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TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY **PROFESSOR PATRICK O'FLANAGAN**, University College Cork - National University of Ireland, Cork on 11th May, 2002 on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **TIM SEVERIN**

A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

Today is a day of recognition and acknowledgement of the work of a traveller. All of us are making a journey in life. The person whom we honour here has spent his life endeavouring to understand the journeys of others and, in so doing, has enriched the lives of many.

'Replica voyage' is the title given in the literature relating to the journeys that retrace the quests of great travellers, many of which have been made hundreds of years ago. I think that this notion of replica voyages deeply underscores Tim Severin's work and that of many others who have undertaken such missions. To commit oneself to such projects, deep intellectual and physical engagement is necessary. In addition, the publication of fascinating accounts of his travels is inspirational and invaluable. We can only marvel at the courage and spirit of early travellers who embarked on journeys without maps, or even hope.

Tim Severin has lived for about thirty years amongst us in Cork entitling him to one seventh of his passport so as to be recognised as a real Corkman! He was born in Assam in India and educated at Oxford where he studied Geography and History. These subjects no doubt whetted his appetite for his subsequent career. We celebrate here today a life's work consisting of at least ten major journeys which have included the Sinbad voyage, the Genghis Khan mission, the Spice Island voyage and the search for Moby Dick. Indeed, what singles out his achievements is not simply undertaking the journeys, but his meticulous dedication to detailed reconstruction of former technologies and conditions to replicate past experience. It is an incredible feat to record that the chronicle of the Brendan voyage has been translated into twenty-seven different languages, which is a sure testament to the wide appeal of his achievements!

Exploration and understanding have always been characteristics of the venerable discourse of geography. They remain for many the bedrock of the discipline revealed in the enormous sales of popular geographical titles in the Anglo- American world and even more so on continental Europe. Much of the exploration conducted by Tim Severin and later published by him was accomplished in the past by anonymous individuals many of whom made daunting sea-journeys which have laid the basis for the subsequent mass movements of people and all that that involved. The recollection of the journeys of other travellers has filtered down over generations of stored collective memory. Tim Severin has confirmed to us that rather than simply being remotely possible, many of these passages were more likely probable, and in some cases, definitely so.

The role of travellers over time has been one where we, as consumers of their work, have been able to sharpen our geographical understanding. This reminds us of the extraordinary breadth and appeal of all aspects of exploration. It also confirms the extraordinary respect that Geography commands amongst people of all ages, to judge by the fact that Geography remains one of the most popular and sought-after undergraduate courses at UCC.

There are subtle connections here. They may reside in the legacy of exploration and the achievements of explorers. After all, the discourse of exploration is extremely diverse. Primarily, it is pure education. It is still possible to read the works of Marco Polo or, Ibn Battuta, as if they were written recently. We depend on them as primary sources for modern geographical understanding. The contributions that they, and Severin, have made, remain as popular since the dawn of writing to judge by the sales of travel-writing topics in our bookshops.

One of the hallmarks of our great explorers was their accuracy, irrespective of which cultures they represented or engaged. Many indeed were conducting surveys and through their efforts, modern surveying of all kinds became a precise endeavour. Many travellers in the past were spies disguised often as pilgrims, but more usually as merchants. One has only to think of the early efforts made to map certain areas for the first time in conditions often of extreme physical duress and personal insecurity. Here one has only to refer to the first accurate mapping of western China when the so-called Great Game was in full swing during the nineteenth century. This was at the time when England and Russia's Asian empires rubbed shoulders in areas like modern Afghanistan.

History too has provided explorers and geographers with good excuses to travel and solve some of the great global enigmas of past times. Perhaps two of the greatest puzzles of all times are the final resting places of two of world history's most intrepid characters namely Alexander the Great and Ghengis Khan. Tim Severin has been active in this arena and has undertaken a difficult project in Mongolia related to Ghengis Khan. Here, no doubt, he crossed over the many branches of the Great Silk Road. No doubt again, he would have journeyed on the tracks made 1,600 years ago, by one of humanity's great travellers Zuan Zhang. Zuan Zhang was a Buddhist monk, who set out on an overland journey from China to India, in search of correct Buddhist doctrines. His account of his 10,000-mile journey made him a hero in his own day and his writings even now inspire millions.

Like St Brendan, who lived and journeyed at the same time, and perhaps for similar reasons, Zuan Zhang motivated one of the early 20th century's great replica travels, namely those of Aurel Stein. Tim Severn's journeys have been conducted in the same spirit and it is an honour to celebrate with him his outstanding achievements. His work has allowed us gain a better understanding of the world that has been made smaller by the travels of others.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:
Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo totique Academiae.