EXPLORATION, PERFORMANCE, ALLIANCE:
Robert Schomburgk in British Guiana

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Introduction

This paper explores the environment and strategies of a set of expeditions, organized and to some degree led by Robert Schomburgk, an Anglicized Prussian explorer-geographer and gentleman naturalist in the tradition of his inspiration and mentor, Alexander von Humboldt.[1] In 1835 Schomburgk, who had drawn the attention of the Royal Geographical Society with a lengthy letter (and map) from the Virgin Islands on tidal currents there, received a commission from the society to execute a series of expeditions up the major rivers of British Guiana. His assignment, outlined in an open letter read before the society in May 1836 at its annual general meeting, was first, to "thoroughly investigate the physical and astronomical geography of the interior of British Guiana," and second, "to connect the positions thus ascertained with those of M. Humboldt on the upper Orinoco." Once in the interior of the territory, in the basins of the Demerara, Essequibo, Courentyne and Berbice, he was expected to examine, sample and record "the general character of its mineral composition, with detailed accounts of plants, animals, and inhabitants, and the astronomical determination of a reasonable number of its principle points." In addition, "particulars regarding the soil and the climate, the origin and course of the rivers, the degree in which they may be severally navigable, or capable of being made so, etc," were also to occupy his attention, "and generally whatever may tend to give an exact idea both of the actual state and future capabilities of this tract of country."[2]

Only after this reconnaissance and information-gathering had been completed could he pursue "the great object, already intimated" of pushing still further into the interior to reach Esmeralda on the Orinoco, the most easterly point attained by Humboldt on his Venezuela expedition. Schomburgk's goal was to reach Esmeralda from the east via the Parima river and a trek overland.

Schomburgk's expeditions were multi-dimensional, spanning the colonial agendas of acquisition and possession

through information gathering, territorial investigation, measurement, mapping, describing and collecting. On the one hand, reaching Esmeralda from the East was a symbolic act, a passing of the torch of the British presence from Venezuela and the corrupt and failing Spanish possessions to the British "main" of Guiana. His expedition represented an act of possession; as he traced the rivers to their sources and planted the Union Jack, as he reached and established the coordinates of key boundary points which separate British territory from greater Portugal, separating a land destined in his eyes for civilization, freedom and prosperity from the slaving darkness and legendary cruelty of the Spanish legacy.[3] At the same time Schomburgk's expedition functioned as a practical investigation and a manifestation of a complex process of possession and colonization. Observations of longitude and latitude along the rivers and prominances of the interior would provide a needed revision of the Arrowsmith's sketchy 1834 map of the Colombian region.[4] The bearings he provides for the navigation of the mouth of the Courentyne make a "valuable contribution to the hydrography of that coast" and promise to be "useful to commercial interests," opening shipping to the cane plantations of the river.[5] Schomburgk's assessment of the fertility and navigability of the interior would take shape in the monograph submitted to Parliament in 1840 entitled *A Description of British Guiana,* a geographical and statistical analysis of the resources and colonial capabilities of the territory. The expedition resulted in a two-volume illustrated edition of the Naturalists' Library in 1841 on "The Fishes of Guiana," a large illustrated work (the *Twelve Views in the Interior of Guiana*) as well as several papers presented to the Linnaean society, including work on orchids consulted by Darwin.[6]

The primary textual production of the expeditions, however, are the representations through which they can be known: the published "diaries" written by Schomburgk in the field and mailed back to the Royal Geographical Society between 1836 and 1845 as progress reports and results.[7] They are curious documents. Arranged like diaries, their literary style strongly suggests that they were composed at rest, rather than on the river. They are as multi-dimensional in subject as the expedition was in object. Juxtaposed with dry and

wet-bulb thermometer readings are accounts of the dramatic and bizarre death of a travelling companion. Next to a description of the horror of a Spanish *descimento,* or press gang slave-haul, is a measurement of the granitic boulders in the river bed ("probably gneiss")[8] As a document, the diaries dramatize the polyvalence of the expedition and their author, the calm schizophrenia of a scientific, moral and political adventure-journey. They merit investigation, perhaps most importantly not as the documentation of an expedition, but as the documentation of an "expeditioneer."

In this paper I will use these published sources to investigate the task of the expedition, the task of penetration, measurement and possession, from the evidence provided within the narration. My attempt to characterize the environment and tensions of the penetration moves from Schomburgk's own construction, using his language, his categories of "Indian" and "savage," his representations of himself and his project.[9] We are here embarked on an historical "think-piece"; if we can recover something of the sights, smells, bodily discomforts, and pervasive anxieties of a South American explorer in the mid nineteenth century, that will count as success.

The role of knowledge and power in the colonial project of acquisition and possession has been well established in a range of encounter literature. Here, by emphasizing the recalcitrance of the world encountered by the nineteenth-century explorer in South America, I hope to nuance our understanding of colonial science and capitalist expansionism. I aim to illustrate the material and character of exploration and the recalcitrant environment the explorer encountered. Moving from this, I will suggest the intricate negotiations and performances required to effect a colonial penetration like Schomburgk's, and point to some of the tensions introduced by this diplomacy of incursion.

Possession through knowledge, domination through discrimination, these analyses of the function of a colonial expedition like Schomburgk's cannot be ignored. Measuring, naming, describing, mapping and collecting served the colonial project of possession; domestication provided the metaphor and the methodology of colonization, the means by which the savage and the civilized could be reconciled on a

common ground, in a relationship which adorned and empowered the colonizer.

Schomburgk's expedition fits well within this analytical framework. Sprigs of potentially useful plants were clipped from the heart of the wilderness to be carried back to the colonial outposts on the shore. The seeds of new and edible fruits were collected, to be planted on the plantations.[10] Schomburgk discovered the "most beautiful flower in the western hemisphere" and sent a sprig of the *Victoria regia* lily back to England where it would be a centerpiece in the Crystal Palace of the Great Exhibition.[11]Animals too were caged and transported.[12]

Schomburgk applies the same techniques of domestication through discrimination and collection to the "Indians" he encountered as well. He measured them, making lists of the relative measurements of the various tribes,[13] and he "collected" the Indians in certain respects too, collected samples of their tools and adornments to bring back as colonial fetishes,[14] collected and recorded samples of their languages,[15]even collected samples of their remains, bartering with a young chief for the skulls of two of his former wives, who were disinterred without delay.[16] He made plaster casts for the Royal College of Surgeons.[17] The tangled metaphors of civilization and domestication find expression in a lengthy passage encouraging the colony to "cultivate" the native population.[18] The domestication of the Indian could not go beyond bringing them back to England, which Schomburgk did in 1839, returning to London with a sample of different tribes.[19]

It is evident, then, that Schomburgk's expedition did use the techniques of measurement and collection as part of a colonial project of domination and domestication. Let us bracket, for a moment, the valid charge that measurement, naming and mapping in these expeditions serve a bourgeois, English, male project of territorial expansion and hegemony. Instead, let us attempt, somewhat experimentally, to use Schomburgk's diaries as the starting point for a reflection on how a solitary, bourgeois, English male, presented with a £50 advance, facing a thick curtain of jungle, managed to *effect* the colonial incursion. What were the means by which a flat-bottomed canoe became the platform for a colonial

incursion, a power base for domestication? How did Schomburgk go into the interior and come out? What practices and negotiations did the expedition demand? Before attempting a response to these questions, I offer a sample of Schomburgk's account.

A Tale

> Jan. 1, 1837—We made slow progress; the river narrowed considerably, and numerous trees which, from age or the undermining effect of the current, had fallen across, disputed our advance so that we were forced to cut a passage...In order to increase the difficulties, many of our Indians were unfit for any work in consequence of indisposition; the entrance of the new year was, therefore, well calculated to enhance the feeling of disappointment, that we should at that advanced period be within so short a distance of the coast: a succession of adverse circumstances had taken place since we undertook the Corentyn expedition; difficulties beset us from the outset, and though I had battled most resolutely to overcome them, and was determined to advance as long as there was any chance of making progress, and famine did not threaten us, I could not feel but doubly the mortification on the first day of the year.[20]

What had happened to the push into the interior? Robert Schomburgk found himself in the fifth month of his second expedition into British Guiana, with only another three months before the rainy season, and he was not deep in the interior at the sources of the Courentyne as he had proposed and intended, but only about 60 miles inland on the neighboring Berbice. His plan to remedy his crew's dysentery with "exertion" failed, and the next morning his crew of Arawaks, Warrows, three Caribs, an English ornithologist named Veith, three other Europeans and half a village of Waccaways, women, children and all, were too sick to press on. They pitched camp on the bank of the Berbice to await a party sent back up the river for provisions. How had it happened?

Schomburgk had set off up the Courentyne in September of 1836, with the intention of tracing it to its sources, enlisting

an Indian crew at the settlements in the vicinity of the last plantations on the upper end of the sea reach of the river. The Indians "showed a general dislike to venture on such an undertaking as the ascent of the upper Courentyne" which they believed to be inhabited by evil spirits, and knew to be inhabited by Caribs, "the nation dreaded by every other tribe."[21] After securing a crew for his boats and provisions, the expedition set out up river. Barely a week into the journey four of the Arawak Indian crew stole one of the boats during the night and ran away, leaving Schomburgk "obliged to depend upon our uncivilized Caribs."[22] The Carib settlements which the expedition passed were not friendly; they harassed the crews and would provide no provisions.[23] Among them Schomburgk noticed female slaves belonging to other Indian tribes.

The Caribs decided to provide an escort to Schomburgk's expedition, and there was nothing he could do to stop them. Three boats of Caribs shadowed his party. "I saw clearly their policy: the Caribs were thus by far the most numerous party."[24] Schomburgk locked his boats at night, took the temperature of the sand banks and water in the evening and the morning, made observations of latitude on the clear nights.[25]

On the 17th of October "the water broke up into torrents and the white flakes of foam which came sailing down as if to give us welcome, the thundering noise of falling waters, and a cloud of mist which hung over the southern hills all spoke in an intelligible voice that some great scene of nature was before us." It was a cataract, two waterfalls, one of about 35 feet, the other of closer to 45. The Caribs came over as Schomburgk was making camp and told him that the falls could not be passed until the rainy season. "It struck me as peculiar that I heard for the first time the impractability of passing the falls before us." There had been hints that he would not be able to ascend the river, but no one had told him there was an insurmountable cataract. He set up camp and offered a reward to the member of his crew who could find or cut a portage around the falls.[26]

The unwelcome escort of Caribs now began to demand provisions out of the expedition's store, and Schomburgk wrote euphemistically that "as policy directed me not to

quarrel with them, I was obliged to give them allowances in rice and other provisions."He calculated that it would take about 8 weeks to cut a portage with a willing crew, and he had no willing crew and provisions that would have been used up in three weeks even without the new demands by the Caribs.

Schomburgk decided that he could perhaps go around to the parallel river, the Berbice, and cross by land over to the regions of the river Courentyne. So he gave up, and broke camp and returned down river. The Caribs fell away at their village of Tomatai. Their deception was only revealed when Schomburgk's party, still heading downstream came upon another Carib boat going up river and loaded for barter. A brief parlay revealed that they were ascending the Courentyne in order to cross over to the Berbice and the Essequibo for the purpose trading for slaves in Macusie Indian territories. The Caribs of Tomatai were to be their guides, and they had arranged everything with that village's chief months before. They even had a pass from the Dutch officials at Nickerie, sanctioning their mission.[27]

Schomburgk realized he had been duped. There *had* been a passage around the cataracts which he had ceremoniously christened the Smith and Barrow falls, before being turned back. The Caribs had not wanted his party to interfere with their illegal slaving mission into British territory.

Schomburgk resolved to make something of the time remaining before the rainy season and make an expedition up the Berbice. Progress up the Berbice was slow, the Waccaway Indians Schomburgk found as guides made him suspicious with their way of keeping apart from the rest of the party in camp. The river started to produce fewer fish because of the high, turbulent water, and the provisions had to be rationed. "We were frequently molested by ants, centipedes, spiders and scorpions which secreted themselves in the rubbish left on the bushes by the last inundation, and inflicted the severest bites on us."[28] Schomburgk reported nearly losing one Indian to a giant alligator and another to a 16 foot snake. The Macusies, the Waccaways, and Andres, the guide, disappeared one night and were not seen again.[29]

Schomburgk's decision to press on despite this setback was rewarded the next day by a "vegetable wonder." Emerging from a thick swamp into a shallow basin of the river, a strange

flower on the opposite bank caught his attention. "All calamities were forgotten," he wrote, when he observed the gigantic six-foot leaf and hundreds of rose petals of the lily he would name *Victoria regia*, and which would be not only the showpiece of his expedition but a metropolitan sensation in London.

"For some days," he wrote "I had discovered rebellious conduct, and had observed disobedience of orders...I was well aware that the generality of the Indians were dissatisfied with the further progress of the expedition."[30] He had not guessed how dissatisfied until one of the Warrow Indians in his group brought him word of a full-scale mutiny afoot in his camp. The Caribs and the remaining Arawaks planned to steal the boats and return down river, leaving Schomburgk and his companions tied in their hammocks if they offered any resistance. Schomburgk and his young companion Reiss kept a close watch through the night but in the morning discovered that the suspected ring-leader and his fellows had run away during the night overland, taking with them cutlasses, camp equipment and provisions. Reduced to eleven "effective men" Schomburgk could not pursue them. "I was still bent on pushing on."

At evening of the 64th day on the Berbice, Schomburgk's dwindling party discovered the path which connected the Courentyne, the Berbice and the Essequibo. Spying five large land turtles on the bank, a boat went ashore in the hope of stocking the bare larders of the expedition, and found only shells, the remnants of a temporary Indian camp. The abandoned camp revealed the trailhead for the westward path to the Essequibo. Convinced from his astronomical observations that the Essequibo was less than 15 miles, Schomburgk set out with a small party to cross over to the other river after a base camp had been established at the trail head. They had scarcely made any progress when they heard signal shots coming from the base camp, and were forced to return. On their approach to the trail head they saw Indian canoes on the shore by the camp.

> I heard the hum of voices, and cautioning the Indian to go softly, we listened. "They are Caribs," he whispered in my ear. I told him to harken again—"Caribs" was again his reply. I stole somewhat nearer and had a survey of a number of red hammocks. It is true then, I thought to myself, the camp has been surprised. Mr Cameroon and Mr Veith have been most likely murdered, or are perhaps lashed to the next tree, and your life is in their hands: What does it signify if you lose it a few hours earlier or later? With this resolution I went forward, my pistol cocked for the first assailant.[31]

Convinced that the camp had been surprised by Caribs and his companions were either dead or prisoners, Schomburgk sprung from the bush, pistol in hand, and brandishing it he demanded of the first Carib he saw "Are you come as friend or enemy?" The Indian did not reply. "Who is your chieftain?" he asked and was taken to a tent and found his companions in conversation with the Carib chief who had deceived them on the Courentyne, and his slave trading comrades, as well, all of whom were on their way to the Essequibo on their mission, having crossed overland from the Courentyne.

The Caribs, Schomburgk claimed, were astonished at finding him where he had claimed he would go, at the path connecting the three rivers. Schomburgk's anti-slaving threats about the vengeance of the "Big Governor" gained credence when they found him this high on the Berbice, an ascent Schomburgk said they believed impossible for him. Schomburgk's authority was all the more increased by the death of one of the Indians on the Courentyne, whom Schomburgk had predicted would succumb to a pulmonary disease. "It happened as anyone might have predicted," he wrote, "but the superstitious Indians had it in great effect." The Carib chief, according to Schomburgk, "took the earliest opportunity, after I had arrived in camp, to inform me that they had given up all idea of enslaving and they were merely going to barter for hammocks, cotton, dogs, etc."[32]

> Of course, I took the greatest advantage of the ascendency I had got over them by the truth of my prediction that I should be before them on the path: it was a moment of pride and exultation, when I considered that I had been the means of saving many an innocent Indian from bondage,

> and from being torn from his family and country as a slave, which could not have been effected without a bloody contest; and the idea that I have been the indirect means of preventing it, recompenses me for my fatigues, and for the anxiety I suffered, when I saw the difficulties of making any progress toward reaching the high mountain range by this road.[33]

He used his new "ascendency" to recruited the Caribs to escort his party to the Essequibo. To insure that there would be no more tricks he claims he kept one of the Caribs "hostage." The portage established the non-existence of the upper Demerara river, thought to extend all the way to the mountains between the Essequibo and the Berbice.

The camp on the Berbice was in 3 degrees 55 and 1/2' N., 57 degrees 50 and 3/4' W. A corroborating calculation via dead reckoning from lunar distances at the village of Annay gave a latitudinal difference of 3/10ths of a mile, and a longitudinal discrepancy of 6 and 1/2 miles. A note by the editors of the Royal Geographical Society Journal called this "surprisingly accurate," and praised Schomburgk in high terms:

> Mr. Schomburgk's indefatigable zeal in obtaining celestial observations whenever practicable must strike the most cursory reader of his Report, and his candour in honestly stating this slight discrepancy is well worthy of imitation by all travellers.[34]

Meditation

The expedition: a few flat boats paddling upstream, three or four Europeans and two dozen Indians, women, children, dogs, a trunk of dried plants and moldering bird skins, a sack of rocks, a box of instruments, a barometer, two sextants, several thermometers, a watch in Schomburgk's pocket, a chronometer in a wooden case. Gunpowder, salt, oilcloth, folded flags, trunks full of beads and fishhooks, looking glasses, rice in sacks and cassava bread, rope, cutlasses, axes, cook pots, guns. A bottle of Champagne to drink on the queen's birthday, the 24th of March, a harbinger of the rains. At each fall and rapid the boats had to be dragged by ropes or

unloaded and carried. Schomburgk could not swim.

The mission: to survive transplanted from the colonial hothouse, a presence which in itself is an act of possession, to take cuttings from the useful or beautiful hidden in the interior, to place a boundary on the embrace of the freedom and prosperity promised by the British empire, to claim, locate, seize, pacify, domesticate, extend. All from a splintering woodskin shooting the rapids with a Waccaway at the helm. This mobile outpost, a hybrid of an Indian tribe in a seasonal migration and a colonial reconnaissance survey, plied the river, collecting feathers and numbers, locating, amassing, subsisting on a narrow lifeline of tributaries.

The Theatre Of Alliance
Part I: An Expedition Under Siege

The process of possession, the story of scientific, historical and geographical subsumption, begins with a story of negotiation. Confronting an impenetrable and hostile thickness of nature, and a volatile population of half-caste jungle dwellers and hidden Indian tribes, the expedition can find no entrance into the interior. Even the river, which seems as wide as the ocean itself on its sea reach,[35] and is thus the free highway to the craft of the explorer, quickly narrows into an ambivalent and threatening chaos, its cataracts like precipitous mountains,[36] its swamps and floodplains like jungle,[37] its stingrays, alligators and electric eels like hostile natives. All progress is labor, and "alone," decontextualized, confronted by enemies, the geographer-naturalist and his craft must find allies, negotiate the unfriendly environment by a diplomacy of incursion, enlist natives against nature and nature against the native.

Robert Schomburgk's narrative portrays a hostile environment. He, his dogs, his party, are set upon: by coushi ants, scorpions, wild pigs, snakes, wasps, stinging caterpillars, and alligators whose hides send slugs ricocheting.[38] His expedition confronts a savage and unwelcoming wilderness: brambles in the shallows where every stinging biting creature in the forest has taken refuge from the rising river, apocalyptic tropical storms, flooding.[39] Camps are pitched on sandbanks crusted with sandfleas;[40] he sleeps with the sound of army ants falling like rain drops on his tent.[41]

The jungle threatens with its denizens and its depth. He represents the animals lying in wait: the jaguar who stalks the camp, snatching dogs and circling the hammock, robbing the fresh kill[42] the alligators who stalk the fisherman, their eyes barely visible in the water, their reptilian skin nearly impenetrable, their life next to impossible to extinguish.[43] Schomburgk cuts a thick slice from the throat of a large one and finds it alive the next morning.[44]

The imminent threat of the fauna is echoed by the broader forces of the environment. Nature makes no space for the explorer, the jungle is impenetrable, the savannas the haunt of the rattle snake.[45] The rivers, the familiar avenue of the penetration, a finger of the navigable sea, coil through rapids, thunder over falls, disappear underground. The forest encroaches on the water,[46] and the fallen trees make passage a labor for American axes, cutting a machete trail across the water.[47] The water bursts onto the plains in the floods and blurs the clear boundaries of the shore.[48] The water explodes from the sky, delivering sheets in the downpour, savage lightening, falling trees. Nature is volatile, invasive, frightening. Even the picturesque views tremble with incipient dangers; the panorama in the mountains is charged with the threat of a false step on the precipitous path,[49] in the liminal civilization of camp a thick snake slithers between Schomburgk's legs.[50] Even the familiar and seemingly passive fauna is no ally: the plants themselves are latent aggression. A falling coconut buries itself in the ground like a cannonball.[51] In a stump lurks a wasp's nest.[52] The sap of a climbing vine is the deadliest poison.[53]

To penetrate, the expedition must thread its way between the yawning dangers of the untamed natural environment. But nature is not the only volatile threat along the river. The native population is another. The "Indians" on the upper reaches of the rivers are the descendants of the man-eating Caribs, the Maroon Negroes whose incursions brought the Dutch colony to its knees, the warlike Kirishana whose raids had kept the Jesuits out of the upper Orinoco. This is the their terrain, their poison arrows can bring down forest deer and tapirs with a scratch.[54] They seem to be able to survive on seeds, pounded wood,[55] sap and even grubs.[56] Their intelligence represents the source of Schomburgk's survival and practical expertise.[57]

At the same time, Schomburgk perceives them as mutinous,

strong and unpredictable. Five times on three expeditions they desert him by night, stealing boats and provisions. His quest to plant the Union Jack at the source of the Orinoco is thwarted, like Humboldt's before, by the raiding parties of Kirishanas.[58] The Caribs on the Courentyne frighten his crew and deceive him about routes. On the Berbice his guide outwits him and secrets away a weeks provision of cassava bread.[59] His communications are in a pidgin, when the Indians speak to each other he cannot understand. They seem to disappear into the jungle at will and reappear miles away.[60] They are inscrutable, armed and on home ground.

The Theatre Of Alliance
Part II: A Diplomacy of Incursion

The wilderness and its savage scope draped the thickest curtain before Schomburgk's expedition. The wild animals, the lack of food, the sickness and fever,[61] the mysterious complexity and hidden dangers of its myriad plants and animals, held the European at bay. Indians provided the only plausible ally. At the mouths of the rivers, at the last outposts and final back-country plantation settlements, he courted crews, paddlers and translators, sometimes guides who claimed some special knowledge. These transcultural Indians spoke some of Schomburgk's tongue. They often chose to travel with their families, so that the women could cook and make camp while the men hunted. When Schomburgk had made up such a crew they outnumbered him and his several European companions. He paid these indigenous escorts in wages, in addition to gifts of cutlasses tools and axes. They were close enough to the cash economy of the colonial plantation society that they could use money, to buy food and guns.[62]

With this nucleus of an expedition he could set out past the last colonial outposts, up the river, past the deserted remains of over-ambitious homesteads, past missions sometimes, into the "interior," where the expedition must subsist on hospitality and new allies.[63] Approaching a settlement, Schomburgk would send ahead a native member of his crew by canoe, to explain that his was not a slaving expedition. At the village, Schomburgk would open the trunk of beads, passing out a looking glass as a gift to a chief, distributing

fishhooks to the villagers.[64] He secures passage, barters for cassava flour, for fruits or sweet potatoes.[65] They camp, his companions hunt for fresh meat, they fish. From them he learns how to set a trot-line baited with a sweet red berry for pacu fish,[66] how to dam a rivulet into a fish trap,[67] how to eat mountain cabbage when provisions have run out,[68] how to predict the coming of the rains from the behavior of turtles and winged ants,[69] how to prepare an iguana. The Indians know what can be eaten, what can be ascended in what season, they know the paths through the hills. They lift the curtain on the jungle, they penetrate the hostile environment for him.

The bourgeois European secures their vital alliance with gifts and performance. His gun kills the caymans. Admittedly, he has to get pretty close, and shoot them a few times, but he takes advantage of every opportunity to do so. He perceives that his guns are admired and feared, particularly in the more remote tribes,[70] but his scientific instruments prove almost equally fascinating, and perhaps more so to the tribes well acquainted with fire-arms.[71]

Nature is more than a stage for Schomburgk's performance of strength, as when he makes a spectacle of killing alligators or giant boas. It can serve as a key ally when he must pacify and win over the natives. When a Taruma Indian on the Wanumu refuses to provide provisions or company for the continuation of a foray on the Courentyne on the grounds that there were hostile tribes and sorcerers ahead, Schomburgk enlisted nature and his instruments in his service:

> I treated his observations as they deserved; and in order to impress him with the power of white men, I profited by circumstances, as the great discoverer of the new world had done before us, and predicted that in the course of an hour, the sun would be partly obscured. He related through our interpreter what I had told him, and a cloudless sky favoured me by allowing the partial eclipse to be visible. I showed it to those who were sober, through the telescope of the sextant, well knowing that their relation would lose nothing by being repeated.[72]

The next morning, when everyone had sobered up from the previous evening's piwarrie feast, the Taruma agreed to accompany Schomburgk himself.

Performance, Alliance, Witness

In this passage, Schomburgk negotiates alliances with a self-conscious performance. In fact, he performs a performance, as he does regularly in his narrative, which often deliberately replay exploits of the Humboldt, Raleigh, or Columbus himself. Schomburgk's expedition traces the routes of these explorers and contextualizes his wanderings by linking his solitude and adventures to theirs. The historical orientation provided by Schomburgk's allusions and references reveal an explorer attempting to find allies not only on the banks of the river, but also in the recesses of the past, a process I have called the "metalepsis" of colonial exploration.[73]

Other sorts of performances help Schomburgk negotiate his vital alliances. He represents himself as a healer, and performs cures, with authority, on the wounded or sick natives in his party, and in the villages. He writes, "I stand in high repute among the Indians as a great physician,"[74] and he applies styptics, salts, and ammonia with some fanfare to cuts, ulcers, snakebites alike. In performing the role of the healer, he even heals himself, going to great lengths not to show any weakness or pain to his crew.[75] These performances as well are part of his negotiation of alliances on the river. At the same time, Schomburgk's representation of these performances (represented in narrative, performed for Indians) serves to construct the identity of the expedition and the expeditioneer.

The negotiation of the river cannot be effected without allies and allies cannot be won without the careful performances. Schomburgk describes his entrance at one village: "We met them with flags flying, horns sounding, and such demonstrations of our self importance as greatly delighted them."[76] Such a demonstration of self-importance must have delighted the expedition as well. In this sense the relationship between performance and alliance becomes intricate and non-linear. Schomburgk's performances, the displays of knowledge and power, through which he attempts not to subjugate and dominate directly, but rather to win the alliances which allow him to maintain his incursion,

simultaneously nurture and construct the expedition itself. Schomburgk needs allies, not simply to paddle and hunt and guide so that he can penetrate nature, but also as witnesses to the "nature" of his project. His performances are designed to win allies, but they also perform the identity of the expedition itself. The Indian witness is a needed mirror of the explorers presence.

When Schomburgk needs a testimony to the ardors of his journey, he relies on the body of the Indian as a text:"The emaciated forms of my Indian companions and faithful guides told, more than volumes, what difficulties we had surmounted."[77] When he needs to communicate that a species is rare, he can say that the Indians do not know it; when he wants to express the remoteness of a region, it is a region that even the Indians do not know.

Schomburgk also performs his scientific observations in the wilderness with Indian witnesses.He uses public performances of the compass, sextant, watch, and telescope in his narrative to describe how he "won the hearts" of the Indians, or their fear and admiration. They are tools by which he negotiates alliances, but the presence of the witnesses introduces tensions in the performance of science. As the same instruments are sometimes used for science and alliance, the dual function can result in problematic ambivalences. These instruments by which the explorer maintains his status as naturalist-geographer become objects of mystical and mysterious curiosity in performance. The Indians watch the use of the thermometer, compass and the sextant, and he is perceived, he reports, as a conjuror. "They were all ear and eye," as he took the altitude of *alpha cassiopeiae*,[78] and "evinced much wonder," believing that Schomburgk was "pi-ai-ing, or conjuring." The tensions arise when an older Indian from the village, Purigoto, to "show his importance and to prove that he knew something of the matter," began to identify the stars in their Indian names. The situation is a curious one, the alliance sought by Schomburgk nearly succeeds too well, and suddenly he finds himself shoulder to shoulder with a village shaman, apparently participating in some conjuration.

As a naturalist-collector Schomburgk enlists the assistance of his Indian allies in locating, collecting and transporting

samples. Here the Indian witness again becomes a problem for Schomburgk's identity as a scientist-naturalist. As the Indians watch him collecting they begin to volunteer specimens, he claims: "Seeing that we collected objects in natural history, few days passed that the natives did not bring us a bird or an insect, or a plant or some fruits as the pine-apple, the cashew nut or the fruit of the cucurit palm."[79]

But while the native thus appeared to affirm the project of the naturalist and bear witness to the virtue of his project, he also subverts and rejects it.[80] Schomburgk claims that he had to struggle again and again to actually collect and transport the specimens, because the Indians were unwilling to carry a bag of sticks and rocks. It was one thing to pick them up and look at them, another to drag them through the forest:

> How frequently I was obliged to use every persuasion to induce the Indian to carry the geological specimens collected during our pedestrian tours! I might have loaded him with provisions, wearing apparel, etc. and he would not have objected to it; but to increase his burden by adding rocks, he thought, could only be done out of mischief; therefore I more than once had to carry the specimens myself.[81]

The Indian's rejection of the naturalist-collector's task dooms the success of that aspect of the expedition. Schomburgk repeatedly laments the loss of collected specimens, sunk in rough trips over the falls when they were in other boats, forced to be discarded when no one would carry them through a portage.[82] Schomburgk represents all his equivocal allies, his crew, nature itself, turning against him in his role as naturalist-collector. He offers this explanation as a defense of the meager collections which his first few expeditions produce.

Conclusion: Narratives Of Alliance

To negotiate the perils of a narrow river in hostile terrain Robert Schomburgk sought to ally himself both with the natives, to confront the wilderness, and even with nature in some cases, to confront the natives. The diplomacy of incursion he practiced enabled the implementation of a project

of domestication and colonial power. I have tried to evoke the intricacies of this diplomacy and the alliances it worked to secure, while offering evidence for the role played by performance in the negotiation of the river. I have suggested some of the tensions introduced by these performances. In making these arguments I have relied on Schomburgk's own narrative and his accounts of how he performed his penetration of the interior of British Guiana. But these examples of isolated performances and negotiations are nested within the broader scope of Schomburgk's narrative performance. Every aspect of the diaries, from the construction of a hostile wilderness to the representations of the Indians, represent exactly an extended performance, a diplomatic negotiation of another set of allies.

Waccaways and eclipses, guns and sextants, these made vital New World allies, but Old World allies kept Schomburgk's craft afloat. The Smith and Barrow cataracts took their names from the former heads of the Royal Geographical Society. Schomburgk planted flags at their crests, flags at the sources of the Essequibo.[83] He buries a champagne bottle with a note commemorating Victoria's birthday (which, no good naturalist could forget, coincided with that of the "great Linné") at the upper Parima.[84] He christened the King William Cataract on the Essequibo (in honor of the "patron of the Royal Geographical Society) and "went through all of the established forms of naming it, much to the surprise and amusement of the Indians."[85] They are still more amused by the observation of Christmas on the upper reaches of the Berbice, where they received rations of sugar, dry beef and rum. "We enjoyed Christmas in our own way," Schomburgk wrote, claiming to have narrated the story of the "birth and atonement of our blessed Saviour" to the assembled representatives of the five tribes of the guianas. They christened the next set of rapids the Christmas Cataracts.[86]

The performance of metropolitan rituals in the presence of the Indian witness is a recurrent theme of Schomburgk's narrative. The Indians are regular observers at Schomburgk's evening prayers,[87] and they witness and assist in the "moving" service for the dead which Schomburgk reads over the body of his drowned companion, the young Mr. Reiss, who had

declared himself "destined to die young" the night before he was thrown from his canoe into the rapids.[88] From the loyal toast[89] to the solemn task of bearing the pall, Schomburgk performs the civilized accouterments of his expedition before his Indian escorts. The determined domestication proceeds through dry beef and champagne. A bottle of rum wins much needed allies on the banks of the Berbice, but a rugged Christmas camp scene goes a step further, cultivating precious allies in the council-hall of the Royal Geographical Society.

The performances are familiar representations of European life, acted out in the wilderness, through which Schomburgk becomes a guerrilla of civilization, extended beyond the front line, a gentleman behind the enemy lines. Such a representation cements his relationship with his sponsors. He is, after all, their agent. No line, separating expedition from performance can be drawn in the case of Schomburgk's diaries. Every detail of the "expedition" cited in this paper is a citation not of an expedition but of a performance of an expedition, a citation of a narrative of expedition. Crafted as a representation of the journey, the diaries presented to the Royal Geographical Society are themselves the consummate artifacts of the negotiation and diplomacy demanded of an explorer on a precarious assignment. His accounts, from the historical points of interest, linking his expedition to its forebears, to the lavish praise of the hardiness of Bunten's siphon Barometer,[90] are an extended negotiation of Schomburgk's alliance with the Society and English gentlemanly science, the alliances which, respectively, underwrote his expeditions and earned him a knighthood in 1844.

Schomburgk made a precarious dug out canoe in an alien landscape into a stage for the diplomacy of domestication. From that stage on a rivulet he negotiated the alliances that allowed him to slip through the dense green land on its fissures, acquiring and locating, destroying and defending, extending the embrace of European consciousness and control.

Notes

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1. Schomburgk will be the subject of a forthcoming biography by Peter Rivière, who has already treated certain aspects of the explorer's work in the monograph *Absent-minded Imperialism: Britain and the Expansion of Empire in Nineteenth-century Brazil* (London: Tauris, 1995). He has offered a brief biographical and interpretive essay as well: "From science to imperialism: Robert Schomburgk's humanitarianism" *Archives of Natural History* (1998) 25 (1): 1-8. Schomburgk also features prominently in my book, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).
2. *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society,* London, John Murray, 1836, Vol. 6, 9. In the body of this paper all references to this journal will appear by volume and page number.
3. "May the moment soon arrive when the boundaries of the rich and productive colony of British Guayana shall be decided by a government survey! then only can peace and happiness be insured to those who settle on the British side of the frontier." This passage follows Schomburgk's account of watching a Portuguese press-gang return from a raid with "little children of 5 and 6" and women, in addition to men, all bound and being shipped for labor in the mines to the south. (Vol. 10, 189).
4. Vol 7, 334.
5. Vol 7, 299.
6. I have examined these sources, particularly the visual and cartographic productions of the expeditions in *Masters of All They Surveyed,* op. cit. n.1.
7. It should be noted that the character of these documents changes considerably over the period, as does Schomburgk's status and role in the geographical definition or British Guiana: he receives a Crown commission to define the boundaries of the colony, and returns to the colony in this capacity in 1841.

8. Vol 6, 225.
9. I emphasize that I am here using the published versions of these sources. As Rivière has noted, and as I have discussed elsewhere, there are manuscript versions of much of this material, which differ from the published accounts. The differences can prove illuminating, see chapter three of *Masters of All They Surveyed.* I will here attempt to use the word "Indian" as Schomburgk used it, as a collective term for the indigenous people of the Guyanas, including those of mixed race who lived in conditions which Schomburgk considered "Indian." The circularity of the term and its role in constructing Schomburgk's perception of his environment are evident, but I use it as part of my attempt to work largely within the text. It is always capitalized, as in Schomburgk's diaries.
10. "We met a family of half-Indians, who had been up the Marie to procure clay for pottery; we bartered with them for some fruit called yuccu by the Spaniards and cocui by the Portuguese, in hopes of obtaining seed to introduce the tree into the colony at Demerara." (Vol. 10, 255).
11. See my discussion of the flower in chapter four of *Masters of All They Surveyed.*
12. Vol. 6, 280.
13. These anthropometric tables stand beside and have the same form as the tables of relative temperatures and barometric pressures. See Vol. 15, 23, and elsewhere.
14. "...an ethnological collection, consisting chiefly of numerous weapons and the household utensils of the Indians of Guiana." (Vol. 15, 103).
15. Vol. 15, 28, and elsewhere.
16. Bartering with a chief at Watu Ticaba, Schomburgk secures a skull, "not quite perfect, in consequence of a tree root having grown over it." This success encouraged him, and he made inquiries and found another Indian, Barokoto, "who, to my astonishment, entered immediately into the proposal, and observed that, if handsomely paid, he would give me the skulls of his mother in law and of two of his former wives." (Vol. 15, 46). This is an astounding passage which goes on for several pages, Barokoto becoming quite moved, according to Schomburgk, on encountering the remains of his youngest wife.

17. Vol. 15, 103.
18. "If steps are not taken to cultivate the Indian's good-will, the colony risks the loss of many valuable individuals," who will wander outside of the sketchy borders of the territory. This poses a serious problem to a slaveless plantation economy. (Vol. 7, 306).
19. Vol. 15, 12.
20. Vol. 7, 319.
21. Vol. 7, 286.
22. Vol. 7, 291.
23. Ibid.
24. Vol. 7, 292.
25. Vol. 7, 293.
26. Vol. 7, 297.
27. Vol. 7, 298.
28. Vol. 7, 325.
29. Vol. 7, 316.
30. Vol. 7, 326.
31. Vol. 7, 330.
32. Vol. 7, 332.
33. Ibid.
34. Vol. 7, 334.
35. "...indeed, the river here resembles more a lake studded with numerous wooded islands." (Vol. 6, 224) The Essequibo is more than eight miles wide at this point.
36. "It is an exciting thing to see the corial, when once in the current, shooting along with the swiftness of lightening: she arrives at the edge of a cataract, and balancing for a moment, she plunges headlong into the surge below, dashing the spray on either side against the rocks that bound the passage." (Vol. 7, 336).
37. "Our pleasure at the open river did not last long: again it narrowed, and dwindled in width to about ten yards. The islets and palms of the former tract were wanting, but they were amply replaced by lianas, chiefly *milkiana, convolvulaceae,* and a spreading bush which might be called the mangrove of the fresh waters. Our progress was now connected with constant toil: with the most harassing labour." (Vol. 7, 324).
38. "Seven discharges proved necessary before they proved successful: several slugs had penetrated the skull..." (Vol. 15, 3).

39. "Myriads of ants, driven by the waters from the savannah, had taken refuge in the bushes and on the trees; and these now assailed us on all sides, and inflicted merciless bites and stings." (Vol. 15, 19).

"After midnight one of those severe thunderstorms, so frequent at the commencement and close of the rainy season, broke upon us with such violence that our tents were blown down, and everyone fled to the canoe, which being in a sheltered place fortunately escaped the merciless fury of the storm..." (Vol. 10, 191).
40. "We had for some days past suffered from a minute sand fly, (*Sinulia spec.*?) which from sunset to sunrise inflicted upon us acute bites...They were this night so numerous that they compelled us to discontinue our astronomical observations. The size of this little insect scarcely exceeds that of a small pin; it attacks not only the face and hands, but gets into the hair and inflicts bites upon the scalp, we suffered from it more than I can describe." (Vol 15, 20).
41. Vol. 7, 318.
42. "On scouring the bush we discovered my Indian dog, Caniantho, stretched out dead, and a triangular wound on each side of his neck made it probable that he had been killed by the same tiger that had carried away the kairounies, and with which he had evidently fought: these were at last found, they had been dragged some distance from the place where we had hung them up and laid side by side to serve as the animal's next nights repast. I regretted the dog very much." Schomburgk had intended to give the dog to the Zoological Gardens on his return to London, as it was a "Macusie breed." (Vol 7, 333).
43. "...their tenacity of life is surprising; we fired at one thus floating, and the ball took off the further end of the snout; it received immediately another ball in the hinder part of the skull, which appeared to have taken effect...." It had not, and after a sound thrashing with cutlasses, the alligator "bounded up" and disappeared. (Vol 7, 313).
44. Ibid.
45. "How wisely ordained that this snake should be so sluggish in its nature, or who would venture on the savannas, where there are so many!" (Vol. 6, 175).

46. "Having brought the corials to our tents, we steered through the rows of trees; certainly a novel species of navigation." (Vol. 15, 9).
47. "Whenever the water on the savannah became too shallow for us, we were under the necessity of regaining the river the river, which we had some difficulty in doing, having to cut our way with cutlasses and axes through the thickets that fringed the stream." (Vol. 15, 19).
48. "On awakening this morning I found my hut under water, and might have stepped at once from my hammock into the canoe...the river had risen 10 and 1/2 feet in 36 hours." (Vol. 15, 8).
49. "A glance below, and the eye measured the abyss which extended at our feet, but the momentary shudder at the thought of a wrong step or slip of the foot vanished at the enjoyment of the splendid view." (Vol. 10, 178).
50. "I was sitting with Mr. Goodall under his tent toward dusk, when I felt something crawling between my feet and before I had time to see what it was, Mr. Goodall jumped in great terror from his seat, crying, `A snake!'...A single motion of one or the other of my feet might have induced the snake to inflict its bite." (Vol. 15, 42).
51. Vol. 15, 76.
52. Vol. 15, 59.
53. Vol. 6, 251.
54. "...though the point of the arrow had only penetrated the skin and had caused scarcely any loss of blood, it was sufficient to take away the life." (Vol. 6, 258).
55. "...they mixed rotten wood with their cassada [cassava] flour to make it last..." (Vol. 15, 55).
56. "The people of one of the smaller corials which had started before us came to a halt to dig up the larva of some insect which they ate with their cassada bread..." (Vol. 19, 227).

Schomburgk notes that the crew eats a large species of earthworm which lives on the riverbank, when they can find them. (Vol. 10, 230).
57. They are "experts" at boat building and navigating the rivers. They guide the "corials" down the rapids "with great care" sometimes in less than a foot of water. Their hunting abilities, knowledge of the forest and capacity to build fires all attract Schomburgk's admiration and emulation. See Vol. 7, 308; Vol. 10, 175 and passim.

58. "Feb. 1, 1839, This day put an end to my hope of reaching the source of the Orinoco: in the evening we arrived at the huts of the Maiongkongs and found them in the greatest consternation, and about to fly from the place in consequence of the massacre of their tribe by the Kirishanas, who inhabit the mountain between the Orinoco and the Ocamo, and who had treacherously fallen upon them when on their way to visit them for the purpose of traffic...These outrages had excited a general panic and my party became infected with the same fears to such an extent, that not only did they preemptorily refuse to go forward, but made hasty preparations for taking to their heels and leaving me and my baggage to my fate. In vain I offered them every bribe I could afford, even my own rifle...nothing could induce them to give up their inducement to return." (Vol. 19, 232).

This passage illustrates Schomburgk's dependence on his native crew.
59. Vol. 7, 310.
60. Schomburgk was repeatedly surprised to discover natives whom he had encountered on one expedition, on another river on a later expedition. In several places he alludes to the "roaming disposition" of the Indians, the "habit of wandering." At least one such "re-encounter" occurs in each of the four accounts. See, for example, Vol. 7, 306 and again 309; Vol. 10, 215.
61. The shape of the narrative of the first journey is almost dictated by Schomburgk's outbreaks of fever. They prevent the expedition exploring the upper Demerara, strike "every other day" and eventually demand that Schomburgk rely on his crew to carry him along the trail back to the river in his hammock. See Vol. 6, 244, 246, 248 and 255.
62. Vol. 7, 286.
63. "I must confess that of all the tribes the Tarumas appeared to us the most friendly and obliging. We lacked neither fish nor game during our stay. Whenever we found that our larder was getting empty, hunting or fishing parties were undertaken, and it was sure to be replenished." (Vol. 15, 47).

And at Esmeralda the local chief, "finding we meant to stay two or three days, set out in his canoe for [the village's]

plantations promising to return the next evening. Good as his word, he came back to us the next day, loaded with some fine bunches of plantains, and a small number of oranges and limes..." (Vol. 10, 247).

There are too many such incidents to cite, Schomburgk's party secure food at nearly every village on his routes.

64. "Our liberality in this article [glass beads] won their hearts." (Vol. 15, 87).

"[We] heaped presents on our informants; a looking glass seemed to cause them great delight." (Vol. 15, 73).

65. "Previous to our departure the Indians had brought us about 30 cakes of cassada bread, for which they demanded mock-coral glass beads and others of a white colour, the latter being most esteemed by the Wapisiana ladies; the men requested for their share of knives, hooks, etc." (Vol. 15, 8).

Though the Maopityans were very short of cassada, and were reduced to eating wood-pulp to supplement their diets, "Our glass beads and knives were, however, too seducing, and the women, (to whose department the barter of the produce of the provision grounds belongs) readily parted with what they could spare." (Vol. 15, 55).

66. Vol. 15, 41.

67. Vol. 6, 259.

68. Vol. 10, 223.

69. Vol. 6, 261.

70. "...a greater sensation was caused by the sight of our fowling pieces. 'Arquebusa, arquebusa!' escaped from almost every lip, and women and children ran away crying when we took one of them up" (Vol. 15, 81).

71. "The natives, who had never seen white men, were much astonished at our cooking utensils, but more so at my compass and its use." (Vol. 10, 169).

"My large telescope proved of great interest to them..." (Vol. 15, 81).

72. Vol. 15, 45.

73. Vol. 10, 181, 184, 238, 247, 250, etc. In this report Schomburgk notes that he possesses manuscripts of the journals of at least one earlier explorer of the region, Lt. Gullifer. There are numerous references to Humboldt's personal narrative.

Vol. 15, 96, which provides a history of previous incursions.

74. Vol. 15, 26.

75. "Had I not been ashamed of showing any weakness before the savages, I might have cried out with the pain..." (Vol 15, 60). See also Vol. 15, 99, where Schomburgk refuses to show his hunger.

76. Vol. 10, 200.

77. Vol. 10, 242.

78. Vol. 10, 215.

79. Vol. 10, 173. A similar story is recounted in Vol. 6, 255.

80. See, for instance, Vol. 10, 201, where an Indian assistant slips and breaks a thermometer.

81. Vol. 6, 280.

82. "How frequently did I consider our disposable force, to see whether certain objects of particular interest to science, or to myself personally, could not be stowed somewhere!" The Indians, he goes on could carry no more than the instruments and a few articles for barter. (Vol. 15, 75).

83. Vol. 10, 171.

84. Vol. 10, 176.

85. Vol. 6, 267.

86. Vol. 7, 317.

87. "A severe thunder storm which raged about sun-set dispersed them, but at our evening prayers they were silent spectators." (Vol. 10, 203).

88. "...and while I read the expressive and moving service for the dead, there was not an eye dry of those who call themselves Christians; and even the Indians, decently apparelled, stood with downcast eyes around the grave, and over many a rude cheek stole a tear." (Vol. 7, 338).

89. "...after drinking to her Majesty's health in the unadulterated water of the Essequibo..." (Vol. 10, 171).

90. Vol. 15, 103.