

# Reading the Tracker: The Antinomies of Aboriginal Ventriloquism

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*I acknowledge the elders of the Ngunnawall past and present, on whose land this work was first read, the elders of Wangal past and present, upon whose land I live and work, and the elders of the Wonnarua and of Yadhaykenu past and present, from whose history this narrative emerges, none of whom ceded sovereignty.*

This paper traverses an array of theories and disciplines bearing on the representation and interpretation of Aboriginal people within the narratives of colonial Modernity and the institutions of Western scholarship descended from these narratives. While these discourses occupy contiguous spaces, their fault-lines articulate ongoing contradictions within Australian cultural discourse, and between that discourse and its material conditions. The rise of Aboriginal Literature, as such, and of global Indigenous Studies, has further illuminated the inability of classical textual analysis to describe certain forms of difference. This deficiency was demonstrated by the post-structural turn, but not, it seems, substantively understood or implemented, and present conditions demand a more urgent reconfiguration of the assumed relationships between writing, interpretation and culture.

In his sweeping pedagogy *Trans-Indigenous* (2012), Chadwick Allen argues that the structures of 'orthodox' literary studies have largely restrained rather than enlarged the ability of interpretation to ethically or accurately reckon forms of literary and philosophical meaning that are outside, and antithetical to, the axioms of Modernity. This makes penetrating sense in light of the theological origins of philology and criticism in typology and hermeneutics—both of which are structured to maintain identity and contiguity with a metaphysical origin. Anxious disciplinary preferences for certain forms of relation and the corresponding erasure of others are further exacerbated in the context of the settler state, where the interpretation of Indigenous culture continues to be structured by the false curatorial terms of survey and 'celebration,' which wittingly or otherwise reiterate 'old regimes for the regulation of authenticity' (xxxii). This history presents the contemporary, non-Indigenous scholar with a series of obdurate methodological problems. One of these is the antinomy between historicism and theory. Their assumed lucidity makes historical research and close reading intuitive tools to address the structures of ongoing dispossession, but these disciplines and the assumptions that buttress them have been shown to be intricately complicit with the erasure and ventriloquism of Aboriginal presence. As Maria Nugent and Felix Driver have shown, among others, the exploration archive is explicitly structured against the recognition of Indigenous labour (Nugent, 67; Driver, 8). If we add to this structure the epistemological problems of curation, dictation and redaction involved in what colonial literature of Aboriginal presence the archive retains, then historicist methods can be seen to be at least as likely to distort as to illuminate this particular field. A comparable problem attends the more abstract methods of critical theory, if such can be opposed to historicism, in that their estranging force is liable to obscure material realities beneath any narratives dislodged and to emphasise the discursive over the material. One of theory's more influential proponents Paul de Man notes the totalising effects of its

destructive power as a consistently defective model ‘of language’s impossibility to be a model of language’ (20). As such theory on its own does not resolve the methodological impasse of difference. Both historical research and critical theory are, as Evelyn Araluen argues, the master’s tools and re-interpreting his house will not dismantle it.<sup>1</sup>

These difficulties will not be swiftly navigated and probably cannot be resolved by a scholar without cultural authority—a term I use advisedly to mean that held by an Aboriginal scholar, recognised by community. As such, I find it necessary to foreground the will-to-power implicit in all our current forms of praxis, and therefore their final failure to describe or approach Aboriginal culture. This essay attempts to think through this predicament in the form of an antinomian or aporetic reading, which could be called historical or decolonial—although this term is easily misused—deconstruction. This approach foregrounds the contradictions and elisions through which the Aboriginal subject has been thought by the settler state and uses these lacunae to illustrate certain conceptual limits of the colonial project. Ideally, the deconstruction of these tropes might open a path for renewed conceptual and dialogic possibilities, but for current purpose it is enough to articulate ignorance in a more honest light. Like any exercise in experimental scholarship this carries certain risks, though I note that risk is precisely what Allen calls for in the context of ‘an academic field that increasingly defines itself as sovereign from the obsessions of orthodox studies of literatures in English’ (xv). Naturally, I may incur the historicist objection that such a negative method is anti-scholastic and aims to disturb more than to clarify. This resistance is already structured by assumptions antithetical to Aboriginal culture and writing, however, which, as Nick Jose argues in the foreword to *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature* have ‘the potential to change received understandings not only of Australian literature but of literature itself, in the largest possible sense’ (ix). The assumption that an Aboriginal text could or should be readily available as an object for transparent ‘Modern’ or secular scholarship is at best dubious and, in the context of settler societies, more likely worse. In his reading of Michel de Montaigne’s *Of Cannibals* (1580), a seminal work in the history of both colonial literature and secular critical thought, Michel de Certeau identifies the form of a *heterology*, in which inheres both ‘a representation of the other and the fabrication and accreditation of the text as witness of the other’ (68). This structure produces authority at the cost of erasure. In a different colonial context, Édouard Glissant paraphrases this process: ‘I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh’ (190). Such structures mean that there are senses in which even the most politically sympathetic, conventional scholarship is complicit with the constitutive erasure of Australian settlement. Contrary to this, I argue that the authority and ability to describe Aboriginal experience do not reside within Western institutions of scholarship. This inquiry is framed as a response to that predicament in the knowledge that, as de Man wrote in *The Resistance to Theory*, ‘it is better to fail in teaching what should not be taught than to succeed in teaching what is not true’ (4). Operating without the illusion of that authority, as Allen’s project demonstrates, the critical instruments of historical and theoretical scholarship can work to dismantle and disrupt the structures and assumptions with which they have been complicit, to open a more hospitable space for substantive dialogue.

Here it might be salutary to clarify some terms. The antinomy, normally signifying a contradiction in law or amongst laws, became a useful device for Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) as a paradox illustrating the limits of rational thought. This structure is adapted by Fredric Jameson to clarify the ideology of form through its contradictions, saliently in *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) but also through the wider arc of his dialectical critique from *The Political Unconscious* (1981) onwards. This method grasps its object as a paradox and an anomaly, and the thinking of it as a contradiction or an *aporia*’ (6): here Jameson draws

explicitly on Derrida's particular definition of aporetic thinking. Contrary to a lamentably popular misconception, deconstruction is neither apolitical nor nihilistic, and the aporia for Derrida is not 'an absence of path, a paralysis before roadblocks... (but) the thinking of the path' (*Memoires* 132). In Richard Beardsworth's commentary, 'Impossibility is not the *opposite* of the possible: impossibility *releases* the possible' (26). Following this logic, this article pays close attention to some of the conceptual paradoxes underpinning one of the most recognisable archetypes of colonised Aboriginality: the tracker. In its deepest symbolism, I argue, the figure of the tracker attempts, and critically fails, to solidify and legitimate the colonisation not merely of the Australian continent but of the bodies and minds of its original inhabitants.

## I

The tracker emerges from national mythology as an *unheimlich* and ambivalent figure, who appears both to support and to unsettle what Paul Carter called 'the "self-reinforcing fabric of illusions' that constitutes colonial discourse (*Road* xv). This participation is exaggerated by the fact that outside this role 'Australia's Indigenous population... rarely enjoy any narrative status in Australian exploration literature' (*Living* 47). Nonetheless, revisions performed in the 1980s and 1990s by historians such as Henry Reynolds have recentred Aboriginal labour by reading against the racialised discourse in which it has been styled. Reynolds argues in *With the White People* (1990) that the history of European exploration in the Australian continent narrates a dichotomy between those who learned to engage with the cultivated landscape of Aboriginal civilization, and thereby survived beneath the mythic aegis of heroic, solitary conquest of a virgin wilderness, and those who, like Burke and Wills, were wary of Aboriginal presence and perished or failed.

However, there are stark limits to what even the most revisionist historicism can achieve within the exploration archive. Nugent acknowledges this in her historical reading of 'the Statement of Jackey Jackey' (an exceptional document that apparently renders the verbatim testimony of Galmarra, a young Wonnarua man who accompanied Edmund Kennedy's disastrous expedition to Cape York in 1848) to which I am significantly indebted. Nugent's rigorous anatomy of the curatorial structures of 'imperial and colonial knowledge' (68) can only aspire to encounter the Aboriginal voice 'with less interference than usual' (71). Because of this limit her study claims to shed only 'a sliver of light on the ways in which Jackey engaged with the limited "subject" and speaking positions available to him' (81). Like Allen's, her conclusion calls for new forms of cross-cultural history that demand 'interpretive approaches [that] go beyond [...] archival sources to be mined for content' (81). Nugent identifies a predicament which, even within the conventions of purely historical praxis, is both remarkable and untenable.

My own theoretical reading of the Statement of Jackey Jackey below is an attempt to address what Nugent and Allen have identified as an epistemological crisis or turning point within textual scholarship. First, however, it will be useful to identify the tropes that structure and contain the idea of the tracker in the colonial archive, and subsequent settler representations. The first of these is a form of primitivism, working such that even when exploration's dependence upon guides and trackers is noted, it is read as a product of 'biology rather than culture' (Reynolds 37). In this heterology the skill of the tracker is explained with reference to bestial or chthonic instinct, and so his distance from the reason of European man. As Langton notes, the tracker is overwhelmingly portrayed as male (58)—with notable exceptions such as Furphy's *Such is Life*—but this gendering has no origins in cultural knowledge or skill, and

becomes another instance of the heterological replication. Given the intricate gendering of the explorer as a model or prophet of the imperial subject, this is not insignificant.

The primitivist trope is critical to the colonial project; without its interference the ability of the tracker becomes an expression of the Aboriginal subject's agency, autonomy, and even more disturbingly, the superiority of Aboriginal knowledge as an interpretation of the Australian continent—fundamentally antithetical to the principles of settlement. An example can be found in the writing of Edward B. Kennedy—a late nineteenth-century bushman with an awkwardly similar name to the earlier explorer. Kennedy devotes a chapter of *Four Years in Queensland* (1870) to 'the Black Question' (67), in which he makes a thinly veiled argument for genocide. He dismisses the tracker's competence in primitivist terms:

And because these Blacks can track well, hunt well, and are exceedingly acute in all their senses; some bring forward these qualities as a proof of their intelligence... what Dingo or other wild animal does not do as much? (68)

The curious power of this racial rhetoric can withstand innumerable contradictions—Kennedy proceeds to describe intricate complexities of hunting and cultural practise without doubting his earlier verdict. This is the logic Tony Birch calls colonial ego-splitting,<sup>2</sup> itself an antinomy, which warps the perception and representation of Aboriginality. From a historical angle Tom Griffiths describes this myopia as a disciplinary tension between the 'detached science,' which regards the Aboriginal subject as its static object, and the 'disturbing humanities' (5), required to reckon with the priority and persistence of Aboriginality as a living culture. The perversely intricate logic of the primitivist reading of the tracker means that even while colonial expansion depends upon Aboriginal knowledge and labour these are translated into further conceptual resources justifying and legitimating the illusions of that settlement.

The second trope is perhaps even more perverse. Langton notes that the contribution of the tracker is translated into an ethical indictment of him by the racial terms in which his 'Faustian pact' is sealed (61). These terms fold the historical critic in yet another double-bind in that a corrective emphasis on the skill and agency of the guide resists primitivism, but seems to deepen the ambivalence and doubleness that attends the translator figure or 'go-between,' described by Turnbull as 'always two-sided, always both enabler and betrayer' (388). As the scout and linguist within and without the structure of the expedition, the tracker figure is both suspect and uncanny from the settler perspective, and from the Aboriginal standpoint a collaborator complicit with the coloniser. Langton notes that the tracker, like the 'native policeman,' remains a figure of treacherous complicity in cultural memory, evinced as recently as 1995, when Noel Pearson branded Deemal-Hall and his supporters 'blacktrackers' (56). This is not to mitigate or even to directly address the actions native police troopers committed under the command of white officers—merely to show that the terms with which settler scholarship frames this problem remain entangled with colonial structures. There are two predominant and closely interlinked forms of this trope: firstly, what we could call the 'melancholy' decline of the 'civilized Aboriginal,' in which a figure working with the colonial project is unflatteringly juxtaposed against a Rousseauian ideal of the untamed noble savage. The second, which may be the obverse of the first, involves a form of projective splitting, in which Aboriginality is rendered as a binary between the faithful servant, or in Langton's terms 'Man Friday' (59) archetype, and the atavistic image of the violent tribal warrior. This structure is palpable in the Statement of Jackey Jackey and on closer analysis becomes almost ubiquitous in colonial representations of the global Indigenous—from the antinomy between Chingachgook and Magua in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), to that between the 'half-

caste' stockman Joe and the traditional 'Aborigine' Marbuck in Charles Chauvel's film *Jedda* (1955). Obviously these binaries are illusions, but their structure is more effective and more complex than their falsity. This reading draws on Daniel Hempel's generative paper 'Colonial Melancholy in Australia: Subjects, Environments and Peoples,' delivered at the Australasian Association for Literature's 2017 Conference. Hempel's nuanced theoretical reading shows how the temporal structures implied in articulations of colonial melancholy consistently imply and invoke the telos of the coming utopian settlement that will inevitably destroy what precedes it. As such elegiac turns like Thomas Mitchell's descriptions of the Murray-Darling,<sup>3</sup> or Freudian tremors like those in Lawson's *The Bush Undertaker* or the 'knob of skull' in Slessor's *South Country* emerge with little ethical content. Formerly these textual patterns have been read as cracks or errors within colonial discourse (Lee, 22) but Hempel's more rigorous model of dialectical criticism shows that colonial articulations of conscience are often complications of, rather than gaps within, the substructure of colonial discourse.

Drawing on this dialectic the most indicative aspect of the antinomian dichotomy between the noble/debased and faithful/bloodthirsty is not its objects but its structure. Antinomies are mutually impossible—the struggle between Chingachgook and Magua clears the path for the manifest destiny of Cora and the nativised Natty Bumppo. Just as the apparent melancholy of the tamed wilderness, or the pillow of a dying race, is not a critique of colonialism but the conceptual labour itself, there is a deeper sense in which the brittleness of these binary tropes is not the weakness but the object of colonial discourse. The critical point of the Faust myth is the inevitable descent and these facile roles are not meant to be liveable or tenable; their actors are not meant to live.

The last methodological or theoretical point to emphasise here is that the illusory, forked and antinomian structure I have described is not unique or particular to the representation of Aboriginal or Indigenous peoples. Other forms of historical and theoretical scholarship have shown comparable and related linguistic problems—with other effects—in other structures of exploration literature and the broader conceptual tendencies of modernity. Robert Dixon and Paul Genoni have traced textual and temporal contradictions in the composition, curation, and publication of exploration writing. (This latter term brackets both primary accounts written by explorers, and secondary hagiographic or fictional stylings, and the distinction between the two can be tenuous given that many explorers also wrote fiction, Driver, 10.) Dixon notes that the explorer operated as a curious conceptual synecdoche of national time: 'the inland explorer had also to become the historian of his nation's past and the prophet of its continental destiny' (80). Conversely, Genoni locates a contradiction at the heart of exploration authorship itself, between the parallel narratives required to serve the contradictory interests of the imperial enterprise and the reading public: 'these two texts were in opposition' (37-38). Both of these analyses align with Adriana Craciun's Foucauldian argument in 'What is an Explorer,' where she reads the explorer as a false historical object, like the Romantic genius—a consumer product overwriting the diverse hierarchies of labour. I emphasise these arguments to indicate that the historical epistemologies my argument seeks to unsettle are already unstable.

Finally, any discussion of the global Indigenous in a colonial text should engage with the problems of linguistic subjectivity itself, which, in the pseudo-secular, Cartesian, positivist sense, is a relatively recent and far from stable object. The paradigmatic moment of the post-structural turn—in English—was Derrida's delivery of 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences' at Johns Hopkins University in 1966. There he elaborated the slippery but powerful concept of *différance*, positioning the history of structure itself as a series of substitutions and metaphors that confect the illusion of presence, or certainty, through

deference to a metaphysical absence, of which the cogito is only the most recent. The heady course of theoretical criticism has borne some curious developments, some of which have misrepresented core concepts. Valentine Cunningham's article 'Sticky Transfers' discusses the invidious role of certain translations in creating an impression of deconstruction as an ethereal freedom from history, rather than a critical engagement with its terms. It is harder to mistake Derrida's later work, which, albeit tortuously, does shed light on the intricacies of colonial representation. Langton's use of the 'Man Friday' moniker is far from arbitrary, given that *Robinson Crusoe* is often cited as the 'paradigmatic text of European colonial experience,' allegorising the colonial explorer's search for 'an image of himself, an opposite who will confirm the reality of his own (superior) being' (Boehmer 18), and as the first modern novel. In the second volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida explores the bizarrely distorting antinomy at the centre of this text and, thus, of the discourse of Modern subjectivity:

whoever says *I* is Robinson, the *autos*, the *ipse*, autobiography is Robinsonian, and each Robinson organizes the economy of his solitude in the company of those, the others, who, as close as can be to him, with him, or even in him (*mitsein*, *alter ego*, labour of mourning, etc.), do not accompany him. (*Beast* 199)

In the history of Australian exploration and literature, the nearest other—forcibly constructed as least like the white Australian—is the Aboriginal, in whose company we rehearse the illusion of our certainties.

A paradigmatic text in the history of Australian literary studies, Vance Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954) demonstrates the intricacy of this relational structure. From his mid-century vantage, Palmer describes early settler culture as:

essentially as fugitive as that of the blacks it drove from their waterholes. More fugitive, perhaps, for the blacks had woven the country's flora and fauna into their legends, let their imaginations play about its hills and rivers, and taken its natural features into the ritual of their lives. (Palmer 25)

This narrative of exile becomes a prelude to the emergence of the 'national type,' which became the master-trope of the nationalist tradition, an advent framed in explicitly appropriative terms: 'the first signs of a new people's birth... (in) oral songs and stories'; the creation of a 'dream-time' (27). If we situate this movement in the context of Ian Mclean's theory of the translation of the 'Aboriginal' from the fearsome 'savage' to a picturesque melancholy whose nostalgia grants the continent's 'new owners a new indigenous identity' (50), then the brittle distinction of the Australian national type becomes coeval, if not identical, with the dispossession and erasure of Aboriginal presence.

A circuitous theoretical route brings us to a number of unsettling and contradictory, but clear conclusions: firstly, as they stand the terms and structures of Australian literary scholarship are intricately incapable of describing, discussing, or analysing Aboriginal culture. Secondly, the terms and structures of Australian literature are intricately uninterested in doing so—according to its own constitutive principles, the solidity and presence of Australian literature as a concept and an institution depend upon its ability to contain Aboriginal presence within its terms. Thirdly, the tracker is among the most obvious attempts at that containment: a heterological mask designed to serve the anxieties of the national gaze.

## II

These conclusions can be applied to consideration of the earlier mentioned ‘Statement of Jackey Jackey,’ which was published in an editorial in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 6 March 1849, beneath the ominous heading ‘The Fate of Kennedy’s Expedition.’ Its significance is complex and, again, contradictory. While Dane Kennedy considers it ‘the only verbatim testimony by an Aboriginal intermediary’ (299), Penny van Toorn suspects the editorial hand of white scribes in the pathetic descriptions of Kennedy’s final moments (172). Nugent’s approach reconciles these problems to an extent, reading the failure of Kennedy’s 1848 expedition to Cape York as a crisis in the national narrative, and the curation of Galmarra’s testimony as an attempt to palliate that crisis, which nonetheless offers a glimpse, however unsatisfactory, of Galmarra’s agency.

As Nugent notes, the publication history of the text itself effected a gradual diminution and containment of Galmarra’s authority. It was published in full only once, and in subsequent iterations it was folded into the partial account of the expedition’s naturalist William Carron as an appendix, subsequent and subservient to white authorship.

The text we receive in the *The Sydney Morning Herald* version is apparently a composite of Galmarra’s verbal testimony to the coroner and doctor Adoniah Vallack, upon first reaching the ship *Ariel* on 23 December 1848, towards which he and Kennedy had carried on alone, intending to return with the ship to collect the remaining members of the beleaguered party, with subsequent clarifications gleaned from conversations during the return to Sydney. Kennedy’s biographer Edgar Beale writes that the initial deposition was taken with a sense of medical urgency, as Galmarra ‘looked very haggard, and was so excited’ (224). Both sections were cross-referenced and corroborated with the other survivors on the two-month return voyage. From the outset, the document anxiously leaps to forestall and contain the implications of its content. In the document’s first sentence the editorial plural proclaims the community’s gladness that the ‘black natives’ in question have been responsible for only one death, and Galmarra’s subsequent testimony is offered as a corrective to rumour, a comfort to panic. This is followed by a recitation or catalogue of names from Kennedy, through the other eleven expedition members in no determinate order, arriving at ‘Jackey an aboriginal native.’ The use of the indefinite article here can be read as an attempt at diminishment—the triple tautology between ‘aboriginal,’ ‘native,’ and the name Jacky (or Jackey), which is primarily an adjective, barely a pronoun.

The narrative is resumed by a synecdochic third-person, organizing the various facts of the expedition’s departure and early stages. Galmarra’s testimony itself is introduced as ‘principally in the language of Jacky, the only survivor’ of the expedition’s final stage, proleptically lauded for ‘courage’ and ‘attachment to his master.’ The explicitly aesthetic description of the text’s ‘affecting simplicity’ labels it as a form of literature, while emphasising the necessary trope of primitivism. Structurally the text seems anxiously aware that publishing the narrative or testimony of an Aboriginal man contradicts fundamental colonial axioms. This is a sense borne out by the narrative’s grammar, which is a curiously literal example of heterology. It is framed as the ‘statement of Jackey, above referred to’ but nonetheless often slides back into the third-person, as though anxious to maintain Galmarra as its object, while simultaneously claiming him as its origin and the origin of its authority. He is himself referred to in the ninth line of the inset narrower print and this gives way to a radical indeterminacy of shifting pronouns: I, they, me, we, Kennedy, Mr Kennedy. This means that the text often juxtaposes first person narration and third person description, as in: ‘we went

back again because there was water there; then Mr Kennedy and Jackey had dinner there.’ Once Kennedy and Galmarra leave the other party-members to recuperate at Pudding-Pan Hill the text’s use of both forms is almost always followed by parenthetical clarification: ‘they (Kennedy and Jackey) [...] we (me and Mr. Kennedy)’ as though other referents were textually possible. In addition to grammatical distortions the narrative is also furnished with Vallack’s parenthetical illustrations of Galmarra’s gestures or facial expressions—‘(Jackey rolling his eyes)’—as though physical, descriptive assurances of its linguistic consistency are needed as verification from the white eye.

These effects produce a warped and vacillating textual subjectivity, as the attention of the voice, or voices, sways between the narrative of the subject’s memory, the comments or questions of interlocutors, and answering clarifications. This produces a contradictory blend of precision and vagueness. It significantly lacks temporal coordinates but contains highly detailed geographical and technical observations. The description of Costigan’s accident is clear and detailed: ‘in putting his saddle under the tarpaulin a string caught the trigger and the ball went in under the right arm and came out his back under the shoulder.’ But recalling that Galmarra’s primary audience is a doctor and coroner, we cannot adduce whether this detail stems from his own eye or Vallack’s need to account for mishap as accurately as possible. The descriptions of Kennedy’s spear wounds and other injuries are comparably precise, and here we recall the other primary heterological device, Faustian ambivalence. The precision of these descriptions, whether they proceed from Vallack or Galmarra, speaks to what Nugent reads as the text’s need to navigate structures of suspicion and ‘exonerate’ itself through a rehearsal of ‘self-sacrificing service’ (73-74). This necessity is clearly palpable in the text’s descriptions of combat with the Yadhaykenu and in the pathos of Kennedy’s final moments: ‘I asked him “Mr Kennedy are you going to leave me?” and he said “Yes my boy, I am going to leave you”.’ There is a subtler process at work in the apostrophe that follows an earlier description of an encounter with the Yadhaykenu:

this fellow on board was the man I gave the knife to; I am sure of it; I know him well; the black that was shot in the canoe was the most active in urging all the others on to spear Mr. Kennedy; I gave the man on board my knife.

This refers to an occasion when two Yadhaykenu men approached the *Ariel* in a canoe and were identified by Galmarra as among those who attacked Kennedy. Consequently one man was shot outright and the other captured; the original document says that the latter drowned trying to escape the boat, but Beale writes that he escaped. The problem or antinomy here is that motives are identifiable both for suppressing or whitewashing violence, and for exaggerating it to satisfy the public’s desire for justice and the expanding settlement’s need for security. The identification’s repetition infers reply to an audience’s demand for assurance and emphasis, however, and the phrase ‘was the most active in urging all the others on’ is notably incongruent with the text’s grammatical voice. This emphasis may well articulate Galmarra’s need to exonerate himself, but it also forms part of a general depiction of the Yadhaykenu that resonates acutely with the splitting structure discussed earlier, as a description that becomes a potent form of colonial propaganda in the statement’s textual after-life.

The antinomian tension between the emphatic faithfulness of Galmarra and the violence and cruelty of the Yadhaykenu is part of a narrative structure with a purpose that is entirely silent within the text. Felix Driver argues that translating failure into martyrdom was the particular skill of the Victorians (79), and the aggrandising and emotional emphasis of this text and its curation attempts to elide the fact that from its design to its conclusion the expedition was an



incompetent failure. As Beale notes, perhaps unwittingly, it was planned according to inadequate and inaccurate information, carried out with inappropriate equipment, and ended with Kennedy's death because he repeatedly and foolishly ignored Galmarra's advice. Warned that they 'speak too much,' Kennedy replies 'No Jackey, those blacks are very friendly.' When pursued by the same, he refuses to abandon the horses despite Galmarra's insistence they would make too obvious tracks, and describing their flight Galmarra notes that he 'told Mr Kennedy to look behind always, and sometimes he would do so, and sometimes he would not look behind.' The statement's second, nonlinear section closes with the decidedly unheroic image of Kennedy stuck 'like a pig in mud,' his feet swollen from moisture. To an estranged eye the lamented explorer emerges as scandalously incompetent, and the heroic rhetoric with which this document is curated significantly works to diminish this tendency and to translate it into a more useful resource for the colonial project.

Kennedy's death temporarily necessitated investing a form of epistemological authority in an Aboriginal man not legally capable of giving testimony. Given under duress, edited and curated, his deposition offered subversive descriptions of Kennedy's errors, but these were palliated by the fearsome descriptions of the Yadhaykenu and the sentiment of his mourning for Kennedy—'I was crying a good while until I got well.' This sentiment simultaneously performs the 'Man Friday' image of devoted servitude required by colonial discourse and, in the context of Galmarra's overwhelming competence, tells us how flimsy and how persuasive that image is.

Because of that persuasion Galmarra's testimony was vindicated by the subsequent inquiry and he was stood drinks by the admiring public, which awarded him a gratuity of fifty pounds. The governor of New South Wales Sir Charles Fitzroy commissioned a ceremonial gorget for him of solid silver, with an inscription that praised his courage and sagacity, but spent more time on his support and affectionate tending of the lamented gentleman Edmund Kennedy. For current historical knowledge Galmarra never touched the money or the breastplate, dying in an accident on an overland expedition not long after, at the age of twenty-one. The expedition itself continued to generate a considerable secondary literature of generic tributes, elegies and cartographic inquiries. Of these Eliza Hamilton Dunlop's poem 'Inscribed to the Memory of E.B. Kennedy, Who Lost his Life while on an Exploring Expedition in Tropical Australia' typifies the sacral aesthetics of martyrdom that attached to failed expeditions; an aesthetic that Reynolds considers a precursor of the Anzac Myth (7). In aesthetic and political terms, Dunlop's poem is a poor shadow of her earlier work 'The Aboriginal Mother.' It is notable, however, for its obsessive emphasis on the apotheosis of misadventure, stridently reverberated in the imperative refrain 'Bewail him not!.' It makes no explicit mention of Galmarra, but I find serendipity in her catachrestic hope that 'wild palms and glydenes shall shadow his bed,' where 'glydene' is both a transliteral error for 'glycine' (a species of native soybean) and a figure of the 'glycerine tear' (a theatrical prop used to aid the confection of false grief).

More indicative is an anonymous poem published in the *Moreton Bay Courier* on 24 March 1849: 'The Death of Kennedy: a Survivor's Tale.' As the subtitle suggests, the poet appropriates Galmarra's narrative and voice. The text was reprinted several times and on the last occasion the author, under the pseudonym 'Nemo,' demurred that the verses 'pretend to be nothing more than a paraphrase, and a weak one, of the touching and interesting narrative of the faithful black' (qtd in Sullivan 136). Where the subversive influences of Aboriginal agency are silenced by Hamilton's rendering, the anonymous text performs a more insidious violence through ventriloquism. Here the textual mask of 'Jackey' performs as a marionette of the colonial fantasy. Kennedy, rendered 'my master' throughout, figures as a selfless Aenean

servant of duty, the Yadhaykenu are registered in a litany of demonising and dehumanising images, and Galmarra's sorrow is bastardised into a militaristic paean to genocide: 'How will the State he served avenge his fate? The blood of all the tribe could scarce allay my hate.' 'Nemo' translates the respite of Galmarra's original ending—'I was on the rock cooeying, and murry murry glad when the boat came for me' - into a rehearsal of the first myth of redemptive Modernity—'But very, very glad was I to see/ At last the white man's boat that came to rescue me.'

The Cape York peninsula remained unconquered until 1864. Over the course of the next three decades blackbirding, the establishment of the Somerset mission, and a series of increasingly aggressive tactics, first by marines and then by native troopers, diminished the Yadhaykenu and their neighbours the Gudang and Gumakudin from an estimated three thousand members to one hundred (Sharp 15). The now amalgamated Gudang and Yadhaykenu nations successfully applied for native title over their traditional country in 2008.

### Conclusion

Galmarra's example illustrates how intricately the representation and narration of the Aboriginal subject in Australian literature is structured to preclude substantive engagement, accurate consideration or equitable discourse. While, like Nugent, I naturally desire to encounter the presence or subjectivity of Galmarra in his deposition through at least a sliver of scholarly light, the intricately antinomial relationship between Aboriginal culture and the idea of literature as it is practised in the settler state render that presently impossible. This structure ensures that the settler mind only observes its own desires and anxieties in the heterological mirror of the tracker, and ensures that it only sees Jackey. While the textual topography of Galmarra's statement appears to describe a crisis in the colonial project, its semantics reveal intricate structures of foreclosure capable of nullifying even the most subversive material. This essay's theoretical experiments have not penetrated those heterological structures: they have demonstrated their intricacy and ubiquity, and so deconstructed Australian literature's claim to compass the tracker as a metonym of Aboriginal experience, knowledge and labour within its own terms of reference. Without an equitable form of epistemological compromise or treaty – such as that underwriting other forms of comparative literary study – this is all the tools of settler scholarship provide for. The solution to this discipline's impasse will not come from within its systems: as Glissant writes in 'For Opacity,' 'As for my identity, I'll take care of that myself.'

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication, expanding on her remarks to this effect in her paper 'Do Not Touch His House: Decolonising Readings of Aboriginal Literature' delivered at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature conference in 2015.

<sup>2</sup> I refer to a lecture delivered as part of his residency at the South Coast Writer's Centre on 23 May 2017: 'Common Threads?: Indigenous Knowledge, Climate Change and Colonial Encounters.'

<sup>3</sup> 'The hills overhanging it surpassed any I had ever seen in picturesque outline. Some resembled gothic cathedrals in ruins; others forts; other masses were perforated, and being mixed and contrasted with the flowing outlines of evergreen woods, and having a fine stream in the foreground, gave a charming appearance to the whole country. It was a discovery worthy of the toils of a pilgrimage. Those beautiful recesses of unpeopled earth could no longer remain unknown...' (Carter, *Road* 130.)