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Making Friends of the Nations

Australian Interwar Magazines and Middlebrow Orientalism in the Pacific

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Abstract

As travel began to massify in the aftermath of the Great War when passenger ships still regularly stopped at ports of call, and as Australia developed a sub-imperial relationship to its near Melanesian neighbors in Papua and New Guinea, the Pacific and its islands loomed large in Australian consciousness and print culture. This article employs Christina Klein's concept of "middlebrow orientalism" to examine how Australia's quality magazines, *MAN* and *The BP Magazine*, reflected an "expansive material and symbolic investment in Asia and the Pacific" (2003: 11) between the two world wars. While development of a consumerist, leisure relationship with the region is in evidence in these magazines that undoubtedly assume the superiority of White Australia, we argue they also promote diversity, inclusiveness, and an emerging maturity in outlook that conveyed the way in which Australians began to understand themselves as Pacific citizens wishing to "make friends of the nations."

Keywords: interwar, magazines, middlebrow, modernity, orientalism, Pacific, print culture

In *Coast to Coast: Case Histories of Modern Pacific Crossings,* Chris Dixon and Prue Ahrens argue that "[t]he Pacific, as Westerners understood it, was always more imagined than real, signifying a fantasy rather than an understanding of the region" (1). In the interwar period, as Australia took up a sub imperial role in Melanesia; as public debate underscored an increasing awareness of Britain's inadequacy in providing naval defense in the region; and as passenger liner traffic massified across the last ocean basin to open for travel while also expanding

further into Melanesia and Asia,[1] the Pacific loomed large in the nation's consciousness and print culture in real and imagined ways. These engagements increased understanding of the region while simultaneously entrenching fantasies of racial threat and exoticism, as well as developing new modes of consumption and leisure in Australia's emerging pleasure periphery. In this article we explore two of Australia's culture and leisure magazines of the 1930s, *The BP Magazine* (1928–19-42) and *MAN* (1936–19-74), to show how their non-fiction articles, advertising, and fiction suggested a modernizing engagement with the Pacific in both real and fantasized ways. This modernizing impulse and its continued investment in fantasy tends to have eluded both literary historians—who largely focus on the purely non-commercial Australian literature of this period, and cultural historians—who tend to consider commercial entertainment at the exclusion of middlebrow sources.

Drawing on, and extending, Christina Klein's notion of "middlebrow orientalism" which she develops in her analysis of the way American middlebrow culture "churned out a steady stream of stories, fiction and non-fiction that took Asia and the Pacific as their subject matter" during the Cold War period (1945–19-61), we outline an earlier, Australian version of this phenomenon between the wars as Australia developed its modern commercial, touristic, naval and governmental presence in the region. Middlebrow orientalism, we argue, held in nervous tension only the typical registers of "high and low" culture germane to the aspirational consumer culture of the emerging middlebrow,[2] but also mediated in these magazines tensions between education and leisure, realism and fantasy, sophistication and relaxation, art and entertainment, documentary and romance, upward mobility and renunciation of class strictures and aspirations. These binaries, we suggest, structured modern, middle-class neo-colonial engagement with the Pacific during this period in mid-range Australian print culture.

By turning to modern, consumer-oriented Australian magazines and considering their engagement with the Pacific, we take up Robert Dixon's interest in the inter-relationship

between emergent media and "colonial modernity," borrowing his term to rectify the "occlusion of colonialism" (2001: 12) in histories of modernity. In this, we also gesture toward the complicated intersection of a rapidly internationalizing and modernizing mass media landscape and massifying travel with modernity's "others," another interest shared by Dixon in his work. In his Introduction to *Prosthetic Gods*, Dixon outlined a new way of "doing postcolonial studies," which purposely moves away from earlier tendencies to use "theoretically driven textual interpretation" as historical evidence in itself (something he considers himself guilty of in *Writing the Colonial Adventure* [1995]). Instead, he pointed out the need to work "upwards from detailed evidence rather than downwards from theoretical models, and always to place literary or visual texts in as richly contextualised settings as possible in order to understand their relation to other texts, to their consumers, and to related domains" (2001: 3).

Magazines are ideally suited for such an approach to cultural and historical interpretation because they force scholars to consider textuality in relation to consumption. Further, they engage with a diverse array of print matter across several cultural fields, from varying sources such as international affairs, popular culture, and literature in the loosely correlative genres of non-fiction travel articles, advertising, and fiction. By exploring these magazines' diverse cultural and consumerist engagements with and across the Pacific region, we follow Dixon's call to pay closer attention to "the different domains in which texts circulate and have meaning" (2001: 7). As David Carter has bemoaned, "literary postcolonialism has had little to say about popular culture, popular modernity, or the culture industries" (2007: 117). Attuning to magazines, we contend, steers cultural historians away from the pitfalls of privileging more securely literary material and consigning to it too much social or political value, as postcolonial literary theory arguably did, and requires an

assessment of the different registers that framed the inscription and reception of these magazines' heterogeneous contents.

Although the interwar period has traditionally been considered as Australia's "dullest" or "driest" in cultural and literary terms (Bennett 1981: 89), more recent studies have sought to recuperate this era as decidedly cosmopolitan, vibrant, and modernizing. As Jill Julius Matthews has powerfully argued in *Dance Hall and Picture Palace*: "[r]ather than the last station on the line, a backwater ten years behind Europe and America … Sydney was a busy port of call in the ceaseless international ebb and flow of commerce and ideas that underpinned cosmopolitan modernity" (2005: 8). While related analyses of Australian vernacular modernities by Angela Woollacott, as well as Robert Dixon and Veronica Kelly, have since contributed to this re-envisioning of the period as culturally vibrant, few have taken up Dixon's call ~~to~~ "to relate Australia's domestic experience of modernity to its colonial or sub-imperial role in the Pacific" (2001: 10). In the aftermath of World War ~~One~~I, as the influence of the Dutch and French in the region waned, the Treaty of Versailles redistributed German possessions in the ~~Bismark~~ Bismarck Archipelago and Pacific surrounds between Japan, Britain, New Zealand, and Australia.[3] Just as Matthews suggests that Australians would have had relatives or friends employed in the plantation economies and colonial administrations of India, Singapore, and Burma, important sea ports en route to England (2005[IB1]: 8), Australians were engaged and familiar, even by if only by proxy, with the colonial and sub-imperial regions of the Pacific in this era, and certainly so in their print culture.[4] In *MAN,* for instance, in ~~the year~~ 1936–3-7, just over 10% of its advertising involved products and destinations in the broader Pacific area, and in *BP Magazine* over 40% of advertising material engaged with New Zealand, Netherlands East Indies, Malay States, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, the Philippines, China, and Japan with some even venturing across the Pacific to North America and Panama. In the 1930s approximately 30% of the

fiction in both magazines was set in these locations and another 15% evoked general shipboard settings. The magazines were also replete with black and white photographs, cartoons, and sketches of littoral, island, tropical and oceanic scenes, many of which were directly set in Pacific locations.

Yet while Australian print culture and magazines in particular are awash with images of the Pacific in this era, scholars tend to overlook it. Generally, this material is dismissed as lacking in good taste, "tainted," as we have argued with Susann Liebich, "by its association with the racial stereotypes it circulated and [placed] outside parameters of high cultural value" (Kuttainen et al. 2015: 157). Dixon contends that the *BP Magazine* drew on the "affective power" of fiction in portraying the region of Melanesia in terms of the romance of the South Seas "portrayed in novels, movies and other media of popular entertainment" and in casting all of these regions in terms of a generalized fantasy of "enchantment," "escape" and "transportation to another world" (2002: 212–13). This extends Adrian Vickers's argument that actual engagements with the Malay States in particular were sorely lacking in Australia in the interwar period, and that most Australians absorbed their perceptions of the region to the immediate North of Australia though stereotyped genre fiction loosely based on the narratives of Kipling (1990: 67–68). Ross Gibson has argued that *BP Magazine*, as the publicity arm of the Burns Philp Shipping Company, which serviced the New Hebrides (the British colonial name for Vanuatu), the Solomon Islands, and the Gilbert, Ellis, and Marshall groups as well as Papua New Guinea worked to transform these regions into vacation destinations. Gibson maintains that "the company's favored islands were practically interchangeable" and "[a] vast array of cultures, including those of Papua New Guinea (PNG) as well as the Melanesian islands, tended to be construed as a single 'world'" (1993: 30). Similarly, while focusing his discussion of the magazine on its portrayal of modern, urban masculinity rather than race or travel, Richard White has observed how *MAN* also peddled a romantic image of

the Pacific rendered by “wanderers on the new romantic frontiers of the South Seas and New Guinea” (1979: 154).

These scattered responses to the apprehension and projection of the Pacific in the Australian commercial print and magazine culture of the era have predominantly criticized its role in fomenting racism and perpetuating colonialist myths of exoticism and fantasy. Though this is undoubtedly so, retrospective analyses yield the colonialist and racist investments of this material all too easily. David Walker’s more nuanced study of Australia’s engagement with the Asia-Pacific has demonstrated how this regional imaginary changed over time, and that in the interwar period in particular, intellectual magazines demonstrated a serious attempt to understand the region’s people, their various political and geographical landscapes, and their cultural and historical contexts, reflecting an attempt to arouse in Australians a sense of themselves as modernizing “Pacific Citizens” (1999: 212–214). We argue, as Mitchell Rolls has done of *Walkabout*—an interwar Australian magazine with a similar focus on travel and geography (see Quanchi 2003: 77), that while certainly this material “does lend itself to glib critique” (2010: 3) middlebrow engagements with colonial modernity such as those we observe in *BP Magazine* and *MAN* require us to attend to the modernizing impulse of their colonialist representations. In these magazines, the escapist romances and colonial adventure narratives of time immemorial are sometimes replaced by or interspersed with more nuanced narratives. Non-fiction articles, while undoubtedly assuming the superiority of White Australia also promote diversity, inclusiveness, and an emerging maturity in outlook that signifies ways in which Australians saw themselves as located within a Pacific neighborhood, wishing to “make friends of the nations,” so to speak, and enjoy the expanded pleasure periphery. In mediating consumerism and entertainment as well as art and education the middlebrow magazine[5] presents heterogeneous engagements with both modernity and colonialism, depicting various “real,” and thus distinct, Pacific regions and

their peoples as well as on-going stereotypes, generalizations, and fantasies. As Klein has argued of middlebrow orientalism, both the real and imaginary engagements as well as the informed and fantastical elements reflect an "expansive material and symbolic investment in Asia and the Pacific" (2003: 11).

In his recent work on Australian middlebrow print culture David Carter considers the function of magazines and newspapers within the "broad cultural field" of the interwar era, arguing that "[a]s ephemeral *periodical* forms, they were often relentlessly modernizing in their engagement with the rhythms of contemporary urban life, its new products and its cultural styles; and therefore they could be critical in mediating modernity for their readers" (2013a: 68). Stories such as Borden Chase's serial "Confession in Crime" (*MAN* February–May 1937), Victor MacClure's "The Shadow" (*BP* January 1929), and L.L. Burton's "The Santa Cruz Arrow" (*BP* June 1930), display properties that locate them in relation to the emergence of modern genre fiction discussed elsewhere by Carter (2013b: 87). Fiction in these magazines, often engaged in themes of mobility, "with many plots turning on air, ship, or rail travel," and showcasing features belonging to crime, thriller, spy, or horror stories. Yet much of the fiction found in these magazines could also be considered part of the "'archive' of colonial Australian popular fiction" recently identified as such as Ken Gelder (2011: 1). This aligns with recent work by Faye Hammill and Michelle Smith on Canadian middlebrow magazines which argues that while such magazines "often reported on high culture in its various forms … [t]he fiction and artwork which they actually published (rather than just talk[ed] about) was nearly always conventional … often, it was formulaic" (11). Despite its formulaic nature, such fiction demands close attention, as John Cawelti argues, not only because of its investments in generalized collective fantasies, but also because of its embeddedness in specific figures and settings, in this case, within and across the Pacific (1976: 6). Andrew McCann makes the connected point that because such fiction "circulated …

in ephemeral periodical writing, it seems to have been placed beneath the threshold of critical cognition" (2004: 230) and that "beneath that threshold is exactly where we need to look in order to reconstruct the experience of colonial modernity" (230).

While the collective fantasies of fiction reveal some truths about Australians' continued investments in their racial superiority and reinforce notions of primitive, premodern paradise or threat on their doorstep, non-fiction items were often conversely inflected by fantasy that announced itself as fact. Dixon observes similarly unstable boundaries blurring fact and fiction, and ethnography and romance, in the commercially successful Australian non-fiction of Ion Idriess, for instance (2001). As Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins explain in *Reading National Geographic,* magazines with historical, geographical, and pictorial content such as *The National Geographic* framed the non-Western world for modernizing Western readers in ways that appeared realistic but which filled in "the imaginative spaces that non-Western people occupy" and drew on "tropes and stories that organize their existence in Western minds," ~~(1993: 2),~~ while providing "varieties of identification" (1993: 2, 3). Among some of these varieties, Klein has emphasized "the pleasures of transforming strangers into friends" (2003: 9). Klein draws on Mary Louise Pratt's notion of "narratives of anti-conquest," which normalize supremacy in a region and develop the notion of friendships based on relationships of "natural" inequality in the service of legitimating neo-imperial power, while at the same time minimizing the traces of military intervention or direct governance in the region (Klein 2003: 16).

In so doing, Klein emphasizes the role that the middlebrow has to play in this new sort of modern relationship, a concept that is also developed in the work of Lutz and Collins, who argue that *The National Geographic* straddled "the significant boundary between art and profit," ~~(8),~~ by drawing on and appealing to readers' sense of "taste and status" (2003: 8, 7). As Klein explains, middlebrow culture addressed and was embraced by ordinary readers who

could “invest their emotional and intellectual energy” in “processes of education and participation,” translating geo-political relationships into imagined, personal ones, and global expansion into commodified forms of cultural production and engagement imbued with sentiment (Klein 2003: 13). Janice Radway has called this mode of engagement “middlebrow personalism,” ~~(1997: 286),~~ emphasizing the affective registers of attachment, identification, connection, and pleasure ~~(Ibid., 283)~~ connected to the middlebrow (1997, 286, 283).

Certainly cultural production did not merely reflect or directly enforce governmental policy or geo-political ambitions or anxieties, nor were all forms of middlebrow orientalism homogeneous and invariable. As Klein explains, middlebrow orientalist texts “served as a cultural space in which the ideologies undergirding those policies could be, at various moments, articulated, endorsed, questioned, softened, and mystified” (2003: 13). Further, as Robert Dixon has shown in his work on Frank Hurley, the difference between the reception of commercial film and advertising was “quite distinct” from that of the same author's non-fiction newspaper articles (2002: 207). As reviewers accepted that film was grounded in “in a popular aesthetic of adventure, entertainment, escapism, and sensory pleasure”—the generic context of “adventure and romance,” ~~(Ibid.),~~ they experienced it “in the first instance as entertainment” (Dixon 2002: 207, 210). This horizon of expectation also framed the reception of magazine fiction, we maintain, while different registers of inscription and reception shaped the non-fiction material. Both domains were nevertheless deeply invested in fantasy and shared authenticating facts that offered readers a broad exposure to the Pacific as a region in which they could expect and wish to be engaged. Yet even so, travel advertisements, we argue, destabilized the already unstable boundaries between real and imagined engagements with the region in perhaps the most obvious ways, peddling consumer fantasies as real engagements with authentic others, and selling the notion that idealized and romanticized spaces could be actually experienced.

Although Dixon and Ahrens have contended that "[t]he persistent myth of the Pacific as an uncivilised and uncharted space was exploited by the early motion picture industry, keen to develop the mass market for vicarious adventure" (2010: 6), and Robert Dixon (2002: 213) has separately maintained that South Seas films heavily influenced the portrayal of the Pacific as a generalized fantasy in the interwar period~~ (2002: 213)~~, many of the Pacific themed stories in these culture and leisure magazines are set in specific and real locales, building Australian acquaintance—no matter how superficially—with the emerging pleasure periphery and sub-imperial zone. For instance, "The Purri's Eye"~~ (Percy Bowles, *BP* Mar 1939)~~, a tale of a planter's wife saving her husband from "plantation natives" (Percy Bowles, *BP* March 1939: 63[IB2]) is set on Kukunu and Vella Lavella in the Solomon Islands. Even Victor MacClure's story of crime and adventure fiction "The Shadow" mentions precise locations in the Lau Group of Fiji: Fulanga, Namuka, as well as Levuka (*BP* January 1929) while "Scavenger" by Thomas Gilchrist (*MAN* June 1938), features a stopover at Tabiteuea (an atoll of the Gilbert Islands). Relatedly, many of the stories in *BP Magazine* refer to actual ships that Burns Philp and their associated shipping lines ran to reinforce the potential attainability of the consumer fantasy many of these stories projected. This is particularly common in tales set on cruise liners such as "A Lesson in Love" (J.K. Andrews, March 1932) and "When Scot Meets Scot" (Dorothy Dawson Damer, December 1935), and also occurs in steamship stories emphasizing onboard murder and corruption (.L. Burton, "The Santa Cruz Arrow," ~~by L.L. Burton, ~~June 1930). Such reliance on realistic detail emphasizes the border position many of these genre stories navigate; many affirm Australia's active presence in the region for trade and leisure, while actively playing into fantasies of adventure and exoticism to entertain their readers.

MAN similarly relied on "authenticating detail" to make their travel narratives appear "realistic" to readers, even while these stories remained heavily tinged with fantasies of escape and nostalgia. "Hawaiian Interlude" by Phillip Lewis (*MAN* February 1937), set in Honolulu,

offers detailed descriptions of the Royal Hawaiian and Moana hotels (both icons of 1930s Hawaii), even going so far as to name specific streets that characters travel along during their time in Honolulu (Fort Street, Beretania and Makaloa Streets, Kakau Avenue). This preponderance of "real" detail reinforces the sense that the author has actually been to the exotic locale described, building the sense of escape into another world while reinforcing the attainability of this fantasy of newfound mobility and travel. As Ken Gelder and Janice Radway have separately argued of crime and romance fiction respectively, such details can make genre fiction appear more real to their readers while simultaneously justifying their value through their potential for instructional knowledge through consumption of a seemingly "frivolous" story (Gelder 2004: 62; Radway 1987: 107). Yet, while many of these stories feature such "authenticating detail," just as many are set in generic, invented Pacific locales such as Pototo and Araliki ("Devil Flowers," *BP* June 1931; "Failele," *BP* March 1934), or on seemingly deserted tropical islands. These instances suggest that the Pacific continued to function as a site of fantasy.

Many of these magazine stories also played to readers' interests in the cultural origins of the Pacific region, expanding readers' interests in indigenous histories or "Tribal Legends." "The Vengeance of Oen" by J.W. Green (*MAN* January 1938) and "The Woman Stealer" by Stewart McKenny (*MAN* March 1938) focus on early tribal societies to detail the perils of forbidden love and a thirst for vengeance, and similar tales can be found in *BP Magazine* in Eric Ramsden's "The Wooing of Matangi-hau" (September 1931) and "The Legend of Papai Maru" by Herbert Moesbury (March 1937). Ramsden's story aims for an air of authenticity through its claim to be "A Love Story of Old Maori-land, Based on a Tribal Legend" (1931: 27[IB3]). Alongside these indigenous "legend" narratives, we also find occasional attempts to display positive, authentic contemporary interracial relationships occurring in the Pacific region, such as in E.T.H's "Failele" (*BP* March 1934) which tells the tale of Cyril Somerville,

a d~~D~~istrict o~~O~~fficer based in Araliki, a northern Pacific port, who finds himself drawn to Failele a "bewitching half-caste Samoan girl" (22). Although stories such as "Failele" remain suffused with assumptions about white supremacy and cultural (as well as masculine) superiority, they nevertheless attempt to build affective relations with the region, educating and familiarizing Australians with their Pacific neighbors, while satiating fantasies of romance and renunciation from "Old World" ties.

Many stories of accommodation in these magazines appear to interrogate existing colonial narratives, stressing the need to understand and work with indigenous peoples, rather than simply repeating and reinforcing outdated patterns of conquest and subjugation. An example of this can be found in "To Hell w~~W~~ith Taboo" by Andrew Gregory (*MAN* December 1939) where protagonist Tom McLaurin faces a riot from his indigenous laborers after deliberately choosing to farm on land considered sacred to them, only to finally come to terms with the dreadful consequences of his mistake. In a different mode, Dora Payter's "The Planter's Wife" (*BP* September 1930) illustrates that successful industry could be accomplished in the South Seas, especially by working with indigenous people and knowledges rather than dismissing them. As in other stories noted above, Payter's narrative utilizes authenticating detail by mentioning actual ports and ships that serviced the region to showcase the Pacific as a real, modernizing space where industry, as well as relaxation and leisure, could be attained.

Thus, while the more mythic "legends" attempted to build a familiarity with the region through an attempt to understand its history and cultural origins, another genre of stories in these magazines attempted to convey Australia's stakes in the potential development and future of the region. Such stories, often set on haulers and pearl luggers, outline a new form of semi-industrial piracy associated with the emerging trade in copra and traditionally sought goods such as pearls, many emphasizing the shipboard rivalries that continue to emerge

surrounding the share of profits and goods. Narratives in *MAN* foreground the peril and dangers of miscegenation associated with engaging with foreign cultures due to the increasing trade to regions such as Borneo and Timor (such as "Melee in Borneo," *MAN* December 1937; or "Monsoon," January 1937). *BP Magazine* features stories largely set aboard haulers where the narrative action stems from an increasing sense of weariness and suspicion among the crew themselves as they try to divide up the spoils of their successful exploitation of the Pacific region's goods ("The Black Terror," *BP* June 1932; "The Coffin Lid," *BP* June 1934). These stories update and interrogate the colonial adventure narratives Dixon ~~outlines~~ (1995) outlines, while reinforcing Matthews's (2005) observations on the romance of modern industrialism present in interwar Australian culture ~~(2005)~~.

~~As well as~~In addition to these stories ~~which~~ that continue to present the Pacific as a site of adventure and romance, *MAN* magazine, with its editorial remit as a magazine for modern men, drew persistently on fantasy tropes connected to masculine tales of escape and renunciation of the trappings of modern society and all its pressures. Narratives of men stranded on tropical islands were a common feature in *MAN*'s short fiction, and also appeared regularly in the cartoons that appeared alongside this material. In some instances male characters isolated themselves to escape their past crimes ("The Woman on M~~m~~y Island," December 1936), or to escape the pressures of modern society ("Enough of Paradise," October 1939), while other stories focused on the potential for romance among these island communities. "Wild Breakfast" by S. Laban Dale (September 1939) tells the story of John Smith, a bored bank clerk, who finds love in a tropical island community. Julian Hillas's "Island Destiny" ~~(May 1937)~~ reinforces traditional stereotypes surrounding the promiscuity of islander women, as Pomeroy, an aspiring planter with a girl waiting back home constantly warns his friend Caillard that "keepin' a kanaka woman is the first step to goin' native" (May 1937: 59[IB4]), before taking up with her himself when his friend has to return to the mainland.

Adrian Vickers has argued that “the Australian bush was no longer considered the major area of romance” by the early twentieth century, as the bush became increasingly associated with more realist narratives in the 1920s, and thus creating space for Pacific locations to serve as “site[s] for the psychological quest, the testing ground on the limits of Western society” (1990: 73). Several stories appearing in *MAN* in its early years appear to test these “limits” by offering fantastical stories of men losing their humanity and falling prey to miscegenation in in this new space for “psychological quest.” Caliba Chatrell’s two connected stories “Finer Torture” (May 1937) and “Melee in Borneo” (December 1937) follow the moral and psychological corruption of Leman Struller, a man who becomes a pirate in the South China seas after his lover, Elsa, and his ship were both taken from him by Chinese pirates. Other stories in *MAN* continue to warn readers of the corruptive potential the tropical environment could have on previously upstanding citizens, as can be seen in “A Present for the King” by David Waterworth (June 1937) and Russell S. Clark’s “Hot Night” (June 1938), both of which feature men who are led to commit murder due to the intense heat and noise of the tropics, while Kurt Offenburg’s “Exit Frau Muller” (March 1939) tells the story of a disillusioned young wife who ventures out unaccompanied at a Sumatran port after she has been jilted by her lover, descending into drunkenness, madness, and eventual death in the tropical milieu.

Although on one level Offenburg’s story reads as a cautionary tale against extramarital affairs, it nevertheless propagates a generalized portrait of the sophistication and glamour associated with cruise liner travel in this era, even if this fantasy of upward mobility is ultimately found to be dissatisfying. While the Sumatran setting adds a degree of exotic local color to this tale, providing an air of realism by building on readers’ interests (however superficial) in the region, the preponderance of shipboard stories in these magazines also draws attention to the generalizing drive of much of this fiction, which often uses the Pacific

as a mere backdrop to foreground the fantasies and anxieties of white passengers aboard these fictional steamships. Cruising was usually represented as a prestigious, sophisticated pastime suffused with glamour. Given these connotations, it is unsurprising that so many authors imagined the steamship as a site of potential romance, as in “A Lesson in Love” (*BP* March 1932) or “When Scot Meets Scot” (*BP* December 1935).

Yet shipboard stories also serve as sites where a number of anxieties and fantasies are brought together, and geographically mobile characters are often connected in some way to concerns about aspiration and social mobility. For example in “Pearls before Gentlemen” by Dawson Sheahan (*MAN* November 1937) preoccupations around trying and failing to read one’s social and class status on board ship play out, as do considerations and concerns about “new money” versus “aristocracy.” In such narratives characters often attempt to read each other’s body language and sartorial codes to decipher clues as to class and nature of other travelling characters. Shipboard stories are often preoccupied with new modes of social and moneyed mobility, and with forms of class as well as racial passing, as can be seen in Lewis’s “Hawaiian Interlude” (*MAN* February 1937). Told from the perspective of a “quarter caste” Hawaiian, Nikatua, who dives for coins thrown by cruise liner passengers, this story focuses on Nikatua’s yearning to pass as a white man and live the lifestyle of the ship’s passengers. Lewis’s narrative draws attention to the constructed-ness of both Nikatua’s view of white society, which he idealizes from his glimpses through the ship portholes, as well the imaginary, and equally constructed, view of Honolulu that these passengers receive upon their brief visit to Hawaiian shores, where their only interactions with locals are through staged “native performances” such as coin diving. Both look out at what they believe is paradise, unaware it is only a construct of their imaginations. A plethora of stories can be found in *MAN* which seem to deal as much with the anxieties associated with aspiration and social mobility, as with their supposed glamour, suggesting that by the late 1930s genre fiction appears to hold

an almost pacifying role, reassuring its working middle class readership that such modern, aspirational lifestyles may not in fact live up to their fantasies associated with upward-mobility and gentility. In contrast to the maturity of perspective in this shipboard story, however, and the kind of detail in evidence in its portrayal of the port of Honolulu, many more shipboard stories conveyed the Pacific region as a generalized background for glamorous cruise travel in which white Australians comported themselves with ease and luxury with little regard for the actual inhabitants of the islands that were sometimes mentioned in passing.

In addition to these many cases of fiction with Pacific settings or travel through the Pacific, both *MAN* and *BP Magazine* featured many non-fiction travel articles and geography items set in the region. These were similarly invested in fantasy, yet they announced themselves as fact, and they also appeared to target readers who shared a pronounced interest in Pacific regions and peoples during the interwar era. In *MAN,* the "Australasiana" section, edited by Ion Idriess and featuring as "associate writers" "Jack Hides, New Guinea explorer, Dr George Mackaness, Australia's foremost historian, [and] Professor Elkin, No.1 authority on the Aborigine" (May 1938: 71) drew, by its very scope and title, articles on the Torres Strait, Papua New Guinea, South East Asia, China, and Japan into an orbit than included *National Geographic*-styled features on the nation. "Around the World With *Man Junior*"—a feature in the pocket-book sized supplement to *MAN* that came out mid-monthly, drew together items of interest in European travel with travel articles on Pacific islands and South East Asia as well as Japan, China, Thailand, Philippines, and trans-Pacific locales such as California or Mexico authored by writers such as Kurt Offenburg and Frank Clune. *BP Magazine* covered a region broadly serviced by its mother company, the Burns Philp Shipping Co., extending into Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, and Africa by writers well known in the Australian interwar press such as E.J. Brady, Jessie Urquhart, C. Price Conigrave, Elsie Segaert, Michael Terry, Eric Ramsden, E.O. Hoppe, Will Lawson, Harry Tighe, Isabel

Peacocke, and Ethel Anderson. In line with Klein's observations of the range of educational articles and material that focused American attention on the Pacific during the Cold War, these features increased Australian familiarity with the broader world in general and the Pacific region in particular during the interwar era, providing a regular diet of narratives of modernization featuring opportunities for industrial development and geo-political diplomacy while barely concealing abiding investments in colonialist fantasy. As such, this content expanded Australian readers' horizons in ways directly and indirectly related to Australia's increasing material and symbolic investments in the Pacific and its regions. While extending the border regions of the Australian geographical imaginary, these non-fiction items, like the fiction features that interspersed their pages, also developed the border region between the real and imagined Pacific.

Nowhere is this ambiguous borderland between realism and fantasy more clearly outlined than in *BP Magazine*'s first issue, featuring discussions and reviews of South-Seas films that spill into discussions of industrial opportunity and development in the region. In the article "When Romance and Realism Meet" about the filming of Frederick O'Brien's popular narrative *White Shadows in the South Seas*, readers are informed that the film crew on the island of Tahiti captured the romance but also discovered the harder day-to-day realities of life in the Pacific (December 1928). In the same issue, the article "The Romantic South Sea Islands" hails the "mythical isles of beautiful imaginings" that offer ease to "[t]he busy city man seeking a few weeks' respite for his tired brain from the hurry and bustle and strain of the high pressure of commercial life" (December 1928: 9). The Solomon Islands and New Hebrides are described as the embodiment of the "[r]omance and adventure" of literary works by such authors as Robert Louis Stevenson and peopled by idealized "dusky races" (December 1928: 9~~Ibid.~~). Yet despite peddling fantasy, these articles were also packed with educational information such as the exploration history and the topographical features of the region, as

well as in-depth information about port towns (such as Tulagi) and native customs. This blending of reality and fantasy, in terms of both geographical specificity and regional generalizations is in evidence throughout *BP* and in *MAN,* and contributes to a discourse of travel as both educational and leisured, as well as aspirational and entertaining.

As both a general interest magazine and the publicity arm of the Burns Philp Company, travel articles in *BP* also walked a fine line between promotion and general information. In articles such as H. Wetherell's "Hong Kong," for instance, statistics on shipping, geography, and population are embedded within gushing prose that verges on advertising copy: "There is a romance of travel, and a visit to Hong Kong is a wonderful example of it. … Naples has been compared to it but for beauty, wonder, and romance, Hong Kong is supreme" (*BP* December 1929: 67). By analogizing a Pacific metropole with a better known European one (just as Eric Ramsden does with Tahiti and Paris in "Paris of the Pacific" [*MAN* March 1938]), and by their more regular practice of embedding Pacific content within pages that covered British and European destinations, the magazines fostered "new loyalties and affiliations," as Klein has observed in the American body of texts she has examined (2003: 12). Further, by deploying the broader Pacific region within the orbit of European destinations with which readers were already familiar, newly expansive boundary-drawing addressed what Klein calls the "problem of collective subject formation" (2003: 14) posed by a need to define a nation in an ambiguously imperial, sub imperial, or neo-colonial world while also transforming readers "from narrow provincials in to cosmopolitan citizens of the world who possess a global consciousness" (2003: 14).

Even apparently realist portraits of some places, packed with detail about the environment and its people—and copiously illustrated with the sort of black and white photography Max Quanchi has explained regularly offered readers in Australia "educative" and "accessible" representations of the south west Pacific throughout the 1930s (2003: 77)—

were transformed by flowery and romantic prose that framed the inset statistics and information. C. Price Conigrave's, "In Papuan Highlands" (*BP* March 1929), for example, steeps readers in geographical and historical detail about the Torres Strait, Port Moresby, the Makeo District, the "Papuan littoral" and the Owen Stanley Range in the interior while expounding on the joys of the tropical vegetation in almost mystical terms. "Quite suddenly," Conigrave gushes, they "passed from eucalyptus country, which gave an Australian touch to the landscape, into tropical jungle, which constituted another world" (1929: 53). "Another world," suggests Robert Dixon was just the way that Australians conceived of that which was foreign to them as they struggled to differentiate self (figured here as "eucalyptus country") from other ("tropical vegetation"), and Australian from non-Australian place and identity in this newly sub imperial zone (1996: 137).

As in the magazine fiction, racial fantasies and anxieties abound in these non-fiction travel articles. In one prominent example, Samson Taylor's queer creative non-fiction piece "The End of White Australia" imagines a future in which Australia is governed by the Japanese (*MAN* February 1937). Article titles such as "The Bloody Cult of Waiet" or "Primitive Pathways of Papua" (both in *MAN* May 1938) obviously pandered to and perpetuated tacit assumptions about white supremacy and an interest in so-called "primitive races." Yet while implicitly assuming white racial superiority, the magazine travel articles also educated readers about their indigenous and regional neighbors. In many of these, indigenous people are romanticized, such as in the "glimpses of the modes manner and surroundings of the dusky inhabitants of these far Pacific Isles" of "In the Solomons" (*BP* June 1929: 25). In other articles authors attempt to quell readers' fears about supposedly primitive ways, consoling potential travelers about the modernization that has occurred on islands so recently regarded as uncivilized, and informing them of the cultural origins of native practices. Certainly colonialist attitudes suffuse such narratives, but, as evidenced in May Macfarlane's

"Skulls and Skull Houses," there is also a genuine attempt to explain island custom to Australian readers: "The hoarding of skulls by primitive races is not just a primitive pastime but is a custom supported by definite ideas that are important" (*BP* June 1929: 33). Ion Idriess's "Bloody Cult of Waiet" similarly invokes the image of a savage past in the Murray Island group of the Torres Strait only to assuage readers' fears that today they are "a peaceful, happy native people" (*MAN* May 1938: 50). Wake Lawson's "Sakus of Espiritu Santo" waxes poetic about the "luxurious green savage island" in the New Hebrides while informing readers in considerable detail about its indigenous culture (*MAN* July 1938: 82). And, contrary to Gibson's assertion that the magazine drew the Pacific Islands as one world (1993: 30), G. Bell Brand writes in detail of the of the Mortlock Islanders and a neighboring tribe, the Tasman Islanders, carefully drawing strong points of differentiation between the two people and pointing out their island groups proximal distance to the Solomon Islands and Australia (*BP* March 1929).

For armchair travelers less well positioned to make an actual tour, the magazines drew the Pacific into an increasingly wide orbit of Australian neighborliness. While Hawaii rarely features in the Australian interwar periodical press of the 1920s, by the 1930s it too is drawn within this progressively trans-Pacific ambit, as in the ~~September 1931~~ *BP* article "Hawaii, Garden of Friendship" which renders Polynesia as "exquisitely beautiful, commercially prosperous, [and] cosmopolitan" even going so far to call it "an inter-racial experimental station" (September 1931: 50). J.L. Bonnington's "I've Come from China" draws China into this circle of friendship as well: "The Sino-Japanese conflict presents to the world this ugly picture of China. But there is a China that is forgotten in a world of inflamed impulse; the China depicted in *The Good* Earth" (*MAN* May 1938: 17).

"Once you round Cape Inscription," writes E.J. Brady about the area from the north coast of Western Australia extending into the Timor Sea, the Torres Strait, the Coral Sea and Pacific Ocean:

> you come straight into the Sea of Pearls; it goes up by Broome and down by Darwin and Thursday Island to Cooktown: a long, lazy, sunlit stretch of Australian Ocean, as yet imperfectly charged and terra incognita to ninety-five out of every hundred citizens of the Commonwealth. Of coasts bordering the Sea of Pearls and continental space which lie behind them, Southern Australia has practically no knowledge. In fact we are yet living in the basement of an enormous mansion and hardly know what its seemingly endless rooms and corridors contain. (*BP* January 1929: 12)

Brady goes on to introduce the region to the majority of Australia's interwar population living in cities and in the south, a gesture regularly made in these articles to an assumed metropolitan readership. May MacFarlane writes that "it takes imagination for city dwellers" to understand the daily life of the Pacific islands, which she strives to inform them a little about (*BP* March 1929: 94), and Toewan Tinghi asks Australian readers who have perhaps never left home to "[p]icture the Sydney Cricket Ground with a background of tropical coconuts palms," in his description of a Javanese "Rampok," noting that "in place of the fence [are] thousands of natives with a sprinkling of Europeans, all armed with a spear and eagerly awaiting the charge and onslaught of a tiger" (*BP* June 1929: 11). Brady's "Sea of Pearls" also shares features with many other articles such as "Coconuts and Copra" (*BP* September 1929), "The Romance of Rubber" (*BP* September 1929), and "Phosphate Island" (*BP* September 1939) by presenting a geographical essay that surveys the history of the region and its future commercial prospects.

As Brady notes, Australian crews work alongside the majority Javanese, Japanese, and Malay crews who are undoubtedly assumed to be their inferiors.

Despite tacit assumptions of Australian superiority in the region, this linkage between commercial enterprise, geo-political strategy, and “making friends of the nations” on Australia’s doorstep and beyond is a key theme of many of the non-fiction articles. *BP Magazine* explicitly develops this theme in ~~their~~ its January 1929 editorial, connecting the benefits of educational travel to the prospect of future governance in the region:

> Youth time is the best time for all enterprise … [and] is served generously in opportunity to-day to realize its hopes and dreams. Thinkers and rulers, fully alive to the benefit of travel in the training of youth for successful citizenship, and counting not the cost in mere coin to the realm, are advocating tours abroad and making possible such trips by practical means for carrying out such schemes. The Young Australia League, for instance, is at present conducting a tour of a selected number of its youthful members who are eagerly absorbing impressions of other lands, other people, and other customs than their own. All of which help to develop their sense of values, widen their horizon, broaden their sympathies and make for an understanding that will prove more and more valuable as years go by. (5)

Perhaps no more patent statement of middlebrow orientalism could be made to express the way in which “Young Australia” could assume a leadership role in the future of the Pacific. The announcement of the new travel feature “Around the World w~~W~~ith *MAN Junior*” declares an equivalent intention in *MAN Junior* from 1938 to expose readers to the sorts of international locations and knowledge necessary for modernizing friendships in an

increasingly politically unstable world: “Hitler enters Austria; there is a war in China … What do you know of the people involved or the nations whose fate may be in the balance? … These are different little worlds, fascinating, important” (August 1938: 129). In articles such as “Java the Picturesque” readers are encouraged enter into a modern spirit of broad-mindedness: “To avoid future misunderstandings … it is no good travelling abroad unless you can leave your prejudices at home,” writes Kurt Offenburg, in a piece that extensively introduces readers to the many different faces of Java (October 1938, 7). In his three~~3~~-part series *Footloose in Fiji*, Gilbert Anstruther forges a new style, forming friendships with the native Fijians and introducing readers to them as characters in his narrative. One such, who is photographed alongside his wife and baby, is “Joni Lendua, a native, a scholar and one of the most perfect gentlemen it has ever been my privilege to meet” (November 1938, 38). In another example, Frank Clune’s exploration of the Great Wall of China, introduces readers to Jimmy Ah-Lee the Chinese fruit seller in Sydney, and a Japanese professor of archaeology, whom Clune addresses as “my friend the Professor,” serving as touchstones of and guides into Asian-Pacific culture (February 1939: 81). These articles survey the history, geography, societies, and current political situations in overseas locales, and allow readers to see Japan, China, or Fiji (for instance) through the eyes of such a host. They demonstrate instances that can be clearly characterized by Klein’s model of “middlebrow orientalism,” extending interest in this region through asymmetrical friendships and texts that tried to educate readers about their evolving relationships with their Pacific neighbors. In all of these cases, the prospect of global expansion is translated into real and symbolic terms , which conflate real and imagined notions of the Pacific and its peoples.

In advertising these boundaries between fantasy and reality, aspiration and escape, sophistication and leisure, education and consumer entertainment collide in these magazines spectacularly, accompanied by lush and colorful illustrations. A cruise liner ad for the K.P.M.

Line can be found in the first issue of *MAN*, encouraging readers to travel "To Bali-Java-Singapore on a GREAT WHITE YACHT" (December 1936: 79). By requesting readers to "GO SAILING" and referring to their steamships as "yachts," travel to Australia's pleasure periphery is explicitly tied to leisure and refreshment, rather than the more common iconography tying cruise liners to sophistication and glamour, though readers as still assured they will gain cultural capital from their ability to see "the Java Seas and the strangely different sights and customs of Bali, Sourabaya, Samarang, Batavia and Singapore" (1936: 79). Although the average reader of *MAN* was unlikely to afford an actual cruise, this interest in sailing remains present in *MAN* in our survey of all December issues published between 1936 and 1939, which also features an advert for Chapman Wonder Launches titled "Summer Adventuring Made Easy in Three Simple Lessons!" (December 1939: 107). The copy assures readers that "Unfettered fun, the freedom of the seas is yours to enjoy," reinforcing the romantic potential of renting launches to "win back favor and enthrone yourself in her heart forever (if that what you want!)." Even this more domestic form of sailing is marketed as offering "glamorous adventure together cruising under summer skies," suggesting the mobility of sea travel—however localized—was still utilized by advertisers to promote a more aspirational and sophisticated leisure experience to potential customers. In an article about cruising in PNG, a photograph of a liner in port is captioned "[a] cruise poster come to life. An Orient Liner waits in Blanche Bay while its passenger list does Rabaul" (*MAN* December 1936: 19). Perhaps no more obvious confusion between the advertisement and reality of travel in Australia's emerging pleasure periphery could be located.

Yet throughout the heavily promotional *BP Magazine* advertisement and copy regularly collide, as in the case of photographs provided by "the New Zealand Government Publicity Department" presented as informative photo features (*BP* March 1929: 23; June 1929: 35). Similarly, advertisements for Burns Philp lines appear as courtesy information

provided in the form of steamer routes and fares for all passages, embedding Burns Philp routes to the Solomons, New Hebrides, Papua, and New Guinea with their "share code" passages via the Royal Packet Line to Java and Singapore with the routes of NYK and AO lines to Manila, Hong Kong, Japanese ports, Matson routes to San Francisco through Hawaii and Suva, and Union Steamship, NZ Shipping Co., P&O and Orient Lines (*BP* March 1929: 86). Opulent advertisements sell Asia-Pacific vacations through Burns Philp's own lines as opportunities to acquire token experiences of other cultures, such as Java: "interesting people . ..old buddhistic and hindooistic temples, native bazaars" (*BP* June 1929: 37); or conversely, as in a "Cruise to New Guinea and Papua" to indulge in leisure experiences: "Five weeks' tour of the South Sea Islands . ..picturesque vistas, novel and amusing incidents and the delights of a sea voyage" (*BP* March 1939: 5).

As ~~Robert~~ Dixon's (2002: 207) analysis of the reception of Frank Hurley's commercial films suggests, many readers probably understood that the facile escapist and romantic plots of commercial magazine fiction set in the Pacific—and its suggestions of aspiration or glamour—amounted to nothing more than light, commercial entertainment ~~(2002: 207)~~. But advertisements made the border between fantasy and actuality markedly blurry in consumer-oriented middlebrow magazines in Australia that featured travel in and content about the Pacific. Further, as we have argued, the presence of genre fiction set in the Pacific in culture and leisure magazines drew on and addressed middlebrow culture while Australia expanded its military, economic, and economic power in the Pacific region. Even while drawing on age-old colonialist tropes, these stories increased readers' familiarity with the region if only by setting an expectation that Australian fiction could and did often build upon Pacific settings; as such, we argue, they helped, to "legitimate a given distribution of power" across the region, in performing the function and operations of what Klein (2003: 12) identifies as middlebrow orientalism ~~(Klein 12)~~.

Updating heavily fictionalized indigenous legends or colonial adventure narratives with stories of industrial piracy (set in the pearling fields, for instance) or more nuanced narratives than previous miscegenation fantasies also set the expectation that Australians held stakes in both the history and future development of the region. In other, shipboard stories, the Pacific served as an expanded pleasure periphery, at once familiar and exotic. Authenticating detail may have increased readers' familiarity with ports of call and given them a sense of expanded geographical and cultural horizons; but more typically and obviously these shipboard stories foregrounded changes in Australian society, with the Pacific serving as a background in which fantasies of class aspirations or renunciation could be enacted. In them, ideas about present and future industrial capacities of the region (for white Australians) collided with abiding racially charged fantasies. Yet even if readers accepted these stories for what they were—light commercial entertainment steeped in stock tropes and stereotypes—there were some truths in them: in the smattering of realistic detail that expanded readers' curiosity and sense of familiarity with Pacific peoples and settings, and in the racialist investments in white superiority which the narratives barely bothered to conceal. The stories served as entertainment and leisure reading that delivered a sense of expanded horizons and light education.

Conversely, we have argued, the non-fiction items of geographical and travel interest in these magazines served as cultural interest items to educate readers about the Pacific region and its peoples, while also being deeply invested in entertainment tropes, in fantasy, and in notions of white aspirational leisure. Ultimately these texts were not interested in the Pacific region in and of itself, but in in Australians' relationships to the region, and in both geo-political and commercial possibilities, the latter of which are translated into tourism opportunities in the magazine's advertisements, developing, as Klein has explained in her study of American middlebrow orientalism after the second world war, a "logic of affiliation"

alongside a rhetoric of difference (2003: 17). Through the affective registers of curiosity, sympathy and friendship, these magazines animated a vision of interconnectedness, articulating the domestic Australian experience of colonial modernity and its vision of a Pacific future that might work through industrial, commercial, touristic, and geo-political alliances at both the material and symbolic level, toward the goal, as Klein has put it in another context, of "transforming strangers into friends" (2003: 9).

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Notes

[1] Although Burns Philp pioneered Australian cruising in the western Pacific as early as 1884, the south-west Pacific fully "came into the possession of Australian tourists in the 20th century" (White 2005: 94). By the interwar period international shipping companies such as Matson and P&O (who used Burns Philp as their Australian travel agent) also opened up travel through the region.

[2] In the 1920s "middlebrow" was largely considered a derogatory term, generally invoking an uncomfortable middle ground between lowbrow commercial, popular culture and more rarefied literary, artistic or scholarly "high culture." Drawing on the work of Faye Hammill and Michelle Smith, we consider the middlebrow as "a mode of circulation, reception, and consumption of cultural products, and also as a space where high and popular culture meet, and where art encounters consumerism" (2015: 10). By providing readers with the cultural capital that would "signify and project their class standing" (Ohmann 1996: 244), Hammill and Smith

argue that mainstream magazines "frame and present the artefacts they contain in such a way as to construct their readers as intelligent interpreters and consumers of modern culture, and simultaneously to provide them with a covert education in these practices" (2015: 11).

[3] Papua New Guinea, came under colonial possession in the late nineteenth century, with Germany and Britain dividing up the eastern regions, while the Dutch laid claim to the southwest coast (Douglas 1996: 28). British New Guinea was later renamed Papua in 1905 and placed under official Australian control, and by 1921 German New Guinea had also been made Australia's responsibility under a League of Nations mandate (Douglas 1996: 28~~*Ibid.*~~).

[4] It is important to remember that, even with the economic fallout from the Great Depression, overseas travel continued to flourish across the 1930s with just under 240,000 temporary departures from Australia reported between 1926 and 1938 (White 1987: 438). As Angela Woollacott and Ros Pesman have both illustrated, women made up a large proportion of these travellers in the early twentieth century, and although these studies both largely focus on travel back to the imperial "Home," Ngaire Douglas's work has drawn attention to the attempts by the Burns Philp Shipping Company to expand into the leisure travel market by targeting single female schoolteachers for South Pacific and Melanesian ~~holidays~~ vacations (1996: 72).

[5] David Carter has elsewhere discussed *MAN* in relation to Australian middlebrow culture. Carter draws attention to *MAN*'s claims "not only to entertain, but also to address 'the reader who likes to read serious ideas and reflect upon them'" (December 1946). Carter outlines how *MAN* constructs an implied audience who were "modern, urban, sophisticated and national" (2013a: 143). An early survey of Australian magazines by Frank Greenop emphasises the "quality" of *The BP Magazine*, drawing attention to its status as "a magazine of excellent standard and popularity" (1947: 248). *BP Magazine*'s status as a quality, middlebrow publication with high production values has been discussed by Kuttainen in earlier publications (2013,~~;~~ 2014).