

= Bruce Chatwin =

Charles Bruce Chatwin ( 13 May 1940 ? 18 January 1989 ) was an English travel writer , novelist , and journalist . His first book , *In Patagonia* ( 1977 ) , established Chatwin as a travel writer , although he considered himself instead a storyteller , interested in bringing to light unusual tales . He won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his novel *On the Black Hill* ( 1982 ) and his novel *Utz* ( 1988 ) was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize . In 2008 *The Times* named Chatwin # 46 on their list of " 50 Greatest British Writers Since 1945 . "

Chatwin was born near Sheffield , England . At 18 he went to work at Sotheby ' s in London , where he gained an extensive knowledge of art and eventually ran the auction house ' s Antiquities and Impressionist Art departments . In 1966 he left Sotheby ' s to read archaeology at the University of Edinburgh , but he abandoned his studies after two years to pursue a career as a writer .

*The Sunday Times Magazine* hired Chatwin in 1972 . He travelled the world for work and interviewed figures such as the politicians Indira Gandhi and André Malraux . He left the magazine in 1974 to visit Patagonia , which resulted in his first book . He produced five other books , including *The Songlines* ( 1987 ) , which was a bestseller . His work is credited with reviving the genre of travel writing , and his works influenced other writers such as William Dalrymple , Claudio Magris , Philip Marsden , Luis Sepúlveda , and Rory Stewart .

Married and bisexual , Chatwin was one of the first prominent men in Great Britain known to have contracted HIV and to have died of an AIDS @-@ related illness , although he hid the details . Following his death , the gay community criticised Chatwin for keeping his diagnosis secret .

= = Life = =

= = = Early life = = =

Bruce Chatwin was born on 13 May 1940 in the Shearwood Road Nursing Home in Sheffield , England to Margharita ( née Turnell ) and Charles Chatwin . His mother Margharita had grown up in Sheffield and worked for the local Conservative party prior to her marriage . His father Charles was a lawyer from Birmingham who joined the Royal Naval Reserve following the outbreak of World War II .

Chatwin 's early years were spent moving regularly with his mother while his father was at sea . Prior to his birth , Chatwin 's parents had lived at Barnt Green , Worcestershire , but Margharita moved to her parents ' house in Dronfield , near Sheffield shortly before giving birth . Mother and son remained there for only a few weeks . Worried about Nazi bombs , she sought a safer place to stay . Margharita took her son with her as they travelled to stay with various relatives during the war . They would remain in one place until either Margharita decided to move out of concern for their safety , or because of friction among family members . Later in life Chatwin recalled of the war , " Home , if we had one , was a solid black suitcase called the Rev @-@ Robe , in which there was a corner for my clothes and my Mickey Mouse gas mask . "

During the war Chatwin and his mother stayed at the home of his paternal grandparents , who had a curiosity cabinet that fascinated him . Among the items it contained was a " piece of brontosaurus " ( actually a mylodont , a giant sloth ) , which had been sent to Chatwin 's grandmother by her cousin Charles Milward . Travelling in Patagonia , Milward had discovered the remains of a giant sloth , which he later sold to the British Museum . He sent his cousin a piece of the animal 's skin , and members of the family mistakenly referred to it as a " piece of brontosaurus . " The skin was later lost but it inspired Chatwin decades later to visit and write about Patagonia .

After the war , Chatwin lived with his parents and younger brother Hugh ( born in 1944 ) in West Heath in Birmingham , where his father had a law practice . He was educated at Old Hall School in Shropshire and Marlborough College , in Wiltshire . An unexceptional student , he garnered attention from his performances in school plays . While at Marlborough , Chatwin attained A @-@

levels in Latin , Greek , and Ancient History .

Chatwin had hoped to read Classics at Merton College , Oxford , but the end of National Service in the United Kingdom meant there was more competition for university places . He was forced to consider other options . His parents discouraged the ideas he offered ? an acting career or work in the Colonial Service in Kenya . Instead , Chatwin 's father asked one of his clients for a letter of introduction to the auction house Sotheby 's . An interview was arranged , and Chatwin secured a job there .

= = = Art and archaeology = = =

In 1958 , Chatwin moved to London to begin work as a porter in the Works of Art department at Sotheby 's . Chatwin was ill @-@ suited for this job , which included dusting objects that had been kept in storage . Sotheby 's moved him to a junior cataloguer position working in both the Antiquities and Impressionist Art departments . This position enabled him to develop his eye for art , and he quickly became known for his ability to discern forgeries . His work as a cataloguer also taught him to describe objects in a concise manner and required that he research these objects . Chatwin advanced to become Sotheby 's expert on Antiquities and Impressionist art and would later run both departments . Many of Chatwin 's colleagues thought he would eventually become chairman of the auction house .

During this period Chatwin travelled extensively for his job and also for adventure . Travel offered him a relief from the British class system , which he found stifling . An admirer of Robert Byron and his book , *The Road to Oxiana* , he travelled twice to Afghanistan . He also used these trips to visit markets and shops where he would buy antiques which he would resell at a profit in order to supplement his income from Sotheby 's . He became friends with artists and art collectors and dealers . One friend , Howard Hodgkin , painted Chatwin in *The Japanese Screen* ( 1962 ) . Chatwin said he was the " acid green smear on the left . "

Chatwin was ambivalent about his sexual orientation and had affairs with both men and women during this period of his life . One of his girlfriends , Elizabeth Chanler , an American and a descendent of John Jacob Astor , was a secretary at Sotheby 's . Chanler had earned a degree in history from Radcliffe College and worked at Sotheby 's New York offices for two years before transferring to their London office in 1961 . Her love of travel and independent nature appealed to Chatwin .

In the mid @-@ 1960s Chatwin grew unhappy at Sotheby 's . There were various reasons for his disenchantment . Both women and men found Chatwin attractive , and Peter Wilson , then chairman of Sotheby 's , used this appeal to the auction house 's advantage when using Chatwin to try to persuade wealthy individuals to sell their art collections . Chatwin became increasingly uncomfortable with the situation . Later in life Chatwin also spoke of having become " burnt out " and said , " In the end I felt I might just as well be working for a rather superior funeral parlour . One 's whole life seemed to be spent valuing for probate the apartment of somebody recently dead . "

In late 1964 he began to suffer from problems with his sight , which he attributed to the close analysis of artwork entailed by his job . He consulted eye specialist Patrick Trevor @-@ Roper , who diagnosed a latent squint and recommended that Chatwin take a six @-@ month break from his work at Sotheby 's . Trevor @-@ Roper had been involved in the design of an eye hospital in Addis Ababa , and suggested Chatwin visit east Africa . In February 1965 , Chatwin left for Sudan . It was on this trip that Chatwin first encountered a nomadic tribe ; their way of life intrigued him . " My nomadic guide , " he wrote , " carried a sword , a purse and a pot of scented goat 's grease for anointing his hair . He made me feel overburdened and inadequate ... " Chatwin would remain fascinated by nomads for the rest of his life .

Chatwin returned to Sotheby 's and , to the surprise of his friends , proposed marriage to Elizabeth Chanler . They married on 21 August 1965 . Chatwin was bisexual throughout their married life , a circumstance Elizabeth knew and accepted . Chatwin had hoped he would " grow out of " his homosexual behaviour and have a successful marriage like his parents . During their marriage , Chatwin had many affairs , mostly with men . Some who were aware of Chatwin 's affairs with men

assumed the Chatwins had a chaste marriage but , according to Nicholas Shakespeare , the author 's biographer , this was not true . Both Chatwin and his wife had hoped to have children , but they remained childless .

In April 1966 , at the age of 26 , Chatwin was promoted to a director of Sotheby 's , a position to which he had aspired . To his disappointment , he was made a junior director and lacked voting rights on the board . This disappointment , along with boredom and increasing discomfort over potentially illegal side deals taking place at Sotheby 's , including the sale of objects from the Pitt Rivers museum collection , led Chatwin to resign from his Sotheby 's post in June 1966 .

Chatwin enrolled in October 1966 at the University of Edinburgh to study Archaeology . He had regretted not attending Oxford and had been contemplating going to university for a few years . A visit in December 1965 to the Hermitage in Leningrad sparked his interest in the field of archaeology . Despite winning the Wardrop Prize for the best first year 's work , he found the rigour of academic archaeology tiresome , and he left after two years without taking a degree .

= = = The Nomadic Alternative = = =

Following his departure from Edinburgh , Chatwin decided to pursue a career as a writer , successfully pitching a book proposal on nomads to Tom Maschler , publisher at Jonathan Cape . Chatwin tentatively titled the book *The Nomadic Alternative* and sought to answer the question " Why do men wander rather than stand still ? " Chatwin delivered the manuscript in 1972 , and Maschler declined to publish it , calling it a " chore to read . "

Between 1969 and 1972 , as he was working on *The Nomadic Alternative* , Chatwin travelled extensively and pursued other endeavours in an attempt to establish a creative career . He co-curated an exhibit on Nomadic Art of the Asian Steppes , which opened at Asia House Gallery in New York City in 1970 . He considered publishing an account of his 1969 trip to Afghanistan with Peter Levi . Levi published his own book about it , *The Light Garden of the Angel King : Journeys in Afghanistan* ( 1972 ) . Chatwin contributed two articles on nomads to *Vogue* and another article to *History Today* .

In the early 1970s Chatwin had an affair with James Ivory , a film director . He pitched stories to him for possible films , which Ivory did not take seriously . In 1972 Chatwin tried his hand at film making and travelled to Niger to make a documentary about nomads . The film was lost while Chatwin was trying to sell it to European television companies .

Chatwin also took photographs of his journeys and attempted to sell photographs from a trip to Mauritania to *The Sunday Times Magazine* . While *The Times* did not accept those photographs for publication , it did offer Chatwin a job .

= = = The Sunday Times Magazine and In Patagonia = = =

In 1972 , *The Sunday Times Magazine* hired Chatwin as an adviser on art and architecture . Initially his role was to suggest story ideas and put together features such as " One Million Years of Art , " which ran in several issues during the summer of 1973 . His editor , Francis Wyndham , encouraged him to write , which allowed him to develop his narrative skills . Chatwin travelled on many international assignments , writing on such subjects as Algerian migrant workers and the Great Wall of China , and interviewing such diverse people as André Malraux , Maria Reiche , and Madeleine Vionnet .

In 1972 , Chatwin interviewed the 93 year old architect and designer Eileen Gray in her Paris salon , where he noticed a map she had painted of the area of South America called Patagonia . " I 've always wanted to go there , " Chatwin told her . " So have I , " she replied , " Go there for me . "

Two years later , in November 1974 , Chatwin flew out to Lima in Peru and reached Patagonia a month later . He would later claim that he sent a telegram to Wyndham merely stating : " Have gone to Patagonia . " Actually he sent a letter : " I am doing a story there for myself , something I have always wanted to write up . " This marked the end of Chatwin 's role as a regular writer for *The*

Sunday Times Magazine , although in subsequent years he contributed occasional pieces , including a profile of Indira Gandhi .

Chatwin spent six months in Patagonia , travelling around gathering stories of people who came from elsewhere and settled there . This trip resulted in the book , *In Patagonia* ( 1977 ) . He used his quest for his own " piece of brontosaurus " ( the one from his grandparents ' cabinet had been thrown away years earlier ) to frame the story of his trip . Chatwin described *In Patagonia* as " the narrative of an actual journey and a symbolic one ... It is supposed to fall into the category or be a spoof of *Wonder Voyage* : the narrator goes to a far country in search of a strange animal : on his way he lands in strange situations , people or other books tell him strange stories which add up to form a message . "

*In Patagonia* contains fifteen black and white photographs by Chatwin . According to Susannah Clapp , who edited the book , " Rebecca West amused Chatwin by telling him that these were so good they rendered superfluous the entire text of the book . "

This work established Chatwin 's reputation as a travel writer . One of his biographers , Nicholas Murray , called *In Patagonia* " one of the most strikingly original postwar English travel books " and said that it revitalised the genre of travel writing . However , residents in the region contradicted the account of events depicted in Chatwin 's book . It was the first time in his career , but not the last , that conversations and characters which Chatwin presented as fact were later alleged to be fiction .

For *In Patagonia* Chatwin received the Hawthornden Prize and the E. M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters . Graham Greene , Patrick Leigh Fermor , and Paul Theroux praised the book . As a result of the success of *In Patagonia* , Chatwin 's circle of friends expanded to include individuals such as Jacqueline Onassis , Susan Sontag , and Jasper Johns .

= = = *Ouidah and the Black Hills* = = =

Upon his return from Patagonia , Chatwin discovered a change in leadership at The Sunday Times Magazine and his retainer was not continued . Chatwin intended his next project to be a biography of Francisco Félix de Sousa , a nineteenth @-@ century slave trader born in Brazil who became the Viceroy of Ouidah in Dahomey ( present day Benin ) . Chatwin had first heard of de Sousa during a visit to Dahomey in 1972 . He returned to the country , by then renamed the People 's Republic of Benin , in December 1976 to conduct research . In January 1977 a coup took place , and Chatwin was accused of being a mercenary , arrested , and detained for three days . Chatwin later wrote about this experience in " *A Coup ? A Story* , " which was published in *Granta* and included in *What Am I Doing Here* ( 1989 ) .

Following his arrest and release Chatwin left Benin and went to Brazil to continue his research on de Sousa . Frustrated by the lack of documented information on de Sousa , Chatwin chose instead to write a fictionalised biography of him . This book was published in 1980 , and Werner Herzog 's film , *Cobra Verde* ( 1987 ) , is based on it .

Although *The Viceroy of Ouidah* received good reviews , it did not sell well . Nicholas Shakespeare said that the dismal sales caused Chatwin to pursue a completely different subject for his next book . In response to his growing reputation as a travel writer Chatwin said he " decided to write something about people who never went out . " His next book , *On the Black Hill* ( 1982 ) , is a novel of twin brothers who live all of their lives in a farmhouse on the Welsh borders . For this book Chatwin won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Whitbread Prize for Best First Novel , even though he considered his previous book , *The Viceroy of Ouidah* , a novel . It was made into a film in 1987 .

In the late 1970s Chatwin spent an increasing amount of time in New York City . He continued to have affairs with men , but most of these affairs were short @-@ lived . In 1977 he began his first serious affair with Donald Richards , an Australian stockbroker . Richards introduced him to the gay nightclub scene in New York . During this period Chatwin became acquainted with Robert Mapplethorpe , who photographed him . Chatwin is one of the few men Mapplethorpe photographed fully clothed . Chatwin later contributed the introduction to a book of Mapplethorpe 's photographs , *Lady* , Lisa Lyon ( 1983 ) .

Although Elizabeth Chatwin had accepted her husband 's affairs , their relationship deteriorated in the late 1970s , and in 1980 she asked for a separation . By 1982 Chatwin 's affair with Richards had ended and he began another serious affair with Jasper Conran .

### = = = The Songlines = = =

In 1983 Chatwin returned to the topic of nomads and decided to focus on Aboriginal Australians . He was influenced by the work of Theodore Strehlow , author of Songs of Central Australia and a controversial figure . Strehlow had collected and recorded Aboriginal songs , and shortly before his death in 1978 , he sold photographs of secret Aboriginal initiation ceremonies to a magazine .

Chatwin went to Australia to learn more about Aboriginal culture , specifically the songlines or dreaming tracks . Each songline is a personal story and functions as a creation tale and a map , and each Aboriginal Australian has their own songline . Chatwin thought the songlines could be a metaphor he could use to support his ideas about humans ' need to wander , which he believed was genetic . However , he struggled to fully understand and describe the songlines and their place in Aboriginal culture . This was due to Chatwin 's approach to learning about the songlines . He spent several weeks in 1983 and 1984 in Australia , during which he primarily relied on non @-@ Aboriginal people for information . Chatwin was limited by his inability to speak the Aboriginal languages . He interviewed people involved in the Land Rights movement , and he alienated many of them because he was oblivious to the politics and also because he was an admirer of Strehlow 's work .

While in Australia , Chatwin , who had been experiencing some health problems , first read about AIDS , then known as the gay plague . It frightened him and compelled him to reconcile with his wife . The fear of AIDS also drove him to finish the book that became The Songlines ( 1987 ) . His friend the novelist Salman Rushdie said , " That book was an obsession too great for him ... His illness did him a favour , got him free of it . Otherwise , he would have gone on writing it for ten years . "

The Songlines features a narrator named Bruce whose biography is almost identical to Chatwin 's . The narrator spends time in Australia trying to learn about Aboriginal culture , specifically the songlines . As the book goes on , it becomes a reflection on what Chatwin stated was " for me , the question of questions : the nature of human restlessness . " Chatwin also hinted at his preoccupation over his own mortality in the text : " I had a presentiment that the ' travelling ' phase of my life might be passing ... I should set down on paper a resume of the ideas , quotations , and encounters that amused me and obsessed me ... " Following this statement in The Songlines Chatwin included extensive excerpts from his moleskine notebooks .

Chatwin published The Songlines in 1987 , and it became a bestseller in both the United Kingdom and the United States . The book was nominated for the Thomas Cook Travel Award , but Chatwin requested that it be withdrawn from consideration , saying the work was fictional . Following its publication , Chatwin became friends with composer Kevin Volans , who was inspired to base a theatre score on the book . The project evolved into an opera , The Man with Footsoles of Wind ( 1993 ) .

### = = = Illness and final works = = =

While at work on The Songlines between 1983 and 1986 , Chatwin frequently came down with colds . He also developed skin lesions that may have been symptoms of Kaposi 's sarcoma . After finishing The Songlines in August 1986 , Chatwin went to Switzerland , where he collapsed on the street . At a clinic there , he was diagnosed as HIV @-@ positive . Chatwin provided different reasons to his doctors as to how he might have contracted HIV , including from a gang rape in Dahomey or possibly from Sam Wagstaff , the patron and lover of Robert Mapplethorpe .

Chatwin 's case was unusual as he had a fungal infection , *Penicillium marneffei* , which at the time had rarely been seen and only in South Asia . It is now known as an AIDS @-@ defining illness , but in 1986 little was known about HIV and AIDS . Doctors were not certain if all cases of HIV developed into AIDS . The rare fungus gave Chatwin hope that he might be different and served as the basis of

what he told most people about his illness . He gave various reasons for how he became infected with the fungus ? ranging from eating a 1 @,@ 000 @-@ year @-@ old egg to exploring a bat cave in Indonesia . He never publicly disclosed that he was HIV @-@ positive because of the stigma at the time . He wanted to protect his parents , who were unaware of his homosexual affairs .

Although he never spoke or wrote publicly about his disease , in one instance he did write about the AIDS epidemic in 1988 in a letter to the editor of the London Review of Books :

" The word ' Aids ' is one of the cruellest and silliest neologisms of our time . ' Aid ' means help , succour , comfort ? yet with a hissing sibilant tacked onto the end it becomes a nightmare ... HIV ( Human Immuno @-@ Deficiency Virus ) is a perfectly easy name to live with . ' Aids ' causes panic and despair and has probably done something to facilitate the spread of the disease . "

During his illness , Chatwin continued to write . Elizabeth encouraged him to use a letter he had written to her from Prague in 1967 as an inspiration for a new story . During this trip , he had met Konrad Just , an art collector . This meeting and the letter to Elizabeth served as the basis for Chatwin 's next work . *Utz* ( 1988 ) was a novel about the obsession that leads people to collect . Set in Prague , the novel details the life and death of Kaspar Utz , a man obsessed with his collection of Meissen porcelain . *Utz* was well @-@ received and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize .

Chatwin also edited a collection of his journalism , which was published as *What Am I Doing Here* ( 1989 ) . At the time of his death in 1989 , he was working on a number of new ideas for future novels , including a transcontinental epic provisionally titled *Lydia Livingstone* .

Chatwin died at a hospital in Nice on 18 January 1989 . A memorial service was held in the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Sophia in West London on 14 February 1989 , the same day that a fatwa was announced on Salman Rushdie , a close friend of Chatwin 's , who attended the service . Paul Theroux , who also attended the service , later commented on it and Chatwin in a piece for *Granta* . The novelist Martin Amis described the memorial service in the essay " Salman Rushdie " , included in his anthology *Visiting Mrs Nabokov* .

Chatwin 's ashes were scattered near a Byzantine chapel above Kardamyli in the Peloponnese . This was close to the home of one of his mentors , the writer Patrick Leigh Fermor . Near here , Chatwin had spent several months in 1985 working on *The Songlines* .

Chatwin 's papers , including 85 moleskine notebooks , were given to the Bodleian Library , Oxford . Two collections of his photographs and excerpts from the moleskine notebooks were published as *Photographs and Notebooks* ( US title : *Far Journeys* ) in 1993 and *Winding Paths* in 1999 .

News of Chatwin 's AIDS diagnosis first surfaced in September 1988 . However , at the time of his death , obituaries referred to Chatwin 's statements about a rare fungal infection . Following his death , members of the gay community criticised Chatwin for lacking the courage to reveal the true nature of his illness , which some people think would have raised public awareness of AIDS , as he was one of the first high @-@ profile individuals in Great Britain known to have contracted HIV .

= = Writing style = =

John Updike described Chatwin 's writing as " a clipped , lapidary prose that compresses worlds into pages " , while one of Chatwin 's editors , Susannah Clapp , wrote , " Although his syntax was pared down , his words were not @-@ or at least not only @-@ plain . ... His prose is both spare and flamboyant . " Chatwin 's writing was shaped by his work as a cataloguer at Sotheby 's , which provided him with years of practice writing concise yet vivid descriptions of objects with the intention of enticing buyers . In addition , Chatwin 's interest in nomads also influenced his writing . One aspect of nomadic culture that interested him was the few possessions they had . Their spartan way of life appealed to his aesthetic sense , and it was something he sought to emulate in both his life and his writing . He strove to strip unnecessary objects from his life and unnecessary words from his prose .

In his writing Chatwin experimented with format . With *In Patagonia* , Clapp said Chatwin described the book 's structure of 97 vignettes as " Cubist . " " [ I ] n other words , " she said , " lots of small pictures tilting away and toward each other to create this strange original portrait of Patagonia . "

The Songlines was another attempt by Chatwin to experiment with format . The book begins as a novel narrated by a man named Bruce but about two @-@ thirds of the way through it becomes a commonplace book filled with quotations , anecdotes , and summaries of others ' research in an attempt to explore human restlessness . Some of Chatwin 's critics did not think he succeeded in The Songlines with this approach , although others applauded his effort at trying an unconventional structure .

Several nineteenth and twentieth century writers influenced Chatwin 's work . The work of Robert Byron had an impact on Chatwin , who admitted to imitating his style when he first began making notes of his own travels . While in Patagonia he read In Our Time by Ernest Hemingway . Chatwin admired Hemingway for his spare prose . While writing In Patagonia , Chatwin strove to approach his writing as a " literary Cartier @-@ Bresson . " Chatwin 's biographer described the resulting prose as " quick snapshots of ordinary people . " Along with Hemingway and Cartier @-@ Bresson , Osip Mandelstam 's work strongly influenced Chatwin during the writing of In Patagonia . An admirer of Noël Coward , Chatwin found the breakfast scene in Private Lives helpful in learning to write dialogue . Once Chatwin began work on The Viceroy of Ouidah , he began studying the work of nineteenth @-@ century French authors , such as Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert . These writers would continue to influence Chatwin for the remainder of his life .

= = Themes = =

Chatwin explored several different themes in his work . They include human restlessness and wandering ; borders and exile ; and art and objects .

Chatwin considered the question of human restlessness to be the focus of his writing . He ultimately aspired to explore this subject in order to answer what he believed was a fundamental question about human existence . He thought humans were meant to be a migratory species but once they settled in one place , their natural urges " found outlets in violence , greed , status @-@ seeking or a mania for the new . " In his first attempt at writing a book , The Nomadic Alternative , Chatwin had tried to compose an academic exposition on nomadic culture , which he believed was unexamined and unappreciated . With this volume Chatwin had hoped to answer the question " Why do men wander rather than sit still ? " In his book proposal he admitted that the interest in the subject was personal : " Why do I become restless after a month in a single place , unbearable after two ? "

Although Chatwin did not succeed with The Nomadic Alternative , he returned to the topic of restlessness and wandering in his subsequent books . Writer Jonathan Chatwin ( no relation ) stated that Chatwin 's works can be grouped into two categories : " restlessness defined " and " restlessness explained . " Most of his work focuses on describing restlessness , such as in the case of one twin in On the Black Hill who longs to leave home . Another example is the protagonist of Utz , who feels restless to escape to Vichy each year but always returns to Prague . Chatwin attempted to explain restlessness in The Songlines , which focused on the Aboriginal Australians ' walkabout . For this work , he returned to his research from The Nomadic Alternative .

Borders are another theme in Chatwin 's work . According to Elizabeth Chatwin , he " was interested in borders , where things were always changing , not one thing or another . " Patagonia , the subject of his first published book , is an area that is in both Argentina and Chile . The Viceroy of Ouidah is a Brazilian who trades slaves in Dahomey . On the Black Hills takes place on the borders of Wales and England . In The Songlines the characters the protagonist mostly interacts with are people who provide a bridge between the Aboriginal and white Australian worlds . The main character in Utz travels back and forth across the Iron Curtain .

" The theme of exile , of people living at the margins ... is treated in a literal and metaphorical sense throughout Chatwin 's work , " stated Nicholas Murray . He identified several examples in Chatwin 's work . There were people who were actual exiles , such as some of those profiled in In Patagonia and the Viceroy of Ouidah , who was unable to return to Brazil . Murray also cited the main characters in On the Black Hill , " although not strictly exiles ... [ they ] were exiles from the major events of their time and its dominant values . " Similarly , Murray wrote , Utz is " trapped in a society whose values are not his own but which he cannot bring himself to leave . "

Chatwin returned to the subject of art and objects during his career . In his early writing for the Sunday Times Magazine , he wrote about art and artists , and many of these articles Chatwin included in *What Am I Doing Here* . The main focus of *Utz* is on the impact the possession of art ( in this case porcelain figures ) has on a collector . *Utz* 's unwillingness to give up his porcelain collection kept him in Czechoslovakia even though he had the opportunity to live in the West . Chatwin constantly struggled with the conflicting desires to own beautiful items and to live in a space free of unnecessary objects . His distaste for the art world was the result of his days at Sotheby 's , and some of his final writing focused on this . The final section of *What Am I Doing Here* , " Tales from the Art World , " consists of four short stories on this topic . At the end of *What Am I Doing Here* , Chatwin shares an anecdote about advice he had received from Noël Coward , who told him " Never let anything artistic stand in your way . " Chatwin stated , " I 've always acted on that advice . "

= = Influence = =

With the publication of *In Patagonia* , Chatwin invigorated the genre of travel writing ; according to his biographer , Nicholas Murray , he " showed that an inventive writer could breathe new life into an old genre . " The combination of his clear yet vivid prose and an international perspective at a time when many English writers were more focused on home instead of abroad helped to set him apart . Aside from his writing , Chatwin was also good looking , and his image as a dashing traveller added to his appeal and helped make him a celebrity . In the eyes of younger writers such as Rory Stewart , Chatwin " made [ travel writing ] cool . " In *The New York Times* , Andrew Harvey wrote ,

" Nearly every writer of my generation in England has wanted , at some point , to be Bruce Chatwin ; wanted , like him , to talk of Fez and Firdausi , Nigeria and Nuristan , with equal authority ; wanted to be talked about , as he is , with raucous envy ; wanted above all to have written his books . "

Chatwin 's books also inspired some readers to visit Patagonia and Australia . As a result of his work , Patagonia experienced an increase in tourism , and it became a common sight for tourists to appear in the region , carrying a copy of *In Patagonia* . The *Songlines* also inspired readers to travel to Australia and seek out the people Chatwin had based his characters on , much to their consternation , as he had failed to disclose to these individuals his intentions .

Beyond travel , Chatwin influenced other writers , such as Claudio Magris , Luis Sepúlveda , Philip Marsden , and William Dalrymple . Nicholas Shakespeare stated that part of Chatwin 's impact was that his work was difficult to categorise and it helped " set free other writers ... [ from ] conventional boundaries . Although he was often called a travel writer , he did not identify as one nor did he consider himself a novelist . ( " I don 't quite know the meaning of the word novel , " he said ) . He preferred to call his writing stories or searches . He was interested in asking big questions about human existence , sharing unusual tales , and making connections between ideas from various sources . His friend and fellow writer Robyn Davidson said , " He posed questions we all want answered and perhaps gave the illusion they were answerable . "

= = = Posthumous Influence = = =

According to his biographer Nicholas Shakespeare , Chatwin 's work developed a cult @-@ like following in the years immediately following his death . By 1998 one million copies of his books had been sold . However , his reputation diminished following revelations about his personal life and questions about the accuracy of his work .

Questions about the accuracy of his work existed prior to his death , and Chatwin had admitted to " counting up the lies " in *In Patagonia* , though he stated there were not many . While researching Chatwin 's life , Nicholas Shakespeare stated he found " few cases of mere invention " in *In Patagonia* . Mostly , these tended to be instances of embellishment , such as when Chatwin wrote of a nurse who loved the work of Osip Mandelstam - one of his favorite authors - when in fact she was a fan of Agatha Christie . When Michael Ignatieff asked Chatwin his opinion of what divided fact from fiction , he replied , " I don 't think there is [ a division ] . "



Some individuals profiled in In Patagonia were unhappy with Chatwin 's portrayals of them . They included one man whom Chatwin insinuated was homosexual and a woman who thought her father was unjustly accused of killing Indians . However , Chatwin 's biographer found one farmer who was featured in the book who thought Chatwin 's depictions of himself and other members of his community were truthful . He stated , " No one likes looking at their own passport photograph , but I found it accurate . It 's not flattering , but it 's the truth . "

Chatwin 's bestseller , The Songlines , has been the focus of much criticism . Some critics describe his viewpoint as " colonialist " , citing his lack of interviews with Aborigines and his reliance instead on white Australians for information about Aboriginal culture . Other criticism comes from anthropologists and other researchers who spent years studying Aboriginal culture and who dismiss Chatwin 's work because he visited Australia briefly . There are others , such as writer Thomas Keneally , who believe The Songlines should be widely read in Australia , where many people had not previously heard of the songlines .

The questions about the veracity of Chatwin 's writing are compounded by the revelation of his sexual orientation and the true cause of his death . Once it became known that Chatwin had been bisexual and had died of an AIDS @-@ related illness , some critics viewed him as a liar and dismissed his work . Nicholas Shakespeare said , " His denial [ of his AIDS diagnosis ] bred a sense that if he lied about his life , he must have lied about his work . Some readers have taken this as a cue to pass judgement on his books ? or else not to bother with them . " In 2010 The Guardian 's review of Under the Sun : The Letters of Bruce Chatwin opened with the question , " Does anyone read Bruce Chatwin these days ? " However , Rory Stewart has stated , " His personality , his learning , his myths , and even his prose are less hypnotizing [ than they once were ] . And yet he remains a great writer , of deep and enduring importance . ? In 2008 The Times named Chatwin # 46 on their list of " 50 Greatest British Writers Since 1945 " .

= = = Legacy = = =

Chatwin 's name is used to sell Moleskine notebooks . Chatwin wrote in The Songlines of little black oilskin @-@ covered notebooks that he bought in Paris and which he called " moleskines " . The quotes and anecdotes he had compiled in these books serve as a major section of The Songlines . In this book Chatwin mourned the closing of the last producer of these books . In 1995 , Marta Sebergondi read The Songlines and proposed to her employer , Modo & Modo , an Italian design and publishing company , that they produce moleskine notebooks . In 1997 , the company began to sell these books and used Chatwin 's name to promote them . Modo & Modo was sold in 2006 , and the company became known as Moleskine SpA .

In 2014 the clothing label Burberry produced a collection inspired by Chatwin 's books . The following year Burberry released a limited edition set of Chatwin 's books with specially designed covers .

= = Works = =

In Patagonia ( 1977 )  
The Viceroy of Ouidah ( 1980 )  
On the Black Hill ( 1982 )  
The Songlines ( 1987 )  
Utz ( 1988 )  
What Am I Doing Here ( 1989 )

= = = Posthumously Published = = =

Photographs and Notebooks ( 1993 )  
Anatomy of Restlessness ( 1997 )  
Winding Paths ( 1998 )

= = Documentaries = =

Paul Yule , In The Footsteps of Bruce Chatwin ( 2x60 mins ) , BBC , 1999 ? Berwick Universal Pictures