

Long walks, incredible journeys: popular fantasies of escape and returning home

Caminhadas longas, jornadas incríveis: fantasias populares de fuga e de regresso a casa

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When I was 8 years old, I was taken to see a Disney movie called *The Incredible Journey* (1963). It concerns a Canadian family who are given the chance to live and work in England temporarily. In order to do so they have to leave their three pets, two dogs and a cat, in the care of a friend. A mix-up occurs and the animals are lost. What then follows is an immense trek of three pets across the plains and forests of north-west Ontario to be eventually reunited with their now returned owners many months later and nearly 400 kilometers away to the west. Disney began making films of this type (what it called “True-Life Adventures”) in 1953 with the documentary *The Living Desert*. In 1957, the same film unit switched over to making what it now called, somewhat oxymoronically, “True-Life Fantasies.” *The Incredible Journey*, based on the 1961 children’s novel of the same name by Sheila Burnford, was the fourth in a sequence of these. To an 8-year-old, the finely-developed homing instincts of cats and dogs were a source of both great delight and perplexity. Even at that age, the story only seemed to have any point, any sense of uplift, if it were true. Give or take a few moments of anthropomorphic license, its concerned voice-over by Rex Aleen appeared to make it so, but it was not. The journey was indeed incredible. When the film was remade by Disney in 1993 and retitled *Homeward Bound*, the animals were talking in the voices of famous film stars¹ and so any pretension to reflecting animals’ natural propensities had been abandoned. The change of title also proves significant.

The animal world is not short of real incredible journeys. Devotees of the Discovery and National Geographic channels will be well aware of the feats of

¹ Notably Michael J. Fox, Sally Field and Don Ameche as the three principals.

monarch butterflies migrating from the north of America to Mexico, or whales which journey across oceans and reappear off distant continents, or salmon battling upstream to spawn in the rivulets where they themselves were spawned. And there can hardly be a person alive who has not seen herds of wildebeest crossing the crocodile-strewn Masai Mara River to get to fertile grazing grounds. The species which best embodies the propensity to migration are of course birds – and in this they are aided by the gift of flight. But it is mainly the flightless variety that has been thought worthy of a feature-length movie. The French movie *March of the Penguins* is a real-life study in scarcely credible hardihood, that of Emperor penguins. The male bird stands for over 2 months protecting eggs and chicks in 40-degree-below-zero temperatures while his mate treks for about five days from the icecap to get to the ocean, where feeding can take place. Having gorged on fish, the animal returns by the same arduous route. The roles are then reversed and the female protects while the male treks and feeds. The spectacle is notable for two things: the sight of colonies of penguins huddling in intolerable blizzards with eggs balanced on their feet and the trek itself – for penguins are scarcely better at walking than they are at flying. The film substitutes a loosely poetic monologue² for Disney's often naked anthropomorphism – but generally the images speak for themselves, howsoever manipulated.

This article is concerned with two issues arising out of this and other experiences of consuming apparently true stories from both the animal and human worlds. The first is, perhaps obviously, why it should make any difference whether the story as presented is factual, given the general inadequacy of any direct correspondence theory of truth. The second is why this should apply with particular force to narratives of human and animal suffering and survival, and especially those with a motif of returning home. It appears that these stories require some form of validation from lived experience to do their work of heartening us. There are numerous examples of outraged public response when popular sympathies in the arena of identity politics have been felt to have been played upon by fantasists. The most recent case was that of the exposed NAACP black rights activist Rachel Dolezal³, who perhaps did not need to be black to do her job but who convinced herself (and the world) that she was black out of what is generally understood to be a collective identificatory association with “victims” (see Aitkenhead, 2017).

In the creative field, there are many cases of this kind of border-line fraud. In English literature, we have the work of Thomas Chatterton, the “Ossian” poet and Fitzgerald's *The Rubiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Here, few feel particularly exercised to outrage because imaginative identification is clearly at play and there are powerful creative gains in this type of imposture. However there are cases where

² French male and female actors voice the aspirations of the breeding pair of birds in the same lyrical style that the film is scored musically, that is to say, in lush emotionalism. This style was not deemed to work internationally and the voice-over of Morgan Freeman was substituted for it in the English-language version.

³ A summary of Dolezal's imposture is presented in *The Guardian* for 25th September 2017. Her attempts to present herself as a pioneering “transracial” person have been derailed by exposure of an earlier indiscretion when she sued a university for being prejudiced against her because she was white.

other dynamics are operating. Steph Lawler (2008) writes of the case of Benjamin Wilkormirski, who published a memoir in 1995, *Bruchstücke*, of his childhood in a Latvian Jewish ghetto, his time in the Nazi death camps and his subsequent experience after liberation and transportation to a Swiss orphanage. His account of this traumatic childhood became an enormous success, entailing translation into many other languages (the English version was entitled *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*) and lecture tours. The only difficulty was that despite the compelling nature of his story of survival, he was neither Jewish nor Latvian, nor had he been in a death camp. He was Bruno Grosjean, a Swiss gentile adopted by a wealthy Swiss couple. Furthermore, despite the exposure of his real origins, Grosjean publicly refused to accept that his story is fake. After addressing the usual issues of the relativity of “fact” and “fiction” in contemporary theory, Lawler asks whether in any important sense it matters that the story is invented, and concludes that some protocols have been transgressed here.

The breach of sociality that is seen to occur when people take on a fraudulent identity is another indication of the inherently social character of narrative identity. Narratives are collective in the sense that no narrative belongs to the teller alone: they must also incorporate the narratives of others. They must, as Hacking puts it, ‘mesh with the rest of the world and with other people’s stories, at least in externals’ (Hacking 1995 251). As such, they must contribute to a form of sociality in which (within certain limits) they are seen as more or less according with the knowledge, and experience and indeed the narratives of others. (Lawler, 2008, p. 43)

It is therefore in this context that I want to turn to the text which is central to my exploration of this topic. In 1956, Polish army lieutenant Slawomir Rawicz published an account of his imprisonment in a Soviet gulag and his subsequent escape in 1941 overland from northern Siberia, across the tundra in late winter, though the Gobi desert in Mongolia, across Tibet and over the Himalayas to freedom in British India. In all, his story describes a 6,500 kilometer journey lasting 10 months across some of the most hostile terrain in the world, with minimal provisions and in a poor state of health. As such, it constitutes an impressive testimony to the human spirit. Rawicz subsequently rejoined free Polish regiments in the Middle East and served out the rest of the war unscathed. After the war, he settled in Nottingham, England, where he became a technician in the School of Art and Design of Nottingham Trent University. He married Marjorie Gregory in 1947 and they had five children together. In the mid 1950s, he narrated his war experiences to a ghost writer, *Daily Mail* journalist Ronald Downing, and the result was the English text *The Long Walk* (1956). Except for the publicity around its publication in the later 1950s, Rawicz led a quiet life until his death in 2004. Since then, however, scholars have begun to look more closely at this narrative and have found it to be questionable in a number of ways. Most notably, Soviet documents which have become available over the last 10 years show that Rawicz was indeed in Gulag Camp 303 north of Irkutsk (he claims to have been gaoled for 25 years for spying, while Soviet records suggest he was imprisoned for killing an NKVD officer), but they also show that he was released much later than his declared escape period. Indeed that he was transported by train across

Siberia to a Caspian Sea port. He then was carried over that sea and released in Iran where he rejoined Polish forces. The Soviets were obviously not beyond the falsification of their own records; the problem is that this documentation is supported by statements and signatures written by Rawicz himself. Arrested when the Soviet Union was at war with Poland in 1939 and intent upon eradicating the Polish political and military leadership (cf. the massacre in Katyn in April and May 1940), Rawicz's later release was consistent with the changed priorities of the Soviet Union following Hitler's Barbarossa campaign there in 1941/2, when an amnesty for Polish combatants was announced. Later settled in Britain, Rawicz could not avoid the skepticism of others, most notably his fellow Polish nationals. According to Strandberg and O'Reilly (2011),

Rawicz met his hardest opponents at a lecture in London 1956, speaking about his book for a group of Polish ex-servicemen. While Rawicz was speaking, several men jumped up and claimed they had known the author before and during the war, that he had been in the infantry and not a cavalry officer and that his story was nothing but a lie. Rawicz never spoke again in front of his own countrymen. He claimed the hecklers were all communist agents.

Thereafter, he either claimed his memory was failing or that Downing had embellished the story, or he simply refused to answer questions about his experiences.

Nearly 40% of *The Long Walk* concerns the events leading up to Rawicz's detention, his incarceration in Lubyanka and his subsequent transportation to and life in the Siberian gulag. No one seriously contests that something like the events narrated actually occurred to Rawicz, so the detail of the book's first 100 pages gives a certain solidity to the claims of the next 160 pages. The other 60% dealing with his escape is problematically repetitive and short on specifics. In 2006, Hugh Levinson on BBC Radio produced a documentary exposing the escape as a fraud. Since 2009, at least two other Polish prisoners have come forward to claim that *The Long Walk* is based on their personal experiences. One of the more substantive of these claims, by Witold Glinski, is explored by Linda Willis in her book-length study of the escape and trek, *Looking for Mr. Smith* (2010), but ultimately it was found to have little more probity than Rawicz's. Glinski claimed that *The Long Walk* was cobbled together by Rawicz and Downing from a transcript of his Calcutta debriefing in 1942, which was obtained illicitly from the Polish Embassy in London. But other witnesses have come forward to claim Glinski was a 17-year-old schoolboy in the Kriesty settlement when the escape was supposed to have taken place. The only evidence supporting the claims is the testimony of a British Intelligence officer in India who affirms that he met three ragged emaciated men in Calcutta who declared they had escaped from Siberia. He could remember nothing about them, however, least of all their names (for the complex detail around these speculations, see Willis 2010). Thus, the veracity of all these claims and counter-claims gets lost in the fog of war and the duplicity of Cold War propaganda, for there can be no doubt that in 1956 there was a rush to embrace Rawicz's narrative as an expedient truth.

The same kind of logic that would have allowed the Soviets to liberate a man who they claimed to have killed one of their own informs the west's desire

to consume uncritically this tale of Soviet brutality and inhumanity. As it were, my enemy briefly became my friend, before once again becoming my enemy. Rawicz, as a gulag survivor settled in England, could provide the justification for the nuclear stand-off which was the Cold War. *The Long Walk* sold half a million copies worldwide on its publication and was translated into 25 languages. It was taken up by the Reader's Digest Book Club in 1958 and re-edited in a condensed form in 1960. All of this was designed to keep this text of resistance to Soviet iniquity before the wider (mostly American) public.

It is nevertheless the case that after the period 2004-2009, when Rawicz's claims were in tatters and other claimants came to the fore (all of whom had Rawicz's text before them and who could therefore reaffirm his narrative detail as their own), the story began to emerge as a valid film script. Producer Joni Levin claims that her husband read *The Long Walk* some 15 years before the film was made and suggested it to her as an idea. It took until director Peter Weir came on board for the project to become a reality. Weir is a film-maker who likes to do his own research and he immersed himself in the literature of the Soviet Gulags. He additionally interviewed 12 living survivors of Soviet incarceration. Out of this he built his concrete proposals for the film. It should be clear that Weir's involvement occurred well after the exposure of Rawicz's fraudulent narrative. Weir himself places the emphasis of his version of the story on the generalized experience of gulag survivors – he is at pains to stress that some 20 million people were sent to some 450 gulags under Stalin's regime. The particular formulation he arrived at was "Inspired by an epic true story", where perhaps the only element deemed to be factually true was the arrival of three disheveled men in India who claimed to have made the walk from central Siberia to Darjeeling. However, no one can agree on which three men, considerable doubt remains about whether three men did in fact make that claim, and we should not leave aside the question of whether the account of the journey by whomsoever related was true. The film is therefore cautiously dedicated to survivors of the gulags rather than any indeterminate long walkers. Yet considerable effort has gone into validating to some degree the veracity of the account that Rawicz presented.

The film project hired Frenchman Cyril Delafosse as a technical adviser. Delafosse was a survivalist expert who came to the attention of Weir when he made public his replication of the journey on foot from Siberia to India. The trek had not been exactly the same. Delafosse was considerably better equipped, in a much better state of health and, due to problems of travelling in the interior of China, was forced to veer around Tibet and head towards Indochina instead, thus missing much of the difficulty of the Himalayas. Despite these crucial differences, Delafosse was engaged to work with the actors, teaching them survival techniques. Originally intended to deliver a one-week training course, he remained for the entire shoot and became an advisor on the technical fundamentals of living rough. Authenticity on the project also extended to building their own version of the penal colony on location in Bulgaria. In this way, cast and crew came to feel that they were living the deprivations and hardships of the narrative.

Weir's engagement with the generalised gulag experience led to the film's major departure from its disavowed source, his interpolation of another dimen-

sion derived from his reading: his understanding that the prison community was made up of two distinct groups, politicals and criminals. Rawicz's story concerns only the enemies of the soviet state – foreign nationals and Russian dissidents and presumed dissidents. This last group extends to people whom a crass system deeded its enemies; the Mark Strong character, the actor Khabarov, is imprisoned for 10 years for playing an aristocrat sympathetically. Weir interpolates Russia's Urki, its criminal class of gangsters, in the figure of Valka, played by Colin Farrell. Neither this class nor the figure of Valka appears in *The Long Walk*, and he is certainly not one of the 6 escapees. In the film, Valka, who has the selfish demeanour of a survivor, does not make the journey beyond Siberia because in his criminal way he is a Russian patriot. The retitled work *The Way Home* is therefore only for those who have a home beyond the frontier.

Another enigmatic figure who appears in both the source and the adapted text is Mr. Smith, the American who was an engineer working on the Moscow underground when arrested by Stalin's security forces. Scholars have attempted to identify this man as someone who must have left a significant historical footprint, but without much success (Linda Willis's book is essentially devoted to discovering who he was). He was not one of the three to arrive in India as he mysteriously leaves the group at the frontier with Nepal – but he was declared to have survived the journey. There are no subsequent corroborating sightings of him. Mr. Smith is a godsend to both the book and the film – a taciturn but sympathetic American who diversifies the entourage of oddly-named Poles and Baltic state nationals, allowing Weir to cast the charismatic actor Ed Harris as a gruff version of himself.

The Slawomir Rawicz figure is replaced by the fictional Janusz Wieszczyk, played by Jim Sturgess, but there are important continuities in the story as well as important divergences. Rawicz is the hero of his own narrative, unquestionably leader of the group and its most iron-willed and competent survivalist. So is Janusz. Both the tough-minded Smith and the gangster Valka acknowledge him as the "Pakhan", the one who knows the way (in a context where geographical orientation is everything). Rawicz/Janusz is also self-sacrificing, in an environment where, as Smith tells him in the film, "Kindness. That can kill you here." The developing of a group ethic is part of both book and film, as the escapees meet and adopt a Polish girl who has fled a soviet work farm. She becomes the centre of the group's care and attention, until she succumbs to heat prostration in the Gobi Desert and dies. Yet there is one place that the film cannot follow the book and that is precisely in the area of Janusz's framing motive for escaping. In the book, Rawicz was just married before he was arrested but thereafter he never saw his wife again, presuming that she was killed in the destruction of Poland. His post-war life was made in England with remarriage and an English family. Janusz, like Rawicz, refuses to confess to spying but unlike him is testified against in court by his young wife; he understands that this was done under torture but it gives the motivation of getting back to her to tell her that he forgives her. Weir's film is therefore a conventional love story with a narrative arc of reconciliation. Slavomir Rawicz's story is a long walk to personal survival; Janusz Wieszczyk's is his way back home. This adaptation thus repeats the inflection

of the cat-and-dog melodrama *The Incredible Journey*, as it was remade as *Home-ward Bound*, shifting focus from the feat itself to the reason for the feat. This is because in our reception of the tale the motivation for the achievement must be explicitly affective, openly sentimental. Empathy with other nationals and other species requires that their motives and feeling about home be equated with ours.

A very similar feat of fact/fiction *legerdemain* was being carried out in another part of the world in the late 1950s. Alongside the contemporaneous animal and Siberian treks I have described above, factional accounts of the tumultuous event in the Middle East were being fabricated in Leon Uris's bestselling novel, entitled *Exodus* (1958). This is an epic account of the early years of the foundation of the state of Israel, and is accredited with having had an enormous propaganda value in reconciling and aligning the American public with the cause of the Jewish state. In that sense, it is the culmination of a 2,000-year-long homecoming beginning in the eponymous chapter of the bible with the captivity of the Israelites and their subsequent flight out of Egypt. Ironically for a book that was sold in 5 million copies and which had such a profound effect on public opinion, it is now largely unread and out of print. Described as a 626-page historical novel, although it was written only 10 short years after the events it narrates, *Exodus* has as a centre-piece the voyage of the ship *Exodus 1947* bearing the remnants of an abused European Jewry gathered together in the Marseille region to journey to Israel. The epic dimension is provided by the political context, where Britain, mandated by the UN to administer Palestine, was enforcing a quota system to prevent mass immigration – given the hostility of both native Palestinians and their surrounding Arab neighbours to what appeared to them to be an uncontrolled resettlement of peoples. The British navy was effectively blockading Palestinian waters to prevent the mass arrival of displaced Jews. The emergent state of Israel, in the figure of early arrivers and local fighters, was therefore conducting an insurgent campaign against Britain, in which it counted on the tacit support of public opinion in both the USA and France. In the novel, the *Exodus* tries to run the blockade, is detained by the British navy and the passengers are interned in detention camps in Cyprus. After a hunger strike organized by militant Israeli groups, which focuses principally on the suffering of children for propaganda purposes, the British are forced to relent and the ship is re-launched and sent on to its destination in Haifa harbour. The fate of the ship *Exodus* is surely a symbol for the iron will and indomitability of the Jewish people. The novel is heavy with citations from Jewish and Christian scripture predicting and celebrating the return of the chosen people to their God-given lands. Its messianic tone is reflected in its five sections, entitled “Beyond Jordan”; “The Land is Mine”, “An Eye for an Eye”, “Awake in Glory” and “With Wings as Eagles” respectively. Well, with its efforts managing to satisfy no one, and in the face of mounting hostility and problems within its own crumbling empire, notably in India, the British withdrew from Palestine and Israel went on to fight its local wars with its neighbours and to absorb its displaced peoples more or less unfettered after 1947.

Following the excitements of 1946-48, Israel quickly dropped out of the news. Leon Uris, a former war correspondent, was engaged by Edward Gottlieb, a public

relations consultant working for Jewish lobbies, to go to Palestine in the mid 1950s and study the situation. So the novel *Exodus* was written by Uris to revive flagging US interest in the Israeli cause. But here is the nub of the question for the purposes of this piece. The historical ship *Exodus 1947* (an American ship formerly called the *S.S. President Warfield* bought in Baltimore and refurbished for the mission by US Jewish interests) never delivered its consignment of refugees to their spiritual home. It was intercepted by the British navy as it entered Palestinian territorial waters, it was escorted into harbour in Haifa where its 4,515 passengers (1600 men, 1282 women and 1672 children) were immediately transferred to 3 waiting British ships and taken straight back to Marseille. The French refused to permit forcible disembarkation there and the Jewish emigrants refused to leave the ships, so they journeyed on till they reached the Hamburg area of British-occupied Germany. There they were forcibly landed and returned to internment camps. All of this took place in the glare of publicity and the British suffered the mortification of being seen to return camp survivors to the very country of their first inhuman incarceration. The real fate of the *Exodus 1947* was if anything a greater defeat for the British than its unmolested arrival in Haifa would have been. Indeed, many of the *Exodus's* passengers eventually found their way to Israel by land routes and by other vessels, but it is curious that Uris chose a totally fraudulent version of the story to be the literal flagship for the Israeli cause. What does it mean when recent history is so comprehensively rewritten to provide stirring moral propaganda? The much-covered account of the *Exodus* was scarcely a decade out of the newspapers.

Leon Uris's *Exodus* (1958) is now hardly read. Like *Gone with the Wind* (1936), the only other American novel with which it can be compared for popular success up to that time, it is both poor history and poor literature. It brings together nationalistic sentiment with religious exceptionalism. All Israeli freedom fighters are tall, chiseled and honourable; all Arabs are dirty and treacherous. The British are handsome insofar as they agree with the Israeli cause and ugly if they have any feeling for the Arabs. Most Jews who read the work understood this. Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion is reported as saying "As a literary work it isn't much. As a piece of propaganda, it's the greatest thing ever written about Israel" (cited in Burston, 2012).

Uris apparently sold the film rights to MGM before the novel was written to finance his researches and an epic movie was duly made of the novel in 1960, directed by Otto Preminger. *Exodus* the movie is almost as bad as *Exodus* the novel, despite using the talents of Dalton Trumbo as screenwriter and Paul Newman, Eva Marie Saint and Ralph Richardson as actors. At 3 hours and 20 minutes, it manages to reproduce the kitsch of the novel and adds to it some of the pomposity of the Hollywood epic. In particular, the movie score by Ernest Gold is one of the most bombastic ever produced. When America's top recording artist Pat Boone wrote lyrics to accompany the theme from *Exodus*, the value of the film as propaganda becomes apparent. It begins:

This land is mine,
 God gave this land to me.
 This brave, this ancient land to me.

This has subsequently become what Boone fittingly described as “the 2nd Jewish National Anthem”⁴. This popular invocation of God as personal arbiter of territorial disputes did not leave much hope for the future and so it has proved. Now the whole *Exodus 1947* episode has interesting echoes in the attempts of the European Union to impede the movement of refugees from Africa to Europe. Then it was west to east, now it is south to north but it is the same Mediterranean and the same issues prevail. How can one behave in a civilized and humane manner when host countries feel little or no hospitality? How can you stop desperate people from behaving desperately? In the period 1945-47, at least in the west, it was easy to represent the situation in black-and-white terms, following the revelations of the Nazi death camps. In truth, it was much less comfortingly so for the nations of the Middle East, emerging from collapsing colonial regimes, and this part of the world has come to seem an immensely intractable problem ever since.

Putting the matter in a more clearly historical context, the prominent Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said has ruefully remarked of *Exodus's* demonizing treatment of Arabs that “the main narrative model that dominates American thinking [about the Middle East] still seems to be Leon Uris’ 1958 novel ‘Exodus’” (cited Burston, 2012). Seen from the other side of the political divide, Jerome A. Chanes (2011) puts the case more positively “*Exodus*, by validating Jewish peoplehood, validated Jews everywhere; more important, it popularized Jewish empowerment”, adding that the novel was “just what we needed at the time – the Americanization of Zionism and Israel.” Indeed, it was critical for this purpose that Uris turn failure into success, before marketing it as such to his American audiences. It was not enough for the empowerment Chanes talks about that the voyage of the *Exodus* be a propaganda success for the Israeli cause; it had to be mission accomplished in a strictly American understanding of winning and losing as well.

Perhaps the onset of the Cold War was a particularly susceptible historical period, when truth (even allowing for a great deal of latitude in determining exactly what that might be) was universally distorted for political gains. Governments, other lobbies and powerful interests groups were prepared to embrace tall stories for both good publicity and for commercial ends. Perhaps the 2nd World War, as Orwell’s work of the war and postwar years suggests, got us all well used to being lied to. An alternative explanation also suggests itself, that, more charitably, the war and its aftermath created so much upheaval, so many real desperate stories, so many tales of personal hardship, that it was genuinely difficult to pick the straight from the manipulated story. Or maybe we just didn’t want to. As the famous line from John Ford’s *The Man Who Shot Liberty Vallance* (1963) affirms, in the western about myth trumping truth which appeared in the same year as the film of *The Incredible Journey*, when you have choose between printing the truth and printing the legend, one should print the legend. In the

⁴ As reported in *The Jerusalem Post* for 2nd October 2010, under the headline “Pat Boone’s Christmas Present to the Jews”, where Boone goes on to explain the impact of his lyrics on Israel’s national imaginary.

Cold War texts cited in this article, the lie also happened to coincide with one of our deepest longing in times of strife, the desire to go home.

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Abstract

In 1956, Slawomir Rawicz published an account of his daring escape from a Soviet gulag in 1941 which led to a 6,500 kilometer trek across Siberia, Mongolia, Tibet and through the Himalayas to freedom eleven months later in British India. *The Long Walk* was translated into 25 languages and sold over half a million copies worldwide. This was a Cold War text for *Reader's Digest* to get behind and behind it they got. In 2010, it was made into a film called *The Way Back*, directed by Peter Weir and produced and distributed by National Geographic. In 1961, Sheila Burnford published *The Incredible Journey* about the 400 kilometer trip across the Canadian wilderness of three animals, two dogs and a cat, to be reunited with their owners. The story was taken up by Disney in 1963 as a feature film and marketed confusingly as a "True-Life Fantasy." It was remade by Disney in 1993 as *Homeward Bound: the Incredible Journey*. What these two books and three films have in common is that they are not true as told, perhaps not true in any useful sense. So what is it about such narratives that makes us want to believe in them? The film critic J. Hoberman recognized *The Way Back* in 2011 as part of a newly emerging genre, the drama of attrition, where comfortable audiences can enjoy the spectacle of protracted suffering providing it leads to some uplifting outcome. *The Revenant* (2015) for instance shows that the genre has finally been noticed and celebrated by the academy. This article looks at the appeal of the attritional epic

journey, also referencing Leon Uris's *Exodus*, the novel (1958) and film version (1960) of which fell between Rawicz's and Burnside's books.

Resumo

Em 1956, Slawomir Rawicz publicou um relato de sua ousada fuga de um gulag soviético em 1941, que levou a uma caminhada de 6.500 quilômetros na Sibéria, Mongólia, Tibete e através do Himalaia até a liberdade, onze meses depois, na Índia do império britânico. *The Long Walk* foi traduzido para 25 idiomas e vendeu mais de meio milhão de cópias em todo o mundo. Este era um texto da época da Guerra Fria para o Reader's Digest apoiar, e realmente foi bem apoiado. Em 2010, foi transformado em um filme chamado *The Way Back*, realizado por Peter Weir e produzido e distribuído pela National Geographic. Em 1961, Sheila Burnford publicou *The Incredible Journey* sobre a viagem de 400 quilômetros pela tundra canadense de três animais, dois cães e um gato, para se reunir com seus donos. A história foi adotada pela Disney em 1963 como uma longa-metragem e comercializada de forma confusa como uma "Fantasia da Vida Verdadeira". Ela foi refeita pela Disney em 1993 como *Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey*. O que esses dois livros e três filmes têm em comum é que eles não são verdadeiros como disseram, talvez não sejam verdade em qualquer sentido útil. Então, o que há nessas narrativas que nos fazem querer acreditar nelas? O crítico de cinema J. Hoberman reconheceu *The Way Back* em 2011 como parte de um genero recentemente emergente, o drama do atrito, onde um público confortável pode desfrutar do espetáculo do sofrimento prolongado, desde que ele leve a algum resultado edificante. *The Revenant* (2015), por exemplo, mostra que o genero finalmente foi notado e celebrado pela academia. Este artigo analisa o apelo da viagem épica atritiva, referindo também *Exodus* de Leon Uris, a novela (1958) e a versão cinematográfica (1960), entre os livros de Rawicz e Burnside.