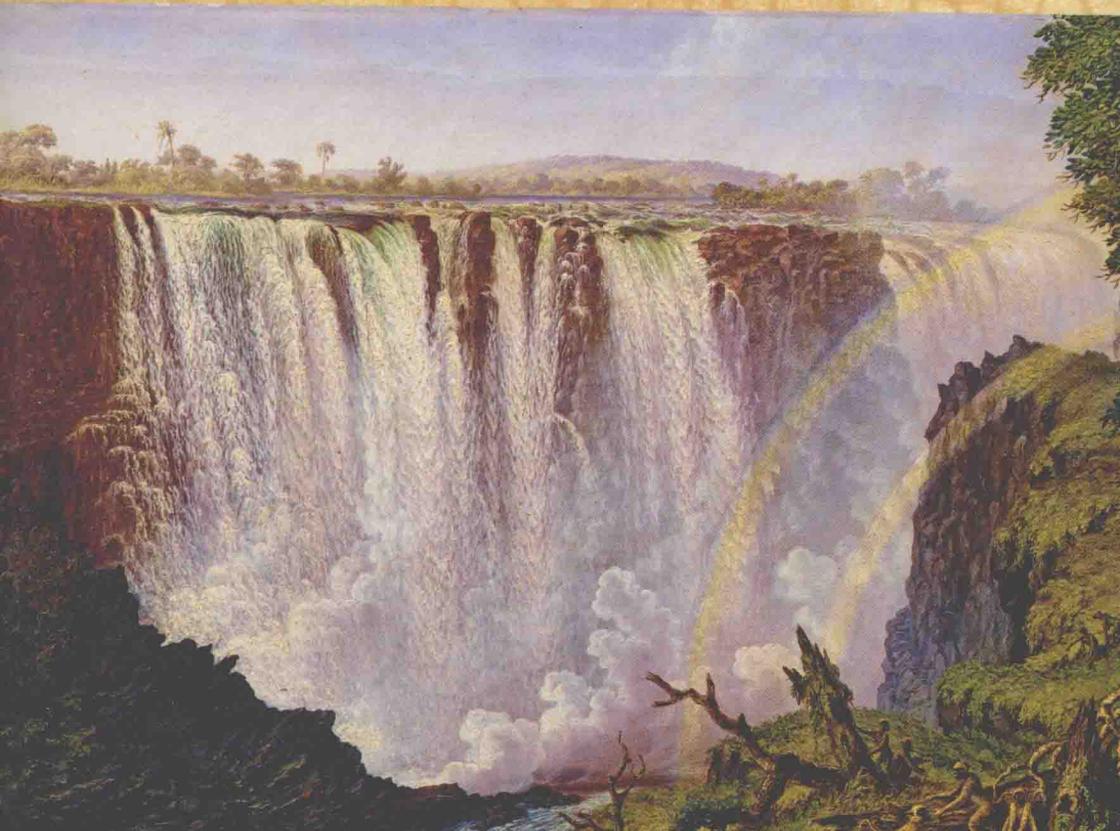


# *Representing Africa*

*Landscape, exploration and empire  
in southern Africa,  
1780-1870*

JOHN MCALEER



# *Representing Africa*

LANDSCAPE, EXPLORATION AND EMPIRE  
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, 1780-1870

John McAleer



MANCHESTER  
UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Manchester and New York

distributed in the United States exclusively by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Published by MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS  
OXFORD ROAD, MANCHESTER M13 9NR, UK  
and ROOM 400, 175 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10010, USA  
www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

Distributed in the United States exclusively by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 175 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10010, USA

Distributed in Canada exclusively by  
UBC PRESS, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA,  
2029 WEST MALL, VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA V6T 1Z2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 978 0 7190 8104 0 hardback

First published 2010

The publisher has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for any external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Typeset in Trump Medieval  
by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire  
Printed in Great Britain  
by the MPG Books Group

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## GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Guidebooks provide a fascinating insight into the presentation of landscape to a general public in the nineteenth century. The decade of the 1830s marked the origins of modern-style guidebooks, notably issued by the publisher Karl Baedeker in Germany and John Murray in Britain. These were representative of the beginnings of bourgeois travel in the era, as well as, in some cases, the continuation of older aristocratic forms. With the development of new technologies of transportation in steam trains and maritime engines, such middle-class travel – as well as migration involving other social classes – grew phenomenally as the century advanced. So far as the Cape and southern Africa are concerned, although there were many travel accounts – including best-sellers like the two-volume work of Anthony Trollope – guidebooks arrived later in the century. In 1888, Donald Currie of the Castle Line of steamers issued a *Handbook and emigrants' guide to South Africa*. Soon he heard of an extraordinary enterprise, inaugurated by two brothers called Brown, to issue guidebooks to South Africa booming the country for emigrants and investors, and sold from hawkers' barrows in the City of London. Currie bought them out and the book became the Castle Line Guide, later (after the amalgamation of the two lines in 1900) the Union-Castle Guide, significantly titled for *the use of Tourists, Sportsmen, Invalids & Settlers*.

These four categories are highly significant, and each of them, of course, had considerable interests in landscape, topography and climate. The Guide of 1899 issued on the eve of the Anglo-Boer War contained ten pages of recommendations by doctors as to the benefits of the southern African climate for various forms of illness. There were also lavish landscape descriptions to entice tourists into the various routes laid out in the Guide. One short description offers something of the flavour. In Natal, 'The ground rises rapidly from the sea-board in a confused succession of hills and ridges, forming many beautiful valleys, in which the cultivation of tea, sugar and other tropical produce is successfully carried on'. In the Cape, the wine growing regions of the interior were given especially favourable mention for the glories of their landscape. The war was to disrupt tourism and settlement, as well as the travels of sportsmen and invalids, but paradoxically it was to make southern Africa better known and with reconstruction the people at whom the guides were directed were soon returning in large numbers.

There is a sense in which this guidebook use of prose descriptions of landscape marks the climax of the phenomena analysed so effectively by John McAleer in this book. Empire was supremely a matter of imagining geographical space and that space was made up of examples of topography and its aestheticised relative landscape, often illuminated by the strong sunlight largely unknown in the northern latitudes of British imperialists. If the light was stronger, the landscapes were different, more exotic, often more extreme. These characteristics, in the case of southern Africa, had excited interest from the seventeenth century, but, as McAleer shows, there was a remarkable growth in publications in the early nineteenth century, reflecting the great extension of a print culture and a literate readership. In such material, landscapes were conveyed not just in illustrations, but also in prose. Landscape description, as opposed to visual depiction, was possibly more extensive and more influential. Landscape was conveyed into readers' imaginations as well as into viewers' perceptions. By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, this was also happening in novels, such as those of Henry Rider Haggard and John Buchan.

Moreover, an ability to convey the elements of landscape, evaluating culturally defined qualities as well as demerits came to be seen as a marker of Western culture, a sign of superiority to add to the many others distinguished by the nineteenth-century categorisers of cultures. Thus, landscape description came to have significance at a number of levels. It represented political and strategic, economic and aesthetic considerations, as well as offering a form of cultural definition. Such extended notions of landscape came to suffuse so many other activities, including exploration, hunting, surveying, road and rail building, agriculture, botanical collecting, military campaigning, geological discoveries, town planning, missionary endeavour and much else. In the pursuit of such prolific concerns, representations of landscape passed through various stages. At one level, there was an urge to render the unfamiliar familiar, to engross it within a known world which could be controlled and dominated. But at another, there was a desire to emphasise the exotic, the different, the wild, the so-called savage so that the supposedly idyllic character of the newly 'planted' frontier town, with its straight lines of roads, its houses, gardens, trees, church and other local institutions could be seen as pulling the landscape – as with the indigenous inhabitants – into the frame of civilisation. The mission station, its layout, its buildings (dominated by the church) and its gardens were seen as introducing the landscape to a state of grace, analogous to the spread of Christianity itself.

In all these ways, John McAleer demonstrates the significance of landscape description (together with related paintings) in the

## GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

transformation of the Cape, and more widely southern Africa, into forms of colonial space supposedly pulled into the orbit of European civilisation. This is a book which offers important new dimensions for an understanding of the centrality of landscape in the imperial imagination.

John M. MacKenzie

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of researching and writing this book, I have accumulated many debts of gratitude. First, I am very grateful to Professor John MacKenzie. My reliance on his many groundbreaking contributions to British imperial and southern African history will, I hope, be obvious from what follows. In addition, as general editor, he was also a constant and generous source of encouragement, advice and support. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of everyone at Manchester University Press.

Research can be a costly business and I am grateful to the Board of Trinity College, Dublin, for funding the research that formed the basis of my doctoral thesis. I would also like to thank the Department of History of Art (TCD) and the Thomas Dammann Junior Memorial Trust at the Royal Hibernian Academy for sponsoring research trips to South Africa. The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art provided generous financial support for the acquisition and publication of the images in the book.

I have been the scourge of librarians and archivists over the years, all of whom have dealt with my numerous requests and enquiries with unfailing professionalism and humour. Shane Mawe and Gary Steele had more requests than most and both responded with their customary friendliness and efficiency. I would also like to thank the members of staff of the British Library, the Caird Library (National Maritime Museum), and the Lecky and Berkeley Libraries (TCD). I am particularly indebted to Charles Benson and the staff of the Department of Early Printed Books at Trinity College, Dublin.

I am grateful to friends and colleagues at the National Maritime Museum for their encouragement. In particular, thanks to Nigel Rigby, Head of Research, and Douglas McCarthy, Picture Library Manager, for their support and assistance. For their valuable suggestions and advice, I must also thank Michael Godby, Douglas Hamilton, Peter Marshall, Katherine Prior, James Ryan, Michael Stevenson, Claire Warrior, Nigel Worden and Tim Youngs.

Three people deserve a special mention for the cheerful way in which they received yet more draft chapters when they must have had many more interesting things to do. At Trinity College, Philip McEvansoneya supervised the doctoral thesis on which much of this book is based and has been a source of support and encouragement ever since. My colleague at the National Maritime Museum, Robert

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Blyth – whose willingness to wield an editorial pencil never ceases to amaze – provided invaluable insights and suggestions with inimitable style. Finally, my thanks to Johanna Roethe, whose readiness to wade through innumerable drafts was always done with unceasing cheerfulness. While all errors remain my sole responsibility, their help has made me appreciate more than ever that research is a collaborative enterprise.

## NOTE ON THE TEXT

In quoting from contemporary sources, the original spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library, London
CBS	Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury
CUL	Cambridge University Library
LMS	London Missionary Society
NLSA	National Library of South Africa, Cape Town
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London
RBG	Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
RGO	Royal Greenwich Observatory
RGS	Royal Geographical Society, London
RH	Rhodes House Library, Oxford University
TCD	Trinity College, University of Dublin
TNA	The National Archives, Public Record Office, Kew
VOC	Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie

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## Introduction

In his portrait of Captain Philip Affleck, Edward Penny depicted all the requisite attributes of a Royal Navy officer in the eighteenth century (plate 1). Affleck, in his white wig and buckled shoes, is seated at a table on which lie a chart, a globe and a pair of dividers. With his waistcoat nonchalantly unbuttoned and his left hand resting on his knee, Affleck appears to have been momentarily interrupted from his work. In the background Penny has included a telling detail. Hanging on the wall behind Affleck is a painting of a ship sailing towards Table Bay with the hulking mass of Table Mountain rising behind it. By introducing this painting within a painting, Penny indicated Affleck's own maritime background. Although he is shown as a Royal Navy captain of more than three years' standing, Affleck began his career in the service of the Honourable East India Company. As a merchant seaman plying the route between Britain and Asia, he would have been familiar with the Cape of Good Hope as the navigational fulcrum around which all European shipping passed as it entered the Indian Ocean. In Penny's work, therefore, this crucial location at the foot of Africa acts as a symbol for European interaction with Asia. The image also bears witness to the maritime umbilical cord connecting southern Africa to the surrounding seas, bringing ships, goods and people from northern Europe, the Indian Ocean and the Far East. Indeed, by including the marine picture in the portrait, Penny may have had an opportunity to paint from a real example. The image he depicted was of a kind readily available to sailors stopping at Cape Town. In fact, Affleck may have owned something similar himself, purchased as a souvenir of his travels to this part of the world. Here, then, is proof of the place that the Cape occupied in the visual and cultural understanding of British people in the 1760s. It stood as a sort of visual synecdoche, symbolising the relationship of this part of Africa with British political, commercial and maritime activity. In other words, it is a representation of southern Africa.

This study examines and contextualises such representations of southern African landscapes, seascapes and settlements by British officials, travellers and artists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It interrogates how and why these descriptions and depictions came about, as well as the role they played in the British imagining and understanding of southern African spaces. It focuses on a period of evolving and expanding British interest and intervention in the southern cone of Africa, its impact on peoples and their environs, and how this was expressed in contemporary landscape and seascape representation and description. For centuries after a traveller on Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the globe first commended the Cape of Good Hope as 'a most stately thing, and the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth', the British imaginative and aesthetic engagement with southern Africa reflected its varied but vital role in Britain's maritime and imperial development.<sup>1</sup> It acted as a victualling station for travellers and explorers on their way to the Indian and Pacific Oceans, provided a space for expanding commercial and scientific interests, enabled the projection of maritime power across two oceans and, not least, became home to an increasingly rich variety of peoples and cultures. Southern Africa was one of the most crucial and intricate pieces in the British imperial jigsaw. Its importance spans the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and the so-called 'first' and 'second' British Empires when the understanding of the meaning and value of imperial possessions to Britain was in flux and undergoing reassessment.<sup>2</sup> Representations of southern African landscapes and maritime spaces reflect this multifaceted position, as do the people involved in recording and disseminating them.

### *British involvement in southern Africa*

The Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope came into British hands via a circuitous route, almost 150 years after the first European settlers had arrived.<sup>3</sup> In broader terms, however, the history of the Cape Colony, and its relationship with the increasing numbers of European vessels that passed it, powerfully demonstrates its place in the world of the Indian Ocean where it acted as the gateway to Asia. It also illustrates the political vicissitudes of those European maritime powers already possessing, or wishing to develop, a stake in that trading system. The first Europeans to encounter the Cape of Good Hope were the Portuguese who initially named it *Cabo Tormentoso* (Cape of Storms) for its tempestuous weather and stormy seas. It was quickly recognised as a useful staging post on the way to the riches of the

## INTRODUCTION

East, whereupon it acquired a name with more positive connotations, *Cabo de Boa Esperance* (Cape of Good Hope). However, according to Thomas Pennant, 'by some infatuation [the Portuguese] neglected this important baiting-place'.<sup>4</sup> The Cape of Good Hope was first settled by the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC, the Dutch East India Company) in 1652 when Jan van Riebeeck landed with 350 settlers. It was never intended to be anything other than a victualling station and there were constant quarrels between the settlers at the Cape and the VOC directors in Amsterdam who wanted to limit any expansion into the interior.<sup>5</sup> According to Captain John Blankett, writing to Lord Hawkesbury from Macao, 'it appears that the Dutch when they first formed the settlement at the Cape of Good Hope never intended it as a place of trade but considered it only as a place of refreshment for their ships in their passage to and from India'.<sup>6</sup> In a twenty-year period, between 1795 and 1815, the Cape changed hands three times. Despite earlier aborted British expeditions to take the colony, it remained a Dutch possession until it was captured in 1795 in an amphibious operation involving Royal Navy ships under the command of Admiral George Keith Elphinstone and troops under General Sir James Craig.<sup>7</sup> George, Earl Macartney, a man with extensive diplomatic experience, arrived in May 1797 to take charge of the government. Under the Treaty of Amiens in 1802 the colony was ceded back to the Dutch Batavian Republic, which reoccupied the territory in February 1803. However, after the resumption of hostilities, the Cape was retaken by Sir David Baird in 1806. It was eventually and officially permanently ceded to Britain under the terms of the Convention of London, signed in August 1814, and it remained in British hands throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

Although by the end of the eighteenth century the Cape Colony stretched for a distance of almost 500 miles from the Atlantic coast on the west to the Great Fish River in the east, areas further inland were relatively unknown to British colonial officials and remained so well into the nineteenth century. At its northern extremity, the colony was bounded by the Berg River and the Stormberg Mountains.<sup>9</sup> This sparsely populated wedge at the foot of Africa, raggedly defined on its northern and eastern boundaries, was poorly mapped at the beginning of the first British occupancy of the region. Lord Macartney lamented the paucity of information that existed: 'We are shamefully ignorant of the geography of the country; we have no map that embraces one-tenth of the colony; I neither know nor can I learn where this Graaf Reinet lies – whether it is five hundred or a thousand miles from Cape Town.'<sup>10</sup> Even in the 1850s, the state of geographical and topographical knowledge was still woefully underdeveloped. In 1854, Thomas