

The Granite and the Rainbow: Towards a New Biography of Louis Becke

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Writing a life is one of our biggest challenges. As life stories are told and retold, D. Jean Clandinin suggests, a life can become an edited and shaped narrative that may differ, for a number of reasons, from historical fact. Such imaginative revision by biography subjects raises issues for the biographer, who seeks to find a balance between fact and imagination, or the granite and the rainbow as Virginia Woolf terms them. On the one hand, a conscientious biographer wants to be factually accurate about their subject; on the other hand, every person has their imaginative perception of their life, which while part of the life story is not necessarily factual. This paper will seek to explore some aspects of the biographer's search for balance between fact and imagination, using this writer's current research into the life of the Australian writer Louis Becke as an example. Becke often edited and shaped events in his life, such as his relationship with the notorious 'Bully' Hayes, as source material for his published stories. Consequently, the search for the 'real' Louis Becke has become a pursuit of an elusive biographic figure.

Biographer Nigel Hamilton claims that 'to approach, interpret, and record a human life is to accept, today, one of the greatest challenges to our intellect, our knowledge, and our understanding' (Renders and Haan ix). While on the one hand a biographer is on a fact-finding expedition, seeking verifiable source material to record a life, they are also aware that another part of the challenge involves approach and interpretation. Not only do people progressively edit and rewrite their own lives, sometimes quite consciously, to form their personal interpretation (or concept) of their life, but the biographer will need to decide on their own approach to an interpretation of that life. Here lies the core of Hamilton's challenge to the biographer, astutely recognised by Virginia Woolf who, in her essay 'The New Biography,' argues that the successful biographer finds a balance between what Woolf terms the granite and the rainbow: that is, the verifiable facts of a life and the imaginative perception of it, perhaps by the subject as well as the biographer, to achieve 'the truthful transmission of personality' (473). This, of course, begs the question of whether there can ultimately be 'truthful transmission.' Perhaps the best a biographer can hope for is Louis Becke's comment about his association with the famous 'Bully' Hayes: 'I have spoken of Hayes as I found him' (Lone Hand 386).

In his *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, Richard Holmes likens the biographer to the pursuer of a fleeing figure whose footsteps they diligently follow through the past but whom they may never quite catch (27). Nevertheless, he argues, the successful biographer is able to intertwine two streams. The **first** consists of information gathered from such sources as associated places, images, objects, other people, or text as in recorded thought in letters or diaries or interviews. The **second** stream concerns the more imaginative relationship between biographer and subject that develops from an ongoing, living dialogue as the biographer constantly queries the subject's motives, actions, consequences, attitudes, and judgements (66). Writers of lives seek to bring together these two streams of fact and imaginative relationships

in order to *understand* both the life narrative of our subjects and who they are as people in the context of their environment. Each illuminates the other.

While I have been researching and writing the life of Australia's first internationally acclaimed writer of the South Pacific region, Louis Becke, I have come to appreciate the search for that balance between Woolf's granite and the rainbow while one is in pursuit of an elusive figure. Between 1894 and his death in 1913, Becke became Australia's most internationally significant writer of the South Pacific region of his time, authoring some 35 volumes that include novels, short story collections, non-fiction, and co-authored historical works, as well as over 200 stories and articles in Australian, British, and American newspapers and magazines. According to Nicholas Halter, Becke's 'international popularity and influence on public ideas of the Pacific region were exceptional' (379). Indeed, so highly was he regarded that in 1901 Becke was invited to write the first introduction to an edition of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, in the process rescuing Melville from obscurity because Becke was the better-known author at the time. As a writer, Becke had a reputation for veracity and reality, because he had spent many years during the 1870s and 1880s working and travelling throughout the islands of the South Pacific, prompting W. H. Massingham, editor of the London *Daily Chronicle*, for example, to consider the stories in *By Reef and Palm* 'incomparably stronger than [Robert Louis] Stevenson's work' (Day 41). Becke's writing was admired by such peers as Joseph Conrad (Karl and Davies 298), Mark Twain ('The Tramp in Melbourne' 4), Rudyard Kipling, who had his own personal copy of *By Reef and Palm*, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who remained a mentor and good family friend (Bradshaw 211).

However, while Becke's stories had enabled readers to project themselves onto a vast ocean space that their wishes could designate as effectively empty, by the time of Becke's lonely death in 1913, those spaces were rapidly being occupied and delineated by colonization and annexation. They were no longer as mysterious and 'free' as they once were. Not only that, but the world's eyes were turning to issues within Europe, such as arms races and political jousting over borders. Consequently, Becke's Pacific Island world no longer represented a bright future of possibility. While during the following decades there were brief resurgences of literary interest in the Pacific by Europeans, during the 1920s and 1950s in particular, as island nations became more conscious of their own histories and stories and of the destructive impact of colonialism on them, they became more desirous of telling their own stories in their own words, and so colonial storytellers like Becke fell out of fashion and out of publication. Over time, the place of a writer like Becke in the perception of the book-buying public swung from hero to colonial villain: from a huge readership which found his writing entertaining and wanted to emulate him, to one which had little interest in his work.

However, Becke's pervasive literary influence is now being re-assessed. Ann Lane Bradshaw proposes, for example, that Becke's story structures provided models for Joseph Conrad's techniques of framing his narratives as tales within tales, of attaching his fictions to actual events of his own life, and of using an ongoing narrator-protagonist in several stories (212, 217, 218). In his recent study of influences on the American literary and cinematic noir genre, *Darkly Perfect World*, Stanley Orr argues that the American crime writer Dashiell Hammett may have read Becke, noting similarities not only in locales and characters, but also in Hammett's treatment of themes of failure, regression, and transgression (16–17). Such critics are recognising now that Becke's substantial contribution to Australian and Oceanic literature and literary culture at the turn of the nineteenth century is significant to our appreciation of the heritage and value of Australian writing at local, Oceanic, and international levels.

Yet, only one small critical biography of Becke has been published: University of Hawaii Professor A. Grove Day's *Louis Becke* in 1967. Perhaps recognising the irony of an American writing the biography of a forgotten Australian writer, Grove Day wryly observed at the time that, 'Louis Becke has not always been held in honour even in his own country' ('Becke's Literary Reputation' 17). However, given that more Becke records are now available and that his work is now attracting critical appreciation and attention once again, it would seem an appropriate time for a modern reappraisal of Becke's life and work, and my current research will, I hope, serve to reintroduce him to a country in which he is now largely forgotten, enabling us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of his life and its connection to his significant contribution to Australian and Pacific literary heritage. Having languished for some time, appreciation of Becke's work is growing again within Australia and internationally, especially in the American Australian Studies area, and so a new biographical investigation of Becke's place within the Australian literature canon would now seem appropriate.

However, nailing down the facts of this author's life is not an easy task. Becke could be considerably creative with the details of his life story, and the surviving archived documents pertaining to his life are far from complete in their coverage, leaving gaps in the granite of Becke's life that can be frustrating for the biographer. Perhaps in editing and rewriting his life into a more adventurous and successful narrative, Becke was attempting to give his life story a meaning he thought it lacked. After all, 'Stories are lived before they are told,' suggests D. Jean Clandinin, and Becke did a lot of living and storytelling before he turned to writing those stories down. As we tell and retell those lived stories, Clandinin proposes, we are in effect constantly editing and rewriting them until, eventually, that *told* narrative becomes our perception of our life, whether it is the facts or not, because that is the version that fills our life with meaning and enables us to build relationships and communities (10–11). In telling and retelling the narrative of his life, Becke created and reinforced a perception of himself in his own mind, as well as the minds of readers. Perhaps as he saw that readers were ready to accept a particular version of his past self that would sell books, a more successful, adventurous version of himself, then he was only too ready to rewrite his past to become that person. I will return to this proposal later by exploring Becke's relationship with the American criminal, 'Bully' Hayes. Unlike novelists who create entirely fictional characters, Becke based many of his characters and events on actual people such as 'Bully' Hayes, and on actual events; his work was often, to use a modern literary term, more like 'faction'—fiction based on or written around facts. Becke sometimes manipulates historical people and events and landscapes for the purposes of his story. This is, I might point out, why finding a Becke letter can be so significant to the biographer; the document connects Becke to actual events at a specific location and date for which we otherwise only have his stories as evidence. Needless to say, when the biographer's subject rewrites their own history, distinguishing between the granite and the rainbow can become a complex task for that biographer.

Understanding the relationship between Becke the person and Becke the protagonist of his stories can be problematic, because while he often seems to be the one telling the story or featuring in it, this is not necessarily so. While Becke might intimate that a story actually happened by using the first person voice of an experienced Pacific inhabitant as narrator, at the same time he is distancing himself because that voice is not his own but that of a persona: a literary avatar. Becke created at least two major fictional versions of himself: Tom Denison (the successful and morally principled supercargo) and Louis Blake (his younger, semi-autobiographical, adventurous alter-ego). Although both protagonists are involved in adventures Becke may not have had in places he may not have been, and over a longer period of time than Becke was actually in the Islands, these are nevertheless activities in which Becke

could have been involved in places he *could* have been. That is to say, while Becke may at times be creative with the facts, he never completely departs from them into obvious fantasy. Given his wide experience in the Pacific region and his undoubted facility for listening to, remembering, and telling oral history and story, his created life cleverly obscures his real life just enough to soften the granite, but never quite enough to completely transform it into the rainbow of imaginative fiction. Becke challenges his biographer to distinguish between the granite and the rainbow while perceiving the relationship between them. Even Becke at times seemed to have difficulty distinguishing between them: as Clandinin argues, ‘People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of their stories’ (13). By way of understanding Becke’s interpretation of his life, then, we first need to know some pertinent information about him.

Becke was born in 1855 in Port Macquarie, New South Wales, and spent his childhood there before his family moved to Sydney. Port Macquarie was a place and time of peace and freedom for Becke, to which he often returns in his writing. The desire for that free life seems to have left him with a perpetual restlessness. Unable to settle, he left home at fourteen for San Francisco to meet up with some of his brothers and find work there. He returned to Australia, eighteen months later, and having been moderately successful as a gold prospector, he sailed for Samoa in 1872. For the next three years, he worked as a trader and supercargo among the surrounding Pacific Islands, where he became involved with the infamous conman, blackbirder and pirate, William ‘Bully’ Hayes, later writing him and versions of their time together into a number of stories that reshaped Hayes into the quintessential Pacific pirate. After the wreck of Hayes’s ship, *Leonora*, Becke returned to Sydney and for the next five years drifted through New South Wales and Queensland. Then he sailed again for Samoa around 1878, working as a trader for seven years among various Island groups. Becke would later rewrite this period to make him appear more experienced, claiming to one newspaper journalist, for example, that ‘I knocked among them [South Sea Islands] for twenty-five years as trader and supercargo’ (Espinade 14). In reality, he was probably there for about thirteen years, but he made excellent use of that time in gathering a wealth of knowledge and material about the South Pacific region that would be a fundamental source for his writing.

By 1886, Becke had returned to Port Macquarie to recuperate from recurring bouts of malaria, and there he married Bessie Maunsell without apparently informing her that he was still legally married to an Islander woman. It was not an auspicious beginning, and despite the birth of a daughter, Nora, whom he adored, Becke’s marriage eventually collapsed. However, while he was working miserably as a stump grubber in 1892, he was overheard telling tales of his South Pacific adventures in a Sydney pub by J. F. Archibald, editor of the *Bulletin*, who invited him home and encouraged him to write his stories down. Becke would later claim to have been a humble, minimally educated worker who wrote ‘intuitively’ (‘Louis Becke Interviewed’ 3), but it is evident from the quality of his early published work that Becke was no novice: he had worked in newspaper offices in both Cooktown and Townsville, for example. His first story at the end of 1892 in the *Bulletin* was followed by many more, although Becke was known to claim that he only took up writing ‘for a living’ (‘Scribblers and Screed’ 14), which may have been true, and that he hated writing because ‘having-to-do-it’ was ‘irksome’ (Espinade 14). After his first collection of short stories, *By Reef and Palm*, was published in England in 1894, Becke quickly became Australia’s most internationally famous writer of that time of stories about the South Pacific region. Nevertheless, Becke died alone and poverty-stricken in a hotel room from throat cancer in 1913.

After months of research, Becke's fleeing figure is gradually becoming more distinct to me as the gap between us slowly closes. Although Becke's life seemed at first to be replete with contradictions, these are being progressively clarified as I find myself drawn into a fascinating life. Here is a young man who associates with seamen, pirates, slavers, gunrunners, and island traders with shady reputations, but who in later life unexpectedly becomes a famous author and mannered associate of aristocracy and literary celebrities. This breadth of experience is reflected in Becke's extensive writing *oeuvre*, which covers a broad field of form and content including novels, novellas, short stories, and non-fiction historical works, based on his experiences living in a number of countries, as well as discourses on Pacific Island ethnography and biology.

As the current biographer of this complex and multi-faceted storyteller, I find myself involved in what Clandinin terms narrative inquiry, 'the study of experience as story' (13), because Becke edited and rewrote his life experience as source material for his stories. To adapt Virginia Woolf's words, Becke manipulated facts, brightening some while he shaded others as the malleable story was told and retold. Eventually, that reshaped life *became* his life. It is quite possible that Becke may not have had to invent very much. Away out there on the edge of the known Pacific colonial world where Becke loved to linger, we can only imagine that some strange and unique events must have taken place that provided ready material for tales.

Life writers are often as intrigued by those steps people make *off* the expected path while on their journey, as by those steps along it. A quiet, bookish scholar becomes obsessed with searching for lost cities in the jungle, for example, or an independent woman in a family of minister's wives and missionaries becomes a pioneer pilot, or an itinerant seaman, gold prospector, and island trader unexpectedly becomes a famous writer. The enquiring mind of the biographer wants to know why their subject took that different path, and so we indulge in a dialogue with them that might be literal if the subject is alive, or imaginary if they are not. If that dialogue becomes extensive over time, a biographer can develop quite a close, trusting relationship with their subject, but the biographer needs to remain cautious, for what might seem the solid ground of fact can suddenly become quicksand if further research unexpectedly reveals the subject in a different light. Feeling that their trust has been betrayed, the biographer might then be tempted to deny the existence of these unexpected and perhaps unwanted revelations, but they are part of the whole experience of the subject's life and so cannot be ignored. As the biographer pursues, then, they should be prepared for unexpected revelations: as their subject becomes clearer, they might not be quite the same person they seemed to be at the beginning of the chase.

In a number of his stories, Becke features the notorious conman, thief, and 'blackbirder' of the Pacific region, William 'Bully' Hayes, as his literary version of a South Pacific gentleman pirate, and I want to briefly explore this literary relationship because it is an example of Becke's manipulation and rewriting of his life narrative. Becke had practical reasons for creating a different version of the Hayes narrative: he needed one that would be more acceptable to a general reading public. To do so, as Jennifer Fuller astutely points out in her study of violence in Louis Becke's work, 'Terror in the South Seas,' Becke had to walk a fine line between the fictional 'Hayes as the boisterous and ill-tempered pirate king of the Pacific,' and the actual violent and morally deficient ruffian (53). While there is documentary evidence to support Becke's basic claim that he and Hayes did sail for a few weeks together aboard Hayes's ship, *Leonora*, Becke preferred his (unsupported) version that they had spent at least two years together adventuring through the Pacific Islands (*Ridan the Devil*, 281). It was a subtle but clever fiction, giving Becke the creative space within which he could mould his larger-than-life

South Seas pirate from a small lump of the raw clay of history. Becke was not entirely creating from nothing, as Hayes had been a well-known historic character, dead some twenty years by that time, with sufficient coverage in newspapers to be the rogue whose misadventures across a wide stretch of the Pacific Ocean had been decried by authorities, while readers shuddered delightedly. Yet Becke's opportunity to create a lasting literary character came about purely by coincidence: in early 1874, he was handed the chance to meet the already legendary Hayes in person.

By the time of their encounter, according to Joan Druett's *The Notorious Captain Hayes*, Hayes had been court-martialled by the US Navy for hanging Chinese pirates without trial, and had a reputation for not paying his debts, for stealing the occasional ship, and for smuggling arms, kidnapping, and blackbirding. From his ship, the *Leonora*, he had established (sometimes by force) copra plantations and coconut oil trading stations on various Pacific Islands, while robbing traders, Islanders, and gullible ships' captains. After the drowning deaths of his wife and child in a boating accident, his behavior deteriorated and his female companions became younger.

Needing a second, smaller vessel, Hayes made arrangements in 1874 with Samuel Williams, in Samoa, to buy the ketch *E. A. Williams*. It had to be delivered to Mili Atoll, and Williams gave that job to Louis Becke, who was working for Henderson and MacFarlane in Samoa at the time. However, when Becke arrived, Hayes declared the ketch was too unseaworthy to sail anywhere. As Becke had thus been rendered unemployed, Hayes offered him the supercargo position on the *Leonora*, which Becke accepted, although he must have known Hayes's notorious reputation. On the other hand, perhaps the very reason he accepted the job was that here was a chance to sail with a legend that would never come his way again. During the trip, they looted the wreck of a ship, held an island chief to ransom at Pingelap, which involved a young girl as payment, and then arrived at Kusaie (also known as Strong's Island, now Kosrae) where the *Leonora* sank during a severe storm on the nights of 14–15 March 1874. In September, Hayes and Becke were found there by HMS *Rosario*, which was hunting Hayes. By then, the two had quarrelled over Hayes's lack of ethics, and Becke had left to lead an idyllic life with a local chief and his family on the other side of the island. Upon the *Rosario*'s arrival, Hayes fled the island, leaving Becke to answer some questions and then be given passage back to Sydney (or possibly Norfolk Island). He would never again see Hayes, who was murdered by one of his crew three years later.

Although Becke only sailed with Hayes for about ten weeks, no one could ever accuse him of not making the most of that voyage. Hayes provided lucrative raw material for Becke's prolific pen that produced at least ten major published stories featuring Hayes, as well as half-a-dozen other pieces about Becke's time with Islanders after the wreck of the *Leonora*. As well as these shorter works, there are Becke's substantial contributions about Hayes's life to Boldrewood's *Modern Buccaneer* ('Personal Items,' *Bulletin*, 10) and the Hayes sections in Becke's own thinly disguised autobiographical work, *The Adventures of Louis Blake*. Given this prolific output in a relatively short time, there can be little doubt that Becke was responsible for the continuation of Hayes' fame into the twentieth century. Over some twenty years, Becke subsumed Hayes into his own life narrative, creating a legend about a South Pacific pirate and the young man who sails with him in an echo of Robert Louis Stephenson's Long John Silver and Jim Hawkins.

'Bully' Hayes was in fact the subject of the first long story by Becke to be published: the two-part "Bully" Hayes: The Pirate of the Pacific. A Chapter in South Sea History,' that appeared

in the *Bulletin* in February of 1893. Although Becke's name is not attached to the story, nor appears anywhere in the story, he included an amended version, 'Concerning "Bully" Hayes,' in *The Strange Adventures of James Shervinton and Other Stories* (1902). *The Bulletin* version sticks to well-known facts, the author/narrator appealing to veracity; they will not spin a 'fancifully embroidered tale,' he declares; instead, 'I will relate what I did see and what did occur.' Even though he admits Hayes killed men with his bare hands during a mutiny, and that some of his actions might have been morally questionable, the narrator states that he too was 'but a callow recruit, or recruiter [of Islander labourers], having ... a conscience sufficiently elastic for the peculiarities of the business.' Having put himself literally in the same boat as Hayes, he gives his reason: Hayes was 'a whole world of dauntless courage and iron resolution' (4 February, 22). In other words, to a young, callow recruit, thrown into a world vastly different than the one in which he'd grown up, the physically bigger and stronger and more experienced Hayes may quickly have become for Becke an icon of attributes he lacked.

In *A Modern Buccaneer* (1894), Becke reveals more about this personal adoration of Hayes, possibly because he knew his contribution would be anonymously subsumed under Rolf Boldrewood's authorship. On going to sea, the protagonist declares that he had promised himself a closer acquaintance with a 'picturesque and romantic personage,' Captain William Henry Hayston, a thinly disguised Hayes. 'Much that could excite a boyish imagination had been related to me concerning him,' he explains, as he anticipates meeting a 'real pirate' and tangible hero whose adventures 'so stirred my blood that, I felt, if I could only once behold my boyhood's idol, I should not have lived in vain' (7–8). His detailed description of the hair, eyes, nose, and 'well-cut, full-lipped mouth' of this giant with his 'magnificent physique,' as 'one of the most remarkably handsome men about this time that I have ever seen' is that of a dazed fan in the presence of a movie star (14). Becke's adulation here of this larger-than-life personality with a lifestyle so defiant of authority suggests some clues in answer to the question of why the seemingly principled and moral Becke would not only ally himself to the very unprincipled Hayes, but also spend the last part of his life defending his dubious activities. For Becke, Hayes became more than a literary character.

Becke makes only passing references to Hayes in *By Reef and Palm* (1894) and *The Ebbing of the Tide* (1895), but in December 1895, Becke wrote 'Memories of "Bully" Hayes' for the *Evening News* in which he gave a more detailed account of events before and after the wreck of Hayes's ship *Leonora*, but without praising Hayes and making it clear they parted ways after the wreck because Becke didn't agree with Hayes's behaviour (14 December 1). It is not until a group of three stories in *Pacific Tales* ([1896] 1987) that Becke re-introduces his alter-ego, Tom Dennison, as the character around whom either events concerning Hayes revolve or to whom a story about him is told. This framing allows Becke to create distance between author and narrative, although the reader is not conscious of this distance because of Becke's frequent use of first person which invites the reader into the storyteller's confidence. These three stories, 'An Island Memory,' 'In Old Beachcombing Days,' and 'The Shadows of the Dead,' are also set on Kusaie after the wreck of the *Leonora*. Once again, the narrator quarrels with Hayes and leaves to live in the village of Leassé, on the other side of the island, with the chief, Kuis, and his wife and child. In 'An Island Memory,' Tom Denison is, consistent with 'Memories of "Bully" Hayes,' critical of the behaviour of Hayes and his crew who, drinking, thieving, fighting and stealing women, 'turned an island paradise into a hell of base and wicked passions' (4). Here, Becke uses these tales as moral fables to demonstrate the idyllic island life that might have been possible if Hayes and his crew had heeded their environment and treated the Islanders responsibly and with respect. While they make enemies of the Islanders, Denison is treated as

a son by his adoptive native family and comes to deeply appreciate their kindness and their way of life on the island that he shares with them.

In Becke's story, 'The Wreck of the *Leonora*,' in *Ridan the Devil and Other Stories* (1899), the narrator (to whom I will refer simply as the Supercargo) expands further on the events of the earlier 'Memories of "Bully" Hayes' on Kusaie. This is the first published story in which Becke introduces his legend of the two-year voyage with Hayes, but he had clearly already taken possession of this part of the story three years earlier when, in an interview he gave to the *South Australian Register* on his way to England in June, 1896, he claimed, 'I was with him for about two years and six months' ('Louis Becke Interviewed' 5). Becke also introduces the myth during this interview that he was arrested for piracy by the captain of the *Rosario*, but there is no evidence of that in the captain's report that he tendered on reaching Sydney. Becke defends Hayes in 'The Wreck of the *Leonora*' as being only an 'alleged pirate:' not a 'remorseless ruffian' but, instead, an excellent seaman. 'Had he lived in the time of Drake or Dampier,' he declares, aligning him with famous romantic privateers, 'he would have been a hero, for he was a man born to command and lead' (281). The Supercargo respects Hayes's physical strength and his ability to protect the weak and defend himself with his fists against those who attack him, and it is this strength that helps save the lives of many on board when the *Leonora* is destroyed by a severe storm while attempting to shelter at Kusaie. With cliff-hanger hints that 'mutiny, treachery, murder, and sudden death' will inevitably eventuate among these survivors (295), Becke left his audience waiting until *The Strange Adventure of James Shervinton and Other Stories* (1902) for further development of the Hayes legend.

In the novella, 'The Strange Adventure of James Shervinton,' Becke's protagonist Shervinton arrives at Ujelang Atoll (Providence Island), which Hayes has used as his base, and provides some background that he had met Hayes elsewhere two years previously and declined his invitation to make their joint headquarters here. Hayes may have been 'a delightful man to talk to,' with 'merry, laughing blue eyes, jovial voice and handsome face,' but Shervinton still cannot trust this contradictory 'South Sea pirate' who could be 'all things to all men' (181). He might well appreciate beautiful women and be kind and generous to the sick and poor, but he could also be 'hot and sudden in his anger' and liked the feel of a trigger under his finger too much (182). Nevertheless, 'he was a good man, was the captain,' muses Shervinton, with perhaps a touch of irony (182). Three chapters later, Becke ostensibly moves away from fiction into a fifty-five-page, five chapter 'memoir,' 'Concerning Bully Hayes.'

Bearing in mind that this is an expanded rewrite of Becke's earlier 1893 *Bulletin* story, 'Concerning "Bully" Hayes' is the longest and most fully developed of Becke's works about Hayes, one that Becke obviously wants the reader to believe has historic authenticity, despite adding the myth of the two-year voyage to it. For the first two paragraphs, Becke deliberately sets this 'memoir' in a specific historic period and context, even leaving in the reference to it being originally written only sixteen years after Hayes's death (217), and this version remains relatively closely aligned to factual timelines and events. Becke consistently defends his hero's character. However, Becke's own reputation had developed during the intervening nine years since this piece had been published in its original form, and so now he adds a longer section about his stay on Kosrae with the Islanders after he and Hayes quarrelled and separated, editing into this chapter entire sections from his 1895 'Memories of "Bully" Hayes' piece, including his quarrel with Hayes.

Two years later, another version appears as 'The Supercargo' in *Under Tropic Skies* (1904), in which his protagonist once again sails with Hayes for two years through the Islands before the

Leonora sinks. Although the Supercargo and Hayes mysteriously reconcile after they argue in this version, the former still elects to continue living on the opposite side of Kusaie, which proves to be a wise decision as Hayes's settlement descends into 'treachery, debauchery, and murder, and all that was evil' (219). The Supercargo settles into an idyllic tropical existence with the villagers in Leassé, hunting and fishing, until the arrival of HMS *Rosario*.

Just as he began his career with Hayes, so Becke ended it with Hayes (or at least his publisher did), when a last story about him appeared in Becke's posthumously published collection, *Bully Hayes: Buccaneer, and Other Stories* (1913). This version had previously appeared as 'The Real "Bully" Hayes' in *The Lone Hand*, on 1 March 1912, but neither was any more factual than earlier versions. Not only do they repeat the legend of Becke and Hayes's four voyages together over some two years, but this time Becke also adds a fight scene between Hayes and the 'notorious ruffian' Buck Dawson, probably because this by now well-published pirate tale needed some freshening up (18). However, it is the conclusion of this story that is significantly different from others. In a last plea in defence of Hayes's character, Becke adds an epilogue of two extracts from books by other well-known authors, Stonehewer Cooper and Fredrick Hayes. Possibly because by now there was an increased public awareness and criticism of the bad behaviour of colonial historic characters like Hayes, encouraged by writers such as historian A.T. Saunders (see Saunders, 'Bully Hayes and Louis Becke'), Becke evidently thought it necessary to include some recognition of the contradictory traits of his pirate hero's character, such as the fact that he could be kind-hearted but also 'hard and grasping,' adding the veracity of personal witness to his claims of lengthy acquaintance (29).

Becke was clearly feeling pressure to restore the image of his favourite pirate at a time when his versions of the legend were being challenged and perceptions were changing about Hayes's treatment of Islander peoples. Unlike the vocabulary of the 1912 version, which in current times would be deemed profoundly politically incorrect, the 'n-word' never appears in these last two stories and there is only one passing reference to 'recruiting' Islander labourers. Only two years previously, in another extended Hayes account that Becke wrote for the *World's News*, in which he uses the term 'alleged pirate,' he complained about 'the amount of pure fiction that has been written concerning "Bully" Hayes' in four recent books, and that a 'score or so of writers' had 'maligned and vilified him as a heartless murderer and wholesale slaughterer of his fellow men.' Such tales, he pronounced, would make 'Baron Munchhausen turn in his grave and groan with envy,' as the Baron may well have done over Becke's own confabulations ('Captain "Bully" Hayes: The Alleged Pirate of the Pacific' 22).

As I, the biographer, pursue the elusive Louis Becke, I remain aware that my task is to bring together Holmes's streams of research and of imaginative enquiry. While the facts of a life are important in order to establish a solid foundation of veracity, so is continuing that living dialogue by which I query aspects of Becke's life such as his motives, actions, attitudes, and judgements. The truth of who we are in our present is, after all, embedded in our past, and in changing who we were in the past to become who we are in the present (our concept of our self), our 'I' is not who we were, but who we want to be. As the writer of adventures, of pirates, of successful trading and surviving in the vast unknown of that pioneering Pacific, Becke wrote his own destiny, becoming in his eyes and those of others, the famous, successful version of his 'I' that he wanted to be. As we live, we write our own narratives, because narrative is our way of organising and giving coherence to our experience. Becke had the unique opportunity to organise and give coherence to his life narrative as he wrote and rewrote versions of his experience, as we have seen in the examples of his treatments of 'Bully' Hayes. He subtly blended life story and published story, using multiple personae to achieve distance and to

express various points of view. Like the poet Walt Whitman, Becke could truly declare, 'I am large. I contain multitudes' ('Song of Myself' 78). As I follow him through the years, through his words and those written about him, I can see that he reconstructed and reimagined his life and, in doing so, he created his own granite from the rainbow.

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