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WRITING?

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Ecotourism and Environmental Concerns: The Rise of Eco-travel Writing?

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ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to broadly delve into the production of creative non-fiction travel writing within the context of contemporary environmental writing, particularly, by exploring its connection to ecotourism. Travel, according to the novelist Pico Iyer, “shows us the sights and values and issues that we might ordinarily ignore; but it also, and more deeply, shows us all the parts of ourselves that might otherwise go rusty”; thus, travelling brings in both the traveller’s subjectivity and perception, which can be a means to explore certain “political urgencies” and the “life-and-death dilemmas” (“Why we travel?” 3) that we may fail to see from our comfort zone. Environmental issues such as global warming, biodiversity loss and air pollution affect people’s attitudes and choices, and travelling is not an exception. Paradoxically, in accomplishing such an endeavour, we also contribute to the increase of our carbon footprint and environmental stress. The underlying hypothesis is that these attitudinal changes along with the current global environmental crises have a significant impact within the wider field of environmental writing and have given rise to a new sub-genre called eco-travel writing. This advances the question as to the extent current environmental concerns are reflected in contemporary writing, and how ecotourism frames the production of non-fiction travel writing that reflects on these global issues. The scope will then be narrowed down to reflect on eco-travel writing in South America, particularly to works addressing the Patagonia Region. Examples will be drawn to reflect on the contemporary state-of-the-art and examine whether this genre is developing in this part of the world.

KEYWORDS: Ecotourism, Environmental Writing, Eco-travel Writing, Creative Non-fiction

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Ecotourism is defined by *The International Ecotourism Society's* website as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES). It is regarded as one of the strongest subsets within the vast umbrella term of “alternative travelling”. Its significance lies in recognising the strong ties between travelling and the environment, having its roots as a response to the development of mass tourism in the 60's. Travelling in those years saw a significant increase due to the boom in jet engines that allowed people to reach many unknown places around the world. Although the 80's saw the advances in “green tourism” and the growing global concerns arising from several environmental organisations, it was not until the 90's that ecotourism expanded. John Swarbrooke, who has written extensively on ecotourism, argues that “...most ecotourism appears to involve travelling to destinations in developing countries. Here there is a chance to see wildlife which is different to that in the tourist's own country, and indigenous people who may appear ‘exotic’, ‘picturesque’ or even ‘primitive’ to the tourist” (318). He continues to warn the reader that “[o]ne of the problems in defining ecotourism is that it varies depending on who you are” (318). This certainly resonates with Meletis and Campbell's observation in contextualising ecotourism and waste management issues in Costa Rica:

Patterns of ecotourism development around the world are not random; ecotourism sites are systematically sited within certain types of places and communities (e.g. with attractive, “relatively unspoilt and natural” landscapes; with species of interest), many of which are marginalized communities of the Global South. Ecotourists, on the other hand, are mainly from the upper classes of the Global North. (748)

The fact that is often Euro-American individuals who have access to these holiday packages while communities of the global south struggle with the basics is not to be ignored. However, with the appropriate management, eco-tourist operators may transform the need to see the “unspoilt” into an instructive opportunity to change beliefs and practices. With these arguments in mind, the question can be advanced as to whether this pattern in ecotourism also applies to environmental writing, particularly in relation to the scope of this essay.

As stated above, behavioural and cognitive factors appear to be crucial not only for the travel destination, but also for sustaining positive environmental attitudes in the long term. It should be noted that "... interpretation (and other communication/educational experiences) should not be expected to change behaviour unless a specific behaviour is explicitly targeted and communication is designed to address attitudes relevant to that behaviour" (Stern and Powell 35). Therefore, ecotourism packages should consider this as a key element for achieving such changes in combination with the direct experience. First-hand experience appears to be crucial for British broadcaster and naturalist, Sir David Attenborough, as stated in a recent interview for *The Telegraph*:

It's very difficult to get people to protect things and work for things that they've never seen, or don't understand. People won't protect things if they don't know about them and it's very important that they should not only know about them, but understand the way they work. Human beings are dependent on the natural world for every mouthful of food and every breath they take, and they ought to be aware how dependent they are but also how precious the natural world is. (David Attenborough)

Indeed, holiday destinations such as Kenya, Tanzania, Dominican Republic, the Great Barrier Reef, the Galapagos Islands and more recently, Antarctica boosted their influx of UK tourists eager to obtain the first-hand experience after watching his documentaries. In this regard, Robert Lambert (*Sustainable Tourism*) suggests that the "Attenborough effect" foregrounds tourists as "ambassadors" responsible for raising awareness and protecting specific places. Nonetheless, one should be careful not to oversimplify that tourists' attitudes will always lead to a shift towards improved environmental behaviour on their return home, but rather see this as the first step in incorporating environmental decisions in the long term.

Human beings are constantly pushing boundaries in the quest of more stimulating and enduring adventures. Thus, we are also pushing our safe operating zone for human existence—the so-called "planetary boundaries" (see Rockström et al. 338-345) appear to have reached their limits, and conscious efforts have to be made to avoid permanent damage to the planet, but in an era of consumerism and hyper-stimulation, this entails radical behavioural changes. The continuous

arrival of tourists to more alternative destinations gives rise to “ecotourist locusts” (Swarbrooke 321): masses of disenchanting tourists that move on to another less mainstream ecotourist location only for the cycle to restart, thus undermining the positive impact that ecotourism has. At a pure environmental level, the paradox lies in the need for encouraging large masses of people to move around “seeing places” to preserve them, but in doing so, generating large carbon emissions: tourism produces around 5% of global Co2 emissions worldwide, while commercial air travel alone releases over 600 million tonnes of Co2 into the atmosphere per year accounting for 40 % of the global warming caused by the transport sector (UNEP &WTO).

ECOTOURISM IN PATAGONIA

As Meletis and Campbell indicated earlier, ecotourism appears to be quite prominent mainly in the Global South. This section will primarily look at ecotourism in Argentina and Chile, particularly in the Patagonia Region.

Comprising a vast territory of roughly over 1,000,000 km² housing mountains, lakes, pristine woods, deserts, glaciers, steppes and untouched dissimilar landscapes, Patagonia appeals to those looking for a different immersion in nature. The Perito Moreno Glacier, for instance, constitutes not only one of the major tourist attractions in Patagonia but also—and most importantly—the third largest freshwater reservoir in the world. It is not surprising for the local people—who are often unable to afford these packages—to see that such attractions are specially targeted to appeal foreign visitors. In addition, Welling, Árnason and Ólafsdóttir observe that the novelty of “glacier tourism” (635-662) deserves a close interdisciplinary examination given the unknown environmental and socio-cultural implications of this phenomenon, particularly in locations where this market is rapidly flourishing.

While there are several non-governmental international organisations and associations developing strategies that address the environmental impact of tourism, there are ones specific to ecotourism operating across the Americas. *Funeco Fundación Ecoturismo Americana*, for example, operates across Latin America with the mission of assisting in developing harmonious tourist relationships that aim at conservation while engaging with the local communities. In Argentina, for

instance, the *Asociación Argentina de Ecoturismo y Turismo Aventura* [Argentinean Association of Ecotourism and Adventure Tourism] also promotes sustainable relationships among the different actors along with a focus on the environment and heritage conservation. The tour operators advertised on their website for the Patagonia area emphasise ecotourism in their core statement, namely by targeting what appears to be specific practices to “...transmit the educational message of conservation, not just to the visitors but to the local communities living in these unspoilt areas” (see *Walk Patagonia* website).

Similarly, the Chilean National Tourism Centre (see Sernatur’s website) has developed a programme that specifically targets the environmental, socio-cultural and economic aspects of sustainable tourism within the accommodation industry by promoting sustainable certification (*Sello S*) across the country. However, probably the most iconic account of transdisciplinary research in conservation is the UNESCO Cape Horn Biosphere Reserve project. This initiative thoroughly emphasises how science and tourism can aid in biocultural conservation by developing an innovative approach looking at “miniature forests”, that is, exploring the variety of ecosystems growing on—and with—the trees (See Hargrove, Arroyo, Raven & Mooney; and Rossi, Massardo, Mansilla, Anderson et. al).

It becomes apparent that the term “ecotourism” is a key element in the tourism industry, specifically in the southernmost areas of Chile and Argentina where wildlife, conservation and various environmental issues are at stake. Although analysing the adequacy of the terminology is beyond the scope of this essay, it is essential, however, to remain critical of how the term is handled since much of its use—or rather misuse—will ultimately depend on the interest of the multiple actors involved in genuinely promoting sustainable actions.

DEFINING THE GENRE

After considering some of the main features of ecotourism, we can now begin to draw some connections with travel writing—understanding the latter as a subset of the broader genre of environmental writing, that is, forms of writing that engage critically and politically to not only denounce anti-environmental practices but also promote environmental action. Carl Thompson

defines travel writing as the record or product of the negotiation of the self and “...other that is brought about by movement through space” (10). Literature offers conflicting evidence regarding its scope since manifestations of ‘travelling’ often overlap with other genres. Despite such a broad definition, what appears to remain a consistent feature in travel writing is its responsibility for depicting and presenting not only places, but also people in an ethical way. In creative non-fiction writing, there appears to be what Lynn Bloom calls a “perennial ethical obligation to question authority, to look deep beneath the surface, and an aesthetic obligation to render their versions of reality with sufficient power to compel readers’ belief” (278). Therefore, as with ecotourism, travel writing also creates a conflict between the need of revealing the true story and marketing the place, but also poses another difficulty: writing an engaging story of a place as if it has never been written before, even when there may be hundreds of books about it.

Travelogues, memoirs, rough guides, and blogs have multiplied exponentially over recent years, and run parallel to people’s interest in the personal appraisal of the narrator rather than in facts easily retrieved from the Internet. In this regard, Timothy Clark refers to Patrick D. Murphy’s observation that the very notion of non-fiction is elusive and begs several questions: “...how much adding of second-hand material, embellishment, shaping, rewriting and so on will lead people to regard work as fictional rather than non-fiction?” (38). Similarly, Clark wonders whether environmental non-fiction may produce an instance of “armchair aesthetic consumerism”; in other words, the notion of experience as a commodity, a romantic escapism accessed effortlessly due to intensified literary artifices. Placing too much emphasis on these difficulties, however, neglects the potential of environmental writing—and particularly, travel writing—in significantly creating a positive engagement that protects “unspoilt” places.

In *Extreme Pursuits Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization*, Graham Huggan explores the extent to which the current apocalyptic global scenario impacts new ways of writing that lean towards reflecting on the environmental crisis rather than on nature itself. Though Huggan concedes that eco-travel writing may be equated to nature writing in that it confides “a degree of agency on the natural environment, recognising nature and its actors as bona fide narrative subjects rather

than illustrative vehicles for human action or expedient objects for scientific analysis or meditative thought” (53), he acknowledges a residual anthropocentrism in the way it is crafted. Indeed, eco-travel writing serves as a powerful critique towards more self-centred ways of contemporary travel writing and a counter response to colonial views.

The question of the “othering” is clearly present in travel writing. Carl Thompson outlines two possible ways of engaging in this process. The first, involves the identification of cultural differences with the other culture. The second, refers to the same process of cultural distinctions but highlighting one’s culture as superior to the “other”. Some types of travel writing and poorly managed ecotourist destinations can engage in patronising attitudes that undermine any possibility of genuine cross-cultural understanding and achieving environmental goals. Although contemporary eco-travel writing and ecotourism appear to be equally composed of a relatively small minority of white Western middle-class tourists, the genre has also developed a postcolonial turn as seen in the production of prominent writers such as Amitav Ghosh, Jamaica Kincaid, Caryl Phillips and Pico Iyer.

In summary, attempting a clear-cut definition of eco-travel writing is challenging given the overlapping with other genres and much of the debate about what counts as “travel”. However, this tension may account for the potential of the genre in developing critiques that engage in environmental and socio-cultural ecojustice beyond a mere instance of aesthetic reflection. Many of the challenges that apply to ecotourism are also relevant to eco-travel writing. If one is wary of these difficulties, a mutualistic relationship could still be achieved: one that acknowledges the benefits of ecotourism to foster environmental understandings, and of eco-travel writing as one of the many expected outcomes of the ecotourist activity.

PATAGONIA: A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION... FOR WHOM?

As with ecotourism, the Patagonia Region remains as one of the favourite destinations for travel writing and, not surprisingly, contemporary travel and nature writing has been mainly done by overseas writers instead of locals, with a few notable exceptions. The reader should be wary that while the pieces examined in this section cannot be regarded as examples of eco-tourism, they

nonetheless engage in different modes of writing about nature and travel in the Patagonia Region. These examples will range from naturalist accounts, to eco-fiction and eco-travel writing which will provide a glimpse of how the genre has developed.

In general, the trend appears to lean towards fiction—such as Francisco Coloane’s Fuegian inspired stories in *Tierra del Fuego* and *Cabo de Hornos*—and to use the natural landscape as a background instead of it being central to the story. As Araya Grandón notes regarding *Cabo de Hornos*, the author often relies on scientific disciplines to intertwine botanical, geographical, paleontological, and ethnographical concepts that ultimately “craft an organic piece of writing which fits in a larger textual *oikos*”¹ (*Un Territorio Más Allá* 42). Such seamless integration in Coloane’s narrative depicts his deep ecological understanding of the interconnections between species and account for a true interdisciplinary response in the form of eco-fiction, yet another contested sub-genre broadly defined by Dwyer as “Fiction that deals with environmental issues or the relation between humanity and the physical environment, that contrasts traditional and industrial cosmologies, or in which nature or the land has a prominent role” (*Where the Wild Books Are* 2). Araya Grandón applies the concept of symbiosis—the close relationship between two or more species often for the benefit of all the participants—to examine *Perros, Caballos y Hombres* and a section of *Cabo de Hornos* entitled *Cururo* among other works. By applying this scientific concept to the analysis of Coloane’s works, he discloses an interesting ecocritical reading of the relationship between the muleteers, their dogs and horses. The strong ties among the species reveal how humans and more-than-humans can significantly engage in productive relationships that complement each other to the extent of forming a unique entity. For Araya Grandón, Coloane’s success lies in the articulation of a southern *oikos* in which the harshness of the weather and the isolation compel participants to engage in cooperative work, which contrast to the detachment observed in large urbanised areas. This primaeval exercise challenges the sense of otherness and the nature/culture divide by incorporating the human to the natural context in a symbiotic interspecies

1 Translated by the author of this article. In the original text: “...la escritura deviene orgánica y conforma un *oikos* textual mayor...”

dynamic. The narrative weaves, then, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic devices that enhance these interconnections, as seen in *Cabo de Hornos* with the protagonists resembling seals and foxes.

Luis Sepúlveda, Chilean writer and environmental activist, is also well-known for producing works that render to ecocritical readings, such as *Story of a Seagull* and the *Cat Who Taught her to Fly* and *The World at the End of the World*. Her work *Patagonia Express* is another notable example of eco-fiction. Silvia Casini, for instance, examines how the sense of place is constructed in Sepúlveda's *Patagonia Express* and explores the intertextual connections that arise with Chatwin's iconic eco-travel piece *In Patagonia*. Casini finds that while Sepúlveda often reproduces some of the clichés of "Patagonialism" (116), namely an enticing far-away place for developing the sense of adventure where the heroic narrator feels in authority to record and reproduce the true events—much of Sepúlveda's prose incorporates elements that challenge the colonial rhetoric and deep environmental and socio-cultural concerns. The protagonist's conversation with an expert surveying forests in Los Antiguos, for instance, implicitly tackles some of the ecological issues in the area, namely deforestation: "He [the surveyor] dreams of a forest reserve supported by UNESCO. A green patrimony of humanity that allows future generations to envisage what the area was like before the so-called development dubiously arrived" (*Patagonia Express* 136)². Sepúlveda emphasises how the urge to fit in the global developed economies poses the threat of intensive logging and commercial fishing to the local systems. He introduces the story of Panchito Barría, a child who died of grief after discovering his dolphin friend was possibly slaughtered by a Russian fish boat:

On a summer morning in 1990, the dolphin did not turn up to their daily meeting. The alarmed fish men searched for him, traced the strait from end-to-end. They never found the dolphin, but they did come across a Russian fish processing ship- one of the many murderers at sea- which was sailing near the strait's second passage. Two months later, Panchito Barría died of grief. (*Patagonia Express* 120)³

2 Translated by the author of this article. In the original text: "Sueña con una reserva de bosque protegida por la UNESCO, algo así como un verde patrimonio de la humanidad que permita a las futuras generaciones soñar cómo era aquella región antes de la llegada del dudoso progreso."

3 Translated by the author of this article. In the original text: "Una mañana del verano de 1990 el delfín no acudió a la cita diaria. Alarmados, los pescadores lo buscaron, rastrearón el estrecho de extremo a extremo. No lo encontraron, pero sí se toparon con un

The story illustrates the profound complexity of interspecies relationships and the emotional impact that arises from such empathic connections. The author is critical of how the exploitation of natural resources produces short-term economic benefits with permanent consequences for the fragile southern environment. Therefore, he often portrays nature—particularly in Patagonia—as harmonious and pristine, but constantly threatened by the ever-expanding industrialisation. In the same vein as Coloane, Sepúlveda recognises the delicate balance that bonds all ecological systems and the importance of each individual participant in the broader picture, thus warning the reader of the catastrophic consequences of potential ecological imbalances.

A less contemporary example of both travel and nature writing from an explorer’s viewpoint, is *Viaje a la Patagonia Austral 1876-1877*. Francisco P. Moreno—Argentinian scientist, naturalist, and geographer rather known as Perito Moreno—is famous for his pioneering explorations in the Patagonia Region, and an early example of combining nature and travel in a narrative. In his prose, Perito Moreno emphasises the connections with the environment and the land conflict with the indigenous people. He provides a thorough account of the native flora and fauna, and at the same time, he envisages the potential use of the natural resources in this unexplored territory. Like Darwin and many other explorers, he surrenders to the wonders of the area: “These fantastic perceptions of nature along with man-made notions compel the imagination to undertake great journeys: transporting oneself in no time and blending a world of ideas with distant places” (*Viaje a la Patagonia Austral* 146)⁴. His writing epitomises the Darwinian “eye of the explorer”; the first white man to set foot in many of these now publicised locations. The modern reader may be often taken aback by the highly patronising tone of Perito Moreno’s descriptions of the indigenous communities:

barco de factoría ruso, uno de los asesinos del mar, navegando muy cerca de la segunda angostura del estrecho. A los dos meses, Panchito Barría murió de tristeza.”

4 Translated by the author of this article. In the original text: “Esas concepciones fantásticas de la naturaleza, unidas á las concepciones del hombre, obligan á la imaginación de este á emprender viajes, transportándole en un instante, combinando un mundo de ideas, á escenarios lejanos.”

It is a joy to demonstrate to the savage that amidst the barbarity of their lives, they provide unhindered hospitality to the civilised man visiting their primitive abodes. This is different from the cruel mistrust they initially experience in areas where proximity and the continuous fight amongst the races leads to ambition and desire of dominion . (*Viaje a la Patagonia Austral* 227)⁵

It becomes apparent that when writing about Patagonia a number of tensions arise: identities, aesthetics and representations enter into conflict as the writers try to reconcile the past with the present, the local with the global. This also echoes the concerns of environmental writing and postcolonial ecojustice, as Clark writes:

In contexts where international capitalism pits itself directly against traditional land use or where people may find themselves in the way of their own government's infrastructure schemes, fundamental questions are often immediately at issue about modes of life, human identity and social justice. (*The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* 120)

Fortunately, attempts can be made to produce pieces of writing that can redress these concerns and formulate ways to respond effectively; ways that engage the readers in reflecting, and most importantly, acting upon unjust representation modes.

Overall, it appears challenging to find local travel writers producing contemporary creative non-fiction about the region without being rigorously scientific or merely too environmentally oriented. As Huggan observes, writers often rely on facts in eco-travel writing to sustain their ecological advocacy, "...drawing attention toward possibilities of acting in, rather than merely upon, the natural environment..." (53), but in the broader realm of creative nonfiction, this stance-taking is so powerful that it has "the potential for being a more ethical expression of the author's ideas than seemingly objective academic articles might [be able to]" (Bloom 286); thus, it maintains the potential in achieving some real agency and reaching a broader audience.

5 Translated by the author of this article. In the original text: "La alegría que es dado demostrar á un salvaje, que en medio de la barbarie en la que transcurre su vida, no deja de dar hospitalidad, sin restricción alguna al civilizado que lo visita en su hogar primitivo, es muy diferente de la cruel desconfianza con que al principio se le trata en regiones donde la vecindad y la lucha continúa de distintas razas, se hace nacer la ambición y el deseo de predominio."

Chatwin's *In Patagonia* may have been the inspiration that many Western travel writers needed for venturing in this southernmost part of the world. For Chatwin, "The Patagonian Desert is not a desert of sand or gravel, but a low thicket of grey-leaved thorns which give off a bitter smell when crushed. Unlike the deserts of Arabia, it has not produced any dramatic excess of the spirit, but it does have a place in the record of human experience" (*In Patagonia* 19). In the same vein as Sepúlveda, Chatwin intertwines local anecdotes with broader historical narratives, thus situating his piece within a larger literary context. As Claire Lindsay points out, Chatwin's persona appears to be engaged in an intellectual nomadic exile who—unlike Sepúlveda's protagonist, who appears to be a more reliable insider—portrays his experiences in far less proximity to the subjects he encounters.

Iyer, as well, refers to Patagonia as "the most magical of all Argentina's pleasures" (*Falling Off the Map* 45) and, like Chatwin, he offers an account of his encounters with the human and more-than-human world—from Welsh settlers to colonies of penguins. His narrative flows into the various descriptions of the Argentinian idiosyncrasy that may help understand why nature in itself seems to be more a mental construct than an ongoing physical and mental concern. Maybe it is in the "miles and miles of nothingness" that the locals lose track of what really is out there and how much we need to protect it. The overwhelming vastness of Patagonia may contribute to often taking the "unnoticed background" for granted and be consumed by a feeling of tininess. As Mount observes in regards to the English day to day background, it is often outsiders who notice the peculiarities: "But, inadvertently, that background has a huge effect on the sights and sounds of everyday life. And we certainly miss it when it changes or is removed altogether" (xvii). It may be then, that any attempt to truly engage in conscious environmental activism shall come first from an understanding of human interconnections with the more-than-human scales, as seen in the "miniature forests" of Cape Horn. Paul Theroux visits Patagonia despite Borges's discouraging appeal and observes upon his arrival in Esquel:

The Patagonian paradox was this: to be here, it helped to be a miniaturist, or else interested in enormous empty spaces. There was no intermediate zone of study. Either the enormity of the desert space, or the sight of a tiny flower. You had to choose between the tiny or the vast. (*The Old Patagonian Express* 108)

Theroux's observation toys with the extremes: it overstates the emptiness of Patagonia and glosses over the multitude of life both in human and more-than-human forms. This overstatement highlights what appears to be normative use of language regarding the landscape: "The landscape lacks shape, finiteness, pattern, history" (*Imperial Eyes* 214). Theroux, as Mary Louise Pratt further argues, denounces in a "Euro-imperial fashion" what appears to be missing, underdeveloped, and primitive not only in terms of the natural surroundings, but also the human other:

The landscape had a prehistoric look, the sort that forms a painted backdrop for a dinosaur skeleton in a museum: simple terrible hills and gullies; thorn bushes and rocks; and everything smoothed by the wind and looking as if a great flood had denuded it, washed it of all its particular features. Still the wind worked on it, kept the trees from growing, blew the soil west, uncovered more rock and even uprooted those ugly bushes. The people in the train did not look out of the window, except at the stations, and only then to buy grapes or bread. One of the virtues of train travel is that you know where you are by looking out of the window. No sign-boards are necessary. A hill, a river, a meadow - the landmarks tell you how far you have come. But this place had no landmarks, or rather, it was all landmarks, one indistinguishable from the other - thousands of hills and dry riverbeds, and a billion bushes, all the same. (*The Old Patagonian Express* 397)

The Patagonian monotonousness makes Theroux rather uneasy, he not only fails to connect with the natural context but also with the people. While Sepúlveda is concerned with the detrimental consequences of development in the South, Theroux despairingly wonders whether modernisation will ever land in this part of the world. Far from connecting with the locals, their surroundings and acknowledging the ecological interconnectedness of all beings, Theroux's piece remains "a monocultural one, rather than one of openness to the experiences of people living with another

language” (*Anglos Abroad* 28). Unlike Sepúlveda and Coloane, Theroux’s rhetoric does not engage at an environmental level, but nonetheless has the potential of outlining cultural assumptions and how colonial views still have an influence on modern travel writing.

Given that the environmental crisis is composed of several interconnected layers, the foremost focus should be to address the local to then think of the global. Detaching from the “English Gentleman” rhetoric seems an essential step to start producing more contemporary non-fiction at a local scale, captivating the local audience and, in return, generating a committed understanding of the regional peculiarities—specifically, in relation to the more-than-human scales. Such an endeavour will also contribute to revitalise identity and create a sense of belonging that quite often is undermined in the attempts to cater for a broader globalised audience—in the paradoxical turn of yielding greater awareness. This also calls for entering dialogue with the indigenous communities in the South who are still suffering from displacement, and whose voices have been silenced by the government and oil and gas corporations for years.

In their narratives, Moreno, Sepúlveda, Coloane, Chatwin, Iyer and Theroux weave a variety of elements that encompass several of the issues undertaken by environmental writing: denouncing anti-environmental practices by foregrounding the importance of multispecies interconnectedness and critiquing global economic models which gloss over the fragility of local ecosystems and cultures. While not all the authors engage with the same degree of effectiveness in this practice, works like these are far from being merely descriptive: they have the potential of engaging the reader in deeper understandings of the Patagonia Region where historical, socio-cultural and environmental aspects are in continuous conversation and divergence. Most importantly, while not devoid of clichés and conventions, they promote ways of seeing the environment and relating to nature that are essential to the disentanglement of the global crisis. Though fostering ecotourism does not equate to producing more eco-travel works, this may be the first attempt in readjusting our perceptual scales, truly engaging in conservation and recognising the strong connections with the environment.

CONCLUSION

Ecotourism may very well be both an illness and a cure to raising awareness on environmental problems. Disentangling the global crisis will need assistance from several disciplines, and travel and nature writing are instrumental in creating engagement. Unfortunately, such production is imbalanced and remains within a sizable minority of Western writers. The rise of eco-travel writing by local writers is yet to be seen at a large scale in the Southern Cone, particularly in the Patagonia Region, and it begs several questions as to why this region has not developed an interest in writing about it, given that it offers such dramatic inspiration. Further enquiries should be done in what caters to the local readers and whether publishing houses see this as a niche in the market waiting to be fulfilled. Encouraging local travel and nature writers as well as international ones to engage in collaborative eco-writing may significantly spark an interest, not only in the importance of more sustainable ways of travelling, but also educating individuals to be more sensitive to environmental issues regardless of the scale.

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