



The Loss of the Wager: The Narratives of John Bulkeley and the Hon. John Byron (First Person Singular)

John Bulkeley, John Byron

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The Loss of the Wager is an eighteenth century melodrama set in a ferociously inhospitable climate on one of the world's most remote and dangerous coastlines. When Commodore Anson set out for the Pacific in 1740, to attack the Spanish ships on the Chilean coast, he took eight ships with him. The Wager was effectively a transport ship, carrying stores and a force of marines; as the squadron rounded Cape Horn in fearsome weather, she was unable to keep up with the rest of them, and with her gear wrecked by the storm, was driven ashore on the Patagonian coast. The tale of mutiny, hardship and tenacity that ensued was told by two of the survivors, John Bulkeley, leader of those who repudiated the captain's authority, and John Byron, then a midshipman, who remained with the captain. Both eventually reached home by different routes, and their dramatic narratives caught the public imagination. Byron was the grandfather of the poet, Lord Byron, who much admired the book and based the shipwreck scenes in Don Juan on 'my grand-dad's Narrative'. This voyage was the basis for Patrick O'Brian's historical work The Unknown Shore, written before he embarked on the Jack Aubrey novels.

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