# Post-*Mabo* Dreaming and Yuramiru's European Explorations: Rodney Hall's *The Lonely Traveller by Night*

**JO JONES**
**CURTIN UNIVERSITY**

**PAUL GENONI**
**CURTIN UNIVERSITY**

Rodney Hall's seven-novel fictional account of European imperialism and Australia—an historical heptalogy—spans some 260 years, from 120 years before settlement/invasion, to 140 years after. It consists of two trilogies: The Yandilli Trilogy (*Captivity Captive*, 1988; *The Second Bridegroom*, 1991; *The Grisly Wife*, 1993)[1]; The Island in the Mind trilogy (*Terra Incognita*; *The Lonely Traveller by Night*; *Lord Hermaphrodite*, 1996); and a final volume, *The Day We Had Hitler Home* (2000). The writing of the heptalogy therefore commenced in the prelude to the 1988 Bicentenary and concluded at the end of the century.

This paper focuses on *The Lonely Traveller by Night* (hereafter *The Lonely Traveller*), the second of the three novels comprising The Island in the Mind, which are the first in the heptalogy's historical chronology. The Island in the Mind traces the beginning of the white-settler Australian nation from the collective "mind" of seventeenth-century Europe. It was a time when an unknown southern continent, from a European perspective, could be no more or less than an amorphous repository for various forms of desire that would tempt monarchs, imperialists, scientists, artists, traders, and corsairs with the riches that might come their way. Terra Incognita is also a prelapsarian space of innocence, full of spiritual possibilities (and dangers), and an apparently blank slate for those who dream of better (or richer) worlds. However, as the heptalogy demonstrates, the land was neither innocent nor blank, but rather a complex repository of culture, knowledge, and imagination that was destined for a headlong clash with European imperialism and colonialism.

*The Lonely Traveller* was written by Hall in 1994 in the wake of the High Court of Australia's 1992 judgment in *Mabo v. Queensland (No.2)* (hereafter *Mabo*). While *Mabo* was significant for Hall, it wasn't the catalytic or transforming moment it was for other Australians. Rather it came as another waypoint in his decades of engagement with Indigenous politics.

## Hall, Imperialism and Indigenous Politics

Born in the English midlands, Rodney Hall arrived in Australia in 1949 aged thirteen: he would develop into one of the country's most passionate observers of European imperialism and colonialism's detrimental impacts. As he has recalled, "My disgust at the way British colonialism oppressed and robbed the indigenous people has been with me constantly since I left school in 1951" (Letter to the author). While Hall's "disgust" was innate, his understanding of the issues was also shaped by a circle of people who shared his outrage at the injustice suffered by Indigenous Australians. Amongst these was his mentor and friend, Brisbane poet and musician John Manifold, who introduced Hall to the Brisbane Realist Writers' Group, where he met other writers interested in progressive Indigenous politics. These included poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal, then known as Kath Walker. Hall's friendship with Walker led him to become involved, at seventeen, with the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Such was Hall's commitment to the Council's cause that he was soon on the executive and responsible for a newsletter providing Indigenous

Queenslanders with an avenue for exposing the consequences of stolen land, stolen children, and stolen wages.

As Hall's literary career made headway in the 1960s, he stayed close to Indigenous politics. This included being on the Queensland organising committee for the 1967 referendum, a role that brought him new friends amongst Indigenous leaders, including Faith Bandler and Doug Nicholls. Hall's employment at the ABC provided sympathetically aligned non-Indigenous literary friends, including Judith Wright. In 1970 Hall published *A Place Among People*, his first novel to address the plight of Indigenous people in the portrayal of Daisy Daisy, a fringe-dwelling Aboriginal woman. As Hall has noted, "By this time I knew dozens of people who were, roughly speaking, in Daisy's situation" (Letter to the author). In novels from the 1980s, *Just Relations* (1982) and *Kisses of the Enemy* (1987), he continued to reveal the wounds festering beneath the scabs of Australia's white colonial history.

By the Bicentennial year of 1988, when Hall published *Captivity Captive*, the first book of his heptalogy, colonisation and its trans-generational impacts were his subject of choice. What wasn't yet apparent was that with this novel he had embarked on a monumental fictional task that would span seven books and take more than two decades to complete. This remarkable heptalogy of associated narratives that chart the corrosive impact of European imperialism and colonialism sits at the heart of Hall's extensive body of work. The three novels of the Yandilli Trilogy were written in the shadow of the Bicentenary and the prelude to *Mabo*, and each confronted aspects of colonial trespass and violence.

For Hall, *Mabo* therefore came after three decades of intense activism and a growing body of writing that reflected his desire for a form of national reckoning.

> I rejoiced at the Mabo outcome, but it came as no surprise, more of an affirmation of the just cause that Australia had so long ignored. Wave Hill, Wik and Mabo were the latest developments in an ancient story that arose from the living shame of land-theft and prejudice. My processes as a novelist—by contrast—are entirely fictional. (Letter to the author)

By 1994, when Hall wrote *The Lonely Traveller*, he was thoroughly prepared for this post-*Mabo* moment when Australia was forced to take another step towards facing the violence and injustice perpetrated in the drive to fulfil its colonial destiny.[2] Notably, he chose to do so by interrogating the pre-colonial moment, when European imperial powers were forming not only the necessary political, military and commercial apparatus, but also shaping the moral conditions that would underpin colonialism's grim legacy in the Antipodes.

Here, we read Hall's representation of Yuramiru and his European travels as a bold counter-narrative challenging fundamental concepts that underpinned the clash of civilisations as European empires encountered the southern continent and its First Nations inhabitants. Published at a time when first contact novels were common in Australian literature, it will be argued that *The Lonely Traveller* presents an audacious inversion of first contact, which is powerfully effective as literature and—in the context of *Mabo*—groundbreaking as polemic.

## The Island in the Mind Trilogy

As noted, by the time Hall wrote the novels of The Island in the Mind, he had spent many years engrossed with the complex legacy of Australia's imperial and colonial genesis. The books from the heptalogy he wrote first, the Yandilli Trilogy, were centered on the weird manifestations of settler colonialism and the violent grotesqueries of the frontier. With *The Second Bridegroom* Hall wrote one of the most ambitious and confronting first-contact novels. The narrative traces the psychological effects of an extreme contact experience after a settlerconvict becomes lost in the Australian bush with a wandering Aboriginal group and finds his physical dislocation is more than matched by the acutely deracinating exposure to Indigenous culture and Dreaming. Soon after *The Second Bridegroom* was published David Tacey (1995) undertook a convincing reading of the novel and concluded:

> Hall has an abiding interest in what has virtually become a taboo subject in Australia: the transformative impact of Aboriginal Dreaming. He has nothing occult or metaphysical in mind, but . . . tends to feel that Aboriginal animism has a psychological impact on Euro-Australians, by first serving to erode the hardened layers of rationality, which may then give rise to a spontaneous spiritual transformation from within. (171)

It is possible to extend Tacey's speculation about Hall having nothing "metaphysical" in mind. Hall seems, throughout the heptalogy, to empathise with, and invest in, Indigenous animism and its psychic connection to their land—to the extent that it is clear that Indigenous Australians also have an "island in the mind," albeit a very different one from that held by European imperialists. As a non-Indigenous man Hall knows he cannot fully integrate the Indigenous worldview as part of his fiction, although it is possible to have non-Indigenous characters attain at least a fleeting comprehension of the Indigenous worldview. Indeed Isabella Manin, with her consuming Catholic faith, seems to open a syncretic space of psychic possibility as one of the layers of communication that are possible between herself and Yuramiru.

While *The Second Bridegroom* was profound in registering the culture shock that accompanied colonialism, it was predictable in that represented first contact as part of a familiar history of the Australian frontier. What Hall was to undertake with The Island in the Mind Trilogy was an examination of the prelude to colonialism, that is, by making his subject the European centre of Early Modern imperialism. As will be discussed, this includes, in *The Lonely Traveller*, shifting the site of first contact with (in Tacey's terms) "Aboriginal animism" and "Dreaming" to the thriving mercantile city of Venice. In doing so Hall was moving on from the detail of what happened in the colonial past, a subject on which public knowledge had increased considerably in the wake of revisionist histories of the 1980s and 1990s. In writing The Island in the Mind novels he moved beyond tales of a motherland, tall ships, convicts and "native" skirmishes. His purpose had now become to focus on exposing the complex mechanisms of European imperialism, and to reveal the ramifications of its insidious reach. In doing so Hall locates the Australian experience within a larger global story of uncontained power and greed, which previous parochial narratives lacked the scale or imagination to fathom or express. The novels of 'The Island in the Mind' have the scope to imaginatively engage with the enduring impact of Europe's Antipodean legacy and the Australian psyche (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in a way that transcends Anglo-centric narratives of conquest and settlement.

With the novels of The Island in the Mind, Hall preempted the wider global scope of studies in decolonisation when many of his literary and scholarly contemporaries remained steeped in national spaces (Jones 4–9). Without downplaying the importance of the historical revisionism of the late twentieth century or denying that forays into national and global political systems are not inherently enmeshed, Hall's work anticipated the more globally informed theoretical and political spaces in ways most other Australian writing of the time did not. One may speculate that many settler Australians were reeling in the face of accounts of colonial violence, and therefore, perhaps guiltily, they compulsively replayed contact stories in response to what was being increasingly viewed as a multigenerational national trauma.

It is significant that the novels of The Island in the Mind did not receive the same recognition as did Hall's novels set in colonial Australia contained in the Yandilli Trilogy. *The Second Bridegroom* won The Australian Literature Society Gold Medal in 1992, and all three Yandilli novels were shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Prize, with *The Grizzly Wife* winning in 1994. By comparison, the response to The Island in the Mind was notably muted—reviews were admiring but also puzzled, and the prizes didn't follow. What we can claim, however, is that the novels of 'The Island of the Mind' are conceptually and aesthetically distinctive in their field. Formally the trilogy is indebted to diverse influences from Cervantes, Shakespeare, Rabelais, and Moliere, to Marquez and Borges. Nevertheless, Hall's vision and innovation remain uniquely his, and contribute in vital ways to global discourses on colonial modernity, marking him as a writer of greater significance than is commonly recognised.

## ***The Lonely Traveller by Night***

*The Lonely Traveller* is centred on an Indigenous man, Yuramiru, who is indeed a solo traveller. In an unlikely scenario, when readers first encounter Yuramiru it is 1667 and he is being sold as a curiosity in Venice. Then, accompanied by Isabel Manin, a young Venetian woman, he leaves Venice as a prisoner. Together they are trafficked through Italy, the Adriatic, Ionian and Aegean seas and islands, all the while embroiled in the military and existential tussle between two of the most far-reaching imperial powers of the age, the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire.

While Hall's densely constructed account of the clash between Venice and Constantinople is grounded in ethnic and religious difference, it overtly materialises as a battle for maritime supremacy and access to trade routes. As is made clear throughout The Island in the Mind, similar battles were being fought across Europe as nations prepared for possession and profit in other hemispheres. In doing so they become part of a complex array of political and commercial interests, including newly powerful nation-states; various religious fiefdoms; the persistent remnants of feudal kingdoms; emerging non-state business enterprises with ocean spanning ambitions; and entrepreneurial sea-faring brigands. These many interests are held in tension by fragile alliances, and they all help to determine the destiny of Yuramiru and Isabella.

Politically, *The Lonely Traveller* represents European imperialism as a synthesis of science, religion, aesthetics, art and creativity—symbolically manifested in the rich civic spaces of seventeenth-century Venice—that gives rise to a maelstrom of psychic and embodied violence that emerged in maritime trade and war and led to colonialism's worst abuses. Within Hall's sublime, intricate, meta-historical fiction it is all but impossible to separate entangled elements of—for example—court intrigues; multi-nation alliances riddled with subterfuge; the erosion of ethnic and religious boundaries; covert and overt military and trade operations; international developments in arts and science; and marginal but crucial distinctions in navigational and cartographic technologies. In such a world, where seemingly insignificant hankerings for luxury fabrics or exotic foodstuffs can determine the course of empires and the fate of peoples, it may seem foolhardy to attempt to separate the many power entanglements of coloniality.

It may also seem unwise to extract specific ideas from such a complex whole, but for reasons of clarity we make three main claims for *The Lonely Traveller.* Firstly, the narrative commences in Venice, and the Venetian Republic serves as an exemplar of an Enlightenment amalgam of religious dogmatism, scientific adventurism, commercial opportunism and mercantile decadence. Venice is represented as a proto-capitalist space of "colonial/modernity" (Mignolo 2), where misunderstood cultures and peoples are commodified as wonders and horrors, and where humans become chattels serving a system that methodically reduces all things to their commercial value. Secondly, the relationship that evolves between the two central characters, Yuramiru and Isabella Manin (whose journal, kept for her parents, constitutes the novel's narrative), explores a contrasting state to the machinations of imperialism and wealth accumulation. Hall's portrayal of the embodied dimensions of their friendship in a succession of shared, confined spaces—a single room in a palace or a ship's cabin—is an expression of the expansion of the self through tender exchanges and emancipatory vision. Yuramiru and Isabella, despite their massive cultural differences, bond as their monetised status unites them as tradable objects, and the language of embodiment becomes their precious space of personal, educative exchange. Thirdly, the novel's semi-realist form allows the protagonists to share visions of Yuramiru's homeland and his journey. Hall's carefully plotted inversion of narratives of European exploration designates the journey, both physical and as dream-vision, as a space outside the occident and the only opportunity for Yuramiru and Isabella to envisage a free or authentic life.

Isabella's journal recounts how her privileged Venetian life, hitherto dedicated to her family, Catholic observance, and the playing of the lute, is overturned when she comes face-to-face with her father's clandestine business. This discovery is made when she wanders into a forbidden basement of her family's canal-side *palazzo* and realises that her father, Signor Manin, is servicing a market for novel manifestations of humankind scraped together from the fledgling trade with the East. Manin's squalid pit of saleable humans has clear connections to the trade in men, women and children that would long remain discreetly hidden, at one remove from Europe. While the circumstances of Manin's "goods" are different from those of slaves exploited as cost-free labour, in that Manin sells scientific and courtly curiosities, the connection between these groups of degraded commodities is clear. The rise of slavery to provide muscle for pre-industrial shipping in support of commercial and military expansion, provides a constant undertow of violence throughout The Island in the Mind, a reminder of the ease with which imperial subjects could be turned against each other as instruments of war and trade.

The transformation of European nations into aggressive capitalist states, and the structural contagion of virulent manifestations of power across neighboring states is apparent from the first chapter of *The Lonely Traveller*:

> The first distant donging bell of each morning prompts other bells to start up, near and far, each stroke and answer like a measuring tape being cast from here to there across the chilled city, until another net—this one unseen, as the shadow net from the leaded window is unfelt—a pulsing clamorous web—holds the city motionless, length and breadth, *dong dang*, from point to point, rhythms catching up with one another to overlap and tangle, mellow bells and harsh old bells. We all belong together. Suddenly a flash of refracted sunlight glances and wavers across my ceiling. Still there are bells answering bells and the sky spreads a gloss along waterways, right to the gloomiest haunts, where a black brightness rocks even in the most hidden cranny. It is so evil, so used up, so unbearably gorgeous. (217–18)

As Walter Mignolo discusses in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011), Western economic and cultural supremacy thrives on the many globalising systems through which power is removed from regional centres and transferred to Europe. Yuramiru, like so many around the world, is caught in a widely cast net of racial and cultural supremacies on which Manin's trade—and imperialism itself—depends. Manin's business is both hidden and illegal, a transgressive indulgence on the part of the merchants and buyers who support it, and abhorrent to Isabella. Generally, in Western Europe at this time slavery remained a shadowy secret, an illegal and distasteful horror kept from the view of courts and drawing rooms. Mignolo stated that in the sixteenth century, "the idea of modernity and its constitutive and darker side, coloniality, . . . emerged with the history of European invasions of Abya Yala, Tawantinsuyu, and Anahuac; the formation of the Americas and the Caribbean; and the massive trade of enslaved Africans" (2). By the seventeenth century, non-European centres had been even more fully subsumed by the inescapable web of European imperialism, which—like the morning bells of Venice—was spreading globally with energy and implacability until everything was "evil and used up," and the "gorgeous" dawn of the En*light*enment was itself becoming unbearable. The Venetian bells may be sonorous and comforting but in reality they represent the malevolent echoes of European imperialism.

The narrator Isabella Manin is, by turns, endearing and irritating. Like Don Quixote, a figure she refers to in letters that bookend her journal, Isabella embarks on a quest that is both noble and ridiculous. An educated woman of unshakable Catholic faith and elegant habits–languages, music, and refined courtesy—she has been accruing value in a gilded cage; her cloistered life and rarefied virginity increase her worth to the wealthy suitors selected by her father for reasons of mercantile alliance and/or social status.

It is Signore Manin's threat to kill Yuramiru, his "priceless article" (225), and to maximise profit by selling his body parts, that is the final outrage for Isabella. She is determined to rescue this specimen—be it beast or human—to both appease her religious qualms and to protect her family's reputation. The threat to Yuramiru also fuels a type of Western religious hubris in Isabella so that she imagines herself to be Yuramiru's champion, steeped as she is in fantasies of romantic martyrdom and an angelic ascent to heaven. In embarking on this quest she casts off her value as an object of exchange in a Venetian context, and binds herself to a "savage," who, she realises, is enmeshed in yet another system of commodification.

Unlike many of Signore Manin's specimens, Yuramiru is not made valuable by a physical deformity, but rather by his singular origin. As "a curio from an undiscovered world" (222) he is both a scientific novelty and an emblem of the profits to be made by imperial trade. So while it strikes Isabella that he "bears no resemblance to any living person ever imagined" (236), she nonetheless recognises that he is human, and perhaps even morally exemplary: "I looked into his soul. You never saw such pain, nor anyone so pure. It's no use telling me this is idiocy. I know what he showed me" (233). With a clever piece of sophistry, Isabella trips a Papal envoy into conceding that Yuramiru is indeed human, and therefore has a soul in need of protection. She then declares that she must be allowed to travel with the specimen after he is sold to the Duke of Palma. "I will never," she confides to her journal, "leave the creature now. He is my life and my life after death" (237).

In becoming Yuramiru's protector, Isabella casts aside the things that had hitherto grounded her life—her family, city, and religion—and a new phase of her education begins. Like Yuramiru, she finds herself exiled from "home" crossing boundaries into new spaces of learning and knowledge. Her realisation that she is leaving her former life and dedicating herself to this man with whom she shares nothing—not language, ethnicity, culture, or religion—is embraced as an existentially liberating journey.

> I feel some light in my heart, a dream, a luminous dream. This is the dream of a world still new, a world with room for you to grow up in it, a future open to hope. I am free from things I do not understand, for the paradoxical reason that I have done something absolutely stupid. When it all happened I knew that if I did not take my words back immediately it would be too late. I knew this. Yet I did not take them back. I stood my ground. (237)

As Ian Dixon ("Borders of the Soul,") has pointed out, the theme of border/boundary-crossing is deeply embedded in *The Lonely Traveller*, wherein movement across physical space is closely tied to the willingness of Isabella and Yuramiru to cross (or transgress) psychic spaces in order to broaden their experience of the world, and eventually, to learn from each other.

Yuramiru and Isabella's fates unfold as they are trafficked through the eastern Mediterranean and the contest for possession of Yuramiru intensifies. The first stopover at Lesina (Hvar in modern Croatia), is controlled by the Republic and provides safe harbour for Venetian shipping; this is followed by Brindisi, an Ottoman-occupied port on the Italian east coast; then the island of Hydra, an Ottoman trading centre in the Aegean Sea; and finally the Turkish slave-trading port of Izmir. Like Venice, each of these ports has been a hub for the movement of goods and people through the Mediterranean, and because of their strategic importance each has long been prized by those wanting to control maritime commerce.

A turning point for Yuramiru and Isabella comes as they are being shipped onwards from Lesina. Their flotilla is attacked and fought over by the forces of Pope Innocent XI and Sultan Mehmed, with both looking to take possession of Yuramiru. After a bloody battle Yuramiru and Isabella fall into the hands of the Ottomans, who plan to deliver Yuramiru as a trophy to the Sultan in Constantinople. At this point the fates of the pair are effectively sealed—Yuramiru is now permanently incarcerated with death as his only possible release, and Isabella also becomes a prisoner set to be transported beyond the reach of the Republic, the Catholic Church, and her family.

In the process of this unfolding ordeal, Hall establishes what cannot be apparent to Isabella, that Yuramiru is an Indigenous Australian—specifically from Ikara, the Wilpena Pound area of the Flinders Ranges. In order to solve the "the mystery of where the savage comes from" (238), Isabella attempts to "teach [him] to speak" (239). He is, of course, capable of speaking—what they lack is a common language. Isabella manages, however, to make a start by exchanging names. She calls him by what she believes to be his name, Yuramiru, and he learns to call her Bella.

While it is the relentless tide of nations and empires washing across Europe—and poised to push on in search of "Terra Incognita"—that forms the backdrop to *The Lonely Traveller*, the novel reinforces the reality that first contact is also a matter of intimate, personal experience. The first step for Isabella is to see beyond her preconceptions of the "savage" to whom her fate is bound. During the time the pair spend in Lesina, Yuramiru is subjected to a process in which science serves as the handmaiden to commerce, with doctors assessing him daily to determine just how valuable he might be. Isabella reports that they "take measurements and record their observations about his skin and bones, his habits and behaviour," knowing that each assessment "affects his price" (238).

It isn't, however, only those with a commercial interest who scrutinise Yuramiru's appearance—Isabella also compulsively assesses her companion's startling physical differences from herself. Recalling "childhood lessons in observation and classification" (254) she is shocked to find that her fate is attached to such an unappealing specimen:

> I observe the following: his skin is deeply black. He has a somewhat skimpy beard and moustache, each whisker is glossy like wire. His arms and legs, which I have seen, are almost hairless. His neck his wrists and his ankles are finely moulded; strong but slim. . . . I think it is quite horrid the way the lips are also black while his mouth inside is as pink as mine. . . . His limbs are skinny. His feet broad and flat. (254–55)

Isabella is particularly troubled by Yuramiru's extreme blackness, a feature that seems more bestial than human. She finds she is "sickened with loathing" (236) by his blackness, and that his otherwise agreeable features are “spoiled by ugly black skin” (279). Isabella also finds Yuramiru’s presence confronting when they are forced into shared spaces. She recoils from his smell and is repulsed when he relieves himself without care for her presence. Eventually, however, with growing familiarity she begins to admire aspects of his appearance and presence, appreciating that his differences mark him as having intelligence and purpose:

> He moves like no other human being anyone ever saw. At first I thought this movement odd, even laughable, but now I grow used to it and see how graceful he is—as if every least action must be allowed the full arc of its motion. There is nothing abrupt or broken. There is nothing soft and wasteful. (255)

Whereas initially Isabella had argued for her own reasons that Yuramiru was human, it is only as the pair are compelled to spend time together in confined spaces that she truly accepts his humanity and that he possesses both personality and character. Whereas once she reported: “I hate this odious savage” (259), she now questions what is meant by the term “savage,” realising that it is singularly inappropriate when applied to Yuramiru.

Eventually the couple’s imprisonment creates, through shared experience and physical intimacy, a strange and radical vision of emancipation for a dark-skinned, non-European man and for a light-skinned, European woman. As Silvia Federici states in *Caliban and the Witch*:

> [C]apitalism, as a social-economic system, is necessarily committed to racism and sexism. For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations—the promise of freedom vs. the reality of widespread coercion, and the promise of prosperity vs. the reality of widespread penury—by denigrating the “nature” of those it exploits: women, colonial subjects, the descendants of African slaves, the immigrants displaced by globalization. (16)

Both Yuramiru and Isabella are objectified and excluded, and as objects of exchange living in close quarters, they experience an existence outside the smoke and mirrors of early capitalism. For both, the self-serving deceptions of international trade and diplomatic competition are laid bare. Yuramiru’s commodification is complete as he is fought over by empires—and factions within empires—and becomes aware of the reality of incarceration and that he will never be restored to an independent life or return to his homeland. Similarly, Isabella realises that her beloved Catholic Church is embroiled in the same system that fuels and benefits from her father’s criminal trade. She too becomes contested property as two men, the cultured and solicitous Turkish eunuch, Kafur Bey, and the compellingly masculine but casually cruel Bedouin, Mohar Ou Youssef, struggle for political influence.

Through the vehicle of Isabella’s journal, Hall reduces the widespread experience of colonialism and first contact to the scale of a prison cell, to the confines of a ship’s cabin, and to the intimacy of a single relationship. In turn Isabella expresses the shock of first exposure, the repulsion associated with physical differences, the refusal to see the “uncivilised other” as fully human, and tests the possibilities of instruction and education in the hope of creating behaviour that is familiar to her. Finally, however, she overcomes distaste and prejudice and expresses admiration of Yuramiru’s different frameworks of knowledge and experience.

A vital aspect of the empathy that develops between Isabella and Yuramiru is found in the enmeshment of embodiment and communication. The pair’s enforced intimacy means that communication must be found outside the linguistic traps of Isabella’s education in European languages. Isabella senses Yuramiru’s keenness to communicate using whatever means he can muster. At first she notes his use of intimate non-verbal gestures to display comprehension and express meaning: “There is his art of catching and releasing my eye at crucial moments. Also his subtle gestures. I come to realize he has been teaching me the body's language while I teach him a language of the mind" (286).

As epistolary novels that rely upon acts of writing, those of Hall's heptalogy are striking for the way they constantly challenge writing as the pre-eminent form of communication—whether it be interpersonal communication, or the declaratory forms required for imperial control and colonial administration. All seven novels represent the many ways in which individuals have dealt with the need to transmit information, knowledge and understanding across cultural and linguistic barriers. In *The Lonely Traveller*, Isabella eventually realises that Yuramiru can telepathically transcend the seemingly impenetrable language barrier.

> At other times it is as though he senses me through his skin. Already he shares my innermost moods. I know I cannot deceive him. I put on a brave face, and he sees I am frightened. I smile and he knows I am miserable. . . . he gives me this feeling that we are communicating without interruption. (255)

Isabella also comes to understand that Yuramiru's presence in Europe is more than the result of misadventure, but rather is something that he has consciously initiated. She realises that he "is like an explorer who came here from his unknown world just to find out" (269), and that he is also eager to share knowledge about his own "unknown world"—information that must be imparted without using regular oral or written communication.

A mark of the explorer's trade is the journal they keep—an account of the places and people they encounter that also signals the advent of empire by verifying their travel over "unexplored" land. Without a written language Yuramiru appears to be without any prospect of creating such a journal, but nonetheless he finds a way, by inserting his "voice" into Isabella's journal. This transpires in two ways. Firstly, in writing her journal Isabella realises that "he [Yuramiru] is fascinated by my pen and notebook, watching while I write this record of my fate" (270). Such is his absorption in Isabella's writing that she hands him a quill and he immediately uses this foreign instrument to render his own strange markings.

> His lines grow strong and then wander away to nothing. What he draws is infantile nonsense . . . I never saw such beautifully careful scribble—lots of tiny circles, themselves in a ring, with fan-shaped lines at the edges. And now, ridiculous little things like bird feet marching diagonally from corner to corner. (271)

What Yuramiru records is a sketch of his journey from Ikara to the Australian east coast, and then his departure for unknown lands. It is an explorer's journal, reporting his travel beyond his own country and his previous experience.[3] The record he creates therefore becomes the first "written" evidence received in Europe—albeit indecipherable to Isabella—of the terrain and geography of Terra Incognita. Eventually Isabella realises that what Yuramiru has created is a form of map—that most essential element of an imperial explorer's journal. Therefore, not only is Yuramiru's presence in Europe the event of "first contact," but he also provides the first reliable account of continental Australia, and with it a record of Indigenous otherness.[4]

Yuramiru, however, understands that his drawings alone cannot fully communicate his homeland or his journey. What he then calls upon is his power to communicate using what Isabella calls his "secret language of dreams" (286). In a series of nocturnal reveries she is presented with a stage-by-stage account of his journey from Ikara to the coast—crossing desert areas and plains, scaling snow-covered ranges, and descending to the coast at a place Hall calls Yandilli. This fictional Yandilli equates to the area of Barragga Bay in Southern New South Wales, and it is adjacent to Bermagui, the coastal town where Hall lived for many years. In the narrative that invades Isabella's dreams, it is at Yandilli that Yuramiru embraces his destiny and departs from his homeland as an explorer of new worlds.

Once again Isabella is initially resistant to Yuramiru's difference, but eventually she welcomes his transposed dreams, realising they represent *his* homeland and *his* journey, and that he is "explaining to me what he cannot explain with his smattering of Italian" (265). The outcome is that Isabella then communicates on Yuramiru's behalf by transcribing individual dreams into Italian for inclusion in her journal. With the journal destined for Venice, Yuramiru's account of his country will be lodged in a European language in the heart of the continent. Europe's imperialists have previously learnt about Terra Incognita only through slipshod accounts left by bewildered sailors or soldiers of fortune who found themselves guessing at the nature of a land they glimpsed from coastal footholds. Their uncomprehending reports were also blurred by the distorting lens of empire and commerce. Yuramiru's "authentic" vision that finds its way into Europe via Isabella's journal is a collaboration between two explorers, a Indigenous man and a teenage woman—two voices and subjectivities otherwise absent from the discourses of seventeenth-century imperialism.

In Hall's audacious inversion of first contact, the "savage" is therefore represented as a variation on that most western of figures, the explorer. In standard readings of imperial narratives the explorer is seen as a servant of empire whose role is to ready barbarous Indigenes and hostile landscapes for the arrival of civilised society. Hall's rendering of Yuramiru, on the other hand, radically transforms the understanding of what it is to be an explorer. At a time when Europe had only notionally "discovered" Australia, he has consciously set out *from* Australia, in the hope of encountering new places and people. Yuramiru has no understanding of trade and profit—the drivers of imperialism of which he is an unwitting victim—but rather he is engaged in the entirely noble endeavour of seeking out places and people for the reward of new knowledge, and the desire to share knowledge about his own country.

Hall's fictional response to the way in which European nations recklessly sponsored military and commercial expansion during the seventeenth century, is represented by his creation of this lone Indigenous man who has struck out with far more admirable motives. Yuramiru's experience moves 'first contact' forward by over a century, while also shifting it from the barely explored coasts and hinterlands of Australia to the European hubs of imperial ambition, trans-continental trade, and colonial profiteering. In Hall's version, it is Indigenous Australia, rather than imperial Europe, which sends forth a true explorer.

The conclusion of *The Lonely Traveller* is unexpected and violent. It involves Yuramiru's death by suicide, assisted by Isabella, after he realises the truth of his incarceration—that he will always be captive, always a commodity, and likely to be slain when, as predicted, he is found to be more valuable dead than alive. In taking his own life Yuramiru ensures that he retains agency, not only denying his captors the opportunity to profit from his death, but also ensuring that his fate will not be that of a scientific curiosity like the many Indigenous people whose remains came to rest in European museums.

Yuramiru's death leaves Isabella vulnerable as she is stripped of the protection she received as his helpmate and guardian. Her only value now is the price she can bring in the slave markets at Izmir. Declaring herself to be a virgin, she knows she will be sold at a premium and perhaps into less precarious circumstances than might otherwise have been the case. In the case of commodification of women it seems that whether in the salons of Venice or the slave markets of Izmir, virginity is held at a premium.

This is not, however, the end of Yuramiru's story, or indeed Isabella's. Their journey, their friendship, and their respective fates have ramifications that unfold over the following novel, *Lord Hermaphrodite*, and echo throughout the remainder of Hall's heptalogy.

## Conclusion

*The Lonely Traveller*, as with the other novels of The Island in the Mind, relates a set of ideas about "Australia" at a time when a relationship was yet to be formed between the imaginings of European imperialists and the material presence of a Southern continent. Hall makes it explicit that the origins of modern Australia predate so-called "discovery" or "settlement" by Europeans. In doing so he ventures back further into the strangeness of the European past, to locate a period that is, at once part of the story of the Australia nation and also a global tale of the European imperial and capitalist energies that were both uniquely creative and widely destructive. While *The Lonely Traveller* encompasses familiar themes associated with colonialism's dark history, it does so by examining the protomodern European empires that had been conspicuously absent from Australia's post-settlement, nation building narratives.

The value of Hall's literary intervention is to constantly invite questions such as: What were the moral and ethical principles from which imperialism proceeded? How might the detrimental impacts of empire and colonialism been avoided? How might this new land have met the promise of *Australia del Espiritu Santo*—The South Land of the Holy Spirit—a land with the potential for a new agreement between peoples? How might the tortuous pathway to and from *Mabo* have been transformed?

While these questions are rhetorical, Hall's depiction of Yuramiru's anti-historical exploration is presented as one response. It is the story of a Indigenous man who made it to Europe with an open mind and good intentions, and who conducted himself with dignity and respect in the face of unspeakable provocation from civilisations that formally honored such traits, while ignoring them in practice. As Isabella writes in concluding her journal:

> [Yuramiru] had left everything he understood behind, and cast himself adrift on the mercy and curiosity of unknown folk. Lost in a world so foreign it must have seemed a chaos of meaningless luxuries and cruelty, he survived by the strength of knowing that survival comes down to a simple matter of correct conduct. (308)

And it is also Isabella's story—the young woman who learned to look beyond the physical, cultural and language differences that separated two individuals, and recognise the humanity and value in the other. By the end of her journal Isabella understands that it was Yuramiru who was the tutor in their relationship: "Curious to think that inside that bone ball were ideas I had never thought and could never think, a knowledge of places I had never been to and could never go to, a language (maybe several) I could not speak and would never speak." (300).

*Mabo* constituted an all too rare moment when modern Australia paused to question the moral underpinnings of imperialism in the Antipodes and the price of colonial dispossession. Across the full range of his heptalogy Hall constantly seeks to give voice to those who were marginalised and oppressed as a result. Unfortunately, in Hall's fictional world, Yuramiru's own voice—shared with the world in the journal of another oppressed subject—had no prospect of being heard above the menacing bells of imperial Venice. Nonetheless, in addressing a time before European empires had established a tainted occupation of his homeland, Hall's account of Yuramiru's European explorations suggests, as did *Mabo*, that histories of imperialism and colonialism could have been, and should have been, different.

## NOTES

[1] The publishing history of these three novels is complicated. After initially being published as separate titles, they were first collected and published as a single volume in Australia in 1994 with the title *A Dream More Luminous Than Love: The Yandilli Trilogy*. They were also collectively published in the UK in 1994 with the

title *The Yandilli Trilogy*; and in the USA in 1995, also as *The Yandilli Trilogy*. They have subsequently been collectively known as The Yandilli Trilogy.

[2] In the wake of *Mabo*, Hall not only wrote *The Lonely Traveller*, but also his first play, *A Return to the Brink*. First produced as part of the Melbourne Festival in 1999, it was based on a series of expository dialogues featuring key colonial figures involved in the legal aftermath of the massacre of Wirrayaraay men, women and children at Myall Creek in New South Wales in 1838.

[3] For an account of Hall's use of tropes derived from explorers and exploration, up to and including The Island in the Mind, see Genoni, 195-237.

[4] In the construction of Yuramiru's "prison journal" Hall is referencing the experience of thirteenth century Venetian explorer and trader Marco Polo. Polo famously spent over twenty years traveling overland to China and undertaking an important diplomatic role in the court of Kublai Khan. After returning to Venice and participating in a war against Genoa, Polo was captured and imprisoned. He then took the opportunity to dictate the story of his epic Asian journey to a fellow prisoner, Rustichello da Pisa, including a glowing account of the hospitality he received and the treasures he was gifted by the Khan. When published, da Pisa's account of Polo's travels furthered the Republic's commercial interests by encouraging trade between Venice and China. Polo's reception as he arrived in the East provides a stark contrast to that given to Yuramiru as he ventured to the West, and the avidly read and absorbed knowledge that Polo shared from his prison cell had a very different fate from Yuramiru's attempts to report on his own travels.

## WORKS CITED

Dixon, Ian. "Borders of the Soul: Internal Metaphor in Rodney Hall's *The Lonely Traveller by Night*." https://www.academia.edu/8677808

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation.* Autonomedia, 2004.

Genoni, Paul. *Subverting the Empire: Explorers and Exploration in Australian Fiction*. Common Ground, 2004.

Hall, Rodney. *A Dream More Luminous Than Love: The Yandilli Trilogy*, Picador, 1994.

———. *A Return to the Brink*, Currency, 1999.

———. *Captivity Captive*. McPhee Gribble, 1988.

———. *Just Relations*. Penguin, 1982

———. *Kisses of the Enemy*. Penguin, 1987

———. *The Day We Had Hitler Home*. Picador, 2000.

———. *The Grisly Wife*. Macmillan, 1993

———. *The Island in the Mind*, Macmillan, 1996. (*Terra Incognita*; *The Lonely Traveller by Night*; *Lord Hermaphrodite*).

———. Letter to the author. 11 January 2022.

———. *The Second Bridegroom*. McPhee Gribble, 1991.

———. *The Yandilli Trilogy*. Faber and Faber, 1994.

———. *The Yandilli Trilogy*, Noonday P. 1995.

Jones, Joanne. 2018. *Falling Backwards: Australian Historical Fiction and the History Wars*. U of Western Australia Publishing, 2018.

Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity.* Duke UP, 2011.

Tacey, David. *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia.* HarperCollins, 1995.