

# **The Roving Party**

**&**

**Extinction Discourse in the Literature of  
Tasmania.**

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## *Abstract*

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The nineteenth-century discourse of extinction – a consensus of thought primarily based upon the assumption that ‘savage’ races would be displaced by the arrival of European civilisation – provided the intellectual foundation for policies which resulted in Aboriginal dispossession, internment, and death in Tasmania. For a long time, the Aboriginal Tasmanians were thought to have been annihilated, however this claim is now understood to be a fallacy. Aboriginality is no longer defined as a racial category but rather as an identity that has its basis in community. Nevertheless, extinction discourse continues to shape the features of modern literature about Tasmania. The first chapter of this dissertation will examine how extinction was conceived of in the nineteenth-century and traces the influence of that discourse on contemporary fiction about contact history. The novels examined include *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* by Mudrooroo, *The Savage Crows* by Robert Drewe, *Manganinnie* by Beth Roberts, and *Wanting* by Richard Flanagan. The extinctionist elements in these novels include a tendency to euglogise about the ‘lost race’ and a reliance on the trope of the last man or woman. The second chapter of the dissertation will examine novels that attempt to construct a representation of Aboriginality without reference to extinction. These texts subvert and ironise extinction discourse as a way of breaking the discursive continuities with colonialism and establishing a more nuanced view of Aboriginal identity in a post-colonial context. However, in attempting to arrive at new understandings about Aboriginality, non-Aboriginal authors are hindered by the epistemological difficulties of knowing and representing the Other. In particular, they seem unable to extricate themselves from the binaries of colonialism. Novels analysed here include *Drift* by Brian Castro, *Elysium* by Robert Edric, and *English Passengers* by Matthew Kneale.



## *Declaration*

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This is to certify that the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated; due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used; the thesis is 40,000 words in length, not inclusive of the bibliography or abstract.

Signed,

Rohan Wilson



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*The Roving Party*  
&  
*Extinction Discourse in the Literature of Tasmania*

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## *Introduction*

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When considering the issue of genocide, Tasmania is often cited – wrongly, I will argue – as the location for the only fully documented case of racial annihilation to have ever occurred. The symbolic moment of extinction supposedly came for the Aboriginal Tasmanians in 1876 with the passing of Trukanini, a member of the Bruny Island people, aged approximately 64. Her death did not come as a shock, but rather as the culmination of decades spent imagining the eventual fate of the Aborigines, predicting their doom, and planning for their demise. Belief in a Tasmanian extinction pre-dated the death of Trukanini, just as it continues to maintain a foothold in the public consciousness more than 130 years later, informing the way academics, historians, and writers portray Aboriginal Tasmanians in literature. It is a belief that underpinned the colonial project in Tasmania from the earliest days of settlement, a belief that continues to manifest in the representations of Aboriginal people today. The nineteenth-century discourse of extinction – a consensus of thought primarily based upon the assumption

that ‘savage’ races would be displaced by the arrival of European civilisation – provided an intellectual foundation for the policies which resulted in Aboriginal dispossession, internment, and death (Brantlinger 2003;1). Furthermore, the limits this discourse placed upon the thoughts and actions of policy makers and settlers greatly increased the likelihood of a genocide, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of genocidal actions followed by extinction predictions. What is more alarming, however, is the way in which extinction discourse continues to shape the features of modern literature about Tasmania.

It would not, given the prominence of the Aboriginal Tasmanian community, seem to be a controversial claim to say that a group of people who identify as Aboriginal Tasmanians actually exists but the catastrophe of colonisation was thought for a very long time to have caused their extinction. This assumption was based on what has been called the ‘falsity of race’ – the categorisation of people into social groups by physical traits or other naturally occurring divisions (Wetherell 1992; 14). As a race, the Aboriginal Tasmanians were thought, under the terms of extinction discourse, to have been destroyed or otherwise to have vanished. However, this claim is dubious. Firstly, it is now widely accepted that grouping people by superficial physical traits is not an adequate description of a social group. Secondly, the ‘vast majority of Aboriginal people’ prefer to define themselves as descendants of Indigenous Australians who are recognised as Aborigines by their community, a definition that is much more social than racial (Langton 1993; 29). It would, therefore, seem counter-productive, as well as incorrect, to suggest that the Aboriginal Tasmanians are in fact extinct. To do so is to accept race as the sole source of group or individual identity, a position that is extremely difficult to defend.

The first chapter of this dissertation examines how extinction was conceived of in the nineteenth-century and traces the influence of that discourse on contemporary fiction about contact history. The demise of the Aborigines was discussed widely in public, planned for in government policy, and lamented in literature and historiography. It follows then that the literature about settlement would reflect this. While most of the novels to be examined are written by non-Aboriginal authors – that is to say, an author who does not specifically identify as a member of the Aboriginal Tasmanian

community – there is a good body of writing by Aboriginal writers in Tasmania available for research. However, as this writing consists largely of poetry, biography and short story, it falls outside the criteria for selection I have decided upon, namely extended works of fiction. Due to word limit constraints, a number of novels deserving closer examination have been overlooked, including Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish*, Mudrooroo’s *Master of Ghost Dreaming*, Beth Robert’s *Magpie Boy*, as well as a number of self-published titles of varying quality and availability. Instead, greater attention will be given to a smaller sample of novels that cover a range of positions and ideas.

The second chapter of the dissertation examines novels that attempt to construct a representation of Aboriginality without reference to extinction. They are texts deeply engaged with the process of comprehending Aboriginality and arriving at a representation that is acceptable to Indigenous Tasmanians. What is perhaps most interesting about these texts is the way in which writers are subverting extinction discourse as a means of understanding or representing Tasmanian Aboriginality in order to reveal its discursive continuities with colonialism and establish instead a more nuanced view of Aboriginal identity in a post-colonial context. In this regard, they mark a shift in thinking away from extinctionism as a source of authority on Aboriginality and towards an understanding of identity that, as Stephen Muecke has described it, is about the self as a ‘multiplicity of identities’ engaged in a constant process of becoming (1994; 251). However, as the study of the subaltern has shown, representations in non-Indigenous writing often portray Indigeneity as a subject position knowingly adopted by the colonised peoples as a means of resistance. This strategically essential vision of Aboriginality develops out of the colonised/coloniser dichotomy which, as a strategy for writing history, might be seen as an oversimplification of a complex period. Representations of this kind also tend to preserve the view of Aboriginality as a fixed or stable identity and reinforce the notion that Aboriginal colonial identity is precisely the same as Aboriginal contemporary identity, and my examination will show that this seems to be the case in some literature about Tasmanian contact history as well.

The approach I intend to take in forming this critique is what Marcia Langton might refer to as an ‘anti-colonial’ approach (1993; 7). The literature about Aboriginal

contact history is written overwhelmingly by white authors and therefore represents overwhelmingly white concerns. It has been said that the desire of non-Aboriginal writers to ‘narrate themselves in relation to the Aboriginal Other’ is an example of their willingness to embrace Aboriginal culture as a part of their own experience of an Australian identity (Muecke 1994; 249). It might also be said that this desire stems from a deeply held moral abhorrence at the genocidal encounters colonisation produced and the urge to understand or explain the importance of these encounters in the context of present day Aboriginal relations. While these factors undoubtedly have some influence on the creation of literature about contact history, I wish to take my critique beyond an examination of the roots of Aboriginal representation in settler-Australian identity. What I will focus on is the way in which the ‘colonising imperative in Australian art’ finds its loudest expression in extinctionism (Langton 1993; 7). The political, moral, and aesthetic statements about Aboriginal Tasmanians that wittingly or unwittingly propagate colonial ways of knowing them are the target of my critique. Of course, it is not the authors of those statements that I am criticising, but rather the intellectual atmosphere that allows such statements to be made. As Langton observed in relation to Aboriginal matters, artistic freedom can only thrive if there is a strong anti-colonialist framework supporting the production of non-Indigenous representations of Aboriginality (1993; 8).

In order to determine the extent to which ideas about genocide and extinction have shaped the novels about Tasmanian contact history, the methodology will consist primarily of a qualitative discourse analysis. This kind of analysis involves a practical engagement with texts and the various social functions they perform. Given this, the majority of this dissertation will be concerned with close readings of extracts from novels as a way of identifying the ideologies and assumptions behind the representations of Aboriginality. Foucault’s concept of the discourse will be used to describe the historiographical, political, social, and imaginative production of genocide and extinction which forms a large part of the intellectual environment for creating literature about contact history in Tasmania. Discourse might succinctly be summarised, for the purposes of this dissertation, as a ‘socially constructed way of knowing some aspect of reality’ (van Leeuwen 2009; 144). In this case, we are looking specifically at socially constructed aspects of the Aboriginal genocide and the various explanations

that accompanied it, including the predictions of extinction, as they were imagined in the early nineteenth-century and as they occur in modern literature. Evidence for the existence of extinction discourse will be taken from the texts to be studied, but that is not to say that discourse and text are interchangeable terms. In order to discover the appeal of extinctionism and its extent throughout Tasmanian literature, these texts will be compared for similarities of what is written and what is assumed to be true. The evidence of repetition and paraphrasing of ideas that occurs, as Theo van Leeuwen observed, will therefore constitute the discourse (2009; 146).





## ***Chapter One:***

### ***Extinction Discourse in the Literature of Tasmania***

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Aboriginal Tasmanians are a racialised category of the wider community and it is impossible to conceive of an Aboriginal person without reference to their lineage. Yet, having said that, lineage is merely one aspect of Aboriginality. It is also an identity that is claimed by and bestowed upon people. An identity, like all others, that is located primarily in community. However, racist discourse in the nineteenth-century imagined Aborigines as pure and authentic only insofar as they were racially homogenous. Any deviation from that homogeneity condemned them to the status of ‘half castes’ or ‘half breeds’ and degrees of blood were routinely used as a means of attributing or denying

Aboriginal status to a person from the outside. It is in these categories of blood, these degrees of Aboriginality, that extinction finds a foothold as a means to marginalise the Indigenous population in Tasmania. While British observers often assumed extinction to be the self-evident outcome of colonisation in the nineteenth-century, today it is generally considered little more than a myth that sprung fully formed out of the racist and imperialist discourses that accompanied colonisation wherever it occurred.

The issue of Aboriginal identity remains highly contested in Tasmania. Michael Mansell, the noted Palawa leader, once stated on an ABC current affairs show during a debate about the controversial documentary *The Last Tasmanian*; ‘We are the only race of people that I know of on earth, the Tasmanian Aborigines, who have to daily justify our existence’ (Ryan 1996; 260). This comment is a fair indication of the struggle the Aboriginal Tasmanians have gone through to have their identity recognised as they have been forced to repeatedly restate their claims to Aboriginal status as a result of the historical falsehood that extinction discourse has entrenched in the public consciousness. It is a falsehood that has its roots in nineteenth-century perceptions of Aboriginality as purely racial. Therefore, when a work of literature repeats or paraphrases the ideas of extinctionism within its narrative, its imagery, or its vocabulary, it must be understood as forming a part of that established discourse, in this case a discourse that denies the possibility of a contemporary Aboriginal identity in Tasmania.

It is, Gayatri Spivak would perhaps remind us, an issue of power. The representations that authors create around Aboriginality – as they perceive it to have existed at the time of settlement and as they perceive it to exist today – are authoritative and hegemonic. As Spivak so perceptively stated, the subaltern cannot speak for themselves (1988; 308). This necessarily leads to representation from the outside. Of course, that is not to say that Aboriginal Tasmanians are unable to express their own identity through the various avenues of discourse available to them, but to stress the point that the subaltern is the subaltern precisely because institutionalised authority is representing it; the Aboriginal subaltern is created, maintained, and represented by academic knowledge. Spivak has defined the subaltern in post-colonial terms as ‘everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism’ or ‘a space of

difference' (de Kock 1992; 45). The books examined in this chapter offer an example of the ways in which Aboriginal access to cultural imperialism is limited and their subalternity reinforced by the intellectual practices of post-colonial authors and academics. We can see in quite stark terms how the privileged academic and institutionalized discourse that classifies and surveys Aboriginal Tasmanians is at the same time reinforcing the hegemony it seeks to dismantle by ironically reinscribing upon Aboriginality the ideological effects of colonialism. Extinction discourse, while first and foremost a derivative of colonial racism, is also an ideology that helps to maintain the status quo of Aboriginal marginalisation.

In writing this dissertation, the practice of representing Aboriginal people is entirely unavoidable for this author. My complicity in the tasks of colonialism is an issue that cannot be overlooked, but the question of my position is not easily addressed. Spivak considered this conundrum in her influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' where she lamented that 'calling the place of the investigator into question remains a meaningless piety in many recent critiques of the sovereign subject' (1988; 271). Although she understands that calling her own place into question is little more than a gesture and as such 'can never suffice', Spivak maintains that foregrounding the precariousness of her position throughout her writings is essential (1988; 271). I have attempted to foreground the precariousness of my own position in a similar manner. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the epistemological problems of knowing the other are an inescapable reality for any author working in this space.

Marcia Langton discussed the issue of representing the Other in her essay 'Well, I heard it on the Radio and I saw it on the Television...', in particular the notion of a shifting Aboriginality constantly remade through the interactions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors with Aboriginal culture (1993; 81). These 'intersubjective exchanges' provide individuals with a space to 'test imagined models of the other, repeatedly adjusting the models as responses are processed to find some satisfactory way of comprehending the other' (1993; 83). Aboriginality, under her view, is an intersubjectivity only defined by the ongoing processes of representation and interpretation (1993; 81). She proposed a three tiered view of Aboriginal representation; first, the interactions between Aboriginal people within the space of their own cultures;

second, the unknowledgeable representations of Aboriginal people that establish stereotypes; third, the intercultural dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people which results in more satisfactory representations. This third kind of dialogue helps to construct an Aboriginality that is relevant and always changing as each party attempts to make sense of the other's expressions of its identity. Within this model of dialogue it is possible to see how artists might arrive at more appropriate representations as the notion of race is replaced with a more social view of Aboriginality through the process of intersubjective exchange. It is with Langton's model in mind that I have produced this critique. There can be no doubt that the epistemological problems Spivak identified are a significant hurdle, perhaps even an impossible hurdle, to overcome but Langton's focus on the practical day to day reality of appropriate conversation at least allows us room to discuss the issue at some level, albeit a fairly rudimentary one.

The power relations that a racialised understanding of Aboriginal identity brings to a text are encapsulated within one important term; hybrid. Over the last few decades, hybridity has become an increasingly nebulous word, one with no single or correct definition used to describe a range of concepts. In its purest form, it describes the melding of two distinct entities into a singular whole and it carries important connotations when applied to the description of race. It has been used by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe a dialectical model of interaction within the space of a text, whereby an utterance may be simultaneously read in competing ways, as representing voices separated by 'social differentiation' (Bakhtin 1981; 358). More recently, Homi Bhabha employed the term in his analysis of post-colonial representation in order to describe the interdependence of the colonised and colonising cultures. The identity of a post-colonial culture emerges within the ambivalent space of the text as the 'voice of colonial authority hears itself speaking differently, interrogated and strategically reversed' (Bhabha 2004; 160). For Bakhtin and Bhabha, hybridity is the common space between cultures and a site of new cultural production.

But this notion of cultural hybridity does not sit easily within the Tasmanian context. Professor Ian Anderson, Chair in Indigenous Health at the University of Melbourne and a member of the Palawa community, contends that the "hybrid" Aborigine inhabits the ambiguous social realm between the world of the coloniser and

the colonised', but 'emphatically they are neither' (1997; 7) and this forces them to assimilate with one part of their heritage if they wish to obtain access to a historical or cultural consciousness. According to Anderson, the hybrid can only be productively transformed one way – white – and he therefore understands hybridity as a form of assimilation (1997; 8). Anderson's position has its basis in the concept of Aboriginalism, theorised by Bob Hodge. Under the terms of the Aboriginalist discourse, white observers imagine Aboriginal people to inhabit a 'closed universe' of 'authenticity and identity as Aboriginals' (Hodge 1996; 27 Aug 08). Any departure from this imagined authenticity 'condemns them to angry denunciation for having betrayed their essential identity, as inscribed in their culture' (Hodge 1996; 27 Aug 08). Within this framework, the hybrid does not truly represent Aboriginal identity as non-Indigenous people conceive it, a point which Anderson is also trying to make.

In his book *Colonial Desire*, Robert Young puts forward a series of objections to the use of the term in contemporary theory. He notes how hybridity as a term has its roots in the racist discourses of the nineteenth-century, most often being used to describe the offspring of what were imagined to be different human species (1995; 9). This leads him to the conclusion that 'in invoking this concept, we are utilizing the vocabulary of the Victorian extreme right as much as the notion of an organic process' (1995; 10). It is precisely this problem that makes the concept such a difficult one to use in the Tasmanian context, where a history of overt racism and genocide has created a specific local sensitivity. Critics have noted that de-historicizing and de-locating cultures from their geographic and temporal localities, as the generalisations of discourse analysis have a tendency to do, can result in critics applying an abstracted concept like hybridity to a debate without fully considering the specific cultural implications (Ashcroft 1998; 120). If we do consider for a moment the historical associations with genocide that hybridity has for Aboriginal Tasmanians, it is easy to understand why some have claimed that it denies their 'existence as a distinct people' by reducing the notion of Aboriginality to simple genetics (Mansell 2002; 25 June 08). It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that describing the Aboriginal people or culture in Tasmania as hybridised could be viewed as a continuation of the genocidal practices of colonisation by the community.

A concept such as hybridity contains within it the embodiment of the power relations between the subaltern Aborigines and the authority that prevents claims to that identity, an authority created and maintained through discourse. The implications that the concept of hybridity has for Tasmanian Aboriginal identity are clear. It denies their status as authentic and limits their access to the cultural and historical consciousness that Aboriginality represents. Nevertheless, it is a concept that finds expression repeatedly in the literature of contact history. Viewed in this way, the fundamental links between the concept of biological hybridity and the concept of extinctionism become more apparent. Extinctionism denies these expressions of identity by implying that anyone claiming an Aboriginal identity in Tasmania today is necessarily a racial hybrid. This connection marginalises, silences, and oppresses the community in Tasmania, and it has done so since the time of British invasion.

## **Genocide and Extinction**

It seems that in Tasmania the words genocide and extinction have become synonymous, given the island's association with what was supposedly the world's only true case of racial annihilation. However, in order to understand extinctionism it is useful to begin by assessing what genocide means when using the term in the context of Tasmanian history. When Raphael Lemkin coined the term in the 1940s, he envisaged it covering a range of activities, including the biological destruction of a people, the destruction of culture and institutions, and the destruction of religious groups. In his article 'Genocide', first published in 1946, he defined it simply as 'the crime of destroying national, racial or religious groups' (Lemkin 2000; 1 Jun 09). His ideas formed the basis of the legal definition adopted in the United Nations Genocide Convention (1948), a convention to which Australia is a signatory. The U.N. defines five separate acts which, when committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part, constitute the crime of genocide under international law. They include inflicting on the group 'conditions of

life calculated to bring about its physical destruction’ and ‘causing serious bodily or mental harm’ to members of the group (MacDonald 2008; 8). The U.N. definition is perhaps too narrow in some regards as it fails to include political groups, a type of group that history has proven to be susceptible to attacks by the political majority. It also relies heavily on the idea of intent to destroy which has proven to be problematic in the Australian context where settlers often acted independently of central control. While many genocide scholars argue that genocide occurred in Tasmania, an equal number of historians argue that without being able to prove intent on behalf of the colonial administration, the case for genocide is weak.

Henry Reynolds and Keith Windschuttle – two historians generally at loggerheads – find themselves in broad agreement on the question of genocide. They both similarly argue that in Tasmania there was no government policy designed to destroy the Aborigines, and therefore no intention to destroy them. Windschuttle states in *Fabrication of Aboriginal History* that ‘the surviving Aboriginal cultures have only been debilitated by the belief that their people were once subject to a conscious policy of extermination, when the reality was that nothing remotely like this occurred’ (2002; 9). Reynolds makes a similar assertion in *An Indelible Stain?*. He states that it is very difficult to decide whether ‘Governor Arthur strayed over the unmarked border between warfare to genocide’ with any certainty (2001; 147). In his book, Reynolds cites a great deal of evidence which suggests Arthur sought to prevent the destruction of the Aborigines as a people, including his privately noted concerns, his public declarations about the status of captured Aborigines as prisoners of war to be treated with care, and his attempts via George Robinson to conciliate the guerrilla fighters engaged in attacking white homesteads (2001; 127-47). However, not all historians agree with their conclusions. James Boyce believes that the ‘pervasive psychological appeal – to Arthur, Robinson, and, it seems, the colonists generally – of a “native-free” Van Diemen’s Land’ was the underlying motivation behind the ‘ethnic clearances’ undertaken by George Robinson (2008; 308). This ‘desire for an ethnically cleansed island’ (2008; 308), he argues, constitutes an intention to dispossess the Aborigines of their lands. If we accept Boyce’s argument, then the claims by Reynolds and Windschuttle appear somewhat less conclusive.

Genocide scholars have approached the subject somewhat differently to historians. They look beyond the responsibility of individuals and expand the investigation to include the role of colonisation as a genocidal process. Tony Barta has stated, in a discussion of Lemkin's definition of genocide and its usefulness for the Australian context, that 'there is no dispute that the basic fact of Australian history is the appropriation of the continent by an invading people, and the dispossession with ruthless destructiveness, of another' (Curthoys 2008; 243). He goes on further; 'If ever a people has had to sustain an assault on its existence of the kind Lemkin described it would seem to have been over the last two hundred years in Australia' (Curthoys 2008; 243). For Barta, the issue of intent to commit genocide is irrelevant. The 'basic fact' (Curthoys 2008; 243) of British invasion and the dispossession and destruction that followed is enough to justify using the term genocide to describe the relationship between settler and Indigenous Tasmanians. Dirk Moses, a University of Sydney lecturer and genocide scholar, also believes that the 'new discipline of "genocide studies"' is a continuation of the long-standing European debate about the legality and morality of occupying and dominating other peoples' (2008; 9). If we consider that the term 'genocide' originally came out of the study of colonialism, as Moses and Barta suggest, then applying the term in the Tasmanian context would appear to be entirely appropriate.

Many in the Aboriginal community also adopt this position. Bain Attwood, professor of Aboriginal history at Monash University, argues that 'many Aboriginal people believe that "genocide" is an appropriate word for remembering their historical *experience*' (2005; 105). He offers this quote from Tasmanian Aboriginal leader Michael Mansell outlining his view of the situation in his typically direct manner; 'The British had more impact on Aborigines than the Holocaust had on the Jews' (2005; 105). Likewise, the Aboriginal Tasmanian spokesperson Jim Everett stated that a 'colonial holocaust' had taken place (Attwood 2005; 105). While it is difficult, and perhaps morally odious, to make comparisons between the Holocaust and colonisation in Australia, the point these men are making is clear. Both the Holocaust and Tasmanian colonisation resulted in the decimation of a people. None of these men are arguing that the Tasmanian and Jewish genocides are equivalent, but they are arguing that we need to consider the outcomes of those catastrophes when making an evaluation about their



status as genocides. Again, the focus for the Aboriginal community seems to be less a question of intention, than a question of outcomes when discussing genocide.

Holocaust scholar David MacDonald investigated these issues in his book *Identity Politics in the Age of Genocide*, and I will use his formulations as the working definition for genocide in this paper. He argues that while

‘...there may not have been any intention to exterminate *all* Indigenous peoples in a given territory,...if the end result had genocidal consequences that could have been foreseen but were not prevented, then genocide can be understood to have occurred’ (2008; 61).

This is a noticeable contrast to the U.N. definition, which relies entirely on proving intent to commit the crime. In the Tasmanian context, it seems hard to deny that colonisation had genocidal consequences. Whether or not these consequences were foreseeable is somewhat more difficult to prove, but there is a good body of evidence that suggests that many members of the colonial government, many settlers, and certainly George Robinson, all believed that the Aborigines were facing an existential threat. Likewise, the authors writing about contact history overwhelmingly express a sense of catastrophe in their works we might appropriately call genocide. As we have seen, the Aboriginal community also has no hesitation at describing their experience of colonisation in similar terms. Given the consensus, both historical and contemporary, about the nature of Aboriginal suffering during the settlement era it seems appropriate to make use of David MacDonald’s definition in order to bring some shape to the Aboriginal experience of settlement.

Certainly, the way in which we apply the term genocide – and all the implications that come along with it – to the Tasmania context is playing a role in the way we create fiction. As Ann Curthoys has pointed out, old words such as extirpation or extermination have by and large been replaced in our collective vocabularies by the all-encompassing term genocide (2008; 240). This has the effect of forcing us to reconsider the events of settlement and the catastrophe that followed in a new light. Curthoys frames it thus;

‘Where *extermination*, *extirpation*, and *extinction* placed the Tasmanian events in a long ago past, out there away from the present, *genocide* connected them to an ongoing present, to legal and political as well as historical considerations. To call something “genocide” rather than “extermination” was somehow seen as far more serious for modern Australians; the questions of intent and responsibility were so much closer to home’ (2008; 240-1).

The works of long fiction examined in this paper display a common trait; they all represent an attempt at working through these ‘questions of intent and responsibility’ (Curthoys 2008; 240-1) by the author. Curthoys maintains that as the term genocide enters our vocabularies, so too do the political and moral ramifications that genocide entails enter into our thinking. Given this, the Tasmanian Aboriginal community is performing a deeply subversive act, a literary strategy that works as a means of self-assertion, when they use the term genocide to describe the events of colonisation. They are demanding that Australians reflect on their own culpability in the events of colonisation and the ways it continues to benefit them.

While genocide may have occurred – depending on the definition of genocide one uses or the historical records one cites – it is now widely accepted that there was no extinction. To acknowledge, on the one hand, that genocide may have occurred in Tasmania does not mean to accept, on the other hand, the false or deluded ideologies that construct Aboriginal Tasmanians as a race whose authenticity was bound inextricably to their racial homogeneity. The concept of extinction derives largely from racist discourses that ignored the epistemological shortfall between the appearances of race and reality of identity and served instead to reinforce the existing power structures whereby white civilised settlers maintained control over dark savage indigenes. However, theories no longer seriously entertained by scientists and academics can still find life in literary discourse. This is not to imply that any of the authors discussed here are racist – in fact, they are far from it – but to show that outmoded racial concepts are in many ways propagated by literary fiction.

## Extinction Discourse in Tasmanian Literature

Thou white man,  
With thy ever growing store  
Of learning, mak'st a home in every land;  
For thee all countries forth their treasures pour,  
And nature waits, the servant of thine hand.  
Not so with us; linked with our native earth  
Are all pleasures, and is all our care:  
The state our fathers lived in at our birth,  
Is but the lot that we are born to bear.  
Let us return to our loved land again!  
Ah! White man, wherefore dost thou keep us here?  
  
Thou dost not know the exil'd bosom's pain,  
Nor wear'st away the life with many a tear.  
Our race is fast decaying;---far and wide  
Extend thy riches, and increase thine heirs;  
Oh! Let us die where our forefathers died,  
That we may mix our wretched dust with theirs.

- 'The Tasmanian Aborigine's Lament And Remonstrance When In Sight Of His Native Land From Flinders Island', Auster, 1847.

This poem, written by a settler poet whose identity is unknown but who signed the poem 'Auster', is a reasonable example of the way in which the Aboriginal population was imagined to be in a state of irreversible decline, both in number and in their collective will to live, by some nineteenth-century observers. It can be read as an expression of the poet's own feelings of sorrow at the imminent loss of the Aboriginal Tasmanian race, as an expression of the narrator's desire to give up living, or as a petition to the government to grant one final request to the Aboriginal people, a request as it were to smooth the pillow of the dying race. These readings reveal sentiments that were common at the time, sentiments that guided policy and informed public opinion. What is more interesting, though, is the way in which it links the appropriation of territory by white settlers to the Aboriginal genocide. This comes through most strongly in the idea that white men 'mak'st a home in every land' (Auster 1847; 4). There is no sense of condemnation for this process, but rather an implicit understanding of its inevitability and the outcomes it had for the Indigenous people. It is a demonstration of the centrality of extinctionism to the colonising process in Tasmania and to the construction of Aboriginality in discourse.

Patrick Brantlinger, Professor of English at Indiana University, examined the origins of extinction discourse in his book *Dark Vanishings*. He described extinction discourse as a 'branch of the dual ideologies of imperialism and racism' (2003; 1). Extinction discourse, he believes, existed 'wherever and whenever Europeans and white Americans encountered Indigenous peoples' (2003; 1). The powerful intellectual sway it held over the minds of nineteenth-century Europeans allowed extinctionism to find expression through the scientific, political, historical and imaginative processes during the period and it has proven to be remarkably resilient, maintaining an influence over the discussions of Aboriginality into the present day. It is underpinned by one presumed self-evident truth; that 'savagery' would not survive when confronted with European civilisation. Starting from this basic assumption, genocide and extinction were conceived of as natural processes and the unavoidable outcomes of colonisation.

The genocide and supposed extinction of the Tasmanians was largely predicted, and in no small part enabled, by this discourse. It was not simply that the Aborigines

seemed to lack any human capacities such as the ability to reason, a sense of morality, an organised religion, or even a written language, but also that they did not seem to build villages or work the soil. To the settlers, it was as if they barely existed at all. In Tasmania, the settlers assumed that the inherent savagery of the Aborigines made them incompatible with the British systems of law and property. By 1828, Governor Arthur was convinced of the ‘absolute necessity of separating the Aborigines altogether from the white inhabitants’ until such time as their habits ‘become more civilized’ (Boyce 2008; 263). His policy would lay the groundwork for the ethnic cleansing that followed, policies that would prove to have a devastating effect. Sir George Murray, writing in reply to the final report of the Aborigines Committee established to investigate Aboriginal attacks on settlers in 1830, stated that it was not ‘unreasonable to apprehend that the whole of these people may, at a not distant period, become extinct’ if the violence continued (Curthoys 2008; 232). Some years later, Governor Sir John Franklin argued that an ‘effort to save them from extinction must be made’ during a discussion about the fate of the remaining 78 Aborigines on Flinders Island at a meeting of the executive council in 1838 (Boyce 2008; 312). Belief in the inevitability of Aboriginal extinction was a feature of the discourse from the earliest days of the colony, a belief that only intensified as settler violence and government policy acted to reduce the Indigenous population to a scattering of survivors. The notion that ‘savagery was vanishing of its own accord’ may have even ‘mitigated guilt’ when violence was employed by settlers, and sometimes ‘even encouraged violence towards those deemed savage’ (Brantlinger 2003; 3). So pervasive was this view that even as recently as 2002, Keith Windschuttle was still describing the Aboriginal Tasmanians as ‘the most primitive human society ever discovered’, a society whose treatment of women ‘was anything but conducive to its long-term survival’ (2002; 377-82). What this demonstrates most clearly is that violence and dispossession were often predicated upon the belief in the auto-genocidal savagery of the Aboriginal Tasmanians.

But even before the symbolic extinction moment – the death of Trukanini – we find a form of proleptic elegy,

‘...sentimentally or mournfully expressing, even in its most humane versions, the confidence of self-fulfilling prophecy, according to which new, white

colonies and nations arise as savagery and wilderness recede' (Brantlinger 2008; 4).

The future-perfect mode of the proleptic elegy mourned the passing of the Aborigines before they were even supposedly lost and this kind of lament became a sub-genre of poetry and fiction during the nineteenth-century, a genre of which Auster's poem 'The Tasmanian Aborigine's Lament' is a perfect example. Brantlinger reminds us that in every country the 'work of cultural and national mourning occurs not because the aboriginals are already extinct but because they will sooner or later become extinct' (2008; 4). It is the supposed inevitability of this outcome that allows the mode of the lament to flourish. More alarming, however, is the way in which this elegaic mode continues to occur throughout contemporary literature about contact history. Writers are gazing back into the past in an effort to reconstruct the lives of the Aborigines, but this process often reinscribes upon their representations of Aboriginality the colonialist assumption that the Aborigines were a doomed race. They are unwittingly calling into question the legitimacy and authenticity of Aboriginal identity in the present. This occurs most notably in Mudrooroo's *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*.

More often than not, critics consider *Doctor Wooreddy* as a part of the post-colonial tradition of 'writing back' to the West in which many indigenous writers have found themselves engaged and there is arguably a good case to be made for reading the novel in this way. Using the diaries of George Robinson as a starting point, it retells moments of colonial encounter from an Aboriginal point of view that allows Mudrooroo to endow these moments with a sense of resistance. In an article for *Antipodes*, Justin MacGregor described the book as representing history from an Aboriginal perspective and, in doing so, rendering the coloniser as the Other on its journey through the 'space between cultures' (1992; 113). The foremost scholar on Mudrooroo, Adam Shoemaker, makes a similar argument in *Mudrooroo: A Critical Study*. He believes that the novel upends the expectations of the reader by pursuing a series of inversions that alter our perception of contact history and reveal the white characters as 'irredeemably primitive' (1993; 48). The arguments of MacGregor and Shoemaker find a strong foundation inside the framework of post-colonialism. Yet, in some ways, the novel employs many

of the old colonialist discursive elements that Mudrooroo is seeking to dismantle. It could be argued that, despite the arguments of Shoemaker and MacGregor about *Doctor Wooreddy's* post-colonial context, the novel participates in the construction of a consensus of thought around the Aboriginal Tasmanians that declares them and their culture lost.

It is worth clarifying at this point the status of Mudrooroo in relation to Aboriginal Tasmanians. Mudrooroo has previously claimed an Aboriginal identity, but he has never claimed to have Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage and, for that reason, I will not consider him as a member of either the Palawa or Lia Pootah communities for the purposes of this discussion. Instead, I am considering him as one who writes about the Aboriginal Tasmanian as an outsider, as do Richard Flanagan, Robert Drewe, and Matthew Kneale and the other writers discussed here. While I would certainly not presume to judge his claims to an Aboriginal identity, in this particular case it seems uncontroversial and self-evident to say that he is not a member of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. His problematic portrayal of the Aboriginal Tasmanians as a doomed race must therefore be considered in the context of the wider colonial obsession with extinction and the implications that obsession has for the Indigenous population.

One of the most prominent extinctionist features of *Doctor Wooreddy* is Mudrooroo's desire to mourn the loss of the Aborigines and his subsequent reliance on an elegaic mode of expression to do so. As a boy, Wooreddy foresees the destruction of his people in the first chapter and his moment of enlightenment, which comes as he observes the first British ships arriving along the Derwent, deserves a closer examination.

'Nothing from this time on could ever be the same – and why? Because the world was ending!... One day, sooner rather than later, the land would begin to fragment into smaller and smaller pieces. Clouds of fog would rise from the sea to hide what was taking place from the Great Ancestor. Then the pieces holding the last survivors of the human race would be towed out to sea where they would either drown or starve' (Mudrooroo 1983; 4).

This passage summarises the extinctionist version of Aboriginal Tasmanian history that dominated historiography and public discussion until the 1980s. The last survivors of the ‘human race’ would ‘either drown or starve’ (Mudrooroo 1983; 4) on an island at sea. This is a reference to the internment of the Aborigines on Flinders Island where they suffered and died in great numbers. Wooreddy’s vision provides him with both foreknowledge and a deep fear of the imminent extinction of his people but, more tellingly, it also provides Mudrooroo with an opportunity to eulogise, a technique commonly employed by colonial writers considering the soon-to-be destroyed Aborigines.

The boy Wooreddy returns to his family, carrying the truth of his new enlightenment as a ‘charm of awful power’ (Mudrooroo 1983; 4). Here, amongst his family, he runs to the ‘nurturing warmth of his mother’ who gives him a large crayfish for dinner and Wooreddy tells us that he loves his mother for it (Mudrooroo 1983; 4). The gentle nature of this scene, the love of family, the nurturing warmth of Wooreddy’s mother, seems calculated to engender feelings of pathos in the reader. A notably elegaic tone manifests throughout these lines where the Aborigines are depicted in a harmonious co-existence with a landscape overshadowed by the impending European colonisation. This pathos is ultimately reliant on our foreknowledge of the genocide that follows colonisation, but it also derives from the idyllic native scene and the authentic Aboriginal state that it represents. We understand what will become of this authentic state when Wooreddy’s vision finally comes true. I will say at this point that the object of Mudrooroo’s mourning is somewhat ambiguous; he may be expressing sadness at the loss of so many lives during the genocidal phase of colonisation and the cultural erasure that necessarily accompanied that loss, or he may in fact be mourning what he sees as a lost race. Whatever the case may be, it has been noted that the tendency to eulogise among contemporary writers looks remarkably similar to the ‘poetic rehearsal of doomed race theories in the nineteenth-century’, regardless of the intention behind the pathos (McCann 2006; 52). Auster’s ‘The Tasmanian Aborigine’s Lament’ provides a useful example of the type of poetic rehearsal McCann was referring to in his article, the supposition that the Aborigines were ‘fast decaying’ as the narrator in the poem says (Auster 1847; 4). Mudrooroo’s mourning creates a disturbing discursive continuity with colonial representations like those produced by Auster and ironically reinscribes the



cultural erasure and political subjugation that the Tasmanians suffered after settlement within the space of his text.

Along with the desire to mourn the passing of the Aboriginal Tasmanians, another discursive element of extinction can be traced in operation throughout the text of *Doctor Wooreddy*; the concept of auto-genocide. A common assumption of race theories that underpinned British colonisation at the time of settlement was that ‘savagery’ acted as a self-extinguishing force (Brantlinger 2003; 2). It should be said that Mudrooroo is not seeking to rationalise or reduce British responsibility for the Tasmanian genocide – genocide in the novel comes inarguably as a result of colonisation – but there are some moments in the text that seem organised around the idea of an auto-genocide as it was constructed in extinction discourse. In the closing pages of the novel Wooreddy tells Ummarraah that the white settlers ‘don’t even believe that we can... choose our own destiny. We have chosen to go away and we are going’ (Mudrooroo 1983; 204). This is the culmination of a series of observations about the nature of the Aboriginal resistance to colonisation. Just prior to it, Wooreddy wonders why the guerrilla leader Walyer had ‘given up so easily and died so easily’ on Flinders Island (Mudrooroo 1983; 203). The warrior Ummarraah also resigns himself to death at the hands of the whites, saying to Robinson this ‘world is yours and you can have the ruins. I will walk with Wooreddy and forget all this’ (Mudrooroo 1983; 203). There seems to be an implication here that the Aboriginal characters are choosing to die. They resign themselves to the extinction that Wooreddy has foreseen. Overwhelming despair eventually swamps Wooreddy, Ummarraah, and Walyer and in the end they simply ‘choose to go away’, as Wooreddy tells us (Mudrooroo 1983; 204).

The historian Cassandra Pybus has examined this passage in Mudrooroo’s book, doing so in the context of her investigation into the Tasmanian catastrophe. She tells us that he ‘portrays the Tasmanians as having ultimately decided to take control of their own destiny, determining their fate for themselves’ and that accordingly they were ‘making a consciously defiant choice, Mudrooroo would have us believe’ (1991; 151). There is certainly a sense that the characters are taking control of their respective destinies by choosing to ‘go away’, as Wooreddy says (Mudrooroo 1983; 204). They are defying the colonialist authority imposed upon them by making the only choice still

available to them – to die in the manner of their own choosing. But this is surely problematic. While many at the time of settlement acknowledged the effects of warfare, violence, and disease on native populations, there was for many others a third, more mysterious cause of Indigenous deaths. Often thought to be ‘the main or even sole factor’ in extinction, this ‘third factor’ was the perception of ‘savagery’ as ‘self-extinguishing’ (Brantlinger 2003; 2). It was often explained by reference to the mechanism of ‘savage customs’ like nomadism, warfare and cannibalism, but for others it was a more mysterious force (Brantlinger 2003; 2). Some settlers believed that the main cause behind Indigenous deaths was the simple fact that many ‘had given up, had lost the will to live’ (Curthoys 2008; 234). This explanation of self-extinguishment, either through ‘savage customs’ (Brantlinger 2003; 2) or through despondency, was a convenient fallacy that helped to rationalise and reduce collective responsibility for the catastrophe that accompanied colonisation. It is hard to see how utilizing this colonial rationalisation constitutes the powerful statement about Aboriginal resistance to white authority that Pybus believes it presents.

Mudrooroo’s novel remains one of the most passionately humanistic books written about contact history in Tasmania, one that offers a uniquely Aboriginal perspective on the events of settlement and presents us with a comprehensive vision of Tasmanian Aboriginality that no other writer in this area has matched. It is clear that he is not complicit in the colonial project in the same way that nineteenth-century writers were complicit. However, what the novel also shows is the manner in which extinction discourse continues to organise the thoughts of contemporary writers. The novel makes use of imagery and vocabulary associated with extinction through Wooreddy’s visions of the future, while at the same time creating a discursive link with colonial laments for the doomed Aboriginal people. It also draws on notions of auto-genocide in order to illustrate their profound despair at their own impending doom, a notion that often served as a means for Europeans to rationalise away their responsibility for Indigenous deaths after colonisation. Marcia Langton, speaking as an Aboriginal critic, has observed that there exists a ‘naive belief that Aboriginal people will make “better” representations of us, simply because being Aboriginal gives “greater” understanding’ and she argues that this belief has a basis in the most essential feature of racism, ‘the assumption of the undifferentiated *Other*’ (1993; 27). To assume that Mudrooroo, as a man who claims an

Aboriginal identity, is incapable of creating a colonialist representation of Aboriginality is to accept Aborigines as an undifferentiated Other, to borrow Langton's phrase. If the Aboriginal subaltern is created, maintained, and represented by academic knowledge, then we find in Mudrooroo's novel a representation that mimics one of the actual modes of colonial dominance; the construction of Aboriginality as doomed.

Extinction discourse in the nineteenth-century was found across all areas of imaginative production, but most particularly in literature. One notable way in which it affected literature was through the trope of the last man. This became a popular narrative construction around the early 1800s, most prominently in *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper, published in 1826. But this trope as it occurred in Australia was not merely a fantasy of 'racial exclusivity' or a means of declaring territory as empty, it also represented a 'condition on which writers could begin to fashion an intensely affective, Romantic mode of writing fixated upon landscape' (McCann 2006; 51). This was achieved because the demise of 'savagery' brought about by the arrival of European civilisation, while generally considered an unavoidable outcome of colonisation at the time, was also an occasion for mourning. Andrew McCann has argued that the desire of the settler-artist to eulogise the Aborigines can be traced back to a perceived lack of history or classical culture in Australia. Without the artifices of imagination that a classical culture provided, there was little left with which the Romantic settler-artist might fashion literature (McCann 2006; 51). This tendency has been summarised thus; 'The void left by a vanished race... will fill the void at the core of the settler's imaginative experience' (McCann 2006; 50). The supposed demise of the Aborigines is re-imagined as a tragedy and a nation-founding epic with the last man at the centre. As a discursive strategy, the trope of the last man allowed the writer to position the Aborigines at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy and to imagine Europeans as the rightful inheritors of the land.

We see this pattern reproduced in *Manganinnie* by Beth Roberts. Published in 1979, *Manganinnie* tells the story of an old Aboriginal woman, the last survivor of her tribe after the events of the Black Line have taken place. While the book is written with an undeniable empathy for the traditional Aboriginal way of life, the same empathy found in *Doctor Wooreddy* that prioritises Aboriginal experience and culture, it also

displays similar tendencies to Mudrooroo's work. The most pronounced of these is the impulse towards the elegaic. In some ways, *Manganinnie* represents the continuation of colonial attempts at filling the void at the imaginative core of settler-Australian life that McCann believes was a driving force behind much of the colonial literature about Aborigines (2006; 50). It earnestly sets about producing pathos in the reader on behalf of the 'vanishing race' that it takes as its subject, embracing the conventions of Romanticism in order to generate it. Roberts' Aborigines live in a harmonious natural state, spiritually connected to the environment, re-imagined as Romantic primitives whose only possession is the netherworld of story and spirit they inhabit. The relationship between Manganinnie and Jo-Jo, the little white girl Manganinnie abducts after losing her family during the events of the Black Line, comes to precisely embody the novel's own ambitions – namely, the desire to remember and lament the lost race of Tasmanians. But more than that, the relationship between Manganinnie and Jo-Jo embodies the colonialist elements contained in the novel as well; the appropriation of tribal territory and the deep past of Aboriginal history.

Roberts draws a large proportion of this melancholic pleasure from the contrast between the impending extinction of the Aborigines and the idyllic lifestyle they are leading. It is a similar strategy to the one Mudrooroo adopts in *Doctor Wooreddy*. However, Roberts is much more knowingly Romantic in her descriptions than Mudrooroo, re-imagining Aboriginal life as a native pastoral scene. Early in the narrative, Manganinnie creates some children out of snow.

'Once again she had children to teach... She told them how the first little children came down in the raindrops and then she sang a lullaby for them. She knew that in the morning they would have melted away, but it did not really matter' (Roberts 1980; 20).

The image of the snow children melting away mirrors the fate of the Aborigines melting away before the settler encroachments. She sings for them and tells them stories, full of the sadness that foreknowledge of their disappearance brings. It is a metaphor which neatly captures the urge to lament that Roberts brings to her work as she tells her story in the knowledge that the Aborigines have similarly 'melted away' (Roberts 1980; 20). It also calls to mind Alexis de Tocqueville's observation after his excursion through

Michigan in 1831 that the Native Americans, ‘the first and legitimate master of the American Continent’, were ‘melting away each day like snow in the rays of the sun’ as the colonists advanced westward (Pierson 1996; 232). In both cases, extinction discourse works as the main source of authority for statements about indigenous disappearances.

Furthermore, the intrinsic link between the landscape and the author’s imagination established within this metaphor is a deeply affective one, an obsession with a Romantic mode of expression. By locating the source of this aesthetic pleasure in a literature of landscape, Roberts creates a discursive continuity with the colonial literatures of the nineteenth or early twentieth century that were engaged in embedding a settler identity into the new soil of Australia. Seen in these terms, *Manganinnie* is a kind of pastoral, comparable in intention to Katharine Susannah Prichard’s 1929 novel *Coonardoo*. The critic Ivor Indyk described the character of Coonardoo as an ‘Aboriginal woman who is not simply at home in the landscape but is the landscape in all its vitality’, and his assessment aptly describes Manganinnie as well (1993; 837). At the time of her death, Manganinnie is at one with ‘the mighty trees and the great, proud boulders’ (Roberts 1980; 97) and she is consistently portrayed as being a primordial agent of nature at home in her pastoral setting. Her death performs the dual task of providing material for Roberts’ melancholic lament on the extinction of the Aborigines while also allowing for a metaphoric appropriation of the landscape, which Manganinnie represents, as her legacy is absorbed into the new settler ethos.

The sleight of hand whereby possession of the land seems to default to the white inhabitants upon Manganinnie’s death becomes clearer towards the end of the novel. One night, as Manganinnie is gazing into her fire, she sees a vision of her husband, Meenapeekameena. He tells her;

‘The time has come when you must know that you will never find another one of us living in *Droemerdeene’s Land*, so you must stop looking. There are none of us left now in the Bush. Many have died but some live on a distant island, and they are all doomed to die without seeing again their tribal lands. Go now and teach your little white girl the ways of the People so that when she is grown she may tell her own people all these things and we shall no longer be spoken of as

savages, but rather as a proud and ancient people living in harmony with all living things' (Roberts 1980; 80).

This vision echoes the enlightenment that Wooreddy undergoes when he sees the first British ships arriving along the Derwent, particularly the detail of people being imprisoned on 'a distant island' which refers to the historical fate of the Aborigines interred on Flinders Island. Moreover, it serves a similar function to the corresponding passage in *Doctor Wooreddy*, allowing the author to enter the mode of eulogy and mourn the lost Aborigines. Roberts, however, is much more sentimental in her use of language than Mudrooroo, even going as far as deploying the image of the Noble Savage in order to generate pathos; the notion that the Aborigines are a 'proud and ancient people living in harmony with all things' (Roberts 1980; 80) is pure Romantic primitivism.

Yet what is most disturbing about the passage is the sense that something is being handed on or relinquished to the settler population. It is delivered through the lines 'teach your little white girl the ways of the People... and we shall no longer be spoken of as savages but rather as a proud and ancient people' (Roberts 1980; 80). This suggests that the passing of the Aborigines into memory confers some sort of legitimacy onto the settlers as the new possessors of the landscape and the historical memory associated with it. The Aborigines may have vanished but by remembering them as a 'proud and ancient people' (Roberts 1980; 80), the settlers might more willingly accommodate their legacy into the new Tasmanian identity taking root in the landscape. Ancient Aboriginal history is therefore assimilated into the broader cultural milieu that makes up Tasmania. This would seem to go beyond the mimicry of colonial discursive elements that Mudrooroo performed in his novel – that is, making use of elements intended to emphasise the tragedy of extinction – and into the realm of colonialism as an ongoing project of dispossession. By linking the Aboriginal past with the settler-Australian present, Roberts is engaging with extinction discourse on similar terms to the early colonial writers who lamented the vanishing of the Aborigines and believed themselves to be inheriting an empty country.

Bain Attwood has written about the desire on the part of some Australians to identify with Aboriginal history. He argues that the discursive construction of

Aboriginality as a stand-in for an ancient past lacking in settler Australian identity allows some people to falsely claim an affinity with land that was alienated from the tribes (1992; 3). This comes about primarily because ‘many European Australians have constructed the Aborigines as the primordial or primitive other, a paradigm of originality and antiquity’ (Attwood 1992; 3). We see something of this construction in *Manganinnie*. The outcome of imagining Aborigines as an ancient people in an ancient land has generally been to define Aboriginality as representing a lesser state, a primitive state, which Europeans have left behind on their trek towards civilisation. These sentiments are at work in Robert’s vision of the Tasmanian Aborigines as a ‘proud and ancient people living in harmony with all things’ (1980; 80). But because *Manganinnie* projects a thoroughly Romantic view of place, it becomes desirable for her to link settler-Tasmanian history to this deep past of beautiful landscapes she has filled with her naked and innocent primitives. Given this, her attempt to co-opt the Aboriginal links to the soil and confer them onto the new white population ought to be seen as an extension of the settler impulse to possess the land, not just physically but also spiritually and imaginatively, in order to be free from guilt or the kind of ‘moral disgust’ that Alan Atkinson supposed many settler-Australians must feel when examining their genocidal history (Attwood 2005; 105). If white Australian history is intertwined with that ancient past, then genocide in the nineteenth-century is easily dismissed as a misunderstanding between two peoples during a period of first contact. It is silenced as a mere aberration.

As with many of the contemporary novels that work within the discursive space of extinction rhetoric, it is hard to justify the suggestion that *Manganinnie* is racist or is purposefully and knowingly working to deny Aboriginality to Aboriginal Tasmanians. It was written with the intention of foregrounding the Indigenous experience of colonisation and it largely succeeds in this goal. Roberts uses traditional language, beliefs, customs, and rituals to recreate a plausible worldview for *Manganinnie*. The white atrocities of the genocidal period in Tasmanian history are re-examined from an Aboriginal viewpoint and the suffering that resulted is exposed. But is this enough? When the assumptions of extinction discourse are so clearly put on display, a novel can devolve into an elegaic commentary on the vanished race and this is what *Manganinnie* represents most strongly. By locating the aesthetic pleasure of her book in a pastoral

representation of the Aboriginal Tasmanian lifestyle, Roberts is signalling her intention to re-imagine the Aborigines as Noble Savages left behind by the coming of civilisation and doomed to vanish. This is problematic not only because it patronises, but also because it allows Roberts to link the passing of the Aborigines with the new identity of the Tasmanian settlers, in effect conferring possession of the land onto them. But, as well as denying an Aboriginal presence in Tasmania today, her desire to link the European community to the Aboriginal past needs to be seen for what it is – an attempt at legitimising white possession of tribal lands. This is the moral message we take away from *Manganinnie*.

Richard Flanagan has written widely on issues that are central to the experience of both Indigenous and settler Tasmanians, always doing so with concern for the sensitivities of the culture and a respect for the community as it exists in Tasmania today. His novel *Wanting* is an excellent example of his ongoing preoccupation with the nature of settler/Indigenous co-existence in early Tasmania, and the implications that the colonial genocide has for the present day. Indigenous author and historian Greg Lehman stated in a letter to *The Mercury* in Hobart that *Wanting* underlines ‘the abuse and manipulation of Aboriginal people’ by the British after settlement and he defended its portrayal of Aboriginal people (2009; 32). However, *Wanting* is also ostensibly about extinction in Tasmania. An appendix in the form of an author’s note follows the final page of the novel and here Flanagan takes the opportunity to clarify his position on extinction. He says:

‘Although the catastrophe of colonisation led many at the time, both black and white, to believe the Tasmanian Aborigines would die out – a terrible anguish which I have tried to mirror in my novel – they did not. Today, around 16,000 Tasmanians identify as Aborigines’ (2008; 256).

This is a strong statement, outlining his rejection of the extinctionist position and, given this, it becomes difficult to suggest that Flanagan is offering a knowingly racist or colonialist account of history in *Wanting*. Yet, the ‘terrible anguish’ that Flanagan has ‘tried to mirror’ in his text comes through in unexpected and uncontrollable ways, appearing throughout the structure and the imagery of the novel, just as it has done for



many other works of fiction situated within the discursive space of Aboriginal extinction.

The pattern that extinction followed has itself become something of a narrative trope for authors. As we have seen, it is common for novels about settlement to follow the trajectory of Aboriginal history as it was imagined to have occurred for more than a century. It is the same structure both Mudrooroo and Roberts use for their characters. Their protagonists moved from a state of pre-settlement innocence or primitivism, to a period of suffering and marginalisation, and then finally death and extinction, a pattern that mirrors the trajectory Aboriginal history was imagined to have taken. By falling back upon this trope, writers are emphasising the injustice their Aboriginal characters are enduring and the tragic outcomes that injustice creates carries the narrative forward. The central Aboriginal character in *Wanting*, the young girl called Mathinna, goes through a slow transformation from a 'beautiful child' early in the novel into something 'queer, lost, belonging and not belonging' (Flanagan 2008; 251), as the ox cart driver observes in the final pages, until her death at the end of the novel. We first see her as a seven year old girl for who the 'earth was still new and extraordinary in its delights', running through tall grass and feeling the 'earth beneath her bare feet' (Flanagan 2008; 9). After moving out of this stage of childhood innocence, Mathinna then enters a period of suffering, firstly at the hands of Sir John Franklin, then in the Dickensian St John's Orphanage where she is abused again, then onto the Aboriginal station at Wybalenna where she suffers even more. She is killed when her friend, Walter Talba Bruney, drowns her after an argument over alcohol. The parallels of Mathinna's life with the extinctionist version of history are apparent. She is reduced from a state of proud and noble innocence to a corpse 'crawling with so many lice it more resembled an insect nest than a human being' (Flanagan 2008; 250). The ox cart driver who finds her body offers the comment 'That's how it goes' (Flanagan 2008; 251), repeating it as if to highlight the inevitability of her death, as all Aboriginal deaths are imagined to be under the terms of extinction discourse. In utilizing this trope as a way to shape *Wanting*, Flanagan may not be setting out specifically in the mode of eulogy, nor is he claiming that the Aborigines are a lost race, but he is organising his novel around a structure that metaphorically reinscribes an extinctionist history upon it.

Furthermore, the imagery around Mathinna's death seems to be working towards this same conclusion. Mathinna's body is found lying beside the road as the mist was 'filling the forest and everything in a soft white shroud', an image which suggests a pall of death hanging over the forest (Flanagan 2008; 250). In the forest, water beaded on the 'white glistening trunks that stood like pillars of salt, rising, falling, crumbling' (Flanagan 2008; 250). This imagery seems to invite generalisation away from the specifics of Mathinna's death and outwards into the broader picture of extinction. The symbolism of the pillar of salt and the movement of 'rising, falling, crumbling' in particular deserve closer examination (Flanagan 2008; 250). The biblical image of the pillar of salt, when taken together with 'rising, falling, crumbling', could be read as a suggestion that an entire way of life is being annihilated, as is implied in God's destruction of Sodom. Similarly, the ox cart driver remembers holding her when she 'had been beautiful', but even as he tries to remember her all around him 'the world was darkening, the long night was only beginning' (Flanagan 2008; 251). The last image we have of Mathinna is of her 'light-coloured soles disappearing into the longest night' (Flanagan 2008; 252). The notion that the 'world was darkening' and the image of the 'longest night' harkens back to the sense of apocalypse so neatly captured in the triptych 'rising, falling, crumbling' and it seems to carry through on the implications that movement portends. It is hard to avoid the apocalyptic resonances of these images and the implications they have for the fate of the Tasmanians.

Given the parallels Mathinna's life has with the fate of the Aboriginal Tasmanians after colonisation, and given the imagery that seems to equate her death with an apocalyptic destruction, her death might reasonably be thought to represent extinction in the novel. The slow disintegration of her life, the loss of her family, the loss of community on Flinders Island, then the slide into loneliness and finally death, are a neat summary of the extinctionist historical interpretation of Aboriginal history that has been repeated ever since the death of Trukanini. It is hard to overlook the similarities, coming as they do in the context of extinction that *Wanting* encapsulates. Flanagan has tried to distance himself from such interpretations by clarifying his position on extinction in an author's note, a position undoubtedly supportive of the Aboriginal community today, and by and large *Wanting* is a progressive book that highlights the mistreatment that Aboriginal Tasmanians suffered at the hands of the

settlers. However, it is also an excellent example of the power extinction discourse has to limit the thoughts and actions of contemporary authors.

Perhaps more than any other, Robert Drewe's 1976 novel *The Savage Crows* embodies the problematic aspects that notions of extinction can bring to a text. The book itself is a mixture of primary documents, the diaries of George Robinson, and the story of protagonist Stephen Crisp as he investigates the Tasmanian genocide. Crisp is portrayed as a subversive outsider, a fringe dweller investigating a dark secret at the heart of the Australian colonial enterprise and it is tempting to imagine *The Savage Crows* as a novel that attempts something similar. It is, however, difficult to maintain an image of *The Savage Crows* as a subversive novel when we consider the author's re-enactment of the same colonial modes of domination he is attempting to dismantle. Some critics have read it as a work that challenges the comfortable orthodoxies about Tasmanian history. In her article 'Unlearning Dominant Modes of Representation', Jodie Brown argues that the novel presents a challenge to the standard conventions of Australian literature, while at the same time revealing aspects of 'social injustice and racial bigotry' (1993; 77). Similarly, David Kerr believes that the book 'purports to be a cry of rage against the virtual extinction' of the Aboriginal Tasmanians (1988; 63). In contrast, the critic Susan Martin criticises Drewe for participating in the Australian colonial project. She identifies the recurrent metaphor of dismemberment and the structures it creates within the text, structures which she believes perpetuate the literal fragmentation of Aboriginal communities in the present (2003; 65). While the novel could be said to participate in the fragmentation of Aboriginal communities, it is perhaps not entirely for the reasons Martin contends as she overlooks the extinctionist assumptions behind the novel's representations of Aboriginality, a set of assumptions that deny the possibility of a contemporary Aboriginal identity in Tasmania.

Because the action of the novel is set partly in Australia in the 1970s, Stephen Crisp is able to use the relatively new term genocide to describe the results of the catastrophe of settlement. Early in the novel Crisp describes the thesis he is writing as an investigation of 'the hunting down, slaughter, rape, infanticide, betrayal, deportation, (redemption?) and extinction of a unique race of four or five thousand people' (Drewe 1976; 36). He considers their fate 'the most effective act of genocide the world had

known' (Drewe 1976; 36). As Ann Curthoy's noted, calling 'something "genocide" rather than "extermination" was somehow seen as far more serious for modern Australians; the questions of intent and responsibility were so much closer to home' (Curthoy 2008; 240-1). Crisp is portrayed wrestling with his moral disgust as knowledge of the genocide undermines the foundations of his cultural identity and he finds himself increasingly marginalised as he rejects the historical amnesia favoured by his friends and family in order to confront his own guilt over the Tasmanian genocide. His brother wonders why he has become 'obsessed with Abos and death and smart-arse social issues', while his colleagues likewise consider him a 'screaming radical' (Drewe 1976; 123). The Tasmanian genocide is presented as a challenge to the moral foundations that his identity is built upon. In many ways, the novel is concerned with re-examining Tasmanian history in order to allay the feelings of guilt that have come to characterise non-Aboriginal writing on this subject, the guilt which Stephen Crisp suffers so acutely.

However, under the surface a more agonised ideological struggle is taking place as the author attempts to come to grips with his own complicity in the continued oppression of Aboriginality in Tasmania. Crisp's meeting with the Aboriginal community living on the Bass Strait islands in the final chapter is a prominent example of the ironies that manifest as the tension between the author's desire to fashion an allegory out of the suffering of the Aborigines on the one hand collides with his reluctance to accept the authenticity of Aboriginal identity on the other, creating a doubled linguistic consciousness. The Blue Plum, a representative of the islander community, tells Crisp that his community represents 'a whole new human population brought into being by hybridization' (Drewe 1976; 252). By its nature, this idea seems to preclude the Aboriginal community from accessing its historical and cultural heritage and, in effect, denies the possibility of a contemporary Aboriginal identity. Nonetheless, Crisp seems to accept this problematic representation as the truth and he subsequently lets go of his guilt about the genocide, believing that the Aboriginal Tasmanians have survived by morphing into a new hybrid population. Yet the narrow racial definition of Aboriginality that hybridity allows seems to preclude any notion of their survival. They are a 'new human population' (Drewe 1976; 252) as the Blue Plum says, and do not

seem to represent the continuation of Aboriginal identity in the manner that Crisp had hoped.

A metaphor on the final page of *The Savage Crows* captures the way modern Aboriginality is conceived of as inauthentic in the novel, further illustrating the influence extinction discourse has had on its creation. As Crisp is leaving the island, he finds ‘two small brown creatures’ – ticks – that are burrowed into his skin and burns them away with a cigarette (Drewe 1976; 263). It is an image that suggests both the anxiety of his guilt (the burrowing) and the desire to rid himself of it (the burning). The notion of brownness is crucial as it symbolises the brown skin of the hybrid community. It has become clear that, despite his academic interests in their language and culture, Crisp has failed to discover any sense of Aboriginality about the island community beyond their physical traits, primarily their brown skins. Yet it is precisely this trait that he is looking for, what might be called their ‘once-were-Aboriginality’, or the notion that the island community, while not authentically Aboriginal themselves, were at least descended from authentic Aborigines. Having discovered that fact about them, he is free to get rid of his guilt and this occurs metaphorically when he burns away the ticks. This final image in the book perfectly encapsulates the way extinction discourse underpins the construction of Aboriginality in the novel. Crisp leaves the island community, safe in the knowledge that, while they are inauthentic, at least some small Aboriginal trace survived the genocide. His conclusions, however, are based entirely upon the narrow definition of race that extinctionism allows him and as such are flawed. Crisp – and this is perhaps true of Drewe as well – is unable to see what the islanders truly represent; the unbroken continuation of Aboriginality.

The fascination Stephen Crisp has with the physical characteristics of the Aborigines corresponds with a similar fascination for the violence they suffered, both before and after death. He describes the disinterment and dissection of the ‘headless, limbless Last Man’ William Lanney (Drewe 1976; 24), well-known in history as supposedly the last male Aboriginal Tasmanian. Before being buried, Lanney’s head and hands are removed by scientists who are intent on examining the skeleton, then after burial his coffin is dug up and the rest of his body taken away by wheelbarrow (Drewe 1976; 18-9). Likewise, Trukanini after her death, was ‘exhumed, tidied up,

lacquered, and stapled to the museum wall' (Drewe 1976; 238). These acts of desecration stand as a final symbolic full stop in the long history of genocide in Tasmania and Crisp feels deeply angry as he rediscovers this history for himself. But what William Lanney's disinterment and dissection parallels most closely is Crisp's own digging up and examining of the past. He is also interested in Aboriginal bodies and in the violence they suffered as a piece of history to be preserved because, just like the scientists who performed the initial desecrations, Crisp believes Lanney and Trukanini to be the last man and woman of their race. His motives are exactly mirrored in those men who seek to preserve Lanney's skull, simply because it is the last of its kind. Crisp's outrage at the way Trukanini is put on display after her death rings somewhat hollow given his own similar determination to display the suffering of the so-called last woman across the pages of his thesis. There is a profound irony at work in the very structure of the text, one that results from the Crisp's unknowing complicity in the colonial imperatives of controlling Indigeneity through representation and institutionalised knowledge.

The question raised by this reading then becomes; is Drewe aware of these ironies or do they result from the problematic representations of Aboriginality? It may well be his intention to use Crisp as a vehicle for exploring these complex ideas about the involvement of the writer in matters of colonial and post-colonial representation, or the matter of the white author's complicity in the ongoing suffering of the Indigenous people. The brown tick metaphor might be a statement to this effect, a demonstration of Crisp's shallow engagement with the true nature of the Aborigines he encountered on the islands. Through this metaphor, Drewe is perhaps indicating the need to understand Crisp's attempts at righting the colonial wrongs he investigated as simply perpetuating more of the same suffering. A similar case could be made for his examination of William Lanney's mutilation. Crisp's insistence that the government was at 'loggerheads' with the Royal Society over the treatment of Lanney's corpse, and his observation that the Royal Society members 'went over the Premier's head' seem like puns intended to reveal the shallowness of Crisp's sympathy for Aboriginal suffering and his macabre fascination with the brutality inflicted upon them, rather than his desire for reconciliation (Drewe 1976; 24). Undoubtedly, there are some examples that support a reading of the novel as knowingly ironic. However, this reading is difficult to

maintain. The Blue Plum's pronouncement of his race as a 'whole new human population brought into being by hybridization' causes problems for any such reading (Drewe 1976; 252). There is a strong sentiment contained in this statement that denotes the island community as somehow not authentic. They are, by nature of their breeding, not Aboriginal but 'African-Tasmanian-Australian', as the Blue Plum describes himself (Drewe 1976; 252). It is hard to imagine that Drewe intends this as a knowingly ironic comment upon the status of Aboriginal Tasmanians. Rather, it seems more likely to have stemmed from his reliance on extinction discourse as a source of authority for his view of Aboriginality. This is also the likely explanation for the persistent ironies around the concepts of colonisation and race in the novel as Drewe becomes mired in the implications of extinctionism.

As an issue of power, it is possible to see how the novels I have discussed represent the continuation of the colonial modes of thinking which located Aboriginality solely in race. Of course, conceiving of Aboriginality in this way leads necessarily to the conclusion that authentic identity disappeared with Trukanini in 1876 and that Aboriginal Tasmanians today are not Aboriginal in any true sense of the word. It is a conclusion that has caused suffering for the community since the earliest days of settlement when degrees of blood were used to separate the supposedly pure from the supposedly tainted. In allowing extinctionism to impose limits on the representation of Aboriginality, the privileged academic and institutionalized discourse that studies Aboriginality in Tasmania is ironically reinforcing the hegemony that it intends to pull down. However, this is not to say that representations that are more appropriate are unachievable, or that the representations discussed here are no better than anything produced in the nineteenth-century. Langton's notion of the intercultural dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal provides an excellent metaphor for understanding the achievements these novels present. They form part of the process of testing that Langton theorised would occur as individuals create 'imagined models' of Aboriginality and repeatedly adjust them as responses (like the one I have produced here) are incorporated and ultimately a 'satisfactory way of comprehending the other' is arrived at (1993; 83). The notion of the intercultural dialogue, while not enough by itself to overcome the hegemonic weight of academic representations of Aboriginality, creates a space where these representations can be critiqued, responded to, and

improved. As Chapter Two will demonstrate, this process is slowly resulting in a view of Aboriginality that is more satisfactory, to use Langton's term, and which incorporates the responses of the Aboriginal community.



## *Chapter Two:*

### *Subverting Extinction Discourse*

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Revealing extinction as a myth contingent upon a racial definition of Indigeneity is a vital step towards creating representations that are more satisfactory. One way writers are achieving this aim is through subversion of the authority that declares Aboriginality as either a hybrid or an inauthentic identity. The novels examined in this chapter form part of the ongoing dialogue about Aboriginality, a conversation which remakes and reinterprets that identity, and we see in the work of Matthew Kneale, Robert Edric, and Brian Castro an attempt at reimagining Tasmanian Aboriginality in a way that highlights the fallacy of extinction. The point of such dialogues, or ‘intersubjective exchanges’ as Langton understands them to be (1993; 83), is to break down the binary positions that the colonial process and colonial power established, to expose the

methods of Aboriginal subjugation, and to ultimately create a more equal society. To that end, the dialectics of subjugation, victimisation, and resistance form the underlying pattern of the novels *Drift* and *English Passengers* as Kneale and Castro use the notion of subaltern agency to explore the resistance aspects of Aboriginal identity. Often, resistance is portrayed as an aspect knowingly adopted in direct opposition to white settler identity, as a kind of negation to white identity. What all three novels share though is a common understanding that extinction, as it is imagined to have occurred under the terms of that discourse, is a nothing more than a means of dispossession and marginalisation. It is revealed as a tool of colonial power.

However, in searching for new understandings, non-Aboriginal authors are hindered by the epistemological difficulties of knowing and representing the Other. In particular, they seem unable to extricate themselves from the polarities of colonialism. It has been noted that the 'reification of a colonial moment of binary oppositions' may in fact tell us more about 'contemporary political agendas' than 'ambiguous colonial realities' (Stoler 1995; 86), and this presents us with a difficult and sensitive problem. On the one hand, Aboriginal Tasmanians like Michael Mansell and Ian Anderson insist that they are Aboriginal in every sense of the word, rejecting the concept of hybridity or any other contextually specific reimagining of their own identity (Mansell 27 August 2008; Anderson 1997); but on the other hand, this rejection tends to preserve the essentialist view of Aboriginality as a fixed or stable identity that is unchanged since the period of settlement (Beverly 1999; 86). As a consequence, non-Aboriginal writers are also preserving the essential Aboriginal position as a colonised people, a subjugated people, in literature. They reify the 'colonial moment of binary oppositions' (Stoler 1995; 199) and, in doing so, they reinscribe that binarism onto contemporary Aboriginal identity.

Stephen Muecke, writing in response to Langton, builds on her ideas about the process of constructing an Aboriginal identity through representation. He proposes, by way of Deleuze and Guattari, a notion of identity as a 'becoming' rather than a static and knowable construction (1994; 251). He summarises their arguments by saying that the 'self is already a multiplicity of identities which are in the process of becoming' and that there are 'always only multiplicities' of the self and that 'they are always "in

between” (1994; 251). The inbetweenness that he describes is the sense of an identity as always being between terms that try to fix it down. It is never just one thing or another but always between these things. Muecke understands that while ‘picturing an abstraction like Aboriginality’ is an impossibility, it may be the case that identity is carried along ‘vectors of narrative’ where ‘histories of individuals or mobs... come up against the blocks of histories of culture, of society and the State’ (1994; 251). In essence, the act of narrative representation transmits some of that identity, but that act of transmission also partly defines the identity for the people who are experiencing it. This is similar in spirit to Langton’s statement that ‘representational and aesthetic statements of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people transform the Aboriginal reality’ (1993; 40). Muecke’s idea of the ‘becoming’ of Aboriginality provides an essential grounding for those aesthetic statements to build upon, a metaphor that simultaneously demonstrates how Aboriginality is best understood, while at the same time freeing it from concrete definitions that risk fixing it into place.

Muecke’s view provides a useful point of contrast for the way in which Aboriginal identity is often portrayed in Tasmanian contact literature. The colonial discourse which seeks to present ‘domination and subordination as if they were mutually exclusive terms’ of reference (Beverly 1999; 86) is everywhere present in the work of authors writing about Aboriginality, but perhaps nowhere is it more visible than in the novels which are engaged in subverting extinction discourse. The problem is that in adopting an essentialist view of Aboriginal Tasmanians as a colonised people, some authors are supposing that identity to be stable. This ‘inherently Eurocentric’ (Beverly 1999; 86) way of understanding the Other is impeding the development of representations which capture something of the fluidity that is a feature of individual and group identities, the feature which Muecke explored so cleverly in his article. As Langton has stated, intercultural exchanges in art allow the testing of ‘imagined models’ (1993; 83) in order to arrive at a more satisfactory representation of the Other – and it should be remembered that as these authors ironise and subvert extinction discourse they are clearly aiming for more satisfactory representations – but nonetheless some authors continue to invest in the dichotomies of colonialism and perpetuate the notion of binary colonised-coloniser identities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Tasmania.

Matthew Kneale's multi-voiced novel *English Passengers* features one strand focused solely on the lives of Aboriginal people, which centres on a young man called Peevay who has an Aboriginal warrior mother and a white sealer father. Through Peevay, Kneale offers a view of Aboriginality that prioritises the continuation of identity through tradition and bloodlines. He uses Peevay as a vehicle for imagining the shifts Aboriginality as an identity has undergone since settlement – the changing language, the integration of British cultural practices, and the disruption of traditional land use systems. Peevay represents some aspects of the inbetweenness that Muecke supposes is a feature of all identities, an ambiguity that is not easily fixed into place with descriptors like Aboriginal or settler. But in other ways Peevay is the archetypal subaltern, a silenced indigene resisting imperialist domination by whatever small means he is able to muster. At times, Kneale's portrayal of Peevay displays a strong devotion to the idea of resistance and of the solid division between colonised and coloniser, often at the expense of genuine insight into the Aboriginal colonial reality. While the novel embodies a clear intention to subvert extinction discourse, it never approaches post-colonial discourse with the same highly critical eye and as a consequence its portrayals of Aboriginality become overly reliant on the notion of resistance.

Peevay's physical difference is conveyed when he sees his own reflection in a pool of water; 'Just there in the water, you see, all at once there was a stranger, and this stranger was like a monster. His face was almost ordinary but that just made him worse because his hair was so wrong' (Kneale 2000; 48). Culturally, Peevay is different from his other family members too. He learns to speak English and move in the world of the settlers. Over time, he develops a hatred for the white population. He tells his mother 'I want to know them so I can fight them', but his mother warns him; 'Know them too much and you may get like them' (Kneale 2000; 236). As his mother observed, Peevay slowly 'gets like them' (Kneale 2000; 236), adapting to the circumstances that the European invasion has imposed on him, circumstances which include a denial of his identity as authentically Aboriginal. In exploring Peevay's dilemma, Kneale explicitly recognises the way in which racist discourse constructs Peevay as a half-caste and as therefore sub-human. Throughout the novel, the racist discourse which underpinned extinctionism is implicated as the cause of Indigenous suffering during colonisation and Kneale re-imagines a version of Robert Knox's infamous *The Races of Men*, a mid-

nineteenth-century source for scientific theories on race and extinction, as *The Destiny of Nations*, a book which categorises the ‘Black Type’ (Kneale 2000; 406) as doomed to extinction in the face of European expansion. This ideology is, however, subverted by Peevay’s determination to survive. His ‘heartfelt desire’ to ‘fight those heinous pissers’, rather than meekly fade away as the terms extinctionism suggest should be his fate, becomes the single most important feature of his identity (Kneale 2000; 450). Initially, Peevay’s resistance is used as a tool for subverting both racism and the consensus of thought that supposes Aboriginal people to be on the verge of annihilation, but as the novel progresses the provisions of that resistance become more and more central to the representation of Aboriginality.

We find a good example of Peevay’s defiance when he walks into a town and sees the farmers and convicts going about their daily lives. He notices that

‘...their eyes looked still and empty, as if there was nothing inside except smallest thoughts, WHAT IS MY NEXT WORK? WHAT IS MY NEXT FOOD? WILL WEATHER BE FINE DAY AGAIN TOMORROW? Yes, these were their delights now that we were dead. I did detest them for this’ (Kneale 2000; 419).

Of importance here is the idea that ‘we were dead’, a reference to the perceived extinction of the Aborigines. This utterance works within the space of two linguistic realities; in one sense, it is a statement of fact for the settlers about the fate of the Aboriginal people; but in another sense, it acknowledges Peevay’s oppositionality by ironically invoking the extinctionist discourse that Peevay’s continued existence has displaced. The primary difference between Peevay – and, by extension, the whole body of the Aboriginal people – and the settler population is brought into focus; he understands himself to have survived the genocide with his Aboriginal identity intact and with a new sense of himself defined against the settlers. The settlers might believe they are extinct, but Peevay knows otherwise. The pronouncements of *The Destiny of Nations* declaring how the ‘Black Type’ (Kneale 2000; 406) will vanish when confronted with European civilisation are revealed as an integral part of the colonising process. In effect, that discourse provides the justification for the settlers to continue occupying the lands they believe to be empty. This occurs despite the presence of Peevay who, under the terms of Potter’s racist discourse, is merely a ‘half-caste’

(Kneale 2000; 406) and has no claim to an authentic Aboriginal identity or, consequently, to Aboriginal lands.

Nonetheless, the heavy focus on Peevay's role as a guerrilla in the midst of the white population seems to suggest an over-reliance on the notion of Aboriginality as a stable colonial subject position, sometimes at the expense of considering the role of complicity, appropriation, and participation in the colonial discourse that posits that identity. The risk involved in this approach, as Frederick Cooper noted, is

‘...that in exploring the colonial binarism one reproduces it, either by new variations of the dichotomy (modern versus traditional) or by inversion (the destructive imperialist versus the sustaining community of the victims)’ (1994; 1517).

Ultimately, Kneale's reproduction of the ‘colonial binarism’ ends up ‘constraining the search for precise ways in which power is deployed and the ways in which power is engaged’ (Cooper 1994; 1517). We see this in the portrayal of Peevay's mother as a woman driven by her hatred for the invaders, and in the way Peevay, by the closing pages of the novel, has taken on that hatred as well. While Kneale is clearly making a point here about the tendency of subjugation to inspire uprising, it seems also that in investigating the nature of Aboriginality in the colonial period, Kneale has reinscribed the dichotomous relations inherent in colonial ideologies back onto his own text. As we have seen, Kneale is concerned with subverting and ironically destabilising these colonial power structures by undermining the terms of extinctionism, but nonetheless he seems to begin from the assumption that the colonised/coloniser binary is an effective way of describing settler and Aboriginal relations in the past, an assumption which ignores the ways ‘power is engaged, contested, deflected, and appropriated’ (Cooper 1994; 1517). In attempting to move beyond a discursive construction that imagined the Aborigines as extinct, Kneale has created a representation that, at its heart, is underpinned by some of the same ideologies that allowed genocide to occur.

Robert Edric's 1995 novel *Elysium* serves as good counterpoint to *English Passengers*, insofar as it represents an attempt at understanding Aboriginality without relying too heavily on resistance as a means of conceiving of it. Like Kneale, Edric is

concerned with exploring the way power was brought to bear upon the Aborigines through racist and scientific discourse. He takes as his subject the famous ‘last man’ William Lanney, here re-imagined and fictionalised as William Lanne. Through Lanne, Edric traces the connections that extinction discourse has to racist science in the nineteenth-century but also necessarily to colonialism and the alienation of tribal land. By re-working the trope of the last man, Edric creates a number of opportunities to subvert and distort the postulations of extinction discourse while at the same time presenting his own vision of Aboriginality. *Elysium* is a work devoted to exposing the fallacies of racist thinking and the suffering that it caused for the Indigenous people. Furthermore, the marginalisation that resulted from racism is demonstrated to be simply another means by which the Aboriginal Tasmanians were dispossessed of their land.

Lanne, as the last Aboriginal man, becomes the subject of an amateur anthropologist. The drawing and measuring of Lanne’s body is significant given that the historical William Lanney was also made a subject of science after his death, when his body was disinterred and dissected, and the process he is put through by Fairfax evokes that eventual fate. Fairfax tells him

‘...without me you would have died unobserved and unremarked. We shared, you and I, something of that strange, one might almost say perverse, interdependence of the hunter and his prey’ (Edric 1995; 138).

His concern that Lanne might die ‘unobserved and unremarked’ is a concern that Lanne does not share (Edric 1995; 138). Lanne is aware that the scientist, in recording the measurements of his body, his family tree, and his cranial bumps is defining him in the role as last male of his people. It is a role that sits heavily with Lanne and he is unable to escape the terrible authority that scientific declarations of his status as last man have. But the hunter/prey interdependence of which Fairfax speaks also needs to be understood as a metaphor for the way scientific discourse constructs Aborigines as a savage Other to its orderly, systematic Self. Edric is concerned here with the propensity to define Aboriginality in reference to science, as theories of race must always do, rather than recognise it as a living and lived identity.

The idea of Lanne as the last man of his race is further used to subvert the racist discourses that position him as such. When Fairfax the anthropologist becomes sick and slowly wastes away, his death is presented as an inversion of the common image of extinction that was often invoked by supposedly humanitarian government officials or scientists. The notion that government and men of science could merely ‘smooth the pillow for the dying race’ (Flood 2006; 205) of the Aboriginal people was often voiced as a way of rationalising Aboriginal genocide or reducing it to the status of an unavoidable sickness. Embodied in that metaphor was an entire ideology, the racism, imperialism, and extinctionism that in fact enabled the genocide to occur. These three strands of interwoven thought found simultaneous expression in the image of the dying Aborigine watched over by the caring, but ultimately powerless, white man. As I discussed in Chapter One, it is no exaggeration to say that the belief in an inevitable extinction drove the creation of colonial government policy and dictated the actions of men like George Robinson who often supposed themselves to be humanitarians coming to the aid of the dying Aborigines. So to attack that metaphor, to re-position its components in order to reverse its meaning, is to subvert the philosophical underpinnings of extinction discourse as it has been imagined since the 1800s. We see William Lanne ‘naked, his arms and legs circled white, his chest and face dotted with ochre, and with rings of scarlet around his eyes to give him vision in the darkness’, enter the hotel where Fairfax lays dying, so that he might retrieve the notes and drawings that made him a ‘matter of official record’ (Edric 1995; 156-9). In a complete inversion of the racist metaphor, Lanne, the last man, watches on but is powerless to help as the scientist slowly wastes away from an unnamed sickness. Lanne is a vigorous warrior wearing tribal markings, a symbol of vitality and strength, while the invalid white scientist and the racist theories he represents seem to be in terminal decline. This is a very effective comment, showing plainly how Aboriginality is imagined in the novel as resisting the various discourses that seek to pin it down and as a living identity that shifts as society shifts.

Similarly, Edric uses Lanne as the last man to draw a connection between extinctionism and land alienation. The removal of the Aborigines through ethnic clearances, the killings, and the taking up of land by settlers were all aspects of the same colonial process that constructed the Aborigines as doomed and their land, therefore, as



empty. This idea becomes apparent when Lanne walks past a drought-stricken farm outside Hobart and sees a farmer working in the field. He observes;

‘Everything in the small clearing behind the man was dead. Even the trees which waited to close in on his ramshackle home looked lifeless. A man could swing his axe into one of those trunks and every last leaf from every branch would shower him’ (Edric 1995; 32).

The sense of desolation is overwhelming. Death is everywhere present in this new landscape of agriculture, a landscape that is built upon the deaths of the Aborigines that Lanne, as the symbolic last man, represents so concisely. The farmer is implicated in the genocide when he holds up something that Lanne assumes to be the severed finger of an Aborigine used as a tobacco stopper (Edric 1995; 33). The farmer’s wife has lost her baby due to the drought and he vents his outrage at the loss. He asks Lanne ‘Where’s the bloody justice in that?’ (Edric 1995; 33). His question needs to be read ironically though, as Lanne stands before him, the living proof of the genocide in which the farmer was both the beneficiary and the participant. It is hard to imagine a greater injustice than the one that Lanne symbolises.

In a final act of subversion, Edric steers his novel away from the logic of extinction implied in the role of Lanne as last man and moves towards the possibility of survival through a symbolic connection to the islander community and the continuation of Aboriginality that they represent. Lanne meets another Aboriginal man who is also struggling with his position in the newly formed society of Van Diemen’s Land. He gives Lanne an ‘obsidian pebble upon which was printed the small egg of a man’s thumb’ (Edric 1995; 164). He tells Lanne that it belongs to an Aboriginal man he was searching for, a man widely believed to be dead but who is in fact alive and living ‘with his wife. Another pure-breed’ (Edric 1995; 165). The possibility that Lanne is not the last man should bring him some comfort but we are told that ‘not once (before his death) did he fully understand the true nature of his own salvation or deliverance, and for the whole of that time he carried with him that small black part of this other lost man’ (Edric 1995; 166). The salvation that Lanne fails to understand is that his people will continue to exist after he is gone and will not become extinct, as racist science would have him believe. The novel makes this point by postulating a mythical family of

Aborigines still at large in the Tasmanian bush, but of course other families still survived on the islands of Bass Strait and a symbolic connection between these two seems apparent. While not as explicit or forthright in its views as *English Passengers*, the book nonetheless makes the point that regardless of the genocidal actions of the settler community, Aboriginality did not end with Trukanini or William Lanney but continues uninterrupted into the present.

Edric achieves a more fully realised view of Aboriginality precisely because he avoids a racialised conception of it. However, he also avoids the colonialist dichotomies that characterised Kneale's work by examining the other ways that power operated upon the Aboriginal people in both colonial times and in the present. This opens up the possibility of a more nuanced portrayal. In *Elysium*, Edric has presented a range of subject positions and examined the way those positions commanded, and were commanded by, colonial power. It is clearly a complex and insightful account. While this is not to say that *Elysium* is always successful, it does offer a vision of the kinds of representation that are achievable through intercultural dialogue and the testing of imagined models in literature (Langton 1993; 83). The dialectics of subjugation, victimisation, and resistance are present throughout the text – as shown in Lanne's exchange with the farmer – but they do not overwhelm the representation of Aboriginal identity. Instead, they act as the foundation upon which the narrative rests, a bedrock of history for the representation of Aboriginality to be built on.

Brian Castro considers many of these ideas in his novel *Drift*. He is also concerned with the unequal ways in which power is distributed in Tasmanian society and the imbalance that the process of colonisation established from the earliest days of settlement. It is a slippery narrative, one that defies any single reading. It has elements of the 'colonial binarisms' that Cooper (1994; 1517) suggests are commonplace in works that are attempting to give a voice to the historical subaltern, the assumptions of a totalized, autonomous social group that resists colonial power but is not engaged or complicit with it. However, *Drift* also works against these assumptions by examining how identity changes and shifts as the society in which it is situated changes around it, and how identity is paradoxically contingent upon skin colour yet not defined or delineated by it. In this regard, *Drift* is a representation of Aboriginality as a becoming,

the way Muecke described it, rather than a racial category as the novels in Chapter One regularly imagined it to be. Yet, in many ways, it succumbs to the easy post-colonial political views of colonised versus coloniser and the black and white morality that characterises such writings as it examines the experience of contemporary Aboriginal lives being lived in Tasmania.

Castro lays out his vision of Tasmania's genocidal history through the narrative involving white sealers in Bass Strait. Sperm McGann leads a raid on an Aboriginal camp in order to abduct women. He takes for himself a woman named WORÈ, a kind of Eve to his Adam. When she is wounded with a whaling gaff, he breathes into her 'wounded side and mumbled words, secret, arcane, and profane' (Castro 1994; 106), much as God breathed life into Adam's nostrils. The idea of creation is played out further when McGann establishes a 'tribe' in the Furneaux islands which he calls the Intercostals, a name which also 'alludes explicitly to that classic tool for constructing the "other", Adam's rib' (Barlow, 1998; 59). The Intercostals live in the manner of the Aboriginal tribes, wearing kangaroo skins, living in huts, and hunting their own food and they survive 'not through trade, but by means of their industrious concubines' – the abducted women – who pull the community together 'like cobwebs placed on a wound' (Castro 1994; 114). Sperm McGann's intention to create a new population comes out in a speech delivered to his fellow Intercostals.

'You have a duty towards progeny. Progeny will be the supply of labour. Progeny will be our salvation, our reward, our harvest... we will fashion a new mankind inured to all hardship, a hybrid of the greatest intelligence, native cunning and physical strength, and through it will evolve an equal and just society' (Castro 1994; 115).

His project of creating a 'hybrid of the greatest intelligence' is of course based upon sexually assaulting the women he has abducted. Consequently, the inherent violence and domination of this process renders his claims to be building 'an equal and just society' utterly without merit (Castro 1994; 115). The idea that a fair society might be built upon the obviously genocidal actions of the sealers is probably intended as an ironic comment. Here, Castro is inviting us to look beyond the sealer's narrative and extend the logic of Sperm McGann's exhortation to Tasmanian society as a whole,

which is an equal and just society only insofar as we take into account the genocide that it is founded upon. McGann's *Intercostals* therefore represent an encapsulation of the colonial process in Tasmania. Castro uses McGann and his *Intercostals* to draw attention to this moral dilemma of Tasmanian history, a problem authors and historians have been debating since the time of settlement. This contradiction – the idea of a just society founded on violent displacement – represents the most fundamental issue for many authors writing about contact history and constitutes the very core of the morality contained in their novels. For Castro, there is no contradiction however. The Tasmania we see in *Drift* continues to be an unjust, unequal society and B.S. Johnson's final suicidal act of terrorism, the destruction of a historical massacre site at Cape Grim, happens because he 'wanted to unburden himself of the weight on his chest' (Castro 1994; 256). He acts out of what Thomas McGann calls in the novel a hunger for 'ethical reappraisal and historical outrage' (Castro 1994; 256). It is, ultimately, an attack against the status quo of historical amnesia required to maintain the fantasy of equality and justice. Johnson tells McGann that it is a 'collective amnesia' which 'makes us all guilty, each to each', and by the closing pages we understand that guilt and his expression of it more fully (Castro 1994; 203).

The story of Sperm McGann's *Intercostals* is balanced against WORE's narrative of infanticide and resistance. The Aboriginal women suffer through his violence, learning to speak English and co-operating with the sealers, but in secret they actively resist the process of hybridisation that McGann has forced upon them. WORE tells us:

'I could tell him how I killed my babies... I kill them because they will be like me. They will be women which McGann will take and thrust his seed into them. I kill them because I follow this shame which I do not yet know how to resist since I now belong nowhere' (Castro 1994; 118).

Her infanticide destroys the project of creating a hybrid population. The critic Damien Barlow has identified WORE's 'counter-narrative' as placing 'McGann's notion of "hybridity" within its colonial context, illustrating the material effects of such practices as genocidal, violent and inextricably tied to processes of domination and power/knowledge' (1998; 62). For Barlow, the effects of McGann's sexual violence necessitate a reassessment of hybridity that recognises its basis in the genocidal process

of colonisation. This is broadly in line with Ian Anderson's view of the hybrid in his article 'I, the Hybrid Aborigine', in which he traces the notion of the hybrid back to the assimilation policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (1997; 7). Anderson believes that the hybrid Aborigine inhabits an ill-defined realm between the white and Indigenous worlds, but is emphatically neither (1997; 7). The intent behind assimilation is always to subsume the minority into the majority, the Indigenous community into the settler community. Employing the term hybrid to describe a person of Aboriginal descent might therefore be understood as an attempt to preclude access to Indigenous cultural and historical consciousness (Anderson 1997; 8). In effect, Castro is exposing the notion of Aboriginal biological hybridity as a genocidal force.

The counter-narrative, to borrow Barlow's term, of WORÈ's resistance to the project of hybridisation demonstrates the power that Aboriginal historical suffering has to shape the lives of individuals in the present by providing a traumatic undercurrent for their experiences. Yet, paradoxically, that same suffering also has the effect of providing a narrative of survival that likewise shapes the identity of Aboriginal Tasmanians in a more positive way. Emma and Thomas McGann live with the outcomes of Sperm McGann's violence, and in some sense they relive it. White men rape Emma McGann, just as white men raped her ancestor WORÈ. That brutality fosters her resistance against white oppression, as symbolised by the 'Whitey Sucks' tattoo across her breasts (Castro 1994; 214). Her brother Thomas McGann also lives with the consequences of Sperm's genocidal actions. While he understands himself as Aboriginal, his white albino skin affects the cultural experience of his identity, 'revealing both the interdependence of physical and cultural identity as well as the impossibility of escaping categorisation' (Wei Wei Lo 2000; 72). Thomas highlights the effects of Sperm's atrocities most accurately when he describes himself as 'black, but maybe not quite; not entirely... and that's much worse' (Castro 1994; 194). His experience of Aboriginality is always at odds with his unwanted white heritage. It is difficult, given this paradox of trauma and survival, to summarise precisely what WORÈ represents in the context of the novel. Bernadette Brennan contends that WORÈ, like Trukanini, 'can be read as an "emblem of extinction"' and that her name WORÈ meaning simply 'woman' might point to her symbolic function within the text (2000; 48). It would seem more likely, however, that WORÈ represents not extinction but rather

a form of origination. The references to her as an Eve to Sperm's Adam and her position as ancestral mother to the present-day McGanns suggests that she might best be understood as a kind of anti-Trukanini, or an emblem of creation and survival. Read in this way, we can see that *Drift* offers a powerful narrative of Aboriginal resilience and cultural continuation.

Cooper has stated that while resistance is significant, 'Resistance is a concept that may narrow our understanding of... history rather than expand it' (1994; 1532), and there is a case to be made that some of this narrowing is at work in *Drift*. The intensity of the focus on those particular aspects of Aboriginal identity that are expressed in relation to the struggle against colonial oppression seems to weigh heavily on the text. As a consequence, Aboriginality becomes something that must be endured in the novel. It is true that *Drift* needs to be understood as a work concerned with re-examining the colonial foundations of Tasmanian society in order to explain Indigenous suffering in the present, but the overwhelming attention given to the resistance facets of Aboriginal identity seems to deny 'any other kind of life to the people doing the resisting', as Cooper says (1994; 1532). Like Kneale, Castro adopts the subject positions provided by post-colonial discourse; the essentialist identification of Aboriginality as a negation of white European identity; the supposition that a colonised/coloniser dichotomy in the past necessitates an identical binary relation in the present day. However, at the same time, he is also deeply concerned with examining the roots of identity in race or other physical characteristics and with the ways that an individual's experience of selfhood necessarily resides in the perceptions other people have about that individual. It is a difficult balancing act to maintain. Ultimately, *Drift* offers a representation which promises to approach the complexity of Muecke's becoming, the experience of self which defies any stable or fixed definitions, but falls short of this goal due to its dependence on the notion of Aboriginal resistance as a way of expressing identity.

Colonialism, it has been noted, is a metaphor that illustrates a 'wide range of dominations', not all of which are actually contingent upon the process of colonisation (Stoler 1995; 199). It provides us with a narrative that 'assumes a coherent story' of what colonisation meant in the past and still means today (Stoler 1995; 199). But as a way of explaining the features of contemporary Aboriginal identity, it is not without its

problems. As we have seen, it tends to posit an Aboriginality constantly engaged in resisting imperial power as the realities of the nineteenth-century frontier are imposed upon the twenty-first century. Rather than continuing to rely on that metaphor as a way to explain Aboriginal identity, perhaps it is better to consider why the dichotomy of colonised versus coloniser continues to fascinate both historiographers and writers and shape contact literature in Tasmania. The post-colonial portrayals of the colonial subject appear in contact literature as a flattened creation, an identity defined more as a negation or an opposition than as a living experience, a becoming as Muecke described it. When imagined as a 'morality tale', this kind of analysis provides a very clear sense of right and wrong, of victim and perpetrator, but as a way of writing history it tends to 'eclipse how varied the subjects are created by different colonialisms' and result in a rather poor account of a complex period (Stoler 1995; 199). Ultimately, it results in problematic representations.





## *Conclusion*

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In writing this dissertation, I have endeavoured to follow Edward Said's advice; 'The job facing the cultural intellectual is therefore not to accept the politics of identity as given, but to show how all representations are constructed, for what purpose, by whom, and with what components' (1993; 380). The politics of identity, as Said implies, are central to a study of representation such as this one. The everyday reality for Aboriginal Tasmanians is that their identity has been, and continues to be, highly contested. The view of Aborigines as a doomed race, as they were imagined to be in the nineteenth-century, or an extinct race as they are sometimes imagined to be in the twenty-first century, is a representation constructed with components of both racist and imperialist discourses which has the effect of denying access to an authentic Aboriginal identity. It is also a representation that furthers the colonial project of dispossession by linking the

passing of the Aborigines with the newly emptied landscape now occupied by settlers. The challenge, as Said says, is to deconstruct the methods of this production and maintenance in order to get to the heart of the power relations that constitute the everyday realities of white and Indigenous Tasmanians. This is what I have sought to do.

In the first chapter, I argued that a distinction could be made between works that employ the components of extinction discourse and works that resist or subvert that discourse in some way. This distinction can be made based on the discursive elements at work in a text, including a tendency to eulogise over the lost Tasmanian race, a reproduction of the nineteenth-century trope of the last man or woman, and a reliance on the idea of biological hybridity to describe Aborigines with white heritage. These elements have their roots in extinctionism, the consensus of thought that grew up around Indigenous populations wherever they faced decimation because of European colonisation. In the second chapter, I explored the ways in which authors subvert extinction discourse by constructing more satisfactory, to use Langton's word again, representations of Aboriginality. The portrayals in the novels I looked at acknowledge the social basis of Aboriginality and the way in which Aboriginality is produced by the interactions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. As such, they do not seek to locate Aboriginality in either race or culture but prefer to examine the transformative effects of the social and the physical on an individual personality. However, the tendency of these authors to structure their representations around the colonial dichotomy of oppression and resistance often leads to portrayals that seem to squeeze the life out of Aboriginality as a living and lived identity and confine Aboriginal people to a role as imperial subjects. Ann Stoler noted that as a strategy for writing, 'nothing is gained by flattening history into a neat story of colonizers pitted against the colonized' (1995; 199). Rather, more attention needs given over to how power was co-opted, deflected, and maintained in colonial societies, and is still co-opted, deflected, and maintained in post-colonial societies.

With a view to this end, the ongoing dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is producing better working theories of Aboriginality as the input from Aboriginal Tasmanians continues to result in new understandings about their

experience. Nevertheless, the fundamental problem is still a lack of knowledge about the nature of Aboriginality in the twenty-first century and there is certainly a need to facilitate deeper and more open discussions between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in order to improve knowledge on both sides of the conversation. Cultural protocols are an essential component of this process of mutual comprehension. They allow non-Aboriginal people to engage with the subject in a manner that avoids alienating the Aboriginal community and they also provide a means by which Aboriginal Tasmanians can exercise some influence on how literature depicts them. The Tasmanian community has produced a set of guidelines called *Respecting Cultures*, an initiative of Arts Tasmania's Aboriginal Advisory Committee, as a way of establishing cultural protocols in Tasmania that will help to govern the interactions of non-Aboriginal artists with Aboriginal culture. In creating this dissertation, I have attempted to follow the protocols laid out in *Respecting Cultures*, in particular the notion that 'the portrayal of Tasmanian Aborigines as being extinct is offensive to Aboriginal people today' (Everett 2004; 18), in order to arrive at a satisfactory representation of Aboriginal culture. Of course, the models of Aboriginality discussed here are merely a part of the dialogue with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community and should by no means be considered as authoritative or exhaustive.

It is the sheer volume of non-Aboriginal portrayals of Aboriginality that is at the very heart of this problem. Langton has called this the 'elephant of colonial representation' (1993; 24) and her metaphor is an apt one for describing the overwhelming body of non-Aboriginal representation. Attempts to analyse and make sense of the vast body of literature by researchers are ongoing but constructions of Aboriginality by non-Indigenous authors continue to feature prominently in Tasmanian literature while novels written by Aboriginal Tasmanians are practically non-existent. Until the voice of the Aboriginal Tasmanians establishes some kind of prominence in fiction, the imbalance will ensure that Tasmanian Aboriginal culture and people are viewed primarily through the filter of non-Indigenous experience. Aboriginal cultural expression is highly visible in many other fields, the traditional arts like basket weaving and shell necklace making being perhaps the most conspicuous. The genres of poetry and biography have attracted a lot of attention from writers too. Fiction, however, seems to be an area that fails to excite the community in Tasmania. It is a shame. There is no

doubt in my mind that people would read with great interest anything that Tasmanian Aboriginal writers had to offer in the area of extended fiction.

*Appendix:*

*The Roving Party*

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They whistled for Black Bill through the frozen foredawn. He sat upright on his pallet and looked about. The fire in the hearth was cold and the room utterly without light. He listened above the darkness, above the slurs from the woman sleeping beside him, with his eyes closed and one ear bent towards the paneless window. Beyond the walls of their humpy was nothing but miles of bush, ancient country that seemed to crowd around like troops of the crippled, and as he waited he listened to those trees. Again came that long slim sound with his old clan name called behind it. A name he no longer had any good use for.

He doubled the blanket over his woman, over the mound of her swollen belly, and he pulled on his hat. His boots. All the while listening at the darkness. Then he swung the barkflap door outwards and stood in the hollow watching the huge columned trees slowly gain distinction as the sun flared alight. In that thin light the frosted grass was like quartzite and the air was damp and misted. He gazed out among the empty trees working his lower lip along his teeth and peering about and he was staring and chewing his lip a good few moments before he saw the first dog trot out of the underscrub. A wormy beast half hidden in the mistbands. Its snout to the air. Then behind it came another and another and another. The whole pack lapping at the air and nosing over the leaf litter for trace. Black Bill pushed back the brim of his hat.

Gathered a dozen yards from the humpy in the steaming scrub reefs was a hunting party of Plindermairhemener men and they were watching him across the mists. The spear clusters they gripped in their hands were as slender as the bluegum saplings all around and kangaroo mantles hung loosely off their long frames to hide the costume pieces beneath, trowsers old and rent and black with the blood of game they had taken, looted cotton shirts gone half to rags, and one fellow was got up in an infantryman's crosswebbing and another fitted out in a fine angola coat as if he was dressed for dinner. Their breath blowing in the cold. They were no longer a cast of relics from a time when the clans sang their country to life but men remade in this new world and as he watched those figures from the doorway he felt for the knife he kept always rigged between his shoulderblades.

Foremost amongst that singular horde was Mannalargenna. The Plindermairhemener called him headman but other men called him witch. He carried across his shoulder a waddy shaped from blackwood and stained with the filth of war and he twisted that vicious tool as he led his horde from the scrub. The frozen grass shattering beneath their bare feet. He was vain, had always been, and his wife had ochred his hair into long ringlets as precise as woven rope and indeed all the men wore their hair in this fashion, sculpted by the womenfolk, but only the headman walked across that ground like a man enamoured with the sounds of his own feet falling and he walked and the Vandiemonian watched him. He came before Bill.

nina kipli. nayri kipli. nina kipli nina tunapri palawa. He gazed up into Bill's face as he spoke.

narapa. Black Bill lowered his knife.

The clansmen arranged themselves on the bare earth beside Bill's humpy and they gestured him to sit also with open palms. They were freshly ochred and painted for war, pungent grease gleaming as if a sheen of water was upon their dark skin, and when Mannalargenna offered him a muttonfish shell of grease and ochre the Vandiemonian accepted and removed his hat and dabbed over his head with the foul mixture. Bill wore his hair cut tightly short after the white men of the district but the clansmen watched him with solemn regard and if their opinion of it was contemptive they gave no outward appearances. The headman again addressed Bill and this time he did so in english by way of showing him his place. For the Vandiemonian was as good as white by now. You come Tumer-ti we need you, he said. tunapri mina kani?

Black Bill studied his deeply creased face.

You come fight, the headman said.

Eh?

Fight with us.

Where? carnermema lettenener?

tromemanner.

Bill looked around at those grim visaged men of war and they met his eyes each and every one and he saw among their faces the bold expectations held for him.

You strong man you fight, the headman said. Come with us.

Black Bill was silent. He scratched at the old ritual scars on his chest. Old but full of feeling. He called to his woman to leave her bed behind and when no reply came forth he called again. His cries oddly deadened by the stays of mist between the trees. Soon she showed in the doorway bundled in a blanket and Bill asked for the meat to be brought out.

tawattya, she said to the clansmen but they looked away from her and shook their heads. Her hair was long for a Palawa woman. It seemed to upset them.

Her name what?

Bill faced the headman. Katherine.

Katarin, the headman said to her. You good woman. You bring food Katarin. Bring tea. Good woman. We talk.

She stared at him. Then vanished inside the hut.

Mannalargenna smiled and waited in silence until she returned with the carving board and a cold joint of kangaroo and they ate freely and passed the billycan of tea around every mouth. Over the smack of lips the headman praised Bill for the fine wife he had taken, her obedience, her silence, and the clansman looked to their chief as he stood and strutted in mock of his own proud wife. He raised their laughter by his portrayal of her arrogant bearing. The beard on his chin was rubbed and matted with ochre and the lank twists jiggled as red as a rooster's wattle while he walked about. Dark hands flapping at his sides, nose turned high. The men of his party laughed but Bill watched and held his tongue still.

The headman smiled broadly. My wife speak two words. I take one and leave one. Do not trust woman Tumer-ti.

Once more he sat among the men of his clan and he reached for the billycan then drank from the rim and he wiped his mouth and looked towards Bill and Bill nodded. By the doorway Katherine held her rounded belly and the headman waved a crooked finger at her.

She carry what?

I dont know, said Bill. The headman studied her a moment and rubbed his plagued left arm. It was a mass of scars where he'd tried to bleed the demon out in his youth.



Boy, he said. Strong boy. I know this. The cold sun in the trees as it loomed over the hills showed Mannalargenna's cragged features, the folds of his face, the strings of chewed leather looped around his neck. Here was a man who might part the very weft of the world by his own words. A man sung up and down the coast, sung even by his enemies. The whites wanted him for hanging and several had their own private funds stood against the receipt of his head for campaigns he had conducted upon them. But Black Bill looked away from him.

The headman said; A boy. My devil tell me.

There was another elder among that party, an old man of skin and sinew, and he summoned their eyes onto himself by beating his waddy on his palm. He was called Taralta and he alone in that clan knew the law and its application. He spoke quietly into the recess his tapping had created, his manner that of a man who understood the price of words when mischosen. His scarred face churlish. He exhorted long against the whites and decried their contempt for peace with ancient turns of phrase Bill could not comprehend, metaphors that had lost sense for all but a few old lawmen. He called the whites the cawing of the crow for morning. An inundation driving them into the heights of the mountains, the peaks of the trees. He adduced for the Vandiemonian a great litany of evils befouling his clan and on each point he drew attention to the culpability of the whites therein and the flagrant contempt they displayed for any notion of justice. As he spoke he beat his waddy upon his palm and it told of the blood pulsing through the flinty hearts of his clansfolk. In his hooded eyes was a hard edge of fury. He said that if you forgave a devil for eating your food, he would soon eat your children. Black Bill listened to the case put forth with his fullest care and he nodded and when the lawman was finished he wiped the running ochre from his forehead and looked into that lawman's face.

I am obliged to Batman, he said, and no one other.

Taralta widened his eyes upon mention of that name as if it was a thing in itself to cause offense. One or two of the seated clansmen, those who had something of the language, saw through Bill's meaning and they rendered it up for the lawman and soon that mob was staring at the Vandiemonian and waiting for Mannalargenna to speak but

the headman was rubbing that bedevilled arm of his as new spasms appeared upon his shoulder, rippling and flexing beneath the skin, and he closed his eyes and appeared intent on hearing whatever counsel it might whisper in whatever sordid tongue it used. Calling to him across the vastitudes.

bungana Batman, the headman said after a moment and the turn of his mouth was something ugly.

The Vandiemonian stood up. I got no more to say on the matter.

When he moved the men of the hunting company also moved, pushed themselves up by their spears, and the dogs wheeled about behind them like a consort come out of the underworld with their eyes aflame in the dawning light and they ranged around him warily. Mannalargenna climbed to his feet and slung his waddy across his shoulder.

Come fight.

No.

I say this. Knife is sharpen on stone. You come now. We find your stone.

Grey light curled above the gums. A single crow barked into the rising dawn. If there was more of a world beyond that small clearing and the few souls stood within, Bill knew nothing of it in those moments when the headman held him fixed in a glare. But the Vandiemonian would not be moved.

My father, said Mannalargenna, he tell me many thing. He like to speak. And I like to listen. Now you hear me Tumer-ti. You hear my story. The headman moved his left hand as he spoke and it seemed as if he was conjuring.

There was two brother you see. They live near a river them brother. They catch plenty crayfish in the river. Plenty crayfish. It was big river you see very big. They got long legs them brother they walk out that river and catch them crayfish. Under the rock. Then one brother he make the fire. Another brother he sing the song. Then they eat them crayfish you see. They sing and they eat. Always this way. They pass many happy day.

I remember it, said Bill. I heard it before.

You hear me Tumer-ti. You listen.

Bill looked around at the others. A dour mob. I aint concerned with yer stories, he said.

But the headman went on. Hunter come to the river. He is hungry hunter you see. He want crayfish. He see them brother eating crayfish singing song. He want crayfish too. He bring up spear. Here, the headman made a motion as if to raise something before continuing. He bring up that spear and he call out. I hungry you give me that crayfish. He hold that spear and he call out. But them brother they scared you see. They scared and they run. They run and they change. They change to wallaby and they jump. Now they jump and jump and the hunter he follow them.

One of the clansmen called out. waranta tapilti nayri, he said. They all began to move off.

makara, said Mannalargenna. The snap in his voice enough to stop them. They shuffled about but did as they were bade and he turned back to Black Bill.

So hunter he change too. He run and he change to that wallaby and he jump. Now three wallaby jump near river. They eat grass. They forget the crayfish you see. They eat grass and they drink water and they forget crayfish. Three wallaby near the river. Very big river.

Black Bill spat to the side. They was snakes was how I heard it told.

Snake?

Aye. Snakes.

powrana?

powrana. Snakes. Bill made a slithering motion with his hand.

No no no. Wallaby. You listen Tumer-ti. You Panninher man not Plindermairhemener. You listen to my story. Three wallaby near the river you see. Not

two and one but three. Them brother lost now you understand. They see plenty wallaby. But no see brother. Three wallaby near river eat the grass and drink the water but they forget. Who is brother. Who is hunter. They forget this thing. Now three wallaby. No one sing. Them all lost. All same you see.

Bill looked the headman long in the eyes. Those black abyssal holes. That makes no goddamn sense, he said. Not a jot of it.

You not hear. Hear nothing. Mannalargenna tapped at his temple. A wind was freshly gotten up in the gums and it dispersed the mists upon its coming. The headman's filthy shirt shifted in it.

I dont want no part of it, said Bill. You do what you think is right. Do what you have to. But leave me out of it.

The headman snorted. He glanced around at his warriors. Then without a word he turned and led them off into the scrub from whence they had appeared, the slow slap of their feet sounding over the rounded earth. Bill waited as those ragged charges melded once more into the bush and waited even after they'd gone, staring into the void they left.

He stood there a long while among his thoughts.

Inside the humpy he filled a tin bowl from the river bucket and unwrapped the soap cake from its leather. He soaped up his hair and rinsed away the clay and possum grease smeared thereupon. The water running bloodcoloured off his forehead. Then he soaped up and rinsed once more to be sure. The collar of his shirt hung limp and redstained about his neck as he ladled the washwater across his scalp and Katherine, huddled in her blankets, loaded the fire with wood and glanced sideways at him through the doing of it.

When he was done, when he'd emptied the water outside, he went into the corner of the humpy and found the old brown bessie kept beside their bed. A decent piece he'd acquired in barter for his pair of seasoned game dogs. Down the muzzle he poured a dose of powder, tamped in a ball and wadding and propped it loaded beside the front door. He lowered himself into the chair. A roving party would be striking out after

the Plindermairhemener in a week. Batman had agreed to cut him in on the bounty. Him and the Parramattas. Without their bushcraft, there was no hope of success.

Katherine badeyed the gun.

You see them again you'll be needin it, he said. But Bill knew the gun was only for show. If Mannalargenna meant harm, then harm would be done.

They would be nine. As the dray crawled over the bald hill it loomed long and blackshaped before the setting sun. Four prisoners hunched and jostling on the flatbed. Sun flaring in the wheelstruts. On the verandah the company of black men passed a pipe amongst themselves and watched the dray clatter ever closer. Black Bill was among them and he was freshly shaved and on his head was a widebrimmed stockman's hat pushed in at the crown. He pulled his turn on the clay pipe and gave it along to Pigeon as the cart inched down the mud track onto Kingston farm. With the Vandiemonian, with John Batman and his manservant Gould, with the Barewurrer men Crook and Pigeon newly come from Parramatta, and now the lags on the flatbed, there would be nine all told for the roving party.

An unchecked throng of Batman's hunting dogs made a show of barking at the horse but quit when it kicked out and sent one bowling off amongst the bracken, bloodied and lifeless. The dray drew up beside the farmhouse, a cockeyed hut hewn from the stuff of the scrub, and the shackled men on the bed looked it over like it was pestilent and indeed it was a poorly sight. Walled with rounds of gumtree and rooved with bark shingles and bleeding smoke from a stone chimney. Its harsh angles entirely at odds with the fields and hills behind it. A pair of soldiers stepped off the bench and immediately the souwester filled their coats where their silver buttons had been sold or traded away and like that farmhouse their appearance spoke of the deprivations that were a general woe of the colony. They trained their firearms upon the prisoners.

Come off there you bastards, said the overseer.

The fettered men moved across the planks of the bed clanging like dulled cowbells and moving in one herd as the overseer signalled them down. With the stock of his firearm the overseer formed them up into a line abreast beside the cart. Now pay attention to me, he said. Pay it good. For I will carve my name into the first cunt what doesnt. He brandished his weapon before them. His red coat had long since faded to a dull pink and the holes at his elbows were patched with tanned hide. You hold that line and you keep your damn eyes down on that dirt there. You ponder on that dirt cause fuck me if you lot aint more useless than a hatful of it. I'm talkin to you you old pisser. Are you listenin? Bloody look at me when I talk.

They are a mongrel lot.

Black Bill looked around. William Gould had come up from the back paddocks and was addressing Bill as he watched the unfoldings. Gould made barely a better sight than the prisoners in his castoffs and his thin hair trailed wildly on the wind but he drew up his face into a frown at the state of the new men and passed his clenched eye over them. Rag and bone and bugger all else, said Gould.

Seems that way dont it, said Bill.

Of that foursome one was a round shouldered old fellow whose hands were inked over in outlandish devices that seemed amassed from the netherparts of the globe, a great Kushite obelisk done in blues atop which was perched a royal eagle, the image of a biblical ram girt all about by Aramaic script, and writ upon the flesh of his neck were a series of geometrics like the motifs worn by cannibals of Otahiti or Owhyee, some faded and illdefined and others freshly cut into his skin. This old lag fixed the overseer with a mean stare such that spoke of his contempt.

Eyes down you dog. Eyes down. Dont you bloody look at me! The overseer was signalling with two fingers out for the fellow to look at the ground. Keep your damn filthy eyes off me, he said. The old lag lowered his head but his disdain remained upon his face and that shabby mob kept their heads turned while the junior private shuffled

along to unchain their basils and toss them ringing onto the flatbed. The men stood about rubbing their abraded ankles and waiting for whatever came next.

Then Gould called out. Here he comes.

They all turned as John Batman appeared. He stood in the shadow thrown by the house and so placed in that darkness he seemed a towering black presence devoid of detail or texture. He took stock of what he saw arranged before that horsecart like a man assessing a wound. In one hand he held two dead lambs that hung loosley, their heads hacked off by means of some butchering instrument. When Batman came forward into the sunlight, he was as bloody as a surgeon and stained to the elbows and he covered that short distance holding those lambs out before him. The blood red on their fleece.

The overseer followed him with his eyes. He wiped one hand against his pants and held it out towards Batman as he approached. His face wore a smile but it gathered at the edges where it was forced upon him. Batman held out a bloodied hand which the overseer took.

Bickle. I supposed they'd send you, he said. His breath steamed out through his beard.

Werent no else man enough to face them roads.

For your wife, he said. First birthins of spring. He had a voice serrated by the overuse of his pipe and a fondness for rum taken straight and it caught on his words.

She'll be most pleased she will Mr Batman. Bickle took one of the tiny headless lambs.

You got that money yet?

Bickle laughed a short tight cough. Now I told you about that. It wasnt no fairly drawn hand.

So you're callin me a swindler?

I'm callin you a swindler. A chisler. A bilk. You choose which suits you best. The overseer looked around at his mate and at the black men arranged upon Batman's verandah, pleased with himself.

There was a little swell about Batman's throat where he swallowed the word he'd almost used. Remember where you are, he said.

All I know is you turned a four when it was needed. And four dont come up too often.

Well it come up. Now you owe me.

I owe you? Christ. Let a man be, would you. No doubt that canny luck of yours will show next time we belly up at the table. No doubt at all. You might just have your money then.

Batman nodded, a slow and measured rocking of the head, but it showed no mood of satisfaction. Instead he handed the remaining lamb in his hands to the second redcoat and the young fellow dipped his head in thanks. The horse huffed and shied in her harness as the soldier dumped it on the flatbed. The gumtrees around the farmhouse lashed in the keen winds and the wind also stirred the brim of Batman's hat as he walked before the line of men stood with their heads bowed and shivering in their rough hessians. He cleared his throat and spat.

You have been told no doubt what I mean to see through. What that means for youse fellows is this; if you've no stomach for killin, so say you now.

The four men looked about but they each of them kept quiet. John Batman continued.

Now I have as much regard for peace in my composition as anyone. But I have been given a contract by the Governor and I intend to collect on it.

The men shifted nervously.

How many ayou had seen a black before today? He indicated with a nod of his head the two men of the Parramatta where they leaned their long bodies against the



uprights of his verandah. The new men seemed unsure of what he expected and they stood mutely rubbing their abrasions. He came around where he might better catch their eyes or look down into their grubby weathered faces. You boy?

No sir.

No?

No sir not a one.

Well take a look. Go on. They're tamed.

The boy raised his head, as did the rest, to study the black men. In turn those three regarded the lags across that open space of rutted grass and mud which served as a turning circle for carts. They were men alike of bearing and build, tall and wellshaped for bush life, clothed but for their bare feet. Pigeon kept himself shaved and well tended and made a fine figure in his callico jacket. But his mate, John Crook, he wore on his head a red wool cap mottled with filth and holes. It was Crook who leaned forward and addressed to the new men some derision in his own speak. His hand waving in dismissal.

Thinks it's white dont it, said the painted lag. Kit up like that.

It was a cold silence that followed. Pigeon came down off the verandah and stepped forward. For a moment he put out his hand to the men, as any gentleman might, but withdrew it when they plainly ignored him. It may have been that they did not know what to make of him, a free man in the employ of Batman. Instead they averted their eyes. No doubt they saw in him something of their own failings at the matters that made men men. The authority. The restraint. Only the boy put out his hand for the Barewurrer man.

Good mornin to you, said Pigeon.

The boy took his hand.

Here John Batman interrupted the niceties. He addressed the men and they listened, the folds of his greatcoat flowing like robes as he motioned at the black men.

These fellows are of a different turn, he said. They've had something of the wildness beaten out of them. Something I say. Not everything. Now the sort you shall encounter in the scrub hereabouts will not shake yer hand. My word. They are a people...

He looked along the row of faces all fixed upon him and the wind blew as cold as river water down the valley where Kingston was situated, funneled through the foothills below the white cotton crown of Ben Lomond, and it set his eyes watering. The effect of those tears was of a man speaking in deep passion, fullhearted, enjoining them to rise up in common cause. The lags watched him and tried to still their chattering teeth. He finished.

A people who havent the smallest inclination towards layin down for us.

From a pocket of his coat he produced a quartflask of Indian rum that ran thickly up the glass then resettled and he pulled the stopper. Not the smallest, he said. He threw back a swallow. A medicinal reek went upon the air in an instant. The Governor is payin us to instill a lesson in the obtuse skulls of these darkskins. But I tell you this right now. It may be the blacks what do the instilling. It may be them affixing our bodies to the trees as you would the common criminal of old. I will offer no indemnity against that outcome. None whatsoever.

Wracks of cloud glowed blood red and the last blooms of sun behind the horizon cast Batman tall and intense in the half light as he looked down upon them. The wind was plainly heard to crash in the bluegums along the hills as it tumbled down the valley. But the four men by the dray only picked at their boils and studied the ground as they had been commanded and if they were averse to the idea Batman was proposing they gave no show of it. From his pockets Batman produced a cake of negro head. He approached the assigned men holding it before him and he placed it in the palm of a blackbearded fellow who closed his fist around that cake and fixed Batman with his one good eye.

You are a top sort you are, he said to Batman. Look here lads we have some chew for ourselves. He divvied the cake four even ways. They rubbed loose the fibers and dipped it into the folds of their cheeks. As they chewed Batman spoke.

There is among them a chief. A warrior. A witch. He is called Mannalargenna. We dont kill this man we want floggin I tell you. Mark him by his beard which he keeps clayed. You must bring him down before all others.

The men spat strings of juice on the ground and nodded their heads and wiped their chins. Their eyes always upon Batman.

Bickle pointed to a line on the printed warrant. Make your mark here if you'd be so kind, he said. It was a crumpled certificate he'd pulled from inside his coat and smoothed out upon the bench of the horsecart. Batman read the thing over narroweyed then carried the paper inside his house to sign his name to it. In that time Bickle put the new men to unloading sacks marked as flour and tea and sugar and tobacco from the dray and in the low sun their shadows grew long and spidered, a procession of storybook horrors shifting over the lumpen turf. All the while he goaded them on with threats of a skinning at the end of his whip.

Look here, Black Bill called from the verandah as John Batman returned with the warrant. They dont have no shoes.

Batman raised his hat to chase the mosquitoes from his neck then resettled it. He studied the bare feet splaying through the mud as they worked to unload. Sergeant Bickle where are their shoes?

Dont recall I saw no shoes on the requisition.

What use are the bastards without shoes? Uhh?

I done what I was ordered. Address your requests to the Police Magistrate and he'll dispatch us forthwith.

Batman shook his head. That no-account wants a ball sendin through his bloody carcass.

Bickle beamed a clutch of rusty teeth. Seems your crows dont need no shoes.

He raised his gun at the Parramatta blacks and at the Vandiemonian and clicked with his tongue. They showed him no kind of deference but rather glared at the soldier where he stood mocking them, their hands whiteknuckled around the uprights and their jaws firmly set. A month ago the Parramatta men were stamping on the browned grasslands of New South Wales, now their feet sank inch deep in the miserable damp of Van Diemens Land. They'd walked the August snow slurries and the mud and river marshes and felt the thorns of the pines through their soles and would not be shod by anyone.

Christ look at the boots on that one, said Bickle as he lowered his firearm. Black Bill had on a pair of boots cut in the fashion of a horseman and shined up fresh. They were boots that might well seem improper on a man engaged in working for himself, the sort rather that passed at eyelevel as a mounted landowner rode past his workgang or showed from the hems of a pair of magistrate's pantaloons. The stitching was well waxed and shined against the boots and the leather had been polished with a lump of glass much in the manner of saddle skirting to give it a high gloss. Indeed John Batman's own boots were of congruent quality but he was a man of means and sway in the colony.

He's stolen them from somebody, said Bickle. Then he laughed and choked and spat on the dirt and some of the game dogs came trotting on to scrap over the sour oyster until he kicked them away and sent them off in a cower. John Batman looked him straight in the face.

I tell you what. You get them off his feet and you can keep em.

The overseer worked a spit cud around his mouth while he summarised Black Bill from hat to heels, his hardset eyes betraying his opinion of what he saw there.

You get them off his feet and I'll call it quits on that money. Call it square.

Bickle nodded slackly.

Go and show him some sport. He aint much.

What is he? Six foot?

Sixish. But he's as untrained as the dog in the street.

That's as may be.

A man of your history ought not to worry.

Bickle never took his eyes off the black man where he was stood upon the verandah. Quits you say?

My word on it.

Aye. Well then.

He removed his cap and shrugged off his regimental coat then he approached the farmhouse where the Vandiemonian was waiting. His own rotten boots squelching over the ground. He came before the verandah and dropped his cap on the dirt and with a small motion of the fingers he called Bill down.

Black Bill was a big fellow. Meaty. He dipped his head under the crossbeam as he stepped off the decking, his dark face darker still shadowed beneath his hatbrim, and when he moved the musculature beneath the gleam of his skin pulled taut, the cords of his forearms like pulleys. He seemed ignorant of the sergeant's intent or perhaps contemptive of it. For he never removed his hat. He waited there before the farmhouse as near a picture of calm as you would ever likely see. Those boots shining on the ends of his legs and his eyes almost as bright. The lags had caught on to the happenings Batman had stirred up, heard the grave tones of voice being employed and they dropped their loads and gathered near the dray to better see what might follow. William Gould seeing them so gathered was about to make them sorry for it when the overseer called out.

Come ere now, he said, and givem up. He raised his naked fists like some village pugilist calling men to take the ring.

But Bill held his ground. Stay back, was all he said but the overseer closed that distance by skipping his feet to hold his stance correct, skipping on his toes and closing.

He lashed out with a right. Bill was up to the task and he moved his head and shuffled back and when the overseer came again, faster, he struck out with his fist.

The strike sat the soldier on his hind quarters. He was up quicksmart but Bill was over him. Snapped him straight to the face. So hard that the wet slap sound startled the horse. The overseer staggered under the blow but righted himself.

You're done for fucker, he said.

Bickle wiped his face. Blood messing the front of his filthy undershirt, blood in his teeth like a fiend on the kill. From inside some disguised pocket of his coat he drew a little highland dirk and displayed it. He circled Bill, blade outheld and great bloody strings swinging from his chin. You miserable nigger, he said.

The fellow lunged and Bill stepped aside and then he lunged again but Bill swayed back like an oarsman so that the blade merely opened a gash in his shirt. He removed his hat and tossed it aside. Eyes revealed as dark as coals in a dead fire's heart. He ran a hand across the gash and assessed the overseer where he was positioned, dirk gripped for another pass. Warm blood drooled down the insides of his shirt.

And when the overseer lurched forward Bill came inside his swing and snapped him upside the chin with a punch that sent his head back brutally. The overseer stumbled but held his feet somehow. Already the swelling around his eye was growing blue and bulbous and he looked about as if he was seeing the place for the first time. Unsteady on his feet. But no one spoke for a call off. Bill allowed the overseer a moment to renew himself somewhat and find what he could by way of sense but the fellow came again quickly. They fell down grappling each other and the knifeblade flashed in the sunlight and suddenly there came a crack as the Vandiemonian rammed his forehead into the soldier's face and put him out cold and bloodied. He rolled the fellow off and stood up and retrieved his hat. He checked the cut on his ribs then replaced the hat. His wardrum heart sounding inside his shirt.

The overseer's face sat like broken fruit beneath his overgrowth of black hair and the blood flowed from his mouth mixed in drool. The private came alongside and John Batman also and together they raised him upright, those loosened eyes rolling

about in their skullholes as he tottered to his feet, and they held his arms until he was righted whereupon he leaned down to spit mouthfuls of blood.

That's a goodun, Bill called to the overseer where he wavered and wiped his mouth. He raised his head.

A goodun? he said.

Bill dipped his chin towards the dirk.

Aye. She cuts fair. Good Scottish steel that. When Bickle spoke his bloodied lips stumbled over his words. You cut?

Not much, said Bill. He touched his chest.

Those men who'd gathered in audience whispered between themselves and spat on the mud until John Batman waved them away. Slowly they moved back to their portage. He's flogged you like a rented mare sunshine, he said to Bickle.

The overseer took up his knife where it lay on the grass and cleaned the blade off on his forearm and spoke without looking up at Batman.

He made his case. I see now I was in error.

The razored wind playing over the fields caused them to pinch up their eyes. In the far distance the sheep turned as if blown so by the winds and Bill sat a moment on the verandah watching their mass turn and coagulate in the last of the sun. Come spring that wind bowled down out of the hills as he'd known it to his whole life and curled the trees over and set the clouds skating and the old folk followed that salted breeze from the coast into the tall western hills where the snow dried before it, harrying the kangaroo herds of the lowland plains with their spears, their dogs. He held his cut chest and gazed up at the mountain. mina carney he mengana knife, he said to Batman.

narapa, said Batman. mina tunapri.

Dawn crept up like a sickly pale child. William Gould walked over the frosthardened mud to the stables and went man to man nudging the assignees awake with the toe of his boot. He dropped a pile of clothing on the ground and stood by as the assignees roused themselves and stripped out of their slops. They pulled on the pants and undershirts and workshirts. A turned and mended coat was among the pile and the boy had hold of it but he was shoved off by the blackbeard who wrenched the coat from his hands and drew it onto his own back. Over everything they hung rawhide vests stitched from an assortment of skins that shared little accord of colour or shape. Then the four bound their feet in the castoff prisoner's hessians for want of shoes, glancing about at each other but saying nary a word against it.

Outside in the sunshine Ben Lomond was a rise of crag and battlement white with silvered snow and stacked with buttresses and the mountain's shadow jagged across the fields and where it lay the ground was grey and iced. The assignees squinted into the light or put their hands before the sun as they took stock of the squares of land engirdled by chock and log fences and the animals which seemed an even mix of bigboned mutton ewes and Bengal-cross cattle meant also for their beef. The little huts of the shepherds scattered about all smoked serenely against the pure morning. No doubt to their eyes the whole of Kingston farm, John Batman's own hunk of country, was a swathe of order hacked out of the chaos, a stamp of authority hammered into the very woodwork of Van Diemens Land. The assignees looked upon that farm and saw therein the ardor of the man who'd made it.

But other men saw otherwise and Black Bill was one such case. He found John Batman working at his makeshift shambles. A ewe, laid open at the throat, was raised up by her hocks on a block and tackle and Batman was leaning against her as he peeled the woollen skin away with a finebladed knife which he stropped occasionally on a belt hung from the crossframe. The pooled blood beneath the ewe was darkly viscid and flecked with ants and long strings of her viscerals hung from the stomach cavity. What Bill saw when he surveyed that grant were the ancient constructions of the Plindermairhemener, the precisely burned plains carved over generations to advantage the hunter, the songlands called up anew on bellowed voices. Upon those constructions



was overlaid a nomenclature that claimed this quarter as white but that mere act had not obliterated anything of the old ways, no, and those clans remained in their abiding relevance to that place as they had imagined and created it.

Black Bill held the ewe's foreleg outwards as Batman bonesawed the leftside shoulder joint and as he doubled the leg backwards the ugly sound of giving bones popped in the silence.

Said Batman; You seen them smokes?

I seen em.

Away above the forested flanks of the mountain, as white as the frayed strings of a fiddle, hung two smoke trails just starting to bend in the new morning winds. They emanated from some deeply hidden quarter to the east of the mountain. Country known only by the clans that walked it.

They wont wait for us I reckon.

Bill shook his head. No. That they wont.

The foreleg came away under Batman's knife and Bill shouldered it onto the butchering stand nearby. Batman wiped his arms off. These reprobates'll eat better than landed gentry by Christ.

No sooner had he spoken it than the men in question came ambling towards them from the stables, led across the frosted ground by William Gould. They made a miserable sight kitted out in furs and barefoot but for the rags bound and tied at their feet. Gould had in his arms a collection of fowling pieces which he handed out to the assignees and they turned those pieces in their hands and seemed suddenly to understand the makeshift disposition of the bountyhunting company and their brows knit up and their jaws hardened. For they were illused weapons worn by the passing of a thousand hands and of that selection not one was fit for any purpose more than culling sick animals. The rust had been filed back along the barrels, the stocks nailed up where the weather had split the grain, and they'd been slung off oily kangaroo leathers barely tanned and still furry.

John Batman dried his gory hands on a towel. Your name?

Jimmy Gumm.

Uhh?

Jimmy Gumm sir.

You?

It's James Clarke sir. Most calls me Horsehead but.

And you Maypole?

Howell Baxter sir. His voice writhed up from down inside his long frame like someone speaking from a well.

Welshman are you?

That I am Mr Batman.

You shot a man before Maypole?

Not without call Mr Batman.

Well you have call now.

Baxter tapped his weapon. This here gun's no good, he said. That particular piece had been restraightened under the blunt side of an axe and was now given to firing along a trajectory which seemed conceived by a lunatic. He made to hand the damaged firearm back, but Batman only stared at him.

You'll find them fine sport without a gun. Most spirited.

The assignee lowered his eyes, then held the gun to his chest. Stood off a ways was a boy of barely gaoling age. He had his arms wrapped around himself against the cold that blew down the valley and he scowled out of a tightfisted face at the men and their business.

Do you know guns and their handlin lad?

I do.

The other men shook their heads. He dont know nothin of the sort, said Horsehead.

He has a knack for lyin dont yer, said Gumm.

Three darkeyed lags and John Batman and Black Bill the Vandiemonian all watched the boy and a few beats of the heart went by when everything was still and it might have been those many eyes on him or something else within the boy but he would not yield. He chewed the insides of his gaunt cheeks as he glared into the faces of those men. The cock of his chin urging them to take umbrage and come at him. Indeed, his sallow skin seemed to belie the fire smoking in his belly. Batman nodded his head, waved a gun over from Gould. He passed that weapon to the boy.

Either way you'll know it soon enough, he said.

A wooden balance and a pack of iron weights were taken from the storshed along with sacks of flour, tea, and sugar and William Gould put the men to measuring the flour into ten pound portions. Sugar and tea were split between the men at sugar three ounces a day and tea a half ounce. Once packed, these rations would feed them for a week as they walked the backcountry, forty pounds or more hauled in kangaroo skin bags putting a curve in their spines and a bend in their knees. Gould held the balance while the men cut down the portions then took their weight against an iron counter, the little sacks being tied off with twine as they were finished. John Batman stood by in his heavy greatcoat sipping rum from a pocket flask and overseeing the work as it progressed.

Do you have a name? Batman said to the boy.

Thomas.

Lad, you waste that there flour and you go hungry.

The boy brushed what flour he could off his arms into the open mouth of the portion sacks. His hair would have been a fair sandy shade but for being matted with filth and it sat square razored across his forehead. He gave the gravest of nods as he

went on adding flour to one side of the scales and the tendons showed through the skin of his neck. Jimmy Gumm watched the boy also. He put down a sack of tealeaves from which he was measuring and spat in his hands and rubbed them over.

Be a good boy and hand me another, he said.

The boy paused in his work. I aint yer boy.

No. You was mine I'd beat three colours of snot from you.

The others laughed at that small exchange. They raised their heads from the divvying and looked around.

What are you laughing at? the boy said. He had gone hard about the eyes. They looked at him and stopped and by turns they bent their heads back to their work. Jimmy Gumm leaned over and removed from the pile beside the boy a little knotted sack and as he moved away he cuffed the boy once around the ear, a decently weighted blow that rocked the boy backwards, then he returned to filling the nine bags he now had with tealeaves. Sheep were heard to wail in the far off. That lonely mewling almost as loud as the boy's low voice when spoke. You wont touch me no more if you know what's good fer you, he said.

I know what he done, Gumm said. There was an eerieness about his eyes, one of which wandered loose of the other, searching and never finding. I know what old Mal done to you, he said. He done what he done to all the lads.

The boy didn't look up. There came again the punctuation of sheep bleating. He wiped his forehead and left a track of flour thereupon. The other men watched.

He was puttin it around that lockup. Choice words they was too. Told to anyone who'd listen. Old Mal said to me, he said Jim, he said I never even got a squeal out of him.

The men laughted at this. The boy's face remained blank though as he worked from the flour sack and filled the smaller one at his feet. His hands purest white. He scooped up more, filled another sack. A misty drift of powder rising about him.

You'd best be careful boy. Elsewise you might get more of the same out there in the quiet of the wilds. A young buck like you.

This time Gumm wasn't laughing.

The boy ceased what he was doing. Something was changed in him. He brushed both hands into the sack and in one calm action he picked up his heavy ended fowling piece and flipped it about. Took it by the barrel. Two white handprints were left upon the stock. He stepped towards Gumm, moving like a man at some trifling matter.

What's this? Gumm glared up at him. But even while the words were shapes in his mouth the boy was bringing the butt down across his head and Gumm raised his arms up as the boy swung again, fullblooded, heaving, and he cried out in horror as the heavy piece fell on his crown, his shoulders. No one made any motion towards them. The boy struck again. Blood ran freely from Gumm's forehead. He scurried off across the bare earth on his hands and knees and the boy followed him. Waling him over the back. Christ Jesus Christ Jesus, Gumm was saying.

A sodden crack then Gumm went limp. The boy held the bloodied piece ready but brought it down no more. John Batman pushed back his coat and spat and ran his eyes over Gumm where he was laid out cold in the muck.

Turn him over so he dont choke at least, he said.

The boy rolled the bloodied fellow over and stood looking down on the battery he'd done as Gumm moaned and writhed on the mud and the life inched back into him. It was enough. He walked back to his bags with the eyes of the other men on his every step.

You save that for the blacks, said Batman. No bastard here wants to see it.

But the boy never even glanced at him. He went once more about the packing and weighing of flour, tying off each sack as he went, and he kept himself tightly drawn as if he might huddle down out of sight but those men saw the jitter in his fingers and heard the quick breaths he drew. He sat there huddled but utterly unmasked.

The axe rang upon the hardwood, struck it like flint, and Katherine raised it once more above herself then hauled it down. Her back curving. The head bit deep and split the log evenways so she reached for one half and sat the rankly fragrant hunk again on the block where she circled the axe about and cut that piece also into pieces. Every toll of the axe coming back a moment later off the mountain. She had a decent pile cut for Mrs Batman's stove and wanted only a few more for the fireplace. The handle hissed through her palms as her upperhand slipped down the polished wood and the blade passed cleanly through the log then buried in the block beneath. She stood there in the new silence, her hands still on the handle, looking across that oblivion of grazing land. Her body performing those blunt motions so wholly unrelated to that hallowed world she stored inside her, as if she was shorn of her foundations and set forth on the breeze. In her belly the baby struggled and she put a hand there to contain it.

We'll be back in a week or so.

She turned around. Black Bill was standing with his hat in his hands and as he ran the brim through his calloused fingers the rabbit felt huffed. He held his chin out like a boxer. She tugged the axehead loose of the block. Brought the weight above her head then down upon a square of wood. The collision jarred up her arms.

Mrs Batman will put you up here at night. In one of them huts.

I go home.

She pulled the axe up once more. Bill stood by, watching her minutely. Over the paddocks the shepherds were rousing up their flocks for the pens. Otherwise there was just the scratching of Bill's hat in his fingers.

And what if nine aint enough to take him? said Bill.

bungana Mannalargenna not hurt me.

Woman, he'll hang yer limbs from the trees.

No. I go home.

Bill slowly exhaled. Think of the child.

She turned to face him then. I think. Always. But you. You follow Batman.

He puts food in front of us. We are in his debt.

Then dont eat his food.

Well, he said. I'm wasting breath here.

He replaced his hat and strode down the grassy slope towards the little fire the new men had burning and around which they had gathered themselves to brew tea.

The morning frost still on the paddocks was steaming off into the ether, rising as white as lost souls, when John Batman emerged from the treeline. He walked through those gums with his greatcoat dragging over the undergrowth and his arms full of bits of bark and grass, walked into the few bolts of sunlight coming through the clouds. He passed the storeshed and the shambles still rigged with two lonely hanging ewe's hocks that spun on the ends of their ropes and he sat himself spreadlegged on the ground by the cookfire the men had burning. Black Bill was there, and Pigeon and John Crook of the Parramatta, all crouched at the coals sipping at some tea in wooden mugs and those dark faces studied Batman as he worked the bark hulls he'd been carrying out flat. They saw what he was about and John Crook reached into the fire's gut and sorted through the coals for something of use to Batman. He placed a few choice embers on the bark and on the moss he'd spread there. Batman then rolled the coals and the bark into one long cudgel which he bound up with twists of grass.

On the other side of the fire, stationed away from the blacks, the assignees studied the goings on but they did not apprehend the purpose of that implement. They scratched at the boils infesting their necks and Jimmy Gumm sat cradling his head, his

beard and hair matted with dried blood. John Batman blew into the opening, blew the coals into life, and smoke oozed from the firestick as he stood up. The midmorning sun was cast over like a candle behind a woollen blanket and they'd taken no breakfast but the smokes above the hill put an urgency into Batman's planning.

On yer feet, he said.

The Parramatta men led the party away from the farmhouse around the archaic curves of the fire plains where the unburned ground was dressed in saplings and the bracken grew as thick as grass. The rangy forms of the black men walking out to the fore as the hatless assignees came behind. They made eastward along the boundary of Kingston, tracking beside the sheer wall of forest that rose from the fields, going until they reached the northern rim of Batman's holdings. Here the stands of whitefleshed and bulbous gums and the fiddlebacked acacias and the gauntly made myrtles were a vast interwreathing. If men indeed indwelled the lightless hollows of that otherworld, they were men who might find commonality with the scores of prisoners disgorged from the hulks onto wharves in Hobart, men unequalled in their loathing for confinement. Perhaps those hunting plains were some small expression of a desire for wind upon skin, of sun upon face, that forest denied. So that beggardly clutch all hung in rags and animal pelts and rusted firearms put forth into the forest with the white of their common breath fluming, walking that ground under them like pilgrims guided by the word of a demented god.

It was a hard slog that first morning. Here the earth was barren and rocky and snow stood in the shadowed clutches lingering on from winter. It was through old country they went, a thousand generations black and one white. They walked hours up the foothills and down the gutters and they passed through a draw of conifer stags burned out by wildfire where a foul wind stirred the branches clacking one against another and



they wound through a gully of skeletons strewn with ash that crackled under their feet and filled the quiet they left for themselves. In the distance the southern approach of Ben Lomond rose out of clefts of forest and its bald peak was noosed in clouds. They followed the Parramatta men ever towards it. Around noon they took a halt to eat. Treeferns made a vault overhead and the men crouched in the shadows picking leeches from their feet and waiting for food. William Gould had a bag of smoked meat for their breakfast and he distributed a few strips to every man until he had one last strip remaining.

Give it to Black Bill over there, Batman said. The assigned men had been eyeing the last meat and now Horsehead pulled his lip back in disgust.

Why dont he eat them boots instead, he said. The others were silent though. Bill worked the meat around his mouth as he leaned on his fowling piece, the ligatures of his jaw flexing and his gaze always on the wisphaired man crouched across from him. He chewed and chewed and passed a water canteen back and forth with the Parramatta men and spat mouthfuls to darken the stones and watched that old man all the while. They lingered a moment longer in the standing of treeferns while the assigned men rebound their feet and then that slipshod militia once more lurched into the scrub.

They walked all day and deep in the afternoon as the circular saw sun kerfed into the hills they came upon a shallow rockface and Batman bid them to scale it, one pulling up another until all stood on top. They eyed the stretch of country rolling around the bend in the earth away below. It was a sheet of bluish green that humped over the hills the way a sheep's fleece would if thrown over rocks and the native hunting grounds made a patchwork of that textured expanse where the grasslands showed through and the ragged herds of kangaroo could be seen even at this distance turning as one upon the pastures. What had their attention though was not the country but a twist of smoke hung straight in the still air. It was a few miles distant, east of the mountain. Those disquiet faces

staring. A cloud shadow crossed the forest like the silhouette of a ship's hull across the seabed. They lowered each other down the rocks, making what they could of any hand holds until their feet hit once more the damp ground. But Black Bill stayed on that lookout. He was glaring at the crawl of white smoke writ large against the bright sky and sucking a gumleaf between his lips as he watched until in time the men called him down, whistled, waved, and he turned away to join them.

They made camp as the light drained from the sky and their breath huffed in the cold gray air, a miserable camp beneath a mountain pine that had grown around a rock and split into two snaking halves and was near onto dead. All about was ringed by a copse of yellowed candlebarks. The sky looked like rain but the weather held and only the chill came down, making their numb hands jar as they snapped limbs off windfall trees and they piled firewood in the lee of that strange pine. Batman made a fire off his firestick and the assignees watched the little flame take as he blew and banked wood on top and they crowded in for its heat. It was a damp stretch of bush they camped within. Moss crept up almost everything and the fust of dead wood and mould filled the nostrils. Mushrooms as round and white as skulls glowed otherworldly in the shadows. The assignees unwound the bindings from their feet and shook the filth off and placed the rags near the fire to dry and in the throw of the firelight the men hauled out their portions of flour and added a pound or so each to a communal damper that William Gould worked up on a slab of bark. A wind picked up that laid the ragged fire over and made it hungry. No one spoke but they each of them listened to the darkened forest beyond and clutched their loaded firearms across their knees.

Black Bill took himself from beside the fire and sat with Pigeon and Crook where they shared a pipe at a small remove from the rest. The pipe went between the Parramatta men and came in time to Bill who thanked them. Then he kicked back and stuck out his leather boots and hollowed his cheeks sucking on the stem.

Where you get boots like that friend? Horsehead was looking at him.

Through honest labour. Friend.

Black Bill spoke around the pipe in his mouth and the words came as white balls that pilled before his face then dissipated. He was no type of man the assignees would recognise. A native got up in finery. Grinning down upon their sorry shackled hides. A man who read and wrote and tilled the earth just as God had meant all virtuous people. To look on him was to see themselves reflected as if in a carnival mirror and the gross distortion cast upon the curving face of it was a double in image that served only to exaggerate their own infirmities.

Then Horsehead rolled back his shirt sleeves and the firelight showed up the bust of a black mare inked into his pale prison forearm, in aspect a stunning likeness that bared its teeth and flung its untamed mane against the wind. He looked Bill hard in the eye as he spoke through the heat haze above the cookfire. Huntin your own kind for bounty aint no sort of honest I know.

You ought to shut your mouth about honest I reckon, said John Batman. A crim like you.

Better born a crim than a bloody ourang-utan.

Batman leaned forward. I aint above cutting yer tongue out. My word I aint.

Horsehead spat a string of tobacco liquor onto the fire where it hissed and raised a stink like charring hair and the slime ran down his chin. An unholy silence stole over the camp and the assignees chewed their tobacco and gazed into the coals. When Black Bill lowered the pipe and tapped it clean on the side of his boot it tolled out miserably in the emptiness. A knifing rain had set in over the mountainside of Ben Lomond and John Batman drew his hat low down his forehead and turned his collar against the wind but the four assignees sat hatless and shivering under blankets. The men looked at Batman and he at them as the night drew in tight around their fire. Tea was poured around and when the fire was loaded up, when all were silent, the boy spoke up.

Have you bin this way before?

Indeed I have, said Batman.

The boy wiped the rain from his face. Come after blacks was you?

Bushrangers.

Batman was cast in firelight and shining like some demon risen as his wet rainslicker gave back the flames. He looked around at Baxter. Welshman. More wood.

Howell Baxter eased out of his blanket and using firewood they'd situated under an oilcloth he heaped up the fire against the mizzle and sparks plumed and petered out as the wood hit, their faint light hopeless against the bitter night, a handful of sparks to light the entire of God's creation. The billycan sloshed and leaned over and he pressed his bare foot to the tin amongst the coals and righted it.

But there's clans out here alright, said Batman. A good many.

And if we dont find no blacks, we'll just haul that one there in and be done with it. Horsehead cocked his thumb in Bill's direction.

Black Bill was keeping out of the rain against the gnarled pine. In his hands was the longbladed dagger he wore behind his neck, inscribed over in spiral patterns by means of a steel bruin and honed viciously keen on a width of east coast sandstone. He turned the dagger point upon his palm and kept his hat brim low so that his face receded in the shadows.

What sort a damn ignorance makes you think we could haul him somewheres he hadnt a mind to go? said John Batman. Uhh?

Horsehead wiped his mouth. I seen him with Bickle. He aint much frolic.

What he is or what he aint aint yours to say.

I know what I see.

And that is all you know. I guarantee you. If you was to draw a bead on him, what do you think is goin to happen? You think he'll stick up his hands?

Horsehead sat in silence. The others turned away their faces and spat or sipped tea. For to look on the native was to ponder what it was they intended to make of themselves. Batman looked around.

Now pay attention cause I'll tell you what. He'll run you from balls to breakfast with that there blade of his. Spill yer innermosts over the stones before you so much as draw down the cock.

The Vandiemonian replaced the knife into the leather sheath strung across his back and tipped his hat on an angle to better meet the eyes of the assignees now gazing at him across the wavering heat of the fire. The wind in the forest canopy was the sound of discord and torment.

A black man raised white, said Batman. Think upon that fact. Not a day passing where some slander aint bespoke in his presence. How many times you suppose he has defended hisself? And I tell you, he keeps account. I seen him break a man's arm twelve months after the fact. Once drawn a blade against Bill this fellow had but wont draw nothing again God help him.

From within the folds of his rainslicker John Batman produced his quart flask and tossed back a swallow. Rum glistened at the corners of his mouth. I reckon even halfwits like you gang of dirties know of the Man Eater, said Batman. Jeffries.

The men nodded at mention of the Man Eater.

You'll likely have heard told it was John Darke what finally caught the monster, said Batman.

Again the men nodded. Behind the rippling of heat off the fire their faces shimmered and shifted and in those kangaroo skin tunics they had the look of wildmen brimming with the heathen indignations come from too long spent in uncivilised parts.

Jimmy Gumm spoke out of his seafarer's beard. John Darke I was told by some. But Jeffries give himself up. Boneless coward that he was.

Batman thumbed the cork into his rum bottle and slipped it inside his jacket. That aint the strict truth of the matter, he said. He was pursued by several parties but it was him there, Black Bill there, caught the monster.

Him?

The selfsame.

The Vandiemonian leaned forward and flung the dregs from his mug over the hissing fire. His rainwet shirt clung to his chest. I was a party to the taking of Jeffries, he said. But merely a party.

The Man Eater hisself told me it was you what took him, said Batman.

Under the watch of the eight partymen Bill poured his mug full from the billycan as the wind washed in the trees. Great fat balls of rain falling from the limbs above. They watched him crush a gum leaf into his tea, stir with a long black finger. A good many things come out of his mouth, he said. But for the most part they was lies or worse. I will tell you this much though.

Then Bill began upon a history he'd recounted a thousand times in grogshops and stockhuts and walking the waytrails of the back country and he spoke in tones precisely audible above the popping of the fire, a sound that penetrated the smoke and haze and filled the ear like cold water.

I saw her with my own honest eyes, he said. A woman hardly older than you boy. A much reduced soul for her suffering. Blackened about her eyes and missing her front teeth and bleeding and staggering and near enough to naked she was and crying like she would never stop. Befelled of something truly awful for which she had no words to tell and which had loosened the crossbeams of her mind. I never saw its like. I was raised in the house of James Cox esquire, raised as good as blood, raised alongside his own children. I saw a good many things in my life there but now I was seeing something wholly new. When this woman arrived at the house she was tended by Mr Cox's maid and given rum and water for the pain and put to bed and come the following day she'd regained herself somewhat but more was the pity for her.

I believed her a lunatic and I don't doubt that she was even now. I told Mr Cox and he was inclined to agree but nonetheless he went to her room and tried to get some sense from her. In the darkened room where she tolerated no light but kept the curtains drawn and where she was hidden among the bedclothes with her face covered over she commenced to tell us her story. Those sheets pulled yet over her head and speaking through the linen like an English ghost. And Mr Cox and I, we listened and we scarcely believed what was heard.

Bill paused in his storytelling and drew from his mug of tea. He regarded the assignees sat there in the rain and sheltered beneath their blankets and it seemed the rain was easing for the fire hissed only intermittently and the thudding on his hat had slowed. He raked his eyes across their ranks.

Two men had fallen upon this woman's hut and upon her family, he said, but to hear her describe them we thought they were devils set forth from the core of the earth all ablaze and bent on bloodspill. Most of what came out was barely more than nonsense but what I heard, what I understood at least, stopped the marrow in my bones.

Seems these men entered her hut in the evening. They had hold of a servant belonged of her neighbour and had a pistol to his head. They entered the hut where was sitting the woman and her husband and her infant and they screamed like animals and bade the householders to stay down and knelt that old servant man amongst the child's toys and proceeded to release the hammer. I saw his body with my own honest eyes when it was buried. The whole front of his head shot clean away. The woman's clothes were rank with gore even a week later. He promptly laid over and died of his wound. Then a second pistol was produced and the husband shot.

The men seemed unmoved by the tale. They scratched themselves and pulled their blankets around as the drizzle ran off their chins. Bill nodded, continued.

Aye. If that was the worst, surely you'd sleep the night and wake come sunrise and never think again upon the Man Eater. But I have not finished. Not yet at least. So he marched that woman from her hut at pistolpoint while his partner sacked the place for food. The wailing infant in her arms. And he snatched the child's leg and tore it away and to hear this woman tell it he tore the very blood from her beating heart. He

tore that child away and set to dashing it against a gumtree and all that sad scrub was filled with the sound.

The company was silent as the Vandiemonian swirled his tea and stared into the dark fluid as if he might therein find an answer or at least find a question worth his breath. But given one question, what would he even ask? What was there about men that needed discussion beyond what history had etched in bitter clarity? He swirled the tea and swallowed and went on and the companymen listened now like he was giving scripture.

Having been marched a dozen mile by Jeffries and his partner and having suffered their depraved attentions to her person, that woman made her escape by way of chewing through her bindings in the black of night some days later. Her husband had survived his wounds but the woman held those sheets over her head and sobbed and even when her husband was called the living sight of him seemed no great comfort to her and it was some time before Mr Cox's maid was able to move her from that bed. I sat with her a good long while and listened to the ramblings she set forth upon when the mood overtook her and I came to know the Man Eater by his deeds and I came to see him outlined in my mind. So when Mr Cox put together a party intended to track the pair, I was the very first to put myself forward. Our own Mr Batman organised a party too, after hearing my account of the matter.

John Batman nodded. Aye. Meself, William Gould there and another fellow, Smith.

What did they have on his head? Howell Baxter leaned in.

Ten pound and yer ticket.

Ten pound?

Ten. And I tell you, wasnt a lag in the district thinkin of nothin else. Batman wiped the rain from his eyes.

Black Bill observed this exchange as he observed most things with his bright white eyes quiet and unblinking. When there descended a fresh silence upon the



campsite he spoke in his rounded voice that tolled out words like coins counted into a palm, each inflected with the neat mock of the old country he had acquired.

It was Mr Darke what found the Man Eater when by chance he saw him skitter in the trees around the flanks of his farmhouse. Jeffries put forth again into the scrub and lost Darke along the gullied banks of the Nile where no sort of bushman could lose his quarry. Tracks stay a week in the soft earth there and will even confide the frame and height of the mark for those adept at the reading of it. But Darke is no sort of bushman. No sort at all. I presented at Mr Cox's and bade him to make a party after Jeffries which he agreed to and I was included in the number.

Jeffries wasted no effort hiding his trace and it ran so plainly we went at a trot and followed the tracks without danger of losing them. All night we followed and arrived at a lonely stock hut as the sun was staining the sky and we found inside some of Mr Darke's men sleeping off a skinful of rum. You could smell the reeking even outside the hut. This I remember. Mr Darke called them out as drunkards and promised floggings for all and raged until a bottle was handed his way and he partook of a dram then it was himself splayed out between them necking from the bottle and sleeping through the freezing dawn.

The men had their ears bent listening to Bill's tale and when he paused to take a sip of his tea they also raised their mugs and drank. The Vandiemonian flicked a finger at the billycan in the fire for another serving and the boy obliged him by lifting it away with a stick and pouring using his sleeve tugged over his fingers against the burning handle. With a fresh steaming mug in his hands Bill went on.

Jeffries was nearby for sure. I read his trace run past the hut and off aways. I myself could not abide wasting the gain we had made after the Man Eater. I never drink while the sun holds the sky but there is few men of like sentiment on this island and was fewer still in that hunting party. I remained watchful. I surveyed the shifting weather and scouted Jeffries' trace some few hundred yards onto Mill's Plain and I pushed on and I was running my eye across the line of trees when I saw him. The very fellow. Dressed in a long dark coat of leather and wending through the gaunt scrub. To my eyes he was wholly unnatural in that landscape and he seemed sprung from the pits of some

foul sphagnum like a murdered Irish peatman twisted in hazel withies and shrunk and blackened. So I shouldered my weapon and I drew a sight on the madman.

Bill pulled on his tea. He coughed. I could have struck him, he said. No doubt in my mind. But if I missed he was off once more into the wilds and gone. I had to be sure you see. For that reason I returned to the hut and woke Mr Darke and the others and they come halfdressed and stinking drunk and we surrounded Jeffries before he knew it. One of Darke's men was up to him first and presented his gun to the Man Eater which reduced him to a grovelling of the most pitiful sort. They beat him and kicked him and stomped him. Even Mr Darke, even Mr Cottrell the constable. It was I who stopped them from killing. I who pulled them all away. For if I hadnt surely one more murder would have been committed. This I believe.

But that Man Eater. He was a sorry wretch. Sorry of sight and sorry of deed. They turned out his pockets and what do you suppose they found? Aye. You know well and good what they found. An arm severed at the elbow. Rancid and chewed up. That was a revelation to harden the most amiable among the hunting party and to press upon them a requirement for justice. One of Darke's men urinated on the bare skin of the Man Eater and a knife was pressed to his shoulder and someone screamed that he would be served his own fried arm for breakfast. The Man Eater was hysterical. They beat him out cold. Then he was roped and dragged naked to Mr Cox's residence. I took my leave for fear of being a party to murder and I fell in the following day with the Leetermairremener people who are a kind people.

Around their hearthfire we gathered and I ate their possum and offered my tobacco and I told the story of the Man Eater and the slaughter he so freely countenanced. The old men of the tribe allowed me measure to speak and called me son and smoked my tobacco warmly but I was clothed as a white man and they likely understood me as white. They listened as I spoke and nodded and the children hid from me behind their mothers. Some of their retinue wore shirts or trousers looted from stockhuts and they had a single flintlock which was rusted all but useless and I believe they thought themselves versed in the comings and goings of whitefolk but as they listened to the awful tale I told, the old men of the tribe grew into the knowledge that their solitary ways were ever closer to being utterly undone and they asked questions

about the iniquity in the hearts of men. Questions whose answers none save God could speak.

Bill turned and looked across that selection of gaunt faces. That's how it was done, he said. How he was caught.

The boy spoke up. You oughta of killed him.

Would you have?

My oath, said the boy.

Then you would have hung alongside him.

They waited for Bill to go on but he drew on his tea and listened to the trees creak like the groans of the damned and presently they understood his tale had finished. The wind through the campsite benumbed and drove the companymen deeper into their blankets where some refuge was had. By now the rain had ceased and the ground was sodden except at the base of the thickest trees where they contorted themselves between the roots for sleeping shelter. The abyss beyond the firelight offered no elucidation and their eyes burned and the blood beat in their ears as they scrutinized that formless sweep of black. Nine men cloistered among the recesses, as cold and dulled as stones. What might in some minds be conceived of as a measure of men was in truth no more than a simple paucity. For that which moaned inside them was given no idiom to show itself.

Black Bill awoke to the prodding of a bare foot, filthy and cold and splitnailed. He pushed back his hat from his eyes. A figure was stood over him training a weapon upon the square of his chest in the fireless dark. Even though the figure was rendered plain by the darkness, by the bald headed outline Bill knew it to be Horsehead stood there and threatening him. The rest slept a dead sleep and stirred not a wink when Horsehead drew down the hammer on his piece, the unoiled creak of it like floorboards giving.

Givus them boots darkie, he growled.

The Vandiemonian pushed back his blankets tenderly and raised himself up. Horsehead was shrouded in his own blankets and his breath showed in the void between them as he spoke. You got no need of em.

Black Bill slid against the tree he'd been sleeping under and rose to his full height above the old fellow who had him bailed up and his white eyes bloomed in the light of the few faint coals yet burning in the pit. Then from behind his back he drew his dagger, blade downwards and gripped in a fist. He waited and he stared. In the silence Horsehead made no move nor did he release the hammer. For he was no doubt in a bind now. Firing would wake Batman. And Batman was likely to respond in kind. Bill raised the blade alongside his cheek from where he might better strike the mongrel's neck.

It was a long instant as the pair stood off like hackled dogs and the ragged snores of the companymen came from the darkness disembodied to count the many beats of it. Bill clenched his fist upon the bonehandled dagger. Horsehead went backwards a pace and he hissed at the Vandiemonian.

I mean to take to the bush by meself. I dont want no part of this madness. Now givem here. Elsewise I'll finish you with ball.

But Bill took a lower stance.

Under that dome of faint light from the coals Horsehead seemed a man beset by a riddling devil and he watched the Vandiemonian's blade wink and he studied that hardened face for evidence of fear or doubt or something but all he beheld was the clarity of intention innate in that knife and the man who bore it. He moved back another pace, then another. The trees groaned and moved and it was the only part of the world that intruded upon their silent ritual. Horsehead lowered the mouth of his gun a little but Bill made him no concessions and even as he rested the weapon against a treeroot and put up his hand to signal restraint the Vandiemonian kept his knife bared. Eventually the assigned man sat himself alongside his gun and tugged his damp blankets across his legs like some shabby squatter taking his ease.

Keep the filthy things then, he said.

But Black Bill pulled his hat brim low and stared at the lag bunched down beside the fire and shivering beneath his bedding. And he watched that faint shape until the sun finally stained the mauve horizon.

All that next morning they followed where the Parramatta men led, going over the rough underscub sorely and without enthusiasm. To the rear was John Batman, bringing them up with his gun crooked over one arm, watching every movement of the scrub as if it meant him ill. The shoeless men slipped down the mossed banks and the rockworks but Batman drove them on through their long task without halt and their empty guts cramped up and they harried him for food but he would not be swayed. In the hour before noon they cut across a markenner winding through the bush, hacked therein by clans passing around the mountain. It was a fine track that followed the mountain's swells and hollows. Pigeon considered both courses a moment, turning his head this way and that. The other men all watching him. He smoothed back his lank locks of hair. Then he led the party down the outlet. The markenner it seemed had not seen fire in many a year, perhaps because the Plindermairhemener were occupied in warring. Where once it had been wide enough for two, now it was narrowed into archways of old sinewed leatherwoods that curved over and young shrubs of every sort clawing at their clothes. Bill pulled his hat brim down and followed the Parramattas. All that untended scrub they trod was festooned with leeches, those gaping black worms reaching from the branches, and as they walked Bill plucked them from his arms and his neck and burst them between his fingers. Somewhere a lone crow called.

They moved up through thinner groves of rainforest in the afternoon and through squatly grown treeferns and their pace picked up somewhat. John Batman took up whistling a broken tune which dipped and rose across the same few bars over and again as they strode along the markenner and the emus he raised with that sound crashed off among the trees in threes and fours booming deep down their throats in alarm. A few more miles around the swollen base of Ben Lomond was a stand of

blackgum that towered like immense colonades of stone and the companymen climbed over the veiny rootwork and tipped their heads back to look at the iron coloured sky brushing past the crowns of those trees. The uppermost branches shivered and swayed in the fresh winds as long gusts full of the cold of the southern icelands flowed through. They moved off around those colossal beings, picking amongst the tendrils buried in the stone of the earth and watching everywhere around them at the rotting scrub that stirred with small scurrying life, the native hens, the banded cats. It was then that Black Bill held aloft his hat and called the party further on with a wave, holding a finger up for silence at the same time. They followed him to where he stood with his sixfoot fowling piece trained on four bark temma nestled down betwixt the stones and trees. The partymen dropped inside the underscrub. Leveled their pieces.

tawattya, Bill called through his hands but it soaked into the forest, lost amid the birdcry.

He hardeyed that village of four poor huts. It was ringed around by a steep draw of pines growing on the bare rock of the mountain in a natural breakwind. It was loose ground, stony, uneven, but the clans had little ground now to choose that was otherwise as Batman had the best of it for his sheep. He approached the temma calling, shifting from one to the next and peering inside and he stepped over a cold dead hearthfire strewn about with the shattered bones of wallaby and fur and hide. He held his hand above the coals a moment then tipped back his hat at an angle. The partymen emerged from the scrub and moved guardedly into the village, weapons to their shoulders, studying the stretchings of bush that led off away eastwards around the dolerite stacks of Ben Lomond. John Batman spat and crouched and narrowed his eyes thinking.

A few paces from the temma half a dozen piles of scat lay cast over with handfuls of shredded grass caked in wipings and the Parramattas nudged at the turds with the points of their toes. Blackening, hard, juiceless. Crook pinched a clod in his fingers and it split open. Wet inside still. They were not long departed. He showed Bill.

Two days gone, Bill said. Not more.

Batman gazed up at the mountain. Two?

Not more.

Aye. Well then.

They took a spell there, knelt amongst the native temma. Out of his drum Batman produced an apple, a perfect red apple, and quartered it with his skinning knife. Juice ran clear over his knuckles and he sucked them clean and then laid the segments neat before him where they glistened under the gaze of eight men held off like trained dogs on their master's handsignal.

I never had apple before, the boy said.

Batman gave a quarter to every man and the fellow beside him to divide how they saw. Howell Baxter and Jimmy Gumm halved a quarter widthways and ate it. Black Bill placed his segment in his creamy palm and looked at the boy sat beside him on a rock lichened in pallid greens.

Have it, Bill said. He held out his hand.

Without a word the boy snatched the apple quarter and stuffed the lump sideways in his mouth. He resembled in aspect and manner the beggar children in the backalleys of Launceston, those tiny mendicants nicking food from households and pleading coins off passersby along the thickly mudded roads. Bill had given them his pennies then his last wedge of bread then his blanket. They'd thanked him and asked him if he was a nigger and he'd replied that he was a Vandiemonian born and grown at which they'd nodded like old weathered sages and shaken his hand. They stank of the filth of the towns. The horse leavings and bucket throwings. Their eyes loomed too big in their thin faces. Much like the boy before him.

What's he done? said the boy.

He? said Bill.

This witch what we're chasing.

He looked abused around the eyes from want of sleep and the razored hair across his forehead was scuffed and matted.

Boy what is your name?

Thomas.

You shouldn't be here.

Well I know he done somethin.

Dont concern yourself with it.

The boy jutted his chin at the armed men settled thereabouts. Seems it is my concern though dont it?

Bill allowed that point. He did as we all do, he said.

Did what?

No more questions. You are a boy.

I'm seventeen.

The boy seemed to harbour no illformed notions about any man or else he hid them well and good. That was often the way for people daily at toil for their very existence. Mouth shut, eyes down. Black Bill took up a handful of leaves and let them fall. The leaves turned wounded spirals. You cant understand his actions unless you know him, Bill said. But who is he? No one can comprehend him. You cant comprehend him.

The boy looked out of his discoloured eyeholes. He's just a man is all.

No that is your mistake isnt it? You give him your own explanations but he exists beyond us all. Outside our provisions of intellect. We know nothin of him. But that wont stop us from imaginin our own nonsense. He's like some void we fill with the strife inside ourselves. All manner of thing issued into that hole as if we might lend it some actuality by our meagre doings.



What a load of old mullock, said the boy.

Is it? Land has no name without us to name it. It has no reason. No dimension. As we walk upon it so do we contrive to bring forth that place into existence. We call it up by name. But it is a false existence that vanishes as we vanish. Given time, all forms return to the womb of chaos from whence they was issued. So it is with him. You call him up with names like chief or witch. But he is neither.

The boy shook his head. He scuffed at the earth with his heel and the rags on his feet came away in folds. This land seems real enough to me, he said.

Aye. It's real. Because we have agreed it is real.

Is this chief real?

I have touched him. Smelt him. But I dont know anymore about him than you do.

The sunlight shredded through the trees like speckling along the backs of fish at idle in a shallows. There was more the boy wanted to ask and he showed it by shifting his weight to better get a view of Bill's face but the Vandiemonian had by now stood up and walked off amongst the domed huts with his hat pulled low upon his crown and his collar turned against the cold.

The temma were woven from longcut slabs of bark laid over a frame of curved branches jammed into the earth. Skins covered the earthen floors inside, the whole teeming with fleas. Within one of the temma, as he tossed each one for things of worth, Black Bill descried a hessian sack likely used for flour but now full of something else entirely. He upended the contents on the ground. A hand mirror, half a broken teacup patterned with prancing horses, an empty jam tin, a calf leathered book. Nothing of any value or use to a mob of wandering clansfolk. On the ground the hand mirror shined like a great eye of

power that gave back an exaggeration of his own ashen features and he peered into that liquid world within the gilt framing but it was a world as ambivalent, as fraudulent as this one and with his good black boot he scuffed dirt across the face of it. Then he reached down for the book where it lay.

A bible. The heft as sturdy as firewood in his hand. He pawed through the damp pages one by one by and every page, every column of text, every inch of every surface was inked with arcane circles, spirals, faces, in ochre as red as blood. The broken halves of the words hung between those scrawls, dis severed from their meanings and rendered useless in the teeth of that fury. Whatever authority the volume had held was utterly undone by those shapes, the fierce curls and angles repeated page after page after page, shapes echoed in the very build of the world. He closed the book and tossed it on the ground.

Jimmy Gumm was likewise engaged in turning out those huts and he watched Bill throw that blemished bible aside. He snatched the damp book from the ground and tucked it inside his drum where he'd also stashed a native shell necklace, a sarcenet ribbon, and a hair brush of turned whalebone and boar bristles. He resettled the weight of the bag across his shoulder and nodded his head at the Vandiemonian who was stood at rest in a warm sunstreak.

It'll do for wipin me fundament, he said.

The ground was a mess of tracks where natives had come and gone for days and Pigeon and Crook went about bent over in diagnosis until it was agreed upon that the natives had decamped eastwards in number. Black Bill considered the trail a moment longer, his face pinched in concentration, his hat brim running through his fingers. But they were gone off into the scrub, those men of the Barewurrer, and Bill fell in behind them as they picked out the trail and led the company onwards. The air was full of the sound of their passing, the creak of leather boots, the sweeping of branch against thigh. They

curved over a rise and down a slight shaded gully where it banked and the damp earth turned under their bruised and bandaged feet. Here the men drank from a creek that sputtered along the gully's furrow and they filled their canteens from a rockpool. The glade was circumscribed about with treeferns towering like primordial insects and the sun above was dimmed by the canopy and in that half-light the mosquitoes swarmed upon the naked parts of them and every hand they raised sent up a flotilla until they settled again as before, mindless, maddening, until it forced them to move on once more. The depths of that damp gully slowed their pace as the understorey grew together and the great rotting lengths of fallen trees occurred more frequently to be scaled or bypassed and the footing was so treacherous that each held constantly to the shirt of the man before him.

Mid afternoon Crook started up singing. He chanted as he walked and the words sounded as conjuring written with the white of his breath, an unelaborate tune rising and falling upon the rhythm of words whose meaning only the whitebanded and ochred men of the Barewurrer knew, but Black Bill heard there the echo of the crow shriek, the chiming of the quail thrush and as that ancient song rattled about the scrub and it showed the man for what he was; incommensurate with lands he was walking. Pigeon joined his voice into the song also, those two sounding out their chorus upon the landscape. The partymen looked about at each other in aspects of cold disdain and they spat and shook their heads.

Then Jimmy Gumm found song too. He had the voice of a dog howling but he wasn't put off. Flecks of spit caught in his beard as he sang. Good people what will you of all be bereft? Will you never learn wit whilst a penny is left?

All the colonials knew that tune. Even Batman who had never placed a foot upon English soil in his natural life. They sang together. We're all like the dog in the fable betrayed, to let go our substance and snap at the shade!

And so Crook's song coalesced into one discordant wail with that ballad, the amalgamation ringing around the mountainside like the death cry of some misbegotten beast. Black Bill pulled his hat low across his eyes and studied the forest shadowed in

the sheersided gorge they walked through as that sound announced the commencement of whatever war it was they sang for, whatever bloodthirst fizzed in their bones.

Pigeon crouched at a grassy embankment, went down on his knees and let his fingertips caress the face of the earth. That a fire had burned through some years back was evidenced by the charcoaled tree husks intermingled with the firescarred living. The squeeze of blackgum and pine was looser and the scrub was easily covered on foot, save for the prevalence of saplings germinated in the blaze that whipped their legs and caught them up.

First mob come up ere, said Pigeon. He pointed out the marks.

A few yards away the grass rose upwards into scrub again and Pigeon walked nearer watching the ground as he went and creasing up his forehead. He paused at the grass edge and pinched up the flattened stalks to reckon on the passing of time.

Second mob come that way, he said and gestured down the mountainside. All go together. One big bloody mob now them buggers.

Batman loosed the cork from his quart flask and poured a measure into his open mouth then slipped the flask inside his greatcoat. They watched him survey that country where it rolled away down the slope, the blue hued mountains in the south hidden by a haze, the dark shapes of hawks crawling across the clouds. He removed his hat and showed his hair crowned in where the hoop had sat. Seems we'll be made to earn our payment, he said.

Plenty dogs. Plenty kids too, said Pigeon.

Horsehead raised his eyes at this. Kids? he said. His pale features a mess of wrinkling and his mouth hard set as he skewered Batman with a glare. But Batman only took the quart flask of rum from his greatcoat and drew a mouthful.

Then another.

The light was thinning. They made another mile or more and in the last red coals of daylight the partymen entered some gums that rose and curved overhead and on those limbs hung long bark spools that turned in the breeze like the flayed skin of traitors desiccating in the cold dry air and they walked that twilit space and saw emu bones protruding from a firepit and the feathers blown about. At the far end of the coupe lay a line of native breakwinds and the party brought their weapons to bear and studied those loose bark erections and looked at each other. The dying sun was on the horizon in a hellish flare. They walked among the structures with their weapons shouldered but the whole of that camp was long since abandoned to the bush. The boy drove his foot into a bark shell as he passed and the thing folded upon itself. The two joined clans had moved on.

They were hereabouts today, said Bill. He studied the ground. We are close.

In the burning light Pigeon strode into the scrub where the wide trodden trail led him. He was followed by the roving party coming ever slower for want of rest and a warm bed. Black Bill paced beside the boy listening to the clatter of the guns and cradling his loaded fowling piece and shading his eyes from the low sun. All of them walking with heads down like men pondering the great irreconcilables about the world. And as they walked the sun withdrew behind Ben Lomond, behind the mountain's dripping wax crags of dolerite, wheeling along its ancient furrow downward into the void.

An hour along the trail they tasted woodsmoke upon the wind. The bush was a grim assemblage of shadows by now. The chirruping and the howling bolder as the light evaporated. Batman allowed no speaking and no spitting. The Parramatta men picked out a path among the trees where the party would not be seen. They said not a word but spoke with their hands as they guided the men onwards. To still the rattling locks of their weapons the assignees stuffed gumleaves under the mechanisms and Batman silenced his bootsoles with kangaroo hide and so too Bill. In that new lain quiet they were a company of haggard things amongst the trees, insubstantial, monstrous, and where the path was narrowed they drew into slender file and barely was their passing evidenced by more than the whisper of the scrub as it closed behind them.

Before that hour had ended all of the company could see the blinking fires in the scrub away down the slope. It was a sight that hardened their resolve. They reached the east side of Ben Lomond and from the banks of a great fold surveyed the land bending away south a dozen mile or more. Stubs of firelight glistened in that stretch of dark forest and they were huge bonfires built for what purpose no one would speculate but in varied aspects of unease the men of the roving party stared across the few hundred yards of moonsilvered bushscape at those pulsings in the blackness. John Batman ordered the men down. They crouched behind the trees and unslung their weapons across their knees but among that company only Batman and Black Bill watched the fires burning in the distance. Bill, raised up on his knees, pulled off his hat and his lips worked in silent reckoning as he tallied first the fires then the clansfolk around them. I make it five fires, Bill whispered.

How many men? said Batman.

A good few.

Hazard a guess.

He was quiet a moment. Eighty, he said. A hundred.

I see dog tracks by the fives of thousands, said Batman. They are some big lot.

Aye.

Jimmy Gumm shook his head. And here's us nine.

The boy was squatting like a rivertoad in the weeds. Glad you give me a gun now aren't you? he said.

Nine will do, said John Batman, it will do superbly.

There drifted in the silence the faraway sound of a story being danced around the bonfires, the sound of one voice performing for a hundred souls. A single clansman passed before the fires and that warrior with his coiled ropes of hair was distinguished against the blaze as a silhouetted medusa treading out the shapes of his narrative. His song rising and mingling with the plumes of smoke. A closed eye moon lit the darkened valley's hollow, showing in mute silvers the curve of the hills away south, and the clansman went around his fire as John Batman dug the quartflask from his greatcoat and watched the moon bend overhead.

In the darkness a vinegary cold descended and even steeped in blankets they could not escape its bitterness. The Parramatta men so recently come from their dustlands seemed crippled with it and sat huddled together and silent and rigid. Only Bill forwent his blanket. The jacket he wore was thin and closer in nature to a vest but if he was cold he made no show of it. He was beside the boy and wiping the gunblack from the pan of his overlong fowling piece.

What's he singing about down there? he said to Bill.

Keep yer voice down, said Batman.

The Vandiemonian laid the weapon across his lap. It was a wellworn piece he kept hooded with possum hide to keep the weather from the lock and engraven into the forestock were detailings of a grotesque African mask. To this he'd added his own etchings, a series of inset circles, a spiral as fine as hair that filled the palmrest. The muzzle was lightly belled and being eighteen bore it kicked like a bastard and bruised his shoulder and the whole was set upon a skittish trigger he'd known to let go of itself

from time to time. He dosed the muzzle now from a leather pouch and fed in a handful of dropshot and drove the lot home. But he had no answer for the boy.

We ought to just get down there, the boy said. Surprisem in the dark.

Lad if you had any sense of what's comin, you wouldnt be in no hurry for it. Batman was stretched out at rest beneath his hat and he kept his eyes closed as he spoke.

So the boy pulled his knees up and said no more on the matter. For his part, Bill merely held his weapon and if he was concerned he never gave voice to it but rather sat with his eyes loosely shut and the other men watched him, unsure of what Bill was about to make of himself.

At midnight Batman dug an oilcloth from his drum and set the boy to polishing the pans. The boy bowed his head over each mechanism as if he was whispering something inside, fingering the cloth into the workings and drying the pans, and they waited out the minutes in silence. Batman then took the cleaned pieces across his knee where he tested the mating of lock and frizzen and, satisfied, passed them off one by one to the assigned men. They readied the weapons sorely slow in the cold. Shot was tamped down and pans primed. John Batman, with his doublebarreled gun on his shoulder and his two fists clenched inside his greatcoat, stepped before the rovers and offered them what few words he had.

If you want them tickets of leave, you'd best save some live head. Makes for good show bringin em in.

They saw the sense in it and said so.

On the approach there was no sound any had stomach to make. They wove a path down the slope over mossy ground and Howell Baxter in his sparelimbed gait



tumbled and muddied his clothes but held his silence. Batman raised his hand for the men to halt while Baxter found his feet. Pigeon and Crook and Black Bill carried on nearer the towering light of the native fires, forcing the rest to jog a few paces along the track cut by the passing of the clanspeople. Pigeon drew some long lungfuls of air through his nose. Then he followed the westerly into the scrub downwind of the campsite and the rovers went after him.

What Black Bill witnessed from that cover stayed with him all his days. They were gathered in the firelight, a crowd of shining damp faces, and its shimmer picked out incisions raised on their chests and streaks of ochre they wore like costuming. Mannalargenna strode among the revellers and bellowed out his epic, a tale of animosity among clans and the requital he'd delivered his people when his cousin's wife was carried off and he'd led men against the trespassers. He was naked, his greased skin aflame. He walked and he clapped and the singing rose around him into the sky as the voices praised their ancient dead. Above it all the moon rolled like a beggar's blinded eye. It rolled on even as Batman whispered and Bill stood from the underbrush. It would roll on blind to the world until his flesh sloughed off and his bones dissolved into the soil of this miserable island. Black Bill gripped the loaded fowling piece tighter.

They held a line eight abreast. John Batman bade them to put the hammers on the cock and so they did and in formation they moved upon the two conferencing clans, wading through the loose packing of brush, drawing their weapons to their shoulders. It was dogs scavanging at the edge of the campsite that started up barking first, leanboned mongrels working through the leavings where wallaby had been gutted. They raised a fullthroated yowl at the interlopers and the noise broke the headman off from his narrative and as his singing waned into quiet talk the clansmen took up waddies and spears and peered into the scrub where the roving party came on like ascended deadmen, eerily pale, gaunt, shadoweyed.

Tails of flame shaped the clansmen from the dark in a series of instants and the bright gout of blood they shed seemed frozen in those daguerreotypes. Two were felled. The clanspeople fled in all directions thereabouts, the common squall of their cries sounding while the rovers repacked their weapons. Black Bill was first reloaded and first into the campsite and he wrenched his eyes everyway, shouldered past a

stumbling woman, stalked deeper into the camp with his weapon upon the ragged torn shadows cast by the fires. A great knot of people broke off before the party, naked women hauling naked children, young men as thinly boned as the spears they threw, the whole howling in one voice of consummate horror as the ruiners lay about themselves with the butts of their weapons, knocking down whoever they beheld or firing into that mass unhindered. Some ran through the fires to escape and some trampled the fallen where they screamed and an old man tottered dumbly as he held the ball wound in his side and Black Bill drew his knife but the fellow was lost in the blind dark scrub and gone and Bill moved off through the pall of sulphur after the headman.

It had become by now a scene of great misery. Wailing sounded in the bush beyond the firelight as the clansfolk decamped in body for the fastness of the mountain forest and the assignees followed those cries they had no understanding of but Black Bill heard and he knew parents called for children and wives for husbands and above it all was the warcry of men steeling to fight. They fired without discrimination into the body of that stampeding people and women and children alike fell and were dragged into the trees bloodied and dazed. The assignees stopped to reprime their weapons and fired on one knee or fired at a run and soon the drifts of gunsmoke choked the air where they fired and refired and blood trails tracked everyway across the campsite and shined beneath the light of the bonfires as they packed and fired anew.

Black Bill stared along the barrel of his piece as he moved among the bark temma. Around the darkened edges of the village Pigeon and Crook skulked in a strange parody of the vanished clanspeople they hunted, lean and longlegged and moving like the grendel after sleeping Geats and Black Bill called to them to watch their heads. Shots rang in the scrub and they bobbed in fear but rose again and pushed on after the assignees. He went low past the temma and into the darkened trees edging the village and here the screaming wounded could be heard above all the firing of weapons and shouting and Bill stepped over a man bleeding from the legs who seemed condensed into the maddening essence of his own pain and had clamped both hands over the bloodflow.

By the full blue moonlight Black Bill made out the headman hefting a child under each arm and bursting up the wooded slope in great strides and his greased skin

showed in silver flashes between the trees as he ran and the children's legs rattled and bounced. The Vandiemonian called him out with a hoarse roar. Mannalargenna stopped and turned to study that interloper fixing him along his sights and the headman's white eyes loomed stark in his dark face as he called down to the Vandiemonian.

Tumer-ti makara!

Give yerself up.

milaythina nika.

Black Bill felt the belled muzzle buck as he fired. The report played out in the hills. Through the haze he saw the headman buckle but then right himself and the children screamed as he broke away for the lightless folded mountain to the north bearing them with him. Bill followed, pulling himself up the steep slope by handfuls of bracken and he entered the gums where the headman had also gone. If there was blood it was lost in the dark and the Vandiemonian studied the gums and the dogwood understorey while the clansmen's calls and the hiss of firearms rang dimly in the cold but he saw no trace of the headman. Under moonlight any man of knowledge might evaporate upon the air and the headman was one such man indeed.

He came to a fallen tree in the scrub where a plush moss grew and covered the trunk entire. He felt along its surface for signs of disturbance but in that abysmal darkness he saw barely where to place his hand. He dropped down off the trunk and he stood and turned, listening away over the tolling of his heart. He heard nothing. For a while all was still. He moved on another few hundred feet and crouched in the bushes and here he reprimed his weapon by feel and slipped the packing rod out silently then dosed the pan from the powderbag. As he moved off there came a faint snivelling from away up the rise further, the clatter of underbrush. He raised his ear to the sounds.

The children were clinging together amongst some burly knotted bluegum roots when he saw them. He came through the brush angling his body that he might approach unheard but when he saw the children he knew himself undone. He brought his fowling piece to bear upon that small clearing where long cleaves of moon issued through the canopy and the trees and the darkness seemed woven of one common fabric but

Mannalargenna fell on him from behind, assailing him across the neck with his great blackwood waddy. It pitched Bill forward and he rolled up to face the headman where he was stood holding that club above himself, as coldfaced as any surgeon or otherwise, and he heaved that weapon down over Bill's upraised arms and beat back his resistance and hammered at him until his bones were heard to give and the club dripped gore and only when the Vandiemonian no longer struggled but merely took the blows, only then did he cease. His breath flared in a shaft of moon as he cocked his ear to the scrub. Then he called the children to him and once more they made forth into the heavy bushlands around the mountain, a retinue of the damned, harried and borne along on an alarm only aggravated by the booms of gunfire they heard coming back off the mountain.

In the night Bill's grown son found him and ran a hand across his stubbled brown cheek. It woke Bill and he looked long into his son's face before he recognised it. At once he felt the ache in his bones and felt the misery lifted from his frame. It was overwhelming and his throat thickened as he asked his son how he'd found him here in foreign country.

I followed you, he said.

Bill was weeping. He held his son's shoulders close and in that grip he knew this was the right and true of the world, this warmth of bodies, this tightness of throat. Bill held his son and sobbed with sweet relief. It was over. He was freed. He raised the boy high to his shoulders where he gripped the ochred ropes of hair on his father's head like the reins of a carthorse. Together they walked.

The birdlife that rose with the sun crooned and stirred Black Bill awake. The bush was filled with the new dawn aflame on the horizon. Skeletal fingers of the trees gave up long black shadows. He was stretched out on the rot and filth of the forest floor. On everything an ashen frost. He felt at his mishapen jaw and at the blood caked on his

face and he emptied his gaze on that wasteland as if he was the last man on God's dying earth.

One of his teeth was loose. He tongued it but the pain was immense and he winced and soon stopped. The first fingers of his left hand were plainly broken, hooked where they had been straight. He felt himself over and found the side of his head clagged with blood and his ears were swollen wierdly and a gouge was torn above his eye full of ground filth. He pushed himself upright. Away a few feet his piece lay where it had fallen, dusted in frost and steaming in the sun and he used it to stand.

The bonfires were burning yet and the glow led him into the campgrounds once more. Dogs paced before the fires, masterless since the clans were driven off and turning in great chaotic herds that neither began nor ended but ran always together as does a snarl of blowflys upon a carcass and Bill leaned on his gun and surveyed the scene from some cover at the edge of the clearing. So many dogs that the shadows seethed with them. Nothing else moved in that desolation save the steady whipping of flames. So he moved forwards into the rising sunlight, out among the dogs where they wandered and yabbered like madmen speaking soliloquys and he sat himself down to wait for John Batman.



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