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A Spanish convict, her clergyman biographer, and the amanuensis of her bastard son

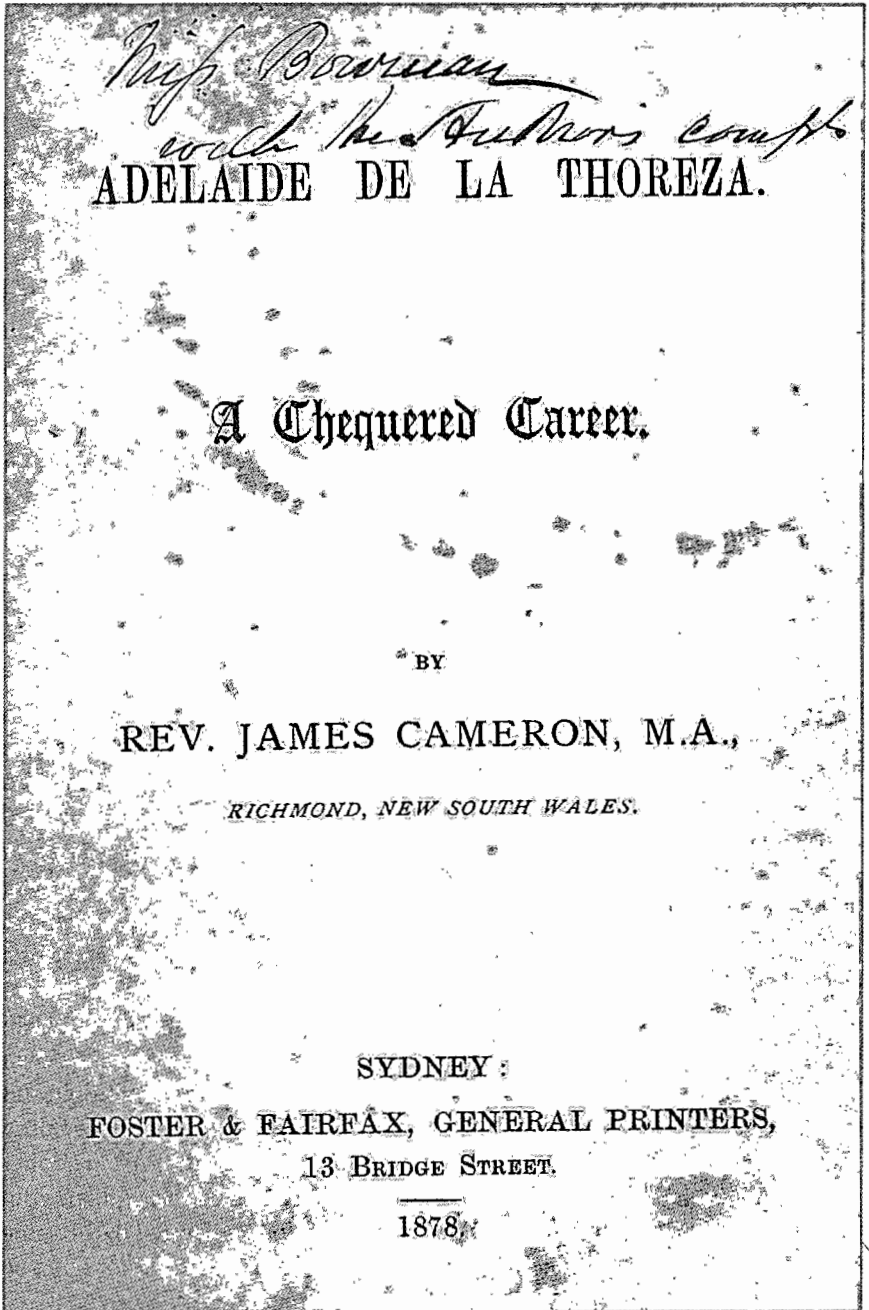
Susan Ballyn and Lucy Frost

It was her courtesy which made him notice her. The bent and toothless old woman who opened the door of the worker's cottage had manners elevated beyond her circumstances, and the clergyman was intrigued. Who was she? How had she learned to sprinkle her elegant speech with quotations from the English poets? Had she been on the stage? To James Cameron she remained a closed book until a sudden and alarming illness frightened her with intimations of mortality, and she spoke more openly than usual to the man who might have been her confessor, if he had been a Catholic priest instead of a Scottish Presbyterian clergyman. Tell me your secrets, the Reverend Cameron coaxed, satisfy my curiosity—and, perhaps he should have added, since I am *not* your confessor and not bound to keep secrets, I will make your telling into my text, I will author you. I will do for you what Richard Cobbold did in 1845 for Margaret Catchpole, buried in that unmarked grave on the edge of town, and buried in the memories of people around here too. Who gave a passing thought to the assigned servant turned shopkeeper until *Margaret Catchpole: History of a Suffolk Girl* created an international bestseller from the story of a woman sentenced to death first for stealing a roan coach gelding, and then for escaping from the Ipswich gaol dressed in the clothes of a man?¹

During the pastoral visits of days and months and years, the Spanish woman handed over her story to the clergyman. Back at his desk in the elegant house dwarfing the little church at its side (both built by the wealthy landowner whose daughter Cameron had judiciously married), the biographer penned prose that drowned in literary cliché the voice of the woman who spoke. And then, within months of her death, after she lay buried in the same churchyard as Margaret Catchpole, James Cameron put in his bid for fame by publishing *Adelaide de la Thoreza: a Chequered Career*.²

The clergyman biographer

The biography is infuriating—the more one looks, the less one sees. No, a biographer is not his subject's ventriloquist, but it would be helpful to know



Title page from James Cameron's *Adelaide de la Thoreza*, Sydney, 1878.

whether Cameron wrote the story he heard, or used Adelaide's account as the springboard for fiction. If her English was really as eloquent as he claims, why not encourage her to write her own account, offering to edit rather than narrate? Did he wait for the old woman to die because she would deny what only she could verify, the story of her life before she was transported to Botany Bay?

The biographer's version of a childhood in Spain

Adelaide, according to Cameron, was born in Madrid in 1808. Her father, Julian de la Thoreza, was a Spanish nobleman, and his wife was of the 'ancient and honourable house' of de la Vega.³ Adelaide as their only child enjoyed their 'undivided interest and affection'. One day when she was four, her protective father decided to keep her home from a cousin's birthday party because she had a bad cold:

The veto thus put on her fondly cherished wish was peculiarly galling to her, and roused into lively exercise the natural heat and vehemence of the Spanish temperament. Her father was busy shaving himself, his foot resting on a stool. Suddenly she sprang on this, snatched the razor from her father's hand, and with it inflicted a wound on her arm, from which the blood spurted over both him and her. 'Will you now let me go?' she exclaimed. Struck with the courageous energy which the deed displayed, her father, instead of chastising her, held her aloft in his arms, and, with a smile of parental satisfaction and pride, exclaimed 'Julian de la Thoreza's own daughter'.⁴

When Adelaide was old enough for school, her fervently patriotic and politically outspoken father sent her to a convent, where during the 'troubulous times' he hoped to keep her safe.⁵ The abbess doted on Adelaide, the spitting image of the lover for whom the nun so long ago had taken the veil (he had been condemned to death for his politics, and 'with a barbarity worthy of such a country, his affianced bride was compelled to be present at the execution').⁶ Only eleven young ladies boarded at the convent, an elite set whose liberal education was carefully nurtured. Here Adelaide learned English, giving 'long recitations from our standard authors in prose and poetry'.⁷ She escaped such disasters as befell the beautiful schoolmate cousin who collapsed and died at the convent door, just as the carriage arrived to bear her off to be married (she died from an orange pip around which a ball had grown in her stomach).

When Julian de la Thoreza was eventually forced into exile, Adelaide left the convent to flee with her parents first to France, and then Italy. Because her father—the son, grandson, and great-grandson of ministers of state—

supported the liberal cause, his life was in danger from the royalists after Ferdinand VII was restored to the throne in 1814. During her exile, Adelaide fell in love with 'a young Italian gentleman' of engaging manners and good family.⁸ He proposed, her parents said yes, and the lovers impatiently waited out the two months until Adelaide would turn fourteen, and they could be married. On the moonlit night before their wedding day, they strolled in the town's public gardens. As they imagined the ceremony to come, the eager bridegroom pulled from his pocket the wedding ring

to place it by anticipation on the finger of his betrothed. But lo! when in the act of putting it on, a gleam as of lightning dazzled her sight. It was the gleam of glittering steel, and that steel was being plunged by a vengeful hand into her lover's bosom.⁹

A hot-headed Spanish rival, to whom 'according to a vile custom of the country' Adelaide was betrothed as a child, had followed her to Italy, and killed off the love of her life. 'Her own hand had been wounded by the weapon in its passage. The ring even had been severed, and the mark of the wound received on that memorable night, she bore about with her through life, and carried to her grave.'¹⁰

A year later, on her fifteenth birthday, Adelaide was back in Madrid. Political allegiances had shifted, and Julian de la Thoreza was a public man once more. On her birthday morning, he 'presented his daughter with a beautiful book' and 'a crown of flowers, which he placed on her head, and called her "Queen Adelaide"'. But he seemed troubled. 'Three times he returned to kiss his wife, ere taking his departure to the Senate House.' All day in the Cortes and on the streets of Madrid there was political turmoil, but within their home, Adelaide and her mother were busily preparing a gala celebration.

The evening came; the guests had assembled; the music had begun; and Adelaide was waiting for her father's arrival, to open the ball. Of a sudden, a confused noise was heard in the great square. Her mother rushed to the window to ascertain the cause. A sorrowful sight burst upon her view. A bleeding corpse was being borne toward her house. It was her beloved husband, struck down by the hand of an assassin.¹¹

Adelaide's mother fainted, lapsed into unconsciousness, and died, recovering only briefly 'to give some directions as to the future custody of her orphan child'. Beside the deathbed stood 'an Indian lady of rank, and of English extraction. She was the widow of a military officer who had been killed in the Peninsular war.' To this childless aristocrat, the Countess Coutts Trotter, Adelaide was bequeathed. She came penniless, 'for all the family property

was confiscated, and she was cast a forlorn orphan on the care of others'.¹² She had no Spanish family to turn to:

Her uncle Adolphus, like her father, had been basely assassinated. Her uncle Alonso had been immured in a dungeon, and on one occasion when he wanted water to quench his thirst, blood was brought to him instead, while the skull of his murdered brother was made to serve the purpose of a drinking cup. It was time to leave a land where political rancour was making blood to flow like water.¹³

The evidence

Not a shred of evidence supports the story Cameron tells about Adelaide's childhood. No record of birth fits his account of an aristocratic lineage (signalled by 'de la') on both sides of her family. 'Thoreza' is not a Spanish surname: 'th' itself is unusual in Spanish, although it might be a corruption of a name beginning with 'z' and thus *pronounced* 'th'. Adelaide's birth is recorded neither under 'Thoreza', nor under any surname beginning with 'z'. Cameron gives no first name for Adelaide's mother, but there is no record anyway of a 'de la Vega' marrying a 'de la Thoreza' (or variant thereof), or giving birth in the Madrid parish to an Adelaide. To complicate matters further, our search must remain inconclusive because the records are incomplete. Adelaide was supposedly born, and her parents married, before Spain had a centralised system for registering births, deaths, and marriages. Few parish records for Madrid survived the Napoleonic wars, Carlist wars, and the Spanish Civil War.

There are state records, however, and if the family of Julian de la Thoreza had indeed included three generations of ministers of state, they would have been appointed by the Crown, and their names printed in the *Gaceta Oficial* in Madrid. No such appointment appears under any version of 'de la Thoreza'. Neither is the assassination of Adelaide's father or her Uncle Adolphus reported. No edict exists authorising the confiscation of property of Julian de la Thoreza. And if Adelaide had borne on her hand the scar from the weapon which killed her Italian lover, the mark useful for identification would have been written into her convict record. It was not.

From orphaned aristocrat to convict woman

In London, says her biographer, Adelaide lived with the Countess Coutts Trotter on Grosvenor Square. The Countess, a Protestant, attended to 'the proprieties of religion', but was very much 'a woman of the world, haughty,

imperious and specially desirous of cutting a respectable figure in fashionable society'.¹⁴ Dutiful Adelaide, though with little heart for such frivolity, went off to 'balls, parties, the opera, the theatre'. After two and a half years, the match-making Countess introduced her ward to an Indian nabob described by the press as having wealth 'so vast that he could pay off the National Debt'.¹⁵ Though admittedly twenty or so years older than Adelaide, he was 'still in his prime . . . tall and handsome, and as attractive as we can imagine an Indian to be'. Adelaide declined his offer of marriage. The Countess was furious with the ingrate: 'seek for yourself another home'.¹⁶

Adelaide found refuge with Lady Kirkwall, who was 'not merely intellectual and accomplished, but also pious'. All went well until summer, when Adelaide 'for various reasons' preferred remaining in town, while Lady Kirkwall went to Scotland, leaving a cousin to stay with her new ward.¹⁷ Adelaide came down with typhus, and almost died. While she was recovering from one sort of fever, the lower orders in the household (butler, housekeeper, and upper housemaid) contracted another: they were stricken with lottery-madness and bought £100 worth of tickets by pawning the Kirkwall silver. They won nothing, as the cousin quickly discovered, seeing in their crime the perfect opportunity to remove a 'hated rival' because, yes, the cousin was in love with Lady Kirkwall's brother, Major de Blatchford, and the Major was in love with Adelaide.¹⁸ The cousin 'laid information against Adelaide, affirming that she had overheard her conversing with the servants about the pawning of the goods'. Adelaide was arrested, and as she left for gaol, 'the cousin, with a fiendish grin of triumph, whispered in her ear the caustic words "What will Major de Blatchford think of you now?"' The trial excited much interest. The Major was there, and Lady Kirkwall, and when Adelaide was convicted along with the servants, 'such a shock did this give to Lady Kirkwall, that she fainted, and shortly thereafter expired'. The judge said he was sorry to sentence to Botany Bay 'one so young, so engaging, and moving in such a circle as Adelaide did'.¹⁹

The evidence

Nothing supports Cameron's version of Adelaide as the orphaned aristocrat betrayed. Still, there are traces in the biography of actual people. Though the Coutts Trotters do exist and in the 1820s owned a house on Grosvenor Square, nowhere is Adelaide mentioned in their extensive household papers, even as servant.²⁰ Neither the family nor Debretts, which guards the Coutts Trotter genealogy for *Burke's Peerage*, countenance the suggestion of an Anglo-Indian countess.²¹ There was a Lady Kirkwall, and although she did not die until 1831 when Adelaide was two years into her sentence, her maiden name of 'de

Blaquiere' is close to Cameron's 'de Blatchford'. There is nothing in the London newspapers about a fabulously wealthy Indian nabob, or an alluring lottery (though public lotteries at this time were illegal). There is, however, the printed record of a trial held at the Old Bailey on the sixth day of the fifth session, beginning Thursday 11 June 1829, and transcribed in shorthand as case 1286 in which 'Adelaide De Thoraza was indicted for stealing, on the 28th of April, 6 sheets, value 15s., the goods of Martha Davis'.²²

Davis spoke first:

I live at No. 15, Finsbury-street, Finsbury-square. I am single, and am a dress-maker—the prisoner was a servant at my house for fifteen months and a fortnight; she was there I believe at the time the sheets were stolen—she was the only female servant in the house; it was her business to mind the bedding and the bed-room; a butcher came to me to ask for a sum of money which I did not owe—I then went and searched the prisoner's box; I found a sheet and a night-gown belonging to me—I knew the sheet was mine, it had been worn a little, but was not dirty—it was a sheet from her own bed, but it was mine; I examined her bed soon after, and both the sheets were gone—this was on the 28th of April; I never saw the corresponding sheet; the officer produced some duplicates, by which we found six sheets; I knew them to be mine, as I had assisted to spin them, and made them up myself.²³

Susannah Perry then told the court that one evening some months earlier Adelaide appeared with 'a pair of sheets and a bolster in her apron', saying that the bailiffs had been to her mistress's house, and Adelaide had already pawned a bed for her. Now she was tired, so would Susannah please pawn the sheets on her mistress's behalf? Yes, she would, and she did, and gave eight shillings to Adelaide. The pawnbroker's assistant said that Susannah had been in the shop, and he thought she had pawned the sheets—her name and address were on the ticket later claimed by Martha Davis.

Davis was recalled: 'These are my sheets, they are marked with my name; the prisoner had no authority to pawn them—I never authorised her to pawn a bed; I had an excellent character with her.'²⁴

A pawnbroker took the stand, saying he had 'four sheets pawned at two different times', not in the name of Susannah Perry but Eliza Wilson: 'I do not know who pawned them'.²⁵ He thought that because they were not marked, Davis had not sworn they were her property, but as the policeman John Bee would tell the court, the tickets for those sheets were found on Adelaide when she was taken up and searched. Again, Martha Davis was recalled:

COURT to MARTHA DAVIS. Q. Look at these four sheets, and tell me what reason you have to claim them as yours? A. I made up part of them—

some of them were kept in a cupboard and some in a box, they are both kept locked; I never sent the prisoner to take the sheets out; I always do that myself.

GUILTY. Aged 23.

Transported for Seven Years.²⁶

Adelaide might have spoken during her trial, said something about her circumstances, entered a defence. We might at least have heard her voice through the clerk's shorthand. Her silence deepens our uncertainty.

Is it relevant that Finsbury Square, where Martha Davis lost her sheets, is no more than a ten-minute walk from the Finsbury Barracks, and 'dressmaker' was often a euphemism for prostitute?

From convict woman to pioneer mother

Aboard the *Lucy Davidson* bound for Botany Bay, James Cameron's Adelaide is still treated as special. 'Every consideration' was shown her during the voyage, and she carried letters of introduction to men of influence, including the Governor:

This secured for her as much regard for her comfort as was compatible with the position she occupied. She was assigned to an old Spanish gentleman, Arietta by name, who lived at the Cow-pastures. It was thought that this would be a congenial home for her; but in her countryman's household she did not, by any means, find things wholly to her mind. Her next place was in the family of Commissary Birch.²⁷

This was much better. Here she cared for a little girl who decades later would remember distinctly 'an assigned servant that we called *Theresa* . . . I was very fond of her and often wished to see her again'.²⁸

Unfortunately, mingling with the lower orders as 'a servant among servants' did Adelaide's morals no good. She became pregnant to a fellow servant, George Smith, who 'afterwards drowned'. Though he offered to marry Adelaide, 'her feelings recoiled', and she 'declined'. Alfred Smith was born, the 'energetic and trustworthy' drover 'still sojourning among us'. Adelaide went next to an estate on the edge of a village, Richmond, where the Cox family lived like English gentry. They treated the cultivated Adelaide as 'companion' rather than convict servant, and attempted to dissuade her from 'stooping' to marry their butler John Masters.²⁹ A few months after 'companion' and butler were free, and before they married on 8 September 1836, Masters (formerly apprenticed to a solicitor and tempted 'in an evil hour' to forgery) wrote his bride-to-be a touching letter. Enclosing the first money earned 'since I have

been in bondage', he was in a mood for promises: 'Your own dear child was first to call me father; in me he shall find a father; in me you shall find a kind and loving partner'.³⁰

To John and Adelaide Masters two children were born, Adelaide and Thomas. The ex-convict parents 'set up a small shop in Richmond, in which confectionery and other wares were sold'. They prospered and moved nearby to the larger town of Windsor, where John Masters 'followed the trade of a painter'. And drank. And grew unpredictable and violent. And was sent away by his wife, desperate for 'some measure of peace and comfort'.³¹ From the distance of Maitland, Masters wrote his 'wounded feelings' into poetry:

Yes, thou didst wrong me, A. . . , I fondly thought
In thee I'd find the love, my heart had sought . . .³²

And in response from Richmond, where Adelaide lived with their unmarried son Tom, and kept herself by washing for the Hawkesbury Benevolent Asylum, came 'verses, believed to be her composition', verses in which 'she bewailed her estrangement from him in whose affection she had hoped to find a solace amid the trials of life'.³³ Years later, an old man 'bowed down with infirmities and sorrows' returned to Richmond to talk with his wife once more, and die. The Adelaide who was by this time confiding in James Cameron lived out the rest of her days in gloom, quoting often the words she wished engraved upon her tombstone:

I've lived to prove
There's darkness in the brightest dream,
And sorrow in the deepest joy.³⁴

On 26 December 1877, in the year before her seventieth birthday, Adelaide Masters née de la Thoreza was 'united to Christ'.³⁵

Amanuensis to the bastard son

Some thirty years later, on 13 November 1909, the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* began a series which would run for a year under the title, 'Some Ups and Downs of an Old Richmondite, Mr Alfred Smith'.³⁶ The reminiscences were introduced by Robert Farlow, who had for some time thought 'the experiences of my esteemed old friend, Mr Alfred Smith, of Richmond, ought to be worth chronicling and should make interesting reading'. Smith might be in 'his seventy eighth year', but his 'memory is very good and clear and carries him back to his early boyhood days'. In this project, says Farlow, 'I

shall place myself in the background as much as possible throughout and allow Mr Smith to tell his own tale'.³⁷ With the exception of one brief comment, the amanuensis calls no further attention to himself until the story's end, and what he then says rings true: 'Throughout I have left the narrator as original as possible, and I think the reader who knows the narrator has often fancied they have been chatting with the old man.'³⁸ Rather different from James Cameron's designs on Adelaide.

Alf Smith begins at the beginning:

I was born at Hobartville on July the 13th 1831 . . . I have heard them say father at one time kept an hotel near Bungarrabee, on the Western road, and was found drowned near Liverpool by one of the late Mr Lowes. Old George James having only one child, a daughter . . . adopted me as his own child. They were kind to me, and I never forgot their kindness, and always tried to do as much as I could to repay them, as long as they lived.³⁹

Only once does Smith mention his mother. He has been describing the cottages along Bosworth Street (did Farlow walk with him along these village streets, inviting the old man to recollect the vanished?):

Mrs Masters, my mother, stands first in my mind. I was taken down to see her one day, and told she was my mother, but I couldn't make out how it was possible to have two mothers. I had always known Mrs James as mother, and I was too young to know anything about being adopted at the age of fifteen months.⁴⁰

For whatever reason, Alf Smith never called John Masters 'father' as Cameron's account seemed to anticipate, but he weaves his mother's husband into memories of the small community where they all lived:

Going down March street . . . there was a skillion standing just past the corner. The front portion has been put on since I first knew it. The first person I have any recollections of living there was John Masters, father of Tom Masters in Windsor. He was a painter and decorator by trade, and a splendid tradesman. He was an artist also, and could paint animals or any other pictures. Weller, I think, who was a publican of Windsor in the early days, had a sign done by him. It represented a blackfellow and a large lump of gold in his hand.⁴¹

John Masters, father of Tom. Tom Masters, mate of Alf Smith. Thomas Mathew Masters, born in Richmond on 23 May 1843, must have been no more than twelve when he started working for Alf, who was twice that age.⁴² 'Tom was well liked all along the road. Civil, obliging, and a real good fellow

was Tom.' Again and again as Alf recounts his stories of those days 'when droving was droving', Tom is mentioned, the lad whose erratic father had by this time been banished to Maitland. The fatherless half-brothers fend for themselves, and look after each other as they travel the vast distances from the other side of Bourke down into Ned Kelly country, even 'entertaining bushrangers unawares'.⁴³ And Alf weaves Adelaide's daughter into the story too, Adelaide Eliza Masters, born in Richmond on 8 January 1838.⁴⁴ Outside Richmond, a clergyman kept a boarding school, where 'Mrs Etherdon, of Marrickville, a sister of Tom Masters, was a pupil'—while her brothers were on the road, young Adelaide was at school.⁴⁵

Alf Smith's recall of detail is phenomenal: in his mind's eye the Richmond where his mother lived for forty years after she was free is rebuilt, and reinhabited. But nothing is said of the convict factor (and Alf's adoptive father had been a convict too), and with names like 'Smith' and 'Masters' the Spanish element seems to vanish as well. Except for one evocative detail. Alf remembers a six-roomed house on Lennox Street, 'old weatherboard, and "brick nogged" inside', run as a pub by a man named Menease, who hailed from Spain, and was my godfather'.⁴⁶ A Spanish godfather . . . Adelaide's gift to her bastard son?

Secrets and cover-ups, or, what to make of this story . . .

Quite a beginning for a child born in the Parramatta Female Factory—an exotic Spanish godfather growing vines on the river terraces outside Richmond, and a completely untraceable father named 'John Smith'.⁴⁷ Or was the almost comically determined Englishness a cover-up for the actual father, recently married and socially pretentious? A father who flourished his signature as 'John, Baptist, Lehimas, De Arrieta' or sometimes with dramatic brevity as just the aristocratic-sounding 'De Arrieta'.⁴⁸

Arrieta had heard about 'a spanish woman' aboard the *Lucy Davidson* from Sydney's harbour master, who 'promised to endeavour to get her assigned to me'.⁴⁹ Perhaps a Spanish-speaker would not tax the vocabulary of a man of whom a bored houseguest had unkindly said, 'De Arrietta's whole range of the English Language did not include above Fifty Words!'⁵⁰ Arrieta had been in New South Wales since 1821, and was the recipient of a 2000-acre grant of prime land adjoining the Macarthur property at Camden Park. Why was he so well treated?⁵¹ Among his contemporaries, Arrieta's call on the public purse was explained by saying that he was a spy during the Peninsular War, or a prisoner of war, or a witness during the trial of Queen Caroline, or, more plausibly, that he was attached to the Commissariat and

acted as a contact between the Army and the local contractors, but he had lost money through speculation, and was therefore pressing his British contacts to help him start again in the colony.⁵² Arrieta was in his mid-fifties when 23-year-old Adelaide joined his household, and the nineteen-year-old he had married the previous year in what looks like a shotgun wedding was already the mother of a baby girl.⁵³ Remembering the household, a neighbour would later recall

an excitable man, Senor D'Arrietta [with] a gay, charming, but equally excitable wife . . . on one occasion, as he sat brooding after a quarrel, she smashed a prize pumpkin over his head. If D'Arrietta was excitable, he was also practical.

'Dios!' he cried. 'What I do now for the pumpkin seed?'⁵⁴

Adelaide's volatile young mistress was English, and it was not for her that Arrieta requested 'the spanish woman'.

Convicts assigned to Arrieta had in the past been reported for absconding and barnburning, and in at least one case, a complaint had been lodged against the master as sexual predator.⁵⁵ Three years before Adelaide's arrival, a convict husband petitioned the Colonial Secretary, saying that 'in consequence of some private motives Mr. D'Arrietta took advantage of Petitioner in order to separate him from his wife'.⁵⁶ Adelaide may have been another victim of Arrieta's 'private motives'. Certainly she was pregnant within ten months of being assigned to his property 'at the Cow-pastures', as Cameron put it, although Arrieta's name, 'Morton Park', sounds more elegant (he was probably evoking the name of the well-connected British Member of Parliament, Morton Pitt, who wrote letters of introduction for 'a good friend of mine, a Spaniard, but who has long resided in England at different times').⁵⁷ One visitor, having described his host as 'a happy, good-humoured, hospitable Spanish gentleman', conjures up a paranoid intruder into the landscape, who 'has, by way of protection from burglars and bush-rangers, drawn a regular chain of videttes around [the homestead] in the shape of fierce growling devils of dogs, pegged down to the ground at such exact mathematical distances, that two can just meet to lick each other's faces, and pinch a mouthful out of any intruder's hip'.⁵⁸ The peculiar personality behind this arrangement of dogs, uncannily like that of the beasts chained across Eagle Hawk Neck to stop convicts escaping from Port Arthur, emerges from the letter from an acquaintance of the Peninsular War years to his wife. After forty-seven days at Morton Park (he counted them), the guest wrote that Arrieta's 'interminable list of mortifications which his embarrassments subject him to—has encreased the irritability of a temper originally warm and hasty till it is become a disease, and the gay warm, easy open hearted man of thirty is become at forty eight

envious, suspicious, gloomy and irritable'.⁵⁹ And no doubt overbearing when it came to making demands upon a young Spanish woman, who found herself assigned to work inside the circle of dogs on a property sufficiently far from any town for a social life beyond the homestead to seem unlikely.

Whoever was the father of Adelaide's child, and it could have been another servant at Morton Park, it was the master who by returning the pregnant convict woman to the Female Factory at Parramatta extended her bondage from two years to almost seven (Adelaide served all but three months of her seven-year sentence, whereas John Masters received his ticket-of-leave before he had served half his fourteen years).⁶⁰ The pressures on Adelaide must have been intense, and if she was not the victim of dastardly aristocrats, as Cameron would have it, she undoubtedly felt the crushing power of forces beyond her control. We know that she gave birth to Alfred Smith in prison, and relinquished him when weaned to George and Ann James. If she had kept her baby longer, she would have risked his being sent to the Orphan School, as usually happened with the children of convict mothers.⁶¹ Even when she was free, she did not reclaim Alf, or establish regular contact with him. But whether she tried, we do not know, and after all, when Alf went to the Jameses in 1832, Adelaide managed to get herself assigned to William Cox at Hobartville, on the edge of Richmond where the Jameses lived.⁶² She and John Masters could easily have moved after their marriage to start a family in some place where people did not know about Alf, or about their convict past, and yet they made their home in Richmond. When Masters turned out to be a disastrous husband and father, Adelaide made him leave the area so that she could stay. We know, too, that before Adelaide relinquished Alf, she generated an official document implying legitimate origins when she had him baptised at St John's Church of England, Parramatta, as the son of Adelaide De Theorisa and John Smith.⁶³ By espousing 'Smith', that blandest of English names, Adelaide told the person registering the baptism what she wanted him to know.

And when did Adelaide begin to realise that power often resides not in the 'facts', but in the way a story is told? Did she as a child in Spain hear details from her life reshaped into stories a mother or father told to make things happen in the way they wished, or at least to try to make them happen? Was she, like her first child, the bastard offspring of a man who used her mother and then pushed her aside, perhaps a British soldier fighting with the Spanish to free the Iberian Peninsula from Napoleonic invaders? Did Adelaide's mother make her way to London in search of the child's father, and then die or abandon her daughter to fend for herself as prostitute or servant? If the past were marked by an English father's betrayal, would that explain her clinging to a Spanish surname, and to Spanishness itself as a source of identity? Or was she after all the victim of some complicated set of circumstances,

reconfigured by Cameron in his fantasy of gothic Spain and the romantic aristocratic child?

We have fossicked in the archives of Australia, Spain, and the United Kingdom, pondered all sorts of possibilities, argued between ourselves and with others, and now we are left with a female convict narrative which remains at crucial points as murky as ever. At its end, however, there is closure. We can see Adelaide clearly at her moment of death, the matriarch whose three children all live within easy walking distance in Richmond, and who have each named a daughter Adelaide in honour of their mother: the daughter of Alfred Smith was born in 1860; of Adelaide (Masters) Etherdon in 1866; and of Tom Masters in 1871.⁶⁴ But 'Adelaide' was after all the name of an English queen, a name which need not sound 'foreign' to British ears, so was our convict woman even Spanish? Cameron says so, of course, but who are we to trust Cameron? Just as we are about to collapse into the despair of researchers who have found much, only to know nothing, we suddenly notice details on the certificate of death. Tom, the son with whom for decades Adelaide had lived, tells for the authorities the story he knows: his mother was born in Spain, the daughter of 'Julian Delatheresa, a Spaniard, rank not known'.⁶⁵ Whatever may or may not be true about Adelaide's origins, we are satisfied now that this convict woman who became an Australian pioneer mother and grandmother began her improbable journey in Spain.