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Travel writing: Always has always will be

Abstract:

Travel writing has changed over the past fifty years to reflect the fact, as Jan Morris has said, that 'nearly everyone has been nearly everywhere' (Morris 2009). In the 21st century, travel writing has become a medium for authors to investigate their own lives as much as to explore exotic destinations. Examples of this 'recording [of] the *experience* rather than the event' (Morris 2009) in travel writing include: John Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1996) and *Into Thin Air* (1997), Pico Iyer's *Global Soul* (2001), Robert MacFarlane's *The Old Ways* (2012), Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2013) and Raynor Winn's *The Salt Path* (2018). The switch to a more character-focused, experiential-based style of travel writing reflects the genre's roots in one of the world's oldest story structures, namely the journey narrative. It is through this connection that we can identify some of the universal structures behind successful contemporary travel writing; the ability to look objectively at life by placing oneself in a liminal space (Turner 1964, Mahdi 1987), and the fact that travel and narrative is in all of us through our ancestral memories of *Homo sapiens'* seventy-millennia long history of migration around the globe (Harari 2011, Mithen 2005, Tattersall 2008).

Biographical notes:

Jono Lineen was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, at the start of the 'Troubles'. He moved to Canada as a young boy and then spent almost 20 years travelling the world working as a forester, mountain guide, ski racer, humanitarian relief worker and writer. He is a curator at the National Museum of Australia. His books include *River Trilogy* (2001), *Into the Heart of the Himalayas* (2014) and *Perfect Motion* (2019). He recently completed a creative writing PhD at Griffith University.

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> Now that nearly everyone has been nearly everywhere, it might be thought that travel writers have lost their purpose. In a way they have. Only the most spectacularly perilous journey is nowadays worth writing a book about, and a public almost surfeited with TV travelogues rarely needs to be told what foreign parts look like.
>
> Ah, but what they *feel* like is something else, and in a profounder sense the best travel writers are not really writing about travel at all. They are recording the effects of places or movements upon their own particular temperaments – recording the *experience* rather than the event...
> — Jan Morris (Morris 2009)

A contemporary change in travel writing

Jan Morris' observation, that contemporary travel writing is more experientially oriented than in the past, references a significant development in the genre over the past 50 years. Historically, travel writing has been associated with the observation and analysis of distant lands (Dampier 1699, Cook 1893, Humboldt 1856, Cherry-Garrard 1922, Stark 1934, Greene 1936, Morris 1958), but as Morris states: 'nearly everyone has been nearly everywhere', and nowadays the distant lands that travel writers journey to are less destinations for external observation and more sounding boards for the ideas and feelings that evolve when we move out of our comfort zone and into the unknown.

Morris's writing itself has morphed over the 60 years she has practiced her craft, from the traditional 'climbers conquer mountain' narrative of *Coronation Everest* (1958) to the groundbreaking memoir of transitioning from James Morris to Jan Morris in *Conundrum* (1974) to her fabulously incisive investigation into how a landscape affects the character of the people who inhabit it in *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (2001).

I myself have engaged in Morris's experiential travel writing. I've written three books that could be defined as travelogues, each of them following my wanderings, but in each I've organically developed a more complex but obscured narrative purpose. In *River Trilogy* (2001) I tracked the Rhine, the Ganges and the Tatshenshini Rivers from their sources to their outlets, but my real objective was to use the Earth's rivers to highlight James Lovelock's Gaia theory by connecting the macrocosm of the Earth with the microcosm of the body. In *Into the Heart of the Himalayas* (2014), I walked 2700 kilometres solo along the length of the Western Himalayas. Initially, it was conceived as an expedition to become the first person to traverse that route. However, after years of introspection, induced by the writing process, I realised the trek was more about my coming to terms with the death of my little brother than any attempt at firstness. And my third book, *Perfect Motion* (2019), is based on a series of walks in various parts of the world: in India, Australia, Canada, Ireland, Sweden and Spain, but those rambles became a lens through which to investigate the humanity-defining power of putting one foot in front of the other over and over again.

In each of my books and in dozens of others I have read over the past two decades – including *Wild* (2013), *The Old Ways* (2012), *Into the Wild* (1996), *Into Thin Air* (1997), *Global Soul* (2001) and *The Salt Path* (2018) – the traveller/writer is not a detached witness to the world, in the traditional mode, but a character, open to change, carrying

emotional baggage, embedded within the story and deeply influenced by the landscape and environment they move through. I think of Robert Macfarlane in *The Old Ways* walking in Palestine and having the process of moving through a troubled landscape affect his political perceptions. As he said:

> Travellers to the Holy Lands have always moved through a landscape of their imagination… Western pilgrims, surveyors and cartographers found the same qualities in the Palestinian hills: barrenness, the macabre. (Macfarlane 2012: 244)

Travel moves the writer, physically and mentally, and that movement can be the start of great personal change, which in itself can be the basis of powerful writing.

Methodology

To support my hypothesis that contemporary travel writing has become one of the most flexible and pervasive forms of storytelling on the human condition and how this is a modern reflection of the ancient world's great tradition of travel narratives, I will first investigate how pervasive and flexible the journey narrative has become through an analysis of three contemporary studies of story categorisation.

Furthermore, I will explore how the exterior journey – movement beyond the comfort of home – can imitate and heighten the interior emotional journey of a story's protagonist. In doing so, I will focus on how the state of liminality, brought about through travel, can create an environment for humans to understand and recount life's great challenges.

Finally, I will show how *Homo sapiens*' 80,000-year history of migration from East Africa onto every habitable corner of the globe – simultaneously combined with the acquisition of oral language and symbolic thought – has gifted all human beings with a deeply-coded connection to story and the journey narrative in particular.

When we realise that travel did not develop as a luxury choice, but as a system of survival, then it seems only natural that the stories we thrive on reflect the conflict and resultant creativity that travel has instilled in our species.

The journey narrative: what's old is new again

With contemporary travel writing's focus on how journey affects character – as in Cheryl Strayed's coming to terms with the passing of her mother or John Krakauer's understanding of death on Everest – I perceive a deep connection with one of humankind's oldest and most pervasive story structures: the journey narrative itself. Modern travel writing is in some ways a 'back to the future' development because complex, character-oriented journey stories have been an intrinsic part of humankind's narrative repertoire for at least 4500 years. The oldest recorded story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, produced sometime around 2100 BCE is the recounting of the travels of Gilgamesh and Enkidu to the sacred cedar forest to confront Humbaba (Davis 1920). Another ancient example is Homer's 8th-century BCE *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus'

emotional, ten-year journey home from the Battle of Troy is recounted in detail. In both examples the protagonists are faced with a series of challenges that they have to overcome and learn from in the course of their journeys.

Such fictional journeys have evolved as prototypes for thousands of other stories in which characters are transformed through their exposure to unknown lands and the experiences and challenges that those new locales give rise to. The journey has developed as one of humankind's most prolific narrative frameworks and is an incredibly adaptable plot structure into which many types of story can be woven.

To understand and prove how flexible and pervasive the travel narrative is, I have studied two of the best-known story categorisation texts: Roland Tobias' *20 Master Plots* (1993) and Christopher Booker's *Seven Basic Plots* (2004), as well as the *Emotional Arcs of Story* project (Reagan et al 2016) undertaken by researchers at the University of Vermont and the University of Adelaide. In the *Emotional Arcs of Story* project 'individual happiness scores' (Reagan et al 2016: 2) were applied to over 10,000 signifying words and then software identified those words within novels drawn from Project Gutenberg's fiction collection. The researchers classified the emotional arcs of 1,737 stories and through these, the project team identified six core emotional arcs. My combining and summarising these documents produced the following table which identifies that journey narratives can be found in every story type:

Reagan et al: The emotional arcs of story	
Story type	**Story listed within the study that involves a journey**
"Rags to riches" (rise)	*Jungle Book*, *Call of the Wild*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Don Quixote*, *Pilgrim's Progress* (Reagan et al 2016: 8-S26)
"Tragedy, or Rags to Riches" (fall)	*Heart of Darkness*, *The Lost World*, *Kidnapped* (Reagan et al 2016: 8-S26)
"Man in a hole" (fall-rise)	*Treasure Island*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *Robin Hood* (Reagan et al 2016: (8-S26)
"Icarus" (rise-fall)	*Peter Pan*, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *White Fang*, *The Song of Hiawatha*, *The Land that Time Forgot* (Reagan et al 2016: 8-S26)
"Cinderella" (rise-fall-rise)	*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Three Men in Boat*, *The Diary of a Pilgrimage* (Reagan et al 2016: 8-S26)
"Oedipus" (fall-rise-fall)	*Wind in the Willows*, *The People that Time Forgot*, *The Quest of the Sacred Slipper* (Reagan et al 2016: 8-S26)
Christopher Booker: The Seven Basic Plots	
Story type	**Story listed within the study that involves a journey**
Overcoming the monster	*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Odyssey*, *Saint George and the Dragon* (Booker 2004: 21-25)

Rags to Riches	*Cinderella*, *David Copperfield*, *Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp* (Booker 2004: 51-55)
The Quest	*Aeneid*, *Divine Comedy*, *Pilgrims Progress*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Treasure Island* (Booker, 2004: 69)
Voyage and Return	*Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Booker 2004: 87-88)
Comedy	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *As You Like It* (Booker 2004: 115-19)
Tragedy	*Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* (Booker 2004: 154-169)
Rebirth	*Peer Gynt*, *The Snow Queen*, *A Christmas Carol* (Booker 2004: 198-211)
Ronald B Tobias: 20 Master Plots	
Story Type	**Story listed within the study that involves a journey**
Quest	*Don Quixote*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Tobias 1993: 71)
Adventure	*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Sea Wolf* (Tobias 1993: 86)
Pursuit	*Les Miserables*, *The French Connection*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Alien* (Tobias 1993: 97-101)
Rescue	*The Prince's Bride*, *Rapunzel*, *The Searchers* (Tobias 1993: 108-110)
Escape	*Midnight Express*, *Papillon*, *The Great Escape* (Tobias 1993: 112-13)
Revenge	*Hamlet*, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Tobias 1993:123-25)
The Riddle	*Benito Cereno*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Tobias 1993: 137-46)
Rivalry	*Billy Budd*, *Mutiny on The Bounty*, *Ben-Hur* (Tobias 1993: 150-57)
Underdog	*Joan of Arc*, *Cinderella* (Tobias 1993: 158-59)
Temptation	*Adam and Eve* (Tobias 1993: 165)
Metamorphosis	*Little Red Riding Hood* (Tobias 1993: 175)
Transformation	*The Red Badge of Courage*, *Catch-22* (Tobias 1993: 184)
Maturation	*Great Expectations*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Tobias 1993: 193)
Love	*Tristen and Isolde*, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *The African Queen* (Tobias 1993: 199-203)
Forbidden Love	*Harold and Maude*, *Romeo and Juliet* (Tobias 1993: 222-24)
Sacrifice	*Casablanca* (Tobias 1993: 232)
Discovery	*The Portrait of a Lady* (Tobias 1993: 243)
Wretched Excess	*Apocalypse Now*, *Othello* (Tobias 1993: 249)
Ascension and Descension	*Heart of Darkness*, *All the Kings Men* (Tobias 1993: 259-60)

This research highlights the flexibility of the journey narrative in each of the 32 different story structures (albeit there is some overlap in the categorisation of story types between the three different studies) and demonstrates that a journey narrative could be used to frame any story. From love to lost fortunes, riddles to rivalries, rebirths to monsters, Cinderella to Oedipus, metamorphosis to maturation, human movement has the ability to capture and progress stories across time and space.

The storyline adaptability that travel displays in the table above suggests that the journey can work as a narrative spine out of which the full spectrum of human life's challenges and emotions can evolve. The joy of love, the pain of loss, the spike of courage, the jagged edge of fear – all these emotions we relate to and feel within ourselves – emotions that work as a story's engine and are accentuated and heightened when experienced somewhere beyond the warm confines of home. One of the keys to travel's narrative universality is that the change that develops in the physical space can mirror and heighten the change that takes place in the psychological space.

The Tobias, Booker and Reagan studies highlight that travel has been a framework to tell powerful fiction stories for millennia. In the past twenty years, that character-oriented, emotion-rich structure has been adapted to contemporary non-fiction travel. Writers such as Elizabeth Gilbert, whose *Eat Pray Love* (2006) chronicles her personal story of losing and finding love across three continents; and Bill Bryson, whose *A Walk in the Woods* (1999) recounts a comedy-filled through-hike down the Appalachian Trail along the east coast of the United States, provide excellent examples of movement through the world combined with personal development, and also the popularity of the form among readers. John Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1996) is a human tragedy with spiritual overtones set on a walk into the Alaskan wilderness; Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2013), the narrative of her trek up the Pacific Crest Trail, is an 'overcoming-the-monster-story' as she tackles the demons that have haunted her since the untimely death of her mother; in *Rice Noodle Fish* (2015) Matthew Goulding goes on a quest across Japan in search of the *shokunin*, the master craftsmen behind Japanese cuisine, and in the process deeply analyses his own understanding of cultural differences; Australian travel writer Torre DeRoche's *Love With a Chance of Drowning* (2013) is a tale of transformation from fearful to fearless on a high seas long-distance yacht journey; Raynor Winn's *The Salt Path* (2018) is a 'Cinderella' (rise-fall-rise) story of a couple's resurrection after a financial and medical crisis when they decide to walk the 1000-kilometre South West Coast Path in Southern England; and *Into the Heart of the Himalayas* (2014) is my own tale of psychological rebirth brought about in the process of undertaking a very long walk in the Himalayas.

I know from personal experience, that I have consciously included increasingly more of what may have been termed 'fictional' devices in my travel storytelling over the past twenty years and I have used my journeys to highlight aspects of own life's challenges. In *Into the Heart of the Himalayas*, the pain of losing a loved one and the challenge of overcoming grief is a constant theme. In various chapters of *Perfect Motion*, I joyfully reminisce about my son learning to walk and travels with my older brother. At the same

time, I have also felt pressure from commercial editors to include these emotive elements in my travel writing because they believe that the emotions that journeys give rise to can connect the reader with story and the author in a very direct way.

Travel as a reflection of the interior journey

As Jan Morris says, the best travel writers are 'recording the experience rather than the event' and, as with the classic fictional texts listed in the categorisation studies above, the best modern travel writing ultimately intertwines the interior landscape with the exterior world. The Hollywood screenwriter Christopher Vogler has said: 'The protagonist of every story is the hero of the journey, even if the path leads into his own mind or into the realm of relationships' (Vogler 2007: 7). This interior realm is an important element in current travel literature: all of the recent travel books I have listed above use, consciously or unconsciously, the movement of the body as a metaphor or a catalyst for a psychological change within the individual. As Raynor Winn says in her book *The Salt Path* when she realises the connection between the independence of the long walk she is undertaking with her husband and the growing freedom she feels in relation to their financial and medical problems:

> Here we were still in control of our life, of our own outcomes, our own destiny. The water ran from our rucksacks as we put them on our backs. We chose to walk and seized the freedom that came with that. (Winn 2018: 240)

Or as Nan Shepherd writes in *The Living Mountain* (2008) on the connection between a long walk in the Cairngorm mountains and the psychological spaciousness it creates:

> Walking thus hour after hour, the senses keyed, one walks the flesh transparent. But no metaphor, *transparent* or *light as air*, is adequate. The body is not made negligible, but paramount. Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body…
>
> It is therefore when the body is keyed to its highest potential and controlled to a profound harmony deepening into something that resembles trance, that I discover most nearly what it is *to be*. (Shepherd 2008, emphasis in original)

Winn and Shepherd emphasise how the physical movement of the body, in both these cases into a *terra incognita*, has a transformative effect on their psychology. The movement frees them of prior conceptions and responsibilities, lets them feel their true selves and helps them understand what a new future could be.

The passage from point A to point B is a universal story structure, and as Winn and Shepherd highlight, external travel can mirror internal transformation. The emotional journey of personal change connects readers to writers by sharing the experience through a multidimensional unfolding journey. As researchers on the *Emotional Arc of Story* project said: 'Our ability to communicate relies in part upon a shared emotional experience, with stories often following distinct emotional trajectories, forming patterns that are meaningful to us' (Reagan et al 2016: 1). These emotional trajectories are

journeys in themselves and such psychological journeys are a hallmark of the best contemporary travel writing. I think again here of: Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2013) – the book's subtitle is 'A Journey from Lost to Found'; Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard* (1978) where the author's search for the snow leopard becomes a metaphor for his own quest for meaning in the wake of his wife's tragic death; John Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* (1997) investigates the psychology of Mount Everest-obsessed climbers, including himself; and the most popular piece of travel writing over the past 25 years, Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat Pray Love* (2006), is subtitled 'One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia', indicating that Gilbert's travels were much more than just geographical exploration.

Liminality

So why are the journey narrative and travel writing in all its forms so abundant, flexible and enduring? One reason might be that travel forces us to the periphery of our experience: while travelling, we are placed in situations beyond our normal understanding and this creates the perfect environment for drama and conflict – the engines of story. As Jonathan Gottschall says in his book *The Storytelling Animal*: 'if there is no knotty problem, there is no story' (Gottschall 2013: 49). Humans are uncomfortable with change and yet change is the essence of travel and story. The geographical and psychological changes involved in travel affect us, they place us in uncomfortable situations and make us assess our interior and exterior lives, and how we adapt to those changes can help redefine who we are. As Will Storr in *The Science of Storytelling* (2018) writes:

> …every story you'll ever hear amounts to 'something changed'… Unexpected change is a portal through which danger arrives to swipe at our throats. Paradoxically, however, change is also an opportunity. It's a crack in the universe through which the future arrives. Change is hope. Change is promise. It's our winding path to a more successful tomorrow. (Storr 2019: 14-15)

Anthropologists identify this state on the edge of our known and practiced world, as liminal space. Victor Turner, the renowned anthropologist, conducted a series of groundbreaking studies into liminality in the 1960s and 70s. In his paper 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage', he writes about how people in this state can be

> divested of their previous habits of thought, feeling and action. During the liminal period, neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos and the powers that generate and sustain them. (Turner qtd in Mahdi et al 1987: 14)

Being forced to think about 'society, [the] cosmos and the powers that generate and sustain [one]', is a good starting point for producing powerful writing. Turner in his liminality studies wrote extensively on pilgrimage in the Christian tradition, and recognised travel as a force that could reorder personalities. In that restructuring of the individual lies the potential for great creativity: 'undoing, dissolution, decomposition' –

these developments 'are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns' (Turner 1964: 49).

Travel transports us physically and mentally, it lets us experience a new external world and this practice refreshes and frees us to look at old beliefs and ideas in new ways. As Natalie Goldberg said, 'As writers we have to walk in the world in touch with that present, alert part of ourselves, that animal sense part that looks, sees, and notices…' (Goldberg 2010: 108). Travelling heightens our senses and makes us more conscious of our surroundings and actions.

This quality of travel to produce liminal states can be a catalytic element in the creation of powerful writing. In their book *Wired to Create* (2015) Scott Barry Kaufman and Carolyn Gregoire say:

> …openness to experience [is] more highly correlated with total creative achievement than other factors … like IQ, divergent thinking and other personality traits. Together these findings suggest that the drive for exploration, in its many forms, may be the *single most important personal factor* predicting creative achievement. (Kaufman & Gregoire 2015)

The idea of exploration, travelling to new places mentally and physically, and making the unknown known, is a key to creativity.

> Any life experience – whether traumatic or ecstatic – that diversifies our repertoire of experiences and pushes us outside of habitual thought patterns can lead to enhanced cognitive flexibility and creativity. (Kaufman & Gregoire 2015)

From my own experience this is true. A few years after my younger brother Gareth died in a tragic boating accident I moved to the Himalayas and spent eight years among those mountains, a time that culminated with a 2700-kilometre solo walk from Pakistan to Nepal through the western Himalayas. In the course of this period in the Himalayas and ultimately through this long trek I was able to come to terms with my brother's death. That trek became the basis of my book *Into the Heart of the Himalayas*. As I say on the last pages of the book:

> I thought of Gareth, completely, putting him back together piece by piece, filling out the shattered puzzle that had lain in my psyche for so long. Months of walking alone had gifted me the chance to view him from every angle, to grasp him again in an innocent embrace. He was gone but that loss, I realized now, could not destroy the love I would always have for him. (Lineen 2014: 326)

I view my coming to terms with the death of my little brother in those mountains as a creative process. I had to view him and my loss in a completely new way and free myself from the density of grief that had developed in the months and years after his passing. Breaking out of my 'everyday' life and traveling to a distant location gave me the mental and physical space in which to reconsider my relationship with Gareth and understand that this great personal loss was not an ending but one of life's great challenges, a universal trial that we all have to face and overcome.

The ability to conceive the unconceivable, to incorporate what had previously been unthinkable into the known world, is at the heart of creativity. Liminality can help create that environment and travel can be a stimulus and framework for great stories.

Travel is in all of us

Another reason why the journey narrative and travel writing are so enduringly popular and all-encompassing is that travel is an elemental part of who we are, we all have the memory of journeys deep within us. Human presence here in Australia is arguably the result of 65,000 years of migration.

Having worked in refugee camps in Africa and Asia with the humanitarian relief organisation Medecins Sans Frontieres, and having talked with and interviewed hundreds of refugees, I can attest to the stories that forced migrants bring with them. These stories have highlighted what a seismic experience involuntary relocation is for everyone caught up in it. People in those camps in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and Nepal all talked about the trauma of leaving home. Home was much more than a location, it was a network of relationships, routines and responsibilities that created stability and a framework out of which full lives were lived. The uncontrolled removal of those foundations set individuals and families adrift and the emotions that I personally experienced and witnessed in the refugee community were some of the most extreme in my life. Even today when I talk to Sierra Leoneans I know in Australia, they return to their journey narrative. Their stories are inevitably tales of incredible hardship that was only relieved when they reached their goal – with the security that Australia represented. For refugees the journey narrative is a definitive piece of their life stories.

From personal experience, I can say that not just forced migration but also voluntary migration is difficult and definitive for an immigrant's life stories. My family migrated from Northern Ireland to Canada when I was ten years old, this journey is one of the central pillars of our family narrative; a conscious move between cultures and places of opportunity. However, the great difference is that for the Lineen clan that movement was considered and deliberate, and my parents had much more control over the process than anyone who has been forced into a refugee camp. Nevertheless, it was a dislocating and stressful time. My mother still talks about my father's precarious employment situation in the first years in Canada and the difficulties of understanding a new health and education system while caring for four young children. Eventually, Canada supplanted Ireland as *home* and the tales of living 'on the edge' became part of our familial mythology, but migration is still a loaded term in our household, a concept full of emotion and unforgettable memories.

I raise the instances of forced and voluntary migration and the vivid memories and emotions both situations leave with participants as examples of how deeply the movement away from 'home' can affect anyone, but also because all our human ancestors arrived at their 'home' as a result of millennia of travel. Sometime around 80,000 years ago our *Homo sapiens* ancestors began a great migration out of Africa (Gugliotta 2008).

Researchers believe it was climate change and the subsequent elimination of food sources that forced our species off that continent (Gugliotta 2008). Over the next 70,000 years, *Homo sapiens* were engaged in a world-changing journey that by 12,000 BC saw the species settled in almost every corner of the globe including Australia and the Americas (Gugliotta 2008, Mithen 2005: 263).

This multi-millennial migration occured around the same time that *Homo sapiens* acquired oral language and symbolic behaviour, which has been described as 'a person's capacity to respond to or use a system of significant symbols' (Faules & Alexander 1978: 5) both of which are essential for the generation of complex stories. Current theories on the linked development of oral language and symbolic behaviour, have their genesis with *Homo sapiens* in Africa sometime around 100,000 years ago (Tattersall 2008: 107; Mithen 2005: 251). As the archaeologist Ian Tattersall says: 'It's only the period following about 100,000 years ago that we begin to see convincing evidence of symbolic behaviour patterns among populations we can recognise as … *Homo sapiens*' (Tattersall 2008: 107). Yuval Harari has written that '[t]he most commonly believed theory argues that accidental gene mutations changed the inner wiring of the brains of Sapiens enabling them to think in unprecedented ways and to communicate using an altogether new type of language' (Harari 2011: 21). For humanity, one of the essential ways symbolic thought processes manifest is through the capacity to mentally immerse ourselves in fictional experiences; to live in story. Story, 'develops our capacity to see from different perspectives and this capacity in turn both arises from and aids the evolution of cooperation and the growth of human mental flexibility' (Boyd 2009: 176). As Michael Corballis has said, 'Stories bind people together, and create culture' (Corballis 2015).

The group of *Homo sapiens* that left East Africa on that species-defining great march numbered between only 1,000 and 50,000 (Gugliotta 2008) yet over the next seventy millennia *Homo sapiens* settled almost every corner of the globe and rose to the apex of the evolutionary pyramid. From the personal to the species level it was the challenges posed during that world-defining journey, and the evolutionary advances that overcoming those problems gifted us, that have defined humankind. The story of *Homo sapiens*' progress, geographically, cognitively and evolutionarily, is the basis for much of what we consider today to be powerful storytelling. The human experience is one of overcoming obstacles and being transformed through the process. Hollywood screenwriter Robert McKee has said, 'The archetypal story unearths a universal human experience, then wraps itself inside a unique culture specific expression' (McKee 1997: 4). Joseph Campbell identified this structure of overcoming and progression in myths and legends around the world; he called that great archetypal story the monomyth and said that it

> will always be the one, shapeshifting yet marvelously constant story that we find together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told. (Campbell 2008: 1)

What Campbell and McKee describe is the life story of humankind between 80,000 and 5,000 BC when settled agricultural development began. For 75,000 years of *Homo sapiens*' existence we have thrived on movement, on cross-continental travel and on the

stories that have developed out of that experience; so it only makes sense that *the journey* is the narrative structure we fall back on again and again to comprehend ourselves and our place in the world.

Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrate how contemporary travel writing, which Jan Morris has described as 'recording the *experience* rather than the event...' (Morris 2009) is not an entirely new development, but has roots in one of humanity's oldest story structures, the journey narrative.

The journey narrative can be identified across almost all societies and story structures, it is prolific and adaptable, and I believe that humanity's enduring relationship with the genre has arisen out of our own evolutionary history. In the 75,000 years that *Homo sapiens* were travelling out of Africa and across continents in search of new lands they were simultaneously developing the ability to devise and recount complex stories. Oral language, symbolic behaviour and the evolution of human creativity all played a role in the development of this communal narration of universally appreciated complex stories.

When we investigate human cognition and the centrality of story in our understanding of the world, and how these qualities matured through thousands of generations of ceaseless travel, the power of the journey narrative and its current resurgence in the form of experiential travel writing should come as no surprise. I believe there is much research potential in this subject. One area, for example, which I am personally interested in, would be to study traditional journey narratives in particular communities and see how they relate to the moral parables that create ethical frameworks within those societies. From where I stand now, that study is on the horizon at the top of the next ridge.

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