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Richard Vowell's Not-So-Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Adventure in Nineteenth-Century Hispanic America

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Abstract. Richard Vowell was a British mercenary who served in the Wars of Independence in Hispanic America. A study of his writings offers a new perspective from which to reconsider the influential arguments of the section of Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York, 1992) that deals with European travel in the region in the period. The analysis centres on the ways in which Vowell depicted Hispanic American masculinities, indigenous peoples, collective identities and the diverse groups that made up society during the wars of independence. Vowell's writings suggest that further sources might be read against the traditional canon of commercial travel literature generally used by historians for the period 1800–1850.

This article explores the career and writings of Richard Vowell, a British mercenary who served in the Wars of Independence in Hispanic America.[1] It argues that Vowell's case offers a new perspective from which to reconsider the influential arguments of that section of Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* which deals with European travel in the region in the period. It is based on archival research in national and provincial archives in Venezuela and Colombia and on Vowell's own published texts. The article consists of six parts. The first discusses the historiography of nineteenth-century travel writing in Hispanic America. The second part introduces Vowell's publications and their subsequent translations and editions. The third provides a brief biography of Vowell, bringing his historical figure into the light from the anonymity and confusion in which it has been shrouded since his best-known work, *Campaigns and Cruises in Venezuela and New Granada*

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and in the Pacific Ocean from 1817–1830, was published anonymously in 1831. The fourth part suggests from a re-reading of *Campaigns and Cruises* how Vowell was not typical of the other British travel writers studied by Pratt. The principal focus of this section is Vowell's career in Venezuela and New Granada, the settings for his fictional writings, which are themselves studied in part five, a detailed textual analysis of the novels *Savannahs of Varinas* and *The Earthquake of Caraccas* (both published in 1831). This section complements the reading of Vowell's travel writing by comparing and contrasting his portrayals of Hispanic American reality with other contemporary fictional depictions, particularly the anonymous *Soldiers of Venezuela* (1818). The final part of the article incorporates this analysis into the arguments put forward by Pratt, asking to what extent Vowell's writings can complement the conclusions of *Imperial Eyes*. The article hopes to contribute to the developing historiography of the Wars of Independence as well as the literary study of nineteenth-century traveller-narrators.

1. *Historiography of nineteenth-century travel writing in Hispanic America*

Richard Vowell's two novels are based on the same Venezuelan *llanos* that Rómulo Gallegos employed, a century later, as the setting for the national conflict between civilisation and barbarism. Rather than providing a 'foundational fiction'[2] for the new Venezuelan republic, however, Vowell's publications form part of a body of literature aimed at interpreting Africa, Asia and the Americas for a British audience.[3] This is precisely the corpus analysed by Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*, which has been particularly influential on the burgeoning areas of the study of travel, travel writing, 'new' imperial history and colonial identities. Pratt defined the 'contact zones' as 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today'.[4] The *Imperial Eyes* of the title were the discourse strategies of the male foreigner travelling through Latin America, Asia or Africa in the period between 1750 and 1850. The cornerstone of the book is formed by both the concept of 'transculturation', understood as a process in which subjugated peoples shape imperial culture to their own local circumstances, and imperial actors, who are themselves affected and changed by the local situations and peoples to which they are exposed.

[2] For Doris Sommer's discussion of *Doña Bárbara* and other 'foundational fictions' see Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley, 1991).

[3] A good discussion of this literature is V. G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to the Outside World in the Imperial Age* (Harmondsworth, 1972), although it does not include Vowell.

[4] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 4.

The concept of the 'contact zone' has been the basis for a broad range of scholarship, and Pratt's original aim – to 'treat the relations among colonisers and colonised, or travellers and "travelees", not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power' – remains sound and useful to an analysis of a figure like Richard Vowell who is difficult to pigeon-hole as either coloniser, traveller, soldier, historian or novelist.[5]

The centre point of *Imperial Eyes* is the discussion of 'Alexander von Humboldt and the reinvention of America'. Humboldt's 'historic journey, and the monument of print it produced, laid down the lines for the ideological reinvention of South America that took place on both sides of the Atlantic during the momentous first decades of the nineteenth century'.[6] It is Pratt's analysis of the subsequent period that is less conclusive:

> On the heels of Alexander von Humboldt, European travellers descended on South America by the dozen. Men, women, scientists, soldiers, speculators – they were all thrilled to be there. … By the 1820s the South American revolutions, in which Britain and France were major military and monetary participants, had become a source of immense interest in Europe … The revolutions were also what made travel possible, and the commercial opportunities they opened created a momentum that easily rivalled Humboldt's scientific and aesthetic passions. As other commentators have observed, the wave of South American travellers in the 1810s and 1820s were mainly British, and mainly travelled and wrote as advance scouts for European capital.[7]

Although she did not discuss his work, Richard Vowell was part of what Pratt labelled the 'capitalist vanguard' of British writers who travelled to and described South America in the 1820s.[8] These writers still saw the region in terms of conquest, she asserted, but it was itineraries and destinations that they conquered, not military or political obstacles. Pratt argued that 'the travellers struggle in unequal battle against scarcity, inefficiency, laziness, discomfort, poor horses, bad roads, bad weather, delays … Spanish American society is mainly encoded in this literature as logistical obstacles to the forward movement of the Europeans, … the journey allegorising the lust for progress. Timetabling proliferates'.[9] This is an excellent synthesis of a certain type of writer. Pratt's sources were all businessmen: John Mawe, Robert Proctor, Charles Brand, Charles Stuart Cochrane and Gaspard Theodore Mollien. Pratt was building on the work of Jean Franco who, in her article 'A Not-So-Romantic Journey: British Travellers to South America 1818–1828' (1979), had elaborated a similar interpretation of British travel to the River Plate, based primarily on texts written by travellers with exclusively commercial interests: Bond Head, Captain Andrews, John Miers, and the

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 146.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 147.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Robertson brothers, a pair of Scottish businessmen.[10] Franco's imagery was just as evocative: she described British travellers as 'missionaries of capitalism whose aim was nothing less than the informal colonisation of the continent'.[11]

The wider conclusions of Pratt and Franco are certainly convincing. There was a capitalist vanguard and there were missionaries of capitalism. 'Informal empire' became a reality, albeit of varying weight according to region, all across the continent.[12] Ricardo Cicerchia has argued forcefully that this led to the existence in Latin America of a 'vast, informal imperial universe'.[13] Cicerchia's argument, drawn from analysis of the travel writings of the Argentine thinker and statesman Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, explores the

> dilemma of the traveller-narrators [which] is expressed most clearly … through forms of discursive composition which produces meaning about modernity that is constrained as much by an ideological mandate as by an experience open to new cultural frontiers. Of course this is a more complex process than their merely carrying out duties as the vanguard of capitalism.[14]

Perhaps an explanation for the shortcomings of this section of Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* argument and Franco's 'Not-So-Romantic-journey' lies in the type of travel writing analysed. The commercial travellers whose travel memoirs were part-financed by their business contacts in order to encourage further interest and speculation in the contact were by no means representative of the several thousand Britons and Irishmen and women who travelled to South America in the 1810s and 1820s, let alone traveller-narrators in general. Many were simple migrants and adventurers from humble or middling backgrounds, who crossed the Atlantic in the hope of bettering their lot and finding improved status, glory, or riches. Some sought political advancement and took part in debates and conflicts.[15] Many hundreds disappeared into Hispanic

[10] Jean Franco, 'A Not-So-Romantic Journey: British Travellers to South America, 1818–1828,' in Mary Louise Pratt and Kathleen Newman (eds.), *Critical Passions: Selected Essays* (Durham, NC, 1999), pp. 133–45, translated by Pratt from the original Spanish version, 'Un viaje poco romántico: viajeros británicos hacia Sudamérica, 1818–1828,' *Escritura*, 7 (1979), pp. 129–42.

[11] Franco, 'A Not-So-Romantic Journey', p. 133.

[12] See for example H. S. Ferns, 'Britain's Informal Empire in Argentina, 1806–1914,' *Past and Present*, 4 (1953), pp. 60–75; Peter Winn, 'British Informal Empire in Uruguay in the Nineteenth Century,' *Past and Present*, 73 (1973) pp. 100–26; and John A. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and Other Essays*, edited by Anil Seal (Cambridge, 1992). The most recent revision of the literature is Alan Knight, 'Britain and Latin America', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. III, the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 124–44. The historiography is summarised in Rory Miller, 'Informal Empire in Latin America,' in R. Louis (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. V, Historiography* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 437–49.

[13] Ricardo Cicerchia, 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, a Man of Letters in Algeria,' *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 36:4 (2004), p. 667.

[14] Cicerchia, 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth,' p. 668.

[15] See particularly the case of Francis Hall as described in David Sowell (ed.), *Santander y la opinión angloamericana: visión de viajeros y periódicos 1821–1840* (Bogotá, 1991), pp. xiv–xvii, and

American society, marrying local women, working in new professions or living off military pensions in rural areas.[16] These people – the vast majority of British travellers to South America in this period – were as much missionaries of capitalism as they were missionaries of Protestantism, which is to say, not at all. Richard Vowell was one such adventurer through these 'contact zones'.

Since the publication of *Imperial Eyes* several scholars have pushed the debate on from travellers and travel writing in order to use the concept of the 'contact zone' as a means of 'meeting the postmodern challenge'.[17] Gilbert Joseph argues that 'contact zones are not geographic places with stable significations; they may represent attempts at hegemony, but are simultaneously sites of multivocality; of negotiation, borrowing, and exchange; and of redeployment and reversal'.[18] In the same sense Mimi Scheller has written convincingly of the Caribbean as one big 'contact zone' over five centuries.[19] Scheller stresses the nineteenth-century development of travel literature about the Caribbean written 'specifically by tourists for the tourist market (rather than by someone framed as an explorer, adventurer, or naturalist). While occasionally dipping into history or social commentary, such works are generally aimed at describing the experience of travel in and of itself, with no wider intellectual motive and no explicit political purpose'.[20]

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the highpoint of the era of Romantic Travel.[21] Travel and its literature moved away from their focus on commerce, pilgrimage and empire, and Romantic Travellers sought out beauty, history, and experience across Europe and in the colonial world. The Grand Tour of Europe reached its apogee. Those British travellers who reached Hispanic America carried on many of the themes of travel elsewhere. They sought out opportunities for business. They climbed mountains, descended rivers and looked out over vast interior plains. They constantly contrasted the New World with their experiences in the Old, or in areas of the British empire they had visited before reaching Hispanic America. Many

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Diego Pérez Ordóñez, *El Quiteño Libre: el más espectacular periódico de oposición de la República* (Quito, 1999).

[16] See Matthew Brown, 'Impious Adventurers? Mercenaries, Honour and Patriotism in the Wars of Independence in Gran Colombia,' unpubl. PhD diss., University of London, 2004.

[17] Gilbert Joseph, 'Close Encounters: Toward a New Cultural History of US–Latin American Relations,' in Joseph, Ricardo Salvatore and Catherine Legrand (eds.), *Close Encounters: Toward a New Cultural History of US-Latin American Relations* (Durham, NC, 1998), pp. 4–5; see also Ricardo Salvatore, 'North American Travel Narratives and the Ordering/Othering of South America,' *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 9 (1996), pp. 85–110. For a late-twentieth-century perspective on these issues in the contemporary world see Raminder Kaur and John Huytnyk (eds.), *Travel Worlds: Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (London, 1999).

[18] Joseph, 'Close Encounters,' p. 5.

[19] Mimi Scheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London, 2003), p. 42.

[20] Scheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, p. 60.

[21] Amanda Gilroy (ed.), *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775–1844* (Manchester, 2000).

of the memoirs published about travel in Hispanic America in the period 1810–1835 dedicated a central position to these themes as they interpreted the continent for a stay-at-home readership. Many concentrated their attention solely on nature and its manifestations.[22] As Pratt wrote, they 'saw and knew'.[23] In Cicerchia's words,

> as a genre, travel accounts condense the crucial components of nineteenth-century modernity: science, subjectivity and historical memory. They provide the rationale for the emancipatory process of secular thought in its instrumental and technological form. These accounts are the tools with which emergent national images were established.[24]

In Venezuela, as Elías Pino Iturrieta and Pedro Calzadilla show, this *mirada del otro* was an important mirror against which the newly-independent state and nation were judged.[25]

Combining the insights of these advances in the study of traveller-narrators, the analysis of the life and work of Richard Vowell can be seen as part of a larger 'history of the foreign-local encounter' in Latin America and the Caribbean, in the sense that it emphasises the 'shaping power that local milieus exercised on foreign actors, ideas, institutions and commodities'.[26] Vowell seems to be a prime example of the 'cultural venturesomeness'[27] of some foreign travellers who did 'open themselves up' to local influences in 'contact zones' rather than asserting their seeing and knowing imperial eyes over the landscape. Vowell represents but one example of the variety of responses to the contact zone by the wide diversity of travellers who reached this peripheral area of British imperial activity in the first half of the nineteenth century.

2. *Richard Vowell: Bibliography*

Campaigns and Cruises in Venezuela and New Granada and the Pacific Ocean was published in three volumes in London in 1831. The first volume, referred to hereafter as *Campaigns and Cruises*, was Vowell's travel narrative. The three volumes were bound separately: the British Library has only the first volume. Volume 2 was *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, and Volume 3 was *The Savannas of Varinas*. In an 'Advertisement' attached to the first page of *Campaigns and Cruises*, the anonymous author claimed his work to be an 'unvarnished narrative' based only upon 'unquestionable sources', in contrast to the inventions and exaggerations of many other chroniclers. The author claimed

[22] As reflected in the selections of Pascual Venegas Filardo (ed.), *Viajeros a Venezuela en los siglos XIX* (Caracas, 1973).
[23] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 136.
[24] Cicerchia, 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth,' p. 666.
[25] Elías Pino Iturrieta and Pedro Calzadilla (eds.), *La mirada del otro: viajeros extranjeros en la Venezuela del siglo XIX* (Caracas, 1996).
[26] Joseph, 'Close Encounters,' p. 17.
[27] Joseph, 'Close Encounters,' p. 20.

that 'no single individual, as far as he is aware, has traversed the country [Hispanic America] to such an extent, nor resided in it for so long a period, and in such eventful times'.[28]

A French translation was published in Paris in 1837.[29] The first Spanish translation was published in Madrid in 1916 with a prologue by the Venezuelan author and scholar Rufino Blanco de Fombona. He followed the author's own judgment, noting that Vowell was the ideal impartial witness, 'incapable of passing judgement or synthesising the characters of men he lived alongside'.[30] His descriptions of other officers were 'cold, distant, severe, sincere, just as he saw them and as far as he could understand them'. The author was 'modest and balanced … [and] his narrative cannot be accused of impartiality' like other foreign chroniclers such as William Miller or Charles Stuart Cochrane.[31] Nevertheless, while the memoirs written by prestigious and influential generals like Miller and Daniel O'Leary were comparatively widely read in Hispanic America in the nineteenth century, Vowell's writings were neglected until they were resuscitated by bibliophiles from the early twentieth century.[32] New editions of all three of his volumes were published in the 1970s. None have ever been reprinted in English. The esteem in which Vowell was increasingly held in Venezuela was explained in 1952 by Juan Uslar Pietri describing it as an '*Odisea por Tierra Firme*', a lyrical and 'heroic narrative that mixed beautiful legends and forgotten histories … uniting fact with fiction, fable with battle'.[33]

Despite Uslar Pietri's rhetoric, Vowell was still esteemed as one of the most impartial commentators on the Wars of Independence, and was correspondingly one of the sources most privileged by the principal mid-twentieth-century researchers who wrote the narrative histories of foreign involvement in the Wars of Independence: by Vicente Lecuna in his *Crónica razonada*, by Manuel Pérez Vila in his biography of Daniel O'Leary, and by Eric Lambert in his three-volume account of the British and Irish 'volunteers' who served in Bolívar's armies.[34] The only scholar to use Vowell for purposes other than fleshing out narratives of Bolívar's wars was Miguel Izard, who relied

[28] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, Advertisement.

[29] [Anon], *Campagnes et criosières dans les etats de Venézuéla et de la Nouvelle-Grenade; par un officeur du 1er Régiment de Lanciers Venézuéliens* (Paris, 1837).

[30] Rufino Blanco de Fombona, 'Prólogo,' in [Anon], *Memorias de un oficial británico: campañas y cruceros durante la guerra de emancipación hispano-americana*, translated by Luis de Terán (Madrid, 1916, republished Bogotá, 1974), p. 7.

[31] Blanco de Fombona, 'Prólogo', p. 9.

[32] John Miller (ed.), *Memoirs of General Miller in the service of the Republic of Peru* (London, 1829); Daniel O'Leary, *Bolívar and the War of Independence* (London, 1981).

[33] Juan Uslar Pietri, 'A manera de prólogo,' *Las Sabanas de Barinas*, 1952, reproduced in *Las Sabanas de Barinas* (Caracas, 1973).

[34] Vicente Lecuna, *Crónica razonada de las guerras de Bolívar: formada sobre documentos, sin utilizar consejas ni versiones impropias. Conclusiones de acuerdo con hechos probados, y la naturaleza de las cosas* (New York, 1950), especially pp. 313–20; Manuel Pérez Vila, *Vida de Daniel Florencio*

extensively on the novels for ethnographical detail on *llanero* culture.[35] The most comprehensive discussion of the book, by Carlos Pi Sunyer, concluded that *Campaigns and Cruises* was an 'authoritative and impartial' text.[36]

In 1918 Lecuna identified the figure of Captain William D. Mahony as the author of *Campaigns and Cruises*. His interpretation was quickly superseded by that of Luis Romero Zuloaga and José Toribio Medina, who in the early 1920s identified Richard L. Vowell as the author.[37] Zuloaga was apparently guided in his research by an unnamed 'foreign professor who he met in Caracas', who I would judge to be Alfred Hasbrouck.[38] The key piece in the jigsaw which allowed Zuloaga to identify Vowell with the author of *Campaigns and Cruises* was the narrative of another mercenary, George Laval Chesterton, who in 1853 published an autobiographical memoir of his time in Venezuela. Chesterton recalled the adventures of 'Captain Vowell', which he heard from the mouth of the protagonist, in being the sole survivor of the massacre of his unit after the battle of Semén.[39] The same incident formed the centrepiece of *Campaigns and Cruises*.

The ninety years that passed between publication in 1831 and a positive identification of the author (a delay caused by the fact that Chesterton's narrative was never translated into Spanish) meant that much mystery and confusion was allowed to settle around the book's authorship. Subsequently, since identification, many various spellings of Vowell's surname in library catalogues and bibliographies have not helped the matter.[40] The author of *Campaigns and Cruises* is listed as 'Vawell' or 'Wovell' almost as often as 'Vowell'. Similarly, Vowell's middle name was generally thought to be 'Longueville' until the research of Carlos Pi Sunyer convincingly showed

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O'Leary: edecán de Bolívar (Caracas, 1957); Eric Lambert, *Voluntarios británicos e irlandeses en la gesta bolivariana*, 3 vols. (Caracas, vol. I 1983, vols. II–III 1990).

[35] Miguel Izard, 'Ni cuatreros ni montoneros, llaneros,' *Boletín Americanista*, 23 (1981) pp. 88–118. Vowell is also an important source for the interesting addition to this literature, Adolfo Rodriguez, 'La Independencia en los llanos como guerra étnica,' *Boletín de la academia nacional de la historia de Venezuela*, vol. 72, no. 326 (April–June 1999) p. 62.

[36] Carlos Pi Sunyer, *Patriotas americanos en Londres* (Caracas, 1978), p. 346.

[37] Luis Romero Zuloaga, *El Universal*, 24 July 1921; also *Boletín de la Biblioteca Nacional* [Caracas] 1 (1925), p. 163; José Toribio Medina, *Bibliographical Essays: A Tribute to Wilberforce Eames*, 1924, pp. 81–4.

[38] Hasbrouck published *Foreign Legionaries in the Liberation of Spanish South America* (New Haven, 1928) after several years of research in Caracas and Bogotá. On Zuloaga see Juan Uslar Pietri, 'A manera de prólogo', in Richard Vawell [sic], *Las sabanas de Barinas* (Caracas, 1973), p. xxii.

[39] George Laval Chesterton, *Peace, War and Adventure: An Autobiographical Memoir* (London, 1853), vol. II, p. 140.

[40] Lecuna, in *Cultura venezolana* (June 1918), pp. 84–5. The catalogue of the Fundación John Boulton library, presumably compiled by Manuel Pérez Vila, lists the author of *Campaigns and Cruises* as William J. Mahony.

it to have been Longfield.[41] Other texts diverge from the convention of naming the author as 'Vowell'.[42] The confusion was grounded in the difficulties of contemporary military clerks who had to transcribe a surname that was entirely foreign to them. Archival documents reveal non-English-speakers listing him as Ricardo (and sometimes Roberto) 'Vole', 'Biold', or 'Woule'.[43]

Collecting all the sources and interpretations together, there is no reason to doubt the identification of Richard Longfield Vowell with the authorship of the three volumes of *Campaigns and Cruises*. By extracting Vowell from the neglect and mystery in which he has been submerged, his historical and literary works can be subjected to the light of consideration and analysis.

3. *The historical figure of Richard Vowell*

Despite the efforts of researchers, aside from his time in Hispanic America, the life of Richard Vowell has largely escaped the historical record. According to Pi Sunyer, Vowell was born on 24 July 1795 in Bath, England, and was orphaned at an early age.[44] (Eric Lambert had Vowell born in Co. Cork in Ireland.)[45] It is not known where he went or what he did after publishing his three volumes of reflections on his adventures. The preface was written in Bath in 1831. Pérez Vila assumed that Vowell died in Bath around 1837. Tantalisingly, internet research suggests that a Richard L. Vowell was a convict in New South Wales, Australia, in 1835.[46]

According to Chesterton, Vowell was studying at Wadham College at the University of Oxford in 1815 when he inherited some money, relinquished (or was expelled from) his studies and 'infected by a prevailing mania, resolved to bear arms for the emancipation of Venezuela'.[47] He crossed the Atlantic aboard the ship the 'Two Friends'. The ship arrived at the Danish island of St. Thomas in the Caribbean in mid-1817. When the expedition broke up without leadership Vowell joined a group seeking to reach Gregor

[41] Carlos Pi Sunyer, *Patriotas americanos en Londres*, pp. 375–83.

[42] For example Pilar Moreno *Santander* (Bogotá, 1989), pp. 186–7, or Carlos García Arrieche, 'La legión británica en la emancipación de Venezuela y Colombia,' *Boletín histórico*, 27 (1971) pp. 346–95.

[43] In addition to sources cited elsewhere in this paper see Archivo Central del Cauca (ACC), Popayán, Colombia, Sala Independencia, M1-2-ad, Sig.1026.

[44] Pi Sunyer, *Patriotas americanos*, p. 346. For a good summary see Manuel Pérez Vila, 'Richard Longfield Vowell,' in *Diccionario de la historia de Venezuela*, CD-Rom, 2000, Fundación Polar.

[45] Lambert, 'Irish Soldiers in South America 1818–1830 (Illustrated),' *Irish Sword*, vol. 16, no. 62 (1984) p. 28.

[46] List of convicts mentioned in the *Sydney Herald*, 1835, at www.hotkey.net.au/~jwilliams4/s35cons.htm on 20 January 2005.

[47] Chesterton, *Peace, War and Adventure*, pp. 140–3.

MacGregor on Amelia Island.[48] When this journey was also unsuccessful he set off to join Bolívar on the mainland. His service in the Independents' army was undistinguished during late 1817 and early 1818. Vowell noted that as he had no time to accustom himself to the new style of horse-riding in Venezuela, his mistakes and discomforts caused 'great disorder [in] the ranks and the undisguised merriment of the llaneros'.[49]

After the battle of Semén (16 March 1818) Vowell was separated from his unit, the Barloventos, which was 'composed entirely of free negroes from Cumaná'.[50] When his colleagues fled Vowell could not follow because of his 'heavy boots'. He claimed to have lain down and pretended to be dead until the action was over. Chesterton's later account described Vowell resting under a bush when his unit was unexpectedly attacked and everyone else was killed. It was this separation from the rest of the foreign soldiers that defined Vowell's experience in South America. He was sheltered by an old Indian who, on hearing Vowell's imperfect Spanish, 'readily comprehend[ed] that I was one of the English who they had heard were with Bolívar'.[51] In order to avoid endangering his protectors he left and scavenged in woods and plantations while attempting to rejoin the Independents' army. During this period as an 'outlaw' he met many picaresque characters and eventually enlisted in a guerrilla band led by Bicentico Hurtado. This experience on the *llanos* provided much of the material for Vowell's anecdotes, ethnographic description and the eventual plots of his novels.

The next period of his life is less certain. *Campaigns and Cruises* records the crossing of the Páramo de Pisba under James Rooke leading to the occupation of Bogotá after victory at Boyacá on 7 August 1819.[52] Archival documents held in Caracas record Vowell serving in Angostura from September 1818 to November 1819, serving under Colonel James Rooke and then under Colonel John Farrar once Rooke had departed with Bolívar.[53] Being in Angostura would mean that Vowell could not have served on the crossing of the Páramo de Pisba, which he described at length in *Campaigns and Cruises*. He was probably delayed by illness and arrived in Bogotá in early 1820, but included the account of the famous crossing of the cordillera as told to him by his many friends and colleagues who made the trip.

From Bogotá Vowell joined the Albion Battalion with the rank of *mayor de brigada* and travelled south to Popayán.[54] Between January and February 1821

[48] For MacGregor's relationship to these events see Matthew Brown, 'Inca, Sailor, Soldier, King: Gregor MacGregor and the early nineteenth-century Caribbean,' *BLAR*, 24:1 (2005), pp. 44–71.

[49] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 61.

[50] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 87.

[51] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 90.

[52] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 159.

[53] Archivo General de la Nación, Venezuela (AGNV), Gobernación de Guayana, vol. 8, ff. 97–8.

[54] Archivo General de la Nación, Colombia (AGNC), Sección La República, Secretario de Guerra y Marina, vol. 778, f. 256.

he was in hospital in Cali (recorded as 'Ricardo Biold'), another illness unmentioned in his narrative.[55] There he served on the court martial and witnessed the frequent recourse to lottery to decide which condemned prisoners would escape death – apparently a favourite pastime of General Manuel Valdés.[56] He then served in Cali in Sucre's Batallón de Santander, whose soldiers were chiefly black recruits and whose officers were principally whites, including several Britons.

Continuing south to Ecuador, Vowell began a naval career that took him to Acapulco and Baja California, Valparaiso, Valdivia, and Callao. He took part in the defeat of the Royalist garrison at Chiloe in 1826. His subsequent service was principally in Chile in the late 1820s. As the region moved into increased conflict, Vowell observed that

> When a country is thus agitated by civil war, prudence appears to dictate to all foreigners the propriety of withdrawing from the struggle, more especially if they have entered the service of that country, at a time when it was united to oppose a common enemy, and with an expressed or implied understanding, that they were to serve against him alone.[57]

The old certainties of the Wars of Independence had disappeared to be replaced by the complexities of internecine quarrels and regional disputes. For the foreigner, 'no war of factions, except in his own country, can or ought to interest a man sufficiently (setting mercenary motives aside) to afford him a plausible excuse, even to himself, for continuing his services as a partisan'.[58] It was for this reason that he took leave of absence to visit Europe in November 1829 and arrived in Portsmouth in spring 1830. He took just over a year to publish his notes.

4. *Vowell's eyes: observing a society in conflict*

In the 'Advertisement' attached to the beginning of *Campaigns and Cruises*, Vowell appeared to be marked by this experience of factionalism as he expressed a desire to remain free of partisan loyalties in his writings. In contrast to the inventions and exaggerations of many of his contemporaries, Vowell could provide an 'unvarnished narrative' based only upon 'unquestionable sources'. He asserted that 'the authenticity of these particulars may be relied on; for the writer has related such facts only as he can vouch for from his personal knowledge, or has derived from unquestionable sources of information, in the countries through which he travelled'.[59] Vowell claimed that 'no single

[55] ACC, Sala Independencia, M1-6-p, Sig.1160.
[56] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 211.
[57] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 457.
[58] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 458.
[59] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, Advertisement.

individual, as far as he is aware, has traversed the country to such an extent, nor resided in it for so long a period, and in such eventful times'.[60]

Of the many incidents described in *Campaigns and Cruises*, the case of the death of Colonel Donald MacDonald exemplifies why Vowell has long been taken to be one of the most reliable commentators on the Wars of Independence, often stripping away the veneer of objectivity and impartiality claimed by other chroniclers.[61] On his way to South America in 1817, Donald MacDonald was shipwrecked and survived the mutiny of the crew of his ship the 'Two Friends', on which Vowell was a (loyal) passenger. Upon eventually arriving at Angostura (now Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela) with the remnants of his men, he died on his way to meet Simón Bolívar in early 1818. A young black sailor was the only survivor of an attack on MacDonald's boat by 'river pirates' on the Orinoco. None of the several chroniclers of the events inferred that the testimony of this survivor was unreliable, either because of his age or colour. But the subsequent additions and alterations they made to the story imply that they did hold such reservations. For example, Gustavus Hippisley speculated that MacDonald was killed by Indians on the riverside because a local cacique was jealous at the attention that female Indians were showing to foreigners.[62] Other commentators blamed MacDonald's 'most vain' dress, saying that it was this extravagance that had excited the Indians' avarice.[63]

The danger of the unknown environment was an undercurrent to all of the versions of MacDonald's death, but some adventurers such as James Robinson saw local 'savage barbarity' as explanation enough.[64] Others embellished the story of MacDonald's death to fit their own understandings of the hostile environment. Indians on the shore were said to have made duplicitous signs, pretending to welcome MacDonald while secretly planning his death.[65] All this is consistent with what Linda Colley has identified as 'the pornography of real or invented Indian violence' in accounts of North American colonial encounters, which were inserted into captivity narratives

[60] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, Advertisement.
[61] Vowell's account appears in *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 49.
[62] Hippisley, *Narrative of the Expedition*, pp. 245–6.
[63] [Anon], *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main in the ship 'Two Friends'*, p. 14; Brown, *Narrative of the Expedition to South America*, p. 19. Based on these sources, Hasbrouck blamed 'MacDonald's incorrigible vanity'. Hasbrouck, *Foreign Legionaries*, p. 163. Hasbrouck based his interpretation on selective readings of Hippisley and Vowell. Carlos García Arrieche, selectively following Lecuna who had selectively followed Vowell, also blamed the flamboyant uniforms. García Arrieche, 'La legión británica,' p. 355.
[64] Robinson, *Journal of an Expedition*, p. 147, pp. 205–30.
[65] For example, Brown, *Narrative of the Expedition to South America*, p. 98. Throughout his narrative Brown used the civilisation–savagery dichotomy more familiar to historians of later nineteenth-century Latin American history as 'civilisation–barbarism'. He repeatedly referred to 'uncivilised natives' (p. 37, p. 149) and 'savage Indians' (p. 48, p. 149). The 'civilisation' against which he contrasted them was epitomised by his own person.

'in part because such lurid passages attracted readers even as they allowed them to feel properly repelled'.[66] Just like Rómulo Gallegos a century later in *Doña Bárbara*, chroniclers like Robinson described the Venezuelan interior as a ferocious landscape, within which MacDonald's death was situated and hence explained.[67] Later chroniclers went further, exaggerating the story so that MacDonald had now been murdered by 'tribes on the banks of the water, quite wild [who] will destroy any white man they lay hold of', triggered by a dispute over a woman.[68] Indigenous populations were 'othered' by imperial adventurers seeking to enhance their own honour at the expense of local people. But such violence was rare. Archival research verified the capture or death at the hands of indigenous groups, of no more than one dozen foreign adventurers during the Wars of Independence in Gran Colombia out of a total of 3,013 on a database (6,800 foreign mercenaries served in Bolívar's armed forces during the period 1811–1826).[69] Rare stories such as that of MacDonald's death, and the attacks on the Irish Legion in the Goajira Peninsula, served to reinforce pre-existing conceptions and stereotypes about the Indian 'races'.[70]

Vowell, however, was more circumspect on the subject. In marked contrast to the other chroniclers he related MacDonald's death as he heard it from the principal witness 'who managed to swim to the riverside even with four arrows in his side'. Vowell commented that 'when he told us about the arrows' he and his colleagues suspected that hostile Indians must have been responsible. He had to discount this theory when they shortly afterwards received news that MacDonald's sword 'marked Gill & Co.' had been recovered from a band of 'river pirates' allied to the Royalist cause.[71] Vowell was not interested in describing antagonistic or violent Indians for the sake of it. He attempted to relate South American reality as he saw it and as he heard it from local people. Having dealt with the story of MacDonald's death in just a page, he turned with little ado to a discussion of the 'numerable birds' found on the river side.

Another instance where Vowell's presentation of Hispanic American societies diverged from those of most of his contemporaries was with regard to the interpretation of gambling in the armed forces. The standard interpretation, as set out in an anonymous letter to a Dublin newspaper in

[66] Colley, *Captives*, p. 177.
[67] Rómulo Gallegos, *Doña Bárbara* (Caracas, 1929) is the classic fictionalised discussion of the civilisation–barbarism paradox in Venezuela.
[68] D. G. Egan to Anon, 20 May 1820, reproduced in *Dublin Evening Post*, 29 July 1820.
[69] The statistical basis for this, and other conclusions drawn from the database, can be found in Brown, 'Impious Adventurers?,' Chapter 2.
[70] See Matthew Brown, 'Rebellion at Riohacha,' unpubl. paper.
[71] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 49.

1819, was that 'society [in Venezuela] is in a most degraded state … There appears to be no distinction of rank: a general is often seen gambling at the same table with one of his common soldiers, on terms of perfect equality. Many negroes hold commissions in the army'.[72] According to this writer, the equality of the gaming table was decidedly dangerous, and directly related to the spectre of black men holding positions of responsibility in the armed forces and hence, *pardocracia*.[73] It was not gambling itself that British commentators criticised when they saw Creoles playing – it was the equality it embodied between different social groups who ought to be at opposite ends of the social and racial hierarchy.[74] By contrast, in his description of an Independent guerrilla force at Ortiz on the river Apure, Vowell was less critical of the routine of 'constant gambling and drinking *aguardiente*'.[75] He recognised that in a society that was undergoing wholesale military mobilisation across caste and class lines such temporary egalitarianism was not only inevitable but also necessary to maintaining morale and discipline.[76]

Vowell's reputation as a faithful and considerate witness to the Wars of Independence is well-deserved. Yet Vowell's rendering of the crossing of the Páramo de Pisba in the first person plural must cast some doubt on the impartiality and veracity of his accounts of other aspects of the Wars of Independence. In the case of his novels, Vowell admitted in a preface that because his material was so 'copious', and fearful of 'bestowing all his tediousness' upon his readers, he decided to insert his 'stray anecdotes and waste sketches of scenery and manners' into two novels, annexed together as *Tales of Venezuela*. His understanding of the nature of post-war conflict, gained over thirteen years spent in South America, informed both of his fictions, *Savannahs of Varinas* and *The Earthquake of Caraccas*. The fact that Vowell openly admitted to having cobbled together his spare sketches and anecdotes into the structure of a novel only serves to reveal his thinking and workings about a Hispanic America which he had little interest in colonising or conquering.

[72] *Carrick's Morning Post*, 17 December 1819.

[73] On the widely-held fear of majority-black rule, or *pardocracia*, among white military officers see Aline Helg, 'Simón Bolívar and the Spectre of *Pardocracia*: José Padilla in Post-Independence Cartagena,' *JLAS*, vol. 35, no. 3 (August 2003) pp. 447–71.

[74] See also C. S. Cochrane, *Journal of a Residence and Travels in Colombia*, p. 220; [Anon] *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main*, p. 116; and Alfred Tischendorff and E. Taylor Parks (eds.), *The Diary and Journal of Richard Clough Anderson Jr., 1814–1826* (Durham, NC, 1964), p. 148, p. 224, p. 230, p. 251, p. 265; Hamilton, *Travels Through the Interior Provinces of Colombia*, vol. II, pp. 18, 61; [Cowley], *Recollections of a Service of Three Years*, p. 242.

[75] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 101.

[76] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 75.

5. *Fictions of Venezuela*

Richard Vowell's perspective as a writer of fiction was a little different from that of the traveller-narrators, as studied by Pratt and Franco. While he did not escape the influence of Alexander von Humboldt he developed a different style from his many mercenary colleagues who went into print before his own return to Britain.[77] As in the case of his travel writing, Vowell's novels were closely linked to his actual experiences in South America. Nevertheless, unlike some of the writers often taken to be typical of the British traveller in South America, they display no clear 'sense of moral purpose [as] missionaries of capitalism whose aim was nothing less than the informal colonisation of the continent'.[78] Vowell chose to publish his semi-fictional musings in order to pass on to his readers some deeper understanding of the significance of the events that he had been involved in.

Vowell was by no means unique in taking this approach. A Trinidadian author, E. L. Joseph, undertook a similar project in the 1830s. He openly admitted that he had turned to fiction because the historical genre was insufficient for his aims. Having originally intended 'to write a history of the War of the Independence of Colombia, México, Peru, Chili and Buenos Ayres … [Joseph came up against] the paucity of materials' which meant that in order to write a 'history' he would have to

> visit all the principal cities on the great South American continent; in order to inspect such few scattered records as were preserved during this most sanguinary civil war, and to consult with all the surviving chiefs who figured in the contest, whether living in the New World or in Europe. To do this required leisure and a fortune, neither of which I possessed. Hence, I was obliged to abandon my project – certainly for the present, probably for ever.[79]

If all potential historians of Hispanic American Independence who found themselves deprived of leisure and fortune were to turn to fiction instead, there would certainly be a boom in the writing of historical novels. But this was the explanation given by Joseph for inventing the fictional character of Warner Arundell in order to tell the story of Independence through fiction. Probably based on a composite of several adventurers encountered by Joseph, Arundell recalled many of their experiences, disputes and achievements. This perspective gave Joseph the licence to indulge in lengthy anecdotes, descriptions of contemporary figures and picaresque digressions, and to mould events in South America into a form that diverged from the norms

[77] For the profound influence of Humboldt's writing, see for example M. Deas and R. A. McNeil (eds.), *Europeans in Latin America from Humboldt to Hudson* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 1–23, and Jason Wilson's introduction to Alexander Von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of a Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent* (London, 1995), pp. i–xxxiv.

[78] Franco, 'Not-So-Romantic Journey,' pp. 133–4.

[79] Joseph, *Warner Arundell*, p. viii.

of travel writing or history. Largely dispensing with the focus on distances, battles, strategy, and opportunities for commerce (as preferred by many of the adventurer-writers), Joseph's fictional rendering focused on character, drama, and anecdotes amidst a wider tale about a quest for identity.

A similar method was used by John Howell, the Edinburgh-based inventor of a flying machine, a submarine, and various articles of bookbinding equipment, who claimed to have edited 'over four thousand pages' of manuscript notes submitted to him by Alexander Alexander, a retired and poverty-stricken mercenary. Like Warner Arundell, Alexander Alexander had a difficult upbringing, and was ostracised by his father. The journey to the New World was, for Alexander like so many others, a quest for a new life and new identity. The two volumes that Howell produced, *The Life of Alexander Alexander*, were formed by a wide-ranging account of adventure and despair that took its narrator from the East to the West Indies before his return home to Scotland.[80] The romance of the story as told suggests that Howell used his artistic licence in rendering Alexander's original notes. Yet Alexander's lengthy reflections on national and racial stereotypes, and his scathing criticisms of the class divisions in armed forces across the globe, firmly situated his involvement in the Wars of Independence within the transatlantic networks and varied experiences of his life. His anecdotal style and disregard for the conventions of travel writing and historical narrative position him, alongside Joseph and Vowell, as part of a triumvirate of writers – an alternative canon, if you like, of adventurers, flaneurs and vagabonds-turned-writers – who complement the 'imperial eyes' of the 'capitalist vanguard' thesis discussed by Franco and Pratt based on their predominantly commercial sources.

One recurrent theme that Vowell's writings shared with *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* and *The Life of Alexander Alexander* was the role of adventure as a means of asserting honour and negotiating new identities. Vowell witnessed at first hand the 'heightened sensitivity over character and reputation' that was rife amongst adventurers.[81] He observed that such behaviour was particularly the case for the mercenaries who were joining a

[80] John Howell (ed.), *The Life of Alexander Alexander, written by himself and edited by John Howell*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1830). Alexander's discharge papers (1814) from the British Army can be found in The National Archives (TNA) WO 97/1210/117. John Howell also worked on *The Life and Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner* (republished London, 2000, edited by Tim Flanney). According to Flanney, 'Howell's method seems to have consisted of befriending old soldiers and sailors, then spending months writing down or editing their life stories' (p. 4). *The Life of Alexander Alexander* is found today in only a few libraries, and its Spanish translation, *La vida de Alexander Alexander, escrita por el mismo*, ed. Jaime Tello (Caracas, 1975), contains only the segments perceived as being directly relevant to the process of Independence in Venezuela.

[81] Brumwell, *Redcoats*, pp. 88–9; Holmes, *Redcoat*, pp. 284–8.

cause where patriotism or nationalism was not a motivating factor for many of the rank-and-file. Vowell explained the constant duelling he encountered as one of 'many melo-dramas' in which 'inexperienced, hot-headed youths who now, for the first time, wrote themselves men'.[82]

Because Joseph, Vowell and Alexander were all present on the West Indian islands and probably Angostura in the years 1817–1819, and they based much of their work on the news and rumour networks of the mobile mercenaries themselves, it is distinctly possible (but probably unverifiable) that the three would-be authors came into contact with each other at some stage. More importantly, the foreign origins of these authors meant that their fictional works have been ignored by conventional studies of post-Independence Hispanic American literature.[83] A consideration of the changing ways that foreign authors – in this case, Vowell – who had lived in the continent went on to fictionalise Hispanic America in this period may prove useful for comparison with the ways that Hispanic American nineteenth-century writers set about their 'national project'. Foreigners and Hispanic Americans alike, 'by fictionalising history … were also interpreting it in the new light of Independence'.[84]

Soldiers of Venezuela

The test case for the subsequent examination of Vowell's fictions is *Soldiers of Venezuela: A Tale* (1818).[85] With this publication date, and the circumstantial evidence provided by analysis of the narrative, it seems certain that the anonymous author of *Soldiers of Venezuela* (entered in one library catalogue as Mr A. Tale) did not travel to South America.[86] Instead, the novel was written to capitalise on the popularity of the Independent cause in this period, when the very first groups of adventurers were recruited. On this basis it is an ideal point of comparison for Vowell's fictions. *Soldiers of Venezuela* followed the career of a fictional English officer, 'gallant, energetic, Eugene Bouverie',

[82] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 3.

[83] The standard account is Franco, *Spanish American Literature since Independence* (London and New York, 1973).

[84] Franco, *Spanish American Literature since Independence*, p. 56. While in this article I focus on the case of Richard Vowell, both Joseph and Alexander feature as part of my wider research project on European adventurers in Latin America in 1800–50.

[85] [Anon], *The Soldiers of Venezuela: A Tale, in Two Volumes* (London, 1818). Here I am presuming that the anonymous author of *Soldiers of Venezuela* was not Hispanic American.

[86] As far as I am aware, the only two libraries to hold a copy in the UK are the Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections, SD810, and Sheffield Hallam University Library, Corvey Collection. D. A. G. Waddell reproduced a short section of *Soldiers of Venezuela* in his 'Los británicos y la política británica frente a Bolívar,' in Filippi (ed.), *Bolívar y Europa*, vol. II, pp. 32–3. Luis López Méndez sent Bolívar a copy in 1818, according to the undated accompanying letter reproduced in Street and Pérez Vila, 'El aporte británico,' f. 128.

who joined the Independent army and became 'trusted by Bolivar, loved by his comrades, and dreaded by the royalists'.[87] After performing several heroic feats, Bouverie fell in love and returned to England to live happily ever after. A principal concern of the text was to show that, despite leaving England for South America, Bouverie's patriotism was not diminished. His nostalgia for home was often expressed.[88] Before the protagonist's departure for Venezuela he returned to his 'native hills', where he was able to 'inhale new life' and revitalise his 'youth's energies'.[89] His patriotism was grounded in the natural environment in the manner of the classic Walter Scott hero that the author clearly intended him to be.

Anxious not to be an 'idle voyager on the vast ocean of life', Bouverie's travels were said to present him with the opportunity to prove 'his manhood, that would enable him to stand forth the protector, and the friend of his sisters; the shield, the solace of his mother; and the advocate of the oppressed, wherever suffering humanity might groan'.[90] The Hispanic American Wars of Independence were presented in *Soldiers of Venezuela* as a 'very fair field for exertion', an ideal proving ground for Englishmen, and a place where those who had lost wealth or honour could regain it.[91]

Bouverie did not expect to be condemned to a 'long and painful exile' in Hispanic America, as he would in a more conventional colonial destination like India, and he hoped instead to soon be home with renewed glory and honour.[92] His mother's response revealed the perceived distance between London and Hispanic America both for her, and for the (non-travelling) author behind her words:

> Oh! my son, when you are exiled beyond the western ocean, when the sun that gilds your morn leaves his evening beams on yonder hill – when months must revolve 'ere a line from you can cheer my lonely life – these, Eugene, these are harrowing anticipations, and I sink beneath their weight. Imagination will be gloomily exercised in beholding you sick, wounded, shipwrecked or a captive! Deprived of every tender care, exposed to all the dangers and difficulties of hostile operations in another quarter of the globe. Perhaps, without a friend to cheer, or a voice to whisper consolation. Oh! my son, reflect yet again 'ere you embark in a service so replete with dangers and with difficulties'.[93]

[87] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 1.
[88] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 3.
[89] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. I, p. 144. For a discussion of how Walter Scott's novels created a prototype for the chivalric British hero in this period, see Girouard, *The Return to Camelot*, pp. 29–38.
[90] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. I, pp. 3, 50.
[91] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. I, pp. 128, 89.
[92] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. I, p. 189.
[93] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. I, p. 193. When Bouverie finally left his family at Portsmouth, 'this moment of separation was among the bitterest that either Mrs Bouverie or her children had ever experienced. The manly heart throbbed even to convulsion; while the utmost fortitude that female bosoms could command was replete with every feeling that affection, regret, and agony could combine. Language was denied to all; but the expressive looks of each spoke volumes'. *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. I, p. 254.

Before Bouverie actually left England, the author inserted a long digression on the merits of domestic life and female companionship. Bouverie was repeatedly reminded that 'the most endearing and felicitous hours of a good man's life are given to his home'.[94] His expedition to South America was presented as a short-term adventure, from which he could return manlier, more experienced and more honourable, and therefore better able to retire to domestic life.

It was only at the start of the second volume that Bouverie finally looked back upon 'the white cliffs of Albion'.[95] As his protagonist left England, the author embarked on another lengthy prelude, situating still-distant South America within a context of conventional legends such as the terrestrial Paradise.[96] The manliness of voluntary enlistment in someone else's war was emphasised. The wife of one volunteer was given the following speech to praise her husband's participation in the expedition:

> If he can aid the cause of liberty, or contribute to the happiness of the human race by submitting to the evil of a temporary separation from me, rejoice in being the wife of a man whose courage cannot degenerate into tameness, nor the lion-heart of valour contract itself to the dimensions of mere domestication.[97]

Explicitly then, *Soldiers of Venezuela* presented adventuring in South America as a necessary preliminary to the kind of manly domesticity described by John Tosh as increasingly prevalent in nineteenth-century England.[98] A man not capable of such adventuring was described as a 'disgrace to manhood'.[99] South America was thus an ideal location for a rite of passage entailing physical exertion, dominance of nature and of other social actors, which could all provide entry into a world of 'heroic achievement'.[100]

Soldiers of Venezuela reflected the probable experience of its author, spending a disproportionate amount of time discussing the feelings and commentaries of those left behind in England (generally, mothers, lovers and friends) rather than the activities of those who left for Venezuela.[101] The novel included minimal description of events in Hispanic America. Whenever Venezuelans were mentioned, they tended to be hostile or threatening.[102] This perspective was also transliterated onto the faraway

[94] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. I, pp. 240–6.
[95] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 1.
[96] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 20.
[97] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 63.
[98] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London, 1999), pp. 108–11.
[99] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 87.
[100] Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain,' *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), p. 180.
[101] It would be possible, on this basis, to construct an argument that the anonymous author of *Soldiers of Venezuela* was a woman. The text contains no identifying details and the historical context does not immediately suggest a possible author.
[102] In this way the novel shared the attitude of Tory newspapers such as the *British Monitor* (formerly known as the *Anti-Gallician*) which published versions of the 'letters the Editor

travellers. Bouverie was described as 'philosophically examining, and attentively considering, the blessings dispensed to all lands, [and in doing so] he felt every tie strengthened that attached him to his own … [exclaiming] "what have we yet seen … that an Englishman need sigh for?" '[103] *Soldiers of Venezuela* showed little interest in the details of Independent campaigning and events were glossed over with reports of Bouverie setting 'the noblest example of personal bravery'.[104] The manly bearing of the adventurers was often demonstrated with regard to the care they took of the women accompanying them. When *Capitán* M'Andrew received a mortal wound on the battlefield, his last words were 'Caroline, my only love'. The narrator saw this as closing 'an honourable life by a heroic death' – very different from *Coronel* James Rooke's legendary death at the battle of Pantano de Vargas (one year after the publication of *Soldiers of Venezuela*) with '*Viva la patria*' on his lips.[105]

For Bouverie and other adventurers, Venezuela was presented as the land where they had gained individual honour through military exploits, and where 'the desire of further distinction had only yielded to a stronger and more rational passion. The impulse that first led to his exile had faded into oblivion'.[106] The urge for domesticated love was finally triumphant, but manly adventuring had been an essential obstacle, even a rite of passage, that first needed to be overcome. In *Soldiers of Venezuela*, Venezuela itself was a land where adventures were had and heroic lives lived – but integration into Venezuelan society was beyond the scope of these imperial eyes. Simón Bolívar appeared as a Prester John figure – aloof from his society, governing benignly and in accordance with the rules of honour – and he was the only South American who featured in the novel in any meaningful way.[107] There was no recognition of regional or social diversity. Venezuela was no more than a blank page upon which white male Europeans could prove their

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has seen' from adventurers, claiming that 'they thanked God every morning when they woke, because on retiring to bed at night they expect to be murdered by the natives – by those very persons whose cause they are defending, but who in fact would be glad to be rid of them'. *British Monitor*, 1 August 1819.

[103] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, pp. 117–19.

[104] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, pp. 130, 153.

[105] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 152. For Rooke see Matthew Brown, 'Soldier Heroes and the Colombian Wars of Independence,' *Hispanic Research Journal*, forthcoming 2006.

[106] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 258.

[107] Prester John was the mythical Christian King of the East, linked to the St Thomas shrine on the Indian subcontinent, who was unsuccessfully sought by generations of travellers (including Marco Polo) from the twelfth century. He was finally identified in the fifteenth century as the Christian King of Ethiopia, but the myth survived in popular travel literature such as the *Travels of John Mandeville*. In the twentieth century, he provided the central motif for John Buchan's novel *Prester John* (London, 1910) and the inspiration for much valuable scholarship on travel writing, for example Charles Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton (eds.), *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot, 1996).

manliness. As the narrator commented, until Eugene fell in love with the widow Caroline M'Andrew, 'every thing he found in the country to which he had removed [Venezuela] only tended to torture him with the remembrance of what he had left in his own'.[108] He had survived only because of 'the presence of one charming English woman in that distant soil'.[109]

In contrast to the author of *Soldiers of Venezuela*, Richard Vowell had an intimate knowledge of Hispanic America. His novels also presented Venezuela as a land where adventurous deeds could earn a brave man honour and glory, just like *Soldiers of Venezuela*. But the treatment of the background was much more sympathetic and engaging, and the heroes were Venezuelans, not imperial Britons. *The Earthquake of Caraccas* told a love story against the backdrop of the warfare associated with the First Venezuelan Republic (1810–1813). *The Savannas of Varinas* recounted a similar tale, although the action had moved on to the late 1810s, and the setting was now the Venezuelan *llanos* rather than the capital and coast, with regular ethnographic descriptions and picaresque episodes punctuating the central love story. What was different about them was that wide array of non-British characters was described as displaying great chivalry and honour both on and off the battle field.[110] A Colonel Bolívar was mentioned showing dashing bravery in battle. One of the novel's heroes, Carlos, was described as 'having the opportunity of signalising [his] knight-errantry' by rescuing his lover just before she took her vows to enter a convent (on her Loyalist father's instructions).[111] The people of the island of Margarita were held to have a 'reckless daring and love of adventure, added [to] a thorough hatred and contempt for the Spanish government'.[112] When describing the *llaneros*, Vowell used a quotation from Walter Scott to illustrate their bravery, strength and heroism.[113] The most notable example of this technique was Vowell's descriptions of José Antonio Páez, who was portrayed as more than just a brave military leader.[114] A leader who habitually led his men into battle, Páez was also depicted showing generosity and kindness to unfortunate Indians, and making sure that his men continued to show good humour despite their many privations.[115]

Where *Soldiers of Venezuela* neglected Venezuelan indigenous groups, Vowell noted how manly honour codes could even extend to the 'untaught

[108] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 282.
[109] *Soldiers of Venezuela*, vol. II, p. 282.
[110] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, pp. 65–6.
[111] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, p. 69.
[112] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, p. 282.
[113] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, epigram to Chapter 10, p. 108. Vowell did not mention which of Scott's work he had taken this quote from.
[114] In many ways this description prefigures that of R. B. Cunninghame Graham, *José Antonio Páez* (London, 1929).
[115] Vowell, *The Savannas of Varinas*, p. 159, pp. 204–5, pp. 217–9.

honour of the native tribes, and more especially by those which are commonly reputed least civilised' such as the Cachirí.[116] He went on to describe the Cachirí Indians as the most warrior-like and 'the most noble of all the Venezuelan tribes'. In *The Savannas of Varinas*, a guerrilla chief, Zaraza, explained how he had been surprised at the friendship and hospitality shown to him by the Indians of Cumaná, where he had been seriously injured in battle.[117] Generally, where there was criticism of Indians, it came out of the mouths of unsympathetic characters and Spaniards, not from an omniscient narrator.[118] At one point, a Creole character expressed his fear that his Cachirí Indian companions would abandon him in crossing the Páramo de Pisba, so as to steal his clothes.[119] But even such a comment was made in terms that were largely positive – the speaker noted that these Indians were individually independent, inventive, and therefore to be admired. *The Earthquake of Caraccas* also contained praise of the Cachirí Indians for their sincerity, honesty and knowledge. In the words of La Chinganera, an old Indian woman whom Carlos (a Creole) consulted when ill, 'no one trusts the word of an Indian, though even the wisest of you come to us immediately when you get fever or ulcers, to see if we can treat it'.[120] On a later occasion Don Beltrán's fever was described as worsening considerably when he stopped taking the treatment prescribed to him by an Indian doctor, and took the pills of a Creole doctor instead. Vowell described a picture of a functioning social hierarchy of masculinities, in which 'genuine Indians' looked down on the *gitanos* (gypsies) and compared *chinganeros* (travelling Indians) to monkeys.[121] Even lower were the dishonourable *rotos*, the criminals and cowards of which the Loyalist forces were supposed to be composed.[122] They completed Vowell's picture of Venezuelan society, one which was much more sympathetic to its diversity and complexity than any of the foreign chronicles.

This aspect of Vowell's writing is key to an understanding of his wider significance. It is not that he depicted a world where equality between men had been attained, or even where it should be an immediate aim for society. Far from it. Yet Vowell portrayed the Wars of Independence as presenting a proving-ground where men of all classes and castes and backgrounds could aspire towards an ideal form of masculinity. This ideal was not solely based on bravery in battle. It entailed generosity to the weak, friendship and

[116] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, p. 30.
[117] *The Savannas of Varinas*, pp. 243–5. This passage mirrors Vowell's own experiences as described in *Campaigns and Cruises*, pp. 100–5.
[118] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, p. 100, p. 49.
[119] *The Savannas of Varinas*, pp. 76–8. Later (p. 159) Vowell wrote that if a group of Creoles saw some Indians drowning, they 'would not have thought it worth while to pull an oar to save them'.
[120] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, pp. 136–7.
[121] *The Savannas of Varinas*, p. 163.
[122] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, p. 133–4.

solidarity towards strangers, independence of mind and means, and loyalty to the forces of good (in this case, represented by Bolívar's armies). Creoles such as Bolívar himself, or Páez or Sucre, were praised and elevated to the very top of this hierarchy. Those who lacked these qualities (such as Valdés with his lack of compassion, or the Royalist general Morillo) were treated with disdain. Race was a principal factor in determining these hierarchies. Black troops in Venezuela were 'perfectly fearless' although lacking in wit or strategy.[123] Black officers were 'these wild looking chiefs' who 'could not endure the severe heat as well as most of the English' even despite being 'quite black'.[124] Vowell drew distinctions between the different indigenous groups he encountered. Those men who were recruited into the army in Venezuela were 'timid and peaceful' but always keen to escape battle.[125] In Patia, in New Granada, the Indians were 'civilised' but 'enemies to the patriots'.[126] For all these groups, whether he complemented or denigrated them, Vowell saw military conflict as a proving ground for their masculinity, where reputations and honour could be won or lost. Women were often the reward of the successful soldier hero, as is made clear in the novels' endings, although *Campaigns and Cruises* has little to say about soldiers' relations with women on campaign.[127]

Vowell positioned himself in his novels as an impartial observer of the Wars of Independence and the individual stories within them, unlike the many partisan memoirs written by other adventurers. He adopted a neutral tone in *The Savannas of Varinas*, often quoting his characters directly.[128] Where in *Soldiers of Venezuela* locally-born characters were so silent as to be virtually anonymous throughout the text, in *The Savannas of Varinas*, whole chapters were presented as being told by the characters themselves. There were narratives spoken by a Loyalist Creole officer (Chapter 3), an Orinoco fisherman (Chapter 11), a freed slave hacienda worker (Chapter 18), and a guerrilla chief (Chapter 19). In this sense, perhaps, Vowell fits better into the category that Pratt associates with 'independent female travellers' such as Flora Tristán and Maria Graham, who 'seek out and exploit heteroglossia' rather 'in contrast with [the] monovocal, totalising forms of discursive authority' employed by most male commercial travel writers.[129] Rather than presenting Hispanic America as a list of itineraries, costs, physical obstacles and recalcitrant natives to be overcome by the adventuring all-seeing hero,

[123] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 87; *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, pp. 160–2.
[124] Vowell, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 67. [125] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[126] *Ibid.*, *Campaigns and Cruises*, p. 223.
[127] On the importance of relations with women to conceptions of masculinity in this period see Matthew Brown, 'Adventurers, Masculinity and Foreign Women in the Wars of Independence in Gran Colombia,' *Feminist Review* 79 (2005), pp. 35–51.
[128] See for example *The Savannas of Varinas*, pp. 115–22. [129] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 162.

Vowell employed a range of narrative voices and perspectives from diverse social and economic and caste backgrounds.

Nevertheless, in *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, each episode was placed within the context of European literature, beginning with an epigram in some way related to the story which followed. This inclination towards European literature was entirely in context with Creole writers of the period, who regularly prefaced their chapters with quotations from European writers.[130] The derivation of the quotes reveals Vowell's literary direction and aspirations. There were six from Shakespeare and six from Walter Scott, and four each from Thomas More and Lord Byron.[131] Vowell also attempted to give his fictions an air of authenticity by regularly leaving Spanish words untranslated. In this way, he continued to display the European erudition which he believed qualified him to describe events from a neutral distance. Vowell described some Spanish merchants as *merca-chifles*, and referred to an unnamed character as *Don Fulano de Tal*, the equivalent of the English 'Mr Bloggs'.[132]

Vowell's perspective on the Wars of Independence was therefore far removed from the simple moral of *Soldiers of Venezuela*, both in style and in politics. The anonymous author had argued that because of the superiority of his values, an Englishman's bravery, ambition and spirit would be rewarded in South America. This was perhaps in keeping with some of the rhetoric surrounding the recruitment of the expeditions in 1817. In contrast, Vowell's *The Earthquake in Caraccas* proposed that the rewards of adventure were haphazard and often dependent upon fate. In a cumbersome and unconvincing dénouement, Carlos, the principal character, reaped what he had sown. At a crucial moment, an Indian woman, to whom Carlos had regularly given alms in the street, appeared as if by magic to enable his escape from a Loyalist band.[133] The final chapter hurried along at great speed in an attempt to tie up several loose ends, until concluding in a conventional (arranged) marriage.[134] Rather than an exercise in demonstrating the superiority of English values, *The Earthquake of Caraccas* was a more complicated novel, much more interested in Venezuela and Venezuelans. It is impossible to know to what extent the author's experiences in Venezuela had changed his perceptions of distant lands, since we know little of Vowell's pre-Venezuela

[130] There is a fascinating contemporary transatlantic comparison to be made with Fermín Toro's *Los mártires* (Caracas, 1838), the Venezuelan's novel set in England.

[131] The Shakespeare plays referenced were *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Othello*, *Henry IV* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The Walter Scott works were *Marmion* (three times), *Lady of the Lake* (twice), and one unsourced quotation. The Byron poems were *Don Juan*, *The Siege of Corinth*, *Beppo* and *The Corsair*.

[132] *The Earthquake of Caraccas*, pp. 13, 227–8.

[133] *Ibid.*, pp. 138–9.

[134] *Ibid*, p. 317.

views. Similarly, we do not know how contemporary readers received such ideas. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra suggests that 'the critique of the universalising tendencies of North Atlantic narratives of nature and history, I suspect, continued after the wars of independence among the post-colonial (in the temporal sense) Latin American intelligentsia'.[135] The very rarity of the novels today, and the fact that no second editions were printed at the time, indicates that their circulation was not large. Moreover, they did not inspire legions of imitators, and were only translated into Spanish over eighty years later.[136]

Perhaps one reason for the novels' limited popularity was that they subverted the themes and interests of popular early nineteenth-century imperial literature. In *Imperial Eyes* Pratt analysed the relationship between sex and slavery in the sentimental travel literature to which Vowell's novels, especially, could have related. The texts analysed by Pratt delighted in descriptions of Dutch, French and Spanish cruelty to slaves, yet counter-pointed them with idealised romances between white men and black or mulatta women.[137] Pratt argued that

> the legitimation crisis provoked by abolitionism and American Wars of Independence called for imagining worlds beyond slavery and military conquest. It is easy to see transracial love plots as imaginings in which European supremacy is guaranteed by affective and social bonding; in which sex replaces slavery as the way others are seen to belong to the white man; in which romantic love rather than filial servitude or force guarantees the wilful submission of the colonised … the allegory of romantic love mystifies exploitation out of the picture.[138]

Consistent with Pratt's argument, many contemporary fictions gave women a passive, subordinate position. In Gustavus Butler Hippisley's *Siege of Barcelona* (1842) the relationship between a Briton, Charles Chamberlain, and his Venezuelan wife Eulalia Ramos could certainly be interpreted along the lines set out by Pratt.[139] *Soldiers of Venezuela* presented the only fulfilling love interest possible as being between Englishmen and Englishwomen, and Vowell told stories of love between male and female Creoles. For Richard Vowell, during the Wars of Independence, race was not a barrier to be

[135] Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, 'Postcolonialism *avant la lettre?* Travelers and Clerics in Eighteenth-Century Colonial Spanish America,' in Mark Thurner and Andrés Guerrero (eds.), *After Spanish Rule: Postcolonial Predicaments of the Americas* (Durham, NC, and London, 2003), p. 104.

[136] The next British fictionalisations of Latin America concentrated on the Caribbean islands, perpetuating stories of pirates, slavery and shipwreck. See for example, Michael Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log* (Edinburgh, 1833), and Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* (London, 1857).

[137] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, pp. 89–90.

[138] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 96.

[139] Gustavus Butler Hippisley, *The Siege of Barcelona, A Poem in Three Cantos* (London, 1842), p. 120. For a standard eulogy to Eulalia Ramos, see General José Dolores Monsalve, *Las mujeres de la revolución de la independencia* (Bogotá, 1926), p. 78.

overcome through literary love. He offered no overt support for, nor any subversion of, the imperialistic gaze. Instead, both his novels dealt with the escapades associated with love between men and women who found themselves on opposing sides of the divide between Independents and Loyalists. The novels hence avoided what Pratt termed the inevitable dénouement of 'cultural harmony through romance', in which 'the lovers are separated, the European is re-absorbed by Europe, and the non-European dies an early death'.[140] Vowell's novels sought to show that political reconciliation was possible, and that a peaceful future beckoned for both couples and the new nation that they represented.

Other affectionate relationships described in Vowell's fictionalised re-imaginings of South America dealt with Pratt's second concern, slavery. *The Savannas of Varinas* featured male slaves who chose to continue serving their former masters out of loyalty, friendship and gratitude. There were two examples: the first was a minor character, an unnamed slave who offered to follow his master and mistress 'all over the world, without a salary or any recompense, rather than stay here to work on the hacienda'.[141] The second was 'Perucho', a freed slave modelled on the historical figure of Pedro Camejo, also known as 'Negro Primero', the manager of a *llano* estate and later the loyal right-hand-man of José Antonio Páez.[142] The death of slaves in the name of the *patria*, as told by Vowell, neatly complements the romantic stories studied by Pratt.[143] This was a considerable development from *Soldiers of Venezuela* and from the popular literature of imperial eyes. While Venezuela was still seen as a 'landscape for adventure', the possibility that Venezuelans could also be adventurous was acknowledged, and on occasions celebrated. The egalitarian level battlefield described by Vowell provided new opportunities for all men, including slaves, to 'prove' their manliness and patriotism.

The ending of *Savannas of Varinas* presents the only problem to seeing Vowell's novels as marvelling at the social opportunities of the new dawn after independence. Concluding the novel, religion and particularly the Catholic Church are used to symbolise the unity that could return to Venezuelan society in the post-war period. Upon the confirmation of Independent victory, the church bells began to chime once more, and the 'old priest took up his position with all the pomp and pride of a town mayor'. The priest then invited all the returned *emigrados* to celebrate

[140] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 97.

[141] Vowell, *The Savannas of Varinas*, p. 130.

[142] Vowell, *The Savannas of Varinas*, pp. 223–4. For Pedro Camejo see Páez, *Autobiografía*, pp. 249–51. For the role of black slaves in Venezuelan Independence, see Lombardi, 'Los esclavos negros en las guerras venezolanas de la independencia,' pp. 153–66.

[143] Similarly, Gustavus Hippisley described an Englishman, Chamberlain, and a freed slave, Gómez, as both being fundamental to 'sustaining the standard' of national emancipation. *Siege of Barcelona*, p. 163.

mass with him to formalise the happy ending of their journey.[144] Vowell's sympathies may have been revealed by the preceding section, in which Páez rewarded the distinguished officer Andrés with the lands that had previously belonged to his Loyalist father. The plains of Venezuela were hence restored to the same peace and order that Vowell imagined they had enjoyed before the wars. Patrilineal property ownership was maintained, lances were put away, and the *patria* could enjoy the liberty and Independence sealed at Carabobo. The Church formed a part of that stability, and like many Venezuelan intellectuals in the post-war period, Vowell did not object.

In this sense then, Vowell's view of postcolonial society was a conservative one. Perhaps this should not surprise, given his apparently moneyed upbringing and Oxbridge education. In addition, it was not totally out of step with elite Venezuelan attitudes in the same period. As Reuben Zahler has shown, liberal reformers and Gran Colombian politicians agreed (sometimes reluctantly) to the stabilising role of the Church in post-war society, even though they wished to diminish the power of corporate bodies that could threaten the liberal project.[145] The ending of *Savannas of Varinas* can thus be interpreted as entirely consistent with the contemporary modes of thought of the Venezuelan society it describes.

6. *Concluding comments*

In *The Radical Soldier's Tale* (1988) Carolyn Kay Steedman argued that it was the experience of imperial service in India, and the contradictions of military service in a strange environment, that gave a nineteenth-century British soldier like John Pearman the opportunity to make the leaps of understanding which are given by the placing together of two perspectives, and the chance to observe the tension between them.[146] Experience of empire radicalised Pearman. In similar fashion it was the experience of military service across Hispanic America during thirteen years that gave Richard Vowell the chance to see outside the blinkers imposed by his imperial eyes. Despite his foreign birth Vowell played a role in the military campaigns that brought independence to Gran Colombia. At least until 1830 matters of birth, origin and lineage were less important to the newly independent nations than displays of patriotism, loyalty, military service and associated ideals of masculinity. All of these were staples of Vowell's writings.

[144] *The Savannas of Varinas*, p. 365.

[145] For the post-independence conflicts between liberal reformers and the Catholic Church in Venezuela see Reuben Zahler, 'Honor, Corruption, and Legitimacy: Liberal Projects in the Early Venezuelan Republic,' unpubl. PhD thesis at the University of Chicago, 2005, chapter 2. Many thanks to Reuben Zahler for allowing me to read his work while in progress.

[146] Carolyn Kay Steedman, *The Radical Soldier's Tale* (London, 1988), p. 27.

Richard Vowell's novels complement the argument of the *Imperial Eyes* thesis, in which 'transculturation' occurred between travellers and 'travelees', but where travel was primarily a means for 'seeing' and 'knowing' a place and thereby further tying that place into imperial commercial and political networks of power. It could be argued that Vowell and others like him simply employed a different method (fiction) towards the same end. This is a possible interpretation, but, I would prefer to see Vowell's difference in terms of a complementary approach to travel, more imaginative and creative, whose relation to imperial projects of power was more ambiguous. Certainly, Vowell's stories suggest the need for further sources to be unearthed that can be read against the traditional canon of commercial travel literature generally used for the period 1800–1850.

By means of his lengthy stay in Hispanic America Vowell opened his imperial eyes and wrote novels that sought to overcome the divides caused by the ideological and military splits occasioned by the Wars of Independence. The fact that these national romances were written by a man born in Europe should serve to underline the contingent nature of much identity formation in the immediate postcolonial republican period.[147] National identities were not forged in closed 'national' spaces, either before, during or after the Wars of Independence. Transatlantic and continent-wide networks of politics, commerce, migration, ideology and geopolitics linked Hispanic America into the 'community of civilised nations'[148] even before the republics had assured their own security, let alone their identities. The presence of people like Richard Vowell in the thick of the struggles for independence and the writing of national histories illustrates this paradox. His travel writings and fictions should no longer be foreign to scholars of the imperial eye.

[147] As argued in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemoligies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, Calif., 2001), p. 9.

[148] Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (New York, 1997), p. 21.