

Travel Writers and Traveling Writers in Australasia

Responses to Travel Literatures and the Problem of Authenticity

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Abstract

This article compares responses to travel writing and imaginative fiction about the settler colonies, in particular Australia and New Zealand, between 1870 and 1945—a time when distinctions between travel, mobility, and emigration were hard to pin down. Very little scholarship has shown an interest in what the subject society’s inhabitants thought of its portrayal, and what this can tell us about colonial and national identities. Australasian responses to works about Australasia, in the form of published reviews, were influenced by the knowledge and particular concerns of the reviewer and their own negotiations with identity. What mattered to readers and critics was the authenticity of the portrayal of the place, but this was not only related to whether the work claimed to be fiction or non-fiction. The perceived level of familiarity that the writer had with the area was the most important factor in determining whether the reception of a work was positive or negative.

Keywords: Australia, authenticity, colonial mobilities, New Zealand, Tasman world, travel fiction, travel writing

The task of forging an independent national identity has often been a source of anxiety for countries that are the product of settler colonization. This is especially true of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as imperial ties began to loosen across the world. One of the “measures” of national maturity is the existence of a well-developed body of literature able to authentically express this identity. According to a reviewer for Victoria’s *Daily Colonist* in 1913, G.B. Lancaster achieved a truly accurate literary depiction of the Canadian North in *The Law Bringers*, a novel written about the North West Mounted Police. The review proclaimed that Lancaster was “one of the few men” sufficiently familiar with those parts to “write convincingly” of them from “long and varied experience” (*Daily Colonist [Sunday Magazine]*, 3 August 1913: 3). But how would this response have differed if the reviewer had been aware of the real background of the author? Lancaster was born in Tasmania, Australia, and at age six immigrated to New Zealand. She was also a woman, a fact that escaped the notice of many reviewers who simultaneously praised the masculine virility of her work. Edith Lytton, as she was otherwise known, lived a semi-nomadic life writing and travelling throughout the colonial world and *The Law Bringers* was the result of a two-year trip into the Yukon. If the reviewer had known of her well-researched but fleeting interaction with many of the places she described, would he (to make a similar assumption) have responded in the same way? If he had thought of her as a travel writer, or a travelling writer, would his expectations regarding authenticity have been different? How is authenticity established?

A feature of Western thinking, as Jacques Derrida observed, is to attempt to categorize the encountered world in terms of binary oppositions that automatically privilege the familiar over the unknown: local versus outsider, Canadian versus foreigner, known fact versus fiction, and so on. The real world rarely fits neatly into these categories however. This article compares responses to travel writing and imaginative fiction about the settler colonies,

in particular Australia and New Zealand, between 1870 and 1945—a time when distinctions between travel, mobility, and emigration are hard to pin down. During this period continuing colonial connections and identification with the Empire seemed to conflict with burgeoning nationalisms. In the negotiation of authenticity what becomes important is not merely the truthfulness of the text but how people responded to the text. The book reviewer had the power to influence the way the work was received on these terms.

Looking at people's responses to portrayals of these settler locales created by outsiders can give extra insight into the way these identities worked that looking at the texts alone cannot. I examine "travel writing" and "imaginative fiction" together because the same test of authenticity is, as I show, applicable to both. This illuminates attitudes to authenticity and fictionality in a way that treating them as separate genres fails to. This systematic study of responses to travelling writers in the form of contemporary newspaper reviews reveals that the question of authenticity is central to work about settler colonies, whether the work is classified as fiction or non-fiction. In essence, the achievement of "authenticity" in depiction hinges on the local preoccupations of the reviewer, in a similar way to the impact of genre on reception observed by Victoria Kuttainen and Sarah Galletly earlier in this issue.

The definition of "travel writing" and the embodiment of a "travel writer" have been the cause of debate and are subject to many qualifications. Clear definitions are hard to determine; for example Hulme and Youngs' *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* never actually settles on one, but the reader is left with the impression that their volume covers all kinds of writing associated with travel. For Joan-Pau Rubiés, travel writing must "take travel as an essential condition for its production" (2000: 7), and this is extended by Lydia Wevers to encompass writing that "addresses itself to an audience elsewhere, often one the traveler expects to rejoin, and [is] written by someone not intending to stay" (2002: 5). There is also an assumption of non-fictionality included in that definition. A British writer who travels and

writes imaginative literature about the place visited with the intention of publishing for a British audience would, by most estimations, not be writing travel writing. This assumes that the division between fact and fiction is obvious or easily deduced, which is not necessarily the case. What about a work that is marketed as fiction but clearly autobiographical (perhaps names of people and places have been changed but the subject is obvious to anyone familiar with the locality)? Conversely, non-fictional travel writing has always been thought of as notoriously unreliable. The success of the travel writing genre was the result of the European appetite for fantastical tales of exotic and distant lands. This by its very nature means it is difficult to check for accuracy, but at the same time there is an expectation of truthfulness. Some fiction writers deliberately copied the empirical style of travel accounts; Hulme and Youngs mention the sub-genres of travel parodies and forgeries that sprang up alongside the lucrative travel writing market and “still cause scholars problems about their authenticity” (2002: 6).

Putting aside problems of distinguishing fact from fiction, the travel writing definition relies on settled life being the normal state of affairs in order to distinguish travelers from migrants or longer-term visitors. It requires people to identify as being “from” somewhere, and this “somewhere” needs to be a single place. Such certainty of origin and identity cannot be disrupted by a brief sojourn to somewhere else. Since the advent of modernity, a life story that involves only one residing place has become much less common. Despite this, much history and literary criticism written in the twentieth century was based on the assumption that the nation should be the primary focus of enquiry. This aligned with political ambitions of control and stability; from the state’s point of view it was important to encourage a sense of belonging in citizens of settler colonies, with the development of a national literary canon forming part of the narrative being woven.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, even though colonies were beginning to assert themselves as independent nations, imperial ties still very much existed, perpetuated by and allowing a great deal of mobility. Studies of broad population trends have tended in the past to focus on large scale, one-way, permanent emigration flows in the British diaspora, or in postcolonial terms on the impact of colonies on the center of empire and the expatriation of colonial prodigies back to the metropolitan center. Much colonial world mobility fell outside of these categories, however. As Tony Ballantyne has said, “the Anglo-Celtic colonists of New Zealand were anything but settled” and “the circulation of people, money, goods and news was the lifeblood of colonial life” (2011: 61). According to Alan Lester and David Lambert “many” mobile Britons occupied a third category outside of “those who settled in or those who travelled through the empire” (2006: 1). These people developed what Lester and Lambert call “imperial careers” where, in the words of Sofia Eriksson, they “perambulated the Empire ... as business and inclination dictated” (2011: 32). Catherine Bishop has also pointed out that these imperial subjects were not limited to elites and wealthy individuals (2014). It was not uncommon for people to live and work within the British colonies without necessarily knowing what their ultimate destination would be. Plans could also change unexpectedly, as in the case of Rudyard Kipling, travel writer and travelling writer. Kipling spent the first 25 years of his life living alternately in England and India (he was born in Bombay), until in 1892 he and his wife embarked on a round-the-world trip. Due to a bank failure the Kiplings returned to the United States (where they had gone first) and lived for four years in Vermont, which had not been the intention upon setting out. They travelled extensively and Kipling was the author of several travel accounts. His posthumously published autobiography *Something of Myself* contains the section “Eating Kiwi” about his time in New Zealand. But identifying the “home” that he would return back to and thus his

audience (famously scattered throughout the empire) is not straightforward, and his life-story is outside of the paradigms of simple migration or travel.

If travel writing requires a metropolitan “home” audience while the author is on a sojourn in exotic colonial locales, this does not allow for the reality of imperial national identities, or localized imperial identities. Recent scholarship has argued for the existence of an “Anglophone settler world,” or “Anglo-world” in the words of James Belich, “a politically divided but culturally and economically united intercontinental system” (2011: 9). This allowed for identity and culture of Anglo-Celtic people in diverse locations to be fostered and developed in new contexts, as demonstrated by Tamara Wagner when looking at colonial narratives of domesticity and imperialism expressed through Australasian domestic fiction (2014: 2–3). Anna Johnston’s study of travel writing about Australasia examines the distinctive places that the Australian colonies and New Zealand occupied in the British imagination (2016). After many years of nation-building it is hard for modern audiences to appreciate the peaceful co-existence of local and imperial identities, or the domestic and the colonial, especially when national assertions have often required definition in opposition to the British legacy. It was hard to differentiate between British colonists and visitors from Britain, particularly in the early days of settlement. Both thought of Britain as home, and although probably largely writing for a British audience could not afford to ignore the possibility of colonial sales. As Justine Greenwood and Richard White have observed, travel writing relies on the “tension between sameness and difference” (2016), but settler colonies complicate this division: who is the “other” that is being written about? Who is the intended audience? Kipling and others like him were British Imperialists (and certainly his views would reflect that), and had what could be called a “pan-British” identity. His “home” audience thus included colonists of British origin in Australia and New Zealand.¹

Looking systematically at contemporary responses to travel writers and travelling writers in newspapers reveals new aspects of the interplay between colonial and national identities in settler colonies and avoids limiting the analysis to well-known literary theories or retrospective nationalist assumptions. The responses are interesting because they differ depending on the location of the reviewer and their preoccupations (as far as these things can be gleaned from their writing) and the place the newspaper is published. The responses of reviewers to travel literatures often hinged upon their estimation of the work's "authenticity," which in turn was reliant on their knowledge or assumptions about the writer and their familiarity with the locality being described. As in the Canadian example, reviewers could be more or less critical of a work depending on what they knew about the author's background. Distinctions based on the level of familiarity an author had about a locality become very complicated when dealing with mobile colonial identities, as well as incorrect assumptions and porous definitions of writers and travelers. I used online databases such as Papers Past (for New Zealand), Trove (for Australia), and the ProQuest Historical Newspaper Database for a broad overseas response (this includes newspapers from Britain, North America, China and India).

The study of reading has become popular in book history circles, with the emphasis on the role of interpretation, audience reception and reader response (see Darnton 2014 for a useful summary). The idea that a text only exists in terms of the interpretation of the person reading it informs a branch of literary theory, approached cautiously by many literary critics because of the danger of going down a path where there is not only no "correct" interpretation of the work but as many correct interpretations as there are readers, leading to what some see as dangerous postmodern deconstructions. Book historians show more of an interest in the life of texts in the world and approach this by means of library records, book catalogues and sales records, which indicate how many books actually reached readers. The

readers' reactions to these books are much harder to ascertain, however, particularly in an historical sense. Historians are reliant on marginalia and the occasional revelatory find if someone has fortuitously noted down their thoughts on a text. One seldom-pursued possibility is found at the junction of literary criticism and reader response theory: this involves looking at critical responses to books as sources indicative of the reactions of readers in different times and places. A promising source of information about the real-time reactions of readers to texts can be found in the book pages of newspapers. The work of Peter F. Morgan on nineteenth-century British periodicals traces trends and discussions through the work of particular reviewers (1983). Roberto Angulo has more recently advocated for the reading of literary reviews as a corpus of historical artefacts without differentiating between well-known and anonymous reviewers (2012).

Travel writing provides an interesting contrast when viewed through the eyes of reviewers as the genre brings different expectations of authority and authenticity, which are at the same time surprisingly similar to those of imaginative fiction. In this article I compare reviews of works by writers who travelled to New Zealand and Australia and wrote about it—both “travel writers” and travelling writers of imaginative fiction, sometimes embodied by the same person (Zane Grey, for example). Whether or not these portrayals were “authentic” or not is not something that will be discussed here. The important point is how authenticity (whatever that meant to each individual) mattered to reviewers of this material and informed their responses.

Overseas reviewers valued “travel writing” about Australasia for seemingly conflicting reasons of accuracy and exoticism. For those books designated as travel writing by their reviewers, practical information about the places visited was valued, presumably related to the possibility that the readers might want to travel there themselves. Beatrice Grimshaw was an author who exhibited typical colonial world uncategorizable-ness—she is

sometimes seen as an Australian author but at the time of writing *In the Strange South Seas* she had lived in Ireland, England, France, the Canary Islands, and the United States and had been on two extended trips in the Pacific. In 1907 she arrived in (Australian-controlled) Papua for a short commission, but ended up staying there for 27 years. She did not live in Australia until she retired there for the last 17 years of her life in 1936. Retrospective appraisals of her work might be influenced by the idea that she was an Australian writer, but at the time she was writing contemporary reviewers broadly classified her as a British travel writer (she was referred to as “a lone woman from Great Britain” in the *New York Tribune* [13 February 1909: 8]). Her intended audience was the reading public of the British world, particularly as on some of her later journeys she was commissioned by various governments of the Pacific to write “tourist publicity” (Laracy 1983). Members of the British colonial world might have found her book instructive. A review in *The Scotsman*, for example, described it as “alive to the humours of South Sea commerce and colonisation” (10 October 1906: 2), as it gave her opinion that there was much opportunity for British people in the Pacific. These reviewers’ evaluations of Grimshaw were based on her capacity to provide useful and correct information in contrast to rumors that the Pacific was home to the very worst kind of colonists.

The second kind of response from metropolitan audiences to travel writing about the colonies takes up the promise of interesting, colorful stories of exotic places that readers were unlikely to visit themselves. This is a seemingly antithetical response to the kind that valued accuracy and produced travel accounts as “how-to” manuals. A review of Grimshaw’s work entitled “Amusing Book about South Sea Islands” delights in the fact that “it is the picturesque and the peculiar rather than the practical that naturally engrosses her attention” (*New York Tribune*, 13 February 1909: 8). Similarly, while responses to Anthony Trollope’s lengthy tome about New Zealand and Australia was most often praised for its thoroughness,

fairness and the care that Trollope took to collect so much “real” knowledge about Australasia, its readability was perhaps reliant on the inclusion of “delightful sketches of private adventures or misadventures”. These caused a reviewer in the London *Observer* to diplomatically surmise that “the reader will be tempted to wish there were more of such passages” in what was a typically long-winded account (2 March 1873: 2, referring to Trollope 1873).

Both of these types of responses require some degree of authority on the subject—while the appetite was for sensational stories, there was an underlying expectation of authenticity without which the work would have lost its appeal. In these cases the response comes from a metropolitan audience, so although the assumption of authenticity is required, it is not easily measured—the readers have to some extent to take the word of the author.

With imaginative writing about Australia and New Zealand there was also a large appetite for exotic tales. There was a healthy market for the “colonial exotic;” despite authors sometimes assuming that British readers would not be interested in local themes, there was much interest in tales of native races, pioneering tales and colonial social experiments (Bones 2015: 873). The inclusion of New Zealand elements in their work gave New Zealand writers an edge in the imperial market that appealed to publishers, and the reading public. Reviews of New Zealand books in the *Times Literary Supplement* between 1890 and 1945 have a recurring theme: although the reviewer did not think much of the book, a redeeming feature was the unique colonial or native element. A review of Rosemary Rees’s *Home Is Where the Heart Is* from 1935 is typical of many: “The setting of this novel in the New Zealand sheplands gives a fresh charm to an otherwise undistinguished romantic narrative.”

There was still an expectation of accuracy from metropolitan audiences, despite the works’ classification as “fiction.” Indeed, lack of quality could be overlooked if what was

assumed to be authentic “local color” was present. A reviewer of Sophie Osmond’s *Ponga Bay* found it redeemed by its New Zealand content: “The narrative is weakly constructed, but the author obviously knows her New Zealand well, and the main interest of the book lies in its drawings of native life and character” (*Times Literary Supplement* [TLS], 15 February 1923: 110). The obvious “colonialism” in Arthur H. Adam’s *Tussock Land* (1904) was described as “the source of freshness and interest in his book” in an otherwise unenthusiastic review (TLS, 5 June 1904: 140). Rees’s *Heather of the South* (1924) is described as “ordinary, almost humdrum,” but “the author’s work is of interest in exhibiting the essential contrasts between New Zealand and Great Britain, and in displaying from an intimate knowledge the life of that country” (TLS, 16 October 1924: 653). These writers might have been seen by critics as second-rate but were valued for the perceived authenticity of their work, which may even have been enhanced by the inferior quality of the prose.

Whether or not writers were assumed to be giving an accurate portrayal depended on the author’s credentials as being some kind of authority on the subject, which seems fair enough. But this could very often be based on erroneous assumptions of the reviewer, and the tone of the review was often related to their estimations of the writer’s background. E. W. Hornung was an English writer who spent two years in Australia and was variously described as Australian or English, or sometimes Anglo-Australian. Hornung’s early works were about Australia, the first being *A Bride from the Bush* (1890). A number of reviewers assumed he was an Australian writer, which may have affected their take on his writing: as indicated by a review in the *Los Angeles Daily Times* which declared that Hornung was “not Australian born, as has been stated recently in several newspapers. He is an Englishman, born in Middleboro, in 1866. He did not go to Australia until he was 18 years old, and only remained there two years, a fact that probably accounts for the vividness and the correctness of his impressions” (7 February 1903: 3). In this case the fact that he was only there for two years is

seen as having a positive impact on the accuracy of the portrayal which is not the usual response.

While a colonial audience could be more critical of inaccuracy in travel writing about themselves than a metropolitan audience, their greater concern was whether it presented a positive portrayal to the rest of the world. As long as there was much hyperbole about the scenic beauty, loftiness of mountains and vastness of deserts, reviewers were happy to overlook the odd factual inaccuracy. Criticisms could be glossed over and obnoxious personalities not mentioned, as in the case of travelling writer and travel writer Zane Grey. In the 1920s and 1930s, Grey, the famous American writer of Western thrillers, made several trips to New Zealand and Australia to undertake fishing expeditions. He praised extensively the quality of the fishing and the locations in two books, *Angler's Eldorado* and *An Angler in Australia* (1926, 1936). Reviews of the first in New Zealand papers were favorable and gratefully quote large sections of the more laudatory passages. There was the odd hint of controversy and inaccuracy in his writing, but in general this was overlooked because it was recognized that the positive effects of his praises on the tourism industry would outweigh anything negative. As one reviewer put it, “the general New Zealand atmosphere is wondrously conveyed, and the inexactnesses are only such as might be expected from a visitor who has had limited time for observation and note-taking” (*Evening Post* [Wellington], 13 November 1936: 21). From the *New Zealand Herald*: “Mr. Grey has done more than justice to angling of both kinds and has spread its fame in a manner that no organised publicity could have done. New Zealand is therefore under a debt of gratitude to him” (12 November 1926: 13). In reality, Grey’s visits were mired in controversy. He incited fury amongst New Zealand anglers with his accusations of barbarism and cruelty in their techniques.ⁱⁱ According to Zane Mirfin in a *Nelson Mail* article “his reputation was contrived and everywhere he went, he overstayed his welcome, argued and fell out with the locals. In

the end he had to pay people to go fishing with him because he was so unpleasant to be around” (2009). Mirfin mentions angling historian Bryn Hammond’s account which claims that Grey hired guides, referred to by the locals as “thugs,” to “safeguard his favourite riffles” and intimidate other anglers into finding a different spot (1988: 78). Hammond also refers to his near success in buying the entire Tongariro River for his own purposes (1988: 77). Some of the intensity of this depiction may be the result of lingering resentment of his criticisms, but a biography that gives a more diplomatic account of Grey describes him as “outspoken and reactionary” in later life and recklessly extravagant with his money, to the extent that he had to conduct a risky operation to evade New Zealand authorities pursuing him for unpaid taxes in order to get his favorite boat out to Tahiti (Pauly 2005: 7 and 268).

Anthony Trollope’s lengthy treatise on New Zealand and Australia was similarly valued for the potential impression it would give to readers in other parts of the Empire, such as when he described New Zealand as a “Paradise” for those who were prepared to be useful (*Tuapeka Times*, 9 October 1873: 6). Throughout many of the reviews in Australasian newspapers there is an underlying sense that Trollope does not really have a good enough acquaintance with the colonies to speak accurately about them, but this is always hidden beneath a veil of sarcasm. One review proclaimed that the book was “much better than we had expected” given that it was written with a London market in mind (*Christchurch Press* 29 May 1873: 3). Another commented on the brevity of Trollope’s visit, saying his account was “as accurate in statement as could be expected under the circumstances” (*Melbourne Argus*, 21 June 1873: 1S). There is perhaps a tension at play between not wanting to contradict a renowned writer while at the same time bristling at some of his comments, which were often blunt, as a reviewer in the *Scotsman* remarked: “Whether the colonists will like Mr Trollope’s book or not, is another matter. If they do not, they ought, for though he tells them of their

faults, and says a good many things of them which are not very pleasant, he never for one moment underrates their many virtues and merits” (28 February 1873: 2).

Responses reflected local and colonial identities just as often as national feeling. This depended on the individual preoccupations of the reviewer, but what people were most interested in at any time were what writers had to say about their local area. Responses were much more often divided upon local notions of knowledge and authority rather than national divisions. For example, the Hobart *Mercury* commented only on the part of Trollope’s work that referred to Tasmania with the usual air of deference with an undercurrent of discontent due to the lack of knowledge about the region:

We might point out other grave errors on the part of Mr. Trollope; but we have no desire to deal captiously with one who has dealt so generously with Tasmania, though we are strongly tempted to pick out and set in array all his mistakes and misapprehensions, since, kindly and hopefully as he speaks of Tasmania, his impressions of us and our future would have been still more favourable but for these errors, for, singularly enough, while he says for us evidently all that he feels he can say as a faithful chronicler, the errors into which he has fallen have led him to do us injustice. (3 May 1873: 2)

The parts of the book relating to local areas were reprinted in local newspapers, such as the *Rockhampton Bulletin*, which passed over chapter 2 titled “Queensland” in favor of chapter 3: “Gladstone and Rockhampton” (*Rockhampton Bulletin*, 16 March 1873: 2). The Melbourne *Argus* discussed the section pertaining to Victoria, saying that “there are many here who will be anxious to know what the voluminous novelist has found to say about Victoria” (5 April 1873: 5). Otago’s *Evening Star* spent the majority of space devoted to the review discussing what he had said about the province, concluding that he “speaks with admiration of New

Zealand generally and of Otago in particular, which he singles out as the highest type of successful colonisation” (17 June 1873: 2).

Interest in the local extended to responses to imaginative literature as well. The response to Australian writer Rolf Boldrewood’s historical novel *War to the Knife* about the New Zealand Wars betrays more about local identities than the existence of a national “imagined community.” This attempt by an Australian to capture an important event in New Zealand’s history might seem likely to have run into resistance from New Zealand reviewers, resentful of their country being depicted by an unschooled outsider. Indeed, Lydia Wevers looked at reviews of *War to the Knife* and concluded that it was widely panned by New Zealand critics because of its wild inaccuracies: “All the main New Zealand papers reviewed *War to the Knife* in similar terms. Typical was the anonymous writer in the *New Zealand Mail* in commenting that the war scenes ‘teem with anachronisms ... Maori life is drawn from his own imagination’” (Wevers 2006: 325).

In fact, it is not the nationality of the reviewers that determined their response but the proximity of the newspapers’ places of publication (and, probably, the location of the reviewer) to the location of the story’s setting. A systematic analysis of all the reviews of this book that appear on *Papers Past* reveals that responses were varied and some reviewers were entirely untroubled by the book. The *Otago Daily Times*, for example, had little problem with the accuracy of the depiction: “some of the stirring incidents of that exciting time are told with this well-known author’s masterly skill. Taking the reader across what has since been called the ‘King Country,’ the marvellous scenery of the Hot Lakes district gives scope for word-painting, in which art Rolf Boldrewood shows no prentice hand” (14 October 1899: 5). There is no reason to expect someone from Otago to be any more familiar with the setting of the book than someone from Australia. It is the *New Zealand Herald* (published in Auckland) article that expresses the most outrage, saying that while “This will prove a light and

interesting novel to those who know nothing about New Zealand and care nothing for truth in descriptions or history,” Rolf Boldrewood, “with a carelessness that seems impertinent, has upset the geography and story of New Zealand for no apparent reason. He makes his hero go from Lichfield to Rotorua by way of Taupo, which is like going from London to Devonshire by way of Cumberland. He walks from Rotorua to Auckland by way of Hokianga” (16 September 1899: 4).

Australian critics complained about the national stereotyping and lack of local nuance that could be found in overseas depictions of themselves: “The Australian who is part of other novelists’ stock-in-trade is one of two things –either an incorrigible blackguard, or an enormously rich uncle with hairy face and uncouth manners. The blackguard may be a picturesque figure, and the rich uncle may be golden-hearted as well as hairy-faced, but they do not, between them, exhaust Australian possibilities” (Murdoch 1935:6). These kind of objections were usually accompanied by a complaint that the writer was scantily acquainted with his subject, as in the case of E.W. Hornung. Negative reviews were more likely to bring up the amount of time he spent in Australia. In many of the reviews of his first novel in Australian newspapers, objection is raised to Hornung’s depiction of an Australian girl in London: “Mr. E. W. Hornung is known to us as the author of an Australian story entitled *A Bride from the Bush*, in which the heroine performs the inconceivable feat of startling a prim and correct London household, by cooeing in the mode Australian. We say inconceivable, because Australian girls, even when brought up in the bush, are not savages nor ignorant of the usages of polite society” (*Maitland Daily Mercury*, 5 November 1894: 4). According to one reviewer referring to Anthony Trollope, “There is nothing more nauseating to colonists, than these dismal stories in which a labored attempt is made to force an interest by giving what is supposed to be a colonial air to commonplace descriptions of men and things” (*Timaru Herald*, 24 July 1882: 2).

This same reviewer said “we never yet met with anybody who had read one [of Trollope’s “colonial” novels], and we are firmly of opinion that nobody ever did read one,” and he might have had a point: there is less Australasian interest in depictions of themselves by famous authors than one might expect. Zane Grey was a very popular writer in Australia and yet his book set in Australia, *The Wilderness Trek*, was not reviewed in any of the newspapers available online, despite having been released in Australia. The only mention of it (dating from 1970) claims it “is notable for the authenticity of its setting and its close observation of the Australian environment” (Bryant 1970: 11). This is in stark contrast to a possibly more perceptive American review at the time claiming that “The flora and fauna of the bush are set down so that you can’t possibly miss them, and yet the smell of the sagebrush predominates. Everything, from the cattle stampede to the crocodile attack, might as well have happened in the Arizona desert for all the sense of difference conveyed” (*New York Times*, 25 June 1944: BR8). By the 1970s, clearly the credit due to Grey because “he ‘put Australia on the map’, in America at least” was the most important thing, as Grey is described as “a modest little grey-haired man, often dressed in plus-fours” with a “quiet manner,” which is completely at odds with other descriptions of his character (previously mentioned).

What there certainly was not was a uniform response to metropolitan literary visitors that can be said to represent the “national” viewpoint. While a commentator in 1987 described D.H. Lawrence’s *Kangaroo* (1923) as having been often “criticised for its pretension towards a knowledge of Australia that, considering the brevity of Lawrence’s stay here, was not available to him” (*Canberra Times*, 19 April 1987: 12), the responses from the various parts of Australia ranged from high praise to utter condemnation to the feeling of taking some rather bitter medicine. The length of his stay was not necessarily seen as the source of false depiction, and a reviewer from Perth wrote, “He was in this State exactly one

week, most of the time at Darlington. But his word-picture of a moonlight night among the timber, living and dead, of the Darling Range is an amazing piece of artistry” (Perth, *Sunday Times*, 27 January 1924: 13S). Whether a work was judged to be “authentic” or not was largely down to the preoccupations of the reviewer, their knowledge about the writer’s familiarity with the landscape and the level of flattery achieved.

The reviewer’s own society could be the subject of travel literatures, and their responses played an important role in how a book was received, yet this is generally not what has captured the attention of scholars. Like imaginative writing, travel writing was popular in the colonial world because it allowed for armchair exploration of unknown “other” places, and the encounter of exotic people, scenery, animals, and plants. The mechanisms behind observation, record, and communication of Imperial contacts as a pivotal aspect in the discourse of colonialism have been extensively discussed. Travel writing provides primary reflections that can tell us much about the discourse the writer is engaged with (such as British imperialism), which is a main focus of criticism of the genre. While we should not dismiss what the observations can tell us about the societies and places travelers encountered at particular points in history, scholars have become more interested in what the observations can tell us about the culture and society of the traveler and in seeing the texts as part of the discourse within which they have been written. For a British audience, for example, according to Mary Louise Pratt, writing about the colonies served the colonizing process, to make the British people feel part of the exciting goings-on in exotic places and take ownership through the process of cataloguing them. It “made imperial expansion meaningful and desirable to the citizenries of the imperial countries” (2008: 3). In an anthropological sense, much has been written about the need of colonizers to classify and record the lifestyles of indigenous peoples and represent them as savage and uncivilized in order to, by contrast, assert their own superior cultural position.

In the field of travel writing studies there has been less attention paid to what colonized “others” thought about their representation in written form, and to their reaction as a site of enquiry. There is certainly interest in postcolonial and ethnographical circles about reactions of indigenous people to colonial interpretations of their culture, especially relating to indigenous agency. The adoption of colonial culture by indigenous people seems on the surface to represent the triumph of assimilation to Imperial discourse, but scholars like Homi Bhabha have demonstrated that subversion and mimicry of colonial discourse is a form of indigenous resistance, as it “mocks and undermines the ongoing pretensions of colonialism and empire” (Huddart 2005: 39). For example, a story by A.A. Grace describes a Māori group who travelled to England and enjoyed alarming the English with displays of savagery, acting “out the exaggerated expectations of savage behaviour for their own ... amusement” (qtd. in Stafford and Williams 2006: 114). Such stereotypes may have been internalized with more negative results, but there is also interest in instances of indigenous people participating in representations of themselves, for example, in Australia through the medium of photography (Lydon 2014: 2).

It is hard to find mention of the contemporary reactions of indigenous people to travel writing about them. If this is because of a general assumption that, as representatives of oral cultures, they were not likely to be consumers of written culture, then this is not only inaccurate but a rather concerning continuation of colonial ideas. In both New Zealand and Australia it was believed that indigenous races were destined to disappear, so perhaps it did not occur to anyone to ask them what they thought about the appropriation of their culture at the time.ⁱⁱⁱ Joan-Pau Rubiés mentions “native voice” in the context of recording it rather than examining reactions to representations of it. An example he gives of “when the non-European became sufficiently anglicised to write his own travel narrative” is *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African, Written by Himself* (1789,

cited in Rubiés 2002: 254). This he dismisses as “inevitably quite fictionalised,” which is worryingly resonant of the attitude described by Sara Mills to writing by non-Europeans: while accounts written by Westerners are by default assumed to be truthful, this is “in contrast to the ‘native’ who is frequently constructed as an inveterate liar in texts” (1993: 114). If indigenous people in the eighteenth century could be well-versed enough in European languages to write a travel book, it does not seem absurd to suggest that they might have been interested in reading travel books a century later, especially one that was an account of their own society.

Things become really problematic in settler colonies when the “others” being written about are also members of the colonizing culture. They are simultaneously the subject of the work and the intended audience (in the sense of a pan-British audience). Yet there is little attention paid to reactions of settler colonials to travel writing about themselves. Pratt goes some way toward examining this when describing the role that the writings of Alexander van Humboldt had in the creation of Spanish-American identity in South America. She claims that Humboldt’s imagery was received by the South American reading public in such a way that it helped form Spanish-American ideas about themselves (2008: 126). It is not clear from her notes, however, how she measured this audience response. Richard White has written about the attention paid to the opinions of overseas visitors and the way that Australian national identity is largely constructed from the estimations of outsiders (White 1994: 2). New Zealanders, too, were reportedly desperate to hear the opinions of foreign visitors of their country, as Edward Wakefield described in 1886: “[W]hen any famous writer undertakes to give the world an account of the colonies from his own observation, all good colonists await the publication of his book with feverish impatience, and when it appears, each of them takes his praise or blame as personal to himself” (Wakefield, “NZ and Mr Froude,” 1886, cited in Wevers 2000: 3). Considering this, it is surprising that so little work

has been done to systematically study the responses of settler colonials to depictions of themselves.

For what is classed as “imaginative fiction,” more attention is paid to responses from the subjects of the writing, at least in the case of settler colonials and in the colonies themselves. In the fields of New Zealand and Australian literature the responses of local critics are important because the accuracy or authenticity of the portrayal affects whether it is judged to make a meaningful contribution to the creation and development of a national canon, and might perhaps encompass the “great Australian or New Zealand novel.” As such there has been much more scholarly attention to reactions to *imaginative* fiction about Australasia. Concerns narrowed toward the middle of the twentieth century to encompass cultural nationalist criteria for the successful capture of the essence of Australian and New Zealand life. This did not account for the diversity of responses to works at the time, however, as not everyone was absorbed with this approach: others may have judged works with different criteria. Criticism might have come from a local perspective rather than national, particularly in Australia where state-based concerns continued to compete with national ones long after Federation. Responses were complicated by the need for validation overseas in an international setting conflicting with resistance to the idea of having to write to please overseas audiences (which would interfere with “authenticity”). Works could have a separate critical life (and potentially much more successful in terms of circulation and copies sold) in the United Kingdom where responses were based on different expectations.

When responses to works by overseas writers are taken into account, they are rarely studied comprehensively: instead, consensus can be found where there were none, and literary anachronisms taken to confirm nationalist orthodoxies. The responses were varied, and not everyone was concerned with national character or canon. There were competing identities relating to pan-colonial ties, localities, states and regions as well as those

encompassing continents, island groups or nations. What these identities have in common is that they were all responsible for requirements of authenticity for travel writing and imaginative writing. There was little difference between these requirements for these types of writing, despite the seeming divide between fiction and non-fiction. Authenticity was determined by the level of familiarity that the writer had with the area, not the claim to truth or fictionality. In a time of fluid colonial identities this was merely a case of time spent in a place, but as nationalist frameworks have come to stand in for the measures of authenticity and authority on local subjects the false divisions between metropolitan and colonial have become solidified into those pertaining to “new” and “old” worlds. These reviewers imposed their own local preoccupations and were not necessarily able to unpack, themselves, the complex nature of “foreign” and “local.” It is only by looking at contemporary reactions to these works that one can see past these divisions to the shared colonial experience and the attempts to colonize the local environment through writing.

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Notes

ⁱ Australian endorsement of British colonial discourses promoted by visiting travel writers is discussed by Richard White (2013).

ⁱⁱ As referred to in "Angler's Eldorado," *New Zealand Herald*, 12 November 1926, 13.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term "smoothing the pillow of a dying race" is used to refer to attitudes to both Māori and Australian Aboriginal people. The earliest recorded use of this statement I could find was by Dr Isaac Featherston in 1856 referring to Māori (quoted in Buck 1924: 352), although Australians seem to attribute it to Daisy Bates in 1938.