Declaration

I hereby declare that the following thesis submitted for the degree of a Master of History contains no material that has been previously accepted for an award of any other degree or diploma at a university. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed ..........................
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Chapter One

The Last Unknown

It was in November, 1871, and while I was sojourning at Sydney, New South Wales, that I formed the resolution of exploring the interior of New Guinea, a country that had great charm for me, as being but little known to Europeans, and therefore affording a new field for the naturalist and adventurer.1

After travelling through India and Malaya, Captain John Lawson fixed on New Guinea to finally satisfy his appetite for adventure and discovery. A merchant vessel, the Nautilus, left him at the south coast village of Houtree in the absence of ‘a single civilised station’ from which to base an expedition. Here the natives were friendly and industrious in spite of the Papuan reputation in Sydney as a ‘fierce, treacherous and thievish race’.2 Lawson recruited two guides, Danang and Aboo (Joe and Billy, two Australian Aborigines were already engaged, as well as Toolo, his Lascar servant of two years), and set off on foot to cross New Guinea and reveal to the world the secret contents of its interior.

They followed a faint path inland under a canopy ‘so closely matted together with parasitical plants, that the sun’s rays were excluded, and we appeared to be walking through a dimly-lighted tunnel’.3 Strange voices everywhere clamoured for attention: ‘the humming of insects, screaming of parrots and chattering of monkeys, together with a thousand other sounds from birds and beasts, created such a hubbub, that we had to shout when talking in order to hear each other’. This fell to silence at noon each day as a ‘stillness of death reigned on all sides’.4 Lawson pushed forward, past the deadly yagi spider, a charging bullock, poisonous snakes, scorpions, and hungry crocodiles that made river crossings ‘a ticklish business’. Each presented a stage challenge, and none as threatening as the moolah, an all-powerful New Guinea

2 Ibid, p. 2.
4 Ibid, p. 32.
tiger Lawson first suspected to exist only in the fearful imaginations of his guides. But rumour introduced itself one sleepless night just nearby as ‘some animal continually uttered a dismal moan like a man in extreme anguish’. When the unseen predator finally made its killing, Lawson had to listen ‘for a full hour to the crunching of bones’. The moolah, or whatever it was, seemed to target Lawson specifically, shadowing and stalking his every step, telling him ‘this place was haunted by demons’.

Lawson made it clear he was no more than an adventurer and sought to spare ‘the peruser of this little book’ the labour of scientific description. But geographical features were recorded and Natural History was collected in line with the responsibilities first explorers carried. He secured Birds of Paradise ‘in a wild state’, and in another region, ‘a magnificent collection of beetles and butterflies comprising over a hundred different kinds’. With limited carrier power in a landscape always novel, only Nature’s most striking examples could be collected. Many were too large to transport amongst blades of grass ten feet high, daisies the size of sunflowers and mushrooms four feet wide. New Guinea’s zoology, botany and geography all followed to scale. Lawson measured a tree that was taller than any other in the world and, in the heart of New Guinea, discovered a mountain he named Hercules for the way it stood ‘in the full grandeur of its height’. In thinning air, with blood flowing from his nose and ears, Lawson had to abandon the assault on Mt Hercules, which at 32,000 feet, was ‘by far the highest mountain known’. Travelling through ‘park-like’ country further inland, Lawson came across ‘a magnificent body of water, sparkling in the brilliant sunlight like liquid gold’. In response to this great lake he issued ‘a loud and prolonged cheer, in which I was joined by my dusky companions, who seemed to have already imbibed a considerable share of my love of travel and adventure’.

Lawson killed his first moolah on descent from Mt Hercules and would face several more, on one occasion saving Danang from being carried away. Lawson also rescued Billy when he sank to his neck in a bog. Toolo, now ‘more like a companion and friend than a servant’, suddenly went mad and attempted to stab Lawson before shooting himself. Within thirty miles of the north coast the party encountered natives of an aggressive character, and were attacked in one village, losing Danang and Joe along with the bulk of the collections and provisions. Instead of continuing to the more densely populated coast, Lawson retreated to the relative safety of the interior. They survived an episode of life-threatening thirst (Lawson

5 Ibid, p. 38.
6 Ibid, p. 57.
7 Ibid, p. 154.
8 Ibid, p. 90.
fighting off an ‘almost uncontrollable desire’ to shoot Billy and Aboo), before reaching the lush region of Lake Alexandrina and, in an alternate course back to Houtree, enjoyed ‘one of the prettiest and most romantic tracts of country’ imaginable. After seven months in the interior of New Guinea, Lawson returned ‘dreadfully shabby, almost naked in fact’, with his journal and a few skins. He was home in England several months later, ‘completely broken down with fatigue’.

Captain Lawson’s journal was published in April 1875 as the first explorer report of inner New Guinea. In this last unknown, the discovered world’s most desired objects and stories melted into one seamless wonder. A reputable publisher, Chapman and Hall, reassuring readers with the presentation of an authentic journey, included a colour-plate frontispiece of Mt Hercules and fold-out map showing Lawson’s route. Journal entries were arranged in line with the narrative conventions of the eyewitness explorer. As one Australian reviewer surmised, *Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea* was ‘a most attractive book, full of exciting incidents, described in a most graphic manner, and in a correct and picturesque style’. While Lawson’s claims generally met scepticism or amusement, there was no existing account to compare it with. The *Geographical Magazine* gestured a welcome, inviting Lawson to address London’s geographers: ‘we understand that the author brought back to England several trophies of the chase and we much trust that he will be persuaded to exhibit them and read a paper at an early meeting of the Royal Geographical Society’. Captain Lawson wrote three letters in response to attacks on his work, but never appeared in public to talk about New Guinea.

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10 *Brisbane Courier*, 6 August 1875.
A more sober forum for New Guinea discovery took place in Sydney a decade later at the inaugural meeting of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (RGSA), following Queensland’s annexation of the eastern half of the island. The prized object appeared before the geographers as the barest of contemporary maps, raised above like a projector screen, or a window of fantasy, framing exactly an unknown primeval world. In his opening address, Society Secretary Marin la Meslé sought to shed some light on what had remained ‘up to this day a sealed book to the geographer’. Wide river mouths on the south coast promised passage right into New Guinea but, so far, ‘no white man dared to brave the unknown terrors of the interior of the dark island’. The blank map provided a smooth clean surface onto which mountain, jungle, swamp and savagery were planted. Even more dangerous than ‘the arrows of the Papuans’, la Meslé cautioned, was a blanket of ‘terrible fever’ in ‘the poisonous air itself [which] stands guard over the island’s treasures, and seems to forbid the explorer the entrance to that magnificent garden of Eden’. The most beautiful and magical things lay in wait for those who could survive the journey.

Under the green dome of the silent forests, myriads of insects and birds have their home. The latter are amongst the most beautiful of the Almighty’s creatures, so marvellous that the first naturalists who described them, in ecstasy before the exquisite colours of their gorgeous plumage, have deemed them worthy of a place in Elysium, and have classed them under the generic name of ‘Birds of Paradise’.

Here the audience sat on familiar ground. In silence from forest canopy heights, floated the perfectly composed Paradise birds, astonishing the first naturalists with their unparalleled beauty and providing, in papers and public lectures such as this, a frozen and foundational moment to conjure New Guinea by way of an untouched object.

The un-earthly birds, exclusive to the distant forests of New Guinea, had long tantalised Europe’s collectors and readers of Natural History. At the time of the first inland expeditions in the 1870s, Paradise plumes were highly valued articles of trade and ‘the rare Bird...
of Paradise’ a recognisable New Guinea icon in European eyes. The bird’s unique beauty prompted speculation of hidden resources which, as pointed out at the RGSA’s first meeting, had already ‘been spoken of as probably of an extreme richness’. The Paradise bird would guide geographers, naturalists and prospectors to the subterranean pools of an unseen interior.

Its attraction added urgency to the RGSA message that the ‘time has come for an expedition of a scientific nature to visit the dark island’;15 an expedition set apart from past explorations la Meslée judged non-scientific for their collective failure to generate discovery according to an imperial program. The idea of New Guinea as an elusive ‘last unknown’ held currency during the second half of the nineteenth century in the elaboration of failure and in the indulgence of unfinished collections. As I will demonstrate, scientific achievement in New Guinea was predicated on the expression of a certain kind of failure which left collecting goals ultimately unrealised and journeys forever incomplete. Needless to say, the 1885 RGSA scientific expedition was a dismal failure, and Captain John Lawson never really went to New Guinea.

NEW GUINEA.
1853.
G. W. E.
A blank on the map

At another meeting in November 1884, as the canvassed scientific expedition approached realisation, RGSA President Sir Edward Strickland sought to place New Guinea within a framework of nineteenth century geographical progress. The notes for Strickland's address show that the parent Royal Geographical Society (RGS) of London's imagined conquest of Africa was held up as a model to be replicated in the domestic project, New Guinea, 'the new child born to us'.

(Sir Edward then referred his hearers to the map of Africa as an example of what had been done by explorers during the last quarter of a century).16

At its inception in 1830, an RGS committee member wrote of that Society's main focus, targeting the centre of Africa as 'virtually a blank on the map, a mysterious region exciting the curiosity of geographers and explorers'.17 Over the next fifty years the RGS sponsored a series of inland expeditions. Lander, Barth, Livingstone, Burton, Speke, Baker, Grant, Stanley, Du Chaillu and Cameron criss-crossed the continent locating lakes, rivers, mountains, customs, tribes, languages, kingdoms and each other. The immediate goals of early African expeditions were partial and modest: explorers sought to establish and preserve spatial relationships between geographical objects encountered in the path of travel, recording field notes and charts under the assumption that these would (later) be worked into a more comprehensive and universally valid system. The erasure of virtual blanks, as witnessed in the time-lapse filling of one map, was the clearest and simplest measure of geographical achievement.18 Hence, when Strickland directed his audience to 'the map of Africa', he asked them to consider not one but a sequence of maps, each of which had formerly held authority. As new travellers retraced and

16 The brackets report gaps in the flow of speech at the meeting, when displayed maps or other objects were consulted, or when the response of the audience was recorded: '(Applause)'. Proceedings of the Geographical Society of Australasia (Sydney 1884), 'General Monthly Meeting 29th November, 1884', p. 115.
18 RGS member Francis Galton proposed to overcome the distorting effect of conventional maps by photographing model replicas of the countryside with stereoscopic cameras to piece together a 'bird's eye' view under a single image, 'On stereoscopic maps, taken from models of mountainous countries', Journal of the Royal Society (35) 1865, pp. 99-104. Galton had previously highlighted the inadequacies of 'ordinary maps' in teaching Geography in English schools: 'The strictly accurate, but meagre information that is afforded to the student by ordinary maps is more tantalising than satisfactory. A blind man fingering a model could learn as much from his sense of touch alone, as they convey to our eyes. They are little more than an abstraction, or a ghost of the vivid recollection with which the memory of the traveller is stored.' F. Galton, 'Notes on modern geography', in J.W. Parker (ed.), Cambridge Essays Contributed by Members of the University (London 1855), p. 80.
extended the journeys of predecessors, pushing the boundaries of Geography further with each additional path, the map of Africa approached a state of completion.

Twenty-five years ago Africa was the great dark continent. At the time Speke and Grant and Burton made the first geographical exploration to the great lakes, and were soon followed by Dr. Livingstone, the eminent missionary. Then Baker and Speke went to work again, and in a few years so many other travellers followed in their footsteps that Africa had almost been mapped out for us.19

Exploration in Africa had moved forward with cumulative effect to a position inviting historical review, where, 'altogether during the last twenty-five years a flood of brilliant light had been shed upon the great dark continent'. In the footsteps of famed explorers, railroads were now being laid and lines of communication drawn up. To illustrate the recent advances, Strickland noted that Ujiji, formerly an 'abominable centre of slave traffic' (and the place where Stanley had found Livingstone), was now the 'head-quarters of our postal system throughout the African continent'.20 The favoured metaphor, a 'flood of brilliant light' cast over Africa, revealed 'great tracts of country teeming with millions of people desirous of obtaining European manufactures'. In the distant geographies instituted by RGS/RGSA proceedings, manufactured products would freely circulate in what formerly were blank spaces. The collective work of 'those who had opened up Africa' in just twenty-five years could thus be referenced in the ever more intricate web of pioneer narratives, in maps progressively ironing blanks from the page, and in sites of noteworthy progress like Ujiji. Together, this opening of Africa was adopted by RGSA members in textbook form as the exemplary incidence of colonial clearing, a master narrative to be emulated in the 'Africa' of their part of the world.

It had been recommended that the RGSA New Guinea expedition be led by a man with 'previous experience in tropical countries', whose party of 'surveyors, skilled collectors, and persons possessing special knowledge in various branches of science', along with the carrier numbers this entailed, would approximate in size the larger African expeditions such as Henry Stanley's in the Congo. A strategy was outlined with the goal of systematically 'opening up' the interior in the wake of the first expedition, drawing on a fund to be known as the 'New Guinea Exploration Fund', which in administration would follow the example of the RGS 'African Exploration Fund'.

20 Ibid, p. 115.
The blank New Guinea interior also played host to the ‘sensational’ geography explorers like Stanley projected onto Africa. The great void represented by the latest chart pulled the reader into a peopled land of storybook charm seen and known already.

‘Now, look at this, the latest chart which Europeans have drawn of this region. It is a blank, perfectly white ...’

‘I assure you, Frank, this enormous void is about to be filled up. Blank as it is, it has a singular fascination for me. Never has white paper possessed such a charm for me as this has, and I have already mentally peopled it, filled it with the most wonderful pictures of towns, villages, rivers, countries, and tribes – all in the imagination – and I am burning to see whether I am correct or not.’

While Stanley appeared to revel in filling the last spaces on the map of Africa, Joseph Conrad at the turn of the century lamented the passing of a boyhood dream for one unknown, ‘the most blank’, he had always marked out as his own:

There was one yet – the biggest, the most blank, so to speak – that I had a hankering after. True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness.

A perfect and horrifying Congo returned Marlow’s gaze when he ‘looked at the map of it’ through the lens of a shop-window, his individual agency subordinated not only to Nature, but to the march of commerce in the imperial scramble. As Marlow hazily recalled snippets from the popular press (‘then I remembered there was a big concern, a Company for trade on that river’), the blank space treasured in youth became a place of darkness. This ‘immense darkness’ had emerged on the tail-end of discovery, to reverse Geographical Society equations of darkness with unmapped unknowns. An unblinking culture of exploitation and commercial opportunity stood solidly in place of the heroic yet fragile outlook of the early explorer.

The displacement of adventurous geography and the shrinking scope for discovery was also suffered within the Geographical Societies. In his 1887 paper ‘On the Scope and Methods of Geography’, RGS member Halford Mackinder saw no room left for Geography to move, with the majority of the globe’s surface now mapped.

For half a century several Societies, and most of all our own, have been active in promoting the exploration of the world. The result is that we are now near the end of the roll of great discoveries. The Polar regions are the only large blanks remaining on our maps. A Stanley can never again reveal a Congo to the delighted world. And as tales of adventure grow fewer and fewer, as their place is more and more taken by the details of Ordnance Surveys, even Fellows of Geographical Societies may despondently ask 'What is Geography?'

With maps for Africa and other unknowns nearing completion, the RGS focus for heroic exploration shifted to the globe's polar extremities. The impending end to 'the roll of great discoveries' would bring death to the adventure tale, and it was to this loss that Mackinder addressed concern about the future of Geography. Had the energetic Fellows of the Geographical Societies filled the blank spaces of the globe too hastily? An anxiety about a use-by date for more celebrated RGS activities partly explains the welcome to Captain Lawson in the Geographical Magazine. The Linnean Society of London had dismissed Lawson for misplacing his zoology so absurdly, as had Alfred Russel Wallace, the only English naturalist to have collected at length in New Guinea. He pointed out that Lawson's tigers, apes and buffaloes were as likely to be found in New Guinea as in the highlands of Scotland. A one-sided 'debate' was sustained in the concert of opinion from explorers, surveyors, hunters and mountaineers, until their objections were put to rest, and the book withdrawn from publication, when the distinguished geographer E.G. Ravenstein calculated both Houtree and Mt Hercules, according to Lawson's co-ordinates, to be placed way out at sea. During his brief run of publication, Lawson succeeded for a moment in uncovering something fresh and exotic to a desired audience - 'the delighted world' to which Stanley revealed the Congo to in 1876.

Although New Guinea had not been formally targeted by the RGS, the Society's proceedings provided a central forum for explorer reports in the 1870s. At the conclusion of one meeting devoted to fresh New Guinea material in 1876, RGS President Henry Rawlinson recalled 'expressing some apprehension' two years ago 'when the subject of New Guinea was first brought forward'. Rawlinson had been 'accustomed to fall back upon New Guinea as a sort of piece de resistance' when 'threatened with the exhaustion of material for consideration'. In the current climate he 'had feared that that piece de resistance would be very shortly consumed'. But these fears had been allayed by the impressive scale of difficulty explorers faced in early inland attempts. 'After all that had been done', Rawlinson could rest safe that 'only the outer crust of the island had been penetrated - nothing more in comparison to the whole island

23 Halford Mackinder, 'On the Scope and Methods of Geography' (read 31 January 1887).
than the rind of an orange compared with the core. The inner essence of New Guinea remained untouched and unknown in resistance to its outer crust, and to the larger geographic and mapping imperatives, which depended for definition and viability on such sites of opposition as functional parts of the whole. Rawlinson made no mention of Captain Lawson at the meeting, perhaps a sore point now, but the first ‘explorer’ demands some credit in shaping the calculated resistance of inner New Guinea to geographic knowledge. This carefully prepared and discovery-filled sanctuary at the outer limit of the known world, Rawlinson insisted, ‘was the real field which would reward some adventurous explorer – some New Guinea Cameron of the future’.

**The Name and the Place**

The Mitchell Library in Sydney holds a series of leather-bound volumes that compile, in scrapbook format, every piece of New Guinea a newspaper reader came across between 1870-86. The glued clippings chart a body of expectation based around maps, sketches, collections, colonising plans, explorer accounts and rumoured adventures. They report the disparate views of explorers, naturalists and missionaries in New Guinea, with commentary from scientific experts and other observers in Europe and Australia. As a set, the *New Guinea Newspaper Cuttings* resemble a collection of botanic cuttings, each item pressed between white pages to stand as type for others in the field. The chaos of classification is here resolved in the sequential authority of printing press dates, but in the selective material available, and the ebb and flow of reader and collector desire, both representation and sequence are uneven and unstable. The chaotic and orderly connections between the cuttings respond to an aspect of writing and map-making which remains indefinitely open.

Another collection of New Guinea reports had been assembled in a more scholarly setting by George Windsor Earl. In his *Native Races of the Indian Archipelago: Papuans* (1853), Earl retraced the early Spanish and Portuguese voyages, Dutch surveys by Jansz, Carstensz,

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Dampier, Pool, and Kolff, the French surveys on the north coast by Bougainville (1768) and d'Urville (1827), and the British surveys of HMS Fly (1842-46) and HMS Rattlesnake (1849) on the south-east coast. At the end of Earl’s timeline of discovery, New Guinea was only vaguely situated on the map, its faint coast not completely joined, let alone a gaping space of ‘two degrees and a half of longitude’ in the interior where ‘the land has not yet been seen’. Earl was a former East Indian merchant who had campaigned in the 1830s for a settlement in Northern Australia to counter Dutch restriction of British trade in the Malay archipelago. Settlement in Australia’s north, he argued, would reconfigure trade patterns in the region, and offset the declining influence of Singapore (since Stamford Raffles’ death) with what ‘would become the commercial emporium of this part of the Archipelago’. The proposal drew support from the newly formed RGS and from prominent officers of the British Admiralty and Colonial Office. Earl accompanied an expedition which established a station at Port Essington in 1838, but the settlement failed to prosper in any way and was abandoned after ten years, though Earl maintained that it had at least initiated British trade with western New Guinea.

Earl pursued the archival opening of New Guinea through the unique character of its ‘Papuans or “Oriental Negroes”’. He sought to ‘dispel the mystery that had enveloped this interesting race’ by sifting through reports of contact, measuring the authentic against less trustworthy accounts, in an overview of the varieties of Papuan existence. Papuan society was defined according to contemporary racial theory, in surveys of: materials and technology (housing, land cultivation, weapons), culture (art, language, history), social relations (status of women, child-rearing, prevalence of slavery and cannibalism), and physical characteristics.

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29 David Gordon, The Australian Frontier in New Guinea, p. 51. The Admiralty surveys by HMS Fly, Bramble, and Rattlesnake in the 1840s reflect a continuity of British interest in New Guinea. When the Netherlands Indies claimed possession of the western half of New Guinea in the Sultan of Tidore’s name in 1848, no continuous European settlement had yet been established. A British settlement at Fort Coronation in the Vogelkop in 1793 and a Dutch settlement at Fort du Bus in 1828 were both short-lived.
30 Earl’s reference to ‘Oriental Negroes’ is an early use of a racial category which, with the ‘Oceanic Negro’, became a staple of ethnology through the 1880s and 1890s. The 1884 Encyclopedia Britannica relates the ‘many curious resemblances [of Papuans] with some East-African tribes’; chief among them: ‘appearances of the hair’, ‘raised cicatrices’, ‘belief in omens and sorcery’, ‘practices for testing the courage of youths’, ‘devoid of forethought or ambition’. Papuans were understood to differ from surrounding races (Pacific, Malay, Australian), with one exception: ‘the extinct Tasmanians were more closely allied to the Papuans’. Encyclopedia Britannica, 1884, ‘New Guinea’, p. 388. Earl also made this connection, basing the affinity of Papuans and Tasmanians on a remoteness they shared: ‘The case of a people so situated must be hopeless. This is probably the last stage in which the race has existed in many of the islands, large and small, from which it has now totally disappeared; and the circumstances bring forcibly to mind the condition in which a remnant of native tribe of Van Diemen’s Land was discovered.’ G.W. Earl, The Papuans, p. 119.
Earl adopted ‘tufted’ or ‘woolly-hair’ as the tell-tale ‘test for genuine Papuans’). Reliable information was scarce as travellers had generally failed to record adequate detail about natives they encountered, and the validity of the more revealing accounts, particularly those relating to inland inhabitants, was ‘by no means satisfactory’ having originated with ‘chiefs of tribes’ or passing through ‘other native informants’. Earl’s data came mainly from Dutch and German sources, arranged and quoted in lengthy extracts. Despite his concern for detached and even-handed representation, the report of one particular encounter was highlighted as a chief marker of Papuan otherness. A Dutch meeting with tree-dwelling Papuans, described separately by Modera and Muller and re-enacted in an illustrative plate, caught Earl’s attention:

Mr. Modera’s account of the monkey-like gambols in the trees may probably excite a smile of incredulity in the reader. Nevertheless, the fact of the Papuans being able to proceed with wonderful rapidity through the mangrove thickets which line the seashores, is well authenticated, and has been long known to those acquainted with the habits of the wilder tribes; but no British traveller, with the fate of Abyssinian Bruce before his eyes, would have ventured to promulgate such a statement, unless he could bring forward incontestable evidence to support it.

While distancing himself or any other British observer from making such a claim without absolute evidence, Earl jumped into the tree-dwelling logic that the mangroves invited, keeping his own feet safely above a swampy and tangled archive. Muddy thickets could only be traversed this way, so ‘naturally [Papuans] prefer scrambling through the upper branches’, and, ‘with a little practice, this singular mode of travelling can even be adopted by Europeans’. Viewers of the picture Earl selected as an emblematic arrival scene were offered a non-threatening vision of Papuan wildness (to counter-balance Papuan male aggression elsewhere), alongside the underlying kinship of the (not-so) distant European also having to adapt in tree-travel. In relaying documents available to him, Earl organised potentially chaotic stories and encounters into sets of identifying scenes and practices which spelled out the attractive and exotic character of New Guinea. Such scenes could be fetishized as things which constituted, as Nicholas Thomas has demonstrated in the context of early colonial Fiji, ‘political actualities in themselves’. Europe’s extraordinary and prolific production of Pacific exoticism allowed peoples previously encountered or described to be ‘subsumed to the form of a picture’, which as representations first, yet also, ‘as something beyond representation’, created ‘a peculiar sense of

32 Earl’s principal contemporary source was Kolff’s narrative on the Dourga, which Earl had previously translated for English readers. D.H. Kolff, Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War ‘Dourga’ ... along the Previously Unknown South Coast of New Guinea, trans. G.W. Earl (London 1840).
INTERVIEW WITH NATIVES OF DOORGA STRAIT. NEW GUINEA.
power on the side of the viewing colonist'. The corrective from Thomas that this power 'was not necessarily reflected in real control over the populations in any particular place' is pertinent to Earl and to later New Guinea commentators, whose documents were produced in advance of the first fledgling settlements and against the grain of British colonial policy in the region.

The absence of a secure European footing made New Guinea all the more attractive to a number of self-styled 'lone voices' who set their particular passion against the imagined disinterest of others. This mode was adopted by those compelled by personal background or experience, however tenuous, to enter the Lawson debate. It is reflected too in the feverish intensity of Lawson-inspired New Guinea Newspaper Cuttings dated to 1875, a sub-set which sparks the media monitoring into a more private record in which the indelible mark of the collector is preserved forever. Another lone admirer of New Guinea was HMS Rattlesnake surgeon Thomas Huxley. On 12 August 1849, there appeared little now to separate him from the coveted object.

Today for the first time we have seen the coast of New Guinea. It lies away to the westward, stretching along the horizon as a blue mountainous mass, several islands some large and some smaller lie between us and it. Time was when I should have made this a red day in my calendar, at the time when I was young and a little enthusiastic myself and fondly imagined others must have somewhat similar feelings.

What does lie between Huxley and the great unknown is the greater distance of time. He is no longer young (although just 24), and realises that others have not shared the innocence of his boyhood dreams. With the sacrifice of what should have been a red-letter day comes nostalgia for a relationship with New Guinea now recognised as exclusive and unusual.

The culminating point Huxley anticipated was never realised as HMS Rattlesnake, under Owen Stanley's command, passed by the most likely gateway to New Guinea, and made landings of just two hours, limiting any possible 'fraternising' with Papuans to little more than the 'interview'. The discovery of the Fly river in a previous survey had suggested a clear path by which the interior could be accessed. HMS Fly naturalist James Beete Jukes estimated a light steamer 'might probably penetrate for a couple of hundred miles, or into the very heart of the
Aroused by the river's wide and welcoming mouth, Jukes wrote of a total project waiting for those to follow:

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 enlivened curiosity of an adventurous explorer, as the interior of New Guinea.37

Soon after his appointment in 1846, when the latter instalments of the Fly's surveys in the Papuan Gulf were being reported, Huxley singled out New Guinea as a final and key project in the Rattlesnake's southern voyage. Following Jukes, he imagined the interior would feed every branch of scientific inquiry, and wrote to his sister of plans extending beyond the Fly's proposed coastal surveys and soundings: 'New Guinea, as you may be aware, is a place almost unknown, and our object is to bring back a full account of its Geography, Geology and Natural History'.38 Huxley's dream was hindered by the caution of Captain Owen Stanley, who felt ill-equipped to explore inland and, according to Huxley, feared hostility from natives living along the course of the Fly river. At one point of frustration in December 1849 when Huxley asked why no party went ashore to inspect a village, Stanley reputedly explained, 'I could see from the boat various little things I did not like'. In the privacy of his diary Huxley railed at the Admiralty's circumspect approach: 'if this is surveying, if this is the process of English Discovery, God defend me from any such elaborate waste of time and opportunity'.39 This failing served to magnify his impression of the riches New Guinea contained:

There lies before us a grand continent - shut out from intercourse with the civilised 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.40

Jukes, Huxley and John Macgillivray (the Rattlesnake's head naturalist) held Science and Empire apart in their assessments of New Guinea's untapped wealth. While Jukes advocated that Government should support Science 'for her own purely abstract purposes',41 he also had grand visions for the southern colonies. The categories (the naturalist, ethnologist, geographer and explorer), with most to gain in New Guinea each possessed an 'abstract' aura. It was

40 Ibid, p. 212.
difficult though, to separate scientific pursuit from a desire for the accumulation of material or symbolic capital. Huxley wrote with conviction that England would soon ‘reap a rich harvest of knowledge’ in New Guinea, and then ‘perhaps more material profit’. In their surveys at the coastal fringe, the first British naturalists to identify a passage into the heart of New Guinea foresaw a collection of ‘things rare and strange’ to rival that of China, Africa or South America. In the untapped and lush interior of New Guinea, unnamed objects would abound in unlimited quantity.

Alfred Russel Wallace envisaged unknown New Guinea as a fitting conclusion to his epic journey through the Malay archipelago, a final and discrete project within the larger collecting program. In Singapore three years before reaching New Guinea, Wallace looked forward to becoming the first to collect at length in ‘a country which no naturalist had ever resided in before, a country which contained more strange and beautiful natural objects than any other part of the globe’. I discuss scientific and collecting contexts relating to Wallace in chapter two, and join his search for Birds of Paradise in chapter six. Here I want to situate his 1857-58 visits to Dorei and the Aru Islands as key reference points shaping the anticipations of later naturalists. Wallace was of particular influence to the Italian naturalist Maria Luigi d’Albertis, whose New Guinea collecting I also examine in later chapters. D’Albertis wrote of a place in his ‘mind’s eye’ ever since learning of ‘the rare bird of paradise of Wallace’. The romance of Wallace as the sole European residing in New Guinea, the taste of pure discovery he at times enjoyed, and his narrative of acute suffering, combined to animate expectant travellers whose pre-destined journeys were tied into the spectacular success Wallace was unable to achieve. Introducing his account of New Guinea travels in the 1870s, d’Albertis recalled the extraordinary power ‘the idea’ had on him:

The idea of journeying to a land of ever verdant primeval forests, a region of perpetual ecstasy, had taken such possession of my mind, and so fired my imagination, that even the few minutes requisite for the steamer to leave the harbour seemed an eternity.

Looking back to those suspended few minutes at the moment of departure, d’Albertis invokes an empty subjectivity, a waiting freely offered to the object of prescribed love. The determination to explore the landscape of his ‘mind’s eye’ is never presented as a choice of his own making. It is pre-ordained. Reading and thinking about regions of ‘perpetual ecstasy’, the excitement of collecting and hunting, the expectations of museum sponsors, come together to acquire the status of the embodiment of fate. In the eternal passage of d’Albertis into New

Guinea, the inscrutable figure of destiny continued to have its hand. After the steamer finally left the harbour, and not much further into his introduction: 'in the far distance, and at the extreme point of the vast prospect loomed Papua, the land of primeval forests, of primitive man – the land of the Bird of Paradise'; and so it appeared d'Albertis would soon discover in its entirety what had never yet been seen. But the object of desire proved elusive. At the outer limit of his 1876 Fly River expedition, when the condition of the river and the objections of his suffering crew forced return, d'Albertis surrendered to the impossibility of his quest:

At last I have seen the lofty mountains of the interior of New Guinea! I have seen them, like giants of different height, towering one above the other ... but we are far from these Papuan Alps – 40 or 50 miles, or even more. My mind is on the rack. I feel like Moses in sight of the Promised Land, destined never to enter it!

At this final gate to the 'promised land', the status of the unknown remains perfectly intact while the explorer's solitary and ever-lasting inquiry is validated just as he is repelled. In the search for unknown New Guinea, obstacles and barriers of different guises would suddenly appear when an elusive goal or collecting destination was almost in reach, to preserve and bring closer its essential inaccessibility. In a related episode during his second Fly river attempt, d'Albertis stumbled across the threadbare grave of 'an individual who probably did not himself know who he was' and 'no doubt would be travelling still if death had not brought his wanderings to a close'. The name of the otherwise nameless individual invited a retrospective eulogy:

Poor Williamson! He now sleeps in sight of New Guinea indeed, but unsatisfied. Now, for a little while, a cross will record where he ended his career – not who he was, how he lived, nor whence he came.

Williamson, his body now swallowed up by New Guinea earth, is well placed to embody d'Albertis' hopes and fears. While the cross conveys little about the life or death of a wandering nobody, it does mark the exact spot where yet another unfinished journey fell short. In his romantic eulogy d'Albertis devours the scene entirely, cannibalising Williamson to set the circuits of desire in motion once again. It may be wondered if the encounter really took place, or whether d'Albertis moved the grave and stripped Williamson of 'who he was' in plotting the

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47 Joseph Conrad described a similar scene when a merchant ship he captained, the last to take the northern route, passed the wreck of the Honolulu in the Torres Strait, significantly, at the gate of unknown New Guinea: 'the story of her life is known by now to God alone, and the winds must have drifted long ago around her remains a quiet grave of
drama of his own journey. Dramatic manipulation in the ordering of experience was characteristic of early New Guinea explorers, who prepared and structured their journeys to tip experience into excess in every way.

Just as an adventure traveller today might while ‘travelling in the footsteps’ follow the narrative of an early explorer, as if re-enacting or walking through history, the first Europeans in New Guinea also created stages of their own making to inject stimulus and history into their journeys. A predecessor’s account provided more than road map or guidebook assistance, it added colour and offered intimacy to a succeeding traveller. A mood piece could also set the scene. The influence of Malthus ‘Essay on Population’ on Wallace at Ternate has been well documented, but not so the coincidence that both Huxley and d’Albertis, twenty years apart, chose Dante’s *Inferno* as cabin reading to choreograph their entry into New Guinea and rehearse their encounter with the unknown.

In the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter Captain Lawson referred to the ‘great charm’ of New Guinea as a prime motivation for going there. References to the charming quality of unknown places recur in nineteenth century explorer writing. The charm of an object can be understood as the expression, manifestation or pleasure effect of its magical power. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, to charm is to: ‘bewitch, influence (as) by magic; bring (as) by magic; endow with seemingly magic power; captivate, delight; give pleasure to’. The charm of an object falls over the subject of its attraction, without the subject expecting or even wanting it, having seemingly taken no part in its production. Once recognised it gives great pleasure and fascination to the unwitting subject, as if made solely for the delight of that subject. An excess of pleasure and delight was welcomed as the working of charm by Henry Stanley when he held the empty Congo map in his hands (‘never has white paper possessed such a charm for me as this’), and by Lawson contemplating a journey to inner New Guinea (‘a country that had great charm for me’). In these dramatisations, as Huxley and d’Albertis also insisted, the charm of the unknown seems tailored for each individual’s private consumption, uncannily evoking the landscape of the ‘mind’s eye’. In a hypnotic episode late in Lawson’s narrative, the romantic and magical quality of a moonlit river lulled his senses:

the very sand on which she had died. ‘Geography and Some Explorers’, *Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1944), p. 30.
I watched the rippling of the river and gave my mind over to reflection, wondering what was to happen in the future, and how many more important discoveries I was to make in this remarkable, and, to Europeans, unknown island. The moon was nearly full; and the beautiful mellow light it shed over the trees and river, gave the place the appearance of a fairy-land. I could easily have imagined myself under the influence of some enchanting spell.49

Here in the blank space of night, as in the blinding whiteness of Stanley’s map before print, the ‘mind’s eye’ wanders freely. In setting up the scene, Lawson makes use of a convention familiar in narratives of exploration. Sitting wide awake at night, and synchronised with the consciousness of Europe on the other side of the world, his reflexive capacity rises as others sleep soundly around him. The deep sleep of carriers and guides (snores add effect in other accounts), is the cue for the charm or spell to take effect. Their sleep also extracts and disqualifies them from taking any part in the future the explorer imagines. Lawson has to look very closely to be sure this ‘fairy-land’ is not an apparition and, in suspecting as much, pushes the night watch in the twilight of his journey into a dream-world of excess.

The smooth envelope of charm encasing scenes and anticipations of scenes like this is not confined to late-Victorian exploration, or to discovery quests for last unknowns. The charm of the unknown appears to be a foundational feature. In 1830, when the newly formed RGS tentatively set sights on the African interior, the explorer Richard Lander described the lure of Africa in terms of charm:

There was a charm in the very sound of Africa, that always made my heart flutter on hearing it mentioned: whilst its boundless deserts of sands; the awful obscurity in which many of the interior regions were enveloped; the strange and wild aspect of countries that had never been trodden by the foot of a European, and even the very failure of all former undertakings to explore its hidden wonders, united to strengthen the determination I had come to, of embracing the earliest opportunity of penetrating into the interior of that immense continent.50

Lander’s recognition of charm in ‘the very sound’ of the name was repeated in the anticipations of New Guinea explorers and naturalists up to fifty years later:

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James Beete Jukes:

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 conceals.51

Luigi Maria d’Albertis:

This word [Papua] had an unknown sound in my ears.52

Theodore Bevan:

The very name New Guinea conjured up to my eager mind a vision of some garden of Hesperides – or shall we say New Fortunate Islands? – a vague, vast wonderland where, in one form or another, the adventures of the Arthurian age might be eclipsed in this prosaic nineteenth century. What Jack’s beanstalk was to him in the way of opportunity this chance trip was to be to me, and I pestered my companions with anticipations innumerable.53

Mere utterance of the name triggers a release of magic contained within. In self-administering the spell, the expectant or nostalgic explorer is undone by the sound of the name, as if undone by the familiar smell of a place or time never actually visited. With a fluttering heart, the armchair voyager transports instantly to the location of desire, arriving at a kind of intimacy with what was seemingly most distant. The unknown in New Guinea was evoked more vividly, was more enticing, more like itself, when anticipated or recalled this way.

For Richard Lander, the unknown was total and most powerful when three basic conditions united in operation. These are set out clearly in his passage on what Africa did to him. Above all, the unknown should:

(1) be unexplored, or better still, have brought failure in previous attempts;
(2) endanger the explorer with its wild and strange Nature;
(3) contain ‘hidden wonders’ with potential for commercial exploitation.

The bind of the rules is confirmed in writings of nineteenth century New Guinea exploration, though the medium of expression transformed significantly from Lander's Africa of 1830 to Lawson's New Guinea in 1875. During the 1850s and 1860s, the mysteries and dangers of the African interior became increasingly familiar through public consumption of what Beau Riffenburgh has termed 'the new expedition accounts', an emerging style of reportage that opened up the archive of explorer experience, expanding the field of possibility for links and borrowing between texts. Explorers toured on lecture circuits before and after expeditions and, as Riffenburgh has shown, the popular press became influential in establishing images of and interest in unexplored areas. Expeditions were closely monitored, and often sponsored by newspapers, giving explorer reports an unprecedented immediacy. In their published accounts, explorers were granted special licence to craft personality and stories of heroism from log-book data. Travelogues also presented a weighty platform through which social and political issues could be fleshed out in scientific, religious or humanitarian terms. The moral or representational stance the explorer assumed was evident in field notes that testified to all the hidden eyes looking over his shoulder, some day acting on the form of his prose. The 'opening up' of Africa kept pace with an opening of the explorer's mind, body and soul to public consent.

In the movement from Lander hearing charm in the sound of Africa, to the 'very mention of Uukes] being taken ' into New Guinea, and to the fantastic visions 'conjured up' by Lawson and Bevan, the stage of the unknown takes the character of a theme park. Lander drew primarily on the interplay of the sublime and picturesque in early-nineteenth century art and literature in imagining Africa's 'boundless deserts of sands', 'the awful obscurity' which 'enveloped' the interior, and 'the strange and wild aspect of countries' untrodden by Europeans. The early explorer's indomitable will in the face of such power and wildness, his vulnerability in the expanse of nothingness, was later celebrated in Joseph Conrad's essay 'Geography and Some Explorers'. Disturbed by a collapse of empirical austerity among explorers during his lifetime, Conrad was critical of concessions made to an audience Chiefly on the lookout for adventure. The wants of this audience are apparent in the invitation Jukes seeks in 'being allowed to visit some of the enchanted regions of the Arabian Nights', and in the great beanstalk leading Bevan up to 'some garden of Hesperides'. The 'vague, vast wonderland' Bevan hoped to enter was a secret place where exotic elements otherwise annexed from 'this prosaic nineteenth century' were preserved forever.

Early adventures in New Guinea restaged the perilous quest into ‘darkest’ Africa, escalating in suspense as an encounter with fearsome inhabitants loomed. The prospect of savagery and the lure of a mysterious and rich interior, accessible only by journeying upriver, were similarly effected in New Guinea. The snaking course of a ‘great river’ inland and the narrative search for unknown sources or fabled kingdoms at its headwaters flowed freely in early explorer accounts. New Guinea’s charm met somewhere between the harsh and wild African interior and a softer Pacific vision of tropical paradise. The labels, ‘Enchanted Castle’ and ‘Pearl of the Pacific’, which frequent the *New Guinea Newspaper Cuttings* portray a paradisiacal place abundant in natural resources; a view inspired in part by romantic imagery dating back to Rousseau of Pacific islands as sites of sensuality, freedom, escape and treasure. The island enclosure of New Guinea attracted shipwrecked remnants of this kind. Its remoteness, vastness, mystery and danger also suggested in Bevan’s ‘vague’ sense the existence of an exotic antiquity entirely detached from the progressive spaces of modernity.

The preview of early European travel in New Guinea was driven by nostalgia for a time when real adventure in unknown lands was still possible. In the introduction to his *Among the Cannibals in New Guinea*, Reverend Samuel MacFarlane of the London Missionary Society reclaimed that moral universe, setting the authenticity of New Guinea against an emerging discourse of exotic tourism.

In these days when so many have done what not many years ago was known as the ‘grand tour’; when alligator shooting on the Nile, lion hunting in Nubia, or tiger potting in India can be arranged by contract with Cook’s ticket; when the Holy Land, Mecca or Khiva are all accessible to tourists; when every mountain in the Alps has been scaled, and even the Himalayas made the scene of mountaineering triumphs; when shooting buffaloes in the Rockies is almost as common as potting grouse on the moors, — it comes with a sense of relief to visit a country really new, about which little is known, a country of bona fide cannibals and genuine savages, where the missionary and explorer truly carries his life in his hand.55

The ‘sense of relief’ MacFarlane finds in this truly novel country is not unlike the solace RGS President Rawlinson drew from recent failures to consume New Guinea. The disappearance of arduous and ambitious journeys in search of new knowledge is here rendered a displacement – by more leisurely and ordinary forms of travel. While earlier journeys encompassed the lived experience, the new travelling belonged to an abstract world of mechanical reproduction. The revolutions of steamship and rail, the mechanisation of labour, the standards of safety and efficiency afforded in expansions of colonial power, made MacFarlane’s trophy list of the globe’s most exotic landmarks and adventures accessible now to tourists. Viewed this way the names quickly lose their charm. The ironic excess of MacFarlane’s list points to an
undermining of missionary, naturalist and explorer fieldwork by new modes of travel and new kinds of travellers. In his study of 'belated' travel to Asia and North Africa, Ali Behad has traced the mid-nineteenth century emergence of the travel-guide which, as a 'dispersed body of practical information', inherited the scope of Government blue-book reports on domestic social conditions. In its systematic approach to knowledge, travel-guide 'statements and their speakers are dissociated from one another'.56 A publisher, rather than an author, assumed responsibility for the guide's contents. Travel-guides 'unsettled the authority of the orientalist savant' by recognising the reader-user as a practising orientalist, thus bridging a gap enshrined in travelogues between the reader's position and the visited Orient. The encyclopedic survey of the travel-guide attempted to 'cover every possible point of information about the Orient', and was forever 'obsessed with ways of specifying the knowledge it provided'.57 It is not surprising that Behad's expectant orientalist adventurers (Nerval and Flaubert) saw little in their passage to the Orient that resembled the 'poetic horizon of the earlier travelogues', and suffered the pain of tourism's banal representative faculties.58

In MacFarlane's nostalgic view, New Guinea remained demanding and dangerous, a precious sanctuary outside the reach of modern travel. Its exotic purity, safe in the devoted and loving care of the knowledge-seeking savant, resisted absorption into European economies. The retrospective distance opened by New Guinea travelogues offered the explorer, naturalist and missionary a privileged position from which to record events and impressions, and to construct an autobiographical narrative around heroic adventure or scientific discovery. The reader, free from being addressed as a potential traveller, could fill in narrative gaps through a kind of romantic identification with the narrator. This was the authenticity championed by early travellers and readers of New Guinea travels. And these were the terms through which adventure could unfold, a 'bona fide' cannibal be encountered and an elusive object secured. But such things were easier said than done, and early travellers were forever holding the mediated world of secondary experience at bay in solitary pursuit of the excluded and disappearing Other. With ears covered, the nostalgic seeker of this authentic elsewhere could still not shut out a gallery of voices behind and before the lived experience, and approach New Guinea as if it were blank on the map and free of influence. For the past, the return to a last unknown, existed in narrative alone, and hence was always absent.

57 Ibid, p. 44.
58 Ibid, p. 36.
The introduction to Captain Lawson's *Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea* is brief. Nothing much is revealed about the author or the circumstances of his journey. Before setting off from Houtree (or Sydney or London), Lawson was already well out of step with fellow New Guinea travellers. As outlined above, the calling to New Guinea was typically passionate and elaborate in its retelling. Writers of early accounts reviewed previous attempts, cited key texts, identified institutional and personal affiliations, and generally sought to place their contribution within an archive they knew intimately. In characterising New Guinea as unknown, the expectant/nostalgic traveller appeared well versed with its fantastic 'obscurity' and highly charged to pursue the (im)possibilities of discovery there. Lawson, in contrast, volunteered little about his background or private connection to New Guinea. As a lover of adventure in the service of Empire, he aligned himself at the outset with a convention of adventure writing recognised by Richard Phillips: 'since the adventurer is defined primarily by his actions, it is not possible to introduce him in much detail before the action part of his story really begins'.

Captain Lawson commenced his journey in an untroubled blank state in a landscape similarly blank because he himself appeared to hold no expectation for it. Approaching New Guinea in this way enabled him to invest it with the imaginative properties of Eden.

Lawson took care to leave no fingerprints on the pastoral Eden inner New Guinea turned out to be. He was reluctant to name culturally significant objects and, when he did so, possession was rarely final or decisive (Mt Hercules is a notable exception, though significantly, its summit could not be reached). He described the fertile interior with the appraising eye of a colonist, yet few place-names punctuate the dotted path on his map. After naming the half-mile wide swiftly-flowing Royal River, Lawson illustrated his transitory status:

I do not think any travellers who may follow my footsteps will quarrel with the name when they have seen this truly noble river; but if they do, they are at liberty to alter it for one more suitable to their tastes.

Lawson positioned himself as a humble and trustworthy servant of Empire, his observations anchored all that was known and easy to imagine. New Guinea's forests were 'a grand sight', its picturesque fields more familiar than home. The world's tallest tree was 'made still more

impressive' by its 'graceful elm-like growth'.61 The particular beauty of this landscape lay in its appearance of having been already domesticated, though no legitimate keeper could be found. Lawson's ennobling code of service was maintained in his reluctance to stamp possession on anything discovered, the journal and moolah skins being his only souvenirs.

As a faithful witness of Empire, Lawson confirmed a design that matched New World ideals of plenitude and limitlessness, and made use of classic schema to quantify the immeasurable abundance. Interchanging with 'one' or 'twenty' objects worthy of note, and against the blurred backdrop of 'very many', are gestures to scenes beyond measurement or description: 'the riches of the forests alone are incalculable'; 'the soil was undoubtedly highly fertile, for it was covered with luxuriant foliage of all kinds'; 'the vegetable kingdom is here represented by millions of magnificent species'.62

A key principle in the evocation of a New World is the enormity of wilderness. Lawson’s 'park-like' country stretched across New Guinea's interior. Great walls of volcanic mountain and dense jungle filled with strange plants and creatures enclosed the inner domesticity. A logic of gigantism emphasised the overly natural character of wilder protective zones. While the picturesque and perfect detail of interior plains made for pleasure and reward, the gigantism of New Guinea would weigh heavy on the reader's imagination, as one London reviewer observed:

The reader will not have failed to remark how very big and huge everything is in Captain Lawson's book. It would be strange if amid a flora and fauna so gigantic, nature should be wanting to herself geologically and geographically speaking. Where there are such huge apes and snakes there must be mighty mountains.63

The wildness of New Guinea was achieved in a scaling that dwarfed the explorer in the progression from ape and snake to mountain and geology. Susan Stewart has discussed the uses of miniature and gigantic exaggeration in her study of the repetitious and impossible Western longing to bridge gaps between language and the experience it encodes. Cultural products like the doll's house, the flea circus and the tableau offer contained worlds over which experiences of interiority can be enacted. While miniaturising is located 'at the origin of private, individual history', and speaks metaphorically for the interior time and space of the bourgeois subject, the gigantic represents infinity and exteriority.

61 Ibid, p. 29.
63 The Times, 29 April 1875.
We find the gigantic at the origin of public and natural history. The gigantic becomes an explanation for the environment, a figure on the interface between the natural and the human. Hence our words for the landscape are often projections of an enormous body upon it: the mouth of the river, the foot-hills, the fingers of the lake, the heartlands, the elbow of the stream.64

The ‘very big and huge’ natural world of Lawson rose to hyperbolic intensity in a great mountain, ‘dwarfing’ the ranges to its south and ‘frowning’ over the northern country ‘like the watchtower of some huge giant’.65 Stewart has linked the presence of a giant to ‘the earth in its most primitive, or natural state’, noting that, ‘giants, like dinosaurs, in their anonymous singularity always seem to be the last of their race’.66 Lawson’s mountain stood alone and unconquered ‘in the full grandeur of its height’, an imposing monument to the last unknown. The watchtower of Mt Hercules, the home of ‘some huge giant’, presupposed the larger-than-life world that Theodore Bevan dared to enter. New Guinea was for Bevan, as mentioned earlier, ‘what Jack’s beanstalk was for him’, a transcendent ‘vast wonderland’ where ‘the adventures of the Arthurian age’ might be relived.67

A rhetorical mode of amplification and excess propelled another fictive traveller in New Guinea. A New Zealander, Henry Watson, ghost-edited the journals of Louis Trégance under the name Reverend Henry Crocker. Trégance was a French sailor, shipwrecked on the east coast, and captured by scouting Orangwok tribesmen after escaping the cannibal slaughter that befell the rest of the crew. The Orangwoks, thankfully, were more civilised. They populated several cities in the interior where they mined gold in crude fashion, and so spared Trégance for his knowledge of mining. Led blindfolded on horseback to the Orangwok cities and mines – a lost civilisation – Trégance was ‘struck very much by the height and size of the trees’ when inner New Guinea was finally unveiled to him. The ‘clear stems’ of plant-like trees ‘ran up nearly a hundred feet before the limbs began to appear on them’.68 An enormous serpent 60 feet long threatened the group and swallowed a slave whole before it was slain by Orangwok guards. The intruding symbol of the other, the serpent, and the great height of trees and mountains, here communicate in very obvious ways New Guinea’s unleashed natural forces, and mark it a sphere apart from culture. The gigantic landscape enveloped and enclosed

67 Theodore Bevan, Toil, Travel and Discovery in British New Guinea, p. 6.
the body of the European (and the diminutive Orangwok society), ensuring that knowledge of the unknown remained partial.

The tall tale, according to Stewart, 'is caught up in its own narrative process, a process of invention through progressive stages'. Moving from understatement to the 'most impossible and improbable of statements', the tall tale stays true to an internal criteria of realism. It is difficult to quote from or extract representative meaning as 'each of its elements is tied within the narrative structure of the overall tale'. Literary reviewers and science commentators confused and inflated Lawson's claims further by quoting and summarising his lies so differently and distinctly. Lawson's wanderings in this sense were endless and polyvocal. As a self-contained set of gigantic lies, his account threatened infinity, and by engaging with its logic, critics and detractors risked being drawn into its vacuum of possibility.

The writer of tall tales violates a boundary between nature and culture. Responses to Lawson were informed by underlying concerns about reliable explorer reportage, which had surfaced in the dispute between Speke and Burton, and in suspicion surrounding (non-British) narratives by du Chaillu and Stanley. Lawson's creator may have drawn inspiration from Charles Waterton's *Wanderings in South America*, which blurred fact and fiction within an exaggerated Natural History setting. Waterton claimed to have ridden the back of an enormous alligator, and had returned to England with the monstrous 'Nondescript', a taxidermic specimen he crafted by stretching and sculpting the rear of a monkey to resemble a human face. Lawson clearly took cues from early modern imaginary voyages, the travels of John Mandeville in particular, a foundation of the genre and of New World discovery itself. It is difficult to pin down exactly what was borrowed from contemporary East Indies and Pacific literature though. References to Earl's anthologies of Papua and the Eastern Seas, which inform and ground Trégance's captivity narrative, or to Wallace, do not appear in Lawson's account.

69 The giganticism of Nature is counter-posed with the Orangwoks' Lilliputian stature. Their king, Hotar Wokoo, was the smallest Tregance encountered, at a noble four feet. Straight hair and fairer skin (than natives of the coast) enhanced the Orangwoks' relative claim to civilisation.


His imaginary was watertight in the way he effaced other texts and unified a disparate scene of writing.

The plot of the late-nineteenth century adventure tale, as outlined by Riffenburgh, begins with the explorer receiving a call. Travelling at great risk in a zone of darkness and danger, he is initiated in a series of trials through which he is cleansed or purified before a discovery is made or an apotheosis reached. An exotic setting is paramount, as is an investment in the explorer's heroic character, which is rigorously tested, and ultimately affirmed, through the assertion of masculinity in hostile country. Captain Lawson's heroism sits comfortably with this plot, though a recognition of the ambivalence beneath the adventure's map-like realism renders him more fragile and fluid than he first appears. An ambivalent split pervades the narrative: Lawson is both hunter and hunted, a provider of civilisation yet deprived of it, a dreamer and demystifier of his own dream, a satirist and object of satirism. His 'perilous journey' leads to a 'crucial struggle' and final 'exaltation of the hero', but that triumph is confused when a fumbled shot from his gun passes through the bodies of three natives, more like music hall and stage farce, than an imperial 'row' with natives. The dangers of quest romance play up elsewhere to give the narrative a self-deprecating tone, as when monkeys hurl excrement and spit at the party from trees above, and in the injury Lawson sustains to his loins after being tossed by a charging bullock.

The inland journeys of two German naturalists were discredited around the same time. Theodore Mundt-Lauff lived in New Guinea for six months in 1869, and Adolf Meyer crossed the island in 1871. Neither account developed into an extended travelogue, and both were quickly exposed as 'Munchausens' in the British press. An anonymously published satirical pamphlet appeared in Australia in 1873 under the title, *Account of a Race of Human Beings with Tails; Discovered by Mr. Jones, the Traveller, In the Interior of New Guinea.* This tall tale, as Nigel Krauth has pointed out, was also an elaborate advertisement for E.W. Cole's book trading. Attached was a note 'to inform all tailless inhabitants of Melbourne and suburbs' that Cole stocked 'a great variety of short and long, old and new, varnished and unvarnished tales' at his Bourke Street store. The wanderings of Lawson, Tregance and Jones were performed in a sideshow on the margins of early New Guinea discovery. The popularity of tall tales, fantastic voyages, vaudeville productions, travelling freak shows and the emerging genre of science fiction in the late-nineteenth century, indicate that carnival culture had not been completely

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legislated from the European landscape in the industrial era. The trickster or time traveller possessed subversive powers of invention and action, though in line with the politics of the carnival, the uncertainty such figures provoked was sanctioned to some degree.

The first query about *Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea* appeared in the London *Athenaeum* when a reviewer called attention to a number of problems in the work: the fauna described by Lawson contradicted accepted New Guinea zoology, other travellers had not reported the hospitality of south-coast natives, Lawson's co-ordinates placed 'Houtree' in the Torres Strait, and there was no mention of the Fly River delta (which Lawson should have crossed). Although no European had travelled more than a few miles inland, the existing archive was substantial enough for Lawson to be difficult to credit.

Upon the whole, the compilers of maps and books will, perhaps, be reluctant to accept the statements contained in this entertaining volume as scientific data, unless the author favours the world with some explanation of the difficulties which his work presents.

In response, Lawson levelled criticism at the arbiters of travel and science. Only those who had seen for themselves, he argued, could claim real authority: 'had it not been for the wish of my publishers I should not have taken notice of your review; for, let a traveller explore and describe what he will, there are always wiseacres at home who know more than he does'. The *Athenaeum* challenged Lawson to 'confound us by producing the skin of the tiger "marked with black and chestnut stripes"'. Letters followed from various experts, including a member of the English Alpine Club, who argued that the alleged nine-hour ascent of Mt Hercules to 25,000 feet was not possible. A response was sought from John Moresby, who made several New Guinea landings as captain of HMS *Basilisk*'s 1871-73 Torres Strait survey. Moresby later explained that his hesitance to comment was for reasons of 'delicacy' as he was preparing his own account for publication ('my feeling was to wait and simply state what I had myself seen in New Guinea'). When Lawson's account was 'beginning to be accepted in some quarters as an authority', he felt

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76 The archive included living creatures known to exist in New Guinea, the *Athenaeum* suggested that Lawson should have encountered tree-kangaroos, which Earl mentions having viewed at the London Zoological Gardens in the 1840s, G.W. Earl, *The Papuans*, p. 21.
77 'The Interior of New Guinea', *The Athenaeum*, 17 April 1875.
78 'The Interior of New Guinea', *The Athenaeum*, 8 May 1875.
79 Ibid.
compelled to join the debate. In a letter to the *Athenaeum*, Moresby stated that Lawson’s 1872 expedition could not have taken place without his knowledge. He had never heard of ‘Houtree’ nor of any Australian merchants trading along New Guinea’s south coast, and went on to list 44 ‘principal’ points of difference, many of which were countered by Lawson in a third and final letter to the *Athenaeum.*

As Linda Hutcheon has observed, ‘irony happens as part of a communicative process’ rather than as a ‘static rhetorical tool to be deployed’. Irony takes a victim or target, in Lawson’s case, the legitimating rhetoric of Captain Moresby, the Admiralty, the RGS, and the claim to authority by armchair travellers and cabinet naturalists. These objects of irony were also lead players in its performance, their objections served not only to stimulate and prolong debate, but to heighten the pleasure of Lawson’s text. While many were angered by Lawson’s claim to authenticity, others announced its pleasure unselfconsciously. The hyperbolic intensity of Lawson was attractive against Moresby’s strict economy of travel. An ‘old surveyor’ writing to the *Brisbane Courier* discussed the book’s merits: ‘knowing something of the locality, I have little hesitation in pronouncing it to be one of the cleverest hoaxes that has appeared for a long time’. Another letter writer suggested that a recognition of a certain excess was necessary in the reading and writing of exploration, that ‘some allowances must be made for these pioneers of progress’. Lawson’s supporters snubbed the encyclopedic and the classificatory in favour of New Guinea’s ‘fabulous geography’, fiction or otherwise.

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81 Moresby explained the circumstances of his *Athenaeum* letter in the appendix of *Discoveries and Surveys in New Guinea* (London: John Murray, 1876), where his letter is also reprinted, p. 321.
82 Captain Lawson’s response to Moresby, and his final comment in the popular press (*Athenaeum*, 12 June 1875) concluded: ‘I am sick of answering the doubts of men who are either anxious to excite a controversy or are carping with petty jealousy, and this is the last time I shall take up my pen for the purpose of defending my book. My discoveries will, sooner or later, answer all cavillers, and henceforth reviews and criticisms will receive nothing from me but silent contempt. His main argument seems to be – because this or that was not seen by the ‘Basilisks’, neither could I have seen it. ‘We never saw’, ‘we never saw’; when Captain Moresby does see, he will be deeply mortified to think he is numbered among those who have tried to throw discredit upon my narrative.’
84 The *Athenaeum* ran a column titled ‘The Interior of New Guinea’ which updated the Lawson story in weekly issues from 17 April–12 June 1875.
85 And this anger continues. One outraged reader has inscribed notes, initialled ‘J.C.’, in the margins of a Mitchell Library copy of Lawson’s book: ‘bloody liar’, ‘lying bastard’ and ‘Jesus!’ appear alongside, significantly, Lawson’s pastoral fantasies. Many of the excesses elsewhere escape comment, and when Lawson impresses hosts in one village, boiling eggs and making tea, J.C. concedes, ‘truth’. There are comments also in the back of a La Trobe University Library copy, and comments for those comments. The anonymous defacement of explorer writing invites and perpetuates its own defacements.
86 *Brisbane Courier*, 28 August 1875.
87 *Brisbane Courier*, 26 August 1875.
A commentator in the science journal *Nature* surveyed the impact of the ‘first’ explorer. Although Lawson’s ‘wonderful work with its abundance of outstanding statements’ scarcely represented a ‘scientific contribution to our knowledge’, it had ‘made us still the more anxious to know the truth about a land which, even in the present advanced state of geographical knowledge, seems to have unknown wonders to reveal’. The lies and ‘fragmentary results’ of Lawson and others ‘only served to whet our appetite for more information’. I will leave for now the question of Lawson’s influence on other travellers, except to confirm that later reports were consigned to scepticism in light of his deception. At the end of the early period of inland exploration (1870-85), a reviewer of Theodore Bevan’s travels in New Guinea assessed the promises and disappointments presented in ‘the great island’, which had compared to the ‘dark continent par excellence as the theatre of adventurous quests and geographical discovery’. The article appears in the last pages of the *New Guinea Newspaper Cuttings*.

The successive stories of different self-styled explorers have so far discredited each other that the interest found itself in some measure tricked and deluded, so that it is not to be wondered at that the public became chary of expressing any credulity on the subject of New Guinea at all.

New Guinea would have been the exemplary theatre had it not been based around a false premise. The undermining of propriety in Lawson and company represented a primary dispossession. A series of ‘self-styled’ explorers had abused trust given to them as witnesses of the other world. Their ‘successive stories’ tainted and conflicted one another, and so replicated the founding fictions. The message is one of loss. Once New Guinea became a sign of itself, it surrendered a position of privilege outside the reach of mediating codes, even though these were conditions of possibility for its authenticity from the outset. Lawson’s discoveries confirmed that the much desired ‘last unknown’ was nothing other than a memory or dream.

There is no record of a ‘Captain John A. Lawson, R.N.’ in the British Admiralty lists of the period. Although Lawson’s identity has not been conclusively revealed, the author appears to have written tandem texts. The narrative homologies between *Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea* and James Bradley’s *A Narrative of Travel and Sport in Burmah, Siam and the Malay Peninsula*, published the following year, suggest that both came from the same writer. The latter was a hunter’s narrative set in the places Lawson was supposed to have sojourned prior to New Guinea. While the lion was central to hunting in Africa, the tiger was the object of

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89 Uncited newspaper review (c. 1886) of Theodore Bevan’s *Toil, Travel and Discovery in British New Guinea*, possibly from a Brisbane newspaper (‘the great island lies so near to us’), *New Guinea Newspaper Cuttings*, vol. 3.
imperial chase in British India and Malaya, and Lawson-Bradley made sure the adversary was even more fearsome and noble in New Guinea. But 'Bradley' is also most probably a pseudonym, the most convincing explanation links Captain Lawson to Lieutenant Robert Armit. The respected bibliophile, E.A. Petherick, connected the two in a letter to Notes and Queries at the turn of the century. Armit's case is compelling; he served in northern Australian waters on HMS Verago in 1868 (during which he was court-martialled), wrote a fantastic theory on meteorology titled Light as Motive Power, drafted a prospectus for a private New Guinea Company that never got off the ground, wrote The History of New Guinea and the Origin of the Negroid Race to accompany the prospectus, and was declared bankrupt in 1875. But to add confusion, later travellers and residents in New Guinea understood that a Queensland police officer, William Armit, invented 'Captain Lawson'.

Alternative origins and motives join the open-ended, collective production of Lawson's journey. In one, the book resulted from a £100 bet at an exclusive London club, poking fun at Victorian gents ensnared by colonial dreams, while satirising the derivative tendencies of explorer writing. According to Basil Thomson, secretary to the first administrator of British New Guinea, Captain Lawson was conceived from within HMS Basilisk to undermine its captain's authority:

He [Moresby] was not popular in the wardroom, which soon came to know that he was writing a book. He bestowed the names of friends and relations upon the various bays and headlands, and called Samarai 'Dinner Island' because he had his dinner there. The wardroom, meanwhile, was plotting a terrible revenge. One of the officers wrote a book — a far more interesting book than any which Admiral Moresby could possibly write, because it was a work of imagination. It appeared before the admiral's great work and was crowned with immediate success.

91 The accounts of crucial battles with a moolah and tiger in Lawson and Bradley, respectively, are very similar, and these in turn can be referenced to the famous lion attack on David Livingstone, narrated in his Missionary Travels and Researches (London 1857), p. 12.
92 Notes and Queries, 2 December 1905.
93 Although H. Romilly, G. Morrison and W. Macfarlane have connected the Queensland police officer W.E. Armit to 'Captain Lawson', an Australian resident would not have been able to submit letters in Lawson's name to the Athenaeum in April-June 1875. H. Gibbey has compiled some notes on the mystery: 'there is a fairly strong reason to believe that the two [Armits] were cousins and there may have been some conspiracy between them to confuse the issue'. 'Notes from H.J. Gibbey, Australian National University', 29 October 1969, attached to New Guinea Newspaper Cuttings, Mitchell Library.
94 Walter Stone, 'Who was “Captain Lawson” — Temporarily of New Guinea?', Biblionews, Book Collectors' Society of Australia, 13 (11), p. 38.
Another rumour approached Lawson more tenderly, against the cynicism of the gentlemen’s wager and the revenge exacted by officers of the Basilisk. In 1905, Edward Smith wrote to *Notes and Queries* with a new clue:

I have always had Captain Lawson lurking in a corner of my brain. It seemed as if I should certainly live to learn the truth about him. It has come. I was recently chatting with a friend who gave me some ingenious stories of his native village in Huntingdonshire. There was one oddity, unfortunately a cripple, and unable to compete fairly in life with other young men, who dabbled in books when not wandering about with a gun.96

The elusive Captain Lawson is here revealed as a young cripple withdrawn from society, who had wandered off to distant and imaginary places with his gun and some books. He got ‘as far as Herodotus’ without ever leaving home. New Guinea’s wild and gigantic interior was no more than his tragic imprint of longing and distance. Only a feverish imagination and a crippled body could travel so freely.

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96 *Notes and Queries*, 18 November 1905.
Chapter Two

A Collector's Haven

The passage of Europeans into New Guinea took in the circuits and loops of previous journeys to unknown places. This reading around the object set up a spectatorial experience through which images of African wilderness, adventure romance, Victorian hunting and Pacific paradise collapsed into each other. New Guinea appeared magically misplaced in a rational age of inquiry. Prospective visitors anticipated a total experience of antiquarian travel where adventure, natural science, cosmology, poetics, philosophy and commercial prospecting came together. Their dreams of recovery and return were mirrored in the fantasies of geographers, fictive explorers, armchair travellers and old surveyors, who, in hours spent studying maps and re-reading favourite journeys, contested the accepted world of possibility and helped redraft late-nineteenth century horizons of adventure and discovery.

Early New Guinea exploration took place in the shadow of this nostalgia, and was thus precluded from ever truly realising what it set out to achieve. No triumphant or definitive (factual) explorer account was written, no New Guinea Cameron or Stanley emerged, as President Rawlinson of the RGS had so confidently predicted. The explorer quest presupposed an elusive gap between the seeker and the object sought for. The desirability of the object or goal arrived in its precarious and evasive hold over the questing explorer. As I suggested in the first chapter, New Guinea was freely imagined, rumoured, and seen and heard, but less easy to grasp or possess. The blank interior had come to acquire the status of a paramount term among geographers, the last missing piece of a global project that fell just short of completion. Something essential and sacred was preserved in the last object, and each branch of science joined together in its pursuit.
Science has stretched its arms all over the known world. England has sent her brave sons to search out the mysteries of the Polar Regions. The heart of all countries in the world has revealed to Science their hidden secrets, all but one solitary exception, the great rich island of New Guinea.97

The field of discovery promised in the ‘one solitary exception’ was particularly attractive to self-made naturalists like Andrew Goldie above, who were able to forge unlikely scientific reputations there. It also attracted Humboldtian naturalists and evolutionary theorists seeking new and discrete islands marked by originality.

In this chapter, I profile the two most influential travellers in the early period of inland exploration, Alfred Russel Wallace and Luigi Maria d'Albertis. Although each practised a very different life, both took a totalised approach to New Guinea when naturalists more commonly operated as professionals in discrete disciplines. This discussion focuses on scientific obsession with New Guinea’s originality, and so departs from its borrowed aura in the ‘last unknown’ narratives of first explorers.

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PHYSICAL MAP of the MALAY ARCHIPELAGO by Alfred Russel Wallace 1868.
Much of the excitement surrounding 'the collector's haven' in the 1870s can be traced to the way Alfred Russel Wallace charged his desire for New Guinea. Well before crossing what now dots across maps as Wallace's Line, he had eagerly anticipated a country at the archipelago's outer limit with 'more strange and beautiful natural objects than any other part of the globe'. The untrodden forests and unscaled mountains offered an ideal environment for new plants and creatures to reveal themselves to a resident naturalist. While images of the African interior would fuel geographical inquiry in New Guinea, the tropical forests of South America provided a backdrop to its pristine wilderness. As Mary Louise Pratt has shown, a scientific reinvention of South America at the turn of the century pitted the Old against an entirely New World. Alexander von Humboldt laid out the terms of difference in his *Personal Narrative* of travel in the 'New Continent':

In the Old World, nations and the distinctions of their civilisation form the principal points in the picture; in the New World, man and his productions almost disappear amidst the stupendous display of wild and gigantic nature.99

The New World was characterised by a Nature so forceful and dramatic that 'man and his productions' (both indigenous and creole) had little impact. Three key images came to signify South America's primal state between 1810-50: its dense tropical forests 'humming with invisible activity', its snow-capped mountains and its vast interior plains.100 These were, significantly, three driving elements that Lawson took to excess in New Guinea.

Prior to his Malayan expedition, Wallace had collected extensively on the Amazon and was the first European to reach upper sections of the Rio Negro. This earlier journey (1848-52) was partly determined by European preferences for exotic Natural History from the abundant New Continent, but also relates to the profound influence the travels of Humboldt and Charles Darwin had on Wallace, who regarded Darwin's *Journal of Researches* as 'second only to Humboldt's Narrative'.101 Unlike Humboldt and Darwin, Wallace did not come from a wealthy family and had left school at 14 when his education could no longer be supported. He joined his older brother in London as an apprentice land surveyor and spent evenings at the

99 Quoted in Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 111, from Humboldt's *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent* (1814).

100 Ibid, p. 125.

101 Darwin in turn wrote from on board the Beagle that his 'whole course of life is due to having read and re-read' Humboldt's *Personal Narrative* as a youth. Cited in M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 112.
Workingmen’s Hall of Science in Tottenham, adding zoology, geology and botany to an early interest in astronomy. Wallace moved to Leicester when 21 to take a position as an instructor at a boy’s school where he came under the influence of the young entomologist Henry Walter Bates. The two set off for South America together in 1848, needing to collect extensively to pay travel expenses. Their duplicates averaged four pence per specimen, less 20 per cent dealer commission and five per cent transport and insurance, an income sufficient for Wallace to remain in the field four years. He experienced the ultimate collector tragedy on the homeward journey, losing everything when his ship caught fire and sank in the Atlantic.102 Wallace survived with his journal, which was published in 1853 as *Travels on the Amazon*. With no immediate prospect of employment and no collection to furnish further study, he decided on a second expedition. His paper ‘On the River Negro’ had been well received at a Royal Geographical Society meeting, and in recognition of his scientific contributions, a free passage to Singapore was arranged by RGS President Roderick Murchison. Using Singapore as a jumping off point, Wallace proposed a series of expeditions throughout the East Indies, the Philippines and later (possibly) to New Guinea. He had settled on the archipelago after studying collections at the British Museum and noting a glaring deficiency in Malay fauna. Here was an opportunity to fill a compelling gap in an authoritative imperial collection, and reveal an ordering principle within the scattering of potentially diverse island entities.

Wallace’s Malay travels took epic proportions, lasting eight years (1854-62), covering more than 14,000 miles, and yielding 126,600 specimens. The entire journey comprised more than 60 expeditions, each involving significant ‘preparation and lost time’, so that in all, ‘six years were really occupied in collecting’. Movement overland was limited by the bulk of collections, equipment, trade goods and provisions. After locating interesting fields, Wallace established camp settlements and worked from these bases, depending on success, for periods varying from days to several months. Passage from one to another was made possible with the labour of native carriers, often spontaneously assembled through the networks of Dutch and British administrators, landowners and missionaries in the region. To continue travelling and collecting, Wallace was again dependent on the sale of specimens shipped at intervals to his London agent Samuel Stevens, who in turn sent him scientific equipment, books and papers.

102 Wallace described the magnitude of his loss: ‘With what pleasure had I looked upon every rare and curious insect I had added to my collection! How many times, when almost overcome by fatigue, had I crawled into the forest and been rewarded by some unknown and beautiful species! How many places, which no European foot but my own had trodden, would have been recalled to my memory by the rare birds and insects they had furnished to my collection.’
The pool of objects available to Wallace depended on deals and negotiations he was able to forge with traders and hunters in the villages he visited. A young assistant, Charles Allen, helped him collect and preserve specimens. Wallace regretted not having enough servants to collect more widely, being so often limited to his own 'especial favourites', zoology. When Allen chose to remain in Singapore, Wallace had to find local help. One servant he employed in 1855 became enormously important for the remainder of his stay. A Malay youth, Ali, who later referred to himself as Ali Wallace, was trained as head servant. Ali grew highly skilled at locating, shooting and preserving insects and birds, and taught Wallace the Malay language. He and Wallace ate meals together, helped one another through illness, and over the years developed a strong rapport. Ali trained other servants and communicated with native residents on Wallace's behalf when they were in locations beyond the reach of colonial power.

In his published account, *The Malay Archipelago: the Land of the Orang utan and Bird of Paradise* (1869), and a later work, *The Geographical Distribution of Animals* (1876), Wallace contrasted the icons and features that characterised the remote poles of the archipelago, the interiors of Borneo and New Guinea. An exact boundary ran south-west from Mindanao, through the Macassar Strait between Borneo and the Celebes, and threaded south through a deep and narrow strait separating Bali and Lombok. West of the line, plants and animals were Asian and Continental in character, while the east was distinctly Australasian, sometimes on islands only a few miles away. Wallace discovered the line while delayed for two months in Bali and Lombok in 1856 before sailing for New Guinea. In Lombok, sulphur-crested cockatoos suddenly appeared where kingfishers were previously common, and marsupials took the place of primates in the trees. This radical change confirmed that the Malay archipelago was a meeting-place of two former continents.

In this Archipelago there are two distinct faunas rigidly circumscribed, which differ as much as those of South America and Africa, and more than those of Europe and North America: yet there is nothing on the map or on the face of the islands to mark their limits. The boundary line often passes between islands closer than others in the same group. I believe the western part to be a separated portion of continental Asia, the eastern the fragmentary prolongation of a former Pacific continent.

Months later Wallace was again struck by nature's contrasting 'productions'. As his prau approached the island of Ke off the south coast of New Guinea, he watched in amazement as


the silent Malay crew was welcomed by a boatload of Papuans, ‘forty black, mop-headed savages intoxicated with joy and excitement’. Comparing the groups ‘side by side’, he realised ‘in less than five minutes’ that they ‘belonged to two of the most distinct and strongly marked races’ on earth. ‘Had I been blind, I could have been certain that these islanders were not Malays’. In the space of a few hundred miles, he had crossed into ‘a new world, inhabited by strange people’. Previously:

It had been the almost universal custom to follow William von Humboldt and Pritchard, in classing all the Oceanic races as modifications of one type. Observation soon showed me, however, that Malays and Papuans differed radically in every physical, mental and moral character.105

Wallace drew up a series of oppositions, from ‘physical contrasts’ to ‘moral features’. While Papuans were vibrant, excitable and inquisitive, Malays were passive. Unlike the Malays, Papuans lacked history and had ‘never yet made any advance towards civilisation’, owing to an absence of tradition to which they could be assigned.106 Wallace viewed their lack of influence as a positive feature. In defining Papua and Papuans as a strange departure from the ordinary, Wallace voiced a contemporary preoccupation with origins and novelty, echoing Humboldt’s discovery of the New Continent at the turn of the century. The identification and evaluation of Papuan phenomena in terms of a scale of influence embraced a genealogical form of self-definition. But there were contradictions and coincidences that unsettled the idea of convergent evolution. How could the Papuan and the distant Negro race resemble each other so closely? If their relation could be proved, how had originality remained intact? Wallace speculated on a distant time and place where answers might be found:

Geological, zoological, and ethnological considerations render it almost certain that, if these two races ever had a common origin, it could only have been at a period far more remote than any which has yet been assigned to the antiquity of the human race.107

Common origin could only lie in one ‘far more remote’ time, as Wallace rejected Charles Lyell’s suggestion that the enormous diversity of the world’s fauna and flora could only be explained by positing independent creations in different parts of the world. The question of Papuan descent featured in evolutionary debates following publication of *The Malay Archipelago*.108 Traces of a remote human ‘antiquity’ possibly still existed in the interior of New Guinea, so argued subscribers to the Lemurian hypothesis, adapting Phillip Sclater’s idea of the

106 Ibid., p. 450.
subsided former continent. Ernst Haeckel later proposed Lemuria to be ‘the single primaeval home’ where man had evolved from anthropoid apes, and urged for scientific exploration of the mountainous interior, the ‘probable cradle of the human race’. In his History of Creation, Haeckel reworked Blumenbach’s ordering of the human races (Ethiopian, Malayan, Mongolian, American, Caucasian), into four groups that sub-divided into twelve species. While Blumenbach’s prime marker of difference was skin (black, brown, yellow, red, white), Haeckel distinguished species through the formation of skull and hair (tufted, fleecy, straight, curly). He viewed Papuans as ‘an entirely different species’ for the ‘peculiar form of their hair’. They belonged, with the Hottentots, to a tufted group numbering just two million. ‘Of all the still living human species’, the Papuan was ‘most closely related to the original primary form of woolly-haired men’.109 Wallace also looked for non-tufted varieties in New Guinea, but ‘could hear nothing of the straight-haired race which Lesson says inhabits the interior, which no one has ever seen’.110

109 Ernst Haeckel, The History of Creation; or, the development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes (London: Kegan Paul, 1883), vol. 2, p. 305.
The Promised Land

In 1872-73, the Italian naturalists Luigi Maria d'Albertis and Odoardo Beccari conducted the first extended expedition into New Guinea, exploring 30 miles into the Arfak Ranges behind the collecting field Wallace established 15 years earlier at Dorei. A Russian venture commenced just prior to the Italians, landing Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay on the north-east coast in Astrolobe Bay. The Vitiaz crew built a collecting house and an underground depot, to ensure survival of journal and collection if not its castaway collector, and fortified the surrounds with land mines, leaving Miklouho-Maclay on the understanding a ship would return 18 months later. Between 1871-73, HMS Basilisk under Captain John Moresby carried out surveys along the south-east coast which, in the custom of the British Admiralty, also incorporated Natural History collecting. The German zoologist Adolf Meyer (who later claimed to have crossed New Guinea), collected in the west for the Dresden Museum in 1873.

Reverend Macfarlane and Reverend Murray of the London Missionary Society arrived with several Loyalty Island teachers in 1873 with hopes of opening New Guinea to Christian evangelism. Within two years, Macfarlane had established a station at Port Moresby and was making regular upriver journeys in the LMS steamer the Ellangowan. The Moresby station subsequently became a starting point for explorers and naturalists interested in the Owen Stanley Range. Meanwhile, the RGS remained an interested on-looker rather than a direct sponsor of exploration, reflecting a reluctance of the British Colonial Office to annex in New Guinea.111 Two private colonising expeditions had been canvassed: one in London by Lieutenant Robert Armit (a ‘Captain Lawson’ candidate) never materialised, another, the Maria, departed unsanctioned and in controversy from Sydney with 70 prospectors in 1871, but was shipwrecked off the Queensland coast. Lawrence Hargrave, later a pioneer of aviation in Australia, was among the few survivors. He sustained a passion for New Guinea and the adventures denied him, joining the inland expeditions of Macleay, Macfarlane, Stone and

111 It was anticipated that the Australian colony would eventually claim some part of New Guinea on behalf of the British Empire. In July 1875, King Leopold met the British Ambassador, Savile Lumley, in Brussels to discuss his plan to follow ‘in the footsteps, however modestly, of England’, and establish a Belgian colony in New Guinea, an island ‘blessed in its fertility’ and ‘placed between Japan and Australia on a great commercial highway of the future’. Lumley cautioned Leopold about the repercussions of such a move: ‘the Australian colonies have got it into their heads that New Guinea is part of Australia. They mean to have it one day or other and would be mad with rage at the idea of seeing a foreign flag planted there’. Cited in Thomas Packenham, The Scramble for Africa (London: Abacus, 1992), from Lumley’s report of the Brussels meeting, pp. 14-15.
d'Albertis, as a collector and engineer. In many respects Hargrave represents the archetype of passion fuelled by denial. After a bitter dispute with d'Albertis over publication and collection rights, he received no official recognition or payment. He devoted much of his post-New Guinea energy and resources to the impossible dream of aviation, to only just miss the realisation of flight.

Luigi Maria d’Albertis travelled further inland in New Guinea than any other naturalist in this period. He was born in Genoa and educated at the Collegio della Missiona at Savona during the early years of Italian unification. At the College he responded to Abbé David, who led Natural History walks through Savona, identifying geological strata in the surrounding hills, and encouraging his boys to gather any insects they encountered. The budding naturalists were instructed to collect accurately and without hierarchy, a discipline Abbé David later applied to his own travel in China and Tibet, acutely aware that ‘the smallest facts about nature, provided they are exact, are of great importance today in helping to understand the scheme of the world’. D’Albertis performed poorly at Savona and was relocated to another school, completing his studies without distinction. He joined the final stages of Garibaldi’s campaign, then travelled to Holland and Britain at his guardian uncle’s suggestion, acquiring a taste for grouse hunting in Scotland.

A former classmate of d’Albertis, Giacomo Doria, had followed Abbé David’s path of instruction. Doria travelled to Persia in 1862 and Borneo in 1865, returning valuable collections to the Genoa Museum. He was a leading member of the Societa Geografica Italiana, an organisation with an expansive mission which Doria later explained was ‘founded to undertake exploration, and therefore to reject the advice of those who argue that, before studying other countries, we should get to know our own’. Doria singled out New Guinea as ‘the golden dream of all naturalists’, enriched all the more because ‘few had the opportunity to land there’. A collection of rare and new species would bring prestige to Genoa’s museum, while exploration of the unknown interior would demonstrate the imperial capability of the newly reformed nation. In 1871 Doria consulted Abbé David to select a partner for the botanist.

112 Lawrence Hargrave’s papers include a scrapbook collection of newspaper extracts similar in scope and often overlapping with the Mitchell Library’s New Guinea Newspaper Cuttings.
113 Helen Fox (ed.), Abbé David’s Diary, translated entry (by Fox) for 23 March 1866 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1949), xxi.
114 His father died and his mother moved to remarry in Naples, leaving d’Albertis under the care of an uncle from the age of eight.
Odoardo Beccari (who had collected with Doria in Borneo) on a scientific expedition to New Guinea. D'Albertis was at this time known to be pursuing game alone in the mountains outside Genoa. It was hoped that his noted hunting and survival skills could be channelled into the service of Italian science. He began intensive training in taxidermy under museum director Ricardo Gestro, and proved a highly talented sculptor, though Gestro held concerns for his student’s volatile temperament, fearing he might clash with Beccari in the field.

D'Albertis partnered Beccari in the Arfak mountains in 1872-73, and quickly earned respect in Europe for the quality of his fieldwork. In eight months in 1873 he sent 900 birds (30 unknown), 800 reptiles, 300 fish and 32,000 beetles to museums in Genoa, Florence and London. The Arfak collection was by far the most complete series of New Guinea fauna up to that time. D'Albertis was praised for his commitment to seriality, his standards of preservation, and for his inclusion of rare and new specimens within the exhaustive whole. Large collections from remote fields at this time were reviewed in the manner of scientific texts, a glowing review from an eminent naturalist conferred prestige onto the custodian museum. As Anne Larsen has noted, scientific specimens in the mid-nineteenth century were ‘fluid pieces’ of the natural world that were bought, sold, exchanged, transported and consulted by many people. But much of the traffic was in duplicate form. There was a concern for original collections and the perfect ‘type’ specimens that gave them unique value to remain intact.

While recuperating in Sydney d'Albertis met the physician and naturalist George Bennett, who travelled widely in the Pacific in the 1830s and had since orchestrated a steady flow of Australian and Pacific specimens to Richard Owen (his former professor) at the British Museum and the ornithologist John Gould. Impressed by d’Albertis’ achievements in the Arfak mountains, Bennett arranged for Phillip Sclater to classify the New Guinea birds, ensuring that d’Albertis would receive due scientific honour. Bennett also translated and edited his early reports, and campaigned for the donation of a steam launch when d'Albertis returned to Australia in 1876 to prepare a second Fly River attempt.

Would the colonists not present him with one? For any discoveries made by him in the little known territory of New Guinea will benefit the colony. It is not often that we meet with so enterprising a traveller as Mr D’Albertis, and judging from what he


117 Wallace had concern for the scientific value of d’Albertis and Beccari’s collections should they be dismantled for sale: ‘Signor d’Albertis appears to have made very large collections in natural history, especially of birds, reptiles and insects. It is to be hoped that complete series of these have been kept together, and that, in conjunction with those collected by Dr. Beccari, they will be made the subject of some important works.’ Reviewed by Wallace in Nature, 3 June 1875, p. 178.
has already done and published, he appears to me one of those who, like Herodotus, depends upon what he sees and not upon what he hears.119

The investment in what d'Albertis did and saw was repeated in the London science journals, *Geographical Magazine, Ocean Highways* and *Nature*, which tracked the ‘indefatigable’ explorer and updated collections sent by the ‘enthusiastic’ naturalist. He was introduced as ‘the pioneer d'Albertis’ to a standing ovation at an RGS meeting in 1877 after a third Fly River attempt, such was the nature of his achievement in New Guinea. Beau Riffenburgh has pointed to the significant role mediators like Bennett played in developing heroic myths in the explorer’s absence.120 Bennett’s influence as a mentor and publicist fostering myths around d'Albertis cannot be underestimated,121 but his hand in creation responded to an investment particular to New Guinea and a perceived crisis in pioneering geography.

As a pioneer, d'Albertis maintained an inner self-reliance, refusing to allow the discordant voices and seductive rumours to colour his judgement. This at least was the impression from afar. His extravagant two-volume account weighs heavy on the unquestionable sincerity of raw experience, the irony of the title names his essential longing, the ‘not’ seen or done. A choreography of fate chose d'Albertis as its unfortunate victim: in a perfect deferral, he twice reached the brink of the ‘Promised Land’ where he ‘could perfectly distinguish the high mountain chain – the very dream of my life’,122 only to be sent back. Alternative pursuits of collecting and hunting countered his immaturity in the face of these huge and mighty forms. But here he also experienced loss, once materially in the form of a Yule Island collection that spilled into the Torres Strait,123 and each day, in the compulsive activity of collecting and the painful register of all the things he missed. A condition for leaving any place was founded in the desire to return. After eight months collecting in the Arfak ranges, ‘the field was still virgin and unexplored’, and the ‘treasures’ there ‘spoke plainly of many more to be found’.124 In his narrative of loss d'Albertis opened the possibility for authentic experience.

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121 The two volume account of d’Albertis’ 1872-77 travels, *New Guinea: What I Did and What I Saw*, was published separately in Italian and English, with a French translation from the Italian.
123 *Nature* announced the loss of a Yule Island collection: ‘we regret to hear that one of his collections from that district containing about 3500 insects and 700 reptiles, has been lost on its transit from Cape York. The bird skins were, fortunately, not sent by the same vessel, and are therefore safe.’ *Nature*, 2 March 1876, p. 356.
The recovery of man’s original condition was situated in the makeup d’Albertis’ party, rather than through contact with Papuans. Two Australians, Lawrence Hargrave and Joe Wilcox, a seventeen-year-old assistant, shared his cabin. Palmer and Jackson (Jamaica), Bob (Fiji), Tom (the Philippines), Tiensin (China), John (Sandwich Island), and Johnny (New Caledonia), slept in the engine room and on the Neva’s deck. Through this mixed community, d’Albertis fondly imagines he might achieve a form of generic brutishness. He monitors their collective savagery and the ever-present danger of his own mutability, at times regarding himself as ‘one of the brutes’. He walks from the boat ‘dressed in Papuan fashion, a semi-Adamite costume’, finding it better suited to pursuits in the forest, and contemplates the infectious savagery around him, at night wondering how they breathe and sleep in such peace: ‘many times I said to myself, why was I not born a savage? Why, at least, cannot I become one?’

D’Albertis shared Burton’s self-styling as an ‘amateur barbarian’ (or ‘the white nigger’, as Livingstone called him). Miklouho-Maclay was known in Australia as ‘King of the Papuans’, and d’Albertis had a similar reputation in the Australian and British press. These explorers carried the authenticity of having come from there, rather than having merely visited.

D’Albertis scorned the use of Malay and Papuan hunters, unwilling to forego or share the pleasures of capture and preservation with anyone else. For this he was admired by armchair naturalists. His virile persona as a hunter immune to sickness, hunger and pain, inflected the inadequacies of sedentary study. The journal was praised for its detail in description, and for the incorporation of science and adventure, which found its voice in the intensity of d’Albertis’ collecting desire. To Wallace and other New Guinea travellers, he was the naturalist’s naturalist. To the wider audience, he was a vestigial character from a bygone era.

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125 Ibid, vol. 1, p. 82.
127 A contemporary naturalist, Tim Flannery (Throwim Way Leg), recharges the late-nineteenth century longing for the wild and untrodden New Guinea (‘I imagined when I set out on this quest that the world was fully documented’), and repeats the painful register of d’Albertis and Wallace: ‘it is with a heavy heart that I must relate that in all my time at Telefomin I never saw a living long-beaked Echidna’ ... ‘my breath caught and my heart began to beat wildly’ ... ‘a band began to tighten around my forehead and I felt a queasiness in my stomach’. Glowing reviews of Flannery in the Australian media also repeat investments in the authenticity of d’Albertis: ‘Flannery doesn’t cuddle his animals and call them endearing names; he carves them up, freezing some bits in liquid nitrogen for future reference and often eating the rest. It’s a refreshing departure from the standard animal gush.’ Sian Powell, ‘Tim bilong wild’, The Australian, 21 March 1998.
A diverse set of naturalists, explorers and missionaries visited New Guinea in 1875. The German Gazelle surveyed the coast of New Britain and the British HMS Challenger surveyed and sounded in the south and north-west. Beccari collected in the west, d'Albertis spent seven months at Yule Island off Port Moresby and Miklouho-Maclay returned to the north-east. William Macleay's Chevert expedition attempted to access the Katou river by steam launch and collected at Yule Island. The LMS Ellangowan under Reverend Samuel Macfarlane explored the Baxter river and the lower Fly (with d'Albertis and Hargrave) inland from the south. A Methodist mission was set up by Reverend George Brown in the Duke of York Islands. This collecting, exploration and mission work was conducted in a general atmosphere of rivalry rather than co-operation, but each was also anchored to the Cape York settlement and linked by the assistance of Papuan guides and interpreters. Macfarlane, d'Albertis and William Macleay (d'Albertis again in 1876) were accompanied by the Moatta headman, Maino, on separate expeditions during 1875.

Captain Lawson's Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea appeared in the midst of this activity and was available to travellers with mail and stores at Cape York from July 1875. The first visitor with something like Lawson's ambition was the English dilettante Octavius Stone, who arrived the same time as the book. Stone explored in the ranges behind Port Moresby after recruiting four members of Macleay's dissolved Chevert expedition. One such member, Walter Petterd, later characterised Stone and his interest in New Guinea:

I joined that party of a Mr Stone, FRGS, a gentleman who has seen more than an ordinary share of the world, and now wished to conclude and crown his travels by crossing the great peninsula of New Guinea. New Guinea is a strange country, and there is every possibility of wonderful and hitherto unknown things being discovered there.128

In a paper before the RGS in May 1876, Stone explained that he only travelled 20 miles into the eastern ranges owing to 'the great difficulty, and at other times utter impossibility, of procuring native carriers or guides'.129 Having reached the lower hills at the foot of Mt Owen Stanley, Stone judged that another means of transport, Timor ponies or South Seas Islanders, would be needed to cross the peninsula. He also joined Macfarlane's first inland LMS expedition on the

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128 Walter Petterd, letter to the Mercury, 13 May 1876.
Ellangowan, ascending about 40 miles up the Mai Kussa river (Macfarlane claimed 77 miles). His subsequent narrative, *A Few Months in New Guinea*, opened with an account of this journey:

It was a moment of intense excitement when we entered this unknown land and first sailed upon the noble river, whose banks had never re-echoed to the sound of a steam-engine, and whose waters had never before been ruffled by a revolving screw. We saw smoke rising in large volumes a couple of miles off, but no other signs of life were visible. Early next morning we sent the men on shore to cut wood. They discovered fresh footprints, and smoke was again visible afar off, but no village, nor even hut, and not a single native did we see. The stillness of the scene was almost painful, and it was only broken by the occasional scream of a passing bird, except for which all was silent as the grave. Even the countenance of an alligator would have been welcome, but not one appeared to relieve the death-like solitude.

As they moved into fertile country, with water fresh to drink and forest replacing mangrove swamp, they met a terrible and eternal silence, which not even the reverberating steamer could break. Fresh footprints and rising smoke, signatures of presence and signs of absence, seemed to lead no where. Then farther upriver they noticed trees had been fired, so landed to investigate and made the most wonderful discovery:

We landed, and wending our way through grass, nearly as high as ourselves, came to a well-constructed fence, made of branches of trees, enclosing about six acres of land. On this ground, part of which was dug over, were planted yams, sugar-cane, and, what I least of all expected to have seen, tobacco. It was the first and last piece of cultivated land we came across during our whole journey. We hung up a looking-glass and knife to astonish and delight the natives on their return.

The patch of cultivated land, enclosed by a well-built fence, and including, most surprisingly, tobacco, constituted a little paradise for the explorer. It was a fleeting discovery, 'the first and last'. No inhabitants could be found, but they would be rewarded for their efforts on return. Stone himself was also rewarded in days following when he became the second Englishman (after Wallace) to shoot a Bird of Paradise. The most remarkable object however, came to another member of Stone's party. While they prepared for the expedition at Port Moresby, the natives had talked about an enormous bird that carried prey the size of a dugong with its claws in flight. Nobody gave the story much credence until the *Ellangowan*’s engineer Henry Smithurst actually encountered the fabled creature:

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132 The legend of a huge winged monster was reported by Sir John Mandeville: 'In this land are many gryffons, more than in other places, and some say they have the body before as an Eagle, and behind as a Lyon, and it is truth, for they be made so, but the Griffen hath a body greater than viii Lyons and still worthier than a hundred Eagles. For certainly he wyl beare to his nest flying, a horse and a man upon his back, or two Oxen poked togeth as they go at
We often heard the natives speak of a large bird which could fly away with a dugong, a kangaroo or a large turtle, but I scarcely credited the statement until I saw two of the birds myself. One was seated on the trunk of a large tree, and rose as we approached. The noise caused by the flapping of its wings resembled the sound of a locomotive pulling a long train very slowly. I had a good opportunity of observing it, and it appeared to be about 16 or 18 feet across the wings as it flew, the body dark brown, the breast white, neck long, and beak long and straight.133

Smithurst sent an eyewitness account to the *Daily News* (both Macfarlane and Stone included the episode in their narratives with qualified scepticism). The bird took on gigantic proportions sounding like the great nineteenth century vehicle of people and capital. Only at this remove in the soundless New Guinea forests could the abstractions of the industrial age become so animate. At this conjunction of the magical and mechanical, the natural and pre-social fused with the social world of material production and mechanised movement, resulting in the apotheosis of an engine beyond human control. In Captain Lawson’s narrative there is also a fascination with engines and forces. He was persuaded by the ‘astonishing’ mimicry of a swarm of flies: ‘had I heard it in England, I should have imagined it was the droning of a steam thrashing machine’.134 The blank New Guinea interior was in this way a distant stage for the grinding machinery of the industrial process.

The *Ellangowan* encountered signs of another creature, marked this time by its pre-history, and linked also to a discovery by HMS *Basilisk* at Collingwood Bay a few years previously. Moresby’s report reflects the high priority that was placed on conjuring the exotic and ‘hitherto unknown’ in the brief survey landing, and how ‘unconfirmed’ sightings then opened up the imagination.

Lieutenant Smith observed the droppings of some large grass-eating animal in a spot where the bushes had been heavily trampled and broken. Our opinion was decided that a rhinoceros had haunted there; and we were much surprised, as this animal has never been believed to exist in New Guinea. It would have been very satisfactory to have set the question thus started at rest, but time failed us.135

A writer for London’s *Quarterly Review* suggested that the rhinoceros was more likely ‘some gigantic and unknown marsupial pachyderm akin to the great grazing diprotodon’ that once roamed the larger Australasian continent. Its survival from a ‘far more remote’ period was entertained in the popular scientific press. The fossilised skeleton of a gigantic wombat had

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been discovered a decade ago when Australian Museum curator Johann Krefft cut short his honeymoon to examine and classify remains found inside a cave in the Liverpool Ranges of New South Wales.

Macfarlane's party found similarly trampled ground and cloven-hoof tracks too large for a wild pig, that they supposed were buffalo. Macfarlane was open to thinking it was something else: 'who knows what new species may not be hidden in the interior, the remaining traces of those now considered extinct?' New Guinea was as fresh and pristine as in the earliest beginnings, the turbulent events of the rest of the world had made no impact here.

Whilst empires have risen, flourished, and decayed; whilst Christianity, science, and philosophy have been transforming nations, and travellers have been crossing polar sea and African deserts, and astonishing the world by their discoveries, New Guinea had remained the same.

In 1878, Andrew Goldie reported similar tracks 70 miles inland from Port Moresby. He was convinced they were diprotodon, though Reverend Lawes suggested that the prints could easily have been made by a crocodile with mud-caked feet, which 'would fully account for the strange appearance of the tracks, “resembling the footprints of a horse, with four toes in addition”.' The Athenaeum also treated Goldie’s creature with suspicion, though it did revel in native terror of the creature and take the opportunity to return Captain Lawson to New Guinea.

135 S. MacFarlane, Among the Cannibals of New Guinea, p. 22.
136 The idea of New Guinea as prehistoric and frozen in time persists with sightings in the twentieth century. Lasting proof eluded American photographer Charles ‘Cannibal’ Miller when he fumbled his camera at the crucial moment: The reeds parted and a head rose up like something out of the Lost World or King Kong ... I moved my camera into line. As if in obedience to my wishes, the colossal remnant of the age of dinosaurs stalked across the swamp. Once its tail lashed out of the grass so far behind its head I thought it must be another beast. For one brief second I saw the horny point. I heard it hiss – Rooooow – Rooooow – Rooooow. I licked my dry lips, suddenly aware that I had not started my camera.’ Charles Miller, Cannibal Caravan (New York: L. Furman, 1939), p. 130.
138 The Scottish collector Andrew Goldie was originally commissioned by a London nursery to collect botany in the South Seas Islands, but renegotiated his field after arriving to the heightened interest in New Guinea. Goldie lived in Port Moresby from April 1876, joining different expeditions as opportunities arose, and by 1878, had established a trading store in Natural History and Ethnology from which dealers in Europe and Australia could directly order. He was later described by Theodore Bevan as ‘unquestionably the chief instrument in supplying the world’s museum’s with exhibits of Papuan ethnology’.
139 Goldie agreed with Macfarlane that extinct creatures may have survived in the remote highlands of New Guinea: ‘it is quite possible if you go further north into the wild, moist and dense tropical vegetation of New Guinea that animals thought to be extinct may yet be found to exist.’ Quoted in Gavin Souter, New Guinea: The Last Unknown, p. 14.
We would suggest some variety of tapir, but that the natives expressed great terror of the animal. Perhaps, after all, the Munchausen-like discoveries of the ingenious 'Captain Lawson' are going to be verified.141

The popular press emerged as a bulletin board and a forum of debate for these unknown sightings, encouraging travellers and readers to check, confirm or contest the information reported, thus perpetuating a circular system of exchange. The reports from HMS Basilisk had a profound effect on d'Albertis. He had originally planned to return to the Arfak mountains, but then 'the reports of the officers and sailors on this unknown island of enchantment, made me abandon the idea of returning to Andai, and resolve instead on going to explore some point on the south-east coast'.142 After ascending nearly 400 miles up the Fly river, d'Albertis had still witnessed none of these creatures:

A world of hope died within me. Arrived at the threshold of the enchanted land, I am doomed to retrace my steps! To turn away without seeing one tiger or ape! Without having seen a trace of the buffalo or rhinoceros ... Now that real persons tell me of monsters which they have seen with their own eyes, although I do not believe them on that account, I shall read Captain Lawson's book afresh, and think of inventing a machine wherewith to measure the huge bird of the Baxter, and the skin of Captain Lawson's tiger.143

The early naturalists held a profound and unbounding faith in the originality of New Guinea, the individual existence of the place. The strange creatures, real and imaginary, were passing figures which the naturalist's desire provoked – a necessary and natural product of this particular soil.

141 Ibid.
A visit to the Macleay Museum
Chapter Three

The Macleay Collection

Now there’s a story about William Macleay, he was a bit of a mad scientist wasn’t he?

My first visit to the Macleay Museum coincided with a booking from a Foxtel crew. They shot an interview with one of its curators for a children’s television program while I read Macleay’s diary nearby. The host’s opening question seemed to anticipate my search for the obsessive collector, but the diary offered no joy. Nothing to hold a story here. Perhaps I would understand Macleay better by looking at the things he collected, rather than words he wrote. I listened for the next question from the other side of the screen.

So everything here is real? Those antlers are real?

Everything here was real: the glass-eyed thylacine, the dodo skeleton, the deformed foetal horse in spirits, the wooden man-catchers from New Guinea. But the objects in these show cabinets barely represented Macleay’s project, even though each once held place in the order of his collection.

Introducing The Macleay Memorial Volume in 1893, J.J. Fletcher of the Linnean Society of NSW noted that ‘Sir William Macleay did little directly to facilitate the work of any would-be biographer’. In 1920 on the centenary of Macleay’s birth, Fletcher published a lengthy tribute to Macleay’s uncle and cousins, but died before completing Macleay’s. An editor of the unfinished work explained that Fletcher had been instructed by Macleay to destroy all ‘private and confidential’ documents once ‘references to affairs concerning the Linnean Society’ were extracted. As custodian of the archive, Fletcher hung on to Macleay’s diary for thirty years in faith to an earlier conviction that Macleay’s ‘pioneering experiences as recorded by himself

144 J.J. Fletcher (ed.), The Macleay Memorial Volume (Sydney: Linnean Society of NSW, 1893), xiii.
could not fail to be interesting', and like the collection bequeathed to Sydney University, should be preserved for future generations. Another would-be biographer, David MacMillan, in the 1950s confessed that many would find his subject dull. But to assess Macleay in these terms was to misunderstand him. Macleay committed to tedium only in self-sacrifice and MacMillan sought to restore him to his rightful place as a pioneer in a ‘dark age’ of Australian science.

The television crew have packed up and gone. In their place, some zoology students view trays of cockatoos brought out from storage. It’s busy today. I return reluctantly to the diary.

Sunday, 20 January 1875

The evening passed as usual, nothing worth noting.

The air is thick with formaldehyde from the cockatoos as I start to feel the weightlessness of Macleay. He needed few words to express the nothing in his life. Behind the veil, (my) Personal Diary, he avoided speculative talk or anything resembling a mood or impression. His words have a transparent quality, listed after one another like small facts, with no mark or odour to distinguish them. They begin on the 1st of January 1874, and taper off in mid-1881. But the atmosphere is of not-beginning, never-ending, the style of the last entry firmly established from the first. Going nowhere seems to be the diary’s beginning and its end. Looking back now, just for signs of the everyday, my notes flow freely.

Tuesday, 8 January 1874

I find I have written this on the wrong page. I must remedy it by using the pages for the 9th and 10th, which are intended for the 8th and 9th.

The days pass like pages falling from a calendar. Life is on-going and non-reversible, though Macleay exercised his power to remedy any errors of administration. The Personal Diary follows internal laws and has strict principles of repetition. In many ways it writes itself. The underwriting of the Macleay collection is this simple and predictable: a long list of things to do and things already done. At another level though, much bigger plans are concealed.

146 J.J. Fletcher (ed.), The Macleay Memorial Volume, xiii.
147 David MacMillan, A Squatter Went to Sea (Sydney: Currawong, 1957).
The collection began with William’s uncle, Alexander Macleay, following his election to the Linnean Society of London in 1794.148 Of a visit to his childhood home in Scotland, Alexander recalled, ‘I lost no opportunity of collecting insects. Indeed I collected almost every one that I saw’;149 not so much revisiting, as re-placing the past. Most of his specimens were ordered through dealers, acquired in exchange, or purchased at London auctions. By 1805, Alexander Macleay’s entomology collection was among the most important in England, for which his large family suffered financial difficulty. He served at the War Office, the Transport Board, and was secretary of the Linnean Society from 1798 until his appointment as Colonial Secretary of New South Wales in 1825. On departure for Sydney, Macleay had a library in excess of 4000 volumes and ‘the finest and most extensive’ collection of insects in private ownership, already well represented in Australian species, returning now to their native land.

He took a 54 acre site at Elizabeth Bay, a grant promised by Governor Darling. As Colonial Secretary, Macleay supervised the early development of Sydney’s Botanic Gardens, Public Library and Colonial Museum,150 and sculpted Elizabeth Bay into one of the Colony’s most celebrated gardens. Work commenced in 1835 on a house commissioned to John Verge, designer of a string of late-English Neoclassic buildings for the colonial gentry. Elizabeth Bay House became a resource centre and meeting place for local naturalists and a key fixture for visiting scientists. HMS Erebus surgeon and botanist J.D. Hooker, later a Kew Gardens director, was comforted to find ‘everything in the inimitable mixture of confusion and order’ when he visited in 1841. ‘The smell of camphor and specimens, so well known to me at home, reminded me strongly of olden times.’ Outside, he witnessed the wonderful ‘revival of nature’ after a fall of heavy rain. Insects crawled out from creepers, flowers and dripping shrubs. Diamond birds were busy in the trees. A large sea eagle took flight, ‘wheeling over the calm waters of the bay’ after finally leaving ‘his lovely lair’.

A long visit to M’Leay’s garden proved it to be a botanist’s paradise. My surprise was unbounded at the natural beauties of the spot, the inimitable taste with which the grounds were laid out and the number and rarity of the plants which were collected together.151

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148 Carl von Linne had stimulated the interest of British botanists and zoologists during visits to London in the 1760s. When Linne died, his entire collection (including manuscripts, herbarium, insects and shells) was purchased by Sir James Smith, who later founded the Linnean Society of London.
150 A Natural History collection was housed in a small room in the Office of the Colonial Secretary when Alexander Macleay took up his post. This expanded to become the Colonial Museum, which opened to the public in 1829 (known from 1841 as the Australian Museum). Macleay was its sole administrator before a committee of Superintendence was established in 1836, which he chaired until his death in 1848.
This 'lovely lair', more than ten years in the making, was only briefly Alexander's. He was manoeuvred from office in 1837, then struggled to meet repayments on stations in Camden, Crookwell and Tumut when wool prices dropped in the early 1840s. A subdivision of Elizabeth Bay and part-sale of the library could not shake creditors, and in 1844, Alexander’s eldest son, William Sharp, took over the mortgages to keep the property intact, assuming its control in lieu of debts owed to him. Alexander was forced from the house and collection to live with his daughter at Rose Bay. He never reconciled with his son and died in 1848 after being hit by a carriage.

William Sharp Macleay began collecting in 1820 with purchases of insects from Philip King’s surveys and from other inland expeditions. As a civil servant in Paris, he became acquainted with the leading French naturalists and devised new principles of biological classification. In another post in Cuba, William Sharp added exotic and valuable collections to his Australian species. He turned to marine biology in residence at Elizabeth Bay, its wharf and foreshore providing access to a largely untapped world below. William Sharp’s displacement of the ‘Father of Zoology’ in Australia – his own father – brought change to Elizabeth Bay house. He had no desire to complete Verge’s original plan (building had ceased in 1839), and stripped gilt chimney glass, rosewood furniture and brass from the drawing room. For twenty years the house closed its doors to all but William Sharp’s inner circle. It stood austere, aloof and imposing in the bay. House and occupant were satirised together in an 1850s poem:

Bleak house blears blindly o’er Eliza’s Bay chill as the owner’s hospitality.

A third Macleay collector, William Sharp’s orphaned cousin William John, began to study and contribute to the family collections around this time. William John Macleay had left medical studies at Edinburgh to work on Alexander’s sheep station in Camden, before making his own fortune (after Alexander lost his) squatting on the Murrumbidgee. He founded the Wagga Express, served as a magistrate, represented the district in the Legislative Assembly, siding with Sir John Robertson and the landed interests and holding five terms. He moved to Sydney to

152 The Circular or Quinary System, outlined in William Sharp Macleay’s Horae Entomologicae, was an influential pre-Darwinian conception of the relations between species. Symmetry of species, however, occurred exclusively within the Divine design. The system lost its scientific currency by the early-1840s.

153 T.H. Huxley described Elizabeth Bay House as ‘one of the two or three houses where I can go and feel myself at home at all times’. In a letter to W.S. Macleay, Huxley wrote that he knew ‘no finer field for exertion than Sydney Harbour’. Quoted in Ann Moyal, Scientists in Nineteenth Century Australia: A Documentary History (Sydney: Cassell, 1976), p. 99. Both W.S. and W.J. Macleay campaigned for Huxley’s appointment to a Natural History chair at Sydney University, but the plan for the chair was dropped in favour of three foundational chairs in Mathematics, Classics, and Chemistry and Experimental Physics.
extend his political influence, and married Susan Thomson, daughter of Deas Thomson, his uncle's successor as Colonial Secretary. Macleay began his own collection in 1858 and from this point directed much of his energy to the advancement of colonial science. He became a trustee of the Australian Museum, a member of the Philosophical Society of NSW, and with William Sharp, founded the Entomological Society of NSW. These institutions, along with the emerging Royal Societies, sparked a resurgence of locally organised scientific activity.155

Macleay shared the family passion for entomology, which he described and classified in the Society's Transactions within the neat closure of Linnean taxonomy. The relative simplicity and rigid application of Linne's framework had democratised the study of Natural History, creating spaces for new species to be named and classified outside the major academies of science. The project of filling a limited number of gaps within the three orders of creation, as conceived by Linne, became increasingly untenable though as the number of known species exploded in the nineteenth century. Boundaries of location, enshrined in Linnean taxonomy, became more fluid in the emerging science of biogeography. An emphasis on total classification declined in Europe as species came to be understood as historically unstable under the influence of Darwin's theory of natural selection, which Macleay opposed, although he continued to swap notes with Darwin about the wonderful variety of species. The variations and relations between phenomena intrigued him much more than the processes of life forms.

William John moved into Elizabeth Bay House after William Sharp died in 1865. As the last Macleay male living in Australia, he inherited the combined collections of 150,000 insects (480 drawers) and library on condition of their eventual transfer to Sydney University for the creation of an Academic Museum. Like Alexander and William Sharp, William John engaged in some fieldwork, but increased collections primarily through acquisition. He employed six collectors in Western Australia, Queensland and Fiji during the 1860s, and purchased several private collections entire. Above all, he prized the acquisition of a potentially new species, that 'miserly pleasure' Darwin had described in the voyage of the Beagle. New to the collection first, then checked against descriptions, prints and catalogues, tabled at scientific meetings, and finally described and classified as a published text. This was the authorship Macleay craved.

155 Scientists in the Colonies had previously deferred to British guidance and expertise, Ann Moyal, Scientists in Nineteenth Century Australia, p. 109. Colin Finney also locates a resurgence of colonial Australian science in the early-1850s. A scientific community took shape through the capacity of the societies and institutions to publish descriptions and more general evaluations in domestic periodicals. Paradise Revealed: Natural History in Nineteenth Century Australia (Melbourne: Museum of Victoria, 1993).
7 January 1874, Wagga Wagga

Nothing was done today in the way of collecting, but Mr Masters in the town met a person named West who collects birds and insects.

Macleay opened his diary on New Year's Day 1874 when he and George Masters, assistant curator of the Australian Museum, set off on a fieldtrip to the lower Murrumbidgee. The purchase of 29 birds from a collector in Wagga 'at a very moderate figure' on 8 January signalled the beginning of a new project.156 No Macleays had collected birds before. On the eve of return, Macleay wrote that he would 'take every opportunity of enlarging the collection in all branches of Natural History'.157 The existing collections of entomology and marine invertebrates would extend now to shells, corals, geology specimens and vertebrates from all parts of the world. In commencing a diary, Macleay found an outlet to aspire to new heights of representation.

Macleay needed to cultivate an extensive global network to collect so widely. He approached dealers in San Francisco, Geneva, Stockholm, London and Genoa, declaring his intentions and setting up large-scale orders against his desiderata lists.

I have hitherto confined my attention entirely to Articulata, but it is now my intention to make my collection as perfect as possible in all branches of the Animal Kingdom. It is therefore very likely that I may become a very large purchaser from you.158

Macleay had offered George Masters a position as his private curator during their fieldtrip. His arrival with three and a half pounds of insect pins on the first day of work met approval ('they were very good and I was much in want of them'). Macleay now stocked 'a supply which will last for years'.159 In poaching Masters from the Australian Museum (knowing as a trustee of his unhappiness there), Macleay gained a valuable asset. Masters soon notified representatives of

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156 The birds were originally intended for George Masters on behalf of the Australian Museum. J.J. Fletcher gave an account of their purchase, as told to him by Masters: 'the skins were in first rate condition, and when Sir William saw them he was much taken with them, and while the inspection was proceeding he said that he thought it would be a good thing to commence a general collection, and he offered to take the bird skins off Mr. Masters' hands. The result was that he became the possessor of them, and he made them the first addition to the entomological specimens to which he had previously confined his attention.' J.J. Fletcher (ed.), The Macleay Memorial Volume, xxx.
157 W.J. Macleay, Personal Diary, 23 January 1874.
158 Form letter sent by W.J. Macleay to dealers in Europe and North America, quoted in J.J. Fletcher (ed.), The Macleay Memorial Volume, xxx.
159 W.J. Macleay, Personal Diary, 6 February 1874.
museums in Europe and North America to transfer exchange relations to his new employer. The collection expanded rapidly through these reciprocal dealings, the purchase of private collections, and the work of contract collectors in Australia and the Pacific. In the overhaul at Elizabeth Bay, much of the library was rebound, new bookshelves were purchased, and missing science journals ordered. Macleay employed another two collectors to assist Masters, and replaced his gardener and butler.

The inherited insect collections were a prime focus of cleansing and renewal. Macleay had the drawers fumigated and took butterflies out in instalments of 100 to relax and reset with the new pins, which were long and required deeper drawers. He was ‘astonished’ to discover W.S. Macleay’s Central and South American insects ‘very deficient’ in key areas and considerable numbers of his Australian specimens without labels. Miscellaneous snakes and lizards, ‘bottled up in the collection for many years’, often ‘heaped together without any order’, were classified and rebottled, or replaced with better specimens. Macleay began to refer to what had always been ‘the Macleay collections’, as ‘my Museum’.

Wednesday, 18 March 1874

Masters did his usual number of butterflies and commenced the work of moving the contents of some deep drawers into others in order to make room for the reset butterflies.

George Masters spent the second half of his life in Macleay’s pocket. He is recognised in the diary for being punctual and reliable, for having a keen eye and a precise hand, for tirelessly setting boxes and crates into order, and often surprising and delighting Macleay with new acquisitions, knowing his tastes better than anyone else. In Masters, Macleay had the perfect life-long servant (and beyond, Masters curated the collection twenty years after Macleay’s death under the terms of his bequest). By serving in the most dignified and perfect manner, Masters contributed significantly to the historical events his master was involved with.

160 In one letter, Masters notified the American Museum of Natural History of his move: ‘I have left the Sydney Museum. I am now with Mr Macleay and have the whole collection under my charge. Should you have duplicates of anything from Mexico, New Mexico, Central America, the Rocky Mountains etc etc they would be very acceptable. You may rest assured of getting good things in return – Could you make use of more Ornithoptera Richmondia? Mr Macleay has a fine lot. Perhaps it would be best to state exactly what Order of Family you most care for.’ George Masters correspondence, letter dated 14 February 1874, Macleay archives, file no. 806008.

161 Macleay outgrew the family legacy in the space of a few months. The combined collections of Alexander and William Sharp had always been treated separately from his in another room, but with the two ‘going the same way’, Macleay ‘determined now to no longer to keep them separate but to have the one only’, Personal Diary, 15 April 1874.
The obituary for George Masters is slight in comparison to the great volume he collected. It records the single honour of his being ‘first to collect the egg of the Bird of Paradise’ in New Guinea. Masters emigrated from England as a professional gardener in 1856. Collecting began on arrival, like so many others, with the smallest and most numerous creatures of the new country (an insect collection later purchased by Macleay). The Victorian Naturalist in the 1920s gave tribute to Masters’ energy at a time when ‘more than half of the natural history specimens in the Australian museum were of his taking’. Masters was ‘a splendid shot, fearless in the bush with natives (much more numerous then than now), and frequently caught reptiles, including venomous snakes with his bare hands’. A reviewer of Masters’ collection of Wilde Bay fauna in 1867 commended him for bringing the unseen to light: ‘there is much to attract the lover of Nature in the beautifully arranged cases, well stored with specimens, creditable to his industry and skill as they are calculated to enlarge our ideas concerning the amount of indigenous animal life existing, almost unseen, in our very midst’. The writer added that this field was now understood to encompass the unknown island of New Guinea.

The results of Mr Masters’ labours will have the effect of attracting other scientific explorers to a field as yet but little touched on by naturalists, the boundaries of which are considered to include the vast island of New Guinea.

Masters’ industry and energy generated the dramatic early expansion of Macleay’s collection. His years in the field together with his experience as a curator brought professional museum practices to Elizabeth Bay. The Australian Museum at this time opened separately for scientists and students in the morning and for the general public in the afternoon, and faced the same set of preservation and display issues that John Gray had outlined as Principal Keeper at the British Museum.

What the largest class of visitors, the general public, want, is a collection of the most interesting objects, so arranged as to afford the greatest possible amount of information in a moderate space, and to be obtained, as it were, at a glance. Gray contrasted the general visitor with the scientific, who ‘requires to have under his hands the most complete collection of specimens that can be brought together for thorough examination’. Cabinets needed to be opened, specimens handled, and these ideally, were not exposed to light through glass, nor preserved in ‘the stuffed state’. The particular challenge of

163 The Chronicle, 18 December 1867, p. 3.
the modern Natural History museum was to provide for ‘rational amusement’ within a regimen of order and classification.

Gray’s insistence on the division between a scientific and a general vision of Nature suggests the two were open to some confusion. Macleay lived inside a classifying house, entirely in the register and safekeeping of natural objects. He sought ‘the most complete’ collection that could be brought together. What also emerges during Macleay’s sudden shift to this total project is his desire to exhibit. While he and Masters transferred existing collections, struggled to get books ‘in order’ and collection rooms ‘shipshape’, a carpenter was engaged to build glass-topped show-tables and refit cabinets for the display of particular shells, corals, minerals and butterflies. In larger cabinets, mammals were frozen in life-like poses and attended by well-selected accessories which evoked their habits and habitats. Some exotic birds were treated similarly, but the majority sat limp, neatly arranged and tagged according to strict divisions and classifications. The Australian birds, perhaps above any other group, were conceived as the perfect series to complete. When their number outgrew the allotted space, a ‘very large and imposing looking’ bird cabinet arrived on time from England so all could be viewed at once.165

Macleay saved a place within his grand inventory of Nature for the cabinet ‘wonders’ of the past. Exotic, rare and unusual natural objects assumed the role of other household vanities: mirrors, clocks, china vases and alabaster lamps, that hid the march of time. Macleay also extracted type specimens and smaller series from the wider collection, thus presenting the absent ‘general visitor’ a pleasurable sense of the whole ‘at a glance’. A metonymic displacement of part for whole, as Susan Stewart has shown, is one movement ‘to the collection’s gesture of standing for the world’. The second is ‘the invention of a classification scheme which will define space and time in such a way that the world is accounted for by means of the elements of the collection’.166 By rendering the objects he accumulated into serial form, Macleay created an alternate other-world unbounded by everyday constraints, which worked for him alone. This system had the characteristics of what Stewart has identified as a miniature version of experience, domestic and sealed from contamination, and set up for manipulation, with the manipulator under the illusion that the collection can be inhabited in real life.167

The house Macleay lived in resembled Carl von Linne’s own Natural History cabinet, a miniaturised world he at once created and inhabited. In Linne’s house:

167 Ibid, p. 69.
the ceilings were covered with bird skins; the walls, with mineral cabinets and insect chest-of-drawers. Room corners disappeared behind tangled tree branches, where some 30 species of birds nested. The windowsills were crowded with potted plants; herbaria piled up on desks, on chairs, even on the sanded floor.168

This kind of menagerie was unacceptable in Macleay context, where there was no place for the living. But it was difficult to maintain an objective distance when storage spilled so easily into classification and display. Large iron tanks filled with fish and reptiles in spirits occupied every collection room. Extra supports were placed under the library and drawing room floors to carry the increasing load. Macleay noted, as a measure of the collection’s greatness, that the smell of methylated spirits was ‘very pronounced over the whole house’.169 This fertile zone germinated and polluted. In another entry, he found shells and fossils ‘in a recess under the stairs’,170 a second-order discovery within the walls of the house. Nature engulfed Elizabeth Bay in a perverse naturalising effect that pulled Macleay deeper into the infinite reverie of his collection.

Friday, 3 April 1874

*Hot and muggy with wind from North. A South West wind with clouds and rain came up a little after sunset which completely changed the temperature.*

Macleay observed the micro-climates of Elizabeth Bay from the tower each morning and evening. He had a greedy eye for weather and a fixed set of terms to record it. The flux of temperature, wind and rain, the patterns of clouds, and passage of moon, tide and sun framed each entry, lending his diary the authority of a ship’s log with its unending pulse. The space between these readings was his window onto the natural world, and set the tone for each day’s collecting.

Saturday, 4 April 1874

*The first day of a clear cool westerly wind. The sun was rather hot in the middle of the day and for an hour or two the sea breeze seemed to have equal power with the west wind but the day altogether was delightful and promising as showing that winter is approaching.*

Occasionally though, Macleay slipped into more casual expression. One particularly stimulating day of acquisition was appropriately ‘deliciously cold’, while a morning of heavy rain preventing visitors to the Sunday ‘scientific whisky party’ left him ‘as dull as the day’.

He was drawn to and disturbed by the random acts of weather and the effects of the seasons; the problem of weather being its transient ephemeral nature.

Wednesday, 8 April 1874

*Did not go to the Fancy Ball, though my dress was complete and ready.*

As the tempo stepped up, Macleay withdrew further into his inner sanctuary. He excused himself from dinners, functions and commemorative events, committing only to the scientific ‘whisky’ gatherings in the drawing room each Sunday. Those who shared or fuelled Macleay’s passions came on conjugal visits to Elizabeth Bay House, at once his refuge and his prison. In self-imposed isolation and seclusion, Macleay marked out his personal space and the property and social relations of that space. Here he also stood in self-sacrifice, on the outside looking in, unable to properly access what was contained in his drawers and cabinets.

Tuesday, 6 May 1874

*Mr Moseley one of the Naturalists of the Challenger came here about eleven o’clock and remained till two. He is a very intelligent man with a general knowledge of Natural History. He seemed to enjoy looking over my collection.*

When the deep-sea dredging HMS *Challenger* arrived in Sydney, Macleay entertained its naturalists at the house (‘a most scientific party’) and joined them on the harbour. They had been eagerly awaited and both parties benefited from the exchange of specimens. The *Challenger* expedition was a joint venture of the Royal Society and the British Admiralty, commissioned solely in pursuit of scientific knowledge. It sounded and dredged every ocean in 362 locations between 1872-76. Macleay was already attracted to the hidden world of the sea. He ventured to the coast on impulse ‘to see what the sea had thrown up’ after a heavy gale, and held ‘fishing picnics’ on Sydney Harbour, admiring the way his dredge stirred creatures up from under the surface. The dredge was an exemplary instrument of retrieval, a mechanical application of Macleay’s non-discriminatory eye. Its iron jaws dragged the floor in a methodic and even action, capturing everything in its path. The *Challenger*’s total quest inspired Macleay and he envied the number of strange and new objects it prised from nowhere in mid-ocean. Its main dredge was five feet wide and took up to eight hours to reach the ocean floor, hence Moseley’s reputation as a man ‘chock-full of science’ whose eyes ‘missed nothing’.

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171 There are few references to Susan Macleay in the *Personal Diary*. She is marginalised in the house as a guest or a correspondent residing elsewhere.

172 HMS *Challenger*’s results, encompassing the physical, chemical, geological, zoological and botanical features of every ocean, were published in 50 volumes over 20 years.
Thursday, 21 May 1874

*Dr. Cox sent me also today some hydatids from a boy’s liver.*

A matrix of informers, collectors and naturalists moved as satellites, orbiting different paths around Macleay’s glow. As a custodian with wide-ranging interests, he received miscellaneous items from friends and strangers. In one entry he recorded the ‘donation’ of a dead dog from a neighbour. Arriving home late at night from the Legislative Assembly, he found ‘two very handsome fishes on a plate’ in the hall.173 Some specimens came from unlikely places, like when ‘Phelps gave me to examine and report upon one apparent entoza which he had found in a sweet bread served up to him at the Club’.174

19 September 1874

*I sent for a ladder today to enable me to rob a laughing Jackass’ nest but it proved too short.*

21 September 1874

*I have now got a good long ladder for birdnesting.*

Nothing went unaccounted for on Macleay’s doorstep. Masters shot birds from the garden late in the afternoon. A system of traps netted rats, bandicoots and bats in the roof and cellar. Macleay peeled bark, upturned stones, raided bird nests and spider webs, and bred caterpillars in the library. He visited the fish market early morning and monitored the curiosity shops in town. One afternoon, Macleay’s collectors returned from Palmer’s Store with the unlabelled skeleton of an Aboriginal female, 130 bird skins, two lizards, a kangaroo rat and a stuffed mongoose.175 All entered the diary and collection without explanation. Macleay would only turn away that which he already possessed in duplicate or that which he was sure to get a better specimen of. His field of interest had no apparent boundary. As Susan Sontag wrote of the celebrated collector Sir William Hamilton, the lover of Vesuvius, a ‘great collection’ continually stimulates and overexcites: ‘not only because it can always be added to, but because it is already too much. The collector’s need is precisely for excess, for surfeit, for profusion.’176

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Thursday, 26 November 1874

_I intend to give my attention henceforth entirely to Natural History and the improvement of my Museum._

Macleay's retirement from politics met fresh resolve - he would devote himself 'henceforth entirely' to his Museum. The Linnean Society of NSW had just met for the first time with Macleay elected President and the 'Sunday whisky' faithful in attendance. Some motioned that it be called the Macleayan Society, which Macleay politely opposed. In his opening address, he proposed to expand his activity even further, to embrace every known science, and make his collection 'as perfect as possible in all branches of the Animal Kingdom'.

Friday, 5 February 1875

_This day completes the first year of Mr. Master's curatorship, and I think that the additions to my Museum during that time have been very large indeed. I have now over 1000 species of birds, of them 395 are Australian. There is a fine collection of fish, the reptiles are rapidly increasing, a large number have been added to the entomological collections, while of shells and marine animals we have accumulated a vast number._

The collection was continually updated and renewed in lists, inventories and landmarks. Every day was an anniversary of some kind, an isolated moment to stand back and reflect. Pleasure arrived in the comfort of enumeration, but gaps were just as important. Observations like 'the evening passed as usual, nothing worth noting', or 'today was a blank for collecting', kept the larger entries in check. Macleay recounted his daily activities in the most spare and neutral manner possible. There is no scope for social relations in the diary. The author is absorbed, distracted, diverted; concerned only for people in relation to things. Macleay's response to the mania of collecting followed the anti-rhetorical stance of Linne who, in pursuit of an unmediated and universal language, advocated the removal of metaphor and irony. As he indulged in highly passionate activity, Macleay enlisted Linne to help banish the self from language.

Sunday, 18 February 1875

_I got today the plans and specifications of a Steam Schooner from Moriarty. The design is very neat, but the whole thing is too small a scale for such an expedition as I now contemplate to New Guinea._

Macleay toyed with the idea of a 'scientific cruise' for some time. It expanded, with the collection, to assume a life of its own. The New Guinea expedition completed a remarkable transformation. In the past year, Macleay had begun a diary, employed a curator, opened his

177 Cited in J.J. Fletcher (ed.), The Macleay Memorial Volume, xxx.
collection to all natural phenomena (having confined it to insects for 25 years), and retired from
the social arena in sacrifice to his world museum. Travel never really captured his imagination.
Macleay’s preference for the cabinet repeated that of the great French naturalist Georges
Cuvier: ‘a traveller can only travel one path; it is only really in one’s study that one can roam
freely throughout the universe, and for that, a different sort of courage is needed’.178

But there are clues in what Macleay was reading to suggest he had a destination, if not a
journey, in mind. On 21 February 1874, he enjoyed ‘a most interesting account’ of a river
journey on the Amazon by a group of American scientists. This rich and varied region would
provide ‘an inexhaustible field for naturalists for hundreds of years to come’. In preparation for
the visit of HMS Challenger, Macleay studied the results of Wyville Thomson’s 1869-71
soundings in northern Australia on HMS Lightning and Porcupine. The Challenger refitted in
Sydney before sailing to New Guinea, and its head naturalists, Thomson and Moseley, would
have put New Guinea under the microscope in their meetings with Macleay. On 11 August
1874, Macleay ‘commenced reading this evening Darwin’s voyage round the world in HMS
Beagle’,179 the horizon spreading out now before him. New Guinea was the subject of a whisky
party in October when Dr Cox ‘brought for exhibition a specimen of bird of paradise from
New Guinea, one described by Wallace, very beautiful’.180 The black duck and plovers Masters
had shot the previous day, ‘the law notwithstanding’, seemed ‘insignificant’ in comparison. On
30 October 1874, the day the Linnean Society first met, Macleay received ‘a letter from a Mr
Webber an old steamship skipper offering to sell me his shells and to command for me any
vessel I may fit out for a scientific cruise’.181

The ‘proposed trip to New Guinea’, first mentioned in passing on 5 January 1875,
broke tradition with the typically formal and decisive diary announcements. And while other
travellers were ‘called’ or chosen by New Guinea, and described at length what New Guinea
did to them, Macleay was circumspect and calculated in choosing for himself the ideal collecting
locality. He did not particularly covet the rare Bird of Paradise, the uncharted Fly river, the
wild interior, or get caught up in failed past attempts. Macleay operated as a counting machine,
a master of automata, and a well-planned expedition to an unexplored tropical region would

178 Quoted in Dorinda Outram, Georges Cuvier: Vocation, Science and Authority in Post-Revolutionary France
179 In a sleight of hand, David MacMillan has Macleay ‘re-reading’ Darwin’s account (A Squatter Went to Sea,
p. 38), although there is no evidence of this. I accept, however, that Macleay took a fresh interest in the great
nineteenth century sea narratives in preparation for his own voyage, and this for him constitutes a re-
reading.
180 W.J. Macleay, Personal Diary, 11 October 1875.
181 W.J. Macleay, Personal Diary, 30 October 1875.
yield new objects in the numbers he required. After weighing and sizing up New Guinea this way, the narratives of Jukes, Wallace and Moresby were processed for information now relevant to him.

Macleay's unspoken New Guinea attraction related to its boundaries rather than mysteries, the familiar above the strange. A growing sense of scientific ownership was directed towards New Guinea in light of Wallace's discovery that its exotic plants and animals belonged to the Australasian group. The sense of a shared past is repeated through the *New Guinea Newspaper Cuttings* to the inaugural RGSA meeting in Sydney in 1884, when la Meslée commented on the inevitability of New Guinea rejoining its rightful origins to 'become part of the future dominion of Australasia, to which geographical system it belongs'.

Macleay held the Linnean view of location of origin as the fundamental diagnostic character and was committed to the perfect enclosure of his island home. The separation of Australian and foreign species remained the ultimate dividing principle at Elizabeth Bay, the domestic celebrated most notably in the series of Australian birds, which began spontaneously in Wagga on 8 January 1874, but did not constitute a collection until 26 January ('the anniversary of the foundation of the colony') when Macleay announced, 'this the commencement of my ornithological collection numbers 35 species'. He had 247 species by 22 May 1874, and 405 by 13 February 1875. But further north was an island that had pulled itself free, or pulled too hard and now found itself alone. An island, so said Wallace, that contained more exotic birds than the rest of the world put together, and represented the great void in Macleay's quest to master the local.

Macleay fuelled his desire for New Guinea in a euphoria of stockpiling leading up to departure. The diary in this period centres on planning and preparation, and tracks the steady flow of acquisitions. On one particularly pleasurable day, Macleay inspected the ship he had decided to purchase, tested his new double-barrelled breechloader, and ordered shirts, undershirts, paper, books and rat traps 'for my voyage'. The weather to close that day was casual and wonderful:  

*the night is lovely.*

Every tomahawk, file, mirror, iron hoop and pair of scissors purchased for trade appeared in the diary, a fresh sub-set no less compelling than the objects from the natural world. Macleay changed his will and had spectacles and two new sets of teeth made up, as if he were about to

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die, or shed a skin, in New Guinea. He supervised stocks of 'blankets, calicoes, prints, mosquito nets, etc. etc.', and 'hams, bacon, preserved meats, vegetables, groceries, etc. etc.' onto the Chevert. Some creature comforts, an easy chair and 2000 Havana cigars, also found their way on board. Two brass six-pounder cannons arrived from Fort Macquarie, the latest charts from the Commodore. Thomas Mort donated an ice-making machine and Sir William Macarthur 'sent up a large quantity of wine and various other delicacies and luxuries' with two tonnes of pumpkins. Many other gifts of food, alcohol and scientific equipment were registered in the diary, these being the Colony's wedding presents to celebrate Macleay's public declaration of undying love. A series of picnics, ceremonies and banquets led up to the honeymoon departure, a spectacular farewell with well-wishers waving from harbour shores, a band playing sea shanties on the pilot SS Cunnaburra, and many other boats in escort to the heads.

In his farewell speech, Macleay named the Fly river as the most compelling passageway, citing Jukes' impression that a light steamer might reach 'into the very heart of the country'. As a safety measure, the upper deck of the Chevert's steam launch was covered with wire netting to shield from arrows and spears. Macleay emphasised that the expedition would be considered a failure if one Papuan life was lost.

I hope that by means of a steam launch which I shall take with me, and which will be so fitted out that it would be utterly impossible for the natives to do any injury to those on board, to penetrate some distance, and be enabled to see what the interior of New Guinea is made of.

HMS Fly and HMS Rattlesnake each abandoned inland forays 40 years ago 'on account of the hostility of the natives', but missionaries and pearl traders had since formed good relations with natives in the Papuan Gulf. George Macleay, cousin of William Macleay and Arthur Onslow, later wrote from London about how indulgent and foolish the adventure looked from afar: 'news I do not like is Onslow's going off to New Guinea - I flatter myself that I am a particularly quiet and prudent man - while Arthur I look upon as a very impulsive man. I do not think that either he or William Macleay know what fear is and I can only say that I shall be very glad when I hear that they are both back within their respective homes.'

The scientific staff Macleay selected came mainly from Linnean and Sunday whisky ranks, three were botanists acting for Macarthur. Eight Kanakas and three indigenous Australians made up a total outfit of 29. Macleay continued to receive ‘numberless applications to join the party’, which he ‘seldom’ answered. A batch of letters arrived from Melbourne ‘of people anxious to go to New Guinea, one suggesting that I should take a cargo of money to present to the chiefs’, this a few years after a private prospecting venture had come to ruin when the Maria sank off the Queensland coast. A large public meeting took place in Sydney a week before departure with annexation as its agenda, which Macleay was too busy to attend. These final weeks also coincided with the publication of the first explorer account, Captain John Lawson’s Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea. The book was debated in England unbeknownst to Macleay as he made final preparations, and arrived in Australia when he was in New Guinea.

Monday, 17 May 1875

This is probably the last entry I shall make in this book for many months as when I do keep a diary at sea it will be on a larger scale.

Macleay intended to write much more at sea. The landlocked Personal Diary closed for a heavy-cased and ornately decorated writing journal. In New Guinea, words would flow more freely and carry a different potency. The flood of new things would be accompanied by observations, travel impressions, even moods and meditations. A late-nineteenth century journey to the unknown, after all, had both positivist and romantic implications. Macleay would generate a surplus of unorganised data which could then be made to cohere.

The diary re-opened as a travel journal after a two week lapse, the first break in an 18 month run of daily entries. A landing at Percy Island in Queensland kicked the narrative into gear. The party fanned out in search, ‘some took guns some insect nets’, while others ran the seine through the shallows. Although the island was mostly dry and barren, Macleay was happy for collecting to have properly begun. At the moment of his writing they headed for the Palm Islands, ‘bowling along in a North West direction at the rate of 6 knots an hour with a smooth sea, a lovely day, and sufficient employment and variety of scene to make the whole thing very enjoyable’.

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187 W.J. Macleay, Personal Diary, 11 March 1875.
188 W.J. Macleay, Personal Diary, 2 April 1875.
Saturday 19th June – 9 o’clock P.M.

Masters got some small birds which he thinks new. He thinks and is probably right that the many collectors that have been at Cape York have always been on the lookout for showy or highly prized birds and have neglected or known nothing about those of small size and sombre.

The Chevert reached the northern-most settlement at Somerset after a month at sea. With a Residency, mission house, police barracks and a ‘well provided’ store, this failed duty-free port was the jumping off point for the south coast and a holding bay for New Guinea mail and cargo. Macleay was told that the Italian naturalist d’Albertis had passed through some months ago, and more recently, Reverend Macfarlane of the London Mission, and Kendall Broadbent, a bird collector and ex-Maria survivor. Cape York itself was rich in Natural History and the Chevert’s specialist collectors all tasted success here. As Masters pointed out, they were prepared to look deeply and uncover the ordinary, whereas past visitors had overlooked much in search of the ‘showy’ and ‘highly prized’. After recruiting Joe, a Tongan pilot and interpreter, the Chevert set sail again and ‘soon lost sight of the shores of Australia’. They anchored once more at Warrior Island for Joe to invite two natives to come to New Guinea and ‘introduce us to their friends’. At anchor the next evening ‘some butterflies flew on board’, the mainland now visible just 10 miles away.190

Saturday 3rd July – 4 o’clock P.M.

The village consists of 7 long houses built on poles 6 feet above the ground with open gable ends and thatched roofs exactly as described by Jukes in the voyage of the Fly, they probably contain 60 or 70 people each, bringing the total population to nearly 500. All round the houses are stinking remains of animals, human skulls, faeces, etc etc. I have not seen the interior of their houses.

The approach to shore took several days owing to some mishaps about the reefs and sandbanks. After breakfast on 3 July, Macleay took a landing party to Moatta at the mouth of the Katau river, having already met the headman Maino on the Chevert. He did not know what to make of the village welcome: ‘I daresay we were expected to join the circle and smoke the calumet of peace. As we did not sit down they, after a time, rose, one after the other, and joined us where we were standing.’ The people of Moatta were very friendly and responded favourably to the trades Joe set up. Young boys impressed Macleay with their ‘wonderful activity in collecting grasshoppers and other common things’, which he ‘felt compelled to accept in order not to damp their enthusiasm’. After a walk through the village and surrounds, he observed the long houses to be exactly as Jukes had described in 1846. He did not venture too close to the houses,

but was stimulated (and repulsed) enough by what he saw to ask Masters to commence an ethnographic collection.

Monday 5\textsuperscript{th} July – 11 o’clock A.M.

*The vegetation was wonderfully rich and dense, and birds of strange cries and magnificent plumage were abundant, though we succeeded in getting only a few. Soon after we turned downstream we were very near being attacked by the natives, who were not much aware of our intended visit. We did not see them at all, but we heard them very near us, making the most hideous noises.*

A party of 18 headed up the Katau river the next morning in the launch with two boats in tow. The river narrowed considerably after a couple of miles, and its banks, previously thick with mud and mangrove, sprouted magnificent palms with leaves 30 feet long and arching overhead. They were forced to return from a point seven miles upstream where a tree had fallen into their path. All efforts to remove it failed, although Hargrave’s request to use dynamite was refused. Then an arrow flew past one of the Kanakas as he rowed to pick up a bird from the bank, and on return, Macleay learnt that the ‘bush natives’ intended further action and had come to Moatta seeking others to join an attack. Several presents were sent in goodwill and an ‘ambassador’ organised a meeting between Captain Edwards, Maino and a group of natives, where more gifts passed hands and an understanding was reached. On 9 July Macleay received word that the bush natives would allow them passage and an eight foot crocodile was presented to him. When the same fallen trunk sent them back again (which Hargrave dismissed as ‘another womanish attempt’), Macleay and Edwards decided it was time to move on to the next location.

Monday 19th July, Midday

*It is nine days since I last made an entry in my Diary, and until today it has all been time mispent. On Monday we lay at anchor off Katow doing nothing. Tuesday I believe we moved a couple of miles, Wednesday ditto, Thursday ditto, Friday ditto.*

Macleay’s writing fell away as the Chevert held up in a clammy, nerve-racking stillness. The checklists, orders, mail, schedules and inventories that had sustained him in the past were gone. He lost patience with the weather and stopped recording it. Tensions began to develop within the party, mostly directed at the captain, and Macleay, who continued to back his judgement. Captain Edwards had made crucial errors navigating the steam launch, and would not consider an attempt on the Fly river until the monsoon season ended in October. Even Onslow, Macleay’s cousin and most ardent supporter, began to wonder if they would ever reach the ‘utterly unknown region’ of New Guinea.

Hargrave wrote in frustration about constraints imposed on him and opportunities missed. He presents a very different picture of Moatta, with sketches of the long houses, plans
of their interior and detailed description throughout. He shared food and ate meals with the villagers, fixed a tomahawk handle for them, compiled a small vocabulary, and exchanged tobacco and a looking glass for two skulls. Their fascination with European magic intrigued him. He performed scientific experiments with a floating balloon (which burst into flames) and fireworks and dynamite (which Edwards and Macleay confiscated and threw into the water). Macleay in contrast occupied a cultural and ethnographic void. To him the Papuans were incomprehensible beings, although he recognised that most of the good things came from them. He stuck to the village periphery, never entering their houses, sending Williams in search of weapons, utensils, ornaments and the prized ‘mummied heads’. On 6 August at Darnley Island, Macleay was pleased to announce that a ‘complete’ mummy had been secured after several days of negotiation, which Williams went to pick up ‘with sundry heads etc etc’.

A rendezvous with Macfarlane at Darnley Island had been arranged to replenish the Chevert’s stores. Macleay was devastated when the Ellangowan arrived without the supplies and refused to dine with Macfarlane, retiring ‘indisposed’ to his cabin. Macfarlane hoped to join forces and ‘penetrate New Guinea’ with the Ellangowan and the steam launch in convoy, but Hargrave told him that Macleay ‘would not share the honours with any man’. Hargrave’s subsequent request to be released for Macfarlane’s Mai Kussa river expedition was turned down. He was bound by the articles to remain with the Chevert and sail east across the Papuan Gulf to Yule Island, bypassing the Fly river area entirely. Another naturalist, Luigi Maria d’Albertis, had been based at Yule for several months. Having suffered recent thefts at the hands of natives, d’Albertis left his Cingalese servants guarding his collections with instructions to fire upon any passers-by while he was away on the mainland (and this was the Chevert’s greeting). On return, d’Albertis was alarmed to find an expedition ‘so well fitted out and provided with every requisite’. Macleay and d’Albertis kept a watchful eye on each other on the island they now shared.

191 Much of the Chevert’s natural and ethnographic material was generated in bulk trades. On 8 July Macleay reported that ‘a large party went on shore and though not able to do much themselves, got a number of good things such as snakes and lizards from the natives’. Papuans also supplied food in great quantity: ‘one chief or head man of one village met them with 20 men loaded with coconuts and bananas entirely as a present to the stranger ... knowing also of our fancy for all sorts of living things they brought specimens of snakes, lizards, insects, ornaments etc etc so that I made a really good haul that day’. Both passages recorded ‘Sunday 11th July, Midday’ (1875).
192 Lawrence Hargrave, Red-backed diary with seals, 8 August 1875.
Macleay: 'Mr. Albertis has his house or hovel on the side of the hill opposite the anchorage.' 193

D'Albertis: 'I almost regret their arrival. It seems to me that they can perform in five days what I could not do in five months. I cannot be expected to be pleased to see them working in the field I have prepared at the risk of my life.' 194

Macleay: 'He has not been fortunate in his collections in fact he seems to have down very little as yet, but he intends to stick to it for some months yet.' 195

D'Albertis: 'I have the same specimens as Macleay but he has fewer examples ... I have reason to believe that, notwithstanding the great preparations made for his expedition and the large number of men he has on board, Mr Macleay has done very little'. 196

Saturday 28th August, Yule Island

We have been once or twice since we came here treated to a view of the main mountain range standing up like a huge wall far up into the sky. Our view this morning took in the whole range from Yule to Mt Owen Stanley, the finest sight I ever saw.

The last words Macleay wrote in New Guinea described a range of mountains reaching 'far up into the sky' in the distance behind and above Hall's Sound. The prospect of the unknown and the 'huge wall' preventing its access was an appropriate conclusion, reason enough not to go there. A six week silence follows this entry, a perfect blank on the map.

The New Guinea Expedition, although a private one, has been sufficiently before the public to become a matter of public interest, both in this and other colonies. It was skilfully and bountifully planned, and was started, as everybody knows with interesting speeches, with many good wishes, and with great expectations. Under such circumstances it is somewhat mortifying to find that the explorers have been under the necessity of not doing much more than going to New Guinea and coming back again. 197

Four members of the party (Dr James, Hargrave, Petterd and Knight), had arranged to join expeditions with Reverend MacFarlane and Octavius Stone. They were released when Macleay conceded his was over. He returned with Masters to Sydney by steamer on the Singapore, 'a most comfortable fast ship', writing an account for the Sydney Morning Herald on the way back to counter the rumours he imagined to be circulating. Macleay argued that science and safety

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193 W.J. Macleay, Journal for the 'Chevert' Expedition, 11 August 1875.
195 W.J. Macleay, Journal for the 'Chevert' Expedition, 28 August 1875.
had been his prime concern, exploration only ever secondary. To emphasise success in these terms, he listed the collections of 1000 birds, 800 fish, and the cases of shells, insects and geological specimens, material to occupy the Linnean Society of NSW for years to come and to benefit any future endeavours in New Guinea. Although Macleay ‘got many handsome and valuable birds’, and averaged 20 to 30 specimens a day, his failure to secure any Birds of Paradise, or other desirable creatures was remarked on in the scientific press (‘no Tree Kangaroo nor Cassowary was seen’).

A backlog of mail and packages awaited Macleay at home and he set to work immediately, picking up the diary where it left off.

Tuesday, 12 October 1875

_The garden looks well. Curran evidently does his best. The vegetable garden and hot house look remarkably well. The season has been unusually dry. I went to town in the afternoon and got my beard clipped. I then went to the Club and played a game of billiards with Stephens and got well licked. I seem to have quite forgot my skill in the game. I dined quietly at home and went to bed early._

197 _Sydney Morning Herald_ editorial, 14 October 1875.
198 Macleay’s failure to supply a narrative of events and discoveries, or one of hardship and suffering, left him open to criticism in the popular press. The _Sydney Morning Herald_ editorial appeared three days after his ‘Voyage of the Chevert’ piece was published (11 October 1875). And the report of the fantastic and exotic things the _Ellangowan_ encountered on the Mai Kussa three days before that: ‘They landed and found the birds of paradise plentiful, and shot three, and killed an enormous reptile measuring 15 feet 6 inches long, of the boa constrictor species. On disemboweling it, found a large male kangaroo had been swallowed by this ugly monster, which being too bulky to carry in the small boat, they cut off its head and tail to take back as proof of their encounter. The party found cloven-hoof tracks, which appearing too large for wild pigs, were pronounce to be buffalos. Suddenly they started a great bird, which must have measured fully 16 feet across the wings, from tip to tip, and in flying it made a great noise.’ _Sydney Morning Herald_, 8 October 1875.
Naturalists engaging in fieldwork in 1875 were tied to the various requirements of sponsors, agents, patrons and institutions, whose directives and demands shaped the scope of inquiry. They were more likely to be collecting from within one of the broader disciplines of zoology, botany, geology and ethnology. Each configuration of interest or investment responded to a general code of scientific instruction which regulated both distant and domestic fields. Each discrete site referred and reported back to a total project, Natural History, the umbrella for all. This abstract totality, by nature of its interdependent parts, necessitated the operation of a set of conventions which spoke universally in every science at every location, from the remote and strange to the domestic and familiar. In this chapter, I examine the instruction of Natural History, specifically, the denial of passion and the emptying of desire that went into the construction of a collecting subject whose eyes miss nothing, but seek no object in particular.

At first glance, the regulation of collecting practices does not appear so relevant to New Guinea. It was a remote field, travellers were of different nationalities, operating outside and between the professional disciplines, collecting seemingly as they wished. Sea-faring naturalists attached to British Admiralty surveys in the Torres Strait and south of New Guinea in the 1860s and 1870s envied the time and solitude enjoyed by Wallace, d'Albertis and Miklouho-Maclay. The dilettante explorer, Octavius Stone, and collector, William Macleay, both ensured a certain autonomy by privately funding expeditions. When Macleay's expedition dissolved, some members of his party remained in New Guinea to freelance as collectors. Another collector, Andrew Goldie, having served out a contract with a London nursery, stayed on in Port Moresby to establish himself as an independent trader of natural and ethnographic specimens. A 'rogue' or 'independent' reading of early New Guinea fieldwork is unsettled when the journals and collections are related to their metropolitan audiences and destinies. The relentless and total inquiry of Natural History holds a strong presence in this exchange. Collecting guidelines and manuals, whether issued by science institutions or more generally in the genre of popular scientific instruction, were a heavy burden on the naturalists' shoulders.
The love of collecting

When asked for inner motivations, collectors are quick to point to the things themselves and materials of preservation as the great attraction. The scene of comfort and nostalgia is the preserved collection, its unchanging smell and touch. Only in this refuge can a specimen's fragile beauty be fully appreciated. The sentiment was commonly expressed by naturalists in the mid-nineteenth century, when a priority for things as instruments of scientific knowledge was first popularised. This was John Taylor's opening message in his *Notes on Collecting and Preserving Natural History*:

The great end of natural history reading should be the development of a love for the objects dwelt upon, and a desire to know more about them. This can only be brought about by such practical acquaintances as collecting and preserving them induces.200

Natural History passed into consciousness by way of 'a love for the objects dwelt upon', as practised in collecting and preservation. The equipment used in the capture and study of natural objects similarly led to the production of scientific knowledge, as Francis Galton observed in his 1874 survey of the 180 'English Men of Science':

The love of collecting, which is a trifling tendency in itself, common to children, idiots, and magpies, often leads to the study of things collected, and is of immense use to a man who wishes to study objects that must be collected in large numbers. I have been told of an astronomer whose primary taste was a love of polished brass instruments and smooth mechanical movements, that nothing satisfied this taste so fully as work with telescopes, and from loving the instruments he soon learnt to love the work for which they were used.201

Collecting itself was basic and trivial, a compulsion endlessly repeated by idiots and magpies, and in the case of children, a pleasurable but aimless activity. The diminutive world of childhood was a remote but familiar place from which scientific taste could be retraced and collecting desire annexed. The child, as an innocent and unformed version of the adult, held clues to the origins of the scientific faculty. In his autobiography, Charles Darwin recalled his childhood passion for collecting as a seed that later blossomed:

I tried to make out the names of plants, and collected all sorts of things, shells, sela, franks, coins and minerals. The passion for collecting which leads a man to be a systematic naturalist, a virtuoso, or a miser, was very strong in me and was clearly innate.202

Darwin was ‘much given to inventing deliberate falsehoods’ with hopes of ‘causing excitement’, and was chastised by his father in teenage years for having no interests outside ‘shooting, dogs, and ratcatching’. Hunting began with a snipe (‘my excitement was so great that I had much difficulty in reloading my gun from the trembling of my hand’),203 and later he wondered why all gentlemen did not pursue ornithology. At Cambridge, a more sober Darwin turned his attention to beetles, employing a labourer to scrape moss from trees, but still, ‘it was the mere passion for collecting, for I did not dissect them and rarely compared their external characters with published descriptions’.204 Only after securing a specimen with scientific cachet as ‘rare’, did Darwin experience his first true claim to possession:

No poet ever felt more delighted at seeing his first poem published than I did at seeing, in Stephen’s Illustrations of British Insects, the magic words, ‘captured by C. Darwin, Esq’.205

Darwin’s passion for collecting completed the full circle in the voyage of the Beagle, where he was becoming ‘quite devoted to Natural History, you cannot imagine what a fine miserlike pleasure I enjoy when examining an animal differing widely from any known genus’.206 Looking back on his passage from childhood, the formerly rapacious, and often secret and deviant hunger for natural objects had transformed into a disciplined and rule-governed system.

In Victorian Things, Asa Briggs has traced the expansive agenda assumed by collectibles in Victorian England. Popular fads shared the rules and hierarchies that organised Natural History collecting. A connection between the private and public consumption of Nature and stamps suggests itself in the coincidence that John Gray, keeper of Natural History at the British Museum, published the first systematic handbook of stamps and helped pioneer the early development of stamp technology in Britain. He proposed stamps to be useful and

204 Ibid, p. 25.
legitimate objects to collect owing to the scope and quality of excellence in their division and classification.

The use and charm of collecting any kind of object is to educate the mind and the eye to careful observation, accurate comparison, and just reasoning on the differences and likenesses which they present ... postage-stamps afford good objects for all these branches of study, as they are sufficiently different to present broad outlines for their classification; and yet some of the variations are so slight, that they require minute examination and comparison to prevent them from being overlooked.207

Postage stamps were being mass-produced in a number of countries in the 1840s and 1850s, and philatelists soon began to specialise by seeking stamps from certain regions and periods, make reference to additional taxonomies of face value, type, and 'cancelled' type, and use equipment such as the stamp measure and perforation gauge. The rarest stamps were often the most unattractive and vulgar, indeed they were 'almost as ugly and inartistic as it is possible for such things to be', wrote one collector.208 Stamp collecting was a useful exercise in classification: 'a cheap, instructive and portable museum for young people to arrange', and offered a means with which to gain a sense of control over the colonised world. One nostalgic collector, recalled the particular thrill of stamps:

I can still remember the early delights of the game, and with what rapture I found my early collection reached its first thousand all different. It was much more difficult then to get a thousand different stamps.209 [not my emphasis]

His words of advice for boys starting collections echoed the instruction of Natural History in the nineteenth century:

Please remember that stamps do not need to be rare or valuable to be admitted to your friendship and to deserve your care. The most interesting kinds are those that are cheap and plentiful.210

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Instructions for the collection of the natural world

Natural History collecting was organised by rules and protocols over a wide array of scientific practice, administered from a metropolitan setting. Numerous examples appear in the informal asides from scientific authorities and returned travellers. 'Trust nothing to memory', Charles Darwin advised in his *Journal of Researches*, 'put a number on every specimen and every fragment and during the very same minute let it be entered in the catalogue'. Instruction was precise in regard to the moment of encounter, where the potential for chaos was counteracted by consistent procedure. With all fragments accurately recorded, the moment of discovery could itself be forgotten.

A formal set of rules was drawn up in *The Admiralty Manual of Scientific Enquiry*, which embodied the wishes of the Admiralty for naval officers to follow practical instructions in contributing to the various sciences. Fifteen leading scientists of the day assembled under one volume, including Hooker for Botany, Darwin for Geology, Prichard for Ethnology, and Owen for Zoology. Their directives were specifically intended for 'Officers serving in her Majesty's Navy', but also to 'Travellers in general'. The Admiralty held Britain's far-flung empire together, and its emphasis on order and discipline carried over to the practice of collecting. The instructions sought to counter the individuality of collectors in the field, negate random or subjective selections, and avert any mishandling of specimens in transit from periphery to centre. Darwin's notes on fresh cataloguing were stressed more firmly by Owen, who revised an earlier booklet of directions for the manual's section on Zoology. As curator of the Hunterian Museum, and later the superintendent of Natural History at the British Museum, Owen's prime concern was the acquisition of specimens. Central to his 'General Directions to be observed during a Voyage' was the instruction:

All observations should be noted down while the impression is warm; and, if possible, with the subjects actually before the observer. When a box or barrel of specimens is once securely packed, it should never be opened till it arrives at the place of its destination.

The moment of encounter should be frozen, closed off, in order to secure its fragile fact. Opening a collecting box prematurely might contaminate the precious contents. If consistent and precise methods were followed, and each specimen was preserved exactly as it appeared in

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210 Ibid, xii.
the field, and correctly arranged and classified, a total effect was maintained. A hierarchy of interest, an aesthetic criteria, or any residue of a history or context of acquisition could be effectively effaced by these layers of representation. A naturalist’s ability to view without discrimination depended on his or her detachment from the natural world. Natural objects were not to be inscribed by the traveller’s hierarchy of interest. Owen cautioned on the obvious seduction of exotic, rare and beautiful objects of Nature:

No bird, insect, shell, or any other zoological specimen, should be neglected because it does not strike the eye as beautiful, or because it is small and appears to be insignificant. Such objects are often the most interesting.213

Naval officers on survey voyages and naturalists choosing the untrodden wilderness as their field were instructed to travel with eyes hungry for everything, and to resist the thought of any objects in particular. This point was emphasised in George Cuvier’s assessment of a series of 1820s French surveys in the Pacific. He commended the officers of la Coquille for emptying their own interests in visits to New Guinea’s shores:

(the officers) collected everything, right down to the smallest species, including some they may have suspected to be common, even on our shores: they did not follow the example of so many voyagers, who, in their pretension to make a selection and to bring back only what strikes them as remarkable, neglect precisely what would have been interesting ... it is a great error, while on a voyage, to do anything but collect the raw material for study.214

D’Albertis’ former teacher, Abbé David, explained that this discipline was best exercised when self-administered. While travelling in China, he regarded himself as ‘above all a naturalist’, attentive to ‘the smallest facts’. And in this patient accumulation of detail, no specimen was too lowly or trivial. He could not ever imagine having ‘too many’ facts, his deep ‘regret’ was ‘not to have more’.

The most minute objects, the most insignificant details, are important. A dot, a comma, a small line are not important in themselves but have value in relation to the whole, and can change radically its final significance.215

All facts and observations were provisionally equal, only the collection of many other facts would determine the ultimate value of any particular one. Natural History instruction in this way equated the growth of scientific knowledge with the accumulation of information.

215 Helen Fox (ed.), Abbe David’s Diary, entry for 23 March 1866, xxi.
The domestic, the banal and the ordinary were the nuts and bolts of the collection. Krzysztof Pomain has located a shift at the close of the eighteenth century, when a privilege to the plain and commonly overlooked objects of Nature replaced the cabinet of curiosities.

Although people continued to be struck by the eccentricity of certain objects, they now focussed their attention on easily found objects, whose essential characteristic was that they were neither rare nor strange, but rather commonplace and banal. This was the case of stones, insects, birds, plants, and sea plants and animals, of which specimens abounded in their thousands.

A code of popular British instruction had emerged in the late-eighteenth century, when reference guides and pocket-book companions were taken up by students and amateurs in the emerging disciplines of Natural History. Collecting ledgers and field note recording systems were modelled in John Lettsom's *The Naturalist's and Traveller's Companion* (1774), Edward Donovan's *Instructions for Collecting and Preserving Various Subjects of Natural History* (1799), and later in George Graves' *Naturalist's Pocket-Book and Tourist's Companion* (1818). The books were conveniently sized for the travel kits of European missionaries, civil servants, military personnel and tourists. Another stream of 'romantic' guidebooks by Reverend William Kirby, William Swainson, John Loudon, Charles Kingsley, Phillip Gosse and William Buckland introduced a stronger instructional and moral imperative for self-starting naturalists in domestic locations.

Natural History was a popular pursuit, led by individuals of international reputation, but relying also on more humble naturalists whose activities attested to the assumption that a familiarity with Natural History was part of the make-up of every educated person. Any observant naturalist could bring to light new facts in unexpected and well-known places that were important to science, as in Gilbert White's classic study of a parish and its surrounds, *The Natural History of Selbourne*.

In his popular manual on domestic marine life, *Glaucus, or the Wonders of the Shore*, Charles Kingsley outlined the qualities required of the ideal British naturalist. Natural History was open for all 'those equipped to really see'. Under Kingsley's schema, every English man and woman could learn to recognise everything constituting the natural world by drawing on the 'highest faculty' of the senses, the 'art of seeing'. When properly equipped, a naturalist's view was panoramic and all-inclusive. Even when it focussed or singularised, Natural History

217 David Allen notes that it was not until the publication of Sir William Jardine's 1827 edition, that 'the real vogue for the book began and its literary merits were appreciated', *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), p. 50.
relationships were still maintained. The viewer absorbed the entire field by 'looking at every object as if he were never to behold it again'. The keen eye Kingsley characterised was more likely directed at the naturalist’s own feet, taking her along the shoreline, inside the crevices of rocks, underneath pebbles, revealing all that was miniature, seemingly insignificant and commonly overlooked. To maintain a total view, the naturalist would direct and control the line of the eye and resist hierarchies of attraction. The level-headed naturalist was ideally:

Never superstitious; wondering at the commonest, but not surprised by the most strange; free from the idols of size and sensuous loveliness; able to see grandeur in the minutest objects, beauty in the unqainly, estimating each thing not carnally, as the vulgar do, by its size or pleasantness to the senses.

Kingsley relaxed these restraints in more demanding and dangerous fields, which required a young male, ‘strong in body, able to haul a dredge, climb a rock, turn a boulder, walk all day, uncertain where he shall eat or rest’. He was ‘gentle and courteous’ in character, but also ‘brave and enterprising’ when necessary, ‘a thoroughly good shot’, able to ‘ride the first horse which comes to hand’, or ‘swim for his life’, and pushing the setting still further, ‘if he go far abroad, be able on occasion to fight for his life’. This portrait of the naturalist adventuring abroad would appear at odds with the restrained and non-discriminatory student of Nature, patiently upturning each pebble in the path.

Anticipating the mania for New Guinea and other ‘unknowns’, Charles Kingsley voiced concern at collectors who expressed passion too freely, bound too closely to the objects of scientific inquiry:

The pleasure of finding new species is too great; it is morally dangerous; for it brings with it the temptation to look on the thing found as your own possession, all but your own creation; to pride yourself in it, as if God had not known it for ages since.

The quest for new species in Kingsley’s terms has disruptive and contagious potential owing to the excesses tied into discovery, an entirely solitary pleasure with desocialising consequences. The moral danger applied to all who collected at the borders of the known world and risk losing themselves in search of the unknown.

Kingsley’s intended audience were unlikely to travel abroad and have to swim or fight for their lives. But popular works of Natural History placed naturalist adventurers under the same rubric as sedate weekend amateurs, to which Kingsley’s manual was specifically oriented.

219 Ibid, p. 44.
220 C. Kingsley, *Glaucus; or the Wonders of the Shore*, p. 27.
Kingsley professed the virtue of the sea, and at its extreme, the ocean floor, above the more celebrated ‘tropical forests of Borneo’ or the ‘rhododendron thickets of the Himalaya’. In characterising the wonders of the shore and beyond, he cited Phillip Gosse’s attraction to the unknown below the surface, where ‘the dark concealed interior of the sea’ is ‘invested with a fresh mystery’, its vast recesses ‘stored with all imaginable forms’. For Kingsley, the thing turning slowly on the ocean floor was as remote and exotic as the orangutan in Borneo, or the rare Bird of Paradise in New Guinea, and relieved of aesthetic or other hierarchical criteria because it came to the naturalist without being chosen. Despite his concern about the ‘moral danger’ of novelty-seeking, Kingsley was unwilling to forego the ‘solid pleasure’ of discovery:

In giving up discovery, one gives up one of the highest enjoyments of Natural History. There is a mysterious delight in the discovery of a new species, akin to that of seeing for the first time, in their native haunts, plants or animals of which one has till then only read.221

The rules of collecting combat collector desire while it bestows value on things, creates hierarchies of interest and takes aesthetic preferences. William Macleay was acutely aware of the advantages gained from a disciplined and controlled self, marked by industry, sobriety and morality; the self offered in service to the larger social body. He represents the very model of desire under the notional control of the rational. Yet Macleay clearly suffered a heightened inner turmoil bound up with desire and its lack. Susan Sontag has characterised collecting as the expression of ‘a free-floating desire that attaches and re-attaches’ onto different objects. The collector is ‘not so much in the grip of what is collected’, but of collecting itself.222 The ideal is to contain all, and finding the limits of pleasure, the collector seeks to move beyond in search of a satisfaction that can never be achieved. Collecting in this sense expresses a desire for a pleasure that is not fully available. It sets out to please, but not entirely. It affords pleasure, but not the pleasure that is represented. The pleasure that is represented remains deferred, perhaps indefinitely, in favour of its fetishistic representation. The completion of desire is deferred in favour of a perpetuating set of staged representations for desire, that is, for more collecting.

It may well be asked whether the scientific discourse of sobriety, issuing institutional requirements that prohibit and prevent desire, actually also produced desire. Instructions lured as they warn off exoticism and excitement. And this opened a space for the participants, readers and followers of journeys to take vicarious pleasure in the setting and breaking of rules.

221 Ibid, p. 28.
222 Susan Sontag, The Volcano Lover, p. 28.
Chapter Five

Alone in New Guinea

Who is spoken to in the journal? The naturalists commonly set up a like-minded reader who knows the seduction of collecting, against another far more innocent. There is a constant difficulty to locate and properly address the two. The collection and its supporting index ultimately operate as an 'internal systematic', directed to the self. In Jean Baudrillard's system of collecting, the realm of successive objects to desire is without limit:

Everything can be possessed, catted or, (in the activity of collecting), organized, classified and assigned a place. The object thus in the strict sense of the word a mirror, for the images it reflects can only follow upon one another without ever contradicting one another.223

The Natural History gaze encompassed New Guinea entirely, novel things were everywhere. It would seem that a heightened state of pleasure was guaranteed simply by weight of the objects available to follow each other. But the possibility of gaps and imperfections ensured a sense of incompleteness. In the journal, states of absence and disappointment, as much as satisfaction, propel the narrative forward. The search for elusive objects (and the absent reader) was an exhausting occupation, bringing pleasure in the agony of every blank as well as every discovery. D'Albertis spoke of this agony in an entry he had to make up for want of material:

To write the history of a day which has got no history is neither pleasant nor easy, and it is especially difficult to begin. When the first step is taken, we can go on to the end of the page.224

A blank day entirely absent of history is coloured with a reflective mood. After extending to the end of the page, d'Albertis discovers a kind of history there anyway. D'Albertis suffered the pathology of completeness acutely and narrated his pursuit without constraint, teetering between Linnean mastery and an overwhelming madness in the face of an absence difficult to name or place. With this mechanism of disappointment in-built, his collecting systems become

frenzied and neurotic: each a little theatre in which he contemplates his insecurity, each betraying the delirium he is caught in.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which naturalists were drawn and ensnared by objects designated for sober inquiry. Contrary to scientific instruction, early European collectors coveted and spoke through things. They were continually absorbed, distracted and diverted by things, in their collecting, manipulated an intimacy with the inanimate. The stage of intimacy was set up through various styles and conventions: the arrival scene, the typical day, the perpetual fresh beginning (or turn) of a collecting cycle, and the special devotion to pets and mascots. This self-fashioning of travel and collecting as solitary and private effaced contact with Papuans, relations with party members, the assistance of carriers and guides, and the requirements of metropolitan patrons.

The arrival scene

In a letter forwarded to the London Mechanics Institute from a place its members were unlikely to visit, Alfred Russel Wallace recounted his first experience of a tropical forest, comparing it against the one he had imagined.

Previous to leaving England I had read many books of travels in hot countries, I had dwelt so much on the enthusiastic descriptions most naturalists give of the surpassing beauty of tropical vegetation, and of the strange forms and brilliant colours of the animal world, that I had wrought myself up to a fever-heat of expectation.225

Wallace had read widely on the subject. His visits to exhibitions, museums, botanical gardens and zoos provided a rich image bank to prefigure the scene. Before leaving England, he admitted having already filled the Amazon with 'strange forms' of 'surpassing beauty' in 'brilliant colours', and built up a 'fever-heat of expectation' that was at first difficult to satisfy:

My early impressions were those of disappointment. On my first walk into the forest I looked about, expecting to see monkeys as plentiful as at the Zoological Gardens, with humming birds and parrots in profusion. But for several days I did not see a single monkey, and hardly a bird of any kind.226

226 Ibid, p. 270.
The first lesson in the tropical forest is patience, only then will the monkeys and parrots show themselves. Discarding the image of South America as a place where naturalists would enjoy the spontaneous hand of nature, Wallace invested science and labour into his project. The message for members of the Mechanics Institute was that the objects of collection would only be located when the seeker looked in a restrained and non-discriminatory manner.

D'Albertis also reconfigured the tropical forest in his first experiential scene. After taking first steps in a New Guinea 'primeval forest' which 'had never as yet owned a master', he reverted to primeval joy, 'I was so pleased at finding myself in a primeval forest that I wanted to run about everywhere'.227 The long awaited first wander is rendered pure and perfect against representations inadequate for their secondary nature. This is repeated in the 'first ramble' of his second Fly river expedition, when the notes of cockatoos and the 'shrill cry of the lories' sounded like 'the parrot-house in the London Zoological Gardens'. The persistence of the London Zoo as a reference point is of note as d'Albertis has now spent more than two years in New Guinea. The London exhibits are never completely superseded as points of origin and continue to reference and translate the real. While d'Albertis sought to elide himself in order to constitute the native forest as an object of representation, there was also a desire to become lost within this object-world and experience its truth directly:

Only to observe these animals in the Zoological Gardens is not to know what they really are; they must be seen in their native forests; and no one can behold them for the first time without being roused to the highest pitch of enthusiasm.228

This state of high enthusiasm is tempered by an exhausting first ramble in which little is discovered apart from thorns and spiders and the other discomforts: 'after a ramble of several hours, I had to acknowledge that, after all my dreams, a primeval forest is not the earthly paradise'.229

In the first rambles of Wallace and d'Albertis, the tropical forest of the imaginary was cleared and re-planted for collecting to commence. The 'earthly paradise' filled up with interesting objects only after being invested with a language of collecting, through which a desire to know, inhabit and possess was charged.

The cycles of collecting

A local and material collection began for d’Albertis the day after his landing. After dramatising his passage and arrival, he switched to diary format only by way of the insects collected early the following morning. A virtual collection though, had already come into existence through his readings of other naturalists’ gaps and discoveries. That land had appeared in his ‘mind’s eye’ ever since learning of ‘the rare bird of paradise of Wallace’, and visited the New Guinea house once lived in by Wallace and reviewed the surrounding country (just as subsequent travellers reported visits to his houses and collecting fields). The same can be said of Wallace, whose approach to New Guinea was tied into the journey of Adolphe Lesson thirty years previously. After ten days in Dorei he happily noted having found ‘most of those [birds and insects] collected by Lesson, as well as many new ones’.230

Collecting translates or ‘resolves’ linear time into the dimensions of a system:

By reducing time to a fixed set of terms navigable in either direction, the collection represents the continual recommencement of a controlled cycle whereby man, at any moment and with complete confidence, starting with any term and sure of returning to it, is able to set his game of life and death in motion.231

In New Guinea, a desirable object of one collecting mindset could reappear to trigger another, as when d’Albertis met ‘an old acquaintance’ not seen for many months, a small black bird he always failed to identify or capture.232 D’Albertis longs for his feathered friend, and with it plays the cyclical game of absence and recall, so that it appears in two places at once.

Collecting was renewable in the fresh desire for natural objects, with each cycle of requirement structured around the pleasure or disappointment of plenty or absence. Just two weeks into his first Fly river expedition, d’Albertis was unsure whether he had a collection yet: ‘at half-past six I went on shore to gather something more for my collection, if I may so call the few objects amassed during the journey’.233 As d’Albertis contemplates these objects, he takes stock in an impromptu inventory, which reveals ‘several species of birds’, ‘a great number of insects’ and ‘numerous serpents’. A collection not yet properly narrated, yet to act as a true index of the journey, is developed and put into order. In the diary entry for the following day,

231 Jean Baudrillard, The System of Objects, p. 89.
after yesterday’s bag has been labelled, preserved and stored on the Neva, d’Albertis begins where he left things, recording, ‘again today I accompanied the men ashore, but obtained little or nothing for my collection’. Now d’Albertis has a collection, partly due to the inventory of the previous entry, but also because the absence of specimens on this unsuccessful day has generated an intensity to collect. The thrill driving the cyclical movement was often enacted in the filling of gaps, rather than the actual possession of things themselves. This principle of absence and repetition structures the journals of Wallace and d’Albertis and other naturalists in New Guinea, their collecting operating as the perpetual fresh beginning of a controlled cycle, unbound by constraints of time, and ‘navigable in either direction’.

Wallace and d’Albertis travel in a permanent state of expectation much like the attitude described by Paul Carter in his spatial histories of Australian exploration. They wish to defer homecoming as long as possible; in line with Francis Galton’s advice to ‘not look forward’ to the journey’s end, the goal is an endless repetition rather than the actual fulfilment of goals. They were kept company in collecting systems which bent constraints of time and space into accord with the desire for and meanings found in objects. D’Albertis:

> It seems to me that in no place, at no epoch of my life, has time flown so quickly as in the midst of these forests. It is more than a month today since I have seen the face of a man except those of my companions – a month since we have been alone in these solitudes.

236 Francis Galton, The Art of Travel, or, Shifts and Contrivances Available in Wild Countries (London: Stackpole, 1872), p. 12. Galton expanded his 1851 RGS Hints for Travellers by gathering ‘the scattered experiences’ of noted explorers, ‘examining into their principles, and deducing from them what might fairly be called an ‘Art of Travel”. He stressed that pleasure in travel was the prime condition of success: ‘interest yourself chiefly in the progress of your journey’, he advised, ‘do not look forward to its end with eagerness’. The ideal journey was solo and of epic proportion, safely removed from colonial infrastructure. The goal was not so much the discovery of significant objects, but a perpetual movement forward negotiating harsh landscape, sickness, hunger, wild beasts, savages and unpredictable chiefs. His instructions pose attractive scenarios in which letters are buried, coded signs posted, misbehaving natives tied up (with diagrams of various methods and knots), ‘large things’ hidden cleverly in surrounding bush, and valuables hidden in the explorer’s own flesh. There is also advice on correct and incorrect ways to roll up sleeves, and recommendations on equipment and gadgets (such as the patent ventilating hat), designed specifically for the expression of Victorian subjecthood in wild countries. In this way, The Art of Travel was written in a similar spirit to Captain Lawson’s Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea, and its romantic orientation intensified over eight editions between 1855-93, as journeys of primordial exploration were increasingly unlikely to take place, and readers sought pleasure in adventure and nostalgia.
Their collections of specimens stood for the world and told the story of the journey, though the impulse was to bypass narration. The pathology of completeness was felt most acutely when it appeared the destructiveness of time could not be overcome and the journey had an end. For d’Albertis the pleasure of Hattam, a particularly abundant region in one collecting regime, was regulated by an urgency that all things here were not salvageable: ‘only five more days to remain in a country where every shot brings down a bird of a new species, and where every insect I pick up is also new to me’. When it is time to say goodbye he regrets previous complaints and suffers the loss of everything still remaining:

What did it matter to me that I had to go to bed without supper, or after a very meagre one, so long as I could reckon on so many more beautiful birds. How it wrung my heart to be obliged to bid adieu to a place in which I had found real treasure, but where I certainly left many more.

The thought of all the unclaimed treasure is heart-wrenching. As Sontag observed: ‘the ideal of completion is a delusive goal’, there is ‘always something more, something better’.

A day in the life

Being here for the purpose of making collections, I have adopted the following system of life.

Early in the narrative, at a point when a practice of collecting has just begun to take shape, the naturalists invariably record a day typical of the life now lived. In the lengthy journal entry for 22 October 1871, three weeks after the departure of the Vitiaz from Astrolobe Bay, Nicolai Miklouho-Maclay outlined the daily system already established. On this typical day, Miklouho-Maclay rose before his servants at five in the morning. After washing and eating, he made the seven o’clock meteorological observations which included temperature of air, ground, stream and sea, the direction and strength of wind, and barometer and evaporation readings. He then

238 L.M. d’Albertis, New Guinea: What I Did and What I Saw, v. 1, p. 120.
240 Susan Sontag, The Volcano Lover, p. 21.
either collected marine specimens from the coral reef or collected insects in the forest, and examined them under microscope. At eleven, he ate the curried rice Boy prepared. After napping he repeated the atmospheric readings for one o’clock, and continued the afternoon occupied by ‘all sorts of household chores, like cleaning the guns or tidying up my cell’. He also made time to record Papuan vocabulary and walk in the forest. After dinner he read, put his notes in order and made a final meteorology recording before bed. This ‘apparently monotonous, but actually for me, interesting life’ is repeated in the same manner day after day, although the journal of course unfolds in every variation of the type. Miklouho-Maclay organised his scientific and collecting regimen in such a way that he could find pleasure in monotony and romanticise his self-inflicted prison.

The monotony of collecting was also timetabled by Wallace in a letter to his mother from the Aru Islands. He sought to structure and inhabit the typical day, listing the countless chores that stripped pleasure away. Like a self-addressed postcard, his archetype day is neatly systematised into something he can possess and make sense of:

Get up at half-past five. Bath and coffee. Sit down to arrange and put away my insects of the day before, and set them safe out to dry. Charles mending nets, filling pincushions, and getting ready for the day. Breakfast at eight. Out to the jungle at nine. We have to walk up a steep hill to get to it, and always arrive dripping with perspiration. Then we wander about till two or three, generally returning with about 50 or 60 beetles, some very rare and beautiful. Bathe, change clothes, and sit down to kill and pin insects. Charles ditto with flies, bugs and wasps. Then to work again till 6. Coffee. Read. If very numerous, work at insects till 8 or 9. Then to bed.

Wallace labours to a punchclock discipline at the separate workplaces of campsite and the jungle he and his assistant ‘have to walk up a steep hill to get to’. Hints of release and escape are permitted in midday wandering, the leisure of night reading and within the component of ‘rare and beautiful’ beetles among the total collected. In the discipline of the day, these little pleasures and sidetracks are subsumed within a total project for which every specimen demands full accuracy and attention. In capturing, preparing, labelling, describing and packing

242 Miklouho-Maclay lived at Astrolobe Bay with his assistant Ohlsen, a Swedish sailor, and a Samoan servant he refers to as ‘Boy’ (neither survived).
243 He sleeps in ‘a hard cot made of two baskets covered with blanket instead of a mattress and sheets’. Night after night they eat the same meal – boiled rice with curry and beans and salt. Miklouho-Maclay was unperturbed when the sugar ran out, and notes the ‘grumbling’ of the other two. He finds pleasure in this diet: ‘it is simple and its monotony rather pleases me; besides that, all these discomforts and trifles are carefully compensated for by the scientific observations and by nature’. D’Albertis also wrote of comforts happily foregone: ‘I have a tent for a house, a mat for a bed, and a stone for a pillow – and that is all. My only light is from a smoky lamp’. L.M. d’Albertis, New Guinea: What I Did and What I Saw, vol. 2, p. 222.
244 J. Marchant, Alfred Russel Wallace: Letters and Reminiscences, p. 49.
specimens, Wallace reminds himself that even though objects neither rare nor beautiful appear
dull, each an unnecessary diversion, together, these represent the heart of the exercise.

Wallace and Miklouho-Maclay spend more than half their time at the campsite or
collecting house, preserving specimens and maintaining collections. The taxidermic process
receives passing reference, and is rarely mentioned in accounts by New Guinea collectors. In
Java, Wallace was told by a village headman to move on from a site he had colonised for days
with the stench of monkeys. Blood and campsite fetor are generally elided in the journal,
instead, the sculpting craft of taxidermy arrests decay, preserving the perfect meeting of
naturalist and natural object forever. The former teacher of d’Albertis, Abbe David, offered
rare resistance to taxidermy’s untold magic, making his revulsion for its process explicit during
the typical day of his China travels:

The rest of the day and a good part of the night is spent on my knees preparing the
skins of the game taken today by my companions and me. One of the most
unpleasant tasks of collecting natural history specimens consists in the necessity of
doing disgusting taxidermic work immediately, when one needs rest and comfort,
especially after a fatiguing day. As for me in particular, as a naturalist, I bear a double
burden because I am not free from my religious duties.  

The intensive labour of Wallace and the monastic sacrifice endured by Miklouho-Maclay are
here composed as a ‘double burden’ Abbe David performs in daily rituals of prayer and then,
also ‘on my knees’, with hands bloodied filing scientific reports. The typical day in New
Guinea, as told in journals and letters, was a day which lasted not nearly long enough to carry
out the impossible task of comprehensive fieldwork. A timetable of labour, suffering and
sacrifice was drawn up to render the collecting life up as an object, a style of living to give
oneself over to more completely.

The typical day mythologises a selfless dedication to the total project. This delegation
to a wider program has a closely related manoeuvre, where Natural History instructions are
addressed in terms which emphasise sacrifice and dedication. At the end of one search in the
Arfak Mountains with Beccari, d’Albertis responded to an (internalised) set of external
requirements:

We had to find the renowned massoi plant, and so we walked on at a smart pace
without being fatigued, and tried to admire and feel interest in everything we saw,
including an old trunk of a tree – which was neither more nor less an old trunk of a
tree.  

245 Helen Fox (ed.), Abbe David’s Diary, entry for 30 July 1868, p. 295.
This style of non-discriminatory looking, 'we had to find', 'we tried to admire and feel interest', where everything is potentially significant to an assessor at some other remove (which could also be d'Albertis), is rendered a tiresome exercise. The designated botanical requirement, the 'renowned massoi plant', itself brings fatigue and ultimate failure in the search. D'Albertis continues even though unwilling, finding ironic interest in an old tree trunk, apparently one of the few surrounding objects that the net of Natural History does not cover.

The seduction of new species

Moments of acquisition and capture were points at which the terms of collecting were disturbed. This moment was marked down as a profit from individual labour. Marvelling at the object, the naturalist set what was momentarily held apart from alternative and competing claims: the forest (former) and cabinet (future). After four years collecting on the Amazon and five years in the Malay archipelago, Wallace dramatised one such moment in New Guinea as if it were the first:

It is one thing to see beauty in a cabinet, and quite another to feel it struggling between one’s fingers, and to gaze upon its fresh and living beauty, a bright-green gem shining out amid the silent gloom of a dark and tangled forest. The village of Dobbo held that evening at least one contented man.247

The solitary and brief pleasure of prising a new species from the lonely forest eclipses any satisfaction offered by cabinet naturalism. A kind of indulgence is savoured in the space of post-capture, where possession is experienced in pure form. Wallace assures himself there is no place he would rather be,248 the village of Dobbo is his romantic refuge, and that evening, as he lets himself loose in the realm of writing and speculation, he locates an order not found in the social world.

248 Another convention is to set the collecting paradise against Europe’s more civilised attractions, generally addressed to fellow naturalists: ‘This was a great day for me! What would not many naturalists give to be in my place this evening! How many of them would prefer this dirty, smoky hovel to all the cafes and theatres of a city’. L.M. d’Albertis, New Guinea: What I Did and What I Saw, vol. 1, p. 102.
In the plotting of New Guinea collecting narratives, the flattening tedium, endless waiting, unpleasant tasks and constant disappointments all construct a stage for that which is most sought after to suddenly appear. In pursuit of this moment, narratives of self-inflicted suffering flow into unhindered expression. The study of Natural History in a remote field was for Henry Forbes:

a life full of tiresome shifts, discomforts, and short commons; but these are completely forgotten, and the days seem never long enough amid that constant flash of delighted surprise that accompanies the beholding for the first time of beast or bird or thing unknown before, and the throb of pleasure experienced, as each new morsel of knowledge amalgamates with one's self.249

In this state of anticipation, this auto-eroticism, the collector's discomforts quickly disappear. Time passes quickly, or sheds its meaning translated into the dimensions of each private collecting quest. The idea of the previously unknown New Guinea thing seduces Forbes, arousing a 'throb of pleasure' on their meeting. And the knowledge resulting from discovery is divided into instalments - small morsels of possession he permits himself to consume.

In Wallace's South American and Malayan travels, the dedication to the ordinary in the absence of the singular and spectacular only heightened his general anxiety, building a 'fever-heat of expectation'. Wallace was initially disappointed when the Amazon he anticipated did not materialise. This collector's haven at first appeared amorphous in character, the exotic and rare were absent or eluded him. But at a critical moment after a period of profitless labour, an unknown butterfly perfectly and beautifully formed fluttered across the path, taking his breath and his innocence away:

My heart began to beat violently, the blood rushed to my head, and I felt much more like fainting than I have done when in apprehension of immediate death. I had a headache the rest of the day.250

The long-awaited encounter with the new object is a moment of ecstasy in which the idea has orgasmic force. Wallace experiences the euphoria of discovery and must then suffer the exhausting meeting of his desire. When the most treasured moment he would somehow liked to have prolonged has passed, Wallace mourns the loss and his head begins to ache. The previously unknown butterfly, now pinned forever as the *Ornithoptera croesus*, takes with it in death the singular beauty of never having been seen or known.

The seduction of new species was freely expressed by New Guinea travellers. Their bias toward the beautiful and the singular as self-confessed ‘lovers of Nature’ contradicted Natural History instruction to absorb everything with a detached and non-discriminatory eye. In China, Abbe David endorsed the number-crunching approach to natural data:

The most minute objects, the most insignificant details, are important. A dot, a comma, a small line are not important in themselves but have value in relation to the whole, and can change radically its final significance.

But this was also a voyage in which he searched for ‘striking novelties’ and achieved notoriety for discovering two new and exotic species. D’Albertis, his reborn prodigy, was similarly ensnared by the prospect of new species and announced his desire unashamedly:

To-day my heart beat quickly at the sight of a magnificent insect, which I do not think has yet been classed among those existing in New Guinea.

As d’Albertis looked around for something to captivate him, a magnificent insect danced to the beat of his heart. If confirmed as unclassed and unclaimed, he will add to his growing collection of new species, a category which heads the inventory of collected objects.

251 David made the European discoveries of the Panda Bear and also a striped dear witnessed in herds after he climbed up to look over the fence of the Chinese Imperial Gardens, forbidden to foreigners.

The search for new species and the patient cultivation of sets and series was a solitary affair. Its suffocating discourse left no room for servants, carriers, assistants or other collectors. The 'little world' the naturalists sought to control was one into which they privately withdrew. Individual collectors frequently crossed paths in New Guinea, and sometimes formed collecting parties, but generally operated alone. The brief partnership of Beccari and d'Albertis in the Arfak Mountains is a case in point. The two were to travel as one for the Genoa Museum, but soon separated, and in the portion of journey d'Albertis shared with Beccari, the latter's presence is rarely mentioned. In a letter to an old school friend, Wallace spoke of how pleasing he now found his own company:

Malays and Papuans, beetles and birds, are what now occupy my thoughts, mixed with financial calculations and hopes for a happy future in Old England, where I may live in solitude and seclusion, except from a few choice friends. You cannot, perhaps, imagine how I have come to love solitude. I seldom have a visitor but I wish him away in an hour!253

The longed-for retreat into a secluded and desocialised world arrived in the nest egg of collecting. Another passionate lover of solitude, Miklouho-Maclay, when first presented with an environment in which he could solely participate, announced a sudden 'forgetfulness of the past' and 'no thought of the future', and determined to keep this place private so he could at last 'think and endeavour to understand all that was around me, from now on this is my goal. What more could one want?'254 He looked forward to a life entirely filled by collecting and scientific observation, pushing Wallace's post-journey anxiety (the collecting after-life) further in the fantasy of possibly never returning.

I am so satisfied with my solitude. Although the contact with people is not burdensome, they are for me the most part superfluous ... I wouldn't mind always being here, and never returning to Europe.255

The people he finds 'for the most part superfluous' also constitute the main project he has set himself to study. But the Papuans over-reach their object domain to Miklouho-Maclay's constant frustration, interrupting and disturbing his solemn 'observations and contemplations'. The only possible escape lies in his dream of becoming 'invisible', and thus, 'a solitary

253 A.R. Wallace, My Life, p. 270.
254 Miklouho-Maclay, Travels to New Guinea, p. 29.
255 Ibid, p. 103.
spectator, an observer, not a participant in what is going on'. No longer would he then have to blow a whistle to announce his arrival on visits to their village. An escape to solitary spectatorship would also mean he could ignore cracks forming in the solid barrier separating the object from detached scientific inquiry.

The solitude the naturalists insist on is not so much a solitude of person as of system. They are alone in making a system of the collectable objects of New Guinea, and are 'ceaselessly flung back on the solipsism' of a lover's discourse. Their withdrawal is a withdrawal into romantic collecting which gives them space to roam free. Is there anyone out there, apart from old school friends, mothers or mentors, to comprehend their lonely talk? A general reader is introduced only to be dismissed as inadequately equipped to fully understand what is written, in turn suggesting the existence of another who might. D'Albertis confides regularly to this reader, here whispering excitedly about the post-capture of three highly prized Birds of Paradise:

I will not stop to describe my joy at that moment; only naturalists who have been similarly situated could understand it, and they can imagine it without my telling them. I might describe the habits of the bird, its beauty, but as I cannot expect that all my readers are naturalists, and therefore likely to feel interested in such small details, I had better omit them.

D'Albertis cuts short the description of what he has, saving for another time (or from time) the illicit detail only fit for naturalists who have been 'similarly situated', and who 'have exactly and right now the same language' as he. In the elaborate self-fashioning of collecting, an ever-present subject taking an uncanny likeness is situated to hear or imagine discovery and beauty without it being spelt out, to soundboard and mirror the naturalist's desired image. The presence of a reader who understands does not alleviate the loneliness of New Guinea though.

An incurable loneliness impels the traveller to gather things, to surround himself with a subject domain not other. In the installation of this territory, certain objects are invested with heightened devotion, and come to assume the social relation of other humans. These objects function powerfully when figured as exotic or familiar creatures the naturalist captures and

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256 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, p. 212. With the exception of William Macleay, none of the naturalists were married at the time of their New Guinea travels. In 1877 Octavius Stone wrote to Hargrave in Sydney to explain his resignation from New Guinea: 'I am afraid I shall not trouble the Papuans again as I am about to get married in April and when a person does this he loses his freedom and becomes a slave.' John Hargrave Papers, letter dated 24 February, 1877. Bachelorhood was common to explorers in Africa, as Tim Youngs noted in *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 82.

allows (invites) to live with him. In reference to Maurice Rheims' notion of the collected object as something like a faithful dog that guarantees the return of its master's desired image, Baudrillard observed:

The pathos-laden presence of a dog, a cat, a tortoise or a canary is a testimonial to a failure of the interhuman relationship and an attendant recourse to a narcissistic domestic universe where subjectivity finds fulfilment in the most quietistic way.259

Baudrillard placed domestic animals in an intermediate category between humans and objects. Through pets the autoerotic can 'fulfil itself without hindrance'. The naturalists alone in New Guinea marked out this intermediate and intimate ground by choosing the company of pets and living specimens, which as travelling mascots, acted as emblems for the collection and the journey. Mascot parrots often took part in nineteenth century sea voyages as memorials to earlier journeys. The deep-sea dredging HMS Challenger naturalist Moseley found particular amusement in the antics and mockery of Robert the parrot, who constantly repeated the line, 'What! Two thousand fathoms and no bottom? Ah Doctor Carpenter, FRS'.260 In an appendix to his journal, the 'Zoology and Botany of the Ship', Mosely listed every creature (including the parasitical ants, moths, mosquitos, rats) they shared their lives with. The most troublesome for Moseley, but one for whom he declared a kind of 'pathos-laden' domestic intimacy, was a cockroach who shared his cabin:

When my light was out, he had a familiar habit of coming to sip the moisture from my face and lips which was decidedly unpleasant, and awoke me often from a doze. I believe it was with this object, that he watched me before I went to sleep.261

Beyond these heady nights in Moseley's cabin, the Challenger's crew took a cassowary on board to add amusement to their 'drudging'. But its frantic ship deck running quickly lost favour and it did not survive the voyage home to England. Towards the end of HMS Basilisk's coastal surveys, that ship 'was full of strange pets and curiosities', among them a cassowary who made it home.262 Collection of live specimens was encouraged by Admiralty guidelines, on condition of delivery in the state of encounter. Captured animals were to be regarded as scientific specimens, not the curiosity or pet as invariably was the practice. In a Zoology sub-section of the Admiralty Manual of Scientific Enquiry, Robert Owen quoted William Broderip of the

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258 R. Barthes, A Lover's Discourse, p. 212.
259 Jean Baudrillard, The System of Objects, p. 89.
260 H. Moseley, Notes from the Voyage of the Challenger, p. 595.
261 Ibid, p. 593.
262 'The most remarkable of the pets was a cassowary from Cornwallis Island (now in the Zoological Gardens, London)'. J. Moresby, Discoveries and Surveys in New Guinea, p. 229.

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London Zoo on correct 'transport of living animals' in their 'transmission to the Menagerie of the Zoological Gardens of London'.

The captive should be kept clean, and should be fed sparingly; that is, it should have only sufficient to sustain it in health; all trash should be kept out of its reach, and it should not be subjected to the capricious kindness or ill-treatment of strangers.263

The guidelines express concern both for the 'capricious kindness' or 'ill-treatment' when 'strangers' interfered with objects of scientific inquiry.

There is no attempt to mask or contain the affection d'Albertis loaded onto the faithful entourage in his tow. He reputedly provoked admiration in Sydney on return from the Arfak mountains as the eccentric and charismatic explorer, walking his pet wallaby on a leash through the streets, having tamed the unknown.264 In a reversal, an Irish red setter named Dash, a loyal companion and a reminder of home, never left his side in New Guinea. D'Albertis extended the pet fantasy in snake-charming rituals performed for natives. During one collecting ramble with Papuan guides, a seven-foot python was encountered sleeping in thick scrub. The 'fine serpent' came to life when attached to d'Albertis:

I will keep it alive on board, as it seems goodtempered, for I held it closely in my hands for half an hour, and it made no attempt to bite me. My people are greatly afraid of serpents, and the mere knowledge that I am keeping it alive among my possessions will prevent them from taking tobacco or other things.265

The python proves an effective watchdog, guarding his possessions and marking out the boundaries of his private domain. D'Albertis pushes local taste still further in provocative displays of affection with another serpent 'befriended' in the same journey, and takes special delight in the horror of natives when kissing its head:

When I go to bring it in, it comes to me of its own accord. While I am working, I often hold it on my knees, where it remains for hours; sometimes it raises its head and licks my face with its forked tongue. It is a true friend and companion to me.266

The beloved pets and mascots, as recipients of 'capricious kindness', must eventually die or disappear according to the rules of attraction, leaving the naturalist alone again. In the wake of Dash's passing (after swimming gallantly into the jaws of a crocodile), d'Albertis faced near-total loss: 'a void is forming itself around me; my kangaroo dies, my dog dies, my snakes desert

264 The wallaby was purchased by George Bennett from a crew member of HMS Basilisk, and presented to d'Albertis during his stay in Sydney on return from the Arfak Mountains.
me, and now I am alone’. Dogged by the cruel turn of a collecting cycle, he must start over again: ‘during the last few days nothing worth notice has happened. The dullness of my solitude was dispelled by collecting insects and animals.’

Wallace secured the ultimate mascot when he chased and shot down from the heights of the trees a highly prized orangutan of Borneo. He was overjoyed to find its young still alive. On route to the collecting house, the baby orangutan latched itself so tightly to Wallace’s hair and beard that he ‘had great difficulty in getting free’. He assumed the role of a surrogate; feeding, washing and grooming the little orphan each day, an operation both enjoyed. But Wallace’s surrogacy fell short when he could provide no milk for it to feed.

When I put my finger in its mouth it sucked with great vigour, drawing in its cheeks with all its might in the vain effort to extract some milk, and only after persevering a long time would it give up in disgust, and set up a scream very like that of a baby in similar circumstances.

A climbing frame was constructed to exercise its weak limbs and, noticing the baby’s liking for hair, Wallace enhanced the setting by creating an ‘artificial mother’ from buffalo skin, suspended to a carefully calculated height above the floor. The replica proved successful until the baby nearly choked on wool and hair, still frantically searching for the nipple: ‘after much grasping it recovered, and I was obliged to take the imitation mother to pieces again, and give up this last attempt to exercise the little creature’.

When the promise of the fake mother deflates, Wallace offers the young orangutan a playmate spider monkey of the same age. Their interaction is anxiously observed, and to Wallace’s dismay, the helpless orangutan lags far behind. After three months in which Wallace confessed he became ‘quite attached to the infant’, the orangutan died from fever he could not cure.

I much regretted the loss of my little pet, which I had at one time looked forward to bringing up to years of maturity, and taking home to England.

When Wallace’s parenthood, his ‘little pet’ project, is taken away, he mourns the loss of an infant prodigy who must die tragically according to the rules. The human-like primate was equipped to return perfect enactments of appreciation to the collector who remade the beloved

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269 Ibid, p. 44.
270 Ibid, p. 44.
in his own image. The perfection of the image returned by the intermediate object is that it can be looked at ‘without it looking back at you’.

As a mirror the object is most perfect, precisely because it sends back not real images, but desired ones. In a word it is a dog of which nothing remains but faithfulness.271

The love of the father in this episode is intrinsically bound with paternal desire. In the staging of Wallace’s experiment, the affection the object sends back ultimately falls apart, turning in on itself through an in-breeding of colonial desire, leaving nothing but a faithfulness which cannot itself survive. In the tragic episodes of unrequited love for docile pythons and eager young primates, the collectors chart as omens the larger projects of possession they anticipate will follow their own, and break down as theirs, in an uncertainty based on faith in self alone.

In Search of the Last Elusive Object

In the solitary collecting quest I have been characterising, the most desired objects remain just out of reach. To move beyond and grasp at what cannot properly be grasped is to seek something more prized and elusive. According to Baudrillard, the exclusive passion engendered by one unique object, far from disrupting, actually feeds collector desire. This ‘last’ object is the paramount term that sums up and speaks for a ‘virtual, invisible or implicit’ whole.

The absent final term is a symbolic distillation of that series without which it would not exist; consequently it acquires a strange quality, a quality which is the quintessence of the whole quantitative calibration of the series. This term is the unique object, defined by its final position and hence creating the illusion that it embodies a particular goal or end.272

In New Guinea an absent final term endowed with strange quality excited and tantalised above all others. The naturalists and behind them an array of scientists, collectors and curators in Europe and Australia, demonstrated undying commitment to the missing object by constantly murmuring its evocative name or contemplating this thing still without a name. Its great attraction absorbed and imprisoned the field naturalist, unsettling the imperial project of non-discriminate collecting towards total representation. The captivation of the last object could appear too vividly as self-portrait, the index or story of a particular journey, and so disrupt the detached fixture of totality sought. Anticipating its power and attraction, the guidelines and manuals discouraged obsessive attention to singular objects as unhelpful and unhealthy.

The much desired last object of New Guinea was a treasure in ornate clothing. It was extremely difficult to obtain, or at least, constructed this way in narratives of dramatic chase. It appeared foremost in the inventory of specimens and was highly sought after by dealers and patrons acting for the private and public Natural History collections of Europe, a demand reflected in the remuneration and notoriety it fetched the naturalist.

The French naturalist René Lesson became the first European to describe a Bird of Paradise in its natural environment when *la Coquille* anchored at Dorei for two weeks in 1824.

From the first day of our arrival in New Guinea, that 'promised land' of naturalists, we saw the Emerald Birds of Paradise flying about in these old forests, daughters of ages, whose sombre depths perhaps afford the most striking and imposing spectacle which can be presented to the gaze of a European.273

What Lesson witnessed in those 'old forests' was somehow already composed as the first meeting. In that timeless and perfect encounter, as evoked by la Meslée at the RGSA's inaugural meeting, the 'first naturalists' described birds 'in ecstasy before the exquisite colours of their gorgeous plumage', deemed them 'worthy of a place in Elysium', and accordingly gave 'the generic name' Birds of Paradise.274 But early classification and description was a construction of distance as the birds were never seen alive. The first naturalists imagined what that encounter would have been like from an archival setting.

European contact with Birds of Paradise dates back to the early sixteenth century when the sole surviving ship of Magellan's circumnavigating expedition returned five skins as gifts from the Sultan of Bacan to the King of Spain. The crew of the *Victoria* reported a Moluccan belief that the bolon diuata (birds of God) had come from an earthly paradise. Paradise plumes were long-standing markers of status (the Maharaja of Srivijaya presented plumes to the Chinese Emperor in the eight century);275 their ceremonial and diplomatic function in Southeast Asia was similarly adopted by high-ranking Turkish and Persian officials who wore headdresses interwoven with plumes in the sixteenth century. The plumes carried honour and privilege much like the imperial and court ritual of baptism by gold. Paradise plumes also adorned the helmets of elite guards of the Sultan and Janissaries of the Ottoman Empire, repeating Moluccan investments in the talismanic properties of plumes in battle.276

The traffic of plumes increased with the expansion of Portuguese and Dutch spice trade in the East Indies. Most of the birds were prepared in Kai and the Aru Islands, with legs and wings removed and the skin smoked dry to preserve the plumes for trade. They travelled to Banda, then to Molucca, before reaching European hands. In Europe, Birds of Paradise were understood to float continuously in the 'highest sky' without feet or wings, turning the way of the sun and never touching the earth until they died. The Portuguese Passaros de Sol (bird of

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the sun), and Dutch *Avis paradisens* (Paradise bird), refer to these early myths. The late-sixteenth century Dutch traveller John van Linschoten reported birds ‘called Paradice-birdes, for ye beauty of their feathers which passe all other birds’. They fell only to one island beyond the borders of the known world east of Molucca:

> these birds are never seen alive, but being dead they are found upon the Island: they flie, as it is said alwaies into the Sunne, and kéepe themselves continually in the ayre, without alighting on the earth, for they have neither feet nor wings, but only head and body and the most part tayle.277

Some trade skins reached Europe intact in the early seventeenth century, and the first illustration of a Bird of Paradise with feet was published in 1655, which many contested in favour of earlier beliefs. Those views became more difficult to maintain, however, when sufficient numbers of specimens featured in the growing collections of birds in Holland and Germany.

Paul Farber has traced a shift in the study of birds in Europe from a literary activity to a modern scientific discipline in which naturalists shared sets of common methodology. Ornithology was one of the more distinct disciplines in the early fragmentation of the natural sciences. Its empirical base expanded dramatically between 1780-1830 as specimens accumulated in vast numbers from South America, Africa and Australia, and individuals carried out specific collecting journeys. Major expeditions were financed by the governments of France and Holland, and to a lesser extent Germany, while Britain relied on amateurs throughout its empire to enhance collections.278 Farber has pointed to various influences and practices associated with the wide-ranging appeal of ornithology during this time. The emerging discipline incorporated an older language of heraldry and codes of armorial insignia through which birds (both mythic and real) signified particular qualities. The aesthetic and symbolic use of birds in clothing and in porcelain, textiles and pottery, was mirrored in the scientific context where advancements in taxidermy and colour-plating allowed birds to be reproduced as never before. Early classifications by French naturalists, Brisson and Buffon, were inspired by an aesthetic perspective, hence Buffon’s ordering of Toucans as ‘monstrosities of the species’.279

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279 Comte de Buffon, *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux* (Paris 1770-83) vol. 7, p. 108, cited in Farber, *The Emergence of Ornithology as a Scientific Discipline*, p. 24. Buffon settled on the description of species by feather colour, even though language could not accommodate their various form: ‘It would be impossible unless one used a prodigious number of words, very boring ones at that, for the description of the colours of birds. There are not even the proper terms in any language to express the nuances, the hues, the reflections and blendings.'
The field of ornithology was ideally sized for the purposes of collecting, the species small enough to be manageable, yet large enough for the production and lure of rarity. The rituals of hunting and the pleasures of the table completed the attraction of birds as objects of scientific study.

The first Bird of Paradise classifications appeared in Linne's *Systema Naturae* in 1766. He classed the *Paradisae regia* and the *Paradisae apoda*, the latter commemorating the 'footless' bird of the past. Francois Levaillant's *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux de Paradis* (1806) was entirely devoted to Birds of Paradise, with the twelve known species figured in life-size colour-plates. His review of the existing literature began with a dismissal of pre-modern conceptions about the birds:

In speaking about these magnificent birds we will persist in fighting the childish stories which were created by the first ornithologists to write about them. We will not resist the correction of modern mistakes which have been committed by those very same people who seem cautious not to repeat the old-fashioned myths, whose absurdity and implausibility do not merit the honour of being taken seriously, and should remain in obscurity or relegated to the realm of fairytales.

The beauty and rarity of Birds of Paradise was unparalleled, but this had always been the case. Levaillant was concerned to place the reader and the birds together in a legitimate scientific context. Although no European had recorded a field observation, Levaillant took steps toward the real in the anticipation of a field naturalist's view. By framing description around a relationship between the observer and the object, he was able to recreate a scene of origin for the male 'Incomparable'.

It would seem as if Nature herself had striven to surpass her previous creations in the production of this magnificent bird. Nothing in the power of man can give an adequate idea of the splendid appearance of an adult male of this species when at liberty in his woods; his dress of metallic colours flashes back, as he moves amid the forest, in equally brilliant scintillations, the firey rays of a tropical sun .... in addition to these beautiful decorations of the head, nature has provided this bird with a voluminous tail, composed of very long and strong feathers, which gives the bird a truly imposing air: ultimately the richness of its entire plumage, which shines with the rarest colours, justifies the nickname of 'Incomparable'.

Nevertheless the colours are essential characteristics here and often the only ones by which we can recognize a bird and distinguish it from others. Comte de Buffon, *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux*, vol. 1, p. 6.

The Incomparable is spectacularly reproduced in the book, despite Levaillant’s insistence that words and illustrations always ‘fail to express the gorgeous appearance of the wonderful creature’.\textsuperscript{283} Its shining example rested on gemlike properties, the glittering and glistening ‘scintillations’ from a tropical sun, marking it as belonging to an entirely different order of natural beauty.

More than twenty series classifications had updated one another by the time Lesson visited Dorei in 1824. The documentation and speculation in these modern works, together with the ‘fairytales’ of the past, was the ornithological baggage carried to that first meeting in Paradise:

The view of the first Bird of Paradise was overwhelming. The gun remained idle in my hand for I was too astonished to shoot. It was in the virgin forest surrounding the harbour of Dorey. As I slipped carefully along the wild pig’s trails through this dusky thicket, a Paradisaea suddenly flew in graceful curves over my head. It was like a meteor whose body, cutting through the air, leaves a long trail of light. With the ornamental plumes pressing against its flanks, this bird resembles an ornament dropped from the curls of a gouri and floating idly in the layer of air that encircles our planet’s crust.\textsuperscript{284}

It came to him as a fantastic vision, rather than one sought. Frozen in astonishment at the sudden flash, Lesson registered arousal, and subsequent impotence, in failing to bring it from the sky. His report kept faith to the elusiveness of the bird. It was other-worldly, a thing dreamt rather than seen, surprising the naturalist, then quickly taking flight, only to be lost once more. The perfect framing of that first encounter would excite (and deflate) the hopes of collectors for years to come.

A primary objective for Wallace in the Malay archipelago, what he termed ‘my special object’, was to observe and collect ‘the rare Bird of Paradise’, which no other naturalist had done in the thirty years since Lesson. In Singapore, he regarded the birds as ‘one of the greatest treats I can look forward to’, and the expedition he eventually began after ‘months of delay and expectation’ was closely tied into the success Lesson had enjoyed. By committing several months to Dorei, Wallace aimed to repeat and surpass that achievement. His fortunes deteriorated however, after sustaining an ankle injury from ‘clambering among the trunks and branches of fallen trees’ too eagerly. He also suffered a malarial relapse, and together, these ailments brought several weeks confinement inside an empty collecting house he had intended

\textsuperscript{283} When first opening a copy of Levaillant’s book (by chance on that very page), I too registered the power of the Incomparable to hypnotise and arouse with its long and radiant plumes. Inside the book, the bird is surrounded by smooth, clean whiteness. It is contained, and can be opened (initiated), closed (stored), and infinitely repeated. The illustrations in Levaillant’s book match, if not surpass, the magic of taxidermy.
to fill. As Wallace lay helpless and incapacitated, a captive within, ‘grand butterflies’ teased in their ‘tantalising’ flight past the open door. With weather now fine and collecting conditions perfect, it seemed that Nature plotted against him. Still, he had reached the home of the Bird of Paradise, a place he ‘had hoped rather than expected to visit’.

Wallace travelled to five different habitats, each expedition ‘occupying in its preparation and execution the larger part of a year’, but collected ‘only five species out of the thirteen known to exist’. The rarer species Lesson had acquired so easily in Dorei were no longer available. Wallace could only purchase poorly preserved skins from the previous season and himself capture the most common species. Nature had clearly ‘taken every precaution’ that ‘her choicest treasures may not lose value by being too easily obtained’. They were protected by a ‘harbourless inhospitable’ coast, then ‘rugged and mountainous country’, and finally, ‘a race of the most savage and ruthless character, in the very lowest stage of civilisation’. Some rare species from the interior were exchanged three or four times in a ‘mutilated’ state in their trade passage to the coast. An expedition to that source was impossible to organise, as Wallace discovered, because the hunters from Dorei feared the natives of the interior ‘who had never even been seen’, and refused to guide him there. Arriving in New Guinea with ‘the most brilliant hopes’, Wallace accomplished ‘next to nothing’ and left deeply disappointed with his results. The rare Bird of Paradise was ‘calculated to excite’ so perfectly and stood for all that would remain beyond reach. In mourning this last object created solely for display, Wallace broke through to a cleared place in his own nature where it was already installed behind glass.

In an address to the London Zoological Society on return, Wallace related the irony that the most beautiful creature known to civilised man was placed alongside the most savage human race.

289 Wallace transported the first living Birds of Paradise to Europe for which he was paid £150 plus return passage by the London Zoo (the fee matched that for the first African elephant and rhinoceros in separate offers made to David Livingstone). There is no story of a relationship with the birds in The Malay Archipelago, except for a note that there were originally several, of which only two survived the homeward journey. There was no scope for any staging of an intimate relation between Wallace and the birds (partly because they were purchased in Singapore at a remove from ‘the field’). In not admitting them to the status of a pet, Wallace was not so much following instruction on live specimens, as reflecting what these objects meant to the collector.
In such a country and among such a people are found these wonderful productions of nature. In those trackless wilds do they display that exquisite beauty and that marvellous development of plumage, calculated to excite admiration and astonishment among the most civilised and most intellectual races of men.290

Side-by-side lived the most exquisite objects of beauty and adornment and the most barbarous of people and practices. The French naturalist Pierre Sonnerat had made the same observation after purchasing skins at Dorei in 1774. He contrasted birds ‘elegant for shape’ and ‘brilliant for the lustre of their colours’ against the ‘hideous and frightful’ appearance of the ‘cruel, suspicious and deceitful’ Papuan traders: ‘it is however on their country that nature has placed the rarest, most precious, most singular, and the most beautiful of its productions’.291 The co-existence of two naturally opposite elements was a curious anomaly, the natives seemingly caring nothing for the Paradise birds of which they were heedless custodians. The Papuans’ lack of propriety was further evidenced in their practice of smoking and ‘mutilating’ the skins, which upset Wallace particularly. This ‘wanton waste of beauty’ installed the propriety of another – the European – who was ‘alone fitted to appreciate and enjoy’.

The perfect creature embodied a certain finality, renewable in the prospect that rare and unknown species, even more beautiful, remote and unlikely, escaped collection. These would only be found across mountain terrain, in dense forest, at the tops of the highest trees, and among ‘the most barbarous’ people, who were the unseen first witnesses and handlers. The place of origin remained unavailable in order for desire to be generated. The elusive nature of more readily available coastal species was also played out in dramatic narratives of chase. At Waigiou, Wallace got ‘very close’ to a male *Paradisae rubra*, but the gun misfired just when the quarry was in his sights and ‘he was off in an instant among the thickest jungle’.292 Of another search, Wallace reported:

> We saw no less than eight fine males at different times, and fired four times at them; but though other birds at the same distance always dropped, these all got away, and I began to think we were not to get this magnificent species.293

Wallace did succeed, however, in discovering one new species (*Semioptera wallacei*), first captured by his head servant Ali:

292 In his field journal, Wallace added: ‘I got close to one and had a splendid view of it and was already gloating over my prize when my gun missed fire’.
Just as I got home I overtook Ali from shooting with some birds hanging on his belt. He seemed much pleased, and said, 'Look here, sir, what a curious bird', holding out what at first puzzled me ... I now saw that I had got a great prize, no less than a completely new form of the Bird of Paradise, differing most remarkably from every other known bird.294

Jane Camerini has contended that the involvement of Wallace’s Malay servants was effaced in the redrafting of his field journal for publication.295 Several passages are edited and sequenced for the general reader, but in my reading, the published version is surprisingly faithful to the original. Servants figure prominently, even though Wallace was at liberty to scale down their presence. The capture of his first Bird of Paradise was entered: ‘on the second day after my arrival my boys returned from the jungle with a most beautiful specimen of that superb little creature the King Bird of Paradise of Linnaeus’;296 which in The Malay Archipelago reads: ‘just when I was beginning to despair, my boy Baderoon repaid me for months of delay and expectation’.297 A sense of anticipation and despair heightens to a dramatic point before Baderoon (previously introduced in the journal as ‘Baderoon or something like it’) is singled out from ‘my boys’ to reward Wallace’s anxiety. The loyal Malay servant thus plays an ironic role in what should have been a crowning moment of desire, that moment is effaced, as is any established claim or interest on the part of the residents of Aru, ‘who saw nothing more in the “burong raja” than we do in the robin or goldfinch’.298

The descriptions of Birds of Paradise in Wallace’s published accounts are more elaborate than in his field notes. A tone of lone observation came in later years where (in London) he was able to reflect on the gap between the perfect thing once held and its image from afar:

I knew how few Europeans had ever beheld the perfect little organism I now gazed upon, and how very imperfectly it was still known in Europe. The emotions excited in the mind of a naturalist, who has long desired to see the thing he has hitherto known only by description, drawing, or badly preserved external covering – especially when that thing is of surpassing rarity and beauty, require the poetic faculty fully to express them.299

The effulgent beauty of the Bird of Paradise is thus conceived from a distance. It is shaped, crowned and consecrated in the collection and archive. Wallace calls up the ‘poetic faculty’ (others referred Paradise birds to expressions of music and romantic love) in the suggestion that

298 Ibid, p. 448.
the object transcends the language of science. Its model of perfection – a harmony of form, colour and light – is achieved in the transformation of Nature into art, the manipulation of frame and order from infinity and flux. The family of tropical birds, wrote popular Natural History instructor Phillip Gosse, shows us ‘what Nature can do in the way of adornment’, and Paradise birds from the highest branch. Investments in the rarity and beauty of Paradise birds align with a set of nineteenth century attempts to reformulate Nature within cultural categories, to tame and domesticate the sublime into the cultivated order of the picturesque.

As Susan Stewart has observed, apprehension of the miniature (and the collection) produces the same effects as the picturesque: the reification of interiority, the reduction of labour to the toy-like, and the positioning of a distanced ‘over-seeing’ viewer. The trade term, burong mati, a starting point of negotiation for Birds of Paradise between Malays, Papuans and Europeans, names the requirement for the rare and beautiful ‘dead bird’ of the collection.

Europe’s long-standing ‘imperfect’ knowledge of Birds of Paradise released a particular quality of emotion in Wallace. For one brief moment he felt the fading pulse of a creature otherwise known only by ‘description, drawing or badly preserved external covering’. The memory of that fleeting encounter from such a distance makes his suffering all the more intense. A collecting journey premised on suffering and self-effacement came to preoccupy subsequent travellers, who commonly inhabit Wallace, the Lesson-within-Wallace, and so on. To sight the bird was to cite previous sightings, and thereby add drama to an unfulfilled narrative. The ‘cabinet’ titans of ornithology in London, Paris and Leiden in turn demonstrated the endless capacity for Bird of Paradise reinscription. The enclosure of the series gave opportunity to naming and renaming, arranging and rearranging of family, sub-family, ally; each description specific to the season and quality of the ‘type’ source. Daniel Elliot’s comprehensive Monograph of the Paradisaeidae (1873) lists more than 70 Bird of Paradise histories published in the hundred years after Linne, with clusters of activity following the visits of key naturalists. Each series adds an extra layer of completion, each is also a delay and postponement, ensuring that the ultimate charge of pleasure will be more complete.

Along this chain of repetition and deferral, later (and materially more ‘successful’) collectors bear witness to the same kind of absence and temper their narratives of capture accordingly. The object of desire can never be found as it originally (never) was. The Italian naturalist Luigi d’Albertis proves an exception in some respects. Thirty-one species had been classified when he first journeyed to ‘the land of the rare Bird of Paradise of Wallace’ in 1872.

300 Phillip Gosse, The Romance of Natural History, p. 306.
but many from skins of poor quality in various states of plumage. Less than a dozen species were described in their natural environment, inviting a space for d'Albertis to become their post-Linnean all-seeing father.

In setting up the stage of his quest, d'Albertis reports a visit to Wallace’s old collecting house in Dorei before climbing the Arfak ranges in north-west New Guinea – the same expedition Wallace had been unable to organise. He adopts the personae of a hunter and takes time to get a fix on his prey. Anticipation turns to despair, then sickness, before the moment for which he could never have been ready is suddenly upon him. After shooting a ‘most beautiful male’, d’Albertis runs to secure the fallen bird, momentarily ‘forgetting the state of my legs’ (swollen with water from dropsy).302 In the days following, his guide alerted him to the presence of another, this time even more ‘rare and beautiful’. The bird was so tame that d’Albertis was able to observe its activity at length:

I should never have tired of admiring his beauty and gestures, every one of which revealed some fresh charm. But fear rose that he might fly away ... I pressed the trigger of my gun and fired. When the smoke cleared away, a black object lying in the middle of the glade showed me that I had not missed my mark; and, full of joy, I ran to possess myself of my prey; but as I drew near my courage failed me, I could not stretch forth my hand.303

D’Albertis witnessed ‘a fresh beauty’ peering into the bird’s fluttering eyes, but had not ‘the courage to touch him until he was quite dead’. His stumbling paroxysm of desire lays bare the frenzied contradictions of hyperbole and fulfilment that are offered.304 The pattern of elusiveness prohibits true possession at moments of capture, and complete mastery of the erotic object. Wrestling with the pain of an unimaginable pleasure, d’Albertis assures the reader he can continue: ‘to show how completely my remorse disappeared, I may add that I actually ate the flesh of my victim’.305

A legacy of the ‘first naturalists’ survives in recent narratives of elusive search. John Goode, a biographer of d'Albertis and himself a bird ‘twitcher’, retraced his subject through Papua New Guinea, Irian Jaya, Australia and Italy in the 1970s, a project inseparable from his own Bird of Paradise quest. ‘To find them’, he advised, ‘you must travel to the wildest, most inaccessible parts of New Guinea’, the same obstacle faced by early naturalists who were

301 Susan Stewart, On Longing, p. 75
'hypnotised by the beauty of the plumes, which were if anything too beautiful'. The absence of the birds is heightened by mass-productions of their image:

Everywhere I went in New Guinea, pictures of Birds of Paradise taunted me from tourist brochures and dress shops, coffee lounges and visiting cards. My natural curiosity became an obsession. I had to see at least one of these marvellous creatures in the flesh.

The building of anticipation and a familiar series of setbacks follow the same trajectory as in the narrative of the early naturalist. Meanwhile, the likeness of the Bird of Paradise teases from postcards, travel brochures, garments, matchboxes and aeroplanes. Just when time has appeared to have run its course, the Paradise bird makes a fleeting appearance, as always prompted by native guides. Goode asks for and receives no more than a glimpse:

I had just about given up all hope when one of our native guides pointed to a tall tree. There, away up in its vine-festooned foliage, a red-tailed Bird of Paradise stood poised. It stayed no longer than ten seconds, but I had achieved my ambition. To see a Bird of Paradise in its natural setting is to witness one of nature’s most impressive miracles.

A sense of completion and satisfaction is here mediated by the many views of Birds of Paradise that build up from the moment of arrival. Goode contrasts the authenticity of his final triumph against the kitsch framings of the Bird of Paradise, but his culminating point has also been ‘souvenired’.

While naturalists from across the ages insist on the Bird of Paradise as natural and self-sustaining, the image is never static or frozen. A key shift occurs in the interval between Lesson and the later accounts of Wallace and d’Albertis. In Lesson’s eyes, the delicacy of design and superfluous beauty were so striking that the Paradise bird ‘resembled an ornament dropped from the curls of a gouri’. Previous to Lesson, Captain Forrest had purchased trade skins at Dorei during a search for breadfruit cuttings in 1784. He wrote of birds that ‘glisten like the seldom glimpsed denizens of an Asiatic harem who are clad in gold of many hues and dipped in the purple of dawn’.

In the industrial age the birds have an entirely different quality, as d’Albertis observed in post-capture:

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308 Ibid, p. 25. The contemporary Australian naturalist Tim Flannery reported a similar meeting: ‘then, suddenly and all too soon, the most magical 20 seconds of my life were over. The bird flitted off through the moss-covered branches and was lost from view’, Throwim way leg, p. 169.
Even today the filmy beauty of paradise feathers outstrips the finest of our spun metals, the most resplendent of our plastics and iridescent fabrics, and even the most intricate of our laces.310

The 'old-fashioned' literary referents have fused with requirements for the bird as a mass-paradisiacal commodity. The 'most resplendent' mineral and synthetic products now describe an object defined by industry's emancipation from nature. In this new narrative of production the object loses the perfection of Lesson's early vision.

The disappointments of Wallace and others in New Guinea can be explained in the movement of the bird from fable to specimen and commodity. The Italian naturalist Eduardo Beccari levelled his failure at the 'destructive war' waged 'by the natives against these birds for which a high price is paid'. The high price was evident in the 18 shilling price-tag for one 'deformed' skin, and in the 3000 skins exported annually from Dobbo.311 Pamela Swadling has chronicled the shrinking opportunities for naturalists and contract collectors as trade routes tightened in response to increased demand for plumes and skins from European millinery. From 1830 the Ternate-based family business of Rennesse van Duirenboden controlled much of the flow and protected its interests by offering little or false information about the origin of the plumes.312 The production of plumes parallels the demand for ivory in Africa, both boomed through pre-colonial freebooting in the late 1860s. Paradise plumes, like ivory for the governments of France and Belgium, became an integral subsidy to the Dutch and German imperial endeavours in north-western New Guinea. An (unsuccessful) private attempt was also made by Sir Walter Ingram, founder of the Illustrated London News, to set up a colony of Birds of Paradise in the West Indies.313

Birds of Paradise were an opportunistic and highly lucrative pursuit for the late-nineteenth century naturalist. Paradise birds were as good as gold, though significantly, early New Guinea collectors rarely expressed any desire for gold. D'Albertis made promises of gold to encourage his Neva crew further up the Fly River. New Guinea gold was evoked by geographers, missionaries, prospectors, annexation agitators and fictive travellers, but not

310 L.M. d'Albertis, New Guinea: What I Did and What I Saw, vol. 2, p. 120.
311 'Beccari's Exploration of Papuasia', letter from Odouardo Beccari to Giacomo Doria, dated at Wokan Islands, 3-4 July 1873, published in Ocean Highways: The Geographical Review (December 1873). In a five month visit to the Aru Islands in 1873, Beccari secured only seven specimens of the more common Paradiso apoda in plumage.
312 Pamela Swadling, Plumes from Paradise, p. 109. This practice has its origins in the late eighteenth century. Pierre Sonnerat noted that 'idle tales' relating to Paradise birds were sustained by Dutch traders in an attempt to throw 'an air of the marvellous over the object of commerce', and thus enhance its value. P. Sonnerat, An Account of a Voyage to the Spice Islands and New Guinea, p. 39.
collectors (Captain Lawson in turn expressed little interest in Paradise birds). The lack of desire induced by gold can be explained in its ubiquity and fundamental uniformity of type. Gold has no universal referent and is capable of unlimited circulation. There is no scope for seriality in gold.

The last object implies the whole in one part, but is somehow greater than the whole because its power is unrealised and untapped, in reserve. The last object is that which is missing and has to be supplied by the imagination. To singularise the special object is to singularise the place it might be found. New Guinea as a tantalising last unknown works off the search for last objects there, a vital piece missing and rendering the imperial project incomplete and desirable.

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314 When gold is distinctive and unique it is consigned to exhibition. Large and freakish nuggets are named in reference to the experience of the finder, as in the ‘Welcome Stranger’ (Sovereign Hill Museum). Names also pick up on likenesses, as in the ‘Hand of Faith’, discovered in 1980 by Kevin and Betty Hillier while prospecting from a converted bus over old Chinese diggings in Kingower, Victoria. The ‘monstrous and frightening’ hand (Age, 26 October 1980) was sold to a Las Vegas casino, ‘The Golden Nugget’, where it is now on permanent display.
Captain John A. Lawson resurfaced with another book, *The Wandering Naturalists: a Story of Adventure*, which was published without much success in 1880. The *Athenaeum*’s review began:

Some years ago the Author of this book tried to play a practical joke on the reading public by publishing a fictitious narrative of adventures in New Guinea in the guise of a true story of travel. We hardly know whether the present book is intended as another attempt at a similar joke, which scarcely bears repetition, or whether it is intended as a story-book for boys.

I am yet to lay hands on this ‘last elusive’ text. The British Library once held a copy, but it was destroyed during the London blitz.
On 26 January 1876, William John Macleay (far right) noted that his collection was now 'so extensive' the house could no longer hold it. Construction began on a new building '115 feet long, 36 feet wide, 9 feet high and made chiefly of iron' in the garden. The entire collection, including insects that had been in the family for 100 years, transferred to Sydney University in 1895. Macleay died shortly after.
'I could never have approached the completeness of his [Darwin's] book.'

Alfred Russel Wallace
Luigi Maria d'Albertis received a gold medal from the Italian Geographical Society, substantial payments for his collections and royalties for his book. He lived in Rome with his pets, including a tame owl and a python he wore around his neck and shoulders, to the alarm of passers-by gazing up at his apartment window. In later years, d'Albertis retreated to the Pontine Marshes where he lived in a Papuan house on stilts which he had built with cane and reeds.
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