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Worthy Objects

Visualising the Self in Elizabeth Macquarie's Journal of her Voyage to New South Wales, 1809

This paper analyses Elizabeth Henrietta Macquarie's little-known 1809 account of her sea voyage to New South Wales, restoring her sea journal to the canon of travel writing. In recent analyses, nineteenth-century travel writing has been shorn of its pretence of disinterestedness, exposing the multiple and various connections between travel writing and imperial ideology, and between travel writing and a partial and deeply motivated language of aesthetics. The paper explores Macquarie's travel writing along these twin axes. This paper argues that the sense of self exposed in Macquarie's sea journal can not be dissociated from her place as a member of the British Protestant elite. Proceeding by way of a close reading of three moments of viewing recorded in the sea journal, the essay asks what formations of class, gender and subjectivity each scene of viewing encloses. The paper concludes by considering a countervailing textual impulse evident towards the end of her sea journal, linking the breakdown in Macquarie's textual command with her imminent arrival at her new colonial home.

Elizabeth Henrietta Macquarie's (1778–1835) place in Australian history rests on more than her vice-regal role as the wife of Lachlan Macquarie, the Governor of New South Wales between 1810 and 1821. Macquarie's reputation has been boosted by her inclusion in Joan Kerr's *The Dictionary of Australian Artists*, ensuring that Elizabeth's contribution to the development of colonial Australian art, whether as a patron or as a practitioner, can no longer be overlooked.¹ While the entry in Kerr mines Macquarie's travel journal for artistic references, it does not consider the writing itself an expression of her aesthetic aspirations. This essay reconsiders Macquarie's artistic achievements, typically confined to the fine arts of architecture, drawing and landscape design, by restoring her travel journal to her artistic oeuvre, and to the canon of Australian travel writing.

1. Joan Kerr ed., *The Dictionary of Australian Artists* (Melbourne and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Visualising the Self

After almost two months at sea, the *Dromedary*, the ship carrying Elizabeth and Lachlan Macquarie to New South Wales, left the relative safety of the North African coastline to sail across the Atlantic Ocean, its next port of call Rio de Janeiro. A passage in Elizabeth's travel journal captures the loneliness entailed in traversing this immensity of empty sky and sea. "We were," she writes, "deserted by every living creature, & left to navigate an immense Ocean without even a Bird to keep us company[.] [I]t seem'd as if we had the whole world to ourselves."² One would expect that this experience of abandonment would occasion a desperate yearning for new faces, novel conversation and fresh sights. But such emotions are tempered in Macquarie's sea journal by a competing feeling, which creeps upon her as the ship sails closer to its first landfall in the southern hemisphere. Notwithstanding the days and days of solitude, there arose "a kind of feeling new to me till that moment, connected with the idea of being totally separated from our Country, & the people belonging to it, seeing that here we were on another quarter of the Globe, with a new Race of beings. . . ." (21).

Here, Macquarie hints at a kind of transformation which was a commonplace in eighteenth-century voyaging literature. One contemporary writer observes that as seafarers ventured from the known world, they not only encountered new races of beings, they hazarded the risk that they themselves might become "a new species of anomalous savages."³ Jonathan Lamb concludes that in the Enlightenment imagination, sailing away from the known world metaphorises journeying away from familiar forms of the civil self, but at this stage of the journey, Macquarie strenuously denies the possibility of such a corruption of self.⁴ The author's joy at the thought of "the sight of human beings again" is mingled with "melancholy," as she "could not help regretting [that they] were not our Own people" (21).

Whatever kind of threat the other poses to Macquarie is checked in this instance by a strict policing of the line between self and other. In her travel tale, apprehension of difference is accompanied by the apprehension of self, so it is possible to suggest that cross-cultural contact becomes as much, if not more so, an encounter with one's

2. All parenthesised references are to this edition: Elizabeth Henrietta Macquarie, "Journal 15 May – 25 Dec 1809," Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, C126, pp. 19–20.

3. Guillaume Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the East and West Indies* [1783], quoted in Jonathan Lamb, "Eye-witnessing in the South Seas," *The Eighteenth Century* 38 3 (1997), 201–12, p. 206.

4. Lamb, p. 206.

own self. This essay will chart how Macquarie's travel journal attempts to contain and maintain the familiar contours of a British Protestant self through a complex circuit of interlocking visuality and self-definition. In her version of the traveller's gaze, the self is confirmed through observation, entrenching dominant or known forms of selfhood. Through an examination of two key moments in Macquarie's sea journal — an account of viewing a Catholic novice's initiation ceremony and a description of the landscape and harbour of Rio de Janeiro — I will trace a mutually informing relationship between observing the exotic and self-definition. The question asked in this essay is not the reliability of Macquarie as an eyewitness but to what end does her narrative of an observing self work?

If, as I will demonstrate, the above two representations of encounter serve to consolidate Macquarie's elite, self-composed subjectivity, a related textual impulse is apparent in a third moment I will examine in her journal. In the final months of her long sea journey, she imaginatively contrasts her situation with that of a "poor cottager's wife" (77). My concern with this imaginary encounter is threefold: to ask what relations of class and gender it encloses, as well as to consider its double metaphorical significance: why would Macquarie express a desire for the other woman, and why at a particular stage of the journey?

While Macquarie's journal begins and ends in the present tense, long descriptive passages describing her stays at various ports of call *recollect* events, outings, people and sights, suggesting that alongside the extant manuscript, Macquarie kept some other form of diary from which she worked a fair copy. If this is the case, the writing in the extant version is advantaged in two ways. It becomes stylistically tighter, and what it loses in immediacy is more than adequately compensated for by hindsight. But the addition of hindsight significantly alters the shape of the travel narrative. The temporal distance between event and its textual record can readily translate into a revised interpretation of the moment. The passages in which Macquarie elaborates herself as a viewing subject occur when her text pauses and the narrative retrospectively reviews recent events. This essay will explore the relationship between the retrospective glance of Macquarie's pen portrait and its delineation of its object of interest, asking what configurations of authority and selfhood ensue from a hindsighted representation of self and other?

A Theatre of Difference

In June 1809, on route to New South Wales, Elizabeth Macquarie spent over a fortnight in Funchal, the capital of Maderia. Despite the repeated reference to her "bad

state of health" (8), Macquarie's journal records an exhausting round of visits to the island's convents and churches, even though in relation to the latter, her diary betrays a patriotic preference for the "chaste and solid Grandeur of our English churches" (25). Katharine Rogers contends that since the formal dissolution of English convents in 1535, they live on in literature as a potent symbol of Catholic oppression.⁵ In the context of Enlightenment thinking, the cloister was emblematic of a reign of irrationality, its ideals of chastity and self-mortification anachronistic in an age celebrating femininity as truly realised in marriage and motherhood.⁶ As we shall see, Macquarie affirms her Protestant heritage by considering the convent as a symbol of restriction.

After walking "about the Town a good deal," Macquarie's party "chance[s] into a church where a young woman was taking the veil!" (10), a "sight" Macquarie confesses that "was too much of interest to admit our quitting the spot till the ceremony was over" (10); an interest manifested by her journal devoting four pages to describing it:

The poor young woman was attended by two noble ladies in full dress, she was also adorn'd with flowers in her head, and etc. She sat on the steps opposite the altar, one of the Ladies on each side of her, who endeavour'd to support her spirits with chearful conversation; she seem'd to do her best to second their efforts, but with a visible struggle I sat or rather crouch'd, very near her — a long time interven'd before the arrival of the Priest; as we waited for him those ladies next to me told me that the Convent to which their poor girl was so soon to belong, was the strictest ever known; something in resemblance to La Trap that it was so poor, that the nuns were obliged to labour very hard for their support, and withall that the situation of the convent was extremely damp & unwholesome, that the nuns died at a very early period. The Lady Abbess at the time being only thirty years of age, a dignity which is never confer'd at so early a period, except from necessity. I felt extremely sorry for the young woman that if it had been possible, I should have most gladly offer'd her my protection if she would have desisted from her dreadful intention — At last the Priest attended by a number of his order arrived; he was a very old man, he went up to the altar, the nuns knelt at his feet, he was so blind that a Friar held a very large heavy candlestick so low, as to enable him to read. . . (10–11)

5. Katharine M. Rogers, "Fantasy and Reality in Fictional Convents of the Eighteenth Century," *Comparative Literature Studies* 22.3 (Fall 1985), 297–316, p. 297.

6. Rogers, p. 312.

In his brief discussion of Macquarie's sea journal Alan Atkinson singles out this episode as demonstrating Elizabeth's "high humanity", associating it with a Marianne Dashwood-like sensibility.⁷ Atkinson is correct in highlighting the passage's sentimentalism, yet we might ask, is there something further at stake in Macquarie's self-stylising as a woman of heightened sensibility?

By calling the novitiate a "poor young woman," Macquarie's description of the ceremony is compromised by an evaluative vocabulary from its first sentence. With the phrase "dreadful intention," Macquarie evokes a Gothic world and the dramatic stuff of the Radcliffean novel is further conjured in the sentence where the writer imagines herself as would-be rescuer of a helpless and about-to-be incarcerated young woman. Just as in the Gothic novel where the foreign terrain is a topography of oppression, here, in the Catholic cathedral, Macquarie sees Romanism as a mental as well as physical geography of incarceration. For our Protestant observer, it is self-evident that the two ladies were in attendance to "support [the novice's] spirits" which she did "with a visible struggle," as if she were not disposing her person freely and willingly, a supposition furthered in Macquarie's fantasy of rescue.

The lack of punctuation in the lines, "she seem'd to do her best to second her efforts, but with a visible struggle I sat or rather crouch'd, very near her," blur which subject belongs to the adverbial phrase "visible struggle." They can be read as if Macquarie was struggling, her huddled body a reflection of her troubled mind. Feminist critics who celebrate the radical parataxis of women's diaries argue that such loose grammatical constructions are expressive of a relational, inclusive mode of writing.⁸ Macquarie's refusal to distinguish grammatically between herself and the object of concern could be read as symptomatic of the fluidity of her sense of self; as if she is equally sharing the bodily plight of the young woman. Yet rather than reading this moment as resisting differentiation between subjectivities, as an instance of feminine writing, I suggest it is self-serving: consolidating the British Protestant female self. If we read the passage otherwise, silently restoring punctuation where it has been omitted, it connotes something altogether different than a moment of cross-cultural identification between women. The sentence tells a story about Macquarie's gaze. It positions her as a viewing subject. The focus of the sentence is her proximity

7. Atkinson quotes from Jane Austen's description of Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* to explain Macquarie's heightened sensibility: "Her sensibility was potent enough!" Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: Volume 1: Beginning* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 319.

8. See, for example, Eleanor Hogan, "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form," *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 14 (1991), 95–107.

to the novice, emphasising her unimpeded vision, establishing the traveller as reliable eye-witness. Supplementing Macquarie's clear observation is her canny ability to ferret out the future fate of the young nun; one which, as the ladies in the audience inform her, bodes ill for the novice.

We can now appreciate the adeptness of Macquarie introducing her pen portrait of the initiation ceremony with an expression of pity. If upon entering the cathedral, Macquarie felt a native sorrow for the "poor young woman," this emotion has been strengthened through viewing the ceremony. Now armed with a knowledge about the convent and able clearly to trace fear and foreboding in the initiate's behaviour, Macquarie has scripted herself as a worthy witness. Catholicism is revealed as prejudicial through a circular logic: by observing the religion as acting contrariwise to the well-being of its adherents, the traveller confirms her preconceptions about the faith. What is obscured within Macquarie's denunciation of Catholicism is both the cultural standpoint which fosters such a point of view, Protestantism, and the circularity of the logic invoked.

The remainder of her account of the novitiate continues such a circular authorising of the self. In the above analysis, I have argued that the object of sight was subordinated to how the author positioned herself in relation to what was seen. An unequal relation also marks her depiction of the final ceremony at the convent's door. Macquarie triangulates her account between describing the technicalities of the rite and herself as a woman in whom eye-witnessing exists in a reciprocal relation to heightened sensibility. At the door of the convent, the novitiate and her mother take their "last embrace" (13). "Till that moment the nun supported herself," recalls Macquarie, the scene still vivid in her mind:

but the sight of her Mother totally overcame her, her head fell on her breast, & she sob'd aloud in an agony of grief; she was then hurried forward, & I saw her walk follow'd by those dreadful looking black Nuns, who threw rose leaves at her — I saw her no more! but understood that her head was immediately to be shaved, she had a great quantity of fine hair, and I saw the dress carried in which she was to change for that she had on, it was an extreme coarse brown heavy stuff, which I suppose she was to wear till she took the black veil. — I cannot say I felt so much distress at the fate of a stranger, as I did on this occasion; the impression was such that I could not hear the subject mention'd without considerable emotion for sometime after. I hope her situation does not *feel* to her, as it *appeared* to me. (13)

Over and above being an account of the details of the ceremony, in this passage Macquarie describes an interlocking circuit of visibility and affect. The sight of the final, dolorous parting of the nun from her mother caused Elizabeth “so much distress” that she could not speak of it. We should ask, does her sensitive vision endow her with moral agency, as is commonly entertained by advocates of sensibility? As the writer herself is aware, the nun remains distanced, an object of sight. On four occasions in this passage Macquarie refers to herself as a viewing subject; she uses the verb “saw” three times and in the final line, speaks of the appearance of the nun’s situation.

Having said that the nun is spectacularised in this description, how much more so is Macquarie’s own emotion? Macquarie frames her own bodily plight, as a sensitive soul experiencing an emotional drama, in front of and obscuring whatever the nun may be experiencing. The novice is rushed from view but Macquarie’s suffering visibly lingers: “the impression was such that I could not hear the subject mention’d without considerable emotion for sometime after.” Markman Ellis contends that avowing that one feels more than the sufferer is the “master-stroke of sentimentalism.”⁹ This conceit becomes even more masterful when social differences divide the observer from sufferer. Under the pretence of cross-cultural sympathy, Macquarie defines her own sensibility as more acute than that possessed by the other woman. Yet, Macquarie raises the stakes further in this imagined semiotic tug-of-war between competing British and Catholic subjectivities by valuing her vision over the other’s affect. In a description largely unmarked by traditional aesthetic considerations, the novice becomes a vehicle for refining Macquarie’s aesthetic gaze. The “poor young woman” does not constitute anything other than an object in Macquarie’s description, confirming the writer as the proper subject — of heightened sensibility, of aesthetic refinement, as well as of the narrative itself — in this story of ostensible sympathy.

Picturesque Visions

A ship is an ideal viewing platform. To the shipboard passenger, abstracted from the shoreline’s bustle and confusion, the landscape becomes a passive object of contemplation. This is a position which mimics but does not quite mirror the eighteenth-century notion of the prospect view. In this aesthetic configuration, the observer

9. Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 106.

commands the landscape, a subject-position derived equally from an elevated perspective and from a stance of implied mastery over the supine land. The aesthetics of separation, abstraction and command have a cognate gender.¹⁰ While to the viewer on board ship, the land is above and around rather than below, I would suggest that a similar aesthetics of distance and mastery is enfolded in a deck-bound gaze.

Macquarie frames her description of the *Dromedary's* arrival at Rio de Janeiro in terms of this classic aesthetic point of view. Commencing her verbal painting with a stock disavowal of being able to capture the scene — “[i]t appears to me that no description can convey to the mind of a person who has not seen this harbour, the wonderful beauty and grandeur of it” — Macquarie nonetheless has faith in her pen:

The Entrance is I believe the finest of any harbour in the world. . . . It was a fine clear evening. . . & the sun was setting behind the Sugar loaf. . . . The first remarkable object after passing Cape Rio, is a gap or vent in the ridge of mountains which skirt the sea shore. This chasm appears from a distance, like a narrow portal, between two rocks of stone. The rock on the left is of a Sugar-loaf form; a solid mass of hard sparkling granite, 680 feet high above the surface out of which it arises. The opposite rock is of the same material; but had a regular and easy descent to the water's edge. A little Island strongly fortified, just within the entrance, contracts this passage to a width of about three quarters of a mile. Having cleared the channel, one of the most magnificent scenes in nature bursts upon the eye. A sheet of water of immense size running back into the heart of a beautiful country to the distance of about thirty miles where it is bounded by a screen of lofty mountains, expanding from a narrow entrance to the width of twelve or fourteen miles, every where studded with innumerable little islands, in every diversity of Shape — the Shores of these islands fringed with shrubs, some of them cover'd with noble trees, and altogether forming the greatest variety of beauty. (21–23)

10. The eighteenth-century ideal of the prospect view has been critiqued in terms of its alignment of masculinity and the ideal aesthetic viewer in studies such as Elizabeth Bohls's *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Jacqueline Labbe's *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan and New York: St Martin's Press, 1998). The interconnections between prospect view with its conceit of disinterestedness and imperial subjectivity have been interrogated in Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) and Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers saw Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

As the landscape yields up its charms to Macquarie, she demonstrates a command over both it and landscape aesthetics in a tight description which combines a sensibility for the picturesque with an impulse for accuracy.

Macquarie's depiction of Rio's harbour, while not formally constrained by rigid aesthetic terminology, mobilises commonplace picturesque motifs. She writes of the "diversity" and "variety" afforded by "innumerable little islands" and the differences in vegetation, mentions a "screen of lofty mountains," separates the scene into distinct fore, middle and backgrounds, and contrasts the smooth sheet of water with the rough beauty of the "sparkling granite" portals. On the other hand, Macquarie is not merely content with a vague picturesque vocabulary. Her eye enumerates as much as it evaluates. Whatever awe might be aroused by the magnificent scene is controlled through exact description, which offers grid-like measurements of the harbour.

With this controlling gaze, Macquarie naturalises her perception of land as a picture. In the above passage, she conflates the view from on board with the stationary stance of a landscape appreciator by abjuring reference to the movement of the ship. For example, the phrases, "after passing Cape Rio" and "having cleared the channel," equally describe a mind's eye and the ship's journey through the harbour. Over and above a concern with the materiality of sailing into the harbour, is Macquarie's aesthetic project, made manifest in the effacement of her viewing position on deck on the *Dromedary*. So while she indicates the height of one of the granite portals guarding the entrance to the harbour, the information is registered dispassionately; representational accuracy drives her description. Indeed, apart from the opening sentence, there are no personal references. Simultaneously, Macquarie rewrites an experience of immersion within the landscape as distanced and removed, and divorces the seer from the seen, repeating two fundamental conceits of landscape aesthetics.

Macquarie's description of Rio's harbour repeats the descriptive pattern that Andrew Hassam has traced in the shipboard diaries of emigrants travelling to the Australian colonies. These writings record how, as the ship nears its anchor, wild, uncultivated bush gives way to increasing signs of civilisation until there appears at last the reassuring township. The increasingly "civilised" landscape seems itself to be an inscription of progress.¹¹ Likewise, Macquarie's description moves from describing scenes of wildness to the site of human habitation and industry, manifested in the town of St Sebastian. But if St Sebastian is the reassuring sign that familiar civic life

11. Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia: Shipboard Diaries by Nineteenth-Century Emigrants* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 182.

subsists in far-off lands, Macquarie subordinates a pragmatic, emigrant interest in the foreign land to an aesthetic one:

The Town of St Sebastian with its numerous Churches & Spires adds greatly to the View, and in every direction from where our Ship lay we saw Convents, and Noblemen's houses scatter'd over the Country, which is also much adorn'd by the number of fortifications & bridges which in several places form communication from one mass of rock to another, which have been separated by some convulsion of nature, & now presents a frightful chasm between so that Rio Janeiro is not only highly favor'd by nature, but also much adorn'd by the Art of Man. . . (23)

The signs of human life are robbed of political, social and cultural purposes in this passage, rendered as pure aesthetic objects which add "greatly to the View."

Just as Macquarie aestheticises convents, that institution which invoked powerful emotions in Madeira, she also reduces to adornments the numerous fortifications defending the harbour, perhaps the most potent symbol of a politically inscribed landscape. What is striking about this textual move is that Macquarie, herself sailing towards a vice-regal appointment, could not be unaware that Rio, although geographically peripheral — "in another quarter of the Globe," as she suggests — had been moved to centre stage of European political, cultural and trade concerns with the relocation of Portugal's crown there the previous year, precipitated by Napoleon's threats to Portuguese sovereignty.

Elizabeth Bohls argues that the picturesque habitually evacuates the "unruly contingency of history" in its depiction of a scene.¹² According to Macquarie, in St Sebastian, it is the landscape alone which has experienced a "convulsion," this tumultuous event resulting in a "frightful chasm." In this picturesque rendering of Rio, it is only geology which harbours a history. It follows that if the impress of history is voided from the face of the country, other marks of contingency in Rio's culture are also effaced. Apart from a reference to a "monkey looking black man" (28), the great social divide of Brazilian society is not acknowledged. While not innocent of contemporary racial thinking, her epithet gives little indication of Macquarie's attitude to a slave-based society. Her silence on the question of slavery becomes more telling when we recall that her sea diary records an encounter with a slave-trader, just three days prior to the *Dromedary* docking at Rio. Infectious fever gripped the trader and to retard a widespread outbreak the crew resorted to "a precaution at which human-

12. Bohls, p. 103.

ity shudders, namely, that of throwing the unfortunate slaves overboard as soon as they were taken ill. When we heard this we all thought on Mr Wilberforce" (19).

Rather than the trade itself, it seems that it is the violent precautionary measure which shocks Macquarie into invoking the name of the noted abolitionist. Not once in her fourteen page reminiscence on her Brazilian sojourn does she dilate on other actions which might cause humanity to shudder. Having argued that Macquarie's description of Rio's harbour is the triumph of aesthetics over politics, this characterisation can be extended to account for the entire portrait of Brazilian society. The social and political divisions of Portuguese culture are only acknowledged at a temporal and spatial remove. Some two months later, while enjoying British hospitality at the Cape, Macquarie casts back to compare the "wonderfully different" (70) situation of South African and Portuguese chattels. "Indeed," she writes, "all the Slaves I saw at the Cape had every appearance of being well treated, they were respected clothed & look'd well fed, contented" while their Brazilian counterparts were kept in "a miserable state" (69).

What unashamedly interests Elizabeth is the human transformation and taming of Rio's landscape; the fortifications and bridges which make raw rock both useful and beautiful to humankind. Untamed nature does not hold this traveller's attention, a point brought into focus through a comparison of the landscape descriptions found in her journal. Significantly, she silently passes over the mountainous and dramatic landscapes of Madeira and Cape Verde Islands, as if the sublime register is foreign or hostile. Cape Town's Table Mountain might impress — the "appearance of so stupendous a mass of naked Rock as the Table Mountain, strikes the eye with wonder" (78) — but after expressing enthusiasm for this geological formation, Macquarie undermines her expression of naked emotion by chastising Cape Towners for white-washing their houses. The resultant "glare is extremely prejudicial in so hot a climate. . ." (79). Appraisal followed rapidly by censure similarly patterns Macquarie's estimation of Rio. After witnessing "grandiest view" (31) at the Gambiers' residence, she restores her equanimity by taking her hosts to task for their garden: "the scent [of the orange grove] is so strong, that it is quite overpowering, & to my taste a grove of Birch would be ten times more preferable" (31).

There is, suggests Kim Michasiw, "a danger" in sublime emotion, and Macquarie's journal can be read as resisting its "seduction": her eye does not "lose itself" and she textually attempts to ward off absorption into the observed.¹³ Nor can Mac-

13. Kim Ian Michasiw, "Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque," *Representations* 38 (Spring 1992), 76–100, p. 84.

quarie's journal be considered as displaying a distinctively female sublime, as traced by Anne Mellor. For women writers whose childhood was spent in the mountainous regions of the British Isles (recollecting for the moment that Macquarie is a Scot), Mellor contends that "sublime landscapes are home scenery, the location of blissful childhood memories. Confronting magnificent mountains . . . their characters experience a heightened sensibility, not of anxiety, but of love, reverence, and mutual relationship."¹⁴

Mellor's notion of women's emphasis on forging an integrative relationship between landscape and selfhood is advanced by William Snyder in relation to the picturesque. Snyder claims that the picturesque is a conducive aesthetic register for women writers as it allows them "to elevate alternate ideals or patterns they saw implied in natural processes: community, generosity, sympathy, delight, connection and intimacy."¹⁵ Macquarie's aesthetic does not accord with either of these mappings of female landscape aesthetics.

What interests Macquarie is the sweep of a scene, a visual point of view captured in her approving estimation of Cape Town "from where our Ship lay," "we had a fine view of the Town which extends a great way along the Beach, the regularity of the buildings & the handsome appearance of them, being all Built of stone white wash'd, has a fine effect" (79).

This rather nondescript statement paradoxically reveals the focus of Macquarie's aesthetic, which devolves on the picturesque "effect" rather than any nebulous affect of a scene. As I have traced above, such a disembodied appraisal of the landscape is at variance with recent reconsiderations of the relationship between female subjectivity and land, and is more often associated with masculinist aesthetics. Might Macquarie's alignment with the normative gender ascription of landscape aesthetics be linked to her colonial destination?

In recent analyses, the picturesque has been shorn of its pretence of disinterested appreciation; postcolonial studies have demonstrated how it was deployed as a productive tool in colonialism's imaginative arsenal.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the term has

14. Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 97.

15. William C. Snyder, "Mother Nature's Other Natures: Landscape in Women's Writing, 1770–1830," *Women's Studies* 21 (1992), 143–62, p. 145.

16. See for example, Stephen Copley and Peter Garside eds., *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Two studies which explore the picturesque as a mode of pictorial colonialism are Ian

widespread currency in colonial Australian landscape descriptions, notwithstanding the “unimproved” nature of the scene. Delys Bird explains colonial Australian women’s frequent recourse to a picturesque register in terms of a compensatory gesture: it allows women an imaginative grasp on foreign space in the absence of actual transformative power.¹⁷ But what is occluded in Bird’s configuration is the other investments which may accompany an aesthetic connection to landscape. In antipodean invocations of the picturesque there is often a slipperiness between aesthetic and colonialist connotations; an appreciation of a view can readily slide into assessing the land as “ready-made” for occupation; a conceit repeated by Macquarie.¹⁸ At Rio, she meets a group of colonial “Gentlemen” who show her “a number of views” of New South Wales. Her eye is caught by a sketch of Dr Harris’s house “which is situated in a park about a mile from Sydney” (43). Her use of the descriptor “park” evidences a slippage between aesthetic and colonial meanings: if unimproved land is “park-like,” the landscape at one and the same time mimics and solicits European land use practices.

Macquarie admires the complementary conjunction of artificial and natural effects in Rio’s scenery. One cannot help speculating how the harmonious union of nature and labour in Rio may have titillated the Governor’s Lady’s own aesthetic ambitions for New South Wales. If the Portuguese who reputedly “have a character for great indolence” (24) could so ingenuously work the landscape, what might result when Sydney’s labour force is properly harnessed? A small part of her landscape ambitions was realised with the opening of Lady Macquarie’s Chair in 1816, a seat offering a panoramic view of the township, harbour and beyond, cut into exposed rock on the small peninsula adjacent to the Government Domain.

With Lady Macquarie’s Chair, Elizabeth inscribed an enduring symbol of her aesthetic sensibility onto the landscape, repeating in a material gesture the conceit of command over a landscape embodied in the discourse of landscape aesthetics. How might this position of implied mastery intersect over land with her colonial location? “Many women writers situate themselves *within* the landscape, as a part of it,” contends Jacqueline Labbe.¹⁹ Given that women are excluded from the normative masculine subject-position assumed in aesthetic discourse, the female self’s immersion

Macleon, *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 35, and Ryan, pp. 54–100.

17. Delys Bird, “The Self and the Magic Lantern: Gender and Subjectivity in Australian Colonial Women’s Writing,” *Australian Literary Studies* 15 3 (May 1992), 123–31, p. 128.

18. Ryan, p. 73.

19. Labbe, p. xiii.

in land offers both a critique and a means to insinuate a place for femininity within that discourse. While the feminist politics of such a position are unassailable, those interested in colonial inscriptions of land might wonder where in this configuration of female subjectivity and land is there room for the other other?

Macquarie's journal exhibits an awareness that others held a primary association with antipodean soil. Midday on Christmas Eve, 1809, the *Dromedary* is twelve miles off the New South Wales's coastline and the traveller "can plainly perceive the smoke of the natives fires" (100). While the extent of Macquarie's ruminations on the existence of Indigenous Australians in her sea journal is limited to this instance, I would suggest we can posit a metaphorical parallel between her awareness of indigenous others and the journal's persistent adoption of a masculinised aesthetic subject-position. Her alignment with the normative gender position of aesthetics can be read as symptomatic of an attempt to differentiate herself from those who are seen (in differing ways) as contiguous with the landscape: in Bohls's words, "women, the labouring classes and non-Europeans."²⁰ By staking a claim to the high ground in landscape aesthetics's visual economy, Macquarie resists association with marginalised others. Such a textual positioning well may be a strategic technique of self-possession given Macquarie's ultimate destination — the penal colony of New South Wales, a subaltern social geography in conflict with an Aboriginalised terrain.

There is more than a passing resemblance between the two scenes of viewing analysed so far, despite the fact that the first revolves upon a calculus of affect while the latter repudiates such bodily reference. Both delineate an epistemology of the viewing subject, normatively positioned as over and above the object of contemplation. Such an aesthetics of separation is furthered in the third scene of viewing this paper will now analyse, even though it elaborates a unity of female desire.

Desiring the Other

The lineaments of the aesthetic subject are mapped in Macquarie's journal not only through her pronouncements on taste but through a desire for the perfect view. There is another form of desire found in her shipboard writing, revolving around the ideal marital conditions offered by life afloat. On reboarding the *Dromedary* after a fortnight-long sojourn at the Cape, Macquarie eulogises her floating home: "the Ship appearing to me in the place of a house. . . & a very happy one it has been to me" (76). It is more than familiarity which prompts Macquarie into this confession. At an

20. Bohls, p. 67.

advanced stage of the lengthy journey to New South Wales — Macquarie was at sea for seven months — she records how shipboard life provides ideal conditions for marital happiness:

I have spent my time in the manner which entirely suits my inclinations, having great comfort of my Husbands company uninterrupted all the morning when we read or write in a social manner, which I shall never enjoy in Shore, as when he has it in his power he shuts himself up alone all the morning to business; but here I am admitted from necessity I have many times thought of the advantage a poor Cottager's wife has over persons *as she may think* in a far happier line of life — she has the satisfaction of inhabiting the same room with her husband and children, she has the objects nearest her heart in her sight at one; a luxury of enjoyment seldom experienced by those she considers above her. (77)

What begins as a meditation on the joys of shipboard life becomes another portrait of the other woman. Macquarie recasts anxieties about her future as envy for the ideal domestic relations enjoyed by the labouring class.

Gender is figured as undercutting class interests in this moment of fantasised universal female desire. The peasant woman and the mistress share a similar want: to be surrounded by their families. Yet the peasant woman is richer than her ostensibly more fortunate mistress; she can enjoy the company of her family as part of her daily routine; for the lady, Macquarie complains, this is the exception. It is “necessity”— limited shipboard space — which forces her husband to share a cabin in the daytime with Elizabeth. Once the *Dromedary* docks at Sydney Cove, Macquarie fears she will be banished from her husband's side. Due to the ideology of separate spheres, her range will be delimited to the private and female sections of Government House — the family rooms and the drawing room — while the Governor will be interred in those parts of the building dedicated to politics and the public.

Macquarie's fantasy is that the cottager's wife already possesses what she desires: being bathed continually in the warm glow of domestic affection. In this bourgeois romance, the ideal of domestic ideology is manifest in the lifestyle of the poor; a conceit which confuses the intermingling of male and female spaces as a desire and not a necessity.²¹ What allows Macquarie to imagine the cosiness of cottage life is the

21. The classic study charting the simultaneous separation of the site of production from the place of domesticity and the relative gendering of each space remains Leonora Davidoff's

ideology of the family's obfuscation of class relations. Hiding its class-bound origin, the bourgeois concept of the family "came to appear above class," allowing its middle-class advocates to project its universal desirability.²² Macquarie perpetuates a further myth that it is she that is disadvantaged by class. Trapped in bourgeois notions of the gendered spheres of household space, Macquarie can only yearn for what the cottager's wife possesses. Yet another mystification of class relations follows from this one. The peasant woman does not revel in her good fortune. Not realising the value of unrestrained contact with loved ones, instead the poor woman imagines happiness as the right only of "those she considers above her." For Macquarie, the cottager woman's idealisation of her social superiors is false: it is the labouring class who are fortunate, having at their fingertips the source of contentment.

In imagining the cottage as a locus of the good, Macquarie obscures economic relations in another way. Rather than the cottage's actual role as the site of agricultural and cottage-based primary production, in Macquarie's rendering it becomes the site of both production and consumption — under its humble roof model domesticity is produced and consumed. This phantasm of emotional wealth stands in front of and obscures the actual differential in wealth between the gentlewoman and the peasant. Macquarie projects a flow of emotional capital which is contrary to the course of economic wealth; the latter, of course, originates in the peasant woman's labour yet its object is to enhance the mistress's household.

I have traced several obfuscations of class that underpin Macquarie's appeal to a universal female desire, which disguise the vertical divide between women. Why might our traveller conjure up such a fantasy at this stage in her travel? I would argue that Macquarie's foreboding at being banished from her husband's side stands in front of and obscures a less tangible unease: a broader anxiety about social life in the colony. So while Macquarie's image of the ignorant cottager's wife revolves upon the orchestration of recuperative difference, offering a revisionary account on the history of relations between tenant and mistress, what cannot be textually controlled from this vantage point is how her colonial life will unfold. As Louis Mink concludes, "there is no story of the future."²³

and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 357–96.

22. Catherine Hall, "The Early Formation of Domestic Ideology," *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 15–32, p. 31.

23. Louis O. Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension," *New Literary History* 1 (1970), 541–58, p. 546.

Worthy Objects

On Christmas Eve 1809, an exasperated Macquarie writes in her journal, “indeed it is full time for our voyage to be over” (99). But, on the other hand, the threat of the unknown looms larger as the miles glide by, for she worried only seven weeks into the journey about being in “another quarter of the Globe, with a new Race of beings.” Arrival at Port Jackson’s shores marks the end of the journey only in a limited and physical sense; there still remains to be dealt with a complex set of cultural, social and psychic negotiations. According to Hassam, the stages of ocean travel correlate with anthropology’s understanding of the rites of passage. Following Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep, Hassam maps the tripartite structure of the rites of social passage — separation, liminal stage, reaggregation — onto the secular journey.²⁴ While the in-between stage of liminality has attracted attention in theories of travel writing, the process of the traveller’s re-integration within society warrants further investigation. Eric Leed offers some preliminary remarks of the negotiation of arrival, but his gendered model of travel precludes an analysis of women as agents requiring incorporation.²⁵ Treading a well-worn path, Leed posits “certain realities” in the history of travel — the “sessility of women: the mobility of men” — which restricts his account to considering women as mediums of incorporation.²⁶

We cannot trace Macquarie’s process of integration as her journal stops abruptly on Christmas Day, the ship frustratingly still out at sea. The journal’s last pages record feelings of increasing “vexatious[ness]” and “baffle[ment]” (102) and this sense of unease is mirrored in its style. The entries become perfunctory, and the writing deteriorates in mid-December to a digest of daily reckonings on the vessel’s progress. The very tool which Macquarie adeptly used to codify and organise her shipboard experience now falls prey to travel’s unsettling impulse.

This essay has traced an interconnection between what catches Macquarie’s eye and two textual impulses, which I would like to designate as open and closed texts. Paradoxically, the passages which appear to reflect the experience of travel — the extended backward glances, recalling Macquarie’s experiences at various ports of call — are those most resistant to its materiality. On these occasions, the journal is gathered in upon itself; its descriptive economy can invoke travel without manifesting its

24. Hassam, pp. 55–56. See also M. N. Pearson, “Pilgrims, Travellers, Tourists: The Meanings of Journeys,” *Australian Cultural History* 10 (1991), 125–34.

25. Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), pp. 111–29.

26. Leed, p. 113.

affects. Macquarie's sea journal tempers the disruptive effect of travel through narrating a circuit of receptivity enclosed by hindsight. It is towards the end of this description of a voyage that Macquarie's writing registers the unsettling impulse of travel, its narrative decay signifying a fracturing of its former enclosed form.

The invocation of the cottager's wife marks the threshold between these two conflicting economies of writing. Anchored in Table Bay, on the verge of the last leg of a long voyage to the "new world," Macquarie casts her eye inwards. Formerly, foreign objects inspired both scrutiny and narrative but now her traveller's eye and her masterful pen shun them. How might we plot the extended descriptions — of the ceremony of initiation and of the harbour of Rio de Janeiro — in this circuit of self and seeing? We can unravel two layers in what has captured Macquarie's travelling eye. Firstly, the objects are worthy insofar as they solicit the power of her pen: they offer a narrative occasion. Secondly, and of greater importance, is that her travel writing elicits a mode of composed self-inscription, indissociable from the description's hindsight narrative economy. In other words, a dialogic relation subsists between the worthy objects described in Macquarie's travel narrative and her composition of a self-contained subjectivity. In the final pages of her journal, this mutually informing relation deteriorates until the journal falls silent before its end: writing has lost its worth.