower speed limits and more numerous hills, the boundary between states wasn't clear. Smaller, more ambiguous touches signaled the state had changed—such as the name on the newspaper boxes—but the boundary was not announced.

In traveling to Patagonia, Theroux has a similar experience with boundaries that are present but that do not announce themselves readily. While traveling by train, Theroux watches signs announcing the names of cities where the train will stop, but he is not aware of passing physical boundaries that separate one country from the next. Rather than seeing a physical border line pass beneath the train, Theroux acknowledges the change from one country to the next by other means: the people he rides with, for example, and the levels of poverty he witnesses.

Only occasionally does Theroux notice physical differences from one country to the next. On entering Guatemala, Theroux notes an evident geographical boundary. Guatemala is partially bordered by a river, and although Theroux does not enter the

country by way of its river boundary, he still cites the river as its edge. He writes, "Guatemala had begun suddenly: a river frontier and, on the far bank, jungly cliffs and hanging vines" (*Patagonian* 96). Earlier on his journey, Theroux encountered another geographical boundary between countries: the Rio Grande, which, in Texas, separates the United States from Mexico. In this instance, though, Theroux comments less on the physical boundary between the countries and more on the ways of life that separate them. In witnessing the differences between Laredo, in Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, its no-holds-barred counterpart in Mexico, Theroux comments on how these cities and their differences represent the differences between the two countries. He writes:

> The longer I thought about it, the more Laredo seemed like all of the United States, and Nuevo Laredo all of Latin America. This frontier was more than an example of cozy hypocrisy; it demonstrated all one needed to know about the morality of the Americas, the relationship between the puritanical efficiency north of the border and the bumbling and passionate disorder—the anarchy of sex and hunger—south of it. (41-2)

In this particular instance, Theroux experiences a defined boundary between countries because the people of Laredo have chosen to keep their city free of debauchery and to exercise such rights across the river instead. Such a move results in Laredo appearing even more pure and Nuevo Laredo even more tainted, making the division between the two even more evident.

In most cases during Theroux's journey, however, no geographical boundary exists to easily set one country apart from the next. When Theroux crosses a boundary between countries that is not obvious through geographical or broad cultural differences,

he seeks to define it through less obvious differences, those on the level of individual instances and sights. For example, Theroux distinguishes Bolivia from other countries by ranking its level of "bareness" in comparison to other bare countries through which he has traveled. Upon arriving in Bolivia, he writes, "The bareness of Bolivia [...] was not the cookie crumb bareness of Mexico or the snail shell bareness of Peru or the withered aridity of Guatemala; Bolivia's bareness was the gritty undercrust of the earth, a topography of stony fossils: the topsoil had simply blown away, exposing the country to its old bones" (*Patagonian* 320). In this case, Theroux makes distinctions between several countries, all of which he considers bare, by contrasting them with one another. Though their boundaries are not physically obvious, he defines them through the countries' differences.

While Theroux travels between countries, the differences from one country to the next are sometimes obvious and sometimes less so. Often he traverses national boundaries while asleep on the train, in the shroud of darkness, or while eating and conversing with fellow passengers. As a result, one country often blurs into the next, and boundaries become slightly fictional as they are only realized when Theroux acknowledges their passing.

As these boundaries become less clear, so do the situations in which Theroux finds himself. His travel creates an aura of mystery in portions of the narrative, rendering Theroux at a loss to define exactly where he is and exactly when. This is not to say he cannot identify the country and city he is in; instead, this blurring of boundaries causes one city to look like the next, one villager to look like the next, and so on.

In one instance, Theroux witnesses a woman behaving as if she were living in a world decades in the past. He writes:

> I saw an Indian woman and decided to follow her. She wore a felt hat, the sort detectives and newspapermen wear in Hollywood movies. She had a black shawl, a full skirt, and sandals, and at the end of her rope, two donkeys. The donkeys were heavily laden with metal containers and bales of rags. But that was not the most unusual feature of this Indian woman with her two donkeys in Bogotá. Because the traffic was so bad, they were traveling down the sidewalk, past the smartly dressed ladies and the beggars, past the art galleries displaying rubbishy graphics. […] The Indian woman did not spare a glance for the paintings, but continued past the Bank of Bogotá, the plaza, […] past the curio shops with leather goods and junk carvings, and jewelers showing trays of emeralds to tourists. She started across the street, the donkeys plodding under their loads, and the cars honked and swerved, and people made way for her. […] It is as if 450 years have not happened. The woman is not walking in a city: she is walking across a mountainside with sure-footed animals. She is in the Andes, she is home. (*Patagonian* 248-9)

As Theroux watches this Indian woman weave her way through modernity while affecting the dress and customs of a time past, he experiences confusion between the past and the present that is parallel to the confusion between poverty and wealth. He sees one trait walk across the face of the other, unaware, and realizes that as this woman continues

to live in the past with little regard for the present, so do the poor live in poverty with little regard for the ways of those who are wealthy.

In creating a sense of confusion, this mystical blurring of boundaries within boundaries, Theroux employs techniques of magical realism. His doing so is particularly effective in creating a veil of mystery around his story because, due to the fact that he is traveling in South America, we cannot help recognizing the similarities between Theroux's use of magical realism and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's. It is not coincidental that Theroux uses touches of magical realism in connection with this particular journey south, through the land about which Marquez wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Theroux acknowledges Marquez while passing by Aracataca, in Columbia, where Marquez was born. Theroux identifies this city as the inspiration for Macondo, the small town in Marquez's novels, and he recalls a woman in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* who cried out at the sight of the first train to ever approach her town, "It's coming, [...] like a kitchen dragging a village behind it" (*Patagonian* 242). Now Theroux is on that frightful train, whistling through Macondo-type villages that are far less than fantasy—their poverty is real for him—and yet he has peppered his description of this journey with much of the same fantasy with which Marquez flavored Macondo.

To bring the flavor of magical realism to his work, Theroux focuses on the weather, using fogs and mists to blur and distort his surroundings. Again and again during his journey, Theroux is confronted by some scene coated in a gauzy mist or some group of people stepping forth as if out of nowhere. This taste of magical realism is present from the very start of his journey; arriving at South Station to begin his travels, Theroux writes, "My skin crinkling into crepe from the dull cold, some friends appeared.

Vapor billowed from beneath the train, so they seemed to materialize from mist, their breath trailing in clouds" (*Patagonian* 6). Again, early on his journey, Theroux encounters a fog of magical realism, this time inside the train: "I packed my pipe and set it on fire and savored the effulgent blur of lazy reflection that pipe smoke induces in me. I blew myself a cocoon of it, and it hung in clouds around me, so comforting and thick that the girl who entered the car and sat down opposite seemed wraithlike, a child lost in fog" (10). Though one or two references to such distortions might be easily ignored, their continued appearance contributes to the narrative's tone, lending mystery and uncertainty to Theroux's journey.

The trains Theroux rides seem to bring with them their own mysterious veil of fog. Mist and fog show up between train cars—"The train stopped in this haze. For several minutes, nothing happened. Then in the fog, a dim tree stump became apparent. It bled a streak of orange and this widened, a splash, increasing and staining the decayed bark like a wound leaking into a gray bandage" (*Patagonian* 16-7)—and underneath the train itself—"As I hurried down the platform, through the billows of steam from the train's underside, which gave to my arrival that old-movie aura of mystery and glory" (25).

Likewise, the cities of South America, many with tropic heat to help them, are coated in mists and auras of mystery. In one instance, Theroux writes:

> It was a brutal city, but at six in the morning a froth of fog endowed it with secrecy and gave it the simplicity of a mountain top. Before the sun rose to burn it away, the fog dissolved the dull straight lines of its streets and whitened its low houses and made its somber people ghostly as they

> appeared for moments before being lifted away, like revengers glimpsed in their hauntings. (*Patagonian* 115)

And, like the cities, the natural surroundings of South America are portrayed in a misty, magically real light: "The mountains were at first scattered buttes and solitary peaks, and some were like citadels, squarish with fortresslike buildings planted around the summits. But it was an illusion—there were no buildings. My eye, unprepared for these heights, was misled, and made the strangeness into familiar shapes" (246-7).

Theroux's use of mists and fogs extends to the clouds as well. He often finds himself traveling at such an altitude that he is actually in clouds, or in a city where clouds sit so low that they surround him. While on one train, he writes, "At the highest point in the pass, we were in cloud. Not tufts of it billowing in the genie shapes I had seen near Bogotá that morning, but a formless white vapor we had entered and become lost in" (*Patagonian* 257). And, while walking through a city, "There were times when the cloud hung so low over the city that it seemed I could reach up and peel wisps of vapor from the ceiling of the sky" (272). Not only do these constant references to fogs and mists evoke magical realism writers such as Marquez, they give Theroux and his narrative an angle from which to be examined other than mere travel writing. The places Theroux visits during his journey are misty, and he uses what he sees through this mist to make what he has to say more interesting, by coating so many of his experiences in a veil of fog.

In addition to his constant references to mists and fog that veil and blur his surroundings, Theroux coats his interactions with Borges in magically real gauze. From the moment he steps into Borges's home—"I rang the bell and was admitted by a child of

about seven"—to when he accompanies Borges around the block to dinner—"The restaurant was around the corner—I would not see it, but Borges knew the way. So the blind man led me"—Theroux is mystified, spending hours on end with the elder writer in his murky penthouse, sharing view on the world and on literature, and hardly wishing to depart (*Patagonian* 362, 372). Borges is depicted as a magical man, capable of knocking his cane against a lamppost he cannot see and reciting lines from stories he hasn't heard in decades. Theroux is, for a few days, caught in Borges' spell. The travel writer visits Borges and reads him Kipling and Poe. Soon, though, he itches to move on, and tells Borges he must pursue his destination.

Theroux's use of magical realism in his narrative is characteristic of postmodern literature, which *Patagonian* could certainly be considered, given that it was written on the border between the postmodern and contemporary eras. Critic Fredric Jameson defines postmodernism, and postmodernist literature at that, as the combination of multiple styles, techniques, or creations from past eras, rather than the creation of something new. The notion that there is nothing new left to be created, of course, causes the creation by combination of postmodernism.

From this definition of postmodernism, Jameson develops the concept of "pastiche," which dictates that "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum" (26). Jameson defines pastiche, which he calls "one of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism today," as "the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language." He distinguishes pastiche from parody, however, explaining that pastiche "is a

neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic" (24-5). We could therefore consider Theroux's use of magical realism a type of pastiche, one in which he calls to mind the work of other magical realists, such as Marquez, but in imitating such writing, intends to honor rather than make fun of what it does.

When Theroux uses magical realism to blur boundaries, he again infuses his work with a characteristic of postmodernism, the destruction of boundaries. According to Jameson, postmodernists tear down "key boundaries or separations" such as "the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture." Academics, Jameson argues, balk at this boundary destruction, for they wish to maintain the distinction between themselves, as the intellectually elite, and what Jameson calls the "schlock and kitsch" of a "*Reader's Digest* culture." Where modernists would reference texts of fellow academics to prove theories, he explains, postmodernists "incorporate" these other works into their own (23). A like phenomenon occurs in Theroux's writing; he incorporates Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* into his own story. Rather than reference it as an outside text and blatantly compare his experience to that of *Pym's* characters, Theroux physically brings the book along on his journey and allows his readers to make the connection between the dark, stormy nights in *Pym* and his own journey of uncertainty.

In accordance with postmodernism, Theroux incorporates *Pym* into his own narrative seamlessly, allowing it to work on two levels. On the surface, we have a writer on a journey who has brought along a book to read. On a second and deeper level,

Theroux's journey is the very journey Poe describes in *Pym,* with nothingness on the horizon and death threatening to creep around every corner. The passages of *Pym* Theroux chooses to include reflect his experience in *Patagonian,* and Theroux's thoughts shed light on both his own journey and the one Poe has written. The lines Theroux chooses to quote from *Pym* are vivid—"All at once, there came wafted over the ocean [...] a smell, a stench, such as the whole world had no name for"—and call to mind futility—"We plainly saw that not a soul lived in that fated vessel" (194). Theroux reflects sentiments similar to those in *Pym* when, during one night spent on a stopped train, he realizes it is futile to keep asking the conductor when the train would depart. "It was pointless to be impatient. I had to admit that this was unavoidable emptiness, a hollow zone that lay between the more graspable experiences of travel" (334). *Pym* tells a tale in Poe's ghostly melodramatic voice, and Theroux compliments this by adding melodrama to his own narrative.

Coale comments on this tendency of Theroux's to lean toward melodrama in areas of despair, writing:

> Throughout Theroux's fiction and his travel books, a pervasive existential emptiness threatens to undermine the observer and the soul. Some black house of the self shivers just beneath the surface of other quests and the speed of trains, as if the landscape were possessing it instead of the other way round. It is as if the self had become a function of what it was seeing, no longer the cause of that vision. (19)

Coale continues, writing that "in *The Old Patagonian Express* Theroux reveals this state more completely, as if he had become more self-consciously aware of the darker price of

travel, that sense of motion that is not merciful or intoxicating, thereby not sparing even himself from his careful scrutinies" (32). Theroux's revelations, both emotional and philosophical, work particularly well when coupled with reference to *Pym,* each melancholy traveler contemplating the fact that there may be only a bitter end in sight.

Though Theroux blurs many boundaries through his use of magical realism, he allows boundaries to remain obvious in other portions of his narrative, specifically those dealing with poverty. The levels of poverty Theroux witnesses from one city to the next, and between cities and trains, enable him to distinguish between classes of people, between haves and have-nots, in Central and South America. These levels of poverty also further the distinction between Theroux's home country and the countries through which he travels. In one city, he meets and initiates a conversation with three homeless boys who choose to live on the streets because of the abuse they suffer at home. He gives them money and talks awhile, but, he writes, "People passing had begun to stare at me." Theroux continues, writing, "I went away, but I did not go far. About fifteen minutes later I walked by. The children were in the doorway, lying down. They slept overlapping each other, like sardines, the smallest boy in the middle, the black boy using the flap of his jacket to keep out the cold—wrapping it around the other two" (*Patagonian* 260-1). Theroux does not encounter such scenes in Boston, and so finds the sight of three boys sleeping in a doorway quite strange and also quite indicative of the level of poverty in parts of South America.

At first, when faced with poor people and poor living conditions, Theroux isn't sure if the people acknowledge their poverty. When one man calls their ride "an old useless train," though, the author writes, "It gladdened me to know these people

recognized that the train was a piece of junk. I had thought, from their silence, that they had not noticed" (*Patagonian* 119). Although the poor people realize they are not extremely well off, they also think they are more well off than Theroux does at times. In another instance, for example, he spends some time with his new acquaintances Mario and Alfredo and gets to see the home of one of Alfredo's friends in the process. About the house, Theroux writes. "It was a number of cubicles nailed to trees, with the leafy branches depending into the rooms. Cloth was hung from sticks to provide walls, and a strong fence surrounded it" (136). Yet the people who lived in this house did not consider themselves to be poor. When the men are walking and Theroux sees a "town" of lean-tos, he asks, "Who lives there?" Mario and Alfredo respond, "Poor people" (136).

Theroux notices that as he travels through Central America, the quality of life becomes poorer the further south he goes. He writes, "The more southerly we penetrated, the more primitive and tiny became the Indian villages, the more emblematic the people: naked child, woman with basket, man on horseback, posed in the shattering sunlight before a poor mud hut" (*Patagonian* 91). Outside Guatemala City, Theroux describes the worst poverty he has seen yet on his journey: "This slum, [...] a derangement of feeble huts made out of paper and tin, was as hopeless as any I had ever seen in my life" (117). Theroux sees poverty—people sleeping outdoors, sprawling gatherings of lean-tos and shacks—in many of the cities he visits. This poverty, though, is only one portion of what he sees, and the harshness of conditions in which he witnesses people living is offset in the narrative by colorful descriptions of the surrounding natural beauty of the countries of Central and South America.

The way Theroux has interspersed scenes of poverty with scenes of other topics—such as descriptions of nature or interactions with other travelers—is uncommon. As Shankar explains, descriptions of poverty in travel narratives sometimes come to characterize a place so fully so as to obliterate all other characteristics, rendering the place synonymous with poverty itself. In his explanation, Shankar cites V.S. Naipaul's descriptions of India, in which he constructs the place in terms of beggars and gutters, even after having visited the flat of a boxwallah, an Indian executive. Writes Shankar, "Poverty," according to Naipaul's construction of India, "is so definitive of India that that which is not poor, such as the flat of the boxwallah, is not India" (134). Shankar also cites the way this all-inclusive label of "poverty" carries with it certain assumptions. One, for example, is the assumption that those who have poor incomes also have poor minds. Chastising Naipaul for calling a peasant's desire for a telephone "fantastic," Shankar argues that simply because an individual is poor does not mean he is not a strong thinker, or, in this case, that he is ignorant of the benefit of a telephone (157). Theroux, however, has gone against the norm in his portrayal of poverty and the poor. When he describes the small boys sleeping in the doorway, for instance, his description is of bright, street-smart children made poor by unfortunate circumstances, not of dumb children who know no better than to sleep in the cold.

Theroux is aware of poverty on the trains even more than on the city streets. He reasons that because the trains are a cheaper form of transportation than buses and, especially, cars, the poor passengers take the trains. On nearly every train he boards, Theroux finds his fellow passengers are, for the most part, poor. He explains, "The train held only the very poor—everyone else had taken the bus. And these were not just poor

people, but defeated people, who wore hats but no shoes and regarded not only strangers but each other with suspicion," and, of the atmosphere on one train, Theroux writes, "This was the bottom of the social scale, mainly people going to the next village—a ten-cent ride to sell a dollar's worth of bananas" (*Patagonian* 121, 103). Theroux has chosen to ride the train, though, knowing he will encounter the poor, who he considers an accurate representation of life and people in the countries he visits. He explains, "It helps to take the train if one wishes to understand. Understanding was like a guarantee of depression, but it was an approach to the truth" (103). It is this understanding that Theroux wishes to satisfy by traveling—an understanding of what another country is like by being next to its people.

The poverty present in Central and South America is not the only aspect of these regions that depresses Theroux. Another is the daunting emptiness he discovers as he nears his destination. The longer he is on the road alone, Theroux begins to become increasingly lonely. Coale explains that this revelation of travel as a solitary and lonely venture occurs often in Theroux's work. In *Patagonian,* Theroux notes that solitude's benefit is the "lucidity of loneliness," and Coale expands on this notion, explaining that within solitude, "only the self alone can see; other selves blur and distort, as do other versions of previous visions, other reports, and other prophecies and myths. Vision depends on an ultimate self-reliance, the loner's quest to see plainly" (31). Coale continues, saying that although the author's sense of self allows him the credibility of an unobstructed view, it also creates in him an isolation. Theroux, by seeking this "lucidity of loneliness," is left isolated to an almost disturbing degree. "The corollary to this romance of solitude," writes Coale, "becomes a kind of self-encapsulation, an isolation so

strong and overwhelming it suggests Hawthorne's haunted mind, the imagination becomes a passive mirror unable to rid itself of its own fears of death and self-destruction" (32). And yet Theroux often goes out of his way to maintain his solitude in the narrative, dodging potential friendships with fellow passengers and seeking hotels in towns where he won't run into the same people twice.

As he skirts these chances at companionship, Theroux becomes further mired in his loneliness. On a train, for instance, Theroux attempts to escape further questioning from a woman who has asked his reason for traveling by telling her that he is going to visit a friend. He immediately writes:

> The lie depressed me. [...] Apart from some distant relations in Ecuador, I did not know a single soul anywhere on this continent. I had been offered the addresses of people, but one of my rules of travel was to avoid looking up my friends' friends. In the past, I had done so reluctantly, and the results had been awkward, not to say disastrous. But traveling alone, a selfish addiction, is very hard to justify or explain. (*Patagonian* 265)

Though the degree to which Theroux welcomes the crushing solitude that accompanies his "lucidity of loneliness" varies daily, his appreciation of being alone so that he can write a travel narrative remains constant. He battles feelings of homesickness and regret for his decision to travel so long and so far, but he always reasons that such decisions make for good travel narratives. This reasoning, however, becomes more difficult to enforce in his mind the closer he gets to Patagonia.

When Theroux sets out from Boston to travel as far south as possible by train, it seems he can't stop smiling. Just barely south of the United States border, Theroux is

already experiencing setbacks—stuffy trains, unorganized train stations, and leaking leak-proof shoes, but he is not disheartened (*Patagonian* 46). As he comes nearer to his destination, however, the author's sentiment begins to change.

Theroux's writing evidences a futility as his journey progresses, a sense that the farther he goes, the more he regrets having gone farther and having distanced himself from his home, though doing so to the greatest possible degree was his prime intention. In one passage, Theroux tells another passenger, "I wish I were home. I have been traveling, but I keep asking myself if it is worth the trouble" (*Patagonian* 254). On another occasion, several train passengers, Theroux included, become nauseated from the altitude on one Peruvian train. A boy says, "If I had thought it was going to be anything like this, I would never have come" and Theroux replies, "You took the words out of my mouth" (292). Theroux includes such revealing bits of conversation in his narrative to portray travel in an honest light, if not necessarily a positive one. By expressing an attitude toward his travel that is at times negative and at others bored, the author challenges our position in sharing this narrative. How tempting it is, for example, to witness Theroux's wondering if his journey is worth his time and to retort, "Is reading about it worth mine?" I intend not to sound trite, but rather to point out how Theroux's attempts at honesty—his ways of sidling up to his reader to say we're all the same—are precisely what result in his being labeled sardonic and grumpy. When Theroux tells it like it really is, his prose rides a fine line between the voices of an honest, groundbreaking, realist writer and an apathetic teenager who has been dragged south by his parents.

Theroux's gradual change in attitude as the narrative progresses might be a result of the warnings of so many fellow passengers. One Argentinean says, "Patagonia! That's so far away they speak differently there. [...] I would never go to these places. I would rather stay home" (*Patagonia* 341). "Forget Esquel," says another about Theroux's destination city. "Forget Patagonia. They're ugly" (380). Even Borges quips, "There is nothing in Patagonia" (377). Theroux begins to agree. He writes, "I got the message: no one ended a journey in such a place; Esquel was where journeys began" (383).

After suffering from altitude sickness and endless delays, insufferably talkative train companions and the daily screeching warble of transistor radio music, food covered in flies and difficulties finding shelter, Theroux is ready to go home. Yes, he professed to write about the journey itself, not just the destination. But what of the destination? As *Patagonian* nears a close, Theroux becomes increasingly eager to reach the end of the line in Esquel so that he can leave the messiness of train travel behind, hop a plane and return to the comforts of home. He leaves us with the impression that he spends little if any time in Esquel; having simply arrived, he has fulfilled his goal. Perhaps Theroux does so to capitalize on his point that "I was more interested in the going and the getting there" than the actual destination (*Patagonian* 383).

While Theroux does indeed show us the value of his "poetry of departures," he ignores any sense of closure his journey might have by cutting his narrative short at the end of the train tracks. Theroux is not, after all, a wanderer. He began his journey with a destination in mind and yet ignores this destination at his arrival. Upon entering Patagonia, Theroux leaves his reader behind, denying us the description of this place that he has provided for so many other places along the way. The problem here is that his

previous descriptions seemed transitory, giving the impression they would culminate in an image of Patagonia that never comes. We are left hanging on *Patagonian's* final page with a strong sense of the "poetry of departures" but none of that of arrivals, or that of return.

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