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Born to Run: Literary Journalism in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This final degree dissertation explores *Born to Run* (2009), a book by Christopher McDougall, as a Literary Journalism Novel. The main focus of the paper is the analysis of an example of Literary Journalism in the Twenty-first Century.

This paper is divided into five sections with sections three and four divided into four and three respectively. The first section is an introduction to the project. The second is an introduction to Literary Journalism, taking into consideration the pioneers of Literary Journalism and specially authors of the 20th Century, like George Orwell, Daniel Defoe and Truman Capote. Next, I analyze the style and structure of the book, which are key to the success of the book both critically and sales-wise, specially the structure which is not straightforward. The author, who takes part in the book, is the protagonist and deserves attention as well as the characters who introduce new points of view into the plot of the book. Then I go on to analyze the characteristics the book shares with adventure novels, and the position of McDougall as the hero. I also analyze the capabilities of Literary Journalism to explore science and share it with people who cannot normally understand it. *Born to Run* connects evolutionary theory and running. To do so the author uses the theories of Dr. Dennis Bramble and Dr. Daniel Lieberman, of the Universities of Utah and Harvard respectively. I also write about the connection between running as an exercise to strengthen the body and as an exercise to strengthen the spirit. The connection between these two aspects is present in the book, as is the cultural exchange that happens between the Tarahumara Native Americans and the American Ultra-runners.

The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that *Born to Run* is a Literary Journalism novel and that Literary Journalism has the capability to connect with people as well as any fiction novel.

Keywords: *Born to Run*, evolutionary theory, Literary Journalism, ultra-running

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1.Introduction

Non-fiction is not something that I have had the opportunity to learn much about while in university. While non-fiction did not appear in my courses, fiction took the main stage with novels, short-stories, plays and poetry from around the world. However, when I was thinking of topics for this paper most of my interests were in non-fiction. As it turned out my two final options were literary journalism and speech writing in American politics. What finally tipped the scales was the combination of fact and fiction in Literary Journalism, mixing something I had studied and something I had not, in a novel that had piqued my interest. *Born to Run*, the book published by Cristopher McDougall in 2009, is not solely a novel about running, but also about the human condition and how running is related to our evolution. Another factor that I took into account was the success of the novel, which has had a major impact on the running industry. McDougall took a fringe, ostracized subject such as barefoot running or minimalist running and brought it to the public eye. The book was a best seller and McDougall appeared in Ted Talks and popular television shows like *The Daily Show with Jon Steward*. As it was thrown into the spotlight, many things changed in the running culture. The running shoe industry changed and new companies were created, like VivoBarefoot, Vivram and Luna Sandals, and many introduced a line of minimalist shoes, like New Balance and Merrell . Famous companies like Mizuno, Reebok and Nike developed new shoes like the Nike Free to be able to compete in this new market. From some time now it has not been unusual to spot runners training with minimalist shoes, or to spot them in races or marathons and new ultra-marathons have been created everywhere. The *Tenerife Bluetrail* is an example, with many more in the Canary Islands and Europe.

What I will do in the paper is, first, to introduce Literary Journalism and its authors, mainly the ones from the twentieth century. Then I will analyze the style, characters and structure that Christopher McDougall uses in *Born to Run* taking special attention to the structure of the novel. I will also talk about the role of the author in the novel, as he has an important role in the plot, and as I consider him the main protagonist. Subsequently I will look into parallelisms between *Born to Run* and an adventure novel. I will analyze the opportunity that Literary Journalism offers to make science accessible to the common man or woman. Then I will talk about the intercultural exchange between the Tarahumara and the Ultra-runner community in *Born to Run*,

taking special attention to Caballo Blanco, one of the most important characters of the book. I will end the paper with my conclusion.

2. Introduction to Literary Journalism

Literature and journalism are two fields that have had a close relationship for a long time. Realism in literature has always aimed to tell a story that is as realistic as possible. The goal is to make the reader wonder if the story is really true or if it is in the writer's imagination. Truth and fact are something inherent to journalism. What is written or told has to abide to the truth, and has to be that way for journalists to retain credibility. There is no flexibility regarding the truth, but there is regarding the way it is told. So there is a part of literature that wants to be realistic, and a part of journalism that wants to be engaging as well as informative. This border where the two fields intersect is the place where Literary Journalism resides, between journalistic facts and literary style.

Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, in their preface to *The Art of Fact*, define Literary Journalism. The definition serves them as the standard to add or reject what they include in their Literary Journalism Anthology. The first criterion is that it has to be factual. It has to attend to the Journalism part of the name. For example, the great work of muckraking journalism, *The Jungle* (1906), by Upton Sinclair would fall outside this definition because the author uses a fictional family to tell his story. The author has to write always about the truth and fact based events. The second criterion is that the writing has to include a process of extensive fact-gathering, avoiding working from memory. The third criterion is currency, if an author writes about something that happened in the distant past it delves into the territory of History, thus the Literary Journalist must adhere to current events. These three criteria ascribe to the part of journalism, and Yagoda and Kerrane add that the work must also be “*thoughtfully, artfully, and valuably innovative*” (14). To them innovation is key to distance Literary Journalism to the kind of mass-produced journalism that has spread throughout the 20th century. Although much has been said about Literary Journalism, there does not seem to be a clear unanimous definition to the genre. Ron Rosenbaum said “It isn’t about literary flourishes or literary references. At its best literary journalism asks the same questions that literature asks: about human nature and its place in the cosmos”(qtd. in Abrahamson)

There are authors that have written great novels or other works of literature, but could not live off their literary work. There are others that could but chose to reconcile their work as journalists and as writers. Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, Stephen Crane, George Orwell, Ernest

Hemingway, John Steinbeck are examples of the latter. Because of this close relationship between both disciplines, characteristics of both tend to influence one another. Many authors delved into this genre before Literary Journalism was acknowledged as such. They are the forefathers, and many are well known fiction writers of their time. They mainly are authors of the 19th century and before. Later came authors that were aware that they were writing journalism that differed from the norm. They are 20th century writers that helped shape what is literary journalism today. They wrote fiction as well as non-fiction. The following list is a selection of authors that appear in the literary journalism anthology *The Art of Fact*.

The anthology makes a first reference to the pioneers and then to the more professional literary journalists of the 20th century. Among the pioneers, the first writer mentioned is Daniel Defoe, who was an extremely prolific writer and journalist. He was the editor of *The Review*, an English newspaper for which he also wrote. His extremely realistic style in fiction proves that his journalistic endeavors permeated into his fiction. In his famous novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), he tells the reader that he is only the teller of a story he found in Crusoe's own journals. His attention to detail and deep description of Crusoe's daily life make the reader wonder if it is not possible that the book is indeed telling the story of the unfortunate castaway. Another pioneer would be Charles Dickens, who began his career as a journalist. His knowledge of England, its people and society is clear in his novels. In *The Great Tasmania's Cargo* (1860) he puts himself in the story as the reporter and tries to find out the truth behind the incident. Walt Whitman also played with journalism. His report of the battle of Chancellorsville from *Specimen Days* (1892) is a great example of journalistic re-creation, as Whitman was not present when the battle took place and recreated the battle using his interviews with soldiers who survived. He also raised the question of the inadequacies of journalistic language to represent the horrors of war. Stephen Crane was another literary author as well as a freelance journalist. His recount of life in the slums of New York is an example of the journalist that puts himself in the culture where his story takes place. In *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* (1893), we see the world of the Irish-American ghetto. His tendency to put himself in the story is also extremely important, as it allows the author to be subjective as his characters and objective as the narrator.

In the 20th century, a new age of journalism began, and in the anthology, some of the most important authors are mentioned. Jack London wrote non-fiction and fiction. His contribution to literary non-fiction was what Kevin Kerrane calls "the dropout narrator," later called "immersion

journalism” where the journalist immerses himself in the situation or group involved in the story. London spent weeks in the East End of London. This style of journalism would later influence writers and journalists like George Orwell. George Orwell is one of the most respected writers of the 20th Century. He was a deeply political man. His fiction novels, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) dealt with totalitarianism. *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) is his recount of the struggle in the left during the Spanish Civil War. His other non-fiction novels, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), focused on the poor and the class struggle. Like Jack London he lived with the people he was writing about, he was practicing immersion journalism. Another very important fiction writer and journalist was Ernest Hemingway, who gained fame with his fictional novels, but he started his writing career as a journalist and foreign correspondent. His non-fiction was never as popular. His works include *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) and *A Movable Feast* (1964). His journalistic style of writing permeated into his fiction, which made it unique and something that many authors would later try to imitate. John Hersey was another war correspondent who covered World War II. He said that literary journalism must be authentic and absolutely reliable. In *Hiroshima* (1946), Hersey recounts the story of six survivors in the aftermath of the detonation of the nuclear bomb. He relies in his interviews to relay to the reader the experience of the survivors. It was first published in *The New Yorker* and later published as a book. The book helped the American reader to humanize the Japanese which had been reduced to infra-human status during the war. His innovation was that it was a book of journalism in the form of a novel. Truman Capote did the same thing two decades after with his novel *In Cold Blood* (1966), in which he recounts the story of a brutal murder in Kansas, he re-creates the events based in his interviews with the killers and witnesses, something very problematic in journalism but revolutionary in literary journalism. Piers Paul Read is another novelist that wrote a non-fiction book. He uses extensive interviews with the survivors of the plane crash of an Uruguayan rugby team in the Andes to write *Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors* (1974). He made use of his narrative skills to recount the struggle of survival and the events that transpired after the tragic plane accident. Hunter S. Thompson was another innovative journalist that disregarded all the conventional norms of journalism in favor of his own style that he dubbed "Gonzo Journalism." He wrote for *Rolling Stone* and *Scanlan's*; his books include *The Rum Diaries* (1998), *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gang* (1966) and *Fear and*

Loathing in Las Vegas (1972). Many times imitated, gonzo journalism focuses on the subjective eye to tell the story. Tom Wolfe is the last journalist I have decided to mention. He is a novelist and essayist that revolutionized journalism in the 60's and 70's. He wanted to energize the way journalists of his time wrote. His anthology *The New Journalism* (1973) is the precursor of Literary Journalism theory.

3. *Born to Run*: Analysis of Style, Structure and Characters

Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, the Ultra-Runners and the Greatest Race the World has Never Seen is a book by Christopher McDougall, a journalist and writer, who studied Journalism in Harvard University (1985), that has worked for the Associated Press as a war correspondent in Rwanda and Angola and has written for *Esquire*, *The New York Times*, *Outside*, *Men's Journal* and other magazines. *Born to Run* was first published in the United States in 2009 by Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, and in the United Kingdom the same year by Profile Books. The novel became a *The New York Times* bestseller and sparked the growth of the barefoot and minimalist running culture in the USA.

Born to Run is a Literary Journalism novel that tells the story of the author as he discovers a tribe of Mexican Indians and the world of ultra-running while he delves into the way humans run, why this happens, and its evolutionary importance. Reviews for the book describe it as one of the best running books of late and praise McDougall's capacity to tell an engaging story. Dan Zak, a reviewer for the *Washington Post* calls it "an operatic ode to the joys of running" and states McDougall's own interest in running: "he approaches the sport with the reverence and awe of a disciple encountering the face of his god. In this case, the god is the Tarahumara." Simon Redfern of *The Independent* describes the book as a "Part how-to manual, part scientific treatise but throughout a ripping yarn." In *The New Yorker* Nicholas Thompson tells that "It's a rollicking narrative, a romanticization of a distant group of people, and a broadside against American shoe companies. "Born to Run" is not the best book on the intricacies of the sport ... but it's certainly the most accessible and the best selling." In *The Irish Times* Paul Cullen says that "this is one of the most joyful and engaging books about running to appear for many years."

3.1 Style

McDougall uses a combination of the first person narrator, when he is present on the story, and an omniscient narrator when he is not. He uses a descriptive and colloquial style of writing, and as Dan Zak said in his review, trying to mimic the gonzo style of Hunter S. Thompson. The normal objective style of journalism is banished for a more subjective eye where the personal

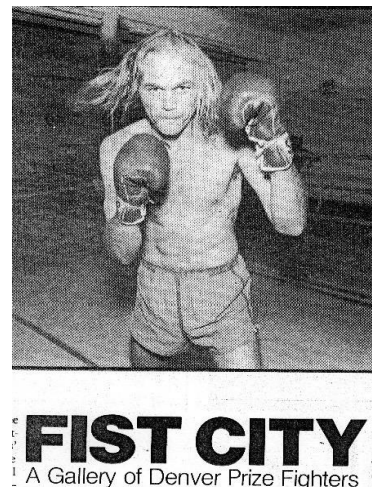
views of the author come into the center stage. His experience told with his voice is why the reader may be compelled to relate to him, and to believe his story, which it is not easy to do so. His use of Spanish in names and adjectives adds charm and color to the characters and settings. It is sometimes awkwardly used, something common in North American culture, but nonetheless agreeable. He uses cliffhangers in his chapters as if they are articles that have to be followed and are published weekly, something that brings to mind the serials of Victorian England and the publications of Charles Dickens, who had to keep the audience captivated. It adds tension to the story.

I find similarities between *Born to Run* and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald when we talk about the narrative point of view. I do so as well with Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* when we talk about characters and the world around them. In *The Great Gatsby* (1925) we see the world through the eyes of Nick Carraway, someone who is new to the world of the high class of New York. He sees the world that is shaped by very strong characters that eclipse Nick in importance. The novel is written around Gatsby and his pursuit of Daisy. In *Born to Run* McDougall tells his story centering it around Caballo Blanco, and his quest to organize a race between the best ultra-runners of the US and the Tarahumara Indians. The book starts with McDougall in pursuit of Caballo and ends with him telling his story. In *The Sun Also Rises* Hemingway tells the story of Jake Barnes and his romance with Brett Ashley. Hemingway creates a cast of characters with very distinct and strong personalities. Around Jake we find these characters that shape his story and his relationship with the environment. The novel of Hemingway puts his focus around the place. The atmosphere of Paris and Pamplona is almost as important as the characters. We see an air of freedom and intellectualism in the Paris of the expatriates. Pamplona is a place of joy and tradition, where one can enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Another similarity is the air of danger of the bullfight. It is presented as the author sees it, a challenge between life and death, between the matador and the bull, but more so with himself. The same happens in *Born to Run*. There is a clear face to face with death, these athletes push themselves extremely hard and in chapter 26 when two members of their party, Jenn and Billy get lost and almost die in the Copper Canyons. The run is a competition with yourself and the way McDougall treats running, with veneration, is the same way Hemingway treats bullfighting. Through McDougall we see this environment, he learns about it and tells us about it.

3.2 Characters



In *Born to Run* there are main characters and secondary characters. The main characters are the ones that add meaning to the story. Christopher McDougall is the writer and protagonist of the story and I will talk about him later. Caballo Blanco, born Michael Randall Hickmann and also known as Micah True is the character that lives in the borders between cultures. He is the focus of McDougall's story. An army brat, which meant moving from base to base with regularity, and with a thin complexion, Hickmann learned boxing to survive his schooldays, though mostly pacifist by nature, he took to boxing extremely well and his earnings in the ring put him through college with a degree in eastern studies. After spending time living in Maui he came back to America with a wife and resumed his career as a boxer. He was fairly successful, but his wife left him and he suffered an accident. After his recovery he took to running as he had when he lived in Maui, but with an obsession that was not normal. In 1994 he paced the Tarahumara in the Leadville 100, a meeting that would change his life as he left for the Copper Canyons a couple of months later. He always had had an inclination to the spiritual and he took his life in the barrancas as a kind of spiritual retreat. His life was as a monk's, living frugally and always looking forward to running the next morning, just for running's sake. It was in the Barrancas where he first met McDougall. He organized the first race between



Tarahumara and American Runners, as it is described in the book, and successfully repeated it, and that carries on after his death. Caballo died in March 27, 2012 while he was running in New Mexico.

Scott Jurek, “El Venado,”(Caballo Blanco nicknamed the American runners with their spirit animal) is the antagonist racer, an ultra-runner born in Minnesota that is both an example of the ideal runner and the friendly competitor to the throne of the Tarahumara. He was a mediocre runner in his teens, and had to care for his ill mother while he was in high school. After her death a friend asked him if he would go to a ultra with him and he finished the race in a good position, before his friend. After that Jurek took to ultras very quickly, rising through the ranks and positioning himself as the best ultra-runner of his time. He is an extremely friendly individual and whose goodhearted is well expressed in the book. An example is that he waits for the other runners in the finish line and cheers them on as they are coming. His vegan diet is praised in the book as he says it is the secret of his strength. The Tarahumara are as one character, kind, pacifist and fiercely competitive. In their midst those who stand out are Arnulfo Quimare, the best runner among them, and Manuel Luna, the Tarahumara who forms a bond of friendship with Barefoot Ted. Barefoot Ted (el Mono) is a strange American barefoot trail-blazer. His compassion to Manuel Luna is one of the highlights of the end of the novel. Ann Trason is used as the antagonist to the underdog team of the Tarahumara in the Leadville 1994 race. Rick Fisher is the swindling manager of the Tarahumara that brings them to compete to Leadville three years in a row. Jenn Shelton (La Brujita Bonita) represents the new blood in the ultra-running world. Dennis Bramble, Daniel Liebermann, David Carrier and Louis Liebenberg are the scientists that discover the link between running and the evolution of the human body. There are many other people mentioned in the book, but the above mentioned are the essential ones to the novel.

3.3 Christopher McDougall: Protagonist, Novelist and Journalist

Kramer says this about the writer in his definition of Literary Journalism: “the narrator of literary journalism has a personality, is a whole person, intimate, frank, ironic, wry, puzzled, judgmental, even self-mocking —qualities academics and daily news reporters dutifully avoid as unprofessional and unobjective” (qtd. in Stretcher). Before writing *Born to Run*, Christopher

McDougall (El Oso) was a journalist. He had written a book about a Mexican Pop Idol but the bulk of his work had been done in the form of articles in magazines and newspapers. Though he mostly wrote and writes about extreme sports and not about current events, his style in his articles is journalistic. In *Born to Run* McDougall tries to achieve a more literary style and he does achieve it.

In a literary journalism novel the voice of the author can be either separated from the novel, if he/she is telling a story in which he/she is not involved, or if he/she is involved in it, the corresponding character in the story is a journalist. However the style cannot be a journalistic one

because a literary journalism work is a factual story told as if it were a literary one. If he/she is not involved in the story the author has to have extensive knowledge of what has happened which mainly comes from research and interviews and turn that knowledge into a story. *Born to Run* is a combination of both, the author is a character in part of the novel and he is not in another. He lived part of what he tells in the book. The problem of the journalist's voice in the novel only presents itself in the parts of the book which the author did not live through, though this problem is small. It mainly consists of one thing: When the author is telling something someone said, it can sometimes look like a quote. “‘That’s the benefit of being a naked, sweating animal,’ David Carrier explains. ‘As long as we keep sweating, we can keep going’” (223).

In *Born to Run*, I found that this journalistic voice presents itself when characters are trying to explain something about running or when it is related to the science behind the book. McDougall's style can be a little over-descriptive, but I would characterize it as colloquial, like a friend telling you a story over a meal and drinks. Dan Zak tells us in his review that “‘McDougall's prose, while at times straining to be gonzo and overly clever, is engaging and buddy-buddy, as if he's an enthusiastic friend tripping over himself to tell a great story.’” McDougall describes his experiences and research in detail, often the ones that impressed him the most. He also does this without regard to objectivity most of the time. The descriptions of the people that he has met are personal and subjective, as are the ones of people he has not met. Like Rick Fisher, though he talks of him in detail, he never interviewed him. His style in the book is



literary, though at times we feel a hint of his journalistic voice in the parts of the book harder to turn into a story.

McDougall with this novel wants to tell us something he discovered, the truth he found: that we as a species are born to run. The common way to tell something like this is firstly stating the truth and then listing the reasons why the theory is right, maybe discrediting these ideas. However, the way McDougall went about it was different, more interesting and more literary. Instead of telling us directly, he goes another way and I would say a better way. He tells us his story, from beginning to end. That is a more intelligent approach. Human beings can be stubborn and resistant to change. In our minds the modern running shoe, with its high and extra-cushioned soles are the norm, as it is also the heel strike when we run. This change since the modern running shoe was invented was something that crept into our common knowledge little by little. The thought was that these big profitable companies had done their research and that if they are selling so much and if they keep coming up with new versions they must have done things right.

These ideas had also crept into McDougall's mind. McDougall goes through three different stages before reaching the end of the book and tries to make the reader go through a similar process. The first stage is discovery. First he realizes that he does not know anything about racing, and that doctors are not as knowledgeable as they should. Then he discovers a new world of running and he is skeptical that its ideas would actually work. However, everything that he had tried before counseled by the most prominent doctors in the field of sports had failed. So he did not have anything to lose. His run with Caballo had given him a glimpse to a new (or old, depending on the perspective) way of running. The first side-story is dedicated to the examples of great runners and the race between Ann Trason, a college professor and the Tarahumara. This is mostly exposition. McDougall recreates this story from interviews with people who were there and these examples are trying to reinforce the idea of discovery: there is another way of running and living and it's not well known. So McDougall creates the example to base the theory on. The basic idea is there are people who tried and succeeded with different experiences of running. The second stage is trial and error. He accepts a new way of thinking and tries to adapt. As is common with many things, McDougall leaps into the unknown head first and he is soon disappointed. After following the steps Caballo had taught him he found himself hurt again. Before giving up he understood that he needed more help, and help came along in the form of Eric Orton, a trainer that helped McDougall prepare for a race he had given up on. He fixed his form and just before

he had to go to Caballo's race he was ready to run it. Everybody can relate to failing at something the first time you try it. These chapters make a firm connection between McDougall and the reader. The third stage is conversion. Though he is a little unsure of his abilities on the road, McDougall goes to the race Caballo Blanco has set up in the Barrancas. He had for some time been able to run in a way he had never been before. His experience tells him that he is right and if the reader is connecting with him, he/she would be in the same place. It is the perfect moment to present the science of *Born to Run*. The reader has accepted the hypothesis just as McDougall has and now the reader needs something to back the premise of the book. The science serves to explain rationally the experience of the author.

McDougall's journey is one of understanding, discovery and personal growth. The idea of bettering oneself through running is present in the book. This relation between running and humanity is deduced from the way McDougall presents the Tarahumara, as a tribe with little to none rates of cancer, obesity, heart disease and other modern afflictions, to the way Barefoot Ted consoled Manuel Luna before the race, not forgetting the theories of doctor Joe Vigil. Vigil said that to be good at running you had to first be a good person, and the rest, money and fame would follow, if that is what you wanted. This relationship between long distance running, nature and spiritual or moral growth is present in the book, through examples of different people. This reminds me of the relation between hiking, nature and philosophy that Jack Kerouac described in his novel *The Dharma Bums*. Like in many of his novels, Kerouac puts himself in the novel through a character with whom he shares some similarities. The way that the "dharma bums" reach some kind of enlightenment is by strenuous hiking in the mountains, alone or in company. The relation of running and deep thinking is something that McDougall expresses. He tells us, "I knew aerobic exercise was a powerful antidepressant, but I hadn't realized it could be profoundly and, I hate to use the word, meditative. If you don't have answers to your problems after a four-hour run, you ain't getting them"(213).

The way the story is told, with the main storyline told through McDougall's experience helps us understand little by little the message he wants to convey. He is the one that tells the story and through his experience the novel advances. He undergoes changes in the novel that are progressive and that form his thoughts on running. He brings all these experiences and people together around himself. He is not the main attraction, there are characters more interesting than him, there are stories more entertaining than his, but he grounds the book in reality. He is the

example that an out-of-shape middle-age man can go through the changes necessary to become a long-distance runner. He is the proof that everyone is born to run.

3.4 Structure

David Abrahamson, in his essay “A Narrative of Collegial Discovery on some Conceptual Essentials” says:

The actual architecture of the piece, structure, may in some instances be the most important analytical tool of all. By way of analogy, for many writers of many pieces, deciding on matters of structure before the actual writing is similar to the black-and-white value drawing many artists do before embarking on the finished painting. Knowing the size, shape, order, and transitions between the story’s major elements can often be the key to the successful mastery of the tale.

The structure of *Born to Run* is not simple and that complexity is needed in this story. It does not follow a singular linear story for the whole book. It has tangents, the author stops to tell a related story, to characterize someone unique in the world of running or to explain the scientific process of the science behind the theory of why we are born to run as a species. In his *Washington Post* review Dan Zak explains that “the book flows not like a race but like a scramble through an obstacle course. McDougall wends his way through the history and physiology of running, occasionally digressing into mini-profiles of top-tier racers and doctors, spinning off into tangents about legendary races like the Leadville Trail 100 Ultramarathon, while always looping back to the main narrative.” McDougall creates a storyline that is not dependent on the main story, but more like a cooperation of many small stories that enrich the main storyline. In the book we can differentiate between the main story and the side-stories, which are background stories. The structure mirrors in a way the process of learning. You can never understand something by itself, context is essential. The books of George Orwell cannot be understood in a vacuum, the context of the early to mid 20th century provides the knowledge necessary for a full understanding. Without understanding the history of communism in Europe, the message of *Animal Farm* is lost. Without understanding the background of ultra-racing and racing in the US, without understanding the way the Tarahumara live and run, the importance of the message the author is trying to convey, that we are born to run, is diluted and loses importance. The side-

stories are the necessary background that elevate a good story to a great story.

The main storyline is the one experienced by the author. He is the protagonist of the book and he moves the main story forward. Injuries had always prevented McDougall to run long distances. He had given up hope of ever running like he wanted to. While on assignment on Mexico he learns about the Tarahumara and he adventures into the Barrancas, meets some Rarámuri and learns about the American gringo, called Caballo Blanco by the natives, that has learned their ways, he finds him and gets his story. These are chapters 1 through 7.

What follows for the next nine chapters is a combination of stories. Caballo tells the narrator about the 1994 race where he first met the Tarahumara. This combination spans from chapter 7 to chapter 16. This brilliantly told story does not begin with the 1994 edition. It begins with Rick Fisher, the American that convinced the Tarahumara to run for him from 1992 to 1994, in three races. The first chapter is the characterization of Fisher and the story of first race (ch. 7). Then McDougall talks about the beginnings of the Leadville race, what it is and why it was organized (ch. 8). Chapter 9 recounts the second race; chapter 11 is the introduction of Ann Trason, who would be the Tarahumara's rival in the 1994 race. The deserved praise that Trason receives works in favor of the ones that passed her to finish first in the race. The chapters that follow until chapter 16 concern the 1994 Leadville 100 race. McDougall introduces Joe Vigil (ch. 13) and Emil Zátopek (ch. 15). Vigil is a college professor and a famous running coach. At the end of his career he is trying to find what moral and psychological factors make a great runner, after learning all he could of the physical factors. Zátopek is the example of a great runner that was a great person. McDougall and Vigil make the argument that he was a great runner because he was a great person.

Back to the main storyline (ch. 17), McDougall returns to the barrancas with Caballo, and they go for a run. McDougall receives his first lesson on the Caballo style of running. The next chapter (ch. 18) is about McDougall back to his daily life. He tries to find information on Caballo but finds it extremely difficult. At the end he writes an article about his experience and leaves it at that, believing that the race Caballo wants to set up is nothing but a pipe dream. Chapter 19 is related to Scott Jurek, the best ultrarunner of our time. He contacts McDougall because he wants to know if Caballo Blanco is reliable and not a lunatic with an unreliable plan. McDougall then writes in this chapter about Scott who, like Ann Trason, would be the rival for the Tarahumara in the coming race. Chapters 20, 21 and 22 tell the story of the group of Americans that meet near

the border to go to the race together. It also serves as a way to introduce all the travelers and racers, especially Jenn and Billy. In Chapter 23 they travel to Creel and McDougall tells the story of Barefoot Ted, the strangest character in their company. In Chapter 24 they travel to the race site. Chapter 26 goes back to the main storyline with the story of Jenn and Billy almost dying in a short run. Chapters 29, 30, and 31 are the chapters of the final race. McDougall tells in this chapter his race from his point of view, the race between Jenn and some Tarahumara, and the race between Arnulfo Quimare and Scott Jurek.

Chapter 25 is the first side-story that tries to explain the barefoot movement. McDougall explains the evolution of the running shoe since Nike presented the first modern running shoe, and the lack of science behind the process of building these kind of shoes. Chapter 27 is the side-story in which McDougall reveals his training for the race, how he changed his diet and how he was rebuilt to run long distances by changing his form. Chapter 28 is another side-story and the most important one. We are nearing the end of the book, and now McDougall introduces the science behind the question: are we born to run? It turns out that according to David Carrier, Dennis Bramble and Daniel E. Liebermann, we are. McDougall takes us through the thought process of the professors to understand clearly why they have reached that conclusion and the proof that humans performed what is called persistence hunting which basically is running an animal to death. The last chapter is the conclusion, when Caballo Blanco tells his story, how he lived and ended up living in the wild Copper Canyon. This last chapter is also the end of the search for the story of Caballo. In a sense, as a journalist, McDougall was waiting for this final piece of the puzzle.

After reading the book I understood that the story had to be structured like this. McDougall wanted to tell his story, but above else he wanted to convince us that the change that he went through was rational and had a scientific base. He discovered something great about running and he wanted to share it. To make his point he had the best personal story possible, but he needed something else to make it more credible. He put forward example after example, he took his time, he carefully listed each one. Each tangent is extremely well placed. They reinforce what was said before. For example, after telling us how great the Tarahumara are at racing and the incredibly long distances they cover he puts forward the 1994 Leadville 100. It is a point of reference to the western reader, to the non-runner and the reader can better understand the prowess of the Tarahumara after reading it.

4. Analysis of *Born to Run*

Although this is a journalistic story and it focuses on a story centered around a charismatic character, the success of *Born to Run* as a narrative non-fiction novel is due to the many themes that help connect with the reader. The book is part adventure novel, part science documentary, part cultural study, part article, part autobiography and part analysis of modern American running. Each theme is centered around a character or group of characters that help understand it. Small or important each character adds to the whole book, and McDougall manages to convert it into a cohesive story.

4.1 Parallelism between the Adventure Novel and *Born to Run*

The adventure theme is centered around McDougall, though other characters play into it. Adventure novels normally follow a structure where the first step is to present the hero in an ordinary world. In this case it is simple to see it. McDougall is a journalist, he does his job and is on assignment researching his latest article. The call to adventure is the reason that gives the excuse for the hero to leave his world and go into the unknown. In *Born to Run* the inability to run long distances due to injury is the reason that enables the call, an article in a Mexican magazine of a Tarahumara Indian running, to be effective and make McDougall go into the Barrancas to find the tribe. It is normal to meet a mentor that guides the hero through the hardships. In the book Caballo Blanco would be the mentor. He first teaches McDougall to run as he puts it “Think *Easy, Light, Smooth* and *Fast*” (111). That is the mantra that McDougall has to follow in order to run like the Rarámuri. The tests and trials are next in the road of the hero. McDougall tries to imitate the run of his mentor on his own but he is unable and the injuries of the past come again to remind him of the long path ahead. It takes other instructors and a lot of learning and trying new things to achieve the correct running form to be able to participate in the race that Caballo is organizing. The final ordeal is the run itself. Unlike other races the one that McDougall is competing against is himself, it is a journey of self-improvement. After a long journey the hero achieves what he or she set to do as McDougall does when he finishes his race and then the hero goes back home with his treasure, be it knowledge or riches. In the case of

McDougall it is the fact that he can run for long distances and the connections and friends he has made over the course of the novel, as well as a better outlook on life.

The adventure or challenge is also to obtain the story. There is an adventure where McDougall sets his goal on finishing the race and being able to run as well as Caballo and the other athletes, then there is the adventure of the journalist, on the path of a great story. It is the story of one that endeavors to one corner of the world to pull out the truth from wherever it is hiding. McDougall represents that journalist. Adventure usually means that danger lurks somewhere close. Danger is represented in the novel as the Barrancas, the Copper Canyons. Death resides in the inhospitable setting where the subject of the journalistic objective is located. It is said throughout the novel that the Copper Canyons is where drug lords grow their crops, where old western desperadoes went to die or hide from the law (Geronimo for instance), and where the harsh climate conditions would kill you if you were lost. McDougall tells that in his first foray into the barrancas in search of the Tarahumara they came across with a pickup of drug dealers that thankfully let him pass. He also mentions the encounters with drug dealers that Rick Fisher had in one of his rafting trips down the Barrancas and one story in the book is how Billy and Jenn almost die when their water supply ran short and they got lost in their way back to the village where they were staying. The danger also helps idealize the Rarámuri and Caballo Blanco, who are the ones living under such conditions.

4.2 Science and Literary Journalism in *Born to Run*

Science is represented in the book in two categories. The first is the science of the establishment that has things figured out but one that does not give solutions to McDougall's problems and the second is the science that adventures into the unknown to search for a solution to a question of evolutionary biology: how did we evolve into what we are?

The establishment science, as I have named it, is the science in *Born to Run* that does not question what has come before and takes anything else as questionable and unreliable. The doctors that treat McDougall at the beginning of the book take for granted that the human foot is something that did not evolve as well as the other parts of the body. As they take this as gospel their approach to the running injury is to treat the symptoms rather than fixing the cause of the

problem, the running form. The reader follows McDougall through his visits to his doctors and his doubts about what they were telling him. It was Leonardo DaVinci who said that “The human foot is a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art,” so maybe this theory the doctors had that the human body had evolved asynchronously is not reliable. I call it the science of the establishment not only because it is the science in which medical practice relied, but also because it is the science that allowed shoe companies like Nike or Adidas to keep selling running shoes with thick cushioned soles that transform our running form into one that allows heel striking, something harmful to the human body. This is explained in the book. McDougall tells us that it was money what was driving the industry and that no fact or scientific data was collected that showed that they were right. The shoe companies kept selling to the public their shoes that would solve the injuries their customers had, with chips on the shoes or absorption gel on the heel, but it was not supported by anything other than wishful thinking and an amateur theory brought forward by the inventor of the modern running shoe and Nike President William Jay Bowerman.

The second science is the theory behind all of the experience that McDougall conveys throughout the book. Mateus Yuri Passos, Érica Masiero Nering and Juliano Mauricio de Carvalho write this in their article for the *International Association for Literary Journalism Studies* journal: “our hypothesis is that the use of narrative resources to describe research and development processes constitutes a journalistic model that, while dissonant from the conventional, mainstream models of journalism, is one that operates under distinct principles that make science more accessible to the layperson.” McDougall uses literary journalism to make understandable the theory published by Dr. Bramble and Dr. Liebermann in *Nature* Magazine in which they said: “it is reasonable to hypothesize that Homo evolved to travel long distances by both walking and running.” The key to this process is not to dwell on the scientific facts and theories, but to show the human factor. McDougall uses a combination of interviews and journalistic recreation to recreate the years-long process in which the scientists came to the conclusion that we evolved to be a distance running animal. David Carrier is the one that started the inquiry, his theory of how an animal evolves around the way they take in air sparks the theory behind *Born to Run*. As he was a student at the time, he was helped by his professor in the University of Utah Dr. Dennis Bramble. Together they developed an unfinished theory that was not getting any recognition among their peers until they came across Daniel Liebermann, a Harvard University professor. An original paper was published in *Nature* by Dr. Liebermann and

Dr. Bramble that explained the evolutionary theory they had. The theory is that between the time that humans started eating meat (the catalyst to our brains growing) and the time when we were able to hunt using the bow and arrow, humans used Persistence Hunting as the way to obtain the precious protein contained in meat. The problem they had is that the theory hinged on the idea that persistence hunting was real and doable. Persistence hunting, mystified and with accounts in many tribes around the world, is a type of hunting where the hunters decide on a target and chase it, not letting it rest, inducing a state of overheating until the animal drops dead. They did not have the evidence when they decided to publish the article in 2004, but it was a blessing in disguise. As it turned out the article made its way into South Africa and into the hands of Louis Liebenberg, a mathematician that had decided to spend years living with the Kalahari Bushmen and who had witnessed and performed persistence hunting. This is where McDougall does his best work in the novel. His recount of the logical conclusions and logical next steps that the scientists take not only explains perfectly the scientific theory but he does so in a way that the reader can follow perfectly and can make the same logical jumps that the scientists do. The final touch is the story of Liebenberg. His stay with the Bushmen is the final piece of the puzzle and it is described brilliantly. His account of the hunt and his success paint the image of truth.

As it was told before, literary journalism may be the silver bullet to make science understandable to the lay-man. Many advances in science can be overlooked which may improve the quality of living. This book is an example that science is important to understand and that the public will respond if confronted with the truth, as evidenced by the strong response by the running shoe industry, of which I will talk later.

4.3 Intercultural Exchange: The Tarahumara and the American Ultra-running Community

Christopher McDougall stumbles upon a story where a very important agent is the Tarahumara Indian. Many on the tribe are not in contact with modern life as many Native American tribes are in North America. Though this applies to most of the Tarahumara, the contact with roads has influenced some tribes within the Tarahumara and they have abandoned the ancient way of life many others still follow. The life in the tribe is simple, they are farmers and hunters, thought

most of their diet is grain and vegetable based, protein is added whenever possible. This diet is complimented by the very thing that makes the Tarahumara remarkable: they run incredibly long distances, something inextricable from their daily life. This combination of healthy eating and exercise make the Tarahumara a very healthy society where cancer rates and diabetes and other modern diseases are almost zero. Their lone extravagance is the “Tegünadas,” a party they throw where two or more tribes get together, drink “Tegüino,” an alcoholic beverage, and play a game of “Rarajipari.” This game consists of two teams kicking a ball up and down a race course and is said that it is the essence of the way the Tarahumara run. Because they let off steam in these gatherings their crime rates are incredibly low and they are an incredibly kind and compassionate people who help each other whenever they can. Of course when McDougall came across these people it was a culture shock and when he wanted to ask them something his questions came across as rude. The Tarahumara have been running from people since the Spanish conquistadors came to the new world and turned them into slave work for their silver mines. In the nineteenth century the US Government put a price on Apache scalps and some opportunists killed the Tarahumara because they were a pacific people unlike the Apache. The Tarahumara are suspicious of people and do not take kindly to strangers coming up to their doorstep and asking questions. To understand the Tarahumara it is better to understand them as a community. They are a Native American tribe and as is common in them the community is more important than the individual. There is someone that is essential to understand the connection with the Tarahumara in the novel, *Caballo Blanco*. He is the border-crosser, the character that is accepted into the community, though not fully. There are examples of border crossers in fiction like Nathaniel “Natty” Bumppo, the character from James Fenimore Cooper's novels like *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) or Lt. John Dunbar from *Dances with Wolves* (1990). *Caballo Blanco* leaves behind his life in America as a boxer to live a simple life in the Copper Canyons where he can run and live freely. His friendship with the Tarahumara is essential to set up the race between the two parties, the Tarahumara and the American ultra-runners.

The other tribe in the book is that of the ultra-runners. McDougall presents them not only as athletes but as people who do not live normally and that take pleasure in their simple lives and running long distances; they tend to be eccentric. They take more pleasure in participating than in winning the races and it is more important to them to improve themselves and to be happy. Happiness is something that McDougall focuses on when he describes these runners, all with

their quirks but all reaching for happiness. This is something they have in common and helps them get along with the Tarahumara during the race. One thing that McDougall tells in the book is the story of Marcelino and Manuel Luna. Marcelino is the son, who McDougall meets when he adventures first into the barrancas. He is killed by drug dealers before the big race and Manuel is understandably grieving. Barefoot Ted is a very odd person who tags along for the race, he is convinced that barefoot running is the solution running injuries and does not hesitate to tell all people near him. He drives Caballo crazy on their way to the town where the race is held. Though he was like that, when he learns of what has happened to Manuel Luna he spends his time with him, trying to get him to teach him the way the Tarahumara fashion their sandals from tires. At the end of the race they were inseparable and Ted had managed to make Manuel happy. This kindness and compassion is the thing that both groups share.



5. Conclusion

Literary Journalism is the combination of fact and fiction, it is reality made literary through the tools of the fiction writer. Writers from different times have written books of what we now call Literary Journalism, from Dickens to Orwell, from Hemingway to Truman Capote. The attraction of truth and reality is something that has never changed, but the way we tell those stories has. The opportunity to tell the truth with a subjective eye and not with the journalistic objective eye is what Literary Journalism provides. *Born to Run* uses the perspective of the author to tell the story. The story of someone searching for a true story and finding something he did not expect: a glimpse into human evolution. His search for the truth also brings a new understanding of running, not only as something physical but also spiritual. McDougall's meetings with different people, characters in the book, help to broaden his vision. These people are also extraordinary in the sense that they strive for happiness with resolution. The structure of the book is not straightforward. It has branching paths that help to understand the sequence of events the author goes through and the theory behind the science of the book. They are examples to better understand the main story of the novel. The way the novel is told mimics some aspects of an adventure novel, with McDougall in the role of the hero. He faces a question he has no answer to and no-one has, but chance puts him on the path to discover a truth he could not foresee. He faces dangers, real dangers of death by man or nature, but these encounters, as they adhere to the truth, can never compare with the tension of fiction, as they are manufactured in the mind of the writer. To understand science, of any kind, a person needs background knowledge, and some training in science. However, this book shows that it is within the power of literary journalism to make science accessible to the layman. In *Born to Run* Christopher McDougall uses his weapons as a writer to make evolutionary theory accessible to the reader. This theory is something that something that has not been reached by many people before, and has only been accessible to people learned in evolutionary theory, but something as important as how we evolved, in this way, is explained for everyone to understand. *Born to Run* also attends to the human spirit. McDougall comes to an understanding that running has meditative capabilities and that running can make people better and happier. This is an underlying theory in the book and one that has much importance, as it is something that has a lot in common with great fiction, to delve into the workings of the human soul. *Born to Run* is as much about how we evolved as it is about why there is such a deep connection between being human and being able to enjoy running.

Born to Run is a book that tells an incredible story, something that is difficult to believe, a book. As you read the book, it becomes increasingly difficult to believe that such a thing may be true, that being human is so closely related to running. Mark Twain said: “Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn’t.” Christopher McDougall took an unbelievable story, and made it into a book. I believe it has the characteristics of Literary Journalism: a surprising real story, extensive fact-gathering, adherence to the truth, a literary style and structure and deep themes that people can relate to, with the addition that it is a story that makes science accessible to every reader.

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