



Le Vaillant's camp at Kok's Kraal on the Great Fish River. Le Vaillant, elegantly plumed, stands in the centre, receiving new specimens from his Khoi hunters to add to his grand ornithological collection.  
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Library of Parliament, Cape Town.)

FRANÇOIS LE VAILLANT

## Travels into the Interior of Africa via the Cape of Good Hope

VOLUME 1

Translated and edited by  
Ian Glenn with the assistance of  
Catherine Lauga Du Plessis and Ian Farlam

For Kees,  
Friend, collaborator, inspiration...  
Warm regards,  
Ian Glenn

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## FOREWORD

With the publication of this volume, the Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of South African Historical Documents (VRS) returns to a genre to which it is no stranger, the traveller's account. In its 89 years the VRS has produced over 30 such volumes,<sup>1</sup> including such key texts of South African travel writing as Valentyn's *Beschryvinge*, Thunberg's *Travels*, Sparrman's *Travels*, Somerville's *Narrative*, Paravicini di Capelli's *Reize* and Lichtenstein's *Travels*.<sup>2</sup> To this company of notable 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century authors whose accounts helped put southern Africa on the European map both literally and figuratively, the VRS now adds an English version – the first in over 200 years – of François le Vaillant's *Voyages ... dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique*.

Apparently a bestseller when it first appeared in the 1790s – it was soon translated from its original French into seven other European languages – Le Vaillant's work was especially popular at a time when interest among educated Europeans in tales of travel in exotic regions was booming, in tandem with Europe's own widening horizons or what Pratt calls its growing 'planetary consciousness'.<sup>3</sup> To these armchair travellers, Le Vaillant's colourful account of his adventures in the wilds of distant Africa was captivating. Led by this swashbuckling young naturalist-explorer – his heroic depiction of himself with pen and brush makes the use of this adjective most apt – the reader was taken on a daring expedition into an unknown world filled with alien flora, fauna and folk. Under the banner of science the book offered its readers the fruits of his discoveries on this journey, all neatly classified, mounted and named. Enthrilled, a contemporary spoke of 'his fondness for science, and love of humanity [and]...daring spirit of enterprise'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a full list of the travellers' accounts which the VRS has published see <http://www.vanriebeeksociety.co.za/publist13.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> F. Valentyn, *Beschryvinge van de Kaap der Goede Hoop...1726*, 2 vols (VRS II, 2 & 4, 1971, 1973); C.P. Thunberg, *Travels at the Cape of Good Hope 1772-1775* (VRS II, 17, 1986); A. Sparrman, *Travels in the Cape 1772-1776*, 2 vols (VRS II, 6 & 7, 1975, 1976); W. Somerville, *Narrative of Journeys to the Eastern Cape Frontier and to Lattakoe 1799-1802* (VRS II, 10, 1979); W.B.E. Paravicini di Capelli, *Reize in de Binnen-Landen van Zuid-Afrika. Gedaan in den Jaare 1803* (VRS I, 46, 1965); H. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa in...1803, 1804, 1805, 1806*, 2 vols (VRS I, 10, 11, 1928-30). Full bibliographic details of these works are available in the list of VRS publications at the end of this volume or on its website.

<sup>3</sup> M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, London and New York, 1992), 9.

<sup>4</sup> E. Helme, 'Dedication' in F. Le Vaillant, *Travels from the Cape of Good Hope into the Interior Parts of Africa* (William Lane, London, 1790), vi and x.

Yet some commentators of the time were less impressed by the writing of this thirty-something naturalist-on-the-make, and called into question its accuracy, authenticity and even authorship. Neither they nor later critics dismissed its contents as unimportant, however, even if they had been embellished. Taken with sufficient grains of salt, corroborating evidence and put into its correct contemporary context, it is a treasure-house of ornithological, zoological and ethnographic information on early colonial South Africa.

It is exactly this which recent scholarship<sup>3</sup> on Le Vaillant has begun to make clear. To this continuing process this volume will contribute significantly, for it provides a translation into English which is wholly new and which is, for the first time, unexpurgated. From it and the accompanying editorial comment Le Vaillant emerges as an Enlightenment man, his vanity matched only by his eagerness to make his name as a naturalist and author in the restless world of science in a France on the cusp of the Revolution. Between that mental world and late 18<sup>th</sup> Century South Africa, his work makes a revealing link.

That this publication (encompassing volume 1 of Le Vaillant's original text) will allow the modern reader to perceive this connection is a tribute to the editor and his team whom the VRS thanks for long years of labour on this text. It is intended to follow it with the publication of volume 2 of the text sooner rather than later. Readers, left hanging by volume 1 at a tantalizing point in the narrative, when the author's flirtation with a Gonaqua maiden whom he re-named Narina, could lead anywhere, will surely demand that the sequel follows in short order.

Howard Phillips (Chairman of the VRS)

<sup>3</sup> L.C. Rookmaaker, P. Mundy, I.E. Glenn and E.C. Spary, *François Levaillant and the Birds of Africa* (Beenthuurst Press, Johannesburg, 2004).

## INTRODUCTION

### I. The Man

François Le Vaillant had, in many ways, a distinctively modern, unsettled life, full of contradictions and paradoxes.<sup>1</sup>

He portrayed himself as a child of nature and celebrated wilderness, yet spent much of his adult life in Paris. He extolled his role as a solitary explorer, yet was a man on company business and caught in complex social movements and legal entanglements. He decried theorists and academies, yet described himself as a man of letters, and was an active member of the *Idéologues*, a leading intellectual group, after the French Revolution.

He changed his surname to suggest his own sense of his own new upper class status, yet at points seemed a celebrant of the French Revolution and collaborated with Casimir Varon who was a leading revolutionary functionary. He produced probably the most lavishly illustrated map ever of South Africa for Louis XVI and depended as a commercial naturalist on wealthy clients, yet applied for a post in the new Museum of Natural History as an *aide-naturaliste* – via the Committee of Public Safety, at the height of the Terror. He served as a cadet officer under royalist France but lived to see his sons take leading roles in the republican armies.

He lived in a time of enormous upheaval and intense ideological and social opposition, and survived the French Revolution and its aftermath to reach old age. Like many others who have lived through a violent revolution, he and his attitudes towards it probably changed to become cautious and flexible and self-serving. When the penalty for ideological inflexibility can be death, some tolerance from later generations towards inconsistency is in order. If we see his contradictions as a sign of his modern complexity and interest, we are more likely to accept him as in many ways our contemporary and to see his work as having an ongoing interest.

<sup>1</sup> Much of this section follows the lengthier biographical account in L. C. Rookmaaker, P. Mundy, I. E. Glenn, E. C. Spary, *François Levaillant and the Birds of Africa* (Johannesburg, 2004) – hereafter *Levaillant Birds*. Earlier accounts, even Bokhorst's in J. C. Quinton, A. M. Lewin Robinson, et al., *François Le Vaillant, Traveller in South Africa, and his collection of 165 water-colour paintings, 1781-1784* (Cape Town, 1973) – hereafter *Le Vaillant, Traveller* – while useful in some respects, should be treated sceptically. V. S. Forbes, *Pioneer travellers in South Africa* (Cape Town and Amsterdam, 1965) and L. C. Rookmaaker, *The Zoological Exploration of Southern Africa 1650 - 1790* (Rotterdam, 1989) provide valuable information on Le Vaillant's time in the Cape.



He was born François Vaillant, in Paramaribo, then part of Dutch Guyana, to French parents on 6 August 1753. His father, Nicolas, and mother, Catherine-Joséphine François, had eloped there because his mother's father had accused Nicolas of kidnapping his daughter. The father came from the haute bourgeoisie, with strong ties to the legal professions.

Le Vaillant describes his childhood in Surinam in the *Historical Background* that prefaced the work (see below, p. 5). We can note some important consequences of his childhood that Le Vaillant himself does not spell out. First, he almost certainly grew up speaking and understanding Dutch as well as French, something that made the trip into the Cape interior possible. It seems that his parents developed his interest in natural history as they traded in specimens, while growing up in a colony under Dutch commercial influence led to his family having connections that were to prove invaluable when it came to getting permission from the Dutch East India Company for coming to the Cape. One account suggests that his father re-married, after his mother's death, into a well-known Dutch family and that his step-mother was niece of Herman Boerhaave, professor of medicine at the University of Leiden.<sup>1</sup>

Le Vaillant's description of how he grew up 'almost savage' also allowed him to present himself as an outsider to French habits and French artifice, someone closer to Rousseau's ideals in *Emile* and elsewhere of what an ideal education should be. The publisher's publicity notice, or *préface d'insérer*, in the *Journal Encyclopédique*, stressed the importance of Le Vaillant's glamorous status as outsider.<sup>2</sup> Le Vaillant presents himself as a person outside the system, able to comment on it with almost anthropological detachment, and it is worth noting how many of the leading literary and cultural figures in France (Rousseau himself, Camus, Saint-John Perse, Le Clézio, Derrida) share this experience of having a double identity, a cultural hybridity as part of the painful benefit of not being born metropolitan. Le Vaillant may have been one of the first to note what would become one of the characteristic feelings of torn identity of children of empire as he left Surinam for Europe in 1763 at the age of 10:

I could not become ungrateful so quickly and so calmly see the last of the generous land that had seen my birth. I often looked at the happy shores I was leaving further and further behind. As they receded and, carried by the winds, I neared the frozen climes of the north, a profound sadness attacked my soul and dissipated the glamour of the future.

<sup>2</sup> See *Levaillant Birds*, 20 and notes.

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, 'Voyage de M. Le Vaillant', *Journal Encyclopédique*, 8, 3 (December 1789), 496-502; on the importance of this publicity see below, xl.

Nonetheless, on his return to France, Le Vaillant, like any other bourgeois son, faced the problem of a career – and hunting, the passion and pastime of his youth, scarcely seemed a career for a young bourgeois. Then a suitable new career as a cavalry officer opened up for him. Up to the late eighteenth century, the rank of cavalry officer had been reserved for the aristocracy. But, under pressures of failing recruitment, members of the high bourgeoisie were allowed to apply to become cavalry officers in the regiment of Berry.<sup>4</sup> At the age of 18, on 3 May 1772 François Vaillant signed on as a supernumerary cadet officer ('surnuméraire') and, in principle, engaged himself for a ten-year career.<sup>5</sup> The entry noted that he was 'natif de Suriname' (born in Surinam) and aged 17.

Perhaps with the promise of a military career in sight, at the age of 20 he married Marguerite Suzanne de Noor, a year or two older than he was, on 16 September 1773 in Lunéville. They were both minors – though in her case this meant younger than 25, as later records suggest she was 22 at the time. His father was listed as 'conseiller au présidial de Metz' (a judge in the regional court of Metz) while his mother had already died.

Their engagement had been formally announced only three days before in order for the banns to be published. His father was present at the marriage, along with a cavalry lieutenant-colonel, Henry Louis Chevalier Dehayssin, but no representatives of her family seem to have signed the register. (Two representatives of the Chenié family signed as family friends and it may be this Chenié family into which she re-married after her later divorce from Le Vaillant.)

De Noor (whose name is also listed as Denoor in many records) was herself the daughter of a career soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army, listed in the marriage records as 'Mr Pierre de Stallan de Noor, officier, capitaine au service de sa majesté impériale et catholique la reine de Hongrie et de Bohême', and an equally aristocratic sounding wife, 'Mme Eleonor le Guileux d'Achy'. Perhaps she saw herself as of higher social status than Vaillant – their son, as an army officer, used De Noor as his signature in his letters as a claim to some kind of aristocratic standing and this may have been a factor in Vaillant's later change of name to Le Vaillant. She seems to have been a woman of considerable force of will and persuasion, as the fate of Le Vaillant's collection shows, but she also had professional ambitions and interests, as one document records her profession as 'naturalist'.

A son, François Antoine Emmanuel Vaillant, was born on 17 January 1775 in Lunéville. His paternal grandfather was listed as godfather, and his maternal grandmother as godmother. A second child, Thérèse-Françoise, was born

<sup>4</sup> See Louis Tuetey, *Les officiers sous l'ancien régime: nobles et roturiers* (Paris, 1908).

<sup>5</sup> Military Archives, Chateau de Vincennes. Yb560. Yb 73, Contrôle signalé de la Compagnie des Gendarmes de Berry.

in February 1776 and died on 21 August of the same year. A few months later, Françoise-Julie was born, on 10 March 1777, named after her godmother, Françoise Julie Le Dur, née Vaillant, married to M. Le Dur, an advocate at the Parliament in Metz.<sup>6</sup>

Le Vaillant says nothing about this period in the military in his account of the travels though it may have been that the cavalry training helped him lead the expedition successfully. Late in his life, after the Restoration, he wrote to appeal to the military for a commission for his son Charles, on the basis of his own service, which he made sound far more substantial than it had been: 'I too had the honour, in my youth, of serving under both Louis XV and Louis XVI, until ... called to pursue another career, that of exploration and scientific discovery...'.<sup>7</sup> But why did he leave the cavalry before his ten year enlistment period was over?

The answer is to be found in the recruitment book of the Berry regiment which records on 5 April 1774 that he was turned down as an officer because he was not tall enough to meet the minimum height requirements for a cavalry officer – he was recorded as being '5 pieds, 2 pouces and 7 lignes' (5 foot, 2 inches and 7 lines), or, in modern terms, about 1.7 m or 5 foot 6 inches.<sup>8</sup> Had he been a centimetre or two taller, the history of ornithology and South African literature might have been very different.

When Le Vaillant talks of moving to Paris in 1777, he does not, understandably, say anything about being a rejected cavalry officer, but his career prospects must have seemed bleak, as a young father of two without a profession or inheritance. Presumably he intended to make a living out of trading birds, perhaps because he knew he had gathered enough skills, and perhaps the formula for preserving them, from a collector he had met, Bécœur.<sup>9</sup> It seems that both his father and his wife were involved in the business of building collections and selling and trading specimens. A contemporary survey of collections stated that by 1780 a 'fils Vaillant' had established a reputation as a bird taxidermist and collector in Asnières, a Paris suburb, and that he had many specimens from Surinam.<sup>10</sup> If this were the case, then we can see the

voyage to the Cape, not as a flight from failure, but as a consequence of his success and growing reputation.

Le Vaillant suggests that when he left on his travels, he was impervious to all requests not to go and left almost in secret. It must have been difficult for a wife with two young children to accept his departure on a lengthy voyage. Yet he writes of receiving a letter from her with great delight during the voyage and it seems that whatever precipitated their separation occurred after his return.

### The trip to the Cape

What happened next is puzzling, though circumstantial evidence suggests a likely chain of events. In short, he went to Holland, met Jacob Temminck, the Treasurer of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), and came to the Cape. But, as Karel Schoeman first pointed out, the Dutch East India Company was very unwilling to allow non-Company members into the Cape. And why should the Company in the form of the fiscal W.C. Boers have assisted him so royally when he was there by providing him with wagons, provisions and workers?

An inspection of VOC records in fact reveals that Le Vaillant, though he nowhere states this in the text, was in Company service during the whole time he was away from Holland and was paid accordingly.<sup>11</sup> But why should a lowly 'constabelsmaat' or gunner's mate on a Company ship have been able to get off in Cape Town? And on what pretext was he listed as being in Cape Town when he was, in fact, in the interior? The first and only record of him in the Company registers for the Cape between 1781 and 1784 shows that in 1781 he is listed as 'Levaelend', 'convalescing' rather than being in any service.<sup>12</sup> On his return he is listed, when being paid off, as having worked on the *Son*, a local ship plying between Cape Town and Robben Island.<sup>13</sup>

The likeliest scenario to explain what happened is that Le Vaillant and Temminck came to an agreement. In exchange for sponsorship in getting to the Cape and help there, Le Vaillant undertook to collect new specimens for Temminck.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps Temminck instructed Le Vaillant to get off in Cape Town on the grounds of illness and to present a letter to Boers, asking for

<sup>6</sup> Lunéville: *Généalogie de toutes les familles, 1562-1792* (d'après les registres paroissiaux et les extraits notariés), vol. 15, Municipal Archives of Lunéville.

<sup>7</sup> Military Archives, Chateau de Vincennes, File of General Charles Levaillant, G.D. 2ème, 1297.

<sup>8</sup> Military Archives, Chateau de Vincennes, Yb560. Yb 73, Contrôle signalé de la Compagnie des Gendarmes de Berry.

<sup>9</sup> On Bécœur and the importance of his discovery of the preservative compound, see *Levaillant Birds*, 23-6 and L. C. Rookmaaker, P.A. Morris, I.E. Glenn, P.J. Mundy, 'The ornithological cabinet of Jean-Baptiste Bécœur and the secret of the arsenical soap', *Archives of Natural History*, 33, 1 (April 2006), 146-58, hereafter Rookmaaker et al. 'The ornithological cabinet ...'.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques de Favanne, in A.J. Dèzallier d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie*, 2 vols (3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed., Paris, 1780), vol. 1, 802.

<sup>11</sup> He is listed as 'Constabelsmaat' in the *Groenboek* of the *Held Wiltmade*, in the Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, VOC 6696 – I am indebted to Femme Gaastra for tracking this down in response to an inquiry.

<sup>12</sup> Cape Archives, VC 46, General Muster Rolls (1775-1782) and VC 47, General Muster Rolls (1782-1789).

<sup>13</sup> He received 552 guilders, 2 stuivers and 4 penningen, and signed a receipt; Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, VOC 6696.

<sup>14</sup> See *Levaillant Birds*, 36.

help. Strictly speaking, then, Temminck was using Company resources for his private interests, and Le Vaillant was in the Cape on fraudulent terms and paid for work he had never done. It is therefore not surprising that Le Vaillant never mentioned the Company at all in his descriptions and also presented himself as an independent observer. And, for a text in French claiming the ideal of social detachment and the freedom from mercantile interests that Rousseau advocated, it would have been a blow to admit that he was in effect on Dutch Company business.

The *Held Woltemade*, the ship on which Le Vaillant travelled to Cape Town, was captured by the British shortly after its departure without him for the East. Research in Admiralty papers in London shows no reference to Le Vaillant, but the evidence suggests that Le Vaillant had met Boers' sister on the *Held Woltemade* on his way out to Cape Town. She continued on the voyage and was taken prisoner.<sup>15</sup>

This position of being at once a part of the Company but in effect a privileged and non-serving part of it may have shaped several parts of Le Vaillant's view of the Cape. Rather like Joseph Conrad in the Congo a century later, he was able to take a detached and critical view of commercial colonialism. Le Vaillant had some reasons to take a positive view of Dutch colonialism and perhaps saw the treatment of slaves as relatively benign compared to what he had experienced in Surinam. Though Le Vaillant was indebted to Temminck and in some ways obliged to conceal what happened, he took a scathing view of Van Riebeeck and Dutch colonial exploitation and could criticise the local officials and, especially, the burghers in the interior for their treatment of the indigenous peoples. But when he talks of having to hide his anger at what happened, it does seem that he felt himself under an uneasy obligation to his patron.

There is also a perhaps surprising animus in the text towards Plettenberg, Governor of the Cape during Le Vaillant's period there though Le Vaillant made no mention of meeting him. As Boers had to return to Holland during this period because of burgher complaints (see, below, p. 16), it may be that Le Vaillant felt that Plettenberg did not give him the same support or simply felt that he was a poor governor.

Le Vaillant's time in the Cape and his activities in Africa have been the subject of extensive analysis, particularly from Vernon Forbes and Kees Rookmaaker, with further commentary in the parliamentary volumes and in *Levaillant Birds*.<sup>16</sup> Further material will emerge from the notes to this and the subsequent volume.

<sup>15</sup> National Archives, Kew, Records of the High Court of Admiralty and colonial Vice-Admiralty courts, HCA 30/336.

<sup>16</sup> Forbes, *Pioneer travellers*; Rookmaaker, *The Zoological Exploration of Southern Africa*.

In summary, he made three major collecting forays. The first, around Cape Town and in the Saldanha Bay area, ended in disaster when the British fleet entered Saldanha Bay and the captain of the *Middelburg* set fire to the ship with Le Vaillant's collections on it. The incident is described in the narrative. The second, the longest expedition, was the trip to the Eastern Cape undertaken from December 1781 to mid-1783, the first part of which is described in this volume; the third, North to the Orange River, from June 1783 till some point in 1784 formed the subject of *New Travels*. He left the Cape on the *Ganges* in July 1784 to return to Holland. In brief, his account of the first journey seems largely accurate, though there are serious questions over some sections; the account of the trip North to the Orange River is much less accurate. A fuller account of the latter should be the subject of a later volume.

### Return to Europe and Revolution

When Le Vaillant returned to Holland in November 1784, he was paid off for his fictitious service as 'constabelsmaat' and, presumably, gave Temminck his share of the collections. If he also traded specimens en route or in Holland, it may be that some of the later errors in his collection and description arose here.

Early in 1785, Le Vaillant returned to Paris, four-and-a-half years after he had left it to set out on his African adventures. He was to spend the rest of his life, till his death in 1824, in France. He lived at the epicentre of the major political and ideological event of modern history, through a series of revolutions and political upheavals, at a time when people could be killed for their ideas and intellectual loyalties. He lived through the French Revolution, the rule of Napoleon, and the Restoration of the monarchy.

When Le Vaillant returned to France, he had as his intellectual or symbolic capital or advantage, not only his ornithological expertise, but his African experience. He tried to make intellectual sense of – and money from – his period in the Cape in four major ways: by selling his collection and being a dealer in natural objects; by writing a popular account of his travels; by writing what we would now call anthropology; and by his contribution to ornithology. Each of these represents a significant part of his cultural and intellectual contribution, and of his experience back in France. In one legal document, Le Vaillant gives as his profession 'homme de lettres et naturaliste' – man of letters and naturalist – showing he saw himself as writer, intellectual and scientist.

Some time between his return to France and the publication of the *Travels*, he changed his name. Whatever the marital and social reasons for this, by becoming Le Vaillant – the valiant one – as opposed simply to Vaillant, he



could also present himself as the archetypal hunter and adventurer, the product, in some sense, of his adventure and his writing.

We know less about Le Vaillant's 40 years in France than about his time in the Cape and what is known comes from two major sources: his involvement in and dealings with the revolutionary bodies of the day; and legal documents around his own complicated marital and familial situation.

### Co-habitation, divorce and re-marriage

At some point after his return from the Cape, Le Vaillant separated from De Noor. His time away must have been difficult for her and the children, both of whom subsequently had uneasy and fraught relationships with their mother. It is not clear how much, if anything, Marguerite contributed to Le Vaillant's work while he was in Africa or after his return. On one legal document she later gave her occupation as 'naturaliste', suggesting she might have helped with the collecting of and trade in natural objects. Judging from her finally successful efforts to press the government to buy the collection, she was a forceful and energetic woman. Much of the complications of his later life came from the timing of his separation, later divorce and a new relationship.

When the secular Revolutionary government introduced a law in 1792 allowing citizens to divorce, reflecting the new social ethos, there was a rush of disenchanted couples taking advantage of the new legislation. It was only in 1793, however, that a flurry of legal activity between Le Vaillant and Marguerite culminated in divorce on 21 August, allowing both to remarry. The reason De Noor agreed appears to be that she had gained some measure of financial independence: earlier in the year she had inherited a legacy from her aunt, Marie Catherine Jabbé (née Denoor), who had died on 4 April 1793.<sup>17</sup> By divorcing, she ensured that Le Vaillant would have no claim on her inheritance. But at the same time she managed to retain her claim to half the value of his natural history collections.

After her divorce from Le Vaillant, De Noor re-married and became Mme Chenié (though the name was often spelled Chenier), but her second husband was no relation of the poet, André Chenier, as Bokhorst speculated, but a tax collector. Later on in her life she figured in a highly-publicised trial and scandal involving their son François and his wife who was accused of trying to poison her mother-in-law but escaped prison and fled to Belgium.

<sup>17</sup> Marie-Catherine Denoor, Suzanne's aunt, was married to François Jabbé, a Paris tapestry merchant; Etudes Lienard, notaire, Archives Nationales, death certificate dated 27 August 1793.

### Foyot

Le Vaillant's second marriage was to Pierrette Charlotte Foyot whom he had probably met in the late 1780s. She was the daughter of Didier François Foyot, a judge in Sézanne in the Marne district to the east of Paris. Foyot (whose sister was to become Charles Baudelaire's grand-mother) was born in 1766. Four children were born of her liaison with Le Vaillant: Jean (5 October 1790), Julie Caroline (24 September 1791), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (24 December 1793) and Charles Boërs (17 September 1794 – though a birth certificate in his Army records gives the date as 17 October 1795, perhaps a more plausible date).

Bokhorst pointed to confusion about the date of the marriage: it is given as June 1789 on the birth certificate of their middle son, who was born in December 1793. We should simply read the claim of the early date as an attempt to provide a birth-date for the son within the dates of their marriage and thus legitimize him. The church of St Germain l'Auxerrois, at which they claimed they had married in 1789, was the church at which the King himself worshipped, but it has no records available prior to 1803, and of course, any marriage recorded before 1794 would have been bigamous. This irregularity would have profound implications for the three oldest children when it came to questions of inheritance.

His and Pierrette's 'cohabitation' was not legalized until early in the following year after his divorce, on 7 February 1794, in the middle of the Reign of Terror, some months after the divorce from De Noor. On 19 pluviôse, L'An II [7 February 1794] a marriage contract between Le Vaillant (called Vaillant in the document) and Foyot was signed with Me Louis Brelut de Lagrange.<sup>18</sup> By then he was forty-one, she was twenty-eight. At this time they were living 'au lieu dit Chaillot, section de Champs Elyses'. The marriage to a daughter of a respectable provincial bourgeois family brought him both a marriage settlement of F50,000 and the gift of property, probably in 1796, from Foyot's father, the farm Soigny-la-Beauvais at La Noue near Sézanne that had been confiscated from the Catholic Church. The gift of the property in particular meant that Le Vaillant became one of the bourgeois benefiting from the change of power during the French Revolution as he passed into a new period of what one might call revolutionary bourgeois respectability. The family moved, for part of the year at least, to the house at La Noue in the Marne, closer to Foyot's parents.

Le Vaillant and Pierrette remained in Paris throughout the period of the Revolution, but little is known of their everyday existence. Only one letter

<sup>18</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris, ET/XIII/481.

written by Pierrette has survived, containing a description of a near-catastrophic experience, and also giving some sense of the family and her devotion to Le Vaillant.<sup>10</sup> A massive explosion in the Grenelle gunpowder factory occurred on 21 August 1794, soon after the Reign of Terror ended, killing a thousand people. At this time they were living just across the Seine from the factory, in the rue des Batailles. Control of the gunpowder factories had been assumed by the government in order to keep pace with the demand generated by France's foreign wars. Jean-Antoine Chaptal, a renowned chemist, was in charge of the Grenelle factory, and had greatly improved the manufacture of gunpowder and quadrupled output. Supporters of the recently deposed Robespierre were suspected of sabotage, though it is more likely that the explosion was an accident, the result of the increased production. Pierrette wrote to her father to reassure her family of their safety.

I have just had your letter, my dear father, and I hasten to set your mind at ease about our fate. I have just recovered from the fright I had and the bruises I got. Heaven be thanked we got off so lightly.

My husband and children escaped completely. At the moment of the explosion the children were playing around the pump that you know is on the terrace in front of the house.

The windows fell from above them, but the good Lord watched over them because they did not get the slightest scratch. As for me, I got up. I was not yet dressed and I escaped with my little one in my arms. At the moment I was going down, a window lighting the third floor staircase fell to the ground floor. Luckily it did not fall completely on me and I only had my arm slightly injured, but our house is in a terrible state. Our windows are broken, our doors buckled, almost all the locks exploded. Even the floor has come away from the walls. But, my dear father, we are really happy to have got off so lightly, because we could have been lost without seeing each other again.

You cannot imagine the horrible noise that this accident caused at the moment of the explosion. Everyone left the house, screaming like mad. Just afterwards, people came to warn us that it was only the workshop that had exploded and that the big powder-room might not take long to do the same.

Judge, my dear father, what my state was when I heard this. A moment before this, my husband had received the order to go to his Section so that I thought we would not see each other again before dying. Everyone was escaping to the Bois de Boulogne and people were urging me to do the same, but how could I dream of saving myself when I knew my husband was in danger. No, I preferred to go

and look for him, and was lucky enough to find him on the way. He was returning, having confirmed the horrible news that we had just been given. Because we had no hope of having enough time to get to the Bois de Boulogne, he took us into a big garden opposite our house, where we took shelter under a thicket of chestnut trees.

After having commended my children, my husband and myself to God, I felt braver, probably what gave me courage was the certitude that I would not survive them. Several times we heard shouts, 'Everyone escape, it is going to go.' Judge, judge of our fear, but one cannot imagine such a thing, one has to suffer it because nothing can be compared to it.

In the end, we got off with a fright only, because there was nothing left to blow up.

(Adieu, my dear father. I embrace mother and Adele tenderly. I embrace you as I love you, that is to say, very tenderly.)

The letter not only serves to give a vivid sense of a near disaster, but also suggests that, by contrast, everyday life in Paris at this period, whatever its hardships, was severely shaken by this blast. It also places Le Vaillant himself into his duty as a citizen member of the 'Sections' and gives an indication that his role during the Revolution may have been more complex than the surviving official documents reveal.

### Life in the Revolution

As the reaction to the *Travels* showed, Le Vaillant's work had both royal and revolutionary appeal. When the Revolution started in earnest and France went to war with its neighbours, he lost many of his sources of income from international trade in specimens and from wealthy aristocratic clients. What then happened to him during the Revolution and what was his attitude towards it?

It had always been accepted, at least until Bokhorst's research, that Le Vaillant was imprisoned during the Terror and saved from execution only by the fall of Robespierre in July 1794. Even the novel *Makanna* ends with the hero, Paul Laroon, based on Le Vaillant, saved from execution by the end of the Terror. As this story was current in biographies during Le Vaillant's life and shortly after his death, it almost certainly emanated from Le Vaillant himself and has been part of biographical accounts since the early nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, it is now possible to dismiss any suggestion that he was in prison during 1793 or 1794. That he was living in Paris and not incarcerated is evident from a variety of sources. There are a number of legal transactions

<sup>10</sup> The original of the letter is held by the Gauvin family, descendants of Foyot's sister, in Sézanne.



signed by him during these years. He had dealings with various government committees trying to negotiate the sale of his collection during this whole period. He wrote a letter dated 13 December 1793 to the Committee of Public Instruction, offering them a copy of his *Travels*. He gave a government committee access to his collection on 5 April 1794, in an attempt to determine a just price. He applied for a post as an *aide-naturaliste* in the Museum of Natural History in Paris in mid-1794, through the Committee of Public Safety, at the height of the Terror. A search of Parisian prison records of the period revealed no trace of him.

The story that he had been in prison during the Terror was in fact contradicted by himself years later, in January 1823, when he claimed, in a letter to a notary, that he had been on the run, abroad, living under an assumed name, and was therefore unable to register the birth of his son Jean in October 1794.<sup>20</sup> 'Having been forced for very pressing reasons to stay in hiding with my wife to escape the revolutionary furies of those unhappy times, and to flee France, even assuming a false name, it was impossible for me to register the birth of this child lest I be found.' His reasons for inventing this story are clear: he wished to legitimize a son born long before his legal marriage to Pierrette Foyot and some thirty years after the event he hoped that the Revolution could serve as an alibi. Though Le Vaillant could invent a story in a sworn statement to try to benefit a son legally, why should he invent a story about imprisonment? To understand this we need to examine the ways in which he had tried to benefit from the Revolution, and succeeded.

Like many artists and scientists at the time, Le Vaillant attempted to obtain support from the government in the form of a subsidy or reward for his *Travels*, as purchaser of his collections of specimens, and as employer. Each of these reveals the new possibilities opened up by the Revolution and his mixed successes in attempting to benefit from them.

## Collection

He tried repeatedly from the eve of the Revolution in 1789 to 1796 to sell his cabinet to the French state.<sup>21</sup> As well as it being his major asset, his ambition was to see it accepted as part of the national collection. Though the state accepted on several occasions that it would be desirable to acquire it, bureaucratic delays, buck-passing, and a shortage of funds complicated the matter. Le Vaillant wanted 60,000 livres for the collection, claiming that he had been offered more than that by foreigners before the Revolution, but claiming that

he wanted to preserve the whole for the French nation. The collection included as its main attraction the giraffe, which a committee of evaluation eventually estimated as being worth 4000 livres out of their total estimation of about 40,000.

There is an extensive correspondence between Le Vaillant and his wife on the one hand and various state representatives on the other, the exchanges falling into three main periods: early 1792 when the government decided against acquiring the collection; then again in 1794, when Le Vaillant was not only pressing the revolutionary committees to buy the collection but also, probably with his publisher, for help with finance to publish the *New Travels* and to find the paper for it.<sup>22</sup> Though the decision to purchase the collection was taken in principle then, a failure to reach an agreement on a price and the subsequent financial difficulties of the state meant that the decision was not acted on till 1796, after the death of Le Vaillant's father, when De Noor took the initiative and managed to obtain art works and other objects in exchange for the collection – the exchange eventually taking place in 1797.

For years after the separation and divorce, his life was dogged by lengthy and protracted financial and legal tussles centred on this major asset, the precious collections of specimens, because he and his wife owned it jointly. Attempts throughout the period of the Revolution and beyond to sell it to the state gave them both reason to get the best possible price for its sale.

This quest took on added urgency after the marriage of Françoise-Julie, Le Vaillant and De Noor's daughter, as he had agreed to give a part of the collection as dowry. The marriage shows his connections with a few members of the revolutionary elite whose names were recorded as guests attending the wedding in late November 1794.<sup>23</sup> The 17-year old Françoise-Julie married a young military engineer, Lafleix Legou, from a colonial family with significant interests in the French colony of Pondicherry. Connections of the Legou family included various deputies from the National Convention, who were among the many dignitaries who signed the wedding agreements as witnesses. Among them were Marragon, uncle of Legou, Urbain Rene Silastre, and Jean Baptiste Leclerc. Marragon and Leclerc were both significant figures. Both had voted for the death of the king, and Marragon had to leave France in 1816 as he was proscribed. Two leading naturalists from the Museum of Natural History, André Thouin and Gerard Van Spaendonck, also attended, suggesting Le Vaillant had friends among the Museum staff.

<sup>20</sup> See Declaration, 4 E 18693, Archives départementales de la Marne, 12 January 1823; a transcript is in General Jean Levaillant, G.B., 2ème série, 3119, Military Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Chapter 6 of *Levaillant Birds* is devoted to the collection and is the fullest treatment of the topic.

<sup>22</sup> See Archives Nationales, F/17/1241/carton 4/ dos Desnoor – the reason that the fate of the collection had eluded scholars for so long is clear from the name on the dossier. I was able to find the dossier and thus trace the fate of the collection thanks to an archivist who had taken the trouble to cross-reference it.

<sup>23</sup> See Archives Nationales, Laisné, ET/XXVIII/566.

On 15 September 1794, not long before the marriage of their daughter who had been promised a share as her dowry, Marguerite (to judge from the handwriting) petitioned the state, vehemently claiming that Le Vaillant had been badly treated compared with other travellers and writers: 'Only Le Vaillant, like a disgraced child, was deprived of the rewards given to those who spend sleepless nights and sacrifice their fortunes and their lives.'<sup>24</sup>

Marguerite was pressing a state that was close to bankrupt, but it may have been that Casimir Varon intervened to help here. The man who helped edit the *Travels* and to whom Le Vaillant dedicated the *New Travels* had taken an important role as bureaucrat during the Revolution, dealing with museum collections.<sup>25</sup> As part of this, he dealt with the problem of whether the Museum had the right to appropriate possessions left by departing émigrés as part of a tax levied on them for leaving France, and was among those insisting on the museum's rights in this matter. His push for the rights to use the goods of the rich to benefit the nation coincided with renewed attempts by Le Vaillant and his former wife to sell their collection to the state and to obtain a financial reward for his travel accounts.

In 1796, after museum officials had finally presented their report on Le Vaillant's collections with a view to acquiring them, Marguerite pressed for a decision. She sent torrents of letters, sought interviews with the minister, Pierre Bénézech, more or less waylaying him in the street. Eventually her determination prevailed. Although the bankrupt state was unable to pay in cash for the collections, it was agreed that they would be paid for in kind. Objects could be chosen from the store of possessions in the Hôtel de Nesle confiscated from the nobility and appropriated by the museums, to the value of 28,442 livres – she may well have known from Varon of these goods and the possibility they could be used instead of money. The notice that the state had accepted the deal was sent to Marguerite, who by now had remarried a tax collector and was listed as Mme Chenié.

With this advantage she acted quickly: she made her selection, signed the receipt, handed over the collection, and selected the goods in exchange for the collection. Le Vaillant claimed in the 'Renseignemens pour mes enfans', written in 1810, that he attached as an addendum to his will, that the objects had been undervalued by a well-known painter (Vigée Lebrun).<sup>26</sup> According to Le Vaillant, Lebrun undervalued them, thinking, perhaps with Mme Chenié's encouragement, that he would buy them from her at these low prices later. She, however, outfoxed him, got far more in the way of goods than she should have, and then kept the goods. Le Vaillant and their daughter Françoise-Julie

did not benefit at all from her ingenious manoeuvring, something both resented, since she only paid them out the nominal amount. To add insult to injury, the collection was then known in the Museum of Natural History as the Mme Chenié collection, something which threw subsequent scholars looking for what happened to Le Vaillant's collection off the trail.

The importance of Le Vaillant's collection in contributing to the National Museum in the 1790s can be measured with considerable accuracy from a table in a document that Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire drew up on 1 January 1809, in which he defended his record of collection by stating what had been collected between the foundation of the Museum on 10 June 1793, and the 1 January 1809.<sup>27</sup>

The table set out the acquisitions as follows:

		Mammals		
	Specimens	Species	Duplicates	Total
10 June 1793	60	11	7	78
1 January 1809	587	131	308	1026
<b>Number added</b>	527	120	301	948
		Birds		
	Specimens	Species	Duplicates	Total
10 June 1793				463
1 January 1809	1903	274	1234	3411

Of 463 birds originally in the collection, 361 were changed because they were in a bad condition – something which reinforces the contribution Le Vaillant made by giving the secret of the preservative methods he had learned from Bécœur as part of the exchange. Geoffroy was justifying the pace and energy of the collection under the Revolutionary government, and pointing to the massive increase in number of specimens and in the process of scientific identification and went on to identify the source of the massive increase, identifying the collection purchased from Mme Chenié as being the source of 3 of the new mammals and 295 of the new birds. Le Vaillant was thus responsible for about 10% of the new collection of the Museum in the first decades of its existence and probably almost all the African birds.

<sup>24</sup> Archives Nationales, F/17/1241/carton 4/dos Desnoor, 15 September 1794.

<sup>25</sup> On Varon, see 'Authorship' below.

<sup>26</sup> Archives of the Marne, 4E11741.

<sup>27</sup> Museum of Natural History, Paris, Archives 2290 (1).



In June 1794, at the height of the Terror, three new posts of 'naturaliste conservateur' at the Museum of Natural History were sponsored by the Committee of Public Safety, with one of the three incumbents nominated by them. Le Vaillant, perhaps through Varon, knew about these posts and submitted his application for the post of 'aide-naturaliste', concerned with the preparation and conservation of animals, with a salary of 3000 livres a year. Though he had no formal qualifications, he had unrivalled skills in taxidermy as well as a huge wealth of field experience. In the event, the post was given to Louis Dufresne, himself a prominent fieldworker who had travelled with Bougainville and was later to be a friend of Le Vaillant, even acting as a witness to the birth of a child in 1806.<sup>28</sup> What this application showed was Le Vaillant's wish to establish himself as part of the scientific establishment and his difficulties in doing so. He thus had to produce his bird books, his scientific and artistic legacy, as somebody outside the new order of formal science.<sup>29</sup>

### Publishing the *New Travels*

Le Vaillant certainly intended following up the great success of his first *Travels* with a sequel, the account of his second African journey. The pre-publication notice issued for the first *Travels* late in 1789 mentioned that his account of the second journey would appear in April the following year; this was premature, but some work may already have been done on it. He must have worked on this sequel during the Revolution, as it was certainly ready for printing by the end of 1794.

At the end of 1794, only months after the end of the Reign of Terror, with the *New Travels* evidently completed and ready for printing, there was no paper to be had. It seems likely that Le Vaillant, using what influence he could, approached Varon for assistance at a time when Varon's own work was in the press. In November 1794 the Commission of the Arts interrupted proceedings to debate the means of obtaining paper to publish both Le Vaillant's work and Varon's new edition of Winckelmann, giving a clear indication of the official importance attached to the *New Travels*.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Birth record, record for Julie Le Vaillant, born 12 November 1806, 10<sup>th</sup> Mairie, Paris Archives, p. 33, no. 347. The other witness was François-Louis Perbal, inspector-general of Military Hospitals.

<sup>29</sup> See *Levaillant Birds*, 112-3.

<sup>30</sup> L. Tuetey (ed.), *Procès-Vérbaux de la Commission Temporaire des Arts*, 2 vols (Paris, 1912), vol. 1, 561.

The citizen Jansen, ready to go to press with the second travels of Vaillant in the interior of Africa, and busy with the edition of Winckelmann, makes known to the Commission that he is powerless to continue his work without paper. He was told that there is a great amount heaped and rotting, at the Louvre, near the offices of Perron, formerly director-general of the national Printers. We return to the agenda.

Here again the link between the two works suggests that Varon may have had some influence in this intervention. When the *New Travels* appeared in 1795, Le Vaillant dedicated the work to 'Citizen Varon'. This can be seen as public gratitude – 'an old debt that I repay, a poor instalment on all that I owe you' – to the editor of his first *Travels*, perhaps as a conciliatory gesture to Varon after his unhappiness after the earlier volume. It could also be seen as invoking the protection of an influential policy-maker of the Revolution – 'I ask you to accept the public veneration which I offer you' – imparting a gloss of revolutionary respectability or sanction to his new work. Or it could simply have been an acknowledgement of assistance in getting the work printed.

It is possible that the parliamentary support and Varon's influence also led to an award of 2000 livres made by the Committee of Public Instruction to 'Vaillant, the father, editor of his son's *Travels to the Caffres and the Hottentots*' on 2 September 1795.<sup>31</sup> While logically the timing suggests that the father was being rewarded for help with the *New Travels*, the title suggests rather that the first journey to the Eastern Cape was in question. This uncertainty makes it difficult to know which text the father had helped edit. The death of Le Vaillant's father Nicolas (noted on the death certificate as 'Levaillant') on 29 June 1796 and his legacy led to further legal complications between Le Vaillant and Marguerite over their ownership of the collection.

### The move to Sézanne

Le Vaillant's second marriage brought, probably only in 1796, the gift of property from his father-in-law, Judge Foyot – the farm Soigny-la-Beauvais at La Noue near Sézanne where the family lived. Previously belonging to the Church, it was purchased by the Judge when Church property was confiscated in 1790. By becoming a man of property, Le Vaillant joined the ranks of those who benefited from the change of power and passed into a period of post-revolutionary calm. The farm remained his home until the end of his life, with his family spending at least part of the year there, though Le Vaillant kept a commercial and residential presence in Paris as well, commuting between La Noue and Paris. He was listed for many years in the *Almanach de Paris*, as

<sup>31</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris, Committee of Public Instruction; G/6/629, 16-18 fructidor, year 3.

a 'naturalist' in the section of merchants, among the ten thousand best known people in the city. Le Vaillant's second marriage ended when Pierrette died in Paris in her early thirties on 24 May 1798, leaving Le Vaillant with four children under the age of 10.

In 1796 Le Vaillant was ready to begin publishing his first major ornithological work, the *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Afrique*, a huge undertaking which was finally completed only in 1810. From 1801 he was concurrently publishing his other major works, *Natural History of Some New and Rare Birds from America and the Indies*, *Natural History of the Parrots*, and *Natural History of Birds of Paradise and Rollers*.

Apart from his other activities, Le Vaillant also participated during this period in a major intellectual movement of the time, the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme, which lasted from 1799 to 1805.<sup>32</sup> This society played the role of an 'anthropology' section in the second class, that of 'moral and political sciences', of the Institut National, the body that replaced the Academies of the former regime. Major figures included naturalists such as Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Jussieu, and Cuvier, linguists such as Destutt de Tracy, and explorers such as Bougainville and Baudin (whose expedition to the South Seas they were to help prepare). There were fifty titular members including Le Vaillant and Legou, his son-in-law, and fifty corresponding members. Jussieu presided, with Jauffret as perpetual secretary. Most of the society's members had belonged to the group known as the Idéologues and saw themselves as analysts of human behaviour. In some ways, the Idéologues continued the work of Rousseau and his speculations in the *Discours sur ... l'Inégalité* that had influenced Le Vaillant. One of their members, Joseph-Marie de Gérando, wrote a theoretical text on methods of anthropological observation, 'Considérations sur les diverses méthodes à suivre dans l'observation des peuples sauvages,' which appeared on 15 September 1799. Intended for the Baudin expedition, it was 'also aimed at the citizen Levaillant, who is going to attempt a third trip into the interior of Africa'.<sup>33</sup> It may thus be that Le Vaillant, after the death of his second wife, considered leaving France again, but instead eventually he chose a different path.

The journal closest in sympathy to this group was *La Décade Philosophique, Littéraire et Politique* that had started at the beginning of the 1790s. Among the reviews this journal carried were an obituary for Varon, who died in 1796, and a review of his work, and also of Le Vaillant's African bird books. The volumes on birds were in fact featured prominently, with comments on his observations in the field.

<sup>32</sup> J. Copans, J. Jamin (eds), *Aux origines de l'anthropologie française: les mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l'Homme en l'an VIII* (Paris, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> Copans and Jamin, 73.

There is a sense of Le Vaillant taking a central place in the major intellectual currents of his time, as someone who intellectually, administratively, and institutionally placed or tried to place himself at the centre of a new intellectual movement. Insofar as the Société envisaged the creation of what eventually became the Musée de l'Homme, we can see that Le Vaillant's many descriptions of the indigenous peoples and of their material culture remained part of his intellectual interest and perhaps helped shaped the formation of anthropology as an intellectual discipline.

But from 1801 Bonaparte started undermining the Idéologues. He had come to power in 1799 as a general-saviour, rescuing a country weary of war and factions. Suspicious of this group of intellectuals who had helped shape the 1799 Constitution which he had overthrown, and who formed a potentially critical grouping outside his influence, he suppressed the second class of the Institut, thus ending the group's institutional status. It seems likely that from this time on, Le Vaillant eschewed political or broader political issues and concentrated on his own scientific work. We can be fairly sure that his friendship with naturalists such as Dufresne continued, given that, as we have seen, he was an official witness at the birth of a child.

### Dubouchet

Some four years after Foyot's death in 1798, Le Vaillant, at the age of about forty-nine, entered into a liaison with a young woman, Rose Victoire Dubouchet, who seems to have acted as mother to his young children but also then became mother to four children of her own with Le Vaillant: Louis Victor (b. 3 September 1803); Rose Aimée Olympe (b. 1805); Julie (b. 12 November 1806); and Calixte (b. 1809). But it would be wrong to see her simply as a mix of governess and sexual partner as there was also apparently a natural history bond between them. A German visitor, Karl Asmund Rudolphi who visited the couple in 1802, left an interesting portrayal of the woman he referred to as Le Vaillant's wife as a knowledgeable collaborator about birds, and of Le Vaillant: 'he was no longer young, but still as passionate as a youngster; he has a fine, lively face, and he is really very interesting. His wife seems still young, and joined in the conversation. ... In his presence everything to do with nature becomes a delight.'<sup>34</sup>

They seem to have moved between Paris and Sézanne quite regularly. Julie, for example, was born in Paris on 12 November 1806, at no 15, rue de Sépulcre. The birth certificate is clear on the parents, but equally clear that they are not presented as man and wife.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Rookmaaker, *Zoological Explorations*, 180; *Levaillant Birds*, 116.

<sup>35</sup> See note 28, above.

Of Le Vaillant's five sons, four entered the military. Jean went to the Collège du Plessis, later to become the prestigious Lycée Louis Le Grand, once again showing that Le Vaillant aspired for his children to belong to the class of the educated new-style meritocratic bourgeoisie, but he had to appeal for non-commissioned status for the youngest sons, suggesting that in his later years he was financially less well off.<sup>34</sup> Considerable documentation on their careers is to be found in the Army archives at the Chateau de Vincennes, often with manuscript material from Le Vaillant himself on their behalf. His letters show that in matters of ideological or political belief, he took the practical if slightly cynical view that the powerful needed to be humoured, if not honoured. Thus, during the time of Napoleon, he wrote in July 1810, of how he hoped his second son would be worthy of meriting 'the goodness of our August Monarch' ('les bontés de notre Auguste Monarque'). Later, when asking for a commission for Charles Boërs, after the restoration of the monarchy, he talked of how he himself had had the honour of serving their majesties Louis XV and Louis XVI in his youth as a cavalry officer.

In Plate 31 of volume one of the Parliamentary volume, we have a charming aquarelle of Le Vaillant's family home in Sézanne, with most of the children and their families presented. This must represent a period about 1810, with his and Dubouchet's young children, a son arriving from Paris, and others playing. Françoise-Julie, the daughter of his first marriage, was not portrayed in the picture, it seems – her marriage to Legou had ended and she had married Lucotte, one of the founding class of 'polytechniciens'. Her relations with her father seem to have been strained, judging from the acrimonious attachment to his handwritten will in which he indicated his anger at her and her mother.<sup>35</sup>

Within a few years, the harmonious scene changed grimly. The first tragedy was that of François Antoine Emmanuel, the son of his first marriage, who had been a professional soldier throughout the Revolution, seeing activity in India, in Pondicherry. He was often in hot water with military authorities, accused of having 'redigé des Mémoires aux Soldats contre leurs chefs' [written up complaints of soldiers against their superiors]. His bravery in action against the Chouans was the reason for his decoration with the Légion d'Honneur. He was taken prisoner of war by the English but allowed back into France on parole.

He married Augustine Joseph Adelaide Brutinel in St Omer on 8 July 1804. They had a daughter, the charmingly named Josephine Narina Le Vaillant, born on 25 ventose An 13 (14 March 1805). After several moves

around France, he returned to Paris, but was arrested in January 1811 on suspicion of fraud and committed suicide in his cell on 4 January 1811 in prison.

More spectacular yet was what followed. Brutinel, a beautiful woman, was arrested on suspicion of trying to poison her mother-in-law, Suzanne (De Noor) Chenié, and, though freed by the jury in May 1811, was imprisoned for life by Imperial Decree. In 1814, she escaped, sensationally, by disguising herself as a priest and fleeing to Belgium, becoming a 'cause célèbre'.

A further shock to Le Vaillant followed shortly afterwards. Rose died on 19 January 1812, leaving him, again, with four children under the age of 10 to raise. They never married but whatever their legal relationship, it was apparently recognized by his peers and by the four children by Foyot, though one possible reason for not marrying Dubouchet might have been to give the Foyot children a greater share of the estate which had come from their grandfather.

### Later years

Only two of Le Vaillant's daughters, Françoise-Julie and Julie, survived into older age. Julie Caroline (b. 1791), died on 27 April 1820, Calixte on 9 November in 1821, and Rose Aimée Olympe, on 13 July 1823. It is difficult to know how to explain this mortality rate among the young women in the space of a few years. One possible reason for the high mortality rate might be that the family was in difficult circumstances. A fairly grim version of Le Vaillant's later years was given by a contemporary biographer, Begin, writing within a decade of his death<sup>36</sup>:

Having divorced, he re-married, had many children, of which several illegitimate, and neglected their education and their future to the point that some of them were in an almost miserable state. One of his wives, I do not know which, died miserably in Strasbourg where she was a music teacher. One of his sons is captain in an infantry regiment.

Though Begin seems to be working on rumour and half-truths here and some of his assertions are plainly false, it may be that Le Vaillant's last years were financially difficult. And if any of his wives were the music teacher in Strasbourg, it had to be his first wife De Noor, who might have had an intriguing life, after her marriage to the tax collector Chenié.

A vivid souvenir of Le Vaillant in his later years at his home at La Noue was left by a local priest, the Abbé Boitel.<sup>37</sup> Despite the straight-faced statement that Le Vaillant had been married to the King of Surinam's daughter (perhaps

<sup>34</sup> Gaston Laplatte, 'Biographie du Général Jean Le Vaillant', private publication held in the Bibliothèque Municipale, Sézanne, 2.

<sup>35</sup> 'Renseignements pour mes enfants', 4E 11741 Archives départementales de la Marne.

<sup>36</sup> E. Begin, *Biographie de la Moselle* (Metz, 1832), vol 4, 377.

<sup>37</sup> See *Levaillant Birds*, 117.



Le Vaillant was not above pulling the legs of the locals or the Narina story gained something in the re-telling), and the Abbé's wish to make Le Vaillant a good Christian, we can accept a portrait of the naturalist as an eccentric, sometimes irascible country squire:

One always came across him at La Noue with his long beard, as in his travels, wearing his grey coat or his hunting clothes, his fur hat and his four-barrelled rifle. He was gifted with exquisite judgment, but he had a strong character, sometimes excessively so. He had transformed the presbytery of La Noue into a natural history cabinet. He had painted several admirable landscapes: a volcano, the crossing of a river, a rare bird. In a room one saw a large picture of the giraffe. The garden was decorated with flowers and plants from almost all parts of the world.

Le Vaillant died on 22 November 1824 at his home at La Noue. He was survived by Françoise-Julie of his first marriage, the three Foyot sons and Dubouchet's son Louis Victor and daughter Julie. Of these, only Françoise-Julie and Charles Boërs were legitimate successors, something which caused considerable legal confusion and, undoubtedly, personal distress.<sup>40</sup>

### Descendants

We may speculate that Le Vaillant intended the home and property he had inherited from the Foyots to remain for their branch of the family rather than having to be shared with the Dubouchet children. What is clear from the document he left in his will is that he did not wish Françoise-Julie, the daughter of his first marriage, to inherit. Biographers like Beuchot shortly after Le Vaillant's death talked about his 'numerous illegitimate children' and this may have stemmed from the confusion and law-suits after his death, where two of the surviving three Foyot sons and the Dubouchet children were considered illegitimate.

All four of his sons in the military were decorated with the Légion d'Honneur at one or other of its grades, and three rose to the rank of general or higher. The three sons of the Foyot marriage, Jean, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Charles Boërs, all had lengthy military careers, with Jean-Jacques using his time in the military to pursue ornithological explorations in North Africa, carrying on his father's work. He was also close to his cousin's son, Charles Baudelaire, who recorded, cryptically, a 'vow to Levaillant' in his *Fusées*.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> For details of the estate and subsequent litigation, see, 4E 11741, 4E 11742, 4E 11744, and 4E 11241, Archives départementales de la Marne.

<sup>41</sup> C. Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 2 v, ed. C. Pichois (Paris, 1980) I, 652.

The brothers were all unmarried and lived into their eighties, apparently remaining on good terms with one another. There is a charming picture in the town hall at La Noue, a reproduction from an illustrated magazine of the time, of Jean and Charles Boërs, both lean, bearded generals, riding in full military regalia with the Duc d'Aumale, son of King Louis Philippe.<sup>42</sup> Charles, the only legitimate inheritor from the second marriage and the relationship with Dubouchet, seems to have shared his inheritance with his Foyot brothers and made some allowance for Louis Victor and Julie, the surviving offspring of Rose Dubouchet.

The tomb erected in the graveyard where he is buried in Sézanne, almost 40 years after his death, is worth reproducing for the familial confusion it portrays and the attempt by the surviving children to present a united familial front.

Posueront Fratres Quator, 1862. Leurs enfants

Julie Caroline 1791-1820

Olympe 1805-1823

Calixte 1809-1821

HIC JACET FRANÇOIS LEVAILLANT

Voyageur en Afrique et auteur d'ouvrages estimés sur l'ornithologie  
1753-1824

RIP

Son épouse Rose Victoire Dubouchet 1783 [or 5?] - 1812.

The 'fratres quator' or four brothers were the three Foyot military brothers and Louis Victor, son of Dubouchet. They paid tribute to their father as 'traveller in Africa and author of esteemed works on ornithology' but their fraternal collaboration in erecting the monument was also a tribute to Dubouchet, who here has the status of wife and mother to Julie, who, only eight years younger than Dubouchet, clearly could not have been her daughter. This suggests that the Foyot brothers accepted that Dubouchet had in fact acted as mother to their sister, and perhaps even to themselves, though she was only a few years older than them.

Louis Victor was the only one of the later children to marry and have a child. (Françoise-Julie had had a daughter with Legou, of whom I have been able to find no trace. Lucotte is listed in Army records as having had two children, perhaps with her, but I have not been able to trace them.) His daughter, Clementine Le Vaillant married Eugene Hottot, a pharmacist, in Paris in June 1866. They had a daughter Rene Elisabeth, born on 24 May 1867, and a son Jean born on 22 June 1869. His birth entry in Paris has the annotation,

<sup>42</sup> The picture is reproduced in *Levaillant Birds*, 118.



died in Toulouse on 13 January 1956. The Hottot line is as far as I have been able to trace Le Vaillant's direct descendants.

Le Vaillant's personal legacy may have been confused but his much greater legacy was as naturalist and man of letters. He left behind the foundations for African ornithology, both in his collections in French museums and in his bird books. He had helped shape a new genre of travel writing, lavishly illustrated and personal, and put Africa on the map as it had never been before.

## II. The Travels

On 25 September 1789, the royal censors in Paris received an application from a local publisher, Le Roy, for permission to publish and to hold a 30-year copyright for a book of travels.<sup>43</sup> The author was given as François Le Vaillant, the title as *Voyage dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique et description des oiseaux et animaux de cette partie du monde*.

In their application to the Censor for permission to publish and also for protection for the publication, Le Roy announced that the volumes were part of a much larger project. They wanted protection against unauthorised rival editions because they were investing so heavily into the expensive process of producing plates: 'As there will be more than 600 plates, and 15 volumes in 12, the engraving and publication could take several years. This is why he begs Monseigneur to grant a 30-year privilege.' In addition to the 30-year copyright for the illustrations, Le Roy asked for 25 or 30 for the text. The *feuille du jugement* of 22 October 1789 noted that it was approved by M. Mentelle, who granted 25 years.<sup>44</sup>

Le Vaillant and his publishers clearly had in mind a substantial series of volumes that would cover a variety of topics and Le Roy was investing in Le Vaillant as somebody able to produce a complete range of knowledge about South Africa. This larger announced project helps make sense of the numerous occasions in the text where mention is made of a description in a forthcoming book on quadrupeds or a bird book. Le Vaillant was, to some extent, trying to create an appetite for subsequent publications. Though Le Vaillant changed publishers and the total project took most of his life, by the time the two sets of *Voyages* and volumes on birds had been published the project had been largely achieved – a tribute to Le Vaillant's vision, ambition, and energy.



François Le Vaillant in his thirties (above) and in his late sixties (below).  
(Reproduced from *François Le Vaillant and the Birds of Africa*  
by courtesy of the Benthurst Press.)



<sup>43</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris, no. A.N. 1553.

<sup>44</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris, no. A.N. 1959 – the report was inserted at the end of the first edition of *Voyage*, vol. 2, 289.

Le Vaillant's first journey into the  
"interior of Africa", 1781-1783



## Publicity for the book

The *Journal Encyclopédique* of December 1789 contained a review of the *First Voyage* that is particularly revealing because it was, in fact, not a review, but a simple relaying of the publicity the publishers had sent out before publication, or a *prière d'insérer* [a plea to insert].<sup>40</sup> The journal, in other words, acted as a publicity agent, taking on trust the lengthy description sent to them, making perhaps one cut and adding a footnote. In a later issue, they returned to Le Vaillant's text to comment on it once again. In view of its importance in giving Le Vaillant's and the publisher's sense of the text, it is worth reproducing most of it:

The account of the voyages of Mr Le Vaillant, expected for several years (all this comes from a printed notice that has just been sent to us) is at last in press and will appear forthwith. This important work, unlike many others of this genre, is not at all the product of laborious researches in a study, nor the assembling of a variety of opinions of foreign visitors, or the reports of their hearsay when they have had neither the strength nor the will to brave dangerous obstacles and to expose themselves to exhausting hardships. It is even less an unfaithful translation of unfaithful originals, where the mercantile spirit seeks to fill up the volumes and multiply them with these make-believe facts and absurd anecdotes, so worthy of amusing the most numerous class which is at the same time the most ignorant. This is a pure, simple, easy text, written by the traveller himself in the most honoured, most universal language, it is a *compte rendu*, completely truthful, of the discoveries of the author in a part of the world very little visited, not to say unknown before him. This is a series, as varied as it is touching, of the adventures, the setbacks, the pleasures, the thoughts, of all the affections of a man of feeling in the midst of the wilderness, and in the home of wild beasts. In a word, this work becomes a solid and upright reference point for the philosopher and the savant who up till now have only been able to study the savages and the marvels of nature through risky comparisons, false perceptions, or through frivolous novels.<sup>41</sup> This is the correction, if it may be said, of the imposing errors of the genius, all the more accredited as the homage given to him is general and public.

Independent, born free, raised in the most Southern climes, with a language and with principles very different from our own, little suited for spreading discoveries and the love of letters, it is a kindness of the author to have loved France enough to have consecrated the first

<sup>40</sup> 'Voyage de M. Le Vaillant,' *Journal Encyclopédique*, 8, 3 (December 1789), 496-502.

fruits of his studies to her, and all the fruits of such a curious voyage. Throughout, he reveals himself to be the philosopher, the profound observer, capable of appreciating men and of grasping their nature, no matter what their barely perceptible differences are. Throughout, his style is elegant but stripped of that vain pomp and of all the show of our modern orations, and carries the imprint of a loving and gentle soul. He can furnish to all those called to the grand career of travel, useful lessons of charity and moderation for, as he puts it so well himself, *one of the ways of maintaining over the savages that superiority the arrogant European claims as his due is not, as one might believe, by intimidating them and inspiring terror through threats everywhere. This idiotic system can only have been devised by a rash madman or by a coward in command of a large troop, taking advantage of his might to impose harsh and imperious laws. A recent example of this from our travel writing provides a striking proof that it is not through thundering threats and brandished swords that one makes contact with men. The tragic death of one of these bold navigators must serve for ever as a lesson for anyone wanting to go by such ill-advised maxims. I am convinced that with men in the state of nature, one should not put forward requests which imply too many sacrifices for them. It is prudent to be less demanding in order to obtain more, and the best way to ingratiate oneself is to try to please them. To succeed with them, the crucial point is to gain their love. From these principles, the reader will realize that I do not believe in eaters of men, and there is no country, however deserted and little known, that I would not introduce myself peacefully and without fear. Distrust is the only cause of their barbarity, if this is the right word to refer to the pressing need to keep far from us, or even to destroy, anything that seems it might disturb our peace or threaten our security.*

We have to follow our young traveller in the details of his expenses, his dangers, the difficulties of his routes, and even of his domestic life. We have to see him scaling mountains, crossing precipices and torrents, dragging behind him thirty Hottentots devoted to his service, enormously heavy wagons, more than a hundred oxen, often numerous hordes of savages, and providing subsistence for all. How touching and truthful he is in the description of the customs of these poor tribes, living closely with them, and getting gifts and services from them while returning in kind those that circumstances made it his duty to do, either through the advice he lavished on them, or through arming himself to defend them, or through exposing himself, through a simple gesture of humanity, to losing in a day all the fruits of his lengthy labours!

The manners, the customs, the ceremonies of these good savages – all holds our attention, all interests. In the midst of the most scholarly expositions, we are suddenly interrupted by narratives full of charm, we pass rapidly from fear to pleasure, from pleasure to terror. We share the frightful emotions of the hunter, continually exposed to the voracity of furious animals watching him by day, or trying to take him by surprise at night. His ardent pleasure, so expansive, when he returns triumphant, with the task of skinning a wild animal, makes the reader love him, his prudence and his skill make the reader admire him. A hothead would excite our enthusiasm, but true courage arouses another interest, and this interest increases more and more as we penetrate into the lands of the Hottentots, and get to know new animals and peoples.

But this part of the *Voyages*, however interesting it might be, is not that which will fix most closely the interest of a certain class of readers in a hurry to delight in new discoveries purely of a scientific order. More awaits them as natural history is enlarged with each step the author takes. All the views, specially designed to satisfy this need, leave nothing to desire. At last we will soon be able to make a clear distinction between the different animals, and particularly all the species of birds so well known by the author and studied by him at such length in their country of origin.

In the first voyage, the public will be excited to see, among other figures carefully drawn and then engraved on the basis of the drawings, the true figure of the Hottentot woman known by the name, 'The Hottentot with a natural apron' and one will see how much one has to take away marvellous and extravagant elements of this fable.

In the same voyage, the figures of the male and female giraffe will show fewer differences between them than they both do to pictures previously given more or less on a random basis.

This will perhaps be the right place to place the justified complaints that certain newspapers thought it justified not to publish, and to refute some petty faults born of envy, and the so clumsy abuse of Mr Le Vaillant's name found in ten public papers to make him the object of I know not what ridicule from which simple respect for his status as foreigner should at least protect him. But the permission, so often solicited, obtained with such difficulty from the most modest of talents, to announce at last the publication of a book impatiently awaited for more than six years, would not permit the author of this work to form useless complaints that friendship would reprove, and which would compromise the repose of a scholar whose heart con-

stantly seeks to be out of reach of any poison, and any literary perfidy.

If Mr Le Vaillant has sometimes, in his work, allowed himself to be energetic and pressing, it was never in a spirit of recrimination, nor with the odious intention of robbing other travellers of their merit and the prize, always too dearly bought, of their researches, their labours, whatever they might be. But an easygoing connivance was not going to silence him when it came to correcting errors and to describing regions no one had yet visited. A culpable weakness should not have robbed the public of new productions that it was its right to demand and await. Men, animals, sites, adventures, everything here seems most scrupulously true. More than thirty engravings undertaken before the eyes of the naturalist himself, and using his drawings as a base, will decorate the four volumes of this precious *Voyage* which will be immediately followed by the history of the quadrupeds and of birds that are *unknown* or badly described that decorate the superb collection of Mr Le Vaillant.

Finally, in whatever light one considers this interesting work, it will less honour its foreign author than his highly admirable country of adoption to which he had for some time resolved to pay homage.

This lengthy blurb reveals the publishers' (and, surely, here, the author's) sense of how the book made a new contribution to the popular and increasingly contested genre of travel writing and depicted the author as a heroic and mysterious outsider to promote sales. In more serious intellectual terms, this notice presents Le Vaillant as somebody who will present serious field-work as a correction to the theorising of the 'genius' like Rousseau and Buffon. And, at a time when French society was racked by revolutionary ferment, the text took the safe line of attacking the British mode of colonialism represented by Captain Cook (the 'bold navigator' mentioned in the text).

While further archival and historical work may in time clarify Le Vaillant's relationship with his publisher or give a fuller sense of the literary field of the time, this publicity for the text gives an unusual and valuable indication of how the publisher and author intended the book to be read and to be received. (A search through some of the major publications of the time revealed no trace of the 'ten public papers' alleged to have attacked him.)

### Influences on the text

Le Vaillant was in his text actively responding to and criticising earlier accounts, particularly those of Kolb and Sparrman. The centrality of the attack on Captain Cook in the *préface d'insérer* makes perfect sense when we remember that Sparrman travelled with Cook, as it thus becomes a way of

disqualifying or negating the observations made by Sparrman. Similarly, the attacks on Kolb, persistently presented as a buffoon swallowing tall tales in the taverns of Cape Town, served a double purpose: to validate Le Vaillant's role as traveller, and to take over the role of ideal observer from Kolb.

Le Vaillant saw his text as meeting the major challenge thrown to travel writing in his day – that by Rousseau. In Le Vaillant's case, he was able to challenge Rousseau by questioning Kolb, on whom Rousseau had based much of his theory of the 'noble savage'.

In particular, Le Vaillant responds to the challenge to anthropology given by Rousseau in his note X of the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*:<sup>46</sup>

For the three or four hundred years since the inhabitants of Europe have inundated the other parts of the world, and continually published new collections of voyages and reports, I am persuaded that we know no other men except the Europeans; furthermore, it appears, from the ridiculous prejudices which have not died out even among Men of Letters, that under the pompous name of the study of man everyone does hardly anything except study the men of his country. In vain do individuals come and go; it seems that Philosophy does not travel. In addition, the Philosophy of each People is but little suited for another ... All of Africa and its numerous inhabitants, as distinctive in character as in colour, are still to be examined ...

### Reception

The publishers' attempt to present the work as a mix of exciting adventure, serious intellectual investigation, and revelation of romantic character worked well, judging by the reception of the work. Rather like Byron, who 'woke to find himself famous', Le Vaillant wrote some years later that he had not anticipated such a reception: 'the success of my first publication greatly surpassed my expectation. It has no doubt been praised much beyond its desert.'<sup>47</sup>

The work managed to appeal to a wide range of readers. Baron Friedrich von Grimm, an influential critic of the time, praised the *Travels* as one of the most remarkable works of French literature of 1789.<sup>48</sup> He particularly praised the character of the traveller. As adventure narrative, the story reached a different audience, including King Louis XVI, an avid hunter, who was reported as having enjoyed the book and for whom a special, lavishly illustrated ver-

<sup>46</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, ed. J. Starobinski (Paris, 1969), 142.

<sup>47</sup> Le Vaillant, *New Travels* (London, 1796), vol. 1, Preface, x.

<sup>48</sup> Frederick von Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, vol. 15 (Liechtenstein, 1968 reprint), 562-5.



sion of the map tracing Le Vaillant's routes was commissioned as a gift by his banker, the Marquis De Laborde.<sup>40</sup>

It was the social criticism of colonialism in the text, however, that drew the lengthiest and most thoughtful reviews, with two major texts drawing implicit or explicit comparisons between the situation in France and in the Cape. The mouthpiece of the revolutionary parliament, the *Moniteur Universel*, published a glowing review of Le Vaillant's text in issue 131, pointing out the zeal for social justice motivating Le Vaillant's anti-colonial critiques, and hoping for further volumes.<sup>41</sup> The review, probably by Jean-François de La Harpe, gave Le Vaillant's text the status of a politically correct literary illustration of the work of political revolution in France:

It is with this same severe even-handedness that our traveller examines the behaviour of the colonists settled on the coast. Injustices, cruelties, robberies, indiscipline, perverse barbarities against the natives – these are the things that struck him and wounded his feelings. Exempt from European prejudice, exempt especially from the commercial self interest that usually takes people to these far-off regions, he denounces and attacks openly vices and abuses just as in the African forests he attacked the beasts that frighten people there.

The review closed by expressing a hope for further volumes.

From the point of view of literary history, the lengthy review that appeared in the *Mercure de France* of 20 March 1790, taking up most of the issue during that week, was even more significant.<sup>42</sup> The review consisted of a lengthy summary of the work, with lots of shrewd commentary, and some critical remarks, while a P.S. points to the sequel and the issue of the map. The review, signed 'C.', was almost certainly by Nicholas Chamfort, one of the greatest writers of the time. Chamfort's own movement from leading figure of the salons of the Ancien Régime and tutor to the king's sister to supporter of the Revolution as Secretary of the Jacobins and speech-writer for Mirabeau, seems uncannily predicted in the reception he gives Le Vaillant's text. The political position of the *Mercure de France* (with its sub-title *Dédié au Roi*) was ostensibly right wing, but it should probably be seen as centrist, as it carried many articles on slave agitations and other crucial social issues. Chamfort's

<sup>40</sup> The map, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, ref BN C.Pl. SH 18e pf 114 div 02 p 26, has a lengthy title: 'Partie Méridionale de l'Afrique depuis le Tropique du Capricorne jusqu'au Cap de Bonne Espérance contenant les Pays des Hottentots, des Caffres et de quelques autres Nations / dressée pour le Roi sur les observations de M. Le Vaillant par M. de Laborde, ancien premier valet de chambre du Roi, gouverneur du Louvre, l'un des Fermiers généraux de Sa Majesté.' A print of the map is included in a back pocket of *Levaillant Birds*.

<sup>41</sup> *Moniteur*, 1789-1790, no. 131.

<sup>42</sup> C., 'Littéraires: Voyage de M. Le Vaillant dans l'Intérieur de L'Afrique ...', *Mercure de France*, 138, 12 (20 March 1790), 57-81.

review certainly shows considerable pessimism about the ability of those in power to learn:

Le Vaillant criticises the DEIC and gives the Dutch East Indian Company excellent advice from which they will not benefit because, despite counsel and warnings, power marches blindly right up to the moment when it falls.

Chamfort explores the text's anti-colonial feeling, giving a lengthy summary with extracts. He subtly drums in Le Vaillant's lesson that the colonists' negative view of the 'Caffres' stems from their material interest in having them robbed of their land:

The Government of the Cape, which cannot keep order or extract obedience from the distant colonists, ignores, or pretends to ignore, the monstrous excesses of which they are guilty to extend the limits of their possessions, at the expense of the neighbouring peoples. From this stems, amongst them, this hate for the whites which is no more than a justified horror at their cruelties and from that, amongst the whites, the atrocity of the calumnies by which they try to denigrate simple and innocent men whose vengeance they have provoked. This painful truth, which M Le V proves by examples and facts, seems to have inspired in him a sort of passion for the savages and a profound aversion for the whites and, in general, for civilisation – a sentiment which always seems a bit bizarre and which the mob call misanthropy but which is, on the contrary, too ardent a love of humanity and a violent indignation against crimes which, in the social order, make men unhappy.

Chamfort, puzzled by the wildly contrasting observations visitors had made of the 'Hottentots', makes a point from Bacon about the necessity for re-starting not only understanding but even observation:

It is a very remarkable thing to see the majority of modern travellers in opposition to the former ones who painted in horrible colours the savage, the man of nature, that others have since seen in a more favourable light. Bacon said that one had to re-start human understanding, a rather painful enterprise after so many lost centuries. It is not impossible that in the same way we will have to re-start observations, the basis for the ideas of some philosophers on human nature, that they represent as evil and made so as always to be so.

Chamfort drew what would now be called an understanding of ideology from Bacon, and his writing influenced Nietzsche and others. What is interesting here is the point that observation itself is not to be trusted – a staple of modern anthropological and social analysis. Le Vaillant's text helped push Chamfort's understanding of ideological issues in representation. Chamfort's

approval of the text's passages of satirical, anti-colonial comment came when he praised them as being worthy of Juvenal, showing that the text was thoroughly in the temper and tenor of its revolutionary times.

In Chamfort's own work we can see him returning to issues raised by Le Vaillant.<sup>32</sup> For example, in his maxim 470, the first in his section on political matters and on the Revolution, he explicitly raises the issue of man in his natural state, and returns, using the example of the Cape, to the differences between civilised man and man in nature in order to defend Rousseau and attack, by implication, French society. More pithily, Chamfort's observation in his Maxim 519, that the 'pauvres sont les nègres de l'Europe' ['the poor are the blacks of Europe'] shows that travel writing like Le Vaillant's made observers look critically at European society and colonialism alike.

### Authorship

But did Le Vaillant write this text, or all of it? There has been a lengthy tradition that Le Vaillant's works were not written by Le Vaillant himself, but by some other person or persons. His father, Casimir Varon, Le Grand d'Aussy, and Philippon are the names that have been mentioned. Confusion on this even influences library classification: many French libraries make (or used to make) Casimir Varon the real author of the *Voyage*. Many of the bibliographical 'facts' on Le Vaillant were taken over from Barbier and Querard, authors of the standard works on anonymous and pseudonymous works in French.<sup>33</sup> Yet their claims need to be taken with considerable caution, for they based their suspicions on a very shaky source: Auguis' lengthy and disputed 'Préface envoyée de Berlin' to his *Conseils du Trône* by Frédéric II. In this he argues that many works ostensibly by the author were in reality written by others. The comment on Le Vaillant was taken up by Querard, who published it with a wrong page reference (xl instead of xi):<sup>34</sup>

Le Vaillant was not at all the editor of his voyages: it is a Mr Perron who edited them on the notes of Le Vaillant who was, for the rest of it, a very stupid man. This Mr Perron was a poor devil, who'd gone through Italy on foot, travelling from city to city, driven by curiosity and, doubtless, by the hope of meeting his fortune on the way.

It is surprising that this notoriously inaccurate and prejudiced 'Préface de Berlin' has been taken as a serious comment, especially when it gets the name

of the supposed author wrong, and even more especially when the *Second Travels* was in fact dedicated to Varon by Le Vaillant. We will return to the issue of Le Vaillant's alleged 'ignorance' later, but what is more central to the question of authorship here is the evident uneasiness in Auguis' own attempt to clarify what makes a 'memoir' the product of a writer rather than an author, or, more crucially, what the process of 'rédaction' or editing involves. At what point does the 'authorship' of the work pass from the person furnishing the materials to the editor of the materials?

Many sources suggest that Varon acted as editor, but can we know what that entailed? Eyriès in the 1827 *Biographie Universelle* argued that Varon had to correct Le Vaillant's material because his written French was not good enough to provide a firm basis for proof-reading, and the obituary for Varon in *La Décade* in 1796 noted that he alone had edited the *Travels*.<sup>35</sup>

What made this collaboration contentious was that Varon, when the book was phenomenally successful, let it be known that he had, in fact, been responsible for much of the writing. According to the influential Parisian cultural newsletter, Grimm's *Correspondance*, Varon let the secret out because he felt he had not been adequately recompensed.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that it was Le Roy who was the initiator of the whole project and the employer of Varon as writer. Le Vaillant himself seemed eager to make amends to Varon by dedicating the *New Travels* to him.

Years later, Antoine Sériès published a brief note, trying to explain what had happened, claiming that the editing had been done 'sous mes yeux' (before my eyes).<sup>37</sup> He wrote a witty epigram to give his sense of the relationship between explorer and editor:

On the Travels of Levaillant in Africa  
Between Levaillant and Varon  
Reader, here is the difference:  
The one, in Africa made his trip in advance  
As a good hunter without pretension;  
The other improved it in France.

He then added: 'Some people have over time raised doubts about the authenticity of this trip, but wrongly so. M. Levaillant made the trip and wrote about it, but more accustomed to observing closely than to expressing his observations, he chose the pen of Casimir Varon to edit them. This choice

<sup>32</sup> N. Chamfort, *Maximes et Pensées, Caractères et Anecdotes* (Paris, 1968).

<sup>33</sup> A.-A. Barbier, O. A. Barbier, et al., *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes* (Paris 1872); J. M. Quérard, *Les Supercheries littéraires dévoilées* (Paris, reprint of 1869 edition, 1969).

<sup>34</sup> P. R. Auguis, *Conseils du Trône, donnés par Frédéric II, dit le Grand, aux Rois et aux Peuples de l'Europe* (Rouen, 1823).

<sup>35</sup> J.-B. Eyriès, 'Vaillant', *Biographie Universelle, Ancien et Moderne* (Paris, 1830), vol. 47-8, 263; the anonymous death notice in *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique* appeared in the issue of An V, no. 10 (30 December 1796), 41.

<sup>36</sup> Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, vol. 16 (June 1790), 35.

<sup>37</sup> A. Sériès, 'Sur le Voyage de Levaillant en Afrique' in *Épigrammes anecdotiques inédites, concernant des Hommes célèbres et des Événements mémorables de nos jours ... par l'Hermite de la Chaussée du Maine* (Paris 1814), 114.

suited the importance of his travels perfectly. The editing took place before my very eyes, based on the original manuscript, composed of several folio notebooks.<sup>7</sup> The evidence suggests that he is referring to the first *Travels*, not the later *New Travels*.

But who was Varon and what was he likely to have added? By 1788 Varon, then 28, was regarded as a promising man of letters, though in highly artificial forms such as riddles and acrostics, and described as an idle though elegant writer. Beuchot's entry in the *Biographie Universelle* gave some details of his life, 1761-1796.<sup>8</sup> He was present in Italy as art student and historian in February 1793 at the time of riots that resulted in strong anti-French pro-Catholic feelings in Italy. He returned to France, and was strongly sympathetic to the revolutionary tendencies at the height of the Terror.

David, who was impressed by the hymns Varon had written for the revolutionary fête on 10 August 1793, recommended him for a position on the Commission of the Museum where Varon became a key figure in drafting and carrying out a new policy for museums, collections, and the arts.<sup>9</sup> In consequence of this, on 27 nivose, An II [January 1794] the Convention Nationale named him as Conservatoire du Muséum des Arts, section Antiquités.<sup>10</sup>

Varon dealt with the problem of whether this museum was allowed to take things from various depots where émigrés had left them as part of a tax levied on them for leaving France, something that would influence the fate of Le Vaillant's collection. Guillaume shows that Varon was one of the people pushing for the museum's rights in this matter.<sup>11</sup> He drafted many official documents, and became more or less the official scribe of revolutionary artistic policy. After the fall of Robespierre, there are some signs of his uneasy place in Paris, and he left Paris for an administrative post in a département, and died in Mons in 1796. In its obituary on him, the *Décade* paid homage to his contribution to Le Vaillant's work.

Varon was, in other words, a fairly hard-line revolutionary and highly-placed policy-maker at the height of the Terror. One fairly cynical way of understanding Le Vaillant's dedication to him in the *New Travels* might be to see it as a way of covering himself politically by invoking the name and protection of a leading civil servant in the arts. Whatever the dedication says about intellectual debts, it was also an act of ideological sympathy or submission to the Revolutionary government and currents of the day.

Is it possible then that Le Vaillant was a political naïf who wrote a simple travel narrative to which Varon added the interesting social commentary? This seems unlikely, given that Le Vaillant named one of his children after Rousseau and seems to have been an active figure in the intellectual life of revolutionary France. What seems more likely is that Le Vaillant talked and made available his notebooks while Varon wrote, perhaps adding more literary allusions in places, or making articulate in the political discourse of the day, what Le Vaillant expressed more simply. Varon may, of course, also have pushed Le Vaillant to articulate or admit what he otherwise may have left tacit or ignored, but it is also possible that Le Vaillant's discussion of colonial abuses helped transform Varon from the idle, elegant literary figure to the political ideologue.

Of the other suggested contributors to the text, we know a little of Legrand d'Aussy, who, according to Beuchot, helped finish the *New Travels* after Varon's death. There are references in Marichal's analysis of the work of Revolutionary Committees to him wanting to borrow duplicate copies from the Bibliothèque nationale for his history of poetry, but little else is known of him.<sup>12</sup>

Le Vaillant's father was paid by the Revolutionary government for his help in having edited the *First Travels* – a sign that the book was highly regarded ideologically. In year 3 of the Republic (1795), a government committee made an award of 2000 francs to 'Vaillant senior, editor of his son's *Travels* ...', but this may have referred to the *Second Voyage*.<sup>13</sup>

As Le Vaillant's father had grown up in France, while Le Vaillant had grown up in Surinam, it seems likely that he would have edited and corrected the text. It is possible, however, that Le Vaillant had the payment made to his father as a way of avoiding legal complications over receiving it at the time of his divorce.

How did Le Vaillant himself see the problem of authorship or his own status? In several legal documents he describes himself as 'homme de lettres' and once as 'homme de lettres et naturaliste', showing that he thought of himself – or perhaps was socially considered – as primarily a writer.

In a document attached to his will in which he describes problems of his inheritance, he talks of the money for the *New Travels* in 1794, claiming that at that point 'ils n'étaient pas encore rédigés' [at that point that had not yet been edited].<sup>14</sup> As the *New Travels* were published in 1795, it may simply mean that Le Vaillant meant that they weren't yet published, but it seems more likely that he meant that the collaborative process, from which he drew 18,000

<sup>7</sup> A.-J.-Q. Beuchot, 'Casimir Varon', *Biographie Universelle, Ancien et Moderne* (Paris, 1830).

<sup>8</sup> M.J. Guillaume, (ed.), *Procès-verbaux du Comité d'instruction publique de la Convention nationale*, 7 vols (Paris 1891-1907), vol III, 189.

<sup>9</sup> Guillaume, vol III, 273.

<sup>10</sup> Guillaume, vol IV, 1 and 55.

<sup>11</sup> Archives Nationales, F17/1078, doss 10, 1214 B, doss 13.

<sup>12</sup> Archives Nationales, Committee of Public Instruction; G/6/629, 16-18 fructidor year 3 (16-18 September, 1795).

<sup>13</sup> Archives of the Marne, 4E11241, 'Information for my children'.



livres, had not yet been completed and that somebody else was doing a substantial part of the writing. Given that the textual status of the *New Travels* is much more dubious than that of this volume, that issue deserves further consideration.

It seems, then, that Le Vaillant benefited from some degree of editing or 'rédaction' of his voyages; that Casimir Varon and Le Vaillant's father were certainly involved in this enterprise; that Le Vaillant was certainly much involved in the project of the *First Travels*, and perhaps less so in the process of the *Second Travels*.

Le Vaillant might not have had the polished phrases or classical references of a Varon, but his written French, judging from letters and later texts, was expressive and lively. No-one has suggested that the writing in the volumes on birds was done by anyone else, yet some of his classic descriptions, like that of the Secretary Bird, were vivid enough to influence a generation of would-be ornithologists. Dozens of manuscript pages of Le Vaillant's writing show that his French, while not always formally correct, was vigorous, capable of a range of registers, and subtle. Le Vaillant may have had an interest in presenting himself as an exotic outsider when he produced the *Travels*, but he was thoroughly French by background and upbringing.

#### The status of the text

One reason that Le Vaillant's reputation has suffered is that much of the judgment on him has come from historians, geographers and ornithologists whose primary concern is with accuracy and truth. They have mistrusted a flamboyant Frenchman who was deemed to be cavalier with facts. What are we to make of what were almost certainly inventions in a text purporting to be a travel account – something which poses a much sharper question for the *New Travels* north to the Orange River than it does for this volume?

One temptation is to take the literary side in the literature vs. history debate. J.M. Coetzee has put the novelist's side by arguing against the presumption, from historians, to correct literature like a schoolteacher corrects homework.<sup>45</sup> Along these lines, one could argue, *Macbeth* may be a misrepresentation of Scottish history, done to flatter one side of a regal feud, but does that mean that we simply dismiss it? Why should we not accept the *Travels* simply as an exciting read, or an important cultural document, without worrying about its referentiality, its claims to truth? Texts may be accurate but tedious, or revealing and interesting precisely because of their inaccuracy. Given the influence of this text as a cultural document in its time, it certainly deserves to remain in print as a South African classic.

<sup>45</sup> See J.M. Coetzee, 'The Novel Today', *Upstream*, 6, 1 (1988), 3.

One reason not to be content with this view, however, is that Le Vaillant himself provided the yardstick for measuring texts when he attacked Kolb or other writers for their inaccuracies. More than that, his text relies heavily on the idea that there is a trustworthy central narrator, a man of feeling and sensibility, who becomes our guide. To find out that he had manufactured material was bound to be devastating. One of the benefits of this volume is that it should allow readers to gauge the extent of Le Vaillant's invention and perhaps also to guess at the reasons for it.

Scholars like Vernon Forbes have filled boxes of inquiries trying to track down the specifics of claims made and this volume records their legitimate concerns about this narrative.<sup>46</sup> While we cannot justify or explain inventions or know the extent to which they stemmed simply from vanity and a hunter's penchant for tall stories, there may be some extenuating circumstances worth recording.

The first is that different versions of events do not necessarily make Le Vaillant a liar. A central event in this volume is Le Vaillant's shooting of a leopard after a hunt. As the notes (see p. 38) show, later English visitors asked the people on the spot whether Le Vaillant's version was accurate or not and, in general, concluded that he had exaggerated his role considerably or simply invented the whole story. Now, as post-modern literary theorists have insisted, we soon see that there is no one definitive version and the versions told by the Slabber family themselves differ quite as much from one another as they do from Le Vaillant's. In one version, he did shoot the animal, but only after it had been injured in a trap. In another, he only attacked an already dead leopard. In yet another version, nothing at all happened with a leopard. Furthermore, we need to recognise a possible animus against Le Vaillant – how likely was it that people who read or heard a version of a story in which they appeared in a less than flattering light would agree that the story was accurate? Embarrassment, resentment or even simple forgetfulness may have given different people different memories of events 30 or 40 years after they happened. What these recorded versions do show is that all subsequent English travellers knew Le Vaillant's work and were asking about it 25 years after its publication – something that can scarcely be said of other early South African writers – or, indeed of most recent ones.

And, if we want to indict Le Vaillant of being a teller of tall hunting tales, we have to note that he certainly told lots of stories against himself. On several occasions, he becomes more or less the comic straight man as he simply cannot see the animal the guides are pointing out to him, like the elephant he takes for a rock. He often records quite scrupulously that animals or birds

<sup>46</sup> Forbes' documents, gathered while he was researching Le Vaillant and other pioneer travellers, are in the Archives of the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town.

were hunted by others. And there is a very puzzling omission – nowhere does Le Vaillant claim to have seen, let alone hunted, a lion, though he often, and convincingly, describes the effect they have on domestic animals and hears them near camp. If he was going to tell tall stories, why not give readers at least a glimpse of lions? Was he put off by some kind of sceptical reception to hunting stories prior to publication? (See p. 66 n. 28.)

A second event on which Forbes did a good deal of detective work was Le Vaillant's claim to have tried to get to the survivors of the wreck of the *Grosvenor*. (See p. 137 n. 148) Forbes concluded that dates made it impossible that Le Vaillant would have known all the details of the wreck and that there were Frenchmen aboard, and Forbes concluded that Le Vaillant altered his narrative in retrospect. It is possible, of course, that Le Vaillant did hear something and thought of trying to help and embellished his role in retrospect. What is also possible is that the publishers pressured Le Vaillant and perhaps Varon to include something about this story. The wreck of the *Grosvenor* had caused massive interest in England and France and would have been one of the few stories about the Cape known to a European audience.<sup>67</sup> We can speculate that there may have been explicit or implicit pressure to include details. Surely somebody in the same area at the time of the famous wreck must have known about it and tried to do something? Why could our hero not do anything? And, so, perhaps, the story shifted to make Le Vaillant the willing but helpless onlooker. Publishers making a massive investment in a very expensive literary endeavour were certainly bound to make every effort to ensure its success. And this tactic certainly worked as some of the early editions of Le Vaillant's work in Britain combined his story with that of the *Grosvenor* survivors.

## Influence

Le Vaillant's *Voyage dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique* was the first literary work about South Africa to reach a wide audience and to have a wide effect. In France it went through twelve editions in six years and it became a European best-seller, rapidly translated into English, with two rival translations (both in 1790), into German (also 1790), Dutch (1791), Russian (1793), Swedish (1795), Danish (1797) and Italian (1816).<sup>68</sup>

It not only shaped European perceptions of South Africa but also provided the model for many of the most influential literary and cultural products

internationally. This travel book can claim to be the model for a wide range of media genres and products: the hunting narrative; the safari as a higher, more spiritual version of the hunting narrative; the anthropological field-record; the lavishly illustrated and mapped first-person travel account we associate with *National Geographic* reports; the exotic adventure story; the erotic possibility of the exotic; and the investigative exposé of colonial brutality and abuse based on an Enlightenment sense of human rights and a critical distance from European ethnocentricity. His work provided the trail that many others – Audubon, Gordon Cummings, his own great-nephew Charles Baudelaire, Gauguin, Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, Teddy Roosevelt, Malinowski, Hemingway, J.M. Coetzee, TRC reporters, and millions of modern safari-goers and bird-watchers – have consciously or unconsciously followed.

South African literature came, more or less literally, out of Le Vaillant's trunk. In the first significant African novel, the anonymously written *Makanna*, the author claims to have found the novel in a trunk off a shipwrecked vessel called the *Ganges* – and Le Vaillant's readers would have known that this was the ship on which he returned to France.<sup>69</sup> The hero of the novel is a young Frenchman, Paul Laroon, clearly based on Le Vaillant.

Le Vaillant's description of Narina influenced a key descriptive moment in *Makanna*:

Yes, she was fair; – just about the height of that statue 'that enchants the world,' which, by the way, is the general standard of her race. And although it must be admitted, that 'the human form divine' is so outrageously burlesqued in the persons of the Hottentot ladies past a certain age, that he who sees, may die of laughter; yet with their juvenile sisters, with whom the heyday of youth is yet in full career, the reverse is so often apparent, that, on the word of La Vaillant [sic], if Zeuxis had had the opportunity of taken [sic] one as a model, he might have escaped the trouble of congregating the flower of the grecian maidens, that he, vain mortal, might in a single picture combine their varied charms.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Le Vaillant was the dominating literary influence on accounts of the Cape.<sup>70</sup> For the British, taking over the Cape from the Dutch, Le Vaillant served as an objective outsider criticising Dutch colonialism and providing an Enlightenment perspective on racial confrontation. From one perspective, South African writing in English is the story of an Enlightenment tradition, influenced by Le Vaillant and early missionaries, giving way to an indigenous, settler literature that was far more

<sup>67</sup> See I.E. Glenn 'The wreck of the *Grosvenor* and the beginning of English South African literature', *English in Africa*, 22, 2 (1996), 1–18.

<sup>68</sup> For these and other publication details, see A.M. Lewin Robinson's chapter in *Le Vaillant, Traveller II*.

<sup>69</sup> *Makanna; or, The land of the savage* (London, 1834).

<sup>70</sup> See I. E. Glenn, 'The future of the past in English South African literary history', *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*, 51, 1 (September 1996), 38–46.

racist and far more influenced by social Darwinism and the ideology of colonial expansion.

Nor did his influence stop there. When J.M. Coetzee published his first novel, *Dusklands*, with a highly articulate and self-conscious eighteenth century narrator, Jacobus Coetzee, as the narrator of the first section, I asked him whether such a sophisticated figure was not atypical, ahistorical. His answer was, not at all, and he said: 'Read Le Vaillant.' Unfortunately, far too few recent literary scholars or literary historians of South Africa have.

On historians and anthropologists in South Africa Le Vaillant's influence seems relatively minor, though, as the notes show, several, like Elphick, Monica Wilson and Susie Newton-King, have drawn on him for corroboration or for giving historical details.<sup>71</sup> Patrick Cullinan's account of Gordon uses Le Vaillant's generally warm account of Gordon while pointing to Gordon's indignant claims that Le Vaillant's giraffe was not shot by him and, in any event, not nearly as splendid as Gordon's – which he had not shot either!<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the best broad account of Le Vaillant's importance in the broader historical scheme comes in an introductory comment in Noel Mostert's *Frontiers*, in which he points out that Le Vaillant was in fact very much in a war zone on the Eastern Frontier, and where he also suggests the importance of the South African case for Western consciousness as he wishes to describe it:<sup>73</sup>

[H]ow central to the historical experience of the Atlantic community, or the Western world as it usually is referred to, was Europe's foothold at the tip of Africa; but, much more specifically, how integral to the confused moral debate about human conscience and the values of empire that arose in the post-abolition world of the nineteenth century was the Cape Colony's frontier drama of encounter between white and black.

To this one can only add that the French Revolution and the Enlightenment were very much part and parcel of that debate and that we need a fuller intellectual history that would supplement the work of Cullinan on Gordon's Enlightenment influence with further work on figures such as Le Vaillant, Sparrman and Kolb.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1820* (Cape Town and London, 1979) 23, 133; M. Wilson and M. Thompson (eds), *Oxford History of South Africa*, vol 1 (Oxford, 1969), 56, 103, 106; S. Newton-King, *Masters and Servants on the Cape Eastern Frontier, 1760-1803* (Cambridge, 1999), 33, 126.

<sup>72</sup> P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon 1743-1795: the man and his travels at the Cape* (Cape Town, 1992), 104-5 and 134-7 – Cullinan errs, however, in giving Le Vaillant's arrival date in the Cape as 1782.

<sup>73</sup> N. Mostert, *Frontiers* (London, 1992), xvi.

<sup>74</sup> Cullinan, 22-4, describes Gordon's meeting with and influence on Diderot.

## Formal innovation in the *Travels*

In form, the book provided a new level of sophistication, a kind of multimedia set of cross-referencings and verifications. One of the real difficulties of understanding the impact of the work at the time is that no modern publisher can afford to re-publish the original with the original edition's number and quality of engravings. Time and again, Le Vaillant asks the reader to look at the pictures, made, he often claims, on the basis of sketches he drew at the time. (One of the great frustrations of Le Vaillant scholarship is that the original notebooks in which he recorded the trip have disappeared.) Or, perhaps, to remember that there are specimens he has made and brought back that can be viewed in his 'cabinet' or collection. Or to look at the map he made, giving a geographical and topographical reality to his voyage. Or, the clincher, the grand finale of the second volume of the *Travels*, that the giraffe skeleton and skin he brought back were on view in the Jardin du Roi. Before an age of photography, Le Vaillant offered the fullest range of ways of recording African reality: the objects used by the Gonaquas; the musical annotation of bird song; well-preserved and re-constituted specimens; descriptions of animal behaviour.

Le Vaillant was in many ways a media innovator and user of innovations at a time of innovation. He was one of the first to know a secret way of preserving specimens that ensured they would survive hundreds of years – something that surely gave the task of taxidermy a whole new significance and value.<sup>75</sup> Marshall McLuhan somewhere argues that Shakespeare's sonnets are full of the power and reach, over space and time, of the word because of the effect of the printing press and printed volumes. Perhaps, for Le Vaillant, the preserved specimen was the equivalent of Shakespeare's printed lines: 'so long lives this, and this gives life to thee'.

At the time, Le Vaillant's contemporaries noted that he was attempting something new with his preserved specimens of birds. He was not content with leaving flat skins in a cabinet, or collection, but wanted to present the bird in a life-like posture and in a real-life setting, where possible. When the Revolutionary Parliament sent experts to evaluate his collection, they noted appreciatively that no collection previously had shown birds in such life-like postures. In terms of life-like collections based on careful observation, Le Vaillant's collection became one of the cornerstones of the holdings of the new, post-revolutionary Museum of Natural History in Paris and so Le Vaillant set the path Audubon and others followed.

His pictures of animals and birds, whatever their faults and inaccuracies, represent a quantum development from anything previously seen of African

<sup>75</sup> Rookmaaker et al. 'The ornithological cabinet ...', 146-58.



wild-life. He developed, as he describes in this volume, a way of shooting small birds without destroying them by using wax and water in the barrel. He describes how, in his childhood, he used a blowpipe and bow and arrow to hunt birds. When he caught them, his inquiring mind led him to think of ways of testing behaviour that we may think of as very modern. He kept vultures in captivity to see how long they could live without eating. Or, in investigating the contents of the Secretary Bird's stomach, he drew striking conclusions about its hunting method from the prey he found then and how it had died. Several ornithologists, most recently Peter Mundy, have argued that Le Vaillant has not had his due as a major ornithological innovator and observer.<sup>16</sup>

As a publisher of bird books, he found ways of publishing them in sections to make them affordable to a broader public. The publication of the *Voyage* led to Le Vaillant having to innovate for a demanding patron. The King of France, Louis XVI, was a keen hunter and a report claims he enjoyed the *Voyages*. His banker, the Marquis de Laborde, must have thought it would cheer the King and distract him from the French Revolution, so commissioned Le Vaillant to design a map of his travels. What Le Vaillant designed is not only a spectacular visual display, but also a map which is probably the first to record wild animals and birds as belonging to a particular habitat. Two artists drew the 'papillons' or 'butterflies': miniature paintings that were inserted into the right place on the map. We thus have Le Vaillant providing at once a visual narrative and reminder of his voyage as a kind of added pleasure for the King, who could trace the voyage more easily, but also an early version of mapping animal and bird distribution.<sup>17</sup>

Le Vaillant's innovations extended beyond the natural world to his anthropological observations. When he returned to Paris, he joined the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme and was one of the Idéologues. When De Gérando drew up his systematic guide for would-be anthropologists, it was noted that this was intended as a possible guide for Le Vaillant, about to attempt a 'third voyage' into South Africa, but he had already shown considerable enterprise in his lengthy description of the Gonaqua, which starts at the end of volume one and continues well into volume two of the first voyage.<sup>18</sup> He records vocabulary, obtains artefacts, finds himself facing the problems of being an insider-outsider. In referring back to previous accounts, he enters the conventions of modern scholarship.

<sup>16</sup> See *Levaillant Birds*, particularly chapter one and part two, *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> See n. 49 above.

<sup>18</sup> See Copans and Jamin, 73.

## Thematic importance of the *Travels*

The work would never have had the effect it did had it been a simple and accurate account of a hunting and collecting expedition into the fairly well-known world controlled by the Dutch East India Company. The work of Thunberg or Sparrman had a limited appeal. To become a European best-seller, the voyage needed lots more: discovery; adventure; a new sense of nature; romance; brotherhood.

The first thing Le Vaillant added was a Rousseauistic sense of nature as freedom and revelation. There is a liminal moment when he leaves Cape Town and writes: 'And then, left entirely to my own devices, and expecting no assistance or support but from my own strength, I returned, so to speak, to man's primitive state, and breathed, for the first time in my life, the pure and delicious air of freedom.' There may have been a political sting to Le Vaillant's comments as it seems that freedom lies only beyond the reach of civilised political control, but it is easy to make fun of this feeling – what about Swanepoel, and the Company servants, and wagons and goods provided by the Company and the obligations to Temminck? Nonetheless, the sentiment has proved irresistible. It surely forms part of the reason why people want to go on safari, or to the bush, or back to nature, or why we cherish wilderness. Whole tourism industries depend on the feeling that one is returning to nature.

And if travels provide freedom, they also become a voyage, a safari which involves self-discovery, a new distance from where one comes from, a different sense of time and space and values.<sup>19</sup> On safari, one is supposed to observe and speculate and learn. The true safari involves looking at ethology or animal behaviour, not simply a shooting match. When Le Vaillant describes the pet baboon Kees and his behaviour, or describes the behaviour of birds, he tries to give the sense of a world out of European control.

For Le Vaillant, the travel is not simply the extension of European control, or the superior viewing of inferior cultures, or the shooting of animals. The *Travels* are probably the first work of discovery that take seriously Rousseau's injunction in his lengthy note X to the *Discourse on the origins of inequality* in which he complains about the ethnocentricity of travel accounts and complains that Philosophy does not travel. In this work, Le Vaillant tries to be a philosopher who travels, who compares values and the costs and benefits of modern European civilisation.

This openness to foreign cultures brought two powerful cultural themes into play. The first was brotherhood across racial and cultural barriers, a relationship that can only flourish in the space out of normal society. Le Vaillant

<sup>19</sup> See L.E. Glenn, 'The man who invented safaris', *New Contrast*, 130, 33, 2 (2005), 64–70.

and Klaas provide the model for some later South African writing and there are traces in *Makanna* and in Rider Haggard and an ironic version in Coetzee's *Dusklands*, but it was in American literature that the brotherhood between men of different races – Huck and Jim, Ishmael and Queequeg, Natty Bumppo and Deerslayer – became a major literary theme, a way of exploring life outside Western familial and social constraints.<sup>80</sup>

The second major theme was erotic. In the person of Narina, the young Gonaqua woman who was as beautiful as one of the Graces, or a classical nude by Albani, Le Vaillant started the theme of the erotic possibilities of the other.<sup>81</sup> Julia Kristeva has written about the erotic nature of travel and leaving the known and Le Vaillant, though he portrayed the relationship as chaste flirtation and teased the readers for imagining it was more, did enough, with scenes of Narina and her friends bathing naked in the river, to eroticise African travel.<sup>82</sup> When the young Charles Baudelaire asked for his great-uncle's work to be sent to him at boarding-school for a friend to read, one suspects that Narina's charms may have had something to do with the request, and possibly with Baudelaire's own later fascination with the erotic otherness of Jeanne Duval.<sup>83</sup> And, in Baudelaire's own cryptic, never fully explained reminder in his *Intimate Journals* of his 'vow to Le Vaillant', we surely have a further sense of the long influence of Le Vaillant's work.<sup>84</sup>

Then Le Vaillant added adventure and danger into the mix. This book made hunting into the first modern extreme sport. Earlier African hunters were prosaically after food or protecting livestock; Le Vaillant makes the hunt a dangerous way of extending scientific knowledge and discovery with established upper-class leisure pursuits. Louis XVI's reaction to the *Travels* would be typical of generations to follow – what were the Grand Tour and the monuments of Europe compared to the thrill of facing danger in the wild? The hunting narrative became a, if not the, literary staple from Southern Africa in the nineteenth century and figures like Gordon Cummings and Selous became revered establishment figures. In the twentieth century, the African hunting expedition remained a model for scientific discovery, as in Roosevelt's expedition to Africa, or as a model for self-discovery and joy, as in Hemingway's short stories.

<sup>80</sup> See, e.g. Leslie Fiedler, *Love and death in the American novel* (New York, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> On this theme in South African writing, see, e.g., I.E. Glenn, 'Race and Sex in English South African Fiction', in C. Malan (ed.), *Race and Literature* (Durban, 1988), 152–62.

<sup>82</sup> See I.E. Glenn, 1997: 'François Le Vaillant: Revolutionary Traveller', in L. Nas and H. Wittenberg (eds), *AUETSA 1996: Conference Proceedings* (Cape Town, 1996), 227–30.

<sup>83</sup> C. Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, (Paris, 1973) I, 24.

<sup>84</sup> Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, I, 652. As the editors note, the reference was probably to Le Vaillant's son, Jean-Jacques Rousseau Le Vaillant, who was friendly with Baudelaire, but a plausible reading is that the vow had to do with a poetic tribute to the older voyager.

But that was not all. Le Vaillant also became one of the first to attack colonial expansion and to expose colonial brutality. His scathing description of the ways in which the colonisers dispossessed the Khoi and reduced them to servitude led Chamfort, as seen earlier, to praise his satire as being worthy of a Juvenal.<sup>85</sup> In his revelation of how colonists killed a captured child or how they took target practice on enemies, he became the first investigative reporter on South Africa, somebody who revealed, in his description, the pains of feeling outcast from his own society. A hundred years before Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, another uneasy company man felt he was a queasy witness to systematic robbery:

I would never stop if I wanted to report in detail the shocking atrocities which are indulged in every day against these unfortunate savages who have no protection and no support. Particular considerations and powerful motives silence me and, besides, what can the voice of a sensitive individual do against despotism and force? One must groan and know how to be silent. I have said enough for everyone to know what the colonists are doing in that part of Africa while the indolent government gives free rein to their excesses and even fears to punish them. In this place all the horrors invented in hell are committed ...

Le Vaillant's comments on how the frontier settlers were escaping Company control and were in danger of seceding were shrewdly prescient. Fewer than ten years after he wrote, the burghers of Swellendam declared independence and became, for a short time, the first African republic. Nearly half a century before the Great Trek, Le Vaillant warned that it would come.

Le Vaillant's view that colonisation was theft, that the indigenous people had 'imprescriptible rights', might have seemed revolutionary in the twentieth century, but for much of the first half of the nineteenth century, it was a literary staple in writing about South Africa.<sup>86</sup> When the British took over the Cape, the most authoritative guide they could find, the one most critical of Dutch settlement, was Le Vaillant. British author after author, in writing about the Cape, repeated sentiments to the effect that colonisation was theft or took the side of the colonised in describing the situation at the Cape. Barrow and others may have criticised some of what they found in Le Vaillant, but there was also a good deal of agreement with him in his criticism of colonial brutality. As Nigel Penn has shown, Barrow's descriptions of colonial brutality echo Le Vaillant's.<sup>87</sup> And, more than that, the first British governors of

<sup>85</sup> See n. 52 above.

<sup>86</sup> See Marie-Jeanne Boisacq, 'Le mythe du bon sauvage Hottentot', *Literature*, 14, 2 (1993), 117–131, and Glenn, 'The Future of the past in English South African literature'.

<sup>87</sup> See N. Penn, *The forgotten frontier: Colonist and Khoisan on the Cape's northern frontier in the 18th century*, (Athens and Cape Town, 2005) and 'The Onder Bokkeveld Ear Atrocity', *Kronos*, 31, 2005, 62–106.

the Cape adopted policies under pressure from those who had portrayed the injustices done to the indigenous peoples, as did the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, in 1834.

Le Vaillant's legacy is profound but mixed. In a dark mood we could accuse him of contributing to most of the colonising vices: from the wholesale slaughter of animals for 'sport' by colonial visitors, to sex tourism. Yet the fairer view of the work must surely be that it was generous, humane and interesting and that its disappearance from South African literature was a major loss of our own heritage.

### Literary history surrounding the text

The fate of Le Vaillant's *Voyage* after publication has been neglect. As settler culture established itself in the nineteenth century, the sharp critique of colonial culture in this work was simply ignored. In France, too, Le Vaillant was turned to missionary use or made the subject of improving literature.<sup>58</sup>

The neglect of Le Vaillant is not an accident but the product of a profoundly political censorship or, rather, of profoundly political censorships, particularly of Le Vaillant's strong ideological links with the French revolutionary spirit of his times. The effects of this censorship come to us most strongly at present in some of the blind spots of post-colonial discourse theories all too willing to accept the censorship of the past as a sign of its simplicity.

Scholarship on Le Vaillant has been bedevilled by the absence of the text and shoddy scholarship. Le Vaillant's texts had gone out of print and the only easily available reprint came in 1932, in a text edited by Boulenger, who combined the first and second *Voyages* into one abridged version.<sup>59</sup> Boulenger claims (I, xvii) that his work is an accurate summary of the original with all omissions indicated faithfully and this claim has in effect been accepted by critics such as Michelle Duchet and Mary-Louise Pratt who take their Le Vaillant from Boulenger.<sup>60</sup> As Boulenger's preface makes clear, however, he is hostile to the Rousseauistic and anti-colonial strands of Le Vaillant's thought, and he has edited correspondingly. We thus face our final irony. It seems that it suits Marxist theorists such as Duchet and post-colonial and feminist discourse theorists such as Pratt to rely on bad right-wing scholarship because it simplifies the complexity of past texts so admirably. Boulenger had a vivid dislike of Rousseau, which he made clear in the Preface and, to put it simply, he edited out of the text anything which smacked of criticism of colonialism. None of the passages of criticism of Dutch colonialism survive in his text.

<sup>58</sup> Le Vaillant *Birds*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> J. Boulenger, *Voyages de F. Le Vaillant dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique (1781-1785)*, 2 vol.

<sup>60</sup> See M. Pratt, *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (London, 1992) and M. Duchet, *Anthropologie à l'aube du siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 1971).

Trying to obtain any kind of reliable idea of colonial discourse by using the Boulenger text is like trying to give a reliable account of Shakespeare's sexual vision from the text edited by the Rev. Bowdler and it is an embarrassment for African literary and cultural scholarship that the work of critics using it has been allowed to stand unchallenged.

Jane Meiring's *The truth in masquerade* is, as she frankly admits in her Preface, 'not a book for the student or the scholar'. Though it had the virtue of reminding readers of Le Vaillant's work, it is, for scholarly purposes, an uneasy mix of novelistic re-telling of scenes in the original, a more or less literal paraphrase of Le Vaillant's two journeys, and commentary on and censorship of sections of it. Thus, for example, when it gets to Hans' account of colonial brutality, Meiring simply censors out the stories he tells and ridicules Le Vaillant for taking a one-sided, pro-Xhosa view of events. It is also difficult to know, from Meiring's procedure, whether she has chosen to re-interpret scenes in the original or simply mistranslated them.<sup>61</sup>

In a further irony, Le Vaillant's re-entry into South African literature came at the behest, originally, of the South African Parliament which had acquired paintings done for the *Voyages* and wanted to stress white South Africa's European connections. They were careful, in gathering the scholarship for the two otherwise very useful volumes of scholarly essays, to omit anything that pointed to Le Vaillant's strongly revolutionary sympathies or to his stinging attacks on Van Riebeeck and Dutch colonialism.

Much of what passes for literary scholarship of Le Vaillant's influence (see e.g. Miller or Sharpley-Whiting on his influence on Baudelaire) seems simply in ignorance of crucial texts and contexts (as Françoise Lionnet has shown convincingly for Miller).<sup>62</sup> We thus have a double and mutually re-inforcing cultural amnesia produced by figures in cultural wars who do not know or do not wish to acknowledge their own intellectual history: right wing settler ideology disqualifies Le Vaillant as meddling creole Frenchman or presents him (in the depoliticised South African parliamentary version or Boulenger's pro-colonial nostalgic mode) as simple adventurer and naturalist, while a later generation of anti-colonialist discourse critics is happy to present him in the right-wing's simplified, politically censored version to prove that there was only one mode of colonial, Africanist discourse and thus, no doubt, to present their own thoroughly modern virtue. This first major work of South African literature and major source text of colonial discourse deserves rediscovery and reconsideration.

<sup>61</sup> J. Meiring, *The truth in masquerade: the adventures of François le Vaillant* (Cape Town, 1973?).

<sup>62</sup> See C. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist discourse in French* (Chicago, 1985); T. Sharpley-Whiting, *Sexualized Savages, Primal Fear, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham, 1999); F. Lionnet, 'Reframing Baudelaire: Literary History, Biography, Postcolonial Theory, and Vernacular Languages', *Diacritics*, 28, 3 (1998), 62-85.



What we now urgently need in rewriting the cultural and literary history of South Africa is, and for, a new South Africa is to remind ourselves of the complexity of earlier discourses and debates, and of the place of the French Enlightenment in them. In our sense of the ongoing dialogue between the French Enlightenment and humanist ideals on the one hand, and the colonial situation on the other, we need to restore the *Travels* to a central place, not as a source of political or moral rectitude, but as a more complex and subtle and interesting text than later French or South African accounts have allowed.

## NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

When the idea of re-publishing Le Vaillant's work in English arose, the obvious plan was to use one of the editions published in England within months of the publication in French – either the Robinson edition, with an anonymous translator or probably translators, or the much inferior Lane version translated by Elizabeth Helme. There might have been some advantages – the retention of the original influential English, the closeness to the metaphor of the time that no contemporary can reach – but there were major disadvantages outweighing them. The Helme translation, though it was the one chosen for republication in the twentieth century, is not so much a translation as an anglicised and sanitised version. As the translator admitted in her preface:

I have likewise softened (if I may be allowed the expression) a few passages that possibly might be accounted mere effusions of fancy and vivacity in a French author, but which would ill accord with the delicacy of a female translator, or indeed with the temper and genius of English readers ...

One could do an entire study of ways in which the original translations systematically distorted the original meaning. Both English translators tend to omit comments hostile to the British – for example the attack on Captain Cook that shows how clearly this work was influenced, as Marie-Jeanne Boisacq has pointed out, by Diderot's commentary on Bougainville.<sup>1</sup> More interestingly, perhaps, we have on several occasions a failure of the English translators to understand what Le Vaillant is saying because they literally cannot imagine that he is saying what he is saying, that he is actually holding the colonists responsible for atrocities, rather than the indigenous people.

Even the much better Robinson version is uneven and it seems likely, from some evidence, that it was produced by a team of translators and scribes with a consequent inconsistency in the result. On one occasion, the French 'seize' (sixteen) is translated into English as sixty. This is not a mistake one is likely to make in writing, but it makes perfect sense if one person is translating aloud and another is transcribing what is written. If one were to use the Robinson text, it needed scrupulous correction in many points, and once that point was conceded, translation practice suggests that working off existing translations is a false economy.

<sup>1</sup> M.-J. Boisacq, 'Le mythe du bon sauvage Hottentot', *Littérature*, 14, 2 (1993), 117-31.

Though this translation has been checked against and in many instances has benefited from the earlier versions in English, it differs from them in its efforts to remain scrupulously, sometimes painfully, close to the original. Some of these decisions are worthy of comment. It retains the italics for names of the original, leaves uncertainties uncertain and tries not to correct errors or problems.

### Technical problems

One of the first problems in translating Le Vaillant's text is that the standard unit is a long, sometimes very long, sentence, punctuated with semi-colons. Perhaps the best way to imagine this is as something close to transcribing an oral account, where many of the logical links would be conveyed by gesture or the implicit logic of events rather than by explicit conjunctions. In translating, the temptation is to introduce variation by mixing up shorter with longer sentences and by substituting a range of other punctuation marks – dashes, commas, full stops, brackets – for the semi-colons and to make the logic apparent by adding conjunctions. Though the translation yields much of the time to this temptation, it resists it far more than the original translations did. It also respects the paragraphing of the original, as that too may give some of the deeper story rhythm of the text.

A second major problem is the very frequent use of 'on' in the original. 'On' can mean, variously: one, we, people, you the readers, they. A standard device for translating 'on' into English is to use the passive: 'on a dit que' ... becomes 'it has been said that'. The problem with using this the whole time is that the passive has a very different force, whereas Le Vaillant in some cases uses the 'on' with the role of assigning responsibility or at least keeping it in play. In translating it, attention has been given to the particular context to decide which usage best captures the sense there, though it undoubtedly loses something of the shifting allegiances and identities the repeated 'on' of the original provided.

A third problem is Le Vaillant's jump to the present tense in passages of high drama, like the elephant hunt. English, too, has recourse to this device and we used it.

### Problems of offensive terminology

Many readers will find terms like Caffre or Hottentot or Negro offensive but it is difficult to know what to do to translate these terms without falling into historical solecisms and anachronisms. Le Vaillant did not think of the African people he met as Xhosa (though he did talk of the Gonaqua). And, in some cases, the text depends, for its effect, on the fact that readers may regard

Hottentots or Caffres pejoratively, thus allowing the narrator to denounce, dramatically, European prejudices when he points out how they are the victims of colonial prejudice. We have thus allowed the terminology to stand in the historical passages, while correcting to current terminology in our own notes.

### Problems of register

The publication drew the admiration of discerning French critics such as Chamfort, in part because of its rhetorical power and satiric verve. Buried deep into the first volume, long after the censor would have been reassured that the subject matter was technical and descriptive, the text launches a savage attack on colonialism and European arrogance. This attack may have owed much to Diderot and Rousseau and to anti-slavery polemics, but it poses particular problems for translation, as it mixes savage denunciation with suave irony and a stirring appeal to rights. When the rhetoric of the investigative reporter merges with that of the Noble Savage and of the American Constitution and inalienable rights, any translator is going to struggle.

Further, the writing is highly sophisticated in its assumptions about having an educated audience that will share its allusions, its psychological complexity and its sense of irony. At several points, the author relies on a playfully sophisticated understanding from the audience and engages us by teasing, accusing, confiding, or keeping us at a distance. This might not seem a point worth making until one sees how often the first English translators flattened or simplified or simply resisted the complexity of thought. Le Vaillant is much more our contemporary than Schreiner or many later writers seem to be.

### Proper names

Any discussion of how to render proper names has to start with the problems posed by the name of the author. On the question of what name to use, the facts are simple. Born Vaillant, at some point, probably during his voyage to the Cape,<sup>2</sup> the man re-named himself Le Vaillant, perhaps echoing the re-naming of the book where he becomes known as 'the brave'. In the records of the General Muster rolls of the Dutch East India Company, there is a record of a 'Levaelend', though his 'signature' at the Heerenlogement was simply F. Vaillant.<sup>3</sup>

We cannot even rely on the man himself for consistency. In dozens of signatures after his return from Cape Town, the name sometimes seems to be written LeVaillant, which could be interpreted to mean Le Vaillant or

<sup>2</sup> Cape Archives, VC 46, General Muster Roll (1775-1782).

Levaillant, in others Le Vaillant, in others Levaillant, while in others, even after his return to France, he signed Vaillant because of legal continuities. In other cases, he initialled pages of a legal document FLV or ended letters signing himself LV. His books clearly took Le Vaillant, while his descendants took the form Levaillant. While LeVaillant would be an ingenious compromise, we have here preferred Le Vaillant as it was the name he used for the original publication of the *Travels*. The other major modern piece of Le Vaillant scholarship, *François Levaillant and the Birds of Africa* took the different view, heeding Kees Rookmaaker's pragmatic point that the joined form at least ensures that libraries record entries under L rather than V.<sup>3</sup> One of the vagaries of research at present is that records are found variously under Le Vaillant [in other words, preceding Lea], Levaillant, Vaillant, or even Varon.

One of the other problems with proper names is knowing what to make of the use of italics. It seems that Le Vaillant intended the italics to be a kind of guarantee of local authenticity – almost like a footnote of having noted the word locally and brought it back carefully. As the spelling chosen may also have a particular interest or an explanation we may not be able to work out, it has seemed preferable to keep the original. When Le Vaillant, for example, tells us that *Roben* Island was named for the sharks found there, he probably simply got mixed up between sharks and seals, but perhaps somebody will come up with an ingenious etymology of *Roben* rather than *Robben*. In other cases, too, when names are spelled incorrectly, we have kept the original and noted the error at least once, though in some cases, like Sparrman, we have corrected subsequent errors.

<sup>3</sup> L.C. Rookmaaker, P. Mundy, I.E. Glenn and E.C. Spary, *François Levaillant and the Birds of Africa*, (Johannesburg, 2004).

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taking away their rights, their authority, their peace, and their happiness.<sup>122</sup> Why should these men, indolent by nature, unattached to any particular piece of land, like true cosmopolitans, not in the least inclined to agriculture, be concerned that some strangers had come to take a little piece of useless and often uninhabited land? They thought that a little further, or a little nearer, was immaterial. It did not matter where their flocks, the only wealth worthy of their note, found their food, as long as they found some. The Dutch held out great hopes for their greedy policy after such a peaceful beginning, and as they are especially skilful and tougher than others in seizing the advantages given by chance, they did not fail to finish off the work, by offering to the Hottentots two highly seductive lures: tobacco, and brandy. From this moment on, no more liberty, no more pride, no more nature, no more Hottentots, no more men. These unfortunate savages, enticed by these two baits, stayed as close as they could to the source providing them. On the other side, the Dutch who could get an ox for a pipe of tobacco or a glass of brandy, tried to keep, as much as possible, such valuable neighbours. Imperceptibly the colony spread and got stronger. Soon one saw rising on foundations that it was too late to destroy, this redoubtable power which dictated laws to this whole part of Africa, and rejected violently all that might resist its ambitions and greedy advancement. News of the company's riches spread and attracted new colonists every day. It was decided, as is always the practice, that might was sufficient right to spread as much as one wanted to. This logic nullified the sacred and respectable rights of property. On several occasions, they grabbed indiscriminately more than was needed, taking all the land that the government or individuals it favoured thought good and suited them.<sup>123</sup>

The Hottentots, thus betrayed, harried, squeezed out everywhere, divided and took two totally different paths. Those still interested in keeping their flocks went far into the mountains towards the north and the north-east. But this was the smaller group. The others, ruined by some glasses of brandy and

<sup>122</sup> The word 'imprescriptible' was a key word in the discourse of human rights, and was used by Rousseau, as well as by Thomas Paine in 1791; it would be tempting to look also for the American parallel by using 'inalienable'. What is clearly significant here is Le Vaillant's use of the language of human rights in a colonial context – something Chamfort picked up as part of the subtle political critique of the text in his review (C., 'Littéraires: Voyage de M. Le Vaillant dans l'Intérieur de L'Afrique ...', *Mercur de France*, 138, 12 [20 March 1790], 57–81).

<sup>123</sup> This passage may owe something to Rousseau and Diderot (see M.-J. Boisacq 'Le mythe du bon sauvage Hottentot', *Littérature*, 14, 2 [1993], 117–31), or even to the anti-slavery rhetoric of Helvetius or Grotius, but has a denunciatory verve which seems quite original and which left its imprint on dozens of nineteenth century British novels about the Cape (see I.E. Glenn, 'The future of the past in English South African literary history', *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*, 51, 1, [September 1996], 38–46). Long before Conrad, Le Vaillant was the uneasy company man denouncing colonialist myths.

a few plugs of tobacco, poor, stripped of everything, never thought of quitting this country. But, renouncing absolutely their habits as well as their ancient and gentle origins, which they no longer even remember today, they basely came to sell their services to the whites. The whites, who are no longer submissive foreigners, but have suddenly become enterprising and proud masters and farmers, do not even have enough workers to cultivate their large farms, and so completely pass on the difficult work and drudgery to these unfortunate Hottentots, who became increasingly degraded and bastardised.

A few of the miserable hordes have settled and live as they can in various districts of the colony; but they cannot even choose their own chief. As they live within the ambit of the Government's authority, the Governor alone is entitled to appoint him. The man he has selected comes to town and receives a large staff very much like those of our couriers except that the knob is made of pure copper.<sup>124</sup> Then as a badge of his dignity, a crescent or gorget also made of wrought copper is put around his neck; on it the word CAPITEIN is engraved in capital letters. From this moment, his unfortunate horde, which has long lost its national name, takes the name of the chief it has been given. One will speak for example of the horde of Captain Keis and Captain Keis then becomes a stooge, a new spy, a new slave to the Government, and a new tyrant for his own people.

The Governor never knows these men personally. Generally it is the colonist nearest to the Horde who applies to the Governor to have one of his creatures appointed because he banks on the gratefulness of such a lowly protégé and expects the new captain to put his own retainers at his service when the need arises. Thus it is that without any preliminary training, without any respect or justice, a powerless and defenceless Horde is put under the authority of a man who is often incapable of leading it in matters of greater or lesser importance. Thus it is that the interest of an individual takes precedence over the general interest. Thus it is that the revolutions in a republic or the childish election of a village syndic proceed from the same principle and are very much alike in their consequences.<sup>125</sup>

Such are in general the Hottentots, who are known today by the name of Hottentots of the Cape, or of the colonies; one must be careful not to confuse them with the savage Hottentots, called in derision Jackal Hottentots, who are far removed from the arbitrary dominion of the Dutch Governor and, in the

<sup>124</sup> For accounts of the system of Government-appointed Captains see Sparrman I, 229–231 and Thunberg 165–6. For a picture of a Hottentot chief in his ceremonial dress with his staff of office, see *Le Vaillant, Traveller*, I, Plate 34.

<sup>125</sup> The end of the paragraph is confusing. Perhaps the text tried to avoid possible censorship by softening the reading of an anti-royalist piece of rhetoric by arguing that apparently democratic procedures are just as liable to be driven by selfish individual motives.

deserts they inhabit, have retained to this day their original customs and unadulterated manners.

I have reached this point in my journey when I no longer have any relation with the former, whom I am leaving behind me, and I am arriving among the latter. It is not necessary for me here to examine in depth and in detail the differences between them. One remark, stemming from the truth of experience, will give an idea of the savage Hottentots' character and of what I am to expect from them: wherever the savages are totally apart from the whites and live in isolation, their manners are gentle; they get adulterated and corrupted the closer they come to the whites; it is very rare for the Hottentots living with them not to become monsters. However dismaying it is to say so, it is nonetheless in principle a truth to which there is hardly any exception. When among very distant nations, north of the Cape under the tropic, I used to see whole hordes surround me with signs of surprise and the most childish curiosity; they came close to me with confidence, they would touch my beard, my hair, my face: "I have nothing to fear from these people," I used to say to myself, "This is the first time they cast their eyes on a white man."

I have gone into this digression all the more readily as it was important to look attentively at this more serious part of my travels and my account. I am eagerly coming back to my story as I always experience renewed pleasure when I tell these delightful though simple adventures.

The whole Horde had found it difficult to part from me and they accompanied me as far as the *Louri* river, four leagues distant from the Gamtoos. We stopped to take leave of our good friends and treat them to a few glasses of brandy and a few pipes of tobacco for the occasion. The women, who had become attached to my Hottentots while I stayed near their kraals, and who also may have missed my cuisine a little and may have regretted the fare from my kitchen, were determined to come along with us.<sup>128</sup> But on several occasions, I had noticed, although I pretended not to, that there had been some quarrelling among my men; as a result they had been somewhat slacker in their service. Therefore I firmly refused permission for these women to travel and stay with me.

Only one of them had seemed to me particularly diligent; I had noticed she took very good care of my cows and goats; that she washed my linen very nicely. These were self-interested reasons to keep her. But there was another stronger motive in her favour: she had become the dearly beloved of my faithful Klaas; separating them meant rending both their hearts asunder and there was no other advantage but to show myself severe and harsh to a man who

would have given up his life for me in any circumstances. I adopted on his account a policy which was the opposite of what anyone else would have done and I decided to keep her. This token of preference showed to what extent I made a difference between Klaas and his companions – whether I was being unjust or weak, I indulged my desire to make at least one man happy, since it could not be done for all of them and I never had reason to regret my decision subsequently. I gave this woman the name *Ragel*, and her duties remained what they had always been.<sup>129</sup> She followed me everywhere I went till the end of my travels.

After the horde went back to their kraal, we continued our travelling, but a violent storm forced us to stop at *Galgebos*.<sup>130</sup> It was five in the afternoon. The place was not without charm and I would have stayed there some time except that there was not one single stream. Therefore we went two leagues farther and crossed the *Van Staade River* and we outspanned at seven on the side of a pool where there was enough water for the whole caravan.<sup>131</sup>

How often does chance not lead to new processes and useful discoveries? Most of the time these are more serviceable and simpler than what we could devise by our own lights, intelligence or contrivances. I had proof of this truth in the very place where I stopped.

That morning the horde I had just parted from had brought me, in my camp, a large supply of milk. I had left a jug almost full of it at hand in my wagon to quench my thirst during the journey. The storm we had weathered had refreshed me so thoroughly that I had not felt thirsty and had not touched it. In the evening, once the fires were going, I was going to let my people have this milk, but it had turned sour. I had it thrown away into a pot as a treat for the dogs. I was amazed to find it had turned into the most wonderful butter; this I owed to the jolts of the wagon which had churned it as we went along. I put this discovery to practical use throughout my journey and was thus supplied not only with fresh butter but with wholesome whey which I drank frequently and which undoubtedly helped to keep me hale and hearty.

The next day, another storm prevented us from leaving this spot; it was a dreadful storm indeed with hailstones as large as chicken eggs which harmed

<sup>128</sup> *Ragel* – Klaas's wife, Rachel, is depicted on Plate 33 in *Le Vaillant, Traveller*, I.

<sup>129</sup> *Galgenbosch*, Gallows Wood. According to Ensign Beutler it was so named because some travellers had cut their names on a tree and others later added a gallows above them. Probably at or near the farm Sunnyside or Klaarfontein, some 3 km ESE of Thornhill: Sparrman II, 14 n. 9; Thunberg, 237 n. 364, 'Reis van den Vaandrig Beutler', G. Theal (ed.) *Belangrijke Historische Documenten* (Cape Town, 1896), vol 2, 25. A farm called 'Galbos' is today some eight kilometres NW of the mouth of Van Staden's River: Gordon, I, 154 n. 476.

<sup>130</sup> Van Staden's River, possibly named after Marthinus van Staden who in 1744 occupied a farm by the Kabeljauws River: Sparrman II, 15 n. 10.

<sup>131</sup> *Le Vaillant* presumably uses the word 'cuisine' to refer to the ample supply of meat in his camp compared to the women's regular diet.

the animals so much that I became worried. I had to kill one of my goats which was fatally wounded. This was a real loss to me. I regretted this goat very much as she was about to give birth.

But at last, the weather changed and we left our pool of water. Towards the middle of the day, after crossing two rivers, the small and the great *Swaar Kops*, I had the men outspan on the bank of the latter.<sup>120</sup> I had just spotted footprints I had never seen before. I pointed them out to some of my men who assured me they were from a rhinoceros.<sup>121</sup> As the camp was being put in order, I followed this track, but night fell and I lost it and I came back not having seen anything. On this second river, which was quite wide, there was another horde of savages. Their kraal consisted of nine to ten huts and fifty to sixty people at most. These people advised me not to cross the Bossiman river which runs along the coast.<sup>122</sup> They told me it was better to cut across on my left and advance deeper inland to avoid a large troop of Caffres who had put the whole district on the alarm, burning and killing everything and everyone they came across; they said that everywhere there was nothing but wild looting, ravaged fields, devastated houses burned to ashes. To escape a swift and certain death, the owners had fled, leaving behind everything except the pitiful remains of their flocks; in a word, they were telling me I was not to come near Caffraria. This stark warning shook me at first. I immediately gathered all my men and we deliberated what to do. I was keen to sound out everyone about the situation. The unanimous decisions, which were in line with my own private plans, were: first, that we should keep clear of this dangerous troop of Caffres, as long as this did not take us too far out of our way; second, that as we were very close to them, we should remain on our guard day and night; third, that to avoid being surprised, we should only camp in open country; fourth, that our oxen should be guarded when grazing by four men armed with guns; fifth, that my horses should always be tied to be sure they were available in case of an alarm; sixth, that my biggest gun should be kept loaded in camp and that three shots fired at regular intervals would be the signal to come back for those who might have had to leave the camp to attend to their chores.

Once we had decided on these precautions and everyone had understood them, I got on my horse and, taking two well-armed men with me, I patrolled the vicinity thoroughly to make sure there were no Caffres lurking nearby. If

<sup>120</sup> Swartkops River, which enters the sea on northern outskirts of Port Elizabeth: Sparrman I, 296. He probably forded it between Perseverance and Despatch: *Le Vaillant, Traveller*, I, 44; Small Swaar Kops is now called the Chattry River, a south bank tributary, which joins the Swartkops 5 km from its mouth.

<sup>121</sup> *Rhinoceros bicornis*, Black Rhinoceros.

<sup>122</sup> Bushman River.



Ragel, wife of Klaas. (From Lane's 1790 English edition of *Le Vaillant's Travels*.)



I had seen one hiding to ambush us, I was prepared to shoot him pitilessly if it was impossible to capture him alive. But we saw nothing. After dinner I went still further. Down to its mouth, the river was lined with thorny trees, while the ground on the banks was sandy and covered with bushes. There was lots of game and I killed some to keep in reserve. We saw nothing to worry us and, as I was satisfied that for the time being we had nothing to fear from these terrible Caffres, I ordered camp to be struck early the next morning and we left the Swaar-Kops.

The horde of Hottentots, terrified by the very mention of those cruel avengers, was considering going to settle further away so as not to be in the neighbourhood of Caffraria. When they saw I was about to leave, they asked permission to follow me and place the horde under the protection of my camp. I granted them this favour. Although I was secretly delighted by this idea, I astutely took the credit for letting them come, both to keep them dependent on me, and to reassure my own people through this bold pretence and boost their courage. I could not have hoped for anything better. My troop became that much stronger and over and above the resources of this horde, I had my own little artillery that could oppose whole clouds of assegais and neutralise the attack of a whole army of savages, provided I was adequately supported.<sup>133</sup> In less than two hours, the huts were taken down, packed up, and put with their other belongings on the back of the spare oxen.

I had half the men of this horde leave before me with all their cattle, giving them two of my men with guns as an escort. They also took one of my horses so that they might quickly let me know of any mishap.

An hour later, I sent off our spare oxen, cows, sheep, goats, and all the women and children of the horde riding their oxen; a group of their own men walked behind them. This company was also escorted, by six of my best hunters. My three wagons followed with the rest of my men, all armed. Finally, riding my best horse to keep an eye on everything, I cantered up and down alongside, right, left, ahead, behind, as I kept fearing some unexpected ambush, for I can say that had I, their leader, been brought down from my horse, the whole caravan would have fallen prey in a moment and been horribly butchered.

I was armed from head to foot. I had a pair of double-barrelled pistols in the pockets of my pants, another pair in my belt, my double-barrelled gun across my saddle-bow, a large sword at my side, and a knife or dagger through the button-hole of my coat. I could fire ten shots right away. In the beginning I found this whole arsenal rather cumbersome but I kept all of it on me, both for my safety and also because I felt that this precaution built up my people's

confidence. My weapons were no doubt to them a sure sign of my determination and in this frame of mind they went on calmly, leaving it to me to defend them.

This procession was something unique, funny, I might even say it was a magnificent sight. It took on different shapes as it wound around boulders and bushes and changed appearance every moment. At times it would disappear totally and then, suddenly, I would get a bird's-eye view from the top of a hillock, and see the vanguard in the distance, slowly making its way up towards the summit of the mountain, while the main body, following peacefully and in perfect order in the tracks of those in front, was still just below me. The women suckled the babies and gave food and drink to the children sitting next to them on their oxen, some of whom were crying, while others were singing or laughing. The men were smoking congenially and chatting and no longer looked like people in dread fleeing a cruel oncoming foe.

I was not as carefree as these travelling machines. I could see clearly how critical my position was and entertained my own philosophical train of thought on my beast. Here I was, three thousand leagues from Paris, the only one of my kind, among so many others, surrounded and watched by the wildest animals, I was tempted to admire myself, the first ever to lead through the African wilderness a group of savages, who had willingly put themselves under my command, executed my orders blindly and relied on me alone for their safety. I had nothing to fear from them as a group; yet among them I could see some who would have made me tremble if strength alone were to decide the contest in single combat. But, in my heart of hearts, I was quite sure that, here as elsewhere, it is not the strongest but the most astute who runs things.

We had not gone very far when my dogs, who were beating all around in the bushes, all started barking in one place. Fear took hold of all. It could only be an ambush by the Caffres, they said. I found it difficult to accept such absurd reasoning. Why would my vanguard have gone through without difficulty? I had just got a glimpse of them journeying on peacefully with no sign of disorder. I spurred my horse on through the bushes and was astonished to find it was only a porcupine fighting off my dogs.<sup>134</sup> I killed it and immediately went back to join my company in case they should do something stupid on hearing the gunshot. I made fun of their bout of panic and they could see that I would not be easily daunted.

The porcupine defends itself very well, as its quills protect it from any attack. When a dog comes close, the porcupine takes the first favourable occasion and throws itself sideways at the attacker. Once the dog has been wounded, he never attacks again. Some quills always stick in the dog's body and this

<sup>133</sup> A kind of spear the Caffres throw with great skill. [Note in the original.]

<sup>134</sup> The porcupine: *Hystrix africae australis*.