

**Rambling in Overdrive:
Travelling Through Tasmanian Literature**

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Two years ago I published an anthology of original and published writings about Tasmania titled *Along these lines: From Trowenna to Tasmania*¹ — a mistake it turns out (as far as the title goes) as readers generally assume that Trowenna is some other *place*, rather than some other *time*. The idea was to situate various texts about Tasmania into context, so that when traveling the arterial highways of the heart-shaped island one was presented with stories and histories (time) that live on the sides of the road (place). This paper will address the theme of the conference ('Originally Tasmanian. Creativity and Innovation in the Island State') with a methodology similar to that 'driving' the anthology. It will examine the relationship between context (the origin) and text (the representation), and by implication, the relationship between natural and symbolic worlds. The ramble, which textually refers to the discursive — ideas, like automobiles, that 'run about' — will be accommodated, and as such will occasionally disrupt normal expectations of chronology, the historian's purview.

The motivation for the anthology came out of a need to experience at first hand niggling doubts about the textual construction of the island. I was a migrant so (in terms of the conference theme) I'm not 'Originally Tasmanian'. I was living in a biotic community I knew nothing about and for which I had no language. I was presented with a textual culture I knew little about, and I was hungry for island stories. I was also aware (but did not understand) that many fifth generation Tasmanians expressed anger at not knowing their own origins, convict or otherwise. To me — part of a post-colonial diaspora — to be able to go back five generations was an impressive achievement.

The research for the book revealed a couple of things. The first, and it is certainly 'Originally Tasmanian', is the phenomenon of Three Degrees of Separation. For instance, (and in the interests of the ramble) we can link James McAuley (1917-1976) to the Salvation Army publication *War Cry*. Professor of English at the University of Tasmania until his death in 1976, McAuley and Harold Stewart (1916-1995) invented Ern Malley the poet, and perpetuated a hoax on the literary magazine, *Angry Penguins* (1940-1946). Along with Max Harris (1921-1995), John Reed (1901-1981) was one of the publishers of the beleaguered *Angry Penguins*. Reed was brother to Tasmanian writer, Cynthia Reed (1913-1976), whose future husband was Sidney Nolan, who happened to design the cover for the Ern Malley issue (Autumn 1944). This is the Cynthia, author of nine works, whose great-grandfather Henry Reed gave General William Booth a loan enabling Booth to buy a printing press and publish *War Cry*. Three Degrees of Separation.

¹ CA Cranston, *Along these Lines: from Trowenna to Tasmania*, Launceston, 2000.

The second learning experience while traveling with text into context was that geography appeared to have suffered at the hands of some historians. Subsequently it appeared to have also suffered at the hands of those writers who had turned to history for their information, and then inscribed history on the landscape. Together, historians and writers appeared to be putting in place rhetoric of habituation that was fast becoming received wisdom.²

The island was portrayed as the source of psychic distress, cultural disenfranchisement, intense disappointment, a *land scape*-goat for social evils, it was gothic, it was grotesque, it was hell, it was heaven, it was penal, it was paradise. It was time to compile the competing texts; it was time to allow readers to confront the analogues and anomalies, literally, by travelling, ‘Along these Lines’ of various roads, with the text *into* context: the essential ingredients being a body, situated in time and place, which is then able to confirm or to challenge what ‘they are told they are seeing’.³ It’s a travel idea older than Columbus who had copies of Marco Polo’s book, and *Mandeville’s Travels* aboard the *Santa Cruz*.⁴ And though modern travellers to this island do not expect to encounter Mandeville’s promise of ‘men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders’, they *have* been fed other fictions.

And there are enough fictions to bury the island in a sea of nomenclature: Trowenna, Loutrouwitter, Van Diemen’s Land, Transylvania, Tasmania, the Apple Isle, the Archipelago State, a Sink-hole, a mood disorder. Anatomically: the Heart Shaped Isle; scatologically: ‘an ugly trinket suspended at the world’s discredited rump’⁵ (courtesy of Hal Porter, one-time teacher at The Hutchins School, and Theatre Royal worker), the female pudenda (Barry Humphries); a testicle (wrongly attributed to C.J. Koch); ‘Pity there is only one of them’ (Tim Bowden).

The transformative power of naming attests to the protean and often ludic nature of the island, and the Map of Tassie undergoes further psychic projection in Richard Flanagan’s (b.1961) novel, *Gould’s Book of Fish*.⁶ There, the character Pobjoy confronts convict artist William Buelow Gould, a historical fellow also known as William Holland (or rather, Pobjoy confronts Flanagan’s construction of Gould also known as Sid Hammet), asking him what the shape of Van Diemen’s Land reminds him of. Pobjoy answers his own question: ‘It’s a mask Van Diemen’s Land looks like, a damn mask!’⁷

² Mikhail Bahktin, in ‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel’ (1937-38) composed the neologism ‘chronotope’, from *chronos* (time) and *topos* (place) in recognition of the relationship between the temporal and spatial. I’m proposing that the chronotope has been unbalanced — too much *chronos*, and not enough *topos*.

³ Donald Horne, *The Great Museum: the representation of history*, London, 1984, p.10.

⁴ M.C. Seymour (ed.), *Mandeville’s Travels*, Oxford, 1967, p. xx.

⁵ Hal Porter, *The Tilted Cross*, 1961; rpt. Adelaide, 1971, p. 9. Cranston, *ATL*, p. 16.

⁶ Richard Flanagan, *Gould’s Book of Fish: a novel in twelve fish*, Sydney, 2001.

⁷ Flanagan, *Gould’s Book of Fish*, p. 187.

The list of aliases attributed to Gould (Jorgen Jorgensen among them) along with Pobjoy's observation of Tasmania as like a mask, raises the question of whether it is even possible to fathom what *is* 'Originally Tasmanian'. Chris Koch (b.1939) plays with the idea of *wayang* masks and multiple identities in *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1978).⁸ Locally, he employs the mask to signal the *un*-originality of Tasmania as an England at second-hand—as well as the mask of history as a recurring, often tragic, drama. It's the type of thing we get in *Out of Ireland: Volume Two of Beware of the Past* (1999)⁹ where narratives from Koch's own ancestry meld with thinly disguised historical figures and incidents recorded in John Mitchel's *Jail Journal* (1854).¹⁰ (Mitchel (1815-1875) was a Young Irelander transportee who lived at Nant Cottage, in Bothwell).

Jail Journal and *Out of Ireland* are a bit like the road signage in Tasmania, placed parallel to the road in such a way that speed cancels comprehension and is likely to result in a dialogue between driver and navigator such as: 'What did it say? I only got the first part'. 'I don't know. I only got the last part'. *Out of Ireland* is also a parallel text, one which admits a multiplicity of voices and points of view. It appropriates the monological history text (while masquerading as one) and transforms it into the dialogical, and the profitable. It's what English writer Matthew Kneale did when he appropriated George Augustus Robinson's journals, wrote *English Passengers* (2000),¹¹ inserted twenty different voices, mined the literature, missed the context, and won an award for what is claimed on the inside cover to be 'One of the best historical novels' (*TLS*). Indeed. It offers little sense of Tasmania (the context) as anything other than an historical text.

I'll return to the idea of what might be 'Originally Tasmanian' shortly (though I'll continue noting Tasmanian 'firsts' as they are encountered); but in addressing one of the other themes of the conference—Tasmanian 'Creativity'—I can say unequivocally that as far as writing, the literary list is as long as the arm of the law. 'Law', from the Old English *licgan* 'to lie', is an over-worked verb used to describe 'story-tellers', though seldom 'history-tellers'.

And fair enough, given the Flanagan, Koch and Kneale examples, and given that Tasmania's first novelist and essay writer (indeed, the first *Australian* novelist and essayist¹²) was a forger. Henry Savery (1791-1842) wrote for the

8 Christopher Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, London, 1978.

9 Christopher Koch, *Out of Ireland: Volume Two of Beware of the Past*, Sydney, 1999.

10 John Mitchel, *Jail Journal: commenced on board the Shearwater steamer*, Dublin, 1913.

11 Matthew Kneale, *English Passengers*, London, 2000.

12 Henry Savery, *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land*, Hobart, 1829, is considered to be the first book of Australian essays. See *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, 1994. Tim Bonyhady, however, writes that William Woolls's *Miscellanies in Prose*, 1838, is the first volume of essays published in Australia. Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, Carlton, 2000, p. 142.

Colonial Times under the name of Simon Stukeley, forced to ‘lie’ in order to circumnavigate the ‘law’—Official Order, No. 41—which forbade convicts to write for the press. The character Stukeley appears in *The Hermit of Van Diemen’s Land*, and strolling along the wharf at Salamanca he observes, in a gently parodic vein, that:

Arts, architecture, literature, religion, and commerce must here thrive so well, because so many excellent people, for whom Old England was not good enough, have congregated...¹³

Writers with Tasmanian affiliations include the usual suspects: Flanagan, Koch, Peter Conrad, Amanda Lohrey, Jimmy Everett, Ida West, Barney Roberts, Carmel Bird, James McQueen, as well as the upcoming, local crowd at the Republic in Hobart, and at Cucina Simpatica, in Launceston.

Given the Island’s protean nature, and given that it possesses only one tertiary institution, it’s not surprising to find artists and academics wearing the same hats. So to return to my stated interest in situating text into context, let’s look at the University context and discuss texts by academics who are writers. Specifically, let’s look at those texts that provide examples of the way history and literature have created a particular Tasmania—a Tasmania whose geography has been subjected to semiotic slurs and overwritten by the rhetoric of habituation.

For example, Vivian Smith (b.1933) lectured in French for ten years and is the author of five volumes of verse. In ‘Tasmania’ he word-paints the landscape with the broad strokes and familiar language of the convict past:

Water colour country. Here the hills
rot like rugs beneath enormous skies
and all day long the shadows of the clouds
stain the paddocks with their running dyes.¹⁴

The ‘rot’ in the landscape, the ‘shadows’, the ‘stain’, all contribute to the creation of an uneasy landscape, one made more personal in the poetry of Graeme Hetherington (b. 1937), who lectured in Classics. Author of four volumes, his verse explores a continuing obsession with the experience of occupying a noncompliant land and an unforgiving history. From ‘Hobart Town’:

A bit of wood flaps overhead,
As though a scrap of history lives
Upon a barbed-wire fence strung high
Round gutted houses convicts built,

Their broken windows eyes turned in
On blackness without moon or stars,

13 Savery, *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land*, 1829; rpt. Cecil Hadgraft, (ed.), St. Lucia, 1964, p. 20. Cranston, *ATL*, p. 100-1.

14 Vivian Smith, *Tide Country*, Sydney, 1985. Cranston, *ATL*, pp. 36-7.

The hind-leg street and looping turn
A hangman's noose and kicking man.¹⁵

For the characters of alumnus, Chris Koch, history and geography are destiny. Characters attempt to escape the tribal stigma of human history by escaping the island itself. In *Across the Sea Wall*¹⁶ the Bass Strait (the 'sea wall') is read as history, as a prison wall, hindering escape. Fellow alumnus, Peter Conrad (b.1948), actualised the hegira, and in *Down Home: Revisiting Tasmania* he continues the idea of a topography doomed by historical inscription. Flying into Melaleuca in the South West Wilderness he writes:

the skyline is the allegorical graph of our dreads: behind Huonville, on the edge
of the south-western no mans land, looms Mount Misery.¹⁷

Even flies, says Conrad, are desperate to escape. In the best (Joseph) Conradian tradition, he releases a buzzing Other Self from the walkers' hut, describing how the fly 'crossed to the plane, circled in and traveled back with us to Hobart'.¹⁸ Poet and prose writer, Margaret Scott (b. 1934), lectured in English. Unlike the previously cited academics, she is a Tasmanian import. In the poem 'Flinders Island' the speaker recognises the impulse to interpret landscape through the lens of colonial history...

It's said the air on the island smells of death,
that the soil's flushed with blood,

[... but then the speaker resists:]

but where the road's unmade it's pale sand,
slipping away into soft glittering drifts.¹⁹

Conversely, Louisa Meredith (1812-1895)—who had little if anything to do with the University context, but was also an import—attributed *her* lack of appreciation for the mainland Australian landscape (according to Tim Bonyhady) to *its* lack of 'significant historical events'.²⁰ The comment reaffirms the power of historical events to shape a reading of the land. But I doubt whether

15 Graeme Hetherington, *Remote Corners*, Hobart, 1986. His second publication was titled *In the Shadow of Van Diemen's Land*, 1999. Hetherington visited Tasmania for the launch of *Life Given*, 2002. *A Tasmanian Paradise Lost* was published in 2003.

16 Christopher Koch, *Across the Sea Wall*, 1965; rev. edn, 1982; and Sydney, 1990, as C.J. Koch.

17 Peter Conrad, *Down Home: Revisiting Tasmania*, London, 1988. Cranston, *ATL*, p.152.

18 Conrad, *Down Home*, p. 152. Also, text and context are in contention. The plane cannot be seen from the huts, not since the new airstrip was completed in 1980. *Down Home* was published in 1988.

19 Margaret Scott, *The Black Swans*, North Ryde, 1988. Cranston, *ATL*, p. 53.

20 Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, p. 141.

this idea of historical lack (or, the imbalanced chronotope) held after Meredith settled in Van Diemen's Land. While on horseback to Port Sorell she engages in gothicising and sketches the historical onto the geographical at a time, we are told, when the first part of her century was engaged in erasure.²¹

I scarcely know anything more thoroughly wearisome, both to mind and body, than a slow progress through these dreary, dark forests, with their huge, tall, gaunt, bare, half-dead trees, standing around you in apparently the same hideous skeleton shapes, however far you go; as different from the verdant leafy, shadowy depths of an English wood as a decaying mis-shapen skeleton is from a perfect human form in vigorous life.²²

Bonyhady writes that Meredith found the Tasmanian landscape almost devoid of history.²³ Perhaps it is Meredith's encounter with landscape outside of historical interpretation that enabled her to see the island as something other than a place of punishment. If so, this might explain why '[f]or more than forty years [Meredith] was the most significant Tasmanian advocate of environmental concerns'.²⁴

As the Meredith example shows, writing up the landscape as history, as a place of punishment, is not simply generational and neither is it entirely dependent on residence status.²⁵ And there were resident writers who were able to read the island from a perspective other than one informed by significant human events. Dramatist and explorer David Burn (1798-1875), author of Australia's first play, *The Bushranger* (1829) could, on occasion, wax lyrical about landscape: 'Nature in untarnished, primeval majesty reigns here supreme, whilst man looks on to wonder and adore' (Wednesday, 18 May 1842).²⁶ More recent examples of environmental rather than historical concerns with landscape exist in the work of Hilda Bridges (1881-1971) aka Joan Gardiner. Author of sixteen novels, she writes about deforestation in *Men Must Live*.²⁷ Charlotte (Isabel) Dick (1881-1959)²⁸

21 Jim Davidson, 'Tasmanian Gothic', *Meanjin*, vol. 48, no. 2, 1988, pp. 307-24.

22 Louisa Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania, during a residence of nine years*, 1852; rpt. Adelaide, 1979, p. 163. Cranston, *ATL*, p. 256.

23 Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, p. 143

24 Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, p. 8. Furthermore, the 'bioregional web-thinking' that I'm about to argue is the mark of many Tasmanian thinkers is evident in another 'first'—Meredith's receipt of a Tasmanian Parliament grant of £100 per year for contribution to 'the cause of Science, Literature and Art' making her, says Bonyhady, 'Australia's first cultural pensioner', *The Colonial Earth*, p. 130.

25 After the CTHS conference a student raised the question or whether or not writing the land as a place of punishment might not be a gender issue.

26 David Burn, *Narrative of the Overland Journey of Sir John and Lady Franklin and Party from Hobart Town to Macquarie Harbour 1842, 1843*; rpt. George Mackaness, (ed.), Sydney, 1955. Cranston, *ATL*, p. 160.

27 Hilda Bridges, *Men Must Live*, London, 1938.

28 The relationship between Dick's novel and the environment is discussed by CA. Cranston 'Tasmanian Nature Writing and Ecocriticism', in Philip Mead, (ed.), *Australian Literary Studies in the 21st Century*, Hobart, 2001, pp. 58-67.

produced what must be one of the earliest eco-feminist perspectives on intrinsic as well as economic values of the land, in her novel *Huon Belle*²⁹ In the interest of links and rambles, it should be noted that Dick was related to Louis Shooobridge who applied for a grant to preserve the scenery of Russell Falls, which resulted in Mount Field National Park becoming one of Australia's first National Parks (1885). In this instance, geography and colonial history share contiguous borders: the Falls were named for J.J. Russell, first Commandant at Port Arthur (1830).

To return, however, to the idea of the psychic projection of historical trauma onto the landscape, it's not surprising that it should be an academic from the School of Geography and Environmental Studies who, in turn, fiddles with history. Pete Hay (b.1947),³⁰ poet and essayist, re-imagines history by populating his landscape using a 'what if' approach, as in his poem about Sir Edward Braddon in 'Two Visits to Gordon Plains'.³¹ The poem is anti-historical: Braddon did not visit Gordon Plains (though Hay did). A similar re-imagining of history in the landscape occurs in 'Arthur River Suite'. Instead of Truganini propelling George Augustus Robinson across the river, out of the way of the spear-brandishing Sandy Cape tribe, 'what if':

Truganini slips, with Wooraddy, to the scrub,
Robinson dies on a Sandy Cape spear,
and all is changed.³²

Hay is a fifth generation Tasmanian with convict ancestry, an academic and artist born on the island, who has published under the mask of a woman's name. His multiple interests represent the intimacy of knowledge that the Three Degrees of Separation of island living instills. Anthropocentric notions of island insularity, isolation, and incest, require, in the case of Tasmania, a paradigmatic shift, to regarding the island population instead as 'bioregional web-thinkers'—people who are, increasingly, more aware of the relation between living things and the environment; between contexts and concepts-as-texts. Perhaps this is because being in the path of the Roaring Forties, being in the state with the highest bushfire danger, Tasmanians are forced to contemplate the elements. And convict ancestry or no, when Tasmanians describe where they are from they describe a landform, an *island*. The word 'is-land' is derived from two primary elements (OE *ae*; L *aqua*) 'water' plus 'land'. It should come as no

²⁹ Charlotte I. Dick, *Huon Belle*, London, 1930. Cranston, *ATL*, pp. 142-43.

³⁰ Several months after this paper was delivered, I launched, in Launceston, Pete Hay's *Vandiemonian Essays*, Hobart, 2002 Readers are directed to Hay's essays 'I Must Go Back to Banana Lake', pp. 1-4, and "'These Blarsted Hills": Affectionate Regard for a Despoliated Landscape', pp. 59-78, as our discussion of texts and authors overlaps.

³¹ P.R. Hay, *The View from the Non-Members' Bar*, Melbourne, 1992. Cranston, *ATL*, pp. 153-55.

³² P.R. Hay, '1832: George Augustus Robinson at the River', in Cranston, *ATL*, pp. 364-65.

surprise then that Tasmanians (being thus centrally situated) have a particular relationship with water—geographically, historically, and literarily.

Take the case thirty years ago when it was proposed that the original ancient alpine lake be turned into an artificial lake. The response was the formation of the United Tasmania Group. The world's first Green party was '*Originally Tasmanian*'. As one writer notes, colonial history and the rhetoric of convictism was turned back on itself, as Lake Pedder became a symbol of 'what Tasmania could be: free, unfettered, a celebration of intrinsic beauty'.³³ Flooded, it symbolised a Tasmania 'unfree, imprisoned, entombed', a Tasmania still under the thumb, one might say, of the Hydro-Electric 'Commandants'. Every literary age needs a moment in time that it can refer to as its turning point, though turning points are usually gradual curves in narrative time. For English Romanticism it was the publication of the Wordsworth and Coleridge poems and manifesto *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), though English Romanticism was already underway. I'm suggesting that with regard to Tasmanian literature, the Pedder experience (though it failed) provided the 'turning point' where a number of Tasmanians finally confronted the *topophobia* that had been born, historically, from out of the island's establishment as a place of punishment.

The recognition of the island's *intrinsic* value had to come from fifth and sixth generation Tasmanians, not from imports, such as Margaret Scott, Gwen Harwood³⁴, Louisa Meredith, Olegas Truchanas³⁵, Peter Dombrovskis, and so on, because it signified a healing moment (in the very best Romantic sense) between history and the past, and geography and the present. (In the interest of the disruptive ramble, however, it should be noted that there are no bunyips in Lake Pedder, unlike the one at the Great Lake that University historian, Lloyd Robson (temporarily turned balladist) writes about, to wit:

And then upspake one fisherman
And in his voice was fear,
"Tis a bunyip that we look upon!"
And he downed another beer.)³⁶

Tasmania's Lake Pedder 'evoked Australia's first great nation-wide land conservation furor and led to much of the legislation...now protecting Austra-

³³ Richard Flanagan, 'Return the People's Pedder', in *The Rest of the World is Watching: Tasmania and the Greens*, Cassandra Pybus and Richard Flanagan (eds), Sydney, 1990, p. 196.

³⁴ Gwen Harwood received a DLitt. from the University of Tasmania in 1988.

³⁵ Truchanas drowned in the Gordon River a month before he was to take up an appointment at the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education. The TCAE was a forerunner of the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology, which amalgamated, with the University in 1991. See Max Angus, *The World of Olegas Truchanas*, Hobart, 1975, p. 53.

³⁶ Lloyd Robson, 'The Ballad of the Bunyip', in Cranston, *ATL*, p. 296. The collection includes another bunyip story by William Moore Ferrar, *Artabanbanus: The Demon of the Great Lake*, 1896.

lia's environment'.³⁷ So said Bob Brown in a collection dedicated to Clive Sansom (1910-1981).³⁸ Author of six books of verse, Sansom, along with Max Angus, addressed the Federal Labor Caucus of the Whitlam Government in defence of Lake Pedder. In 1976, Sansom became a founding patron of the (then Tasmanian) Wilderness Society. He spoke against the Franklin River Dam, but died the year before the 1982 'Fight for the Franklin' campaign. That campaign was supported by a number of Tasmanian artists, musicians and writers who held a benefit concert in aid of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society. This time it was geography creating the literature, with both creating history. Federal intervention meant the dam would never be built: and the arrogance referred to in 'Point not Taken' by alumna Vicki Raymond (b.1949) would not continue:

In the seventeenth century
a curious fashion arose.
You drove out in your carriage
to 'take' some well known view...

[verses omitted]

My friend, too, daintily takes
rivers, mountains, everything,
as biscuits from a plate.
but he never takes the point.³⁹

The relationship with water continued with university dropout James McQueen (1934-1998), who was part of, and wrote about, the Franklin River campaign.⁴⁰ Author of novels, short stories, children's literature, and orchid books, he refused writers' grants as protest against the treatment of the Franklin River protesters. And though continuing the association of social disease with a sick landscape in his earlier work, this was modified when McQueen's own backyard came under threat. Written during the Franklin campaign, his novel *Hook's Mountain*⁴¹ is a performative narrative, temporarily stopping the logging of Blue Mont, in the North of the state. Palawa poet and activist Jim Everett (Mawbana Pleregannana, b.1942), and Cape Barren Islander, Karen Brown (b.1950) later published *The Spirit of Kuti Kina: Tasmanian Aboriginal Poetry*⁴²

³⁷ Bob Brown, in Ruth Sansom, (ed.), *Clive Sansom by Forty Friends*, Hobart, 1990, p. 141.

³⁸ Clive Sansom's University affiliation rests in his papers being held at the University of Tasmania Archives, DX18.

³⁹ Vicki Raymond, *Holiday Girls and Other Poems*, Hobart, 1985. Cranston, *ATL*, pp. 405-8.

⁴⁰ James McQueen, 'More than a River', in *The Rest of the World is Watching*, 1990, pp. 41-53. Cranston, *ATL*, pp. 401-5.

⁴¹ James McQueen, *Hook's Mountain*, South Melbourne, 1982. Cranston, *ATL*, pp. 227-8

⁴² Jim Everett and Karen Brown, *The Spirit of Kuti Kina: Tasmanian Aboriginal Poetry*, Hobart, 1990.

as a record of protest against the bid to drown the Franklin, which would have meant the drowning of Kuti Kina Cave, an Aboriginal site dating back 20,000 years. For these ‘Original Tasmanians’ there was no disciplinary separation between history and geography.

Something had changed. The Franklin River battle tipped the so-called narratives of shame from *topophobia* to *topophilia*. The land stories were not to be drowned out. Artists, activists, academics, demonstrated a refusal to contribute further to a history of obliteration. A type of ‘whole thinking’ (to borrow from poet Les Murray) gradually came about between history and geography, or, text and context. The reconciliation between indecent histories and blameful geographies reaches its confluence in the drowning narrative in Flanagan’s *Death of a River Guide*.⁴³ The river guide’s life and the lives of his ancestors—convict and Aboriginal—are brought into focus as he drowns in the last wild river,⁴⁴ the Franklin. Genealogies (the shame, the stain) and Geographies are embraced, and the river he once exploited, embraces him. Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish* (as you’d expect from the title) also has a concern with water. The character Gould becomes what he has studied and painted; he becomes a fish, or more precisely, he becomes a seadragon, ‘unburdened by speech and its complications’.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he’s a seadragon given to introspection:

Everything that’s wrong about this country begins in my story: they’ve all been making the place up, ever since the Commandant tried to reinvent Sarah Island as a New Venice, as the island of forgetting, because anything is easier than remembering. They’ll forget what happened here for a hundred years or more, then they’ll reimagine it like the old Dane reimaged it, because any story will be better than the sorry truth that it wasn’t the English who did this to us but ourselves, that convicts flogged convicts and pissed on blackfellas and spied on each other, that blackfellas sold black women for dogs and speared escaping convicts, that white sealers killed and raped black women, and black women killed the children that resulted.⁴⁶

The orator is, specifically, a Weedy Seadragon⁴⁷. This is worth observing for, as any undergraduate student knows, it is important to establish the reliability of the narrator.

⁴³ Richard Flanagan, *Death of a River Guide*, Ringwood, 1994. Cranston, *ATL*, 398-401.

⁴⁴ A ‘wild river’ is specifically designated as one that ‘has not been polluted, dammed or altered by the activities of human’, and its essential character is its natural condition. Australian Conservation Foundation, Policy Statement No. 27,

⁴⁵ Flanagan, *Gould’s Book of Fish*, p. 397.

⁴⁶ Flanagan, *Gould’s Book of Fish*, p. 401.

⁴⁷ The University connection to the seadragon rests with Professor in Aquaculture, Nigel Forteach, whose brainchild was the establishment of another ‘original’ and ‘first’, the Seahorse World, Beauty Point.



Figure 1: Weedy Seadragon (Copyright permission for use of postcard image granted by Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts)

Ostensibly sketched by convict artist Gould, and the subject of the final chapter, the picture and text represent the dichotomy and tension between parallel texts. Pobjoy's notion of the island as 'like a mask' continues within this fishy tale where even seadragons effect a masquerade, because Gould, or perhaps the good Dr de Little who collected specimens for Gould,⁴⁸ or perhaps even the State Library of Tasmania which provided Flanagan with the picture, has added the text 'Leafy Sea Dragon'. *This* is a Leafy Seadragon:



Figure 2: Leafy Seadragon (Source: http://www.divegallery.com/Leafy_Sea_Dragon.htm)

The Weedy- and the Leafy Seadragon are of the same family. As are writers of fiction, and writers of history. Archivists, like historians, 'build on the literature'. So when Gould, or de Little, or Darby, labeled the specimen, the State Library of Tasmania built on that knowledge and published a lovely post-

48 Garry Darby, *William Buelow Gould: Convict Artist of Van Diemen's Land*, Canberra, 1980, p. 54. Darby's text also labels the Weedy Seadragon as the Leafy Seadragon.

card with the impostor on it.⁴⁹ It's an instance in which language contributes to inadvertent transformation and erasure, but *contextually*, there's a very real threat of erasure—both species of seadragon are endangered, and currently protected by law (from *licgan*, to lie). But in this case it was Flanagan (the storyteller, the time-honoured liar), who avoided the rhetoric of habituation. It matters not to the seadragon what it is called; it matters only that nature (or history, for that matter) not be reduced to linguistic construction (as is the red tree on the Midland Highway) so that all that is left are words, not the things themselves—like the Dead Island headstone of the writer we began with, Henry Savery. Savery's actual grave location is unknown. And as one cannot enquire of the dead, we're left with only representation. Or, increasingly, representations of representations. More people will read the tourism text on the memorial stone than will read Savery's *original* texts.

What then *is* 'Originally Tasmanian'? The real *origins* of the island were when it and the mainland separated. *Intricacy* and *intimacy* have been shaped by the island form, a form that engages Barry Commoner's first law of ecology that 'everything is related to everything else'. The Governor spoke in his address earlier about 'networking'. I prefer the organic model with its links to the island context. For me, what is 'Originally Tasmanian' is the growing number of bioregional web-thinkers, Three Degrees of Separation people, who are capable of engaging on many levels, and of wearing many hats, be they academics, artists, or activists. At a time when tourism is currently engaging in representation—in rewriting history *and* the landscape, so that the Midland Highway is re-named the Heritage Highway and bears two-dimensional metal cut-outs of romantic bush rangers (an idea to be replicated at York Town, in the marketing of pain and death with its proposed two-dimensional convict cutouts)—at a time when tourism is marketing the earth and rewriting history and the landscape in its attempt to rename the Abt Railway the 'West Coast Wilderness Railway'⁵⁰—geography *and* history appear in danger of being reinvented, reimagined, reinscribed by a new brand of story teller.

⁴⁹ After communicating the anomaly to the Allport archivist I was told CSIRO was soon to begin work identifying the species. The library website is now correct, but impostor postcards are still for sale.

⁵⁰ The Premier Jim Bacon officially opened the West Coast Wilderness Railway on 3 April 2003.