

## Chapter 8

# The Art of Encounter: Verisimilitude in the Imaginary Exploration of Interior New Guinea, 1725–1876

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Jamais au Spectateur n'offrez rien d'incroyable.

Le Vrai peut quelquefois n'estre pas vraisemblable.

(*L'Art poétique*, Boileau, III.47–8)<sup>1</sup>

### Encounters, Factual and Fictional

There is an enduring paradox in the art of writing about cross-cultural encounters: in trying to convey something of the alterity or strangeness of an encounter, writers invariably fall back upon a limited range of entirely familiar conventions, shared understandings that enable them to convey the meaning of the encounter to a like-minded or like-cultured audience. In order to be represented, difference must first be recognisable (Fothergill 1994, 40). Consequently, as Stephen Greenblatt proposes, Western narratives of encounter with native others often tell us less about those native others than they do about Western practices of representation (1991, 7):

Travellers do not simply record what they see. They travel with a purpose. They journey with preconceptions. They observe and write according to established models, having these in mind even when they wish to query or depart from them (Youngs 1994, 209).

Bronwen Douglas and others have argued for the importance, and demonstrated the viability, of recovering indigenous or subaltern presence from Western texts, but our ability to attempt this sort of reading must be predicated on some prior understanding of the structured quality of these texts (Douglas 1998, and this volume; Beer 1996, 325; Guha 1983). Access to ethnographic insight and indigenous agency in these texts requires a form of reading that remains alert to the mediating effects of these representational conventions, and an acknowledgement that they are not “easily corrected for” (Greenblatt 1991, 7). “The things to look at,” as Edward Said advises of Orientalist texts, “are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances,

not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original" (1985, 21).

What I want to explore here is the possibility that an analysis of fictional accounts of exploration may offer a more ready means of identifying these representational conventions than consideration of the seemingly sober narratives of "real" exploration. Like engravings and other forms of visual imagery, explorer narratives establish their own "canons of authenticity" and their own lexicons of textual emotion through the "constant repetition of vaguely familiar scenes" (Steiner 1995, 224). The seduction of factual narratives, operating through the apparently singular reality of the events that they describe, tends to obscure or mask the familiarising role of these conventions, through which a series of unconsciously anticipated routines have the effect of investing the narrative with an air of authority. Travel fiction, however, is unencumbered by the requirement to report, by the exigencies of events or by the need to explain – although we shall see how each of these requirements is skilfully deployed in fictional narratives purporting to offer accounts of real encounters. A further and particularly intriguing feature of cross-cultural encounters is that these same representational conventions, reflecting a series of preconceptions and assumptions about difference, come to play a significant role in structuring the nature of the encounters themselves. An attention to fictional narratives of encounter and exploration thus potentially offers access both to the rhetorical strategies of textual authority and to the presumptions of actual explorers.

Popular travel fiction, quite evidently, draws upon factual accounts of exploration, often following closely the trajectories of explorer heroes and repeating details of the new lands encountered and their inhabitants. To this extent, it might be said to have "promoted, spread and entrenched the assumptions and images emerging from the scientific works" (Richards 1989, 90). But, in equal measure, travel and scientific accounts have endorsed the powerful imaginary canons of fiction: "such components of travel accounts as 'style, plot, [and] the character of the narrator-traveller bear a remarkably close relationship' to those that occur in 'strictly fictional' works" (Batten 1990, 132, quoting Hans-Joachim Possin). This recursive relationship has been further cemented through the assumed pedagogic value of adventure fiction, first affirmed by Rousseau, who actively promoted *Robinson Crusoe* as a fundamental and edifying text for the children of the Enlightenment (Green 1989, 37). Travel fiction, subsequently, could be considered part of the requisite baggage of any educated Western traveller. By the 1850s, what I refer to here as a European "colonial imaginary" for Africa (as a form of shorthand for collective representations that traversed public and professional domains) was widely available and commonly understood.<sup>2</sup>

It was found in children's books, in Sunday School tracts, in the popular press. Its major affirmations were the "common knowledge" of the educated classes. Thereafter, when new generations of administrators went to Africa, they went with a prior impression of what they would find. Most often they found it, and in their writings in turn confirmed the older image – or at most altered it only slightly (Philip Curtin 1963, as quoted by Fothergill 1994, 46–7).

Some scepticism about the fixity and impermeability of the categories of fictional, travel and scientific forms of narrative is thus in order. For the Western reading public of the late nineteenth century, "travel literature, ethnography and adventure novels were often consumed indiscriminately" (Dixon 2001, 102). Uncertainty persists, and has evidently reigned amongst writers in each genre, as to the historical or veridical status of many narratives of adventure. François Leguat's account of his seemingly fantastic voyage to the island of Rodrigues was alternately regarded as a truthful source or derided as fiction, from its publication in 1707 until the 1980s – currently, his tale is held to be largely factual (Rennie 1995, 70–3). In some respects, it may be more instructive to conceive of a veridical continuum of narrative forms with respect to historical events of exploration, or of a dense textual skein that extends between fiction, travel accounts and scientific writing, all of which reference, play off and plagiarise each other.

The European exploration of interior New Guinea – the "last unknown" of Karl Shapiro's poem and Gavin Souter's history of New Guinea exploration (Shapiro 1944; Souter 1963; Ballard 2006)<sup>3</sup> – came late in the long history of European expansion and its attendant literatures. If the narrative strategies common to factual and fictional accounts of travel had already been honed with reference to the Americas, Africa and sundry remote islands of the Indian and Atlantic oceans, then it might be argued that interior New Guinea, as the "last colonial imaginary" (Garnier 2002), was subjected to a more knowing form of literary exploration. Through consideration of a series of fictional explorations of New Guinea published between 1725 and 1876, it is possible to identify a range of rhetorical strategies that correspond to different narrative genres, and to track the resurgence in a novel form of the timeworn strategy of verisimilitude.

Verisimilitude, derived from the Latin *verisimilis* and cognate to the French *vraisemblance* and German *wahrscheinlich*, refers to the semblance of reality and specifically, as the *New Oxford Dictionary* insists, to "the quality of a representation that causes it to appear true." But the reality effect demanded of verisimilitude often exceeds the standards that we expect of the real or the true. Without the comfort of proof, it must convince through appeal to a logic of the real, to an anticipated, prefigured understanding of the semblance of the truth. The art of verisimilitude, then, is the art of persuasion, of the deployment of

rhetorical devices that convey a sense of the real which improves on the poverty of reality itself. The art of the encounter narrative, whether fictional or factual, consists of strategies that achieve this reality effect for an audience that is already familiar with the anticipated categories of difference.

## **Verisimilitude in the Fictional Encounter – A Brief History**

Histories of a European tradition of travel fiction conventionally hinge upon the publication in 1719 of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, as the defining moment in the evolution of the genre.<sup>4</sup> Prior to Defoe, fictional interest in the exotic appears to have been largely utopian in mode, adopting locations such as the Americas principally for their value as conveniently distant settings for satirical critiques of contemporary European society. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516–19), William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), and Henry Neville's *Isle of Pines* (1668) are amongst the best-known and most influential texts of this earlier period. By the late seventeenth century, travel narratives were increasingly replacing romances in popular taste, and Defoe's realist narrative of shipwreck and redemption through labour struck a powerful chord and spawned an entire genre, the Robinsonade, in its wake (Green 1989; Rennie 1995, 68). The influence on the emergent colonial imaginary of *Robinson Crusoe* and Defoe's other novels was immense, possibly exceeding that of the real voyage accounts of the period in their broad appeal and in the power of their imagery. Much as Defoe had drawn upon the voyage narratives of William Dampier, published between 1697 and 1709, and the tale of the marooned sailor, Alexander Selkirk, published in 1712, for the detail of his setting for *Robinson Crusoe*, so too the authors of subsequent Robinsonades turned to contemporary travel literature for inspiration.

During the course of the eighteenth century, the heroic figure at the centre of the Robinsonade came to take the form of the gentleman naturalist or scientist, with the British and French scientific expeditions to the Pacific supplying much of the necessary material (Batten 1990). Michael Bravo has demonstrated how "the language of accuracy and precision" became employed during this period "to scrutinize, combine, discard, evaluate, praise or criticize the scientific conduct and observations of travellers" (1999, 181). In step with this trend toward investing authority in the rhetorical vocabulary of precision, fictional travel became increasingly marked by the detail of its description of exotic places and peoples: "the romantic impulse to tell (and subsequently rework) Crusoe's tale [was] counterpointed by a stress on verisimilitude – to minimize, even conceal, the impropriety of fiction" (Bristow 1991, 97).<sup>5</sup> The digression to describe, often at great length, the characteristics of flora and fauna, or the morals of the indigenous inhabitants emerged as a staple element of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century adventure novel (Adams 1983, 273).

Although the Antipodes had furnished utopian authors with a suitably obscure setting since at least as early as Hall's *Mundus* (1607), Pacific exploration

during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the region established as the preferred setting for Robinsonades (Dunmore 1988, 9; Green 1989, 46). The heroes of Wyss' *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812), Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841) and Ballantyne's *Coral Island* (1858) all found themselves on islands located more or less loosely in the Pacific. In keeping with the general observation that adventure fiction has tended to follow closely on the heels of explorer narratives, it should present no surprise to find that New Guinea featured only scarcely in fiction prior to the middle of the nineteenth century.

## New Guinea, the "Last Unknown"

While Europeans had been aware of New Guinea since at least 1511, exploration before the mid-nineteenth century consisted of little more than sporadic landings for water and victuals, or attempts to map routes circumventing the island.<sup>6</sup> Other than two short-lived and unsuccessful settlements, the British Fort Coronation at Doreh Bay (1793–95) and the Dutch Fort du Bus at Triton Bay (1828–36), there were almost no protracted engagements with the indigenous communities of New Guinea, and no forays beyond the narrow coastal strip. Perhaps the first sustained attempt to map portions of the coastal mainland was Captain Blackwood's surveying mission on HMS *Fly* to the Papuan coast between 1842 and 1846 (Jukes 1847). Fragments of the coastline had already been mapped in some detail (see Wichmann 1909–12), but this usually reflected little more than the duration and extent of a passing ship's contact with the island, rather than a direct commission to chart the coastal topography.

A degree of frustration at their inability to know New Guinea beyond its coastline was evident amongst navigators by the 1840s. In a widely cited passage, Joseph Beete Jukes, an officer under Blackwood on HMS *Fly*, speculated on the character of this unseen interior:

I know of no part of the world, the exploration of which is so flattering to the imagination, so likely to be fruitful in interesting results, whether to the naturalist, the ethnologist or the geographer, and altogether so well calculated to gratify the enlightened curiosity of an adventurous explorer, as the interior of New Guinea. New Guinea! The very mention of being taken into the interior of New Guinea sounds like being allowed to visit some of the enchanted regions of the Arabian Nights, so dim an atmosphere of obscurity rests at present on the wonders it probably contains (Jukes 1847, 291).

Thomas Huxley, a member of the next surveying expedition to the Papuan coast, in HMS *Rattlesnake* under the command of Captain Owen Stanley during 1849–50, was equally sure in his view of New Guinea as:

a grand continent, shut out from intercourse with the civilized world—more completely than China, and as rich if not richer in things

rare and strange. The wide and noble rivers open wide their mouths inviting us to enter. All that is required is coolness, judgment, perseverance, to reap a rich harvest of knowledge and perhaps of more material profit (Huxley 1936, 129).

That great harvester of knowledge, Alfred Russel Wallace, provided the first widely read account of the main island of New Guinea to be written on the basis of personal experience, in his enormously influential account of eight years spent in island Southeast Asia between 1854 and 1862. *The Malay Archipelago*, first published in 1869, ushered in a golden era of scientific exploration in New Guinea, as Wallace was followed during the 1870s by a wave of naturalist explorers and collectors consciously emulating his feats: Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay, Adolf Bernhard Meyer, C.B.H. van Rosenberg, Odoardo Beccari and Luigi Maria d'Albertis amongst them. D'Albertis, in particular, pioneered the exploration of the interior through his navigation of the Fly River on three successive visits between 1875 and 1877 (D'Albertis 1880). Collectively, Wallace and the second wave of explorers of the 1870s inspired a new round of fictional adventure writing, novel in terms of both its focus on the last unknown of New Guinea, and its particular emphasis on what might be termed "naturalist realism" as a narrative strategy.<sup>7</sup> Interior New Guinea presented a familiar fictional setting whose time had come, as implied by James Stanley, writing as Julian Thomas, during his passage along the coastline in 1883:

The vastness of New Guinea ... makes it an attractive field for the traveller. As in our youth we believed in the African Mountains of the Moon, and the strange races which lived beyond them, so in New Guinea, the unknown land, we are ready to admit that great marvels and wonders may be hidden in the midst of its vast mountains (Thomas 1886, 377).

## The Premised Land: Imagining Interior New Guinea

During the middle of the nineteenth century, as New Guinea began to impinge upon the European imaginary through the gathering tide of exploration reports with their teasing reflections on an unattainable interior, the first handful of fictional works speculated freely on what lay beyond the beach. As a space whose boundaries had already been described, the interior presented an irresistible canvas for the colonial imaginary, and the contemporary exploration of the interiors of Africa, Asia and the Amazon Basin supplied many of the elements of the interior imagined for New Guinea. Snow-capped mountains and towering forests, miniature humans or pygmies in the company of gigantic animals, and the promise of untold wealth and lost kingdoms were easily transposed from one interior to the other.<sup>8</sup>

A review of fictional adventures in New Guinea published between the 1830s and 1870s suggests something of the range of sources of inspiration for this

imagined interior, in addition to those details gleaned from the naturalist explorers.<sup>9</sup> Few, if any, of the works considered here are well known and this perhaps reflects the signal absence of literary merit amongst them. They are all obviously and often inelegantly derivative, but that is precisely the attraction that they hold for this study. While I touch here upon a number of the published contributions to this first round of fictional exploration of interior New Guinea, attention is focused on the two most widely read and circulated novels: Louis Trégance's *Adventures in New Guinea* (1876) and Captain John Lawson's *Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea* (1875a).<sup>10</sup> The first, a classic example of the meta-narrative of moral redemption for children, toys with the vocabulary of precision but wears its fabulous colours openly. The second introduces a much more serious challenge to the distinction between fictional and factual through its reference to the conventions of exploration, as practice and as narrative.

The earliest work of obvious fiction in which some part of the narrative is located explicitly in New Guinea appears to be Daniel Defoe's *A New Voyage Round the World* (1725), in which the unnamed author leads an expedition crossing the Pacific from west to east. Pausing on Guam while en route from Manila, the author clearly anticipated New Guinea and its surrounding islands as lands available for European discovery:

And now, if ever, I expected to do something by Way of Discovery; I knew very well there were few, if any, had ever steer'd that Course; or that if they had, they had given very little Account of their Travels (1725, 120).

Approaching a "vast Tract of Land ... which we call Nova Guinea" (1725, 121), the expedition's ships anchor close to shore, sending out boats to seek water and fresh food. In keeping with his general strategy of cautious realism (Scrimgeour 1963), Defoe dwells without great elaboration on a lengthy sequence of contacts with New Guinea's inhabitants, described initially as naked "black Creatures" (1725, 123) and later as "black, or rather of a tawny dark brown; their Hair long, but curling in very handsome Rings" (132); a "peaceable, quiet, inoffensive People" (131). Two young women are captured but clothed and then returned to their people during a foray upriver on small boats, an act of generosity which summons an equally generous response from their relatives, who provide the expedition with "Provisions, Cocoa Nuts, Roots, Cabbages, and a great Variety of Things which we knew little of" (1725, 129). Despite this more extended contact, the settlements prove too distant to be described, and the problem of translation precludes even the identification of names; the wide river explored by the expedition is named only by analogy, "being as broad as the Thames is about Fox-Hall" (127).<sup>11</sup> What Defoe seeks to convey here, as he does in Captain Singleton's earlier crossing of the interior of Africa (Defoe 1972 [1720]),

is not the exotic specificity of New Guinea or its people but rather its general suitability for commerce.<sup>12</sup>

For more than a century after Defoe's *New Voyage*, New Guinea does not appear to have featured obviously in Western fiction. Scarcely touched by Captain Cook, who did no more than set foot briefly on a south coast beach in 1770 (Ballard 2008), New Guinea was passed over for other, more attractive and better-understood settings. The next series of fictional explorers were Americans engaged in commercial exploration of the southwest Pacific though, here, the genre was pioneered by authors who also travelled, blending their own experiences with those of others, often through the pen of metropolitan ghostwriters. American interest in New Guinea appears to have developed as their whalers first entered the waters around New Guinea in 1799; whaling activity increased through the 1830s, peaking at about 1840 (Gray 1999, 24). Amongst the whalers active during this heyday was a Captain Benjamin Morrell.

Morrell's account of his commercial voyages to the Pacific during the early 1830s was vigorous in its promotion of the southwest Pacific as a "golden harvest which now awaits the sickle of enterprise" (B. Morrell 1970 [1832], 461). Almost certainly, Morrell did visit the north coast of New Guinea and various islands of the Bismarck Archipelago in 1830, kidnapping several inhabitants, whom he later exhibited in the United States. Yet his narrative, together with that of his wife and voyaging companion, Abby Morrell (A. Morrell 1970 [1833]), appears to have been extensively embellished, largely as a means of maintaining the interest of the hapless backers of Morrell's financially ruinous expeditions.<sup>13</sup> When he ran out of locations on known maps that could be named after his friends and masters in New York, Morrell simply invented islands. Both narratives tended to excess, describing six volcanoes erupting in concert along the New Guinea coast, and flocks of four or five hundred birds of paradise flying between islands. However, husband and wife were outdone by the account of Morrell's final voyage to New Guinea, as captain of the *Margaret Oakley* in 1834. Written after Morrell's death by one of his crew, Thomas Jefferson Jacobs (1844), this remarkable work tacks bewilderingly between ethnographic detail on one hand, including recognisable illustrations of New Guinean artefacts and regular insertions of word lists, and irrepressible fancy on the other: marble obelisks, abandoned cities and baboons abound.<sup>14</sup>

The New Guinea adventures of John Coulter (1847) represent a further degree of fictionalisation of what may have been the events of real voyages. Lengthy accounts of interactions with the inhabitants of New Ireland, New Hanover, New Britain and mainland New Guinea at MacCluer Gulf and along the south coast provide an excess of ethnographic detail. The presence and intervention of no less than three white castaways at different points in the narrative enables Coulter to become involved in local conflict and to observe at close range the

lives of members of New Guinea's two races, the Papuans and the Horraforas. A profusion of recognisable names for islands and bays, as well as for known trading vessels and real captains, serves to anchor Coulter's voyage. Yet none of the vessels or their captains prove to have been in the vicinity of New Guinea during 1835, the year of Coulter's visit, and neither the ethnographic detail nor the numerous gongs with which the Papuans signal to each other now ring true.

Charles Beach's *Andrew Deverel: The History of an Adventurer in New Guinea*, published in 1863, purported to represent events that had taken place during the 1850s.<sup>15</sup> The preface follows closely the "strategies of endorsement" for travel narratives described by Gillian Beer (1996, 323), advertising the narrative's claim to truth and neatly declining to declare it either strictly fictional or factual:

The author is an entirely unlearned man, unaccustomed to literature, but he has actually been in all the scenes he describes, and has taken part in the adventures. If he can excite the curiosity and call the attention of the commercial world to the riches and unexplored resources of New Guinea, he will have conferred a benefit. That beautiful country offers a virgin field to enterprise which would well repay the dangers and difficulties of exploration.

May 11, 1863 (Beach 1863, preface [n.p.]).

In an otherwise conventional tale of love lost, and the search for fame and fortune with which to win it back, Andrew Deverel, the novel's American protagonist, finances a gold-seeking expedition bound for New Guinea. Deverel's motives were self-consciously historical and literary:

He knew the attention of mankind could not be turned upon New Guinea without some notice being taken of the one who had first drawn attention of others to it. He would be making a mark on the world that would last for ages. He would some time have his name written on the pages of the history of a country. He would be doing something towards making himself worthy of the one he loved, and would be winning a name that even her proud father might envy (1863, 115).

A brig carrying the gold-seekers from San Francisco via Manila anchors off the northeast coast of New Guinea, and short forays are made to shore.<sup>16</sup> A party of shooters seeking birds of paradise is ambushed by Papuan warriors, and the brig and its well-armed crew then approach the mouth of a wide river in order to deal out vengeance (this is surely the same river described by Defoe, though the hardening of Western attitudes towards Papuans, real and imaginary, in the intervening centuries is instructive). The attacking Papuans, massed on rafts, are decimated by cannon and rifle fire, and their white castaway leader is captured. When the brig is forced to enter the river to avoid a storm at sea, the battle rages on, with much loss of (largely Papuan) life. The expedition,

accompanied by its white captive, is ultimately forced to retreat to Manila, where the author nurses the regret that “[h]is name would never be written in the future history of New Guinea” (1863, 170).

The sources for both Coulter and Beach were almost certainly other American writings, including those of the Morrells and perhaps the earlier narrative by Amasa Delano (1817, Chapter IV) of his voyage to New Guinea with MacCluer on the *Panther* in 1791. Nothing in the ethnographic detail or in the descriptions of coastal New Guinea resembles the principal contemporary source available to Beach in English author George Windsor Earl’s *The Native Races of the Indian Archipelago: Papuans* (1853). As with Jukes and Huxley, Beach’s narrative is confined to the coastal strip, and the interior is little more than a site for a vague and unbounded imaginary of gold and other forms of wealth. Beach may also initially have been influenced by Edgar Allan Poe’s *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1975 [1837]), but then Poe himself was directly inspired by Morrell, to the extent of borrowing or digesting many pages of text from the latter’s voyage account.

If this sub-genre of American commercial voyagers published between the 1830s and 1860s stuck relatively closely to real sources and real voyages to New Guinea, a subsequent Australian strain of New Guinea explorer fiction was content to play more loosely with a New Guinea setting. Edward Cole’s short, satirical pamphlet of 1873, *Account of a Race of Human Beings with Tails; discovered by Mr. Jones, the traveller, in the interior of New Guinea*, was written in flagrant self-advertisement for the wares of his Melbourne bookshop, and contained:

the startling announcement which has just reached us of the discovery by a traveller of a race of men in the interior of New Guinea still possessing tails of unmistakable length, thereby once more triumphantly demonstrating to the world that the deductions of honest, laborious, scientific men are, as a rule, verified by later discoveries (1982 [c.1873], 4).

If his text had no pretensions to realism, Cole was nevertheless alert to the contemporary vogue for New Guinea’s interior, and to the scope for pricking the vanity of metropolitan scholars and their learned societies. Of the claim of his traveller, a Mr. Jones, Cole wrote that,

were it not for the high standing and well known integrity of the traveller, and high character of the “Calcutta Anthropological Review” – to the proprietors of which he has imparted the startling information – we should still doubt; but, of course, with such authorities before us, strange as is the fact our doubts must cease (1982 [c.1873], 5).

Gold was very much at the heart of the New Guinea imagined by Marcus Clarke in his short story “Gipsies of the sea, or the island of gold,” which was serialised in the *Melbourne Herald* during December 1874. Clarke’s band of gentleman adventurers declared that “[t]he only place left to be explored is New Guinea,” as they embarked for “a new Eldorado in that mysterious Papua which has so long defied the conquering races of the west” (Clarke 1982 [1874], 13, 15).<sup>17</sup> The Americas were obviously the model for this imagined interior:

This barbaric coast-line of New Guinea, inhabited only by savage monsters of huge stature, and unappeasable ferocity, is really the boundary of a great empire, the Saturn ring of a new planet. The interior of the vast island-continent which stretches away to the eastward is a fertile land more civilised than was ancient Mexico, more wild in religious extravagance than was ancient Egypt, more rich in metals than was the “Ophir” of Solomon. It is the Eldorado of Raleigh; the “Land of Gold” of which Cortez dreamed (1982 [1874], 21).

The centre of this fabulous island was dominated by

the great Temple of Kitzpolchi, God of the Smoking Heart ... Here are still carried on those awful rites which horrified the stalwart Spaniards, and caused the destruction of the Palace of Axayacau. From this terrible centre radiate the tribal circles in ever-lessening civilisation until the forest-girt coasts give birth only to the uncouth and savage giants who – ignorant alike of religion and humanity – know but one law, to “kill the stranger” (23).

Clarke’s deliberately overwrought romance, in which all but the narrator met grisly ends in pursuit of love or wealth, was a moral fable on the perils threatening young Australian men of the day, written shortly after the disastrous loss of life in 1872 during the shipwreck of an ill-fated gold-seeking expedition to New Guinea on the *Maria* (Maiden 2000). His vision of a lost civilisation at the heart of a continent of savages preceded by a decade Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), though I would argue that this suggests not so much a reverse flow of influence, from New Guinea to Africa, as a shared debt to a common imaginary.

There is little intertextual reference and considerable thematic diversity amongst this early fictional corpus on New Guinea, reflecting the absence of established conventions specific to this new field and the limited agreement evident even in explorer narratives about the ways in which New Guinea might be represented. Even as they imagined the unknown interior, authors returned repeatedly to the established sources, modelling their accounts of New Guinea on African, Asian or American precedents; thus, Morrell writes of wigwams and Jacobs of *wampum* shell wealth belts.<sup>18</sup>

Certain persistent themes can be detected, however, revolving around questions of the prestige associated with exploration, the authority of presence and experience and the possession of blankness. The twin desires for wealth and fame attach themselves in equal measure to this last unknown: colours of gold can be detected running through each of the texts, but the undying fame of priority is just as powerful a pull. Claims to experience, to actual presence in the interior, furnish the narrator with an unchallengeable authority; even as they approach the coast, Europeans recount rumours of Papuan savagery which they will seek to refute between passages describing desperate and violent clashes. Presence also confers rights to name and to possess. Morrell names islands and coastal features as an extension of his business enterprise, but Jacobs happily renames entire archipelagoes, substituting his own renditions of native terms for most of the established names of the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago.<sup>19</sup>

The “blankness” of New Guinea’s interior offered not only the promise of a naming bonanza but also the projection of fantasies of possession, whether by virtue of its emptiness or through association with “natural” allies. Hence the manner in which the racial and moral topography of the imaginary interior is mapped, often in the form of an inverted gradient of civilisation, with barbaric black tribes on the coast barring or impeding entrance to a more civilised interior, settled by lighter-skinned and often shorter people who are blessed with riches, usually in the form of gold. Indigenous inhabitants encountered en route to this – not so much blank as white – heart of the island are thus impediments to progress and to the restoration of a true and natural alliance between Europeans and the denizens of the deepest interior.<sup>20</sup> Many of the elements of this earlier cohort of fiction are united in a single narrative in the adventures of Louis Trégance among the Orangwöks, which serves in its turn as a counterpoint to the parodic precision of Captain Lawson.

### **Moral Redemption: Louis Trégance Among the Orangwöks**

The tale of Louis Trégance’s adventures marries the well-worn theme in juvenile literature of moral redemption to this novel cartography in which a barbaric coastal fringe must be traversed to attain an inner kingdom of wealth, inhabited by a civilisation ripe for the Christian message. Notionally based on a manuscript written by Trégance and edited by “Henry Crocker,”<sup>21</sup> the volume’s preface closes with the transparent statement that “the true character of the book is evident to the careful reader” (Trégance 1892 [1876], vi).

After a conventionally brief account of an unhappy French Catholic upbringing, and subsequent conversion to Protestant faith while in service with a bourgeois family in England, the narrator, Trégance, joins a ship bound for Australia. There he learns to dig for gold at Ballarat, and several pages are spent

describing the technical process of creating amalgam (1892 [1876], 32–3). Inspired by “stories in Australia ... that the interior of the country [New Guinea] was rich in gold,” he leaves on “an adventurous voyage” (1892, 60). Off the southern coast of New Guinea, the expedition encounters a hurricane, the ship strikes a reef and, like the *Maria* and its supercargo of gold-seekers in 1872, sinks. Trégance and some of his shipmates survive but are captured by a tribe of coastal “negroes,” armed but otherwise naked. After a week of being fattened up, the crew are led off to be butchered for a cannibal feast. When Trégance grasps the hand of the tribe’s priest he recognises the first of the Masonic grips and responds. He is duly rescued from the pot but attends the feast at which his former companions constitute the *plat du jour*.

As he lives among the Papuans, Trégance begins to learn their (conveniently uniform) language and hears tales of the dense forests that surround the interior kingdom of K’ootar and the high snow-covered peaks of the central mountains. The Australian rumours of gold are confirmed by the Papuan priest, and the two resolve to travel together to K’ootar. Before long they are captured by a troop of Orangwōks, the people of the interior, mounted on little yellow-and-white striped ponies, and carrying shields and wearing armour of beaten gold. Valued for his gold-mining knowledge, Trégance is placed in the house of an old chief where, between long passages of ethnographic description of Orangwōk customs, he wins the affections of his host’s daughter, Lamlam. Sent to assist at the King’s mines amongst the snow-covered mountains, he experiences a volcanic eruption and rediscovers the power of Christian prayer. Once at the mines, he introduces his novel Australian mining technology, and manages to boost production. When Trégance uncovers evidence of fraud on the part of the local governor, a civil war ensues and his prestige is further enhanced by assisting the King’s forces in their defeat of the Governor’s separatist rebellion. Now esteemed by his hosts, Trégance marries Lamlam (a long passage accounts to his readers for this interracial transgression)<sup>22</sup> and they have a child together. Fired increasingly with Christian zeal, Trégance and Lamlam preach to the Orangwōks until their child, unhealthy product of a transgressive union, sickens and dies, commending his own soul to Jesus with his dying breath. Lamlam also dies shortly afterward, effectively freeing Trégance, who is accused of proselytising and expelled by the Orangwōks, returning to the coast and ultimately to New Zealand, where he duly meets his editor.

Although Trégance’s editor evidently had access to George Windsor Earl’s (1837) description of Dayak communities and environments in the interior of Borneo,<sup>23</sup> and to the narrative of Owen Stanley’s voyage on HMS *Rattlesnake* for knowledge of the southern coastline of New Guinea, there is no attempt made to disguise the volume’s intentions as a moral charter for the lives of young Christian readers.<sup>24</sup> Once beyond the “ethnographic” frontier, the interior

environment is entirely fabulous, with American, Asian and African fauna, including tigers, elk, antelopes, buffalo, bison and eagles thrown together in an ecological potpourri, along with more conventional New Guinea species such as the bird of paradise (here termed the *wawkoo*). Shorter than the coastal Papuans, between 4'6" and 5' in height, the Orangwōks of the interior are also fairer in skin colour, with straighter hair: "An Orangwōk reminded me of a Malay, and yet he was something like a Negro too, but very much superior to the ordinary Papuan" (Trégance 1892 [1876], 70). Trégance writes admiringly of the "habit of restraint and silence which was so observable in the Orangwōks, especially when contrasted with the Papuans proper, who were a highly excitable and boisterous people" (74).<sup>25</sup>

In what amounts to little more than a gesture in the direction of verisimilitude, the accompanying map of New Guinea (figure 8.1) traces the coastline of New Guinea in some detail and with much care for established geography before striking out into a more fanciful interior.<sup>26</sup> The inclusion of a map is itself a claim to truth, a form of reality effect, establishing at least an internal correspondence with places and features named in the text (Joyce 2002, 151). Yet, the temptation evident in Trégance's map to complete the imaginary interior by filling most of the blank space proclaims the presence of an all-seeing (and thus indubitably fictional) authority. Positioned somewhere between Wyss and Marryat in terms of narrative strategy, and largely unencumbered by dates or figures, Trégance's tale marks a tentative step toward a limited, naive form of verisimilitude, in which claims to veracity serve primarily to convey the necessary context of credibility for the truth of the novel's moral charter. Published just a year before Trégance's account, a very different narrative of adventure to New Guinea's interior moved much more boldly toward a highly precise parody of explorer convention.

### **Parodic Precision: The Wanderings of John Lawson**

In November 1871, just as Captain John Moresby was leaving Sydney for the southeast coast of New Guinea on the surveying expedition of HMS *Basilisk*, another captain, John Lawson, had "formed the resolution of exploring the interior of New Guinea, a country that had a great charm for me ..." (Lawson 1875a, 1). On 24 June 1872, he landed near the village of Houtree, on the south coast of New Guinea, where he enlisted the services of two Papuans to augment his motley crew of two Australian aborigines and a Lascar (the generic colonial term for ship's crew in the Indian Ocean).<sup>27</sup> With a flourish of precision, the party departed:

Having completed my arrangements, I started for the interior at four o'clock on the morning of the 10th of July, taking a north-west direction. The village of Houtree, my starting point, is situated on the Torres Strait,

and my observations place it in longitude 143°17'8" E., and latitude 9°8'18"S (1875a, 12).

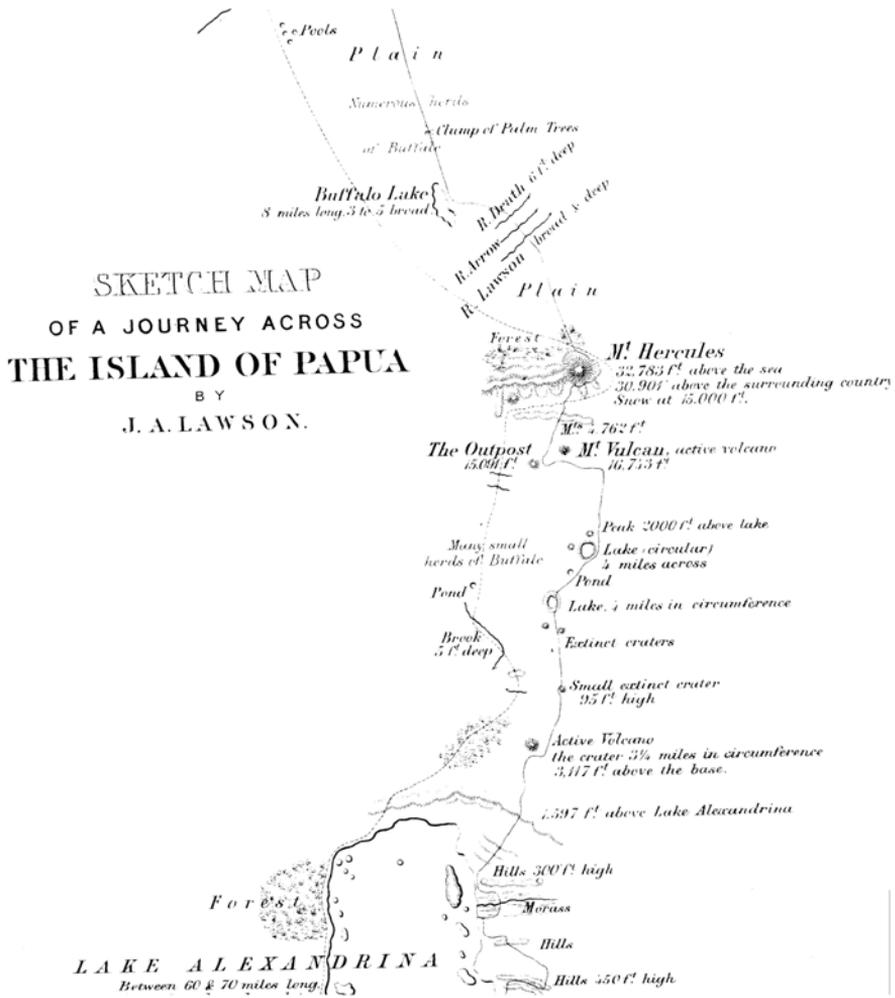
Lawson's adventures in the interior of New Guinea during the following eight months demonstrated all of the qualities required of an explorer by Huxley, "coolness, judgment, [and] perseverance" amongst them. His achievements, as documented in his 1875 account, *Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea*, were unparalleled.

Lawson had walked across the island at its widest point, from Houtree to within twenty or thirty miles of the north coast, before turning back and retracing his steps – a route traced diligently, if somewhat vaguely, in an elegant fold-out "sketch map" (a small portion of which is shown in figure 8.2). In the course of this expedition, during which three of his five assistants met hideous deaths, Lawson had ascended the world's highest mountain, Mt Hercules, stopping just short of the snow-covered summit in order to return to his base camp within the same day. Armed with a rifle and a modicum of navigational equipment, he traversed and mapped a series of vast savannah plains teeming with wildlife, the mighty Lake Alexandrina and the wide and sluggish Gladstone and Royal rivers. Contacts with Papuan inhabitants of the interior were sporadic but increasingly violent, and Lawson and his team were forced to subsist on the abundant game: catching more than a hundred fish in just two hours, bringing down nineteen ducks with two shots and, once his rifle was lost, knocking down three dozen quail with a stick.

While he was disarmingly modest about his physical prowess, Lawson evidently derived great pride from his naturalist discoveries. New species abounded, including a giant striped tiger, the Moolah, one of which he was able to kill and skin, various new birds of paradise and ducks, a bison-like ox, human-like apes, spiders, beetles, fish and the tallest tree in the world. Where the species were already known, he found them in profusion: herds of thousands of deer and buffalo, three hundred and fourteen crocodiles spotted in an hour, and a colony of birds in twenty thousand nests. If his account of the ascent of Mt Hercules appeared abbreviated and casual, Lawson was positively prolix on the finer detail of his specimens, devoting five pages to the description of a new trapdoor spider. "I have no wish to weary the peruser of this little book with monotonous descriptions," he declared, before launching into the particulars of three more unknown butterflies (Lawson 1875a, 58–9). So much of what surrounded him was new to science that Lawson ultimately tired of the seemingly endless tasks of description and nomenclature; encountering "a few ostriches or emus," he added that "the reader is left at liberty to call them which he pleases" (240).



Figure 8.2 Detail from “Sketch Map of a Journey across the Island of Papua by J.A. Lawson”



Source: John A. Lawson. 1875a *Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea*. London: Chapman & Hall.

Lawson's ethnography of the Papuans is a study in the terms of amateur observation of the period. Physically, his Papuans bore little resemblance to the Papuans of Earl or Wallace, being "repulsive-looking men, having coarse and ugly features, exceedingly short, squat bodies, black matted and dirty hair, and a little monkeyish manner" (Lawson 1875a, 5). With "skin of a tanned, yellowish hue" (11), Lawson's Papuans had never seen a "Blackman" before (209). Curious "to learn something about Papuan law," Lawson offered ethnographic sketches of Houtree Village, describing Papuan morality and customs ("the men showing great regard for their wives and children, and treating the aged with reverence and respect") on the basis of interviews with Chief Kilee.<sup>28</sup> As prescribed by ethnographic convention, Houtree lives were traced from birth through to death, via marriage ("they feast and get fuddled for a week or ten days") (276); a long excursion on Papuan polygamy leads to pointed remarks about the nefarious influence of contact with the Dutch (69–70).<sup>29</sup> Through regular trade with Malay and Chinese vessels, the Papuans at Houtree and further inland had become entirely familiar with long Dutch smoking-pipes and armed themselves with brass six-pounder cannon, horse pistols, pikes and curved swords. The principal foodstuffs and commercial products all appear to have been Asian or American in derivation, including yam, maize, rice, spice trees, mango, tamarind, lime, peach, teak, roasted monkey and herds of cattle bearing "a great resemblance to the yak." The debt of Lawson's Papuans to Asia was most evident in their speech:

But one language appears to be spoken on the island, and of that, many of the words are, without doubt, derived from the Malay, Hindoostanee, Chinese, and other tongues. It is easily learned, or, at least I found no difficulty in mastering it ... (1875a, 277–8).

Lawson's tale was published by Chapman & Hall of London, and sales of the book were obviously sufficiently strong to enable Lawson to publish two further volumes of his travels (neither related to New Guinea) (Bradley 1876; Lawson 1880). Good sales are not always reflected in the reviews, however, and the book met with uproar in the press, attracting unfavourable comment in the *Times* and the *Geographical Magazine*, and in magazines such as the *Athenæum*, many of which cast doubt on its veracity. Alfred Russel Wallace himself undertook the review for *Nature*, in order to counter some more favourable responses which had appeared to accept some of Lawson's claims, as "a duty to inform our readers that it is wholly fictitious. It is not even a clever fiction" (1875, 83). Most reviewers appear to have been divided between outrage and mild amusement:

None of these animals have been met with hitherto in New Guinea by other travellers, who were content with tree-kangaroos and wild pigs, neither of which Captain Lawson has been fortunate enough to observe there (*Geographical Magazine* 1875).

In a letter to the *Athenæum*, the Alpine Club waxed sceptical about the precise details of Lawson's ascent of Mt Hercules, calculating his rate of ascent as three or four times faster than the best climbers of Mont Blanc (Barlow 1875). The more pedantic reviewers observed unaccountable fluctuations in the strength of Lawson's arsenal and supply of fortifying spirits, and queried his credentials as a captain.<sup>30</sup> Yet the literary critic, Henry James, writing in the *Nation*, captured well the ambivalence experienced by many reviewers for whom there remained some slight chance that this was at least a partially true account of travel:

There was a certain vagueness about some of the author's statements, and many of his stories bordered closely upon the marvellous; but his manner of narration seemed most plausible, he gave, first and last, a good deal of detail, his work was published by a most respectable house (Messrs. Chapman & Hall), and, above all, the things he had seen and done were so curious that, if they were not true, the more was the pity (James 1984 [1875], 1136).

Unexpectedly, Lawson took his critics head on, engaging in a lengthy correspondence with the *Athenæum* after its publication of a derisory review which demonstrated that the coordinates, carefully recorded by Lawson for the village of Houtree, actually placed it well out to sea: "[T]he gentleman who wrote this article knows nothing whatever about New Guinea, except such information as he has gleaned from text-books and gazetteers of doubtful accuracy" (Lawson 1875b, 585), to which the *Athenæum* retorted that "our knowledge of New Guinea has ... been derived ... from a study of the original writings of travellers who have actually visited the island" (*Athenæum* 1875, 586). Lawson countered with the assertion that Captain Moresby, as the only other possible source of recent first-hand information on New Guinea, was most likely the origin of the *Athenæum's* intelligence; and, as a parting shot added: "[L]et a traveller explore and describe what he will, there are always wiseacres at home who know more than he does" (Lawson 1875b, 622).

There matters might have rested but for the intervention of Captain Moresby himself, freshly returned from his surveying expeditions on HMS *Basilisk* along the southeast coast of New Guinea and busily preparing his own account of adventures for publication. In a lengthy letter to the *Athenæum* (subsequently reprinted as an appendix to his own sober narrative of exploration, *Discoveries and Surveys in New Guinea and the D'Entrecasteaux Islands*, 1876) Moresby laboured, point by point and page by page, through the least plausible of Lawson's claims, while grounding his own observations upon the "truth" of his presence in New Guinea during exactly the period that Lawson claimed to have been there: "Proas do not exist in Torres Strait ... No tame fowl were seen by

us in New Guinea ... Rice is unknown amongst the Papuans, and no trace of monkeys was ever seen by us," etc. (Moresby 1875).

Moresby and the other indignant letter writers to the *Athenæum* had fallen, like a herd of his mythical Papuan bison, into Lawson's trap, and he pilloried his critics mercilessly:

My ascent of Mount Hercules has, also, provoked something more than mere astonishment in the minds of the delicate city gentlemen and podgy professors who are in the habit of ascending Mont Blanc, with the aid of sherry and sandwiches, and half-a-dozen greasy, garlic-fed guides, and then devoting a quarto volume to an account of their exploits (Lawson 1875b, 585).

Lawson openly mocked Moresby's solemnly stated objections to his claims, objections that were frequently buttressed by Moresby insisting that he "never saw" the animal species or ethnographic details contained in Lawson's account:

A due sense of modesty should have kept [Captain Moresby] silent, especially as he is not a qualified judge as to what is or what is not to be found in the interior of New Guinea ... "We never saw," "we never saw"; when Capt. Moresby does see, he will be deeply mortified to think he is numbered amongst those who have tried to throw discredit upon my narrative (1875b, 787).

In a turn of satirical bravura, Lawson then queried whether Moresby was even the author of his own letter: "Surely the letter in the *Athenæum* bearing Capt. Moresby's name cannot be a forgery; if so, I am wasting my powder" (787).

At the height of this storm of controversy, Captain Lawson achieved perhaps his finest moment, when he had a paper read for him before a meeting of the Anthropological Society on 22 June 1875, with Colonel A. Lane Fox, the President, in the chair. Sadly, his paper, "The Papuans of New Guinea," was not reproduced in the society's journal. Perhaps more tellingly, no vote of thanks was offered to its author (Anthropological Society 1876, 322; *Athenæum* 1875, 858). Challenged by the editor of the *Athenæum* to appear with the skin of his Moolah tiger, Captain Lawson finally fell silent.

Lawson's principal rhetorical strategy harnessed the obsessive descriptive detail commonly associated with naturalist explorers but couched it in the modest, bluff language of plain-speaking gentleman amateurism. Lengthy parodies of naturalist narratives are present throughout Lawson's account, but parodic precision need not always entail verbose description. Just as effective are the passages of *ennui* – of short, terse entries for those days unmarked by events of any note: "Dec 4. Passing over exactly the same kind of country as yesterday. Still less forest" (Lawson 1875a, 249).<sup>31</sup> Restraint itself becomes a marker of truth.

Similarly, Lawson's map (figure 8.2) is both minutely detailed and restrained in its observance of the voyager's line of sight. Rivers are crossed, though their sources and subsequent outflows are not known, and villages glimpsed in the distance, though they remain unvisited and unnamed. The extent of the map is limited to the scope of his route – no claims are made for New Guinea beyond the reach of Lawson's eye and his surveying equipment (in contrast with Trégance's all-seeing map). A similar contrast is evident in the illustrations for the two volumes. Trégance is shown being wrecked at sea, captured by the Orangwōks, and tried before a toga-clad jury of Orangwōk chiefs. Lawson restricts the illustration of his text to just the map and a delicate watercolour sketch of Mt Hercules, reproduced as the frontispiece to his book (figure 8.3) – the immediacy of the sketch and the presumed agency of the author lending further weight to the claim of his presence in the interior.

**Figure 8.3** "Mount Hercules"



Source: John A. Lawson. 1875a *Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea*. London: Chapman & Hall, frontispiece.

Finally, like his map, Lawson's achievements, while admirable in their ambition, proved to be modest (and thus equally admirable) in their execution: Mt Hercules remained unclimbed and New Guinea uncrossed.

The question of Captain Lawson's identity has engaged bibliophiles, librarians and scholars ever since (see MacFarlane 1951; Romilly 1893, 189–90; Souter 1963, 11; Stone 1960; Tudor 1961a, 1961b, 1961c). Although several candidates

have been proposed, including William Edington Armit (1848–1901), a policeman in Queensland, later employed in British New Guinea, and Robert Henry Armit (1844–?), a lieutenant in the Royal Navy with experience as an assistant surveyor in Australian waters and later Honorary Secretary of the New Guinea Colonising Association, the case is far from closed.<sup>32</sup> Later private – and previously unknown – correspondence by Lawson (still writing in character) includes the heavily qualified confession that:

a great part of the book is a correct description of the island of New Guinea and was at the time derived from an original source. In fact it is a work of fiction drawn largely from nature; and I say that many of my assertions remain to be disproved (Lawson 1895).

Lawson's "original source" is not identified, but his account is strikingly devoid of reference to or evidence of any familiarity with the few texts that might have provided him with more credible ecological or ethnographic material. The narratives of the natural scientists exploring New Guinea during the early to mid-1870s would have been available to him only as reports to newspapers and letters to journals, but a glance through Earl's (1853) ethnography of the Papuans or Wallace's *Malay Archipelago* might have spared Lawson some of the criticism from his reviewers.

This seemingly fatal poverty of sources is more than compensated for by the precision of his parody, and the confidence with which Lawson met his detractors in the press reflects the sureness of his style. Indeed, the ecological and ethnographic blunders appear almost deliberate, as part of his satirical stand on the privilege of presence in an interior to which no one else – Captain Moresby included – could claim access. Lawson's parodic precision was rendered still more effective by occasional evidence for sober restraint interspersed with passages of wild excess in which familiar elements of a global exotic were knowingly transposed to New Guinea in breach of naturalist expectation.<sup>33</sup> Such niceties mattered little to Lawson, whoever he (or she) might have been, but they mattered greatly to real explorers such as Captain Moresby, who suffered the final indignity of having his own hard-won discoveries belittled by the Admiralty's Hydrographer:

"Discoveries, Captain Moresby!" he replied; "I was not aware that you had made any. I suppose New Guinea was discovered before you went there. We have work like yours coming in every day."... Thus my hopes vanished; the word 'discovery' was henceforth officially eliminated by the Admiralty (Moresby 1913, 306).

Lawson could take possession of interior New Guinea, sculpting its topography as he pleased and stocking it with whatever he fancied, secure in the knowledge that no standards of proof could dispossess him entirely. As David Glen observes,

Lawson's New Guinea imaginary was "watertight in the way he effaced other texts and unified a disparate scene of writing" (2000, 27).

Wallace may have dismissed his account as poor fiction but Lawson's parody achieved something altogether more interesting by identifying the rhetorical strategy of precision and the vocabulary of field naturalist explorers as the critical narrative devices conferring authority, not just on documents or their authors but on what Gillian Beer describes as the entire "international gentlemanly community of enquirers" (1996, 323). Membership of this community was critical to the intellectual legitimation or registration of one's discoveries: Paul du Chaillu's 1861 narrative of exploration in interior Africa had previously been subjected to intense scrutiny and scepticism, particularly in the pages of the *Athenæum*, as his "class, educational background, and race quickly became key issues in the debate over the scientific worth" of his book (McCook 1996, 179).<sup>34</sup> The acceptance of new discoveries thus hinged upon the successful incorporation of their discoverers within the scientific community, and of their narratives of discovery within a canonical archive (Pratt 1992, 204; Withers 2004). Securing an audience at one of London's learned societies was amongst the very highest of honours to which colonial explorers could aspire; Lawson claimed later that he had also received personal speaking invitations from Sir John Lubbock of the Royal Society, as well as from the Royal Geographical Society and Zoological Society (Lawson 1895, 1–2).

That Lawson's outrageous claims were even briefly entertained by these societies would appear to confirm his most inspired insight, which was that the truth-claiming narrative strategies of actual explorers and their own appeals to a privilege or rhetoric of presence could be turned against them. The intense competition and exclusivity that characterised learned metropolitan society, and the gathering professionalism and boundary maintenance of the natural sciences were the game in Lawson's sights, and his aim proved as true in London as it had been in interior New Guinea. Climbing mountains, documenting native customs, discovering vast lakes, collecting new butterflies and fighting off natives with equal ease, Lawson aligned each of the classic avenues of colonial advancement and subjected them collectively to the satire of his modest wandering in New Guinea's interior.

## The Last Colonial Imaginary

Travel narratives are as old as journeys themselves, if not older.

(Todorov 1996, 287)

The success, or fleeting notoriety, of Lawson's *Wanderings* owed much to the fortuitous timing of its appearance, during the brief interlude between the identification of New Guinea's interior as a novel field for enterprising explorers and the English publication in 1880 of the first comprehensive account of travels

into the interior, the bluntly titled *New Guinea: What I Did and What I Saw*, by Luigi Maria d'Albertis (see Mosko, this volume). The expectation that adventure fiction in the realist mode should follow closely the more factual reports of actual explorers appears largely to be borne out in the case of interior New Guinea. Yet, in the course of their own adventures, these real explorers also reacted to or even emulated the New Guinea imagined in fiction. Thus d'Albertis acknowledged the stimulus of Lawson in launching his ambitious second expedition up the Fly River in 1876:

Although I had thrown aside with contempt the book relating Captain Lawson's travels across New Guinea, still I actually had perused it; and it will not be wondered at that when I came to converse with the people who had actually beheld the huge birds, and seen the tracks of the buffaloes, and when, moreover, I heard of the probable existence of the rhinoceros, as asserted by Captain Moresby, my unbelief was staggered, and in my heart I begged Captain Lawson's pardon for having doubted his veracity (D'Albertis 1880, vol. 2, 2).

Lawson's fauna may have appeared ridiculous from the zoological security of London, but explorers approaching New Guinea were less certain of the integrity of Wallace's line: Sir William MacGregor's dinosaur or megafauna, MacFarlane's giant bird and Monckton's "gazeka" were all the productions of otherwise sober explorers (Souter 1963, 13–4).

While it is not my intention to suggest that Lawson's claims were seriously received by his readers, there are grounds for asserting that his *Wanderings* contributed in some measure to, or at least prefigured, the shift from the apparent polyphony of representations of New Guinea and of Papuans before the 1870s toward a more unified, if no more coherent, series of conventions guiding subsequent narratives about the exploration of interior New Guinea. Factual and fictional narratives of interior exploration would continue to leapfrog each other, from d'Albertis through to the self-conscious accounts of first contacts in the Highlands written by patrol officers and prospectors during the 1920s and 1930s, but the imaginative freedoms exercised by Trégance had been lost.

The broader argument being put forward here for the influence of a diffuse but all-pervasive colonial imaginary draws its strength from the permeability of the boundaries between fictional and factual writing, amongst academic, scientific, administrative, popular and juvenile literatures, and within the reading libraries of travellers. From at least the eighteenth century onward, travellers read fiction as they travelled and as they wrote, having been exposed as children to juvenile Robinsonades and other travel fictions. It may be possible to trace the intertextual genealogies that extend from the personal, first person singular narrative (whether fictional or factual) through to the plural forms of observation and witness, to generalised narratives and thence to a broader colonial imaginary,

which in turn informs further personal narratives. Perhaps the more rewarding challenge is to consider not just the mutual implication of fictional and factual accounts but the manner in which this collective literature has drawn upon and further nourished a common imaginary.

The notion of a colonial imaginary may obscure the multiple histories and cultures of colonialism, but the extent to which the elements of this imaginary traversed these histories and cultures is striking. Much as Defoe and other seminal travel fictions were translated into most European languages – and then rewritten to further embed them in local, national understandings – so, too, Trégence and Lawson were both swiftly translated, indicating a ready market and an anticipated appreciation for these fictions across Europe. Mary Louise Pratt describes the product of this gathering uniformity of representation as a “monolith” (1992, 220) and, while that may be too concrete a metaphor for the entangled and often elusive transfers between narratives that we can often scarcely distinguish as either factual or fictional, it does resonate with the sense of the power and pervasiveness of the resulting conventions that operate throughout colonial literatures and imaginaries.

The travel encounter is a classic site for the enactment of these conventions, allowing as it does for the projection of preconceptions, relatively uncomplicated by more substantial engagement. Pratt writes of the European project of circumnavigation as “a double deed that consists of sailing around the world then writing an account of it” (1992, 29). In much the same way, encounters are almost invariably a “double deed,” but one in which the conception of the account prefigures the act of encounter as much as the encounter determines the content of the narrative. If we are to appreciate the terms of the travel encounter – in Pratt’s double sense as both event and narrative – we shall have to incorporate fictional accounts within our analysis, in order to understand how they have assisted in prescribing and embedding those terms. As the authors of travel narratives – fictional and factual – have long appreciated, the real often finds itself standing in the shadow of the semblance of the real.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Dryden's revision of the translation of this famous couplet by Sir William Soames reads: "Write not what cannot be with ease conceiv'd; Some truths may be too strong to be believ'd" (Boileau-Despréaux 1755).

<sup>2</sup> See Naranch (2002) on the political and analytical implications of Lacan's substantivisation of the imaginary.

<sup>3</sup> Shapiro's poem offers an epigrammatic précis of New Guinea as it was imagined in children's fiction and approached by European explorers: "And children learned a land shaped like a bird, / Impenetrable black. Here savages / Made shrunken heads of corpses, poison darts / Pricked sudden death, no man had crossed their hills. / It fell from Asia: severed from the East; / It was the last Unknown. Only the fringe / Was nervous to the touch of voyagers."

<sup>4</sup> This very cursory summary of European travel fiction draws principally upon Adams (1983); Dunmore (1988); Fausett (1995); Gove (1975 [1941]); Hordern House (2002); Rennie (1995); and Urbain (1998). See McKeon (1987) for a comprehensive history of the tension between romance and history in seventeenth and early-eighteenth century English novels.

<sup>5</sup> This shift toward a heightened and more sophisticated verisimilitude in travel fiction can be identified in Frederick Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841), which was composed explicitly as an improvement upon the crude attempts at realism of Johann Wyss' *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812). Asked by his own children to write a sequel to the exploits of the Robinsons, Marryat found Wyss' factual errors

unpalatable: "it does not adhere to the probable, or even the possible, which should ever be the case, in a book, even if fictitious, when written for children" (Marryat 1970 [1841], xi).

<sup>6</sup> On the history of European contact with New Guinea, see Wichmann (1909–12); Souter (1963); and Moore (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Wallace's *Malay Archipelago* spawned a fictional sub-genre in its own right. An early example is William Kingston's *In the Eastern Seas, or, The Regions of the Bird of Paradise: A Book for Boys* (1874), which follows much of the route of Wallace's travels around what is now Indonesia, faithfully reproducing descriptive passages and even illustrations from the original. George Manville Fenn's *Nat the Naturalist; or, A Boy's Adventures in the Eastern Seas* (1887) covers much of the same ground.

<sup>8</sup> See Ballard (2000) for a preliminary analysis of this mapping of an African imaginary onto interior New Guinea.

<sup>9</sup> Extracts from many of these works have been assembled by Nigel Krauth (ed. 1982). Krauth's (1983) unpublished doctoral thesis provides the most comprehensive analysis of early European literature on Papua New Guinea, though it identifies Beach (1863) as the first fictional account of Europeans in New Guinea, and does not address the New Guinea fictions of Defoe (1725), the Morrells (B. Morrell 1970 [1832]; A. Morrell 1970 [1833]); Jacobs (1844) or Coulter (1847) (see below).

<sup>10</sup> Nigel Krauth (1983) offers the most detailed analysis available of these two works; Regis Tove Stella (2007, 21–8) has recently delivered a critique of both books from the perspective of a Papua New Guinean scholar.

<sup>11</sup> Defoe signals the forms of knowledge that would be desirable in such a moment of discovery, following the general expectations of the Royal Society's instructions (McKeon 1987, 100ff), if only to account for his author's failure to furnish them: "Our Stay here was so little, that we could make no Enquiry into their Religion, Manner of Government, and other Customs: nor have I Room to crowd many of these Things into this Account" (1725, 133).

<sup>12</sup> The author's verdict on New Guinea is suitably modest: "it seem'd to be very pleasant, but very hot; the Woods were all flourishing and green; and the Soil rich, but no great Matter, that could be the subject of Trade: But an excellent Place, to be a Bait Land, or Port of Refreshment in any Voyage" (1725, 134).

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Morrell's narrative appears to have been written by Samuel Woodworth for the Harper brothers' publishing house (Exman 1965, 29–30); Woodworth's son, Selim, was one of only two survivors of Morrell's final and fatal voyage. Abby Morrell's account, which has recently been treated as a sober, self-authored text (Smith 2000), was written by a Colonel Samuel L. Knapp, also under contract to the Harper brothers. Quite how much liberty these writers took with tales – no doubt already enhanced in the telling by the Morrells – is unclear. A later attempt to revive Morrell's reputation as an explorer of the Antarctic was howled down at the Royal Geographical Society (Hamilton 1870), and subsequent critics have been equally as unforgiving (Pearson 1984; Springer 2001; Stommel 1984, 16ff; Wichmann 1909–12, II(i), 16–8, 27–31).

<sup>14</sup> Pearson has suggested that "this book contains what must be the earliest of the several hoax accounts of journeys to the interior of New Guinea," though the interior adventures described by Jacobs appear to be confined to the island of New Britain (1984, 47).

<sup>15</sup> Wichmann's almost obsessively comprehensive chronological listing of ships visiting New Guinea faithfully logs the accounts of the Morrells and of Coulter, dismissing the latter's claims as "fantasy" (1909–12, II (i), 34–5). Deverel, however, is so patently fictional that he fails to register. Krauth (1983, 18–21) identifies Captain Mayne Reid as the probable author writing as Charles Beach.

<sup>16</sup> Fiction would continue to inform real voyages with Beach and the other authors of fictional New Guinea inspiring at least two gold-seeking expeditions from San Francisco, their plans modelled closely on Beach's account (Laracy 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Clarke uses New Guinea and Papua interchangeably. Only with the advent of colonial boundaries, and particularly that between German New Guinea and Australian-administered Papua, did the terms assume their more limited spatial references. Here I tend to use *New Guinea* in reference to the island and reserve the term *Papuan* for its inhabitants (see Ballard 2008 for a brief history of the latter term).

<sup>18</sup> See also Bougainville writing of a *cacique*, as quoted in Tcherkézoff (this volume).

<sup>19</sup> "To name any of these delightful lands, basking in the light and heat of a tropical sun, and abounding in everything that can satisfy the physical wants or delight the sensual tastes, after the cold, damp, sterile regions of the Scottish or the Irish coast, as is now the case, is palpably absurd" (Jacobs 1844, 113–4, footnote). Thus New Britain became "Bidera" and New Ireland "Emeno," in an early satirical

stab at the conventions of naming rights and the unfortunate attribution of names such as the New Hebrides, New South Wales and New Caledonia to Pacific territories.

<sup>20</sup> The optimism of this interior imaginary of the mid- to late-nineteenth century stands in strong contrast to the subsequent pessimism of the moral topography conceived in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1973 [1902]), in which nothing of moral value remains to be discovered in or recovered from the centre.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Crocker appears to be a pseudonym for the Reverend Henry Crocker Marriott Watson, "a Tasmanian who migrated to New Zealand in 1873 and who published anonymously several other novels in the *voyages imaginaires* genre" (Krauth 1982, 35).

<sup>22</sup> "Besides, Lamlam was not black by any means, she was fairer than any of the Orangwōks, and they were usually of a dark olive complexion. ... Let those who feel inclined to condemn my feelings towards Lamlam, just place themselves in my position, an outcast from all civilised life, and their judgment will, I am sure, be greatly modified" (Trégance 1892 [1876], 154).

<sup>23</sup> This point is made by Krauth (1982, 36). Earl's summation of the literature on Papuans, published in 1853, would have been of more use to Trégance.

<sup>24</sup> Trégance's tale was evidently a popular title within the genre of children's fiction, and at least three further editions were published in English (in 1888, 1892 and 1894), with a translation into German under the title *Ludwig Freigang. Auf Neu-Guinea – Neun Jahre unter den Orang-Woks*, Leipzig (1878).

<sup>25</sup> The "excitability" associated here with Papuans is probably derived, whether directly or indirectly, from Wallace's famous contrast between Papuans and Malays (1869, 317–8).

<sup>26</sup> The dotted coastline of north-eastern Papua suggests that the author had not yet had access to Moresby's (1876) account of his surveying expedition to this area, with its accompanying map. However, he (or she) had obviously read accounts of Stanley's surveying voyage to southern New Guinea (published by MacGillivray in 1852), as Trégance identifies the Owen Stanley Mountains from the south coast (Trégance 1892, 43).

<sup>27</sup> Companionship on both fictional and factual adventures to New Guinea deserves a study of its own. Of Lawson's companions, only two survive. D'Albertis (emulating Lawson?) would later hire an even more exotic blend of assistants for his voyages up the Fly River; tragically, most of them would prove as expendable as Lawson's crew.

<sup>28</sup> Chief Kilee becomes "Kilu" on Lawson's return, symptomatic of the author's casual disregard for individual Papuans and for his readers alike (Lawson 1875a, 7, 11, 272).

<sup>29</sup> The Dutch are not kindly treated by Lawson, who described them as the "oppressors" of Papuans (1875a, 267).

<sup>30</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* 1875, *Times* 1875. The reviewer for the *Edinburgh Review* enjoyed himself immensely: "The Captain's double-barrelled rifle must have produced others on the journey, for we only hear of one when they started, and yet it and three others had been lost and still two remained" (*Edinburgh Review* 1875, 517); "With Captain Lawson to see a mountain is to ascend it, and perhaps he would add to ascend a mountain is to see it" (512); "It is clear that as Captain Webb is among swimmers so is Captain Lawson, of whom we know not whether he be a land or sea captain, among climbers" (515), adding later, when Lawson lashes one of his companions, that his choice of "*ultima ratio*, a rope's end ... makes us think that he must be a sea-captain" (516). A search of the Navy and Army List for 1875 has produced no Captain Lawson, on either sea or land (Stone 1960, 38).

<sup>31</sup> Compare Conrad: "Day after day, with the stamp and shuffle of sixty pair of bare feet behind me ... Camp, cook, sleep, strike camp, march" (1973 [1902], 28).

<sup>32</sup> Krauth (1983, 39–46) has assembled the most detailed case for R.H. Armit as the true identity of Captain Lawson, largely on the basis of stylistic similarities and Armit's uncritical reference to Lawson at a time when his New Guinea Colonising Association was seeking to promote New Guinea as a destination for British settlers. An additional piece of evidence, not documented by Krauth, is the very close correspondence between Lawson's frontispiece illustration of Mount Hercules (figure 9.4) and Armit's (1875) frontispiece engraving of Mount Egmont in New Zealand.

<sup>33</sup> As Lawson later commented on the reaction to his book: "The indignation of the naturalist portion of the Society was unbounded because I had made horned animals to exist eastward of Celebes; which would, it seems, upset all their preconceived ideas of 'geographical distribution'. That, of course, one could not expect them to tolerate" (1895, 7).

<sup>34</sup> Lawson's adoption of the title of Captain was an obvious claim to the credibility conferred by status, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* review (1875) of Lawson's book opened with a lengthy diatribe against the abuse by authors of military commissions as "certificates of trustworthiness and responsibility."