

IN HONOUR OF A FELLOW-EXPLORER: FLINDERS' AND BOUGAINVILLE'S MONUMENTS TO LAPÉROUSE IN MAURITIUS AND AT BOTANY BAY

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With the exception of James Cook, Jean-François de Galaup de Lapérouse (1741–1788) is arguably the best-known explorer and the most tragic figure in eighteenth-century Pacific navigation. Lapérouse is credited with having 'led the most impressive, single voyage of exploration in the eighteenth century and probably of all times.'¹ The disappearance of his two ships *La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe*, after their departure from Port Jackson on 10 March 1788, far from negating the remarkable achievements of the expedition, in fact endowed it with a mythical quality. Our purpose here is to explain the circumstances that led to the erection of monuments to Lapérouse in Australia and Mauritius, or as it was known at the time of the navigator's first visit, Isle de France. The present inhabitants of both islands are indebted to two explorers who greatly admired and pitied Lapérouse: Matthew Flinders (1774–1814), held captive on Isle de France from December 1803 until June 1810, and Hyacinthe de Bougainville, who stopped over at Port Jackson in 1825.

In what follows, the motivation for the two men's personal tributes to Lapérouse, doubling up as national tributes, will be explained. That there is a *camaraderie* at sea is beyond dispute; by

1789, Lapérouse had already become a legendary figure among navigators of all nations, including Englishmen and Irishmen, notably Watkin Tench, whose account of Lapérouse's last stopover was almost immediately translated into French as *Voyage à la Baie Botanique, avec une description du Pays de Galles [...] et quelques dessins relatifs, à M. de Lapeyrouse pendant son séjour à la Baie Botanique [...]*,² often quoted by French scholars dealing with the mystery surrounding the fate of the expedition. In much the same way as Lapérouse spoke highly of James Cook, so too Matthew Flinders and Peter Dillon expressed their high esteem, and sympathy, for the French explorer. Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811), Hyacinthe's father, was one of the French dignitaries who readily interceded on behalf of Flinders in 1808, canvassing publicly for his liberation. Such mutual support and concern for each other's welfare is not surprising, since explorers at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth, were, generally speaking, humanists who saw progress through discovery as superseding nationalism; they were citizens of the world and heirs to the Enlightenment.

In several corners of the world, monuments, simple and ornate,

commemorate visits by Lapérouse: at Lituya Bay, explored by the navigator in July 1786; at Lapérouse Bay, a few miles from 'Big Beach', in Hawaii, reached in May 1786; at Petropavlosk, Kamtchatka, where Lapérouse stopped from September to December 1787. At Vanikoro, Dumont d'Urville had a cenotaph raised, bearing the simple inscription: 'A la mémoire de Lapérouse et de ses compagnons. *L'Astrolabe*. 14 mars 1826.'³ In Noumea, San Francisco, Sydney and Albi, Lapérouse's birthplace, stand colleges (*lycées*) bearing his name. In Albi, there are a Lapérouse Museum and a monument in the Lapérouse Square.⁴ When Peter Dillon found conclusive evidence at Vanikoro, he dispatched a letter to the Governor of Bengal on 19 September 1826, in which he described Lapérouse as 'the unfortunate French navigator',⁵ a term repeatedly used by Matthew Flinders and Hyacinthe de Bougainville. The monuments erected in various corners of the world testify to the fact that, in his humdrum existence, Man needs models; Thomas Carlyle declared in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*: 'No great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but a biography of great men.'⁶ If nations erect monuments to great men, is it not because, as Lord Bolinbroke has stated, 'history is philosophy teaching by example'?⁷ In a speech delivered upon his arrival at Bristol, Edmund Burke, himself a great man, remarked on 13 October 1774: 'Great men are the guide-posts and landmarks in the state.'⁸ On the last but one page of his narrative, Lapérouse wrote as a heading to a planned paragraph in 1788: 'Des Européens sont tous compatriotes à cette distance de leur pays' [Europeans are all compatriots this far from their countries].⁹

FLINDERS AND LAPÉROUSE: THREE MONUMENTS IN MAURITIUS (1805, 1897, 1989)

Isle de France, a French colony from 1715 to 1810, had had its fair share of illustrious visitors before Flinders's enforced stay: Bougainville the elder, in November-December 1768, and Marion Dufresne, among others. Between 1772 and 1776, Jean-François de Galaup de Lapérouse was a frequent visitor to, and even a resident on, the island. After distinguishing himself in North America in the 1760s and in 1782, he followed Charles-Henri-Louis d'Arsac de Ternay, appointed Governor of Isle de France and Isle Bourbon. Lapérouse was an 'enseigne' (midshipman) on the *Belle Poule*, a 22-gun frigate that sailed from Brest and reached Isle de France on 22 August 1772, *via* the Cape of Good Hope.¹⁰ At Isle de France in 1773, Lapérouse was put in command of the *Seine*, a *flûte* of 700 tonnes and 30 guns, in which he went on a successful mission to Pondicherry, Chandernagore and Balasore from July to September. Another mission in 1774 was to take him back to India where, the following year, he distinguished himself in the *Seine*, by overcoming a Mahratta fleet of three ships and twenty smaller vessels. As a result of these achievements, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. When peace was restored, Lapérouse returned to Port Louis in May 1775 for a well-deserved rest and a closer association with the inhabitants of Isle de France.

The year 1775 saw the beginning of a love-affair that led directly to the erection of a monument to Lapérouse in the area of Mesnil, just a few miles North of the present town of Curepipe. Soon after his arrival in 1772, Lapérouse had become

acquainted with Abraham Broudou, the manager of the naval store-yards and of the French hospital in Port Louis. In 1775, Mr Broudou invited Lapérouse to visit the family home at Eau Coulée, not far from Curepipe, in Plaines Wilhems, to spare him from the heat of the capital. The navigator at once fell in love with the younger Mlle. Broudou, Louise-Eléonore, born in Nantes in 1775.¹¹ Intent on marrying his beloved, Lapérouse purchased a property of 156 and a quarter *arpents*, jointly with Charles Mengaud, a naval officer from The Hague, at Mesnil, not far from the residence of the Broudous. Here, Lapérouse built a house for himself and Eléonore.¹² This land constituted one half of an original concession – there were fourteen in all in the region of what became Curepipe – allocated to Camille Nicolas Morphy in 1756; Lapérouse acquired it from François Pierre Boybellaud on 29 April 1775, for 6600 *livres*.¹³

As is often the case, the course of true love did not run smooth; when Jean-François wrote to his father, Victor-Joseph, to ask for permission to marry Eléonore Broudou, this was refused, for the family had plans to marry Jean-François off to a French heiress of aristocratic stock. Governor Ternay, as the family's proxy, conveyed the news and his own disapproval to Lapérouse in no uncertain terms.¹⁴ Jean-François had no choice but to accept the decision of his father and his superior, and he resolved to sell his property at Mesnil to Antoine Rivalz de St Antoine on 23 May 1776.¹⁵ On 16 December 1776, Ternay, who had been replaced by Brillane as Governor, set sail for France in the *Belle Poule*, accompanied by Lapérouse. The love-story, however, was to have a happy ending after all; Eléonore travelled to

France with her mother who placed her in a Paris convent; Jean-François, ten years her senior, found her and married her on 13 June 1783.¹⁶ The couple lived happily for two years only, until Lapérouse's departure on 15 March 1785. Mme Lapérouse was never to see her husband again; she lived with her relations in Nantes and died in 1807, long before Dillon's discoveries.¹⁷ It is also worth noting that Lapérouse was due to call at Isle de France on the return journey in 1788–9, but never made it, having perished at Vanikoro.¹⁸ When he did not return in December 1788 and January 1789, alarm bells began to ring in the island.

The mystery surrounding Lapérouse's fate, the 1791 expedition of Bruni D'Entrecasteaux, who was Governor of Isle de France and Bourbon in 1789, and the general concern in France were a favourite topic of conversation, when Matthew Flinders arrived in the leaky schooner, *Cumberland*, first at Baie du Cap on the South coast of the island on 15 December 1803, and the next day at Port Louis. The arrival and imprisonment of Flinders, from 1803 until 1810, have been commemorated in grand style in Mauritius in 2003, with several exhibitions and the unveiling of a new monument by Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, on 6 November 2003, at Baie du Cap. Within the framework of the cultural events organised to mark the bicentenary of the presence of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders, 'Encounter Mauritius 2003', a major international conference, 'Baudin-Flinders: Travels, Encounters and Discoveries', was organised at the University of Mauritius from 20–23 October 2003, during which several speakers from Australia, Jean Fornasiero, Gillian Doolan, John West-Sooby, and the

present author, spoke of Matthew Flinders. It is planned to publish the conference proceedings in August 2004. Moreover, two new books were launched on Flinders in Mauritius: Marina Carter's *Companions of Misfortune: Flinders and Friends at Ile de France, 1803-1810*, and the present author's *'My Dear Friend': The Flinders-Pitot Correspondence, 1806-1814*.¹⁹

Matthew Flinders had a hand in one of the monuments to Jean-François de Galaup de Lapérouse at Mesnil, Mauritius. After two years of incarceration at the 'Café Marengo' and the 'Maison Despeaux' or 'Garden Prison', both in Port Louis (December 1803 - August 1805),²⁰ unable to convince Captain-General Decaen of his innocence, Flinders sought the help of Jacques Bergeret and of Thomi Pitot with his request to be transferred to the property of Madame d'Arifat, 'Le Refuge', in Plaines Wilhems, near the present La Marie. To this end, the British explorer signed a parole that he would not venture more than two leagues from the property, although this did not prevent him from going on many excursions in Plaines Wilhems. During one of these, Flinders visited Mesnil, the site of Lapérouse's former residence, alas no longer standing; in his *Voyage to Terra Australis*, Flinders recorded his emotions on this occasion:

I surveyed the scene with mingled sensations of pleasure and melancholy: the ruins of the house, the garden he had laid out, the still blooming hedgerows of China Roses, emblems of his reputation, everything was an object of interest and curiosity [...] It was here that the man lamented by the good and well-informed of all nations, whom science illumined, and humanity, joined to an honest ambition, conducted to the haunts of remote savages, in this spot he once

dwelt, perhaps little known to the world, but happy; when he became celebrated he had ceased to exist. Monsieur Airolles promised me to place three square blocks of stone, one upon the other, in the spot where the house of this lamented navigator had stood; and upon the uppermost stone facing the road to engrave 'Lapérouse'.²¹

We see here the reasons for Flinders' respect for Lapérouse: his passion for discovery, his 'honest ambition', his quest for glory, his professionalism, his humanism and his promise cut short by death. Whether Mr Airolles ever placed the stones, as requested, is not known; most local historians think he did. However, in 1897, the 'Comité des Souvenirs historiques' raised a monument at Mesnil that was recently renovated by the 'Société de l'histoire de l'Ile Maurice' and unveiled in the framework of 'Encounter Mauritius', on 22 October 2003. During the official ceremony, the President of the 'Société', Mr Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière, declared: 'So to Flinders the honour of initiating the first memorial [to Lapérouse] in Mauritius [...] The monument we see here is supposed to stand at the place of Lapérouse's home. However, some sixty years ago, this monument was on the other side of Mesnil River, next to the main road, and at the request of the landowner was moved here.'²² The plaque reads:

'LAPÉROUSE

ILLUSTRE NAVIGATEUR A
ACHETÉ CE TERRAIN EN AVRIL 1775
ET Y A HABITÉ.
LE CAPITAINE FLINDERS DIT DE
LUI:

'In this spot he once dwelt, perhaps
little known to the world, but happy.'

Visitors to Mauritius should take the road from Phoenix towards Curepipe, and at Mesnil, they will spot the monument on the left, across a small bridge. During the same ceremony, the British High Commissioner, Mr David Snoxell, mused:

What a pity Flinders and Lapérouse never met. Flinders was only 14 at the time of the death of Lapérouse. But clearly Flinders was an admirer of Lapérouse. Flinders knew of his reputation when he arrived in Mauritius. During his captivity, it was Flinders who proposed the erection of a monument on this spot for Lapérouse, and this at a time when Britain and France were locked in a war and Flinders was an unwilling guest of Captain-General Decaen! The bitter conflict was not allowed to cloud the respect of one explorer for another's achievements.²³

It is also worth noting that in 1890, the 'Board des Commissaires de Curepipe' named the road that went down from the town to Mesnil 'Rue Lapérouse'; the connection with Flinders was, once more, stressed as one of the chief factors in this decision.²⁴ The 'Rue Lapérouse' still stands today, as does a second monument to the navigator, unveiled at 'Eau Coulée', on 14 March 1989, by Mr Alain Decaux, Ministre de la Francophonie; its inscription reads:

'A la mémoire
de
Jean-François Galaup
Comte de Lapérouse,
Navigateur français
Explorateur de l'Océan Indien et de

l'Océan Pacifique (1741-1788).
Lapérouse vécut à l'Isle de France de
1772 à 1776
et s'installa au Mesnil
pour se rapprocher de celle qu'il allait
épouser en 1783
Eléonore Broudou.'

Although there is no direct link between Flinders and the second monument, it is clear that the decision to erect it was prompted by the existence of the first (Mesnil) monument. Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière observed at the recent unveiling of the Mesnil monument: 'So, perhaps this second monument [at 'Eau Coulée'] is closer to the spot where Lapérouse lived. Only more research will tell.'²⁵

Thus can Mauritius boast of two monuments to Lapérouse; modern historians give much of the credit for this to Flinders. The seven long sombre and frustrating years spent by Flinders in captivity on Isle de France (1803-1810) left an indelible mark in the annals of Isle de France; Flinders devoted a large number of pages to the island in his narrative,²⁶ and two monuments have been raised to the English explorer, one at La Marie in 1942, the other at Baie du Cap in 2003. Last but not least, in 1805, Flinders succeeded in raising awareness that there should be a monument to Lapérouse, and his project eventually came to fruition in 1897. The Englishman's spontaneous decision to remember Lapérouse confirms Paul Brunton's conclusions regarding Flinders' sensitivity: 'Matthew Flinders was born in 1774 and came to manhood during the age of sensibility, which was fast becoming cult-like in its zeal [...] He respected the sensitive side of his nature as he did the rational side.'²⁷ The same romantic leader had erected a tablet in 1802 at the head of Memory

Cove, near Port Lincoln (South Australia), to mark the loss of eight of his men; the tablet originally bore the words: 'Nautici Cavete'.²⁸ Just as this tablet went to pieces, the stone bearing the words 'Lapérouse', probably placed by Mr Airoles at Mesnil, has not been found, but these noble deeds of Matthew Flinders have become part of the local folklore in Mauritius and Australia, revealing a caring and altruistic nature.

BOUGAINVILLE'S MONUMENT TO LAPÉROUSE AT BOTANY BAY (1825)

During his expedition round the world (March 1822 – June 1826) and his stopover at Port Jackson (29 June – 21 September 1825), Hyacinthe de Bougainville took a decision to leave behind a lasting sign of the French presence in NSW; he designed and financed a monument to Lapérouse, which has become a popular place of pilgrimage for French visitors to Australia and a major public attraction for present-day Australians. Here, Bougainville's manuscript notebooks and the *Journal de la navigation autour du Globe*²⁹ provide invaluable information on the motivation behind the Baron's bold and exciting initiative and on more mundane details, such as the costs of the monument and the steps taken by the French commander to acquire the site and obtain official permission from Governor Brisbane. In his manuscript notebooks, Bougainville recorded in detail his first visit, on 26 August 1825, to French Camp with the artist La Touane, Boissieu and Captain Piper: 'Went on a pilgrimage to the spot visited by the crew of Mr de Lapérouse in 1788 at Botany Bay.'

It was an emotional occasion; the Baron had already resolved to erect a monument: 'As soon as I had heard that there were relics of Lapérouse's stopover

at Botany Bay, I had hit upon the idea of erecting a monument to our illustrious and unfortunate compatriot on the very spot from which his last message had been dispatched.' The plan was revealed to Captain Piper on the outward journey, on horseback, to Botany Bay, and as soon as the party arrived at the site, the Baron and his escort set about 'determining the exact location of the proposed monument.' La Touane was required to draw a plan of the location that was submitted to Governor Brisbane. The Baron stated quite clearly, both in his notebooks and in the official narrative of his voyage, that the lack of a monument had been a sad oversight by the French nation: 'In my view, such a tribute to the memory of our dear departed comrades is long overdue', he declared in the notebooks. And he added in the *Journal*: 'However, by some strange paradox, when the whole world shared our loss and when navigators from all countries went in search of any wreck left behind on little-known coasts [...] no one had thought of erecting a monument in his honour'. And 'the spirit of Lapérouse who himself had generously honoured the memory of his predecessors, had not in turn been commemorated through a cenotaph'.³⁰

Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de Lapérouse reached Botany Bay on 26 January 1788 and sailed again on 10 March, leaving behind the remains of Father Le Receveur who had died on 17 February 1788. The expedition, which was expected to return in triumph to France, *via* the Isle de France, was never heard of again. A year before Bougainville landed at Port Jackson, Louis-Isidore Duperrey had arrived in the *Coquille* on its voyage around the world (1822–1825). The captain and his officers made a point of going on a pilgrimage to the grave of Father Le Receveur and to French Camp

in 1824. It was during this visit that one of the young French officers carved an epitaph on a tree trunk which can still be read today in the Lapérouse Museum, and which is referred to by Hyacinthe de Bougainville both in his notebooks and in the *Journal*. The next French official party to visit French Camp, after Duperrey's, was indeed the Baron de Bougainville and his men on 26 August 1825. One can only wonder how much time would have elapsed before a monument would have been erected to the memory of Lapérouse, had it not been for the Baron's generosity and vision.

After the initial visit, Bougainville consulted his second-in-command, Ducamper, about the inscription for the monument on 27 August 1825. In the event of the French government turning down his written request, quoted below, the Baron was prepared to invest his own funds in the project, as indicated in his notebooks on 8 September 1825: 'I hope that the government will endorse fully the measures that I have taken in this respect. I would not complain if I had to pay for the monument myself. It is by honouring the memory of great men that one inspires greatness in others.' This statement sheds considerable light on the Baron's motives; he felt that any nation had a duty to honour its 'great men', a philosophy very much in keeping with the authorities' decision to erect a Panthéon in Paris to honour the great men of the Revolution. In his notebooks, moreover, Bougainville describes an emotional occasion at Tavern Hill, on 6 September 1825, at a ball given in honour of the French visitors: 'A transparent screen had been raised and was very flattering to me [...] On another display nearby were written the names of Cook, Lapérouse, Bougainville, d'Entrecasteaux, and then a B-e; I wished that the last name had been omitted.' To

be deemed worthy of such 'an illustrious company' embarrassed the Baron greatly; all the same, his view of history was that discovery and progress were the work of great men, and he clearly put Lapérouse and his father in this category.

A few days before the expedition sailed from Port Jackson, Hyacinthe de Bougainville wrote in an official dispatch to the Minister for the Navy on 13 September 1825:

Your Excellency will also find enclosed the description of the first stages of the erection of a monument in memory of M. De Lapérouse. Following my visit to the spot where this illustrious navigator had set up camp during his stopover at Botany Bay, the memories which this occasion evoked led to a resolution to erect a monument on the very shore from which our unfortunate compatriots had sent their last message back home. I discussed my plans with Governor Brisbane who welcomed them all the more since on the opposite side of the bay, he himself had recently arranged for a plaque to commemorate the arrival of the immortal Cook. H. E. had no hesitation in granting me the required site and has kindly agreed to entrust the creation of the mausoleum to the government architect. Plans have been drawn up and an estimate of the costs has been arrived at for a monument which will be completed in four years. On my return to France, I shall have the great honour of presenting to you all the documents pertaining to the negotiations in the hope that Your Excellency will approve of my actions on France's behalf, aimed at commemorating a man who has been mourned by the whole nation.³¹

Largely as a personal favour to Hyacinthe de Bougainville, the generous

Thomas Brisbane, who had a great deal of affection for France and was a corresponding member of the French Academy of Science, granted an area of 176 square yards for the monument and a further 70 square yards for Father Le Receveur's grave which was located 136 yards from the said monument. The official ceremony, during which the first stone was laid by the Baron on 6 September 1825 was recorded both in the notebooks and in the *Journal*; Chédeville took down minutes, held nowadays in the private Bougainville Archives, Paris:

Minutes of the ceremony of the erection of a monument in honour to M. Lapérouse (155AP12, dossier 2, pièce 1)

Today 6 September 1825 at one o'clock in the afternoon in Botany Bay

The Baron de Bougainville, Captain, in command of the naval division, accompanied by Mr Ducamper, Captain, in command of the corvette *Espérance*, Longueville, captain, Pénaud, a midshipman and the clerk Chédeville,

And in the presence of Major John Ovens, Engineer and of John Piper, Naval Officer, who represented the Governor, Sir Thomas Brisbane, and of Mr James Macarthur,

Has laid the first stone of a monument to commemorate the stopover in this country by the expedition under the command of M. de Lapérouse.

The English government has granted an area consisting of 176 square yards (126.867 square metres) which were part of the Garden where this navigator has left plants and seeds with which he wanted to enrich this region.

The same government has also made a concession of 70 square yards (64.029 square metres) where had been buried the body of Father Le Receveur, the chaplain and naturalist in the *Astrolabe*, whose grave was situated near a tree which bore the following inscription:

Near this tree was buried Father
Receveur.

Visited in March 1824.

This grave and this tree are at a distance of 136 yards (124 metres) from the monument.

Botany Bay (New Holland),

On this day, month and year,

Signed by:

Chédeville, Pénaud, Bougainville,
Ducamper, Ovens, Piper, Macarthur

Two days after the ceremony, on 7 September 1825, Hyacinthe de Bougainville received an estimate of costs for the monument from the government architect, George Cookney, who had been instructed by Governor Brisbane to oversee the works:

... I hereby certify the estimated expense for the erection of the said monument agreeably to the drawings bearing my signature, to amount to the sum of £178 or 712 Spanish dollars.

Witness my hand this 7th day of September 1825.

George Cookney, Government Architect,
Sydney, New South Wales

Witnessed by John Ovens³²

At the same time, Cookney forwarded a supplementary estimate for the costs of the grave of Father Le Receveur that he put at four pounds or

sixteen Spanish dollars. Contracts were signed for the works; Bougainville opted for a column in the Tuscan style, handing over to Cookney the inscription that he had drafted himself. Captain John Piper, volunteered to act as proxy and represent French interests. The Baron wrote to him in English on 9 September 1825, leaving precise instructions.³³ He also entrusted Piper with enough money to cover the costs of Lapérouse's monument and Father le Receveur's tombstone (a total of 736 and a half *piastres*), plus four *piastres*, the value of two coins to be embedded in the foundations.³⁴ Before leaving NSW, Bougainville took all the necessary steps to ensure the satisfactory completion of the monument. Not only did he seek the personal guarantee of Governor Brisbane that work would proceed as planned and the personal assurance of Captain Piper, but he also requested a formal undertaking, that the monument would be finished in the allotted time, from George Cookney, who duly obliged on 17 September 1825.³⁵

Bougainville sailed from Port Jackson on 21 September 1825, confident that the project was in safe hands. The last words written by the Baron in his private diaries confirm the fact that the monument to Lapérouse was still uppermost in his mind after his return to France in 1826: 'Lapérouse: Mr Gaimard in the *Astrolabe*, and Boissieu in the *Favorite* have seen the monument, the former when it was still under construction, the latter after its completion. According to a letter I received from Mr Macarthur, it was apparently completed in June 1828.' Moreover, not only did Bougainville keep in touch with John Piper to check on the progress of the works, but he appears to have interviewed French visitors to Botany Bay after 1826 to ascertain their impressions of the monument.

Just like Matthew Flinders, Hyacinthe de Bougainville had been deeply moved by the tragedy that had befallen a precursor and fellow-explorer. Whereas Flinders' humble three stones represented a personal tribute, Bougainville saw himself as the representative of the French nation, raising a memorial to a national hero. Whatever their respective motives, the two men's actions demonstrate immense pride in their chosen profession and confirm the proverbial mutual respect and admiration that prevail among navigators. One cannot nowadays visit the Lapérouse monument at Botany Bay without being aware of the Baron de Bougainville's role, nor should the many visitors to the monuments in Mauritius ignore the lead given by Matthew Flinders. Both 'disciples' of Lapérouse used the epithet 'unfortunate' to describe their fellow-explorer; his personal tragedy had much in common with Greek tragedy in the Aristotleian sense. In both cases, pity was occasioned by the representation of undeserved misfortune, and 'terror' was inspired by a virtual reality where what happened to the protagonist could also befall the spectators. Clearly, explorers were acutely aware of the unpredictable dangers of crossing vast oceans; Dumont d'Urville, who survived many near disasters, could sympathise wholeheartedly with the fate of Lapérouse and his crew, as he erected a monument at Vanikoro. Flinders's decision to head for home in 1803, from Port Jackson, in the small and inappropriate schooner *Cumberland*, has been described by Anthony Brown in a recent article, as 'a sign of Hubris', while his clash with the megalomaniac, Decaen, 'has the stature of classic Greek drama'.³⁶ The English explorer and his crew might well have perished as a result of this bold and rash

decision; in any event, he suffered a great deal during his captivity for nigh on seven years on Isle de France. In 'The Missing Line', the poet C.W.A. Hayward (pseudonym T. the R.), ascribes the following thought to Flinders at Port Lincoln: Such reefs and breakers, Nautici Caveti!³⁷

Perhaps, the real clue to the sympathy of Flinders and Bougainville for Lapérouse lies in a phrase used by the former in his *Journal on the Investigator*; recounting the 'Encounter' of 8 April 1802, Flinders explained Baudin's interest in the work of the English expedition and went on to say: 'Having learnt from the boats crew that our business was discovery; and finding that we had examined the south coast of New Holland thus far, he appeared to be somewhat mortified. I gave him as much information respecting Kangaroo Island, the Inlets No. 12 and 14 and Bay No. 10, as was necessary to his obtaining wood and water.'³⁸ The subsequent amicable exchange of information at Port Jackson, another example of instinctive cooperation between scientists and explorers, even at times of war between France and England, explains navigators' proneness to applaud their colleagues' achievements and rue their sad fates. One of the first enquiries made by Flinders, after landing at Port Louis on 16 December 1803, concerned the health of Nicolas Baudin, whose death caused him much distress. Lapérouse, Flinders and Bougainville were three of a kind: professional sea-faring men, erudites, rational and sensitive men, humanists, separated from their dearest, committed to scientific progress through discovery that transcended nationalism, and fully aware of the plight of their fellow-men. It is not surprising, therefore, that with

such common values, Flinders and Bougainville empathized so much with Lapérouse. Finally, Bougainville offers another valid explanation of the fascination that the disappearance of Lapérouse held for the general public: 'What a chain of tragic events, the last of which is yet to be revealed, and will probably remain shrouded in mystery for ever! It is no doubt this element of mystery that explains the keen and sustained interest shown by the French public in Lapérouse's disappearance in an era where natural, and other, catastrophes were so common.'³⁹ Two hundred years after Flinders' arrival in Mauritius, and two hundred and fifteen after Lapérouse's disappearance, another expedition, launched in October 2003, to 'return to France the remains of the navigator [...] so that he can at last complete his journey', according to Alain Conan, President of the Solomon Association (Noumea), has brought to the surface the first ever skeleton, presumably of one of Lapérouse's crew, on 20 November 2003. This news from Agence France Press, relayed to the entire world, confirms the lasting interest in the legendary figure and the enduring value of commemorative monuments to Lapérouse in all corners of the world. As William Hazlitt wrote: 'They only deserve a monument who do not need one; that is, who have raised themselves a monument in the minds and memories of men.'⁴⁰

ENDNOTES

- 1 'A Short Bibliography of Jean-François de Galaup de Lapérouse, 1741-1788', <http://pages.quicksilver.net.nzs/jcr/~lap2> Variations in the spelling of the name have been altered to Lapérouse throughout this essay.
- 2 Paris, Letellier, 1789.
- 3 Y. Cazaux, *Dans le sillage de Bougainville et de Lapérouse*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1995, p. 288.
- 4 See <http://albi.cityvox.com/profil/0,3997,ALBFRAPLICIT67193,00.html>
- 5 Y. Cazaux, p. 291 - my translation.
- 6 *The Oxford Book of Quotations*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1977, p. 126, no. 24.
- 7 Henry St John, Lord Bolinbroke, *On The Study and Use of History*, Letter 2, in *The Oxford Book of Quotations*, p. 78, no. 13.
- 8 *The Oxford Book of Quotations*, p. 100, no. 10.
- 9 Quoted by Y. Cazaux, p. 268.
- 10 A. Toussaint, *Dictionary of Mauritian Biography*, Port Louis, Standard Printing Establishment, 1941-1965, p. 21.
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