

## THE PROSE OF LAND JOURNEYS

I had certainly never before seen a coast so beautiful: the tints of the rocks, foliage, and verdure, were all of that warm, mellow kind which a painter would delight in studying. The lofty forest too, rising so luxuriantly close to the sea, presented a great contrast to the stunted *Banksia* thickets, and desiccated shrubs, which I had seen on the sea coast in the sandstone districts round Sydney.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond those early accounts of exploration and of tentative settlement, the later texts of pioneer travels show a fuller appropriation of the terrain, sometimes enacted through the very text and its role in a wider community of readers. In later works from the 'semi-settled' period there is an increasing confidence and an emerging measure made of regional lifestyle and mores. The various later travels of people across the zone are unofficial and in approach are the forerunners to modern tourism. The five texts have been selected as those most extensive in their coverage of land travel.

While there are many of the characteristics of exploration in the earlier journeys—reflecting their (realised) primacy for defining particular areas—the prose has a limitation in conception that reflects the seemingly narrower possibilities. Gone is the vast grandeur and sense of wonder of the exploration text, succeeded here by a more modest in-filling of detail, that may present itself as possibly important for some future time—either economically or for its closer scientific interest. Generally the time available in any area is longer and this permits a closer engagement with the land and its people. Whatever negotiation of passage takes place in part reflects the aims of the groups, yet without the needs of permanency, or the close competition for resources, and there is the potential to draw out the better instincts of communication. Here we have a more equal power relationship, and a tendency to show more of human respect.

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<sup>1</sup> Clement Hodgkinson, *Australia, from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay: with Descriptions of the Natives, Their Manners and Customs; the Geology, Natural Productions, Fertility, and Resources of That Region; First Explored and Surveyed by Order of the Colonial Government* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1845), p. 73.

The spatial construction of the North Coast can vary, being now very much dependent upon the increasingly varied prior knowledge of the writer, and the dominant aims of the text produced. Varied views of centre again depend upon the assumed readership, be it a general British one, those with scientific interests, those seeking advice for investors, or even those indulging in purely private writing—that form which can often be a practice exercise for other more permanent records.

### PIONEER TRAVELS

Local histories of the whole region draw almost uniformly upon the text of Clement Hodgkinson.<sup>2</sup> With its sweep across the region and sensitive encounter with unfamiliar landscape and people, the sections are often quoted for their local settings and detail. Similarly Hodgkinson's illustrations are often reproduced, with claims of significance beyond the region.<sup>3</sup> Yet the remaining writers in this chapter receive less attention both locally and elsewhere. If noted, they are usually relied upon—rarely even in extract—for support of a generalised point or for descriptive local colour.

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#### Clement Hodgkinson

The first extensive records of non-gubernatorial or so exalted journeys along the North Coast were those of the much later settler and contracted surveyor to the Government, Hodgkinson (1819-93).<sup>4</sup> His work is the longest and most substantial text in its close engagement with so many aspects of the North Coast, of those

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<sup>2</sup> See Norma Townsend, *Valley of the Crooked River: European Settlement on the Nambucca* (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1993), pp. 8-9, 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> See: George Farwell, *Squatter's Castle: The Story of a Pastoral Dynasty: Life and Times of Edward David Stewart Ogilvie 1814-96* (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1973), pp. 149, 175; *Australians 1838*, ed. by Alan Atkinson and Marian Aveling (Broadway, NSW: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, 1987), pp. 29, 40, 100. Rod Ritchie, *Seeing the Rainforests: In 19th-Century Australia* (Sydney: Rainforest Publishing, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> *op. cit.* His work provides the epigraph for this chapter, and the title for this current study.

reports/records so far considered. The author declares that it was written in England in response to the enthusiasm of those who had heard his stories of the North Coast.<sup>5</sup> Published in 1845,<sup>6</sup> and never re-published, it remains one of the most valuable sources for local history in that its span covers much of the whole region in its largely unsettled condition.<sup>7</sup> The prime interest of subsequent commentators on Hodgkinson's text has nearly always centred on the specific journeys by the writer which are incorporated within the text.

In one sense, the journeys are almost official, in that they evidence an extension of the skills used in his employment responsibilities, but here taken beyond the prescribed limits of survey. Almost surprisingly, the journeys are revealed as private affairs—the first two ostensibly looking for further grazing land to the north, and the third to the south simply the result of a missed boat to Sydney. While there are some links to it, what distinguishes this text from the style of maritime prose or of that of settlers is its similarity to the wide-ranging exploratory mode of Oxley, combining keen observation and scientific recording, and over-riding this with a constant determination to capture what is sublime and romantic about this land. In the post-exploration period, this effort appears marginal and arbitrary to the wider exploration interest, which had moved on elsewhere. Yet the text positions itself to counter this change of general focus of interest—especially through its later detailing of commercial opportunities in Part III. Less grandiose than that of Oxley, this text is no less detailed as to land form and fauna, but without the informing presence of the colonial botanist, it is understandably less specific in botanic detail. In approach, Hodgkinson evidences a modest attempt to express the prose in an acceptable contemporary literary style.

<sup>5</sup> K.A. Patterson, 'Clement Hodgkinson (1819-93)', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, 39 (1968), 127-138 (p. 127). The point is taken from Hodgkinson, pp. v-vi. Patterson gives a biographical overview of Hodgkinson's work but is stronger for the later [Victorian] period.

<sup>6</sup> As per title page. The dedication is dated October, 1844., suggesting completion at that time.

<sup>7</sup> See. for example: Marie H. Neil, *Valley of the Macleay* (Sydney: Wentworth Books, 1972); Caroline Carey, *Tales of Trial Bay: An Early History of South West Rocks* ([Kempsey, NSW]: [n.p.], 1993); David Dunne, *Family, Farm and Forest: a History of the Eungai District, N.S.W.*, 2nd edn (Eungai Creek, NSW: D. Dunne, 1990); Norma Townsend, *Valley of the Crooked River: European Settlement on the Nambucca* (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1993); *Pioneering in the Bellinger Valley*, ed. by Norman Braithwaite and Harold Beard (Bellinger, NSW: Bellinger Courier-Sun, 1978).

Beyond satisfying the enthusiasm of his English audiences, the major aim in Hodgkinson's text, as he declares it, is to:

rectify the prevailing opinion of many persons, that all parts of New Holland are distinguished by a scantiness of vegetation, and aridity of soil, exceeding that in any other country.<sup>8</sup>

This statement of aim is largely repeated at the end of Part II, when the North Coast survey is ostensibly finished. In essence it is an early, but, ultimately, a vain attempt to broaden the developing nationalist identity. Still, Hodgkinson's mapping of the North Coast makes an identification based upon the location of rivers, and it imagines up-river passages following each to its source in the mountains. In the manner of Rous's texts of river exploration, Hodgkinson now presents a view that moves back from the river mouths, describing the banks, the immediate vicinity which at times includes spots of European settlement, and so, eventually, reaches the mountains. Following on from Oxley's southern journey, there is the presentation of a long series of rivers as the characteristic descriptor of the North Coast. As if to stress from the outset the importance of the area, the text's title moves from the national, to the then sea-access ports that (for him) span the region. The title misleadingly—and probably deliberately—announces that Hodgkinson explored and surveyed the whole coast from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay. In this it assumes, or insinuates the presentation of, a broad longitudinal sweep of the region—the land equivalent of the passage by Cook, and with even more detail than Flinders, and as if Oxley had a third land journey to link his discoveries of Port Macquarie and Moreton Bay. While this may be merely a publisher's concept of the desired reader placement of this text, it suggests a sense of completeness in its treatment of the region, and it sets up an unwanted anticipation of this.

Finally, within the text itself, the structure is focused on the various river valleys, the emphasis on which for Hodgkinson is not in any simple navigation sequence. Rather, his personal (reflective and ranking) geography of the North Coast is revealed thus:

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<sup>8</sup> Hodgkinson, p. vi. Largely repeated on p. 124.





the MacLeay river, and two smaller rivers, between that stream and the Clarence ... the river Hastings, and the Port Macquarie district, the Clarence, Richmond, and Tweed rivers, and the country in the vicinity of Moreton Bay and the Brisbane river.<sup>9</sup>

His detailed surveying work in the Macleay, and to its immediate north, leads to the particular stress upon that area—in fact it takes all of Part I of the text.<sup>10</sup> There is then a geographical awkwardness to Part II which treats the southern Hastings in good close detail, followed by a sudden massive overleap to the northern Clarence and the rivers beyond, each treated in slighter detail than the familiar southern parts. Other than reflecting the central locus of the author's experience, the pattern of reduction of the northern rivers is justified for the readers thus:

The general character of the country on the banks of the other rivers, north of Port Stephens, viz.: the Manning, the Hastings, the Clarence, the Richmond, the Tweed, the Brisbane, &c. being, with some little variation, nearly similar to that at the MacLeay, a more brief notice of their natural features will suffice.<sup>11</sup>

Such generalisation, and selection based on so many variant criteria, is a salutary reminder of the ultimate arbitrariness of all mapping and reporting schemas.

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In Part III the text moves to an overall assessment of production and investment opportunities in New South Wales (moving in places to an Australia-wide perspective). Finally, Part IV presents a collection of 'Australian field-sports, and the incidents of a bush life, with anecdotes of the Aborigines',<sup>12</sup> where many of the examples come from the North Coast, and in this return from the national to the local, the centrality of the coastal region for Hodgkinson's account is reinforced thereby.

What underscores the importance of the land-based view is the incorporated text of the three journals—a journey overland from the Macleay to the Bellinger River; then a later one by the coast to the same river's entrance; and, later again, an overland

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<sup>9</sup> Hodgkinson, p. vii.

<sup>10</sup> The map which faces p. 1, in its varying degree of detail, shows the same emphasis on the area from Port Macquarie to the Bellinger.

<sup>11</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 2

<sup>12</sup> Hodgkinson, p. viii.



journey from the Macleay south to the Hunter River. While descriptions of settled valleys commence from the river entrance, in Port Macquarie's case 'from the sea',—there is none of the distant abstracted characteristic of maritime prose. The ease of detail selected shows essentially an inland view, with the river merely a textual device to penetrate and reveal the land. There is some degree of transition from the style of then still-influential maritime texts—in the search for navigable entrances in particular. There is also some regional commonality in the overview of the later Part III, cited through the presence of

no less than nine rivers with bar harbours, which can be entered by coasting vessels and small steamers<sup>13</sup>

Yet, on the closer scale, even in the journey northward along the beaches from Nambucca to the Bellinger entrance—the section that most closely echoes Oxley's southern journey—there is no recording of any thoughts of sea-based travel or of encountered/anticipated difficulties, no recording of navigational dangers, or clarification of maps, or even thoughts as to the usefulness of ships/boats/canoes for an easier passage. In short, the texts of Flinders and Cook are, for the first time, clearly absent in this new (settler-based) positioning of the North Coast.

Even from the vantage points in the mountains there is a reformulation of the vision of the land. For the Hastings valley there is a distinct contradiction of Oxley's grand sweeping vista. Where Oxley, in his enthusiasm, included much from the north and the south in the Hastings Valley as first seen from Mount Seaview, Hodgkinson excludes the Hastings and its embracing land mass as seen from the major ranges, and chooses to limit it thus:

The river Hastings rises at Mount Warragembi, which is one of the summits on the range which divides the basin of the Manning river from that of the MacLeay. This range branches out at Mount Warragembi, so as to form the basin of the Hastings river, which consequently does not rise in the great main chain of mountains dividing the eastern and western waters, as some authors have averred.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 121.

<sup>14</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 73.

The aim of this larger feature approach, one concentrating on the mountains and their east running rivers, is to reveal what is so distinctive about the North Coast, in a unique linking of its rainfall and fertility:

Experience has proved in Australia, that the only districts in which one may be assured of exemption from drought, are those where the chains of mountains attain a very great elevation, and throw off numerous lofty ranges extending to the sea coast; their formation, also, being of a nature favourable to fertility and moisture.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly crossing the region is the possibility of fairly easy inland access. Oxley's vision of an east-west route is shown to be now coming into some existence,<sup>16</sup> but with the wool from only one season having been so transported at the time of Hodgkinson writing. The ultimate and eventual marginality of such trade traverses is, perhaps, indicated in the unenthusiastic description of the route between the Clarence and the Tablelands:

The communication between the table land along the main range, and the navigable estuary of the Clarence, is naturally much less difficult than at Port Macquarie; wool drays can descend from the fine district, called Beardy Plains, (that portion of table land opposite the sources of the Clarence) with comparative ease, to that part of the river where the vessels take in cargo for Sydney.<sup>17</sup>

At the northern extreme of his zone of focus, in incorporating Oxley's Brisbane River text, Hodgkinson will not accept Oxley's confusing claim for the Brisbane River as the navigable access to the Liverpool Plains. Rather, in an exercise of regional centralising, he derides the Brisbane River to the north as:

much inferior in size to the Clarence, and not even equal to the MacLeay river.<sup>18</sup>

Oxley's enthusiasm for the sublime in nature is also much changed and clearly exceeded, and it should be remembered that this text has as its focus the reverse direction to Oxley's work where waterfalls indicated a drop towards coastal lands. Here the labouring up-river is culminated by the reward of ecstatic visions:

The sublimity of these falls cannot be surpassed by the finest waterfalls of the Alps, especially when the MacLeay is swollen by rain;—the untrodden forest crowning the towering precipices, the dazzling spray, and boiling foam, and the mighty roar of the

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15 Hodgkinson, pp. 176-177.

16 Hodgkinson, p. 21.

17 Hodgkinson, p. 97.

18 Hodgkinson, pp. 103, 104.



torrent, reverberating with a deafening sound through the narrow glen, cannot fail to strike the spectator with admiration.<sup>19</sup>

The exaggeration is based on an implicit claim of the writer's considerable familiarity with the Macleay falls, an exaggeration which then carries over to an expression which also conveniently omits the Aborigines from the locality.

The Switzerland-like sublime and the romantic occur at various points in the text. Again, in the personal journals which Hodgkinson includes so freely, we find:

We had a beautiful view from the summit we were now upon. To the westward, amidst a confused mass of mountains rising beyond mountains, covered with universal forest, the eye could trace the deep, narrow valleys full of brush, of the streams forming the Nambucca, curling into the deep mountain recesses. Looking towards the north-west, the direction in which I wished to proceed, tier beyond tier of mountains rose in serrated ridges of steep, high conical summits; the view in that direction being bounded by the dim, blue outline of a level crested range of surpassing altitude. Looking east, the eye embraced the dense forest and swamps on the Nambucca river, the silvery glare of its tranquil reaches, and the blue surface of the boundless Pacific Ocean, which was about twenty-five miles distant. To the south-east, the isolated position of Mount Yarra-Hapinni made it stand forth in bold relief<sup>20</sup>

In this description the eye makes a four-fold scan, finding delight in all, and so by reflection, ultimately expressing a joy in the observer's (land-based) position. Unlike the case in the text from Oxley, the sea now has a minor role, as a muted backdrop. More generally, such panoramic vision is brought about by the circumstances of the journey.

Enveloped by the darkness or shade of heavy vegetation, or even battling through dense brush, when an eminence is gained, the view is sudden and surrounding. Unlike the static forward vision most characteristic of inland exploration, here the eye is liberated, and in attempting to maintain the threefold descriptive pattern of the highly picturesque the profusion of detail overwhelms any simple concept of a prospect. Robert Dixon has noted Oxley's frustration in attempting to apply this all-pervading cultural model to the seemingly unvarying Western Plains,<sup>21</sup> but here the potential for the sublime is in any direction, and now it overwhelms any attempt at simple controlled presentation of the awesome in nature.

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<sup>19</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-classical Culture in New South Wales 1788-1860* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 94.

By contrast, a more conventional prospect begins with the details of the settlements along a river. Human impact on the landscape can be seen as dwarfed by the enormity of the background, and the clear movement of the eye in this description soon takes the reader away from the immediate human evidence and towards the distance and the natural:

The track here led me through the chain of rich cultivated farms bordering on this stream. The scenery was surpassingly beautiful as the shades of evening crept over the landscape. The alluvial plains in the narrow valley were of a rich golden hue from the ripe maize, which formed a strong contrast to the dark green foliage of the lofty brush, and the glistening white trunks of the gigantic Flooded gum trees. Immediately beyond the brush, lightly wooded forest hills, verdant and grassy, rose in graceful waving contour; whilst looking up the valley, lofty mountains, covered with brush, and tinted with deep purple, from the reflected light of the glowing evening sky, closed the scene to the north-west.<sup>22</sup>

Here the eye is directed in a linear mode—according to the rules of the picturesque with its three distances—seemingly more appropriate for a view beginning with a European-based centre. After the related breath-taking joy of the earlier journeys, such conventional description appears greatly limited, and almost static.

An earlier rhapsodic descriptive passage marks the end of this part, with an example which comes closest to capturing a combination of the sublime and the panoramic:

The view from the range was magnificent. At our feet was the narrow glen of the Bellengen, choked up with dark green, impervious brush, whilst immediately opposite to us, on the north side of the river, a gigantic range rose up in perpendicular buttresses, three thousand feet high, and the total altitude of the range itself could not be less (judging from analogy) than five thousand feet. Opposite the point we had attained, the outline of this high range was a level table land, but nearer the coast it became broken into an undulating outline of steep, conical summits. Exactly opposite to us, in a deep cleft, a beautiful cascade dashed down a fall several hundred feet perpendicular, like a long band of silver, glittering in the rays of the declining sun; to the east we could discern the dim outline of the horizon over the Pacific Ocean; and turning to the west, mountains beyond mountains rose in varied contour, whilst snow-white clouds floated in serpentine wreaths among the narrow glens, and dark mountain recesses.<sup>23</sup>

The attempt to use the four compass points becomes an inadequate frame to impose on the marvellous sights surrounding the observer. It is, therefore, somewhat unconvincing when Hodgkinson would have us believe that his sole aim in this journey was a prosaic commercial search for new grazing land, or more generally:

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<sup>22</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 83.

<sup>23</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 39.

In writing this hasty work, the object I had in view, was to endeavour to analyse the degree of profit likely to attend, henceforward, the rural occupations of New South Wales<sup>24</sup>

His grand account, written up in England from his journals, other readings, and recollections, appears to have gained much more force and dramatic presentation from a long-lasting powerful vision of the land and of its sublime grandeur.

The finer detail of the published work fleshes out a pattern of close observation and recording. This includes accounts of the geology and soils, with one example linked to a generalised definition of region:

the clay slates, (so frequently met between the Hunter and Moreton)<sup>25</sup>

There are generous lists of tree species, including comparisons with similar named species in other countries.<sup>26</sup> Similarly there is much detail of the fauna encountered—in general, a vision of plenty, where abundance is measured in tallies of fish speared<sup>27</sup> or in the numbers of animals/species killed:

In the district of Port Macquarie, and at the MacLeay river, quails were particularly abundant. I remember that on one occasion, Mr. T— of Port Macquarie, shot no less than thirty brace in a few hours, on the cultivated plain at our squatting station at the MacLeay river.<sup>28</sup>

Intertextual comparative links are used to emphasise the range of the writer's own reading, with many other writers mentioned by name, and occasionally by published work. The list includes: Wentworth, Dr Lang, Captain Sturt, Professor Jameson's notes to Cuvier's *Theory of the Earth*, based on Humboldt, Mr. Cunningham (quoted from an encyclopaedia), Captain King, R.N. and John Oxley. This pattern of acknowledgement of authorities reaches its maximum point when there are incorporated long quotations from other colonial texts of exploration, such as Oxley's on the Brisbane River. The longer quotations reflect an era of fewer and more expensive books, and where the ability for a reader to follow sources was limited. The excessive reliance upon such long extracts becomes clear after just over two pages are

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<sup>24</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 194.

<sup>25</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 223.

<sup>28</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 204.

taken to correct errors in 'Mr. Montgomery Martin's History of *all the British Colonies*.' At this point the reader is told: 'Errors such as this are scarcely worth mentioning'.<sup>29</sup> Of the briefer references to most relevant Australian authorities, the climax of these is the flattering reference to:

Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell... [noting the] indomitable energy, accurate judgement, and untiring scientific research, which that distinguished officer displayed...<sup>30</sup>.

A note follows with the full citation for Mitchell's publication, ending with the name of the publisher—T. & W. Boone, the very publisher of Hodgkinson's text. This goes further than publishing house solidarity, reflecting a textual model from the senior surveyor and one to whose stature Hodgkinson aspired, but who expresses himself in his own awkward and fragmentary method.

When one comes to Part III of the text, then the claimed centre of interest—a (failed) attempt to redirect the national image of aridity to incorporate the lushness of the coast—is overtaken by that of encouraging agricultural activity. This section, with its analyses and calculations on possible farming ventures, gives over six pages to the 'favoured localities' (that cover a span which overlaps the lower North Coast): Illawarra, Williams, Paterson and Manning rivers, and Port Macquarie.<sup>31</sup> The detail is logical and persuasive, and, for the modern reader, it only reveals the limits of its understanding in the last sentence where the crop intended to be grown in these valleys is the inappropriate one of wheat.

As a surveyor, Hodgkinson had the authority to proceed through the still unsettled areas, making his way as a peaceable emissary of the Crown. Accounts of his contact with the Indigenous people have drawn present-day praise for his courtesy and for the respect for tribal customs shown in his passages across tribal boundaries.<sup>32</sup>

Being aware, that one of the chief causes of the hostility of the wild blacks to parties travelling throught the bush, was their indignation at the encroachment of white men on the prescribed haunts of the tribe; which cause would occasion a quarrel between

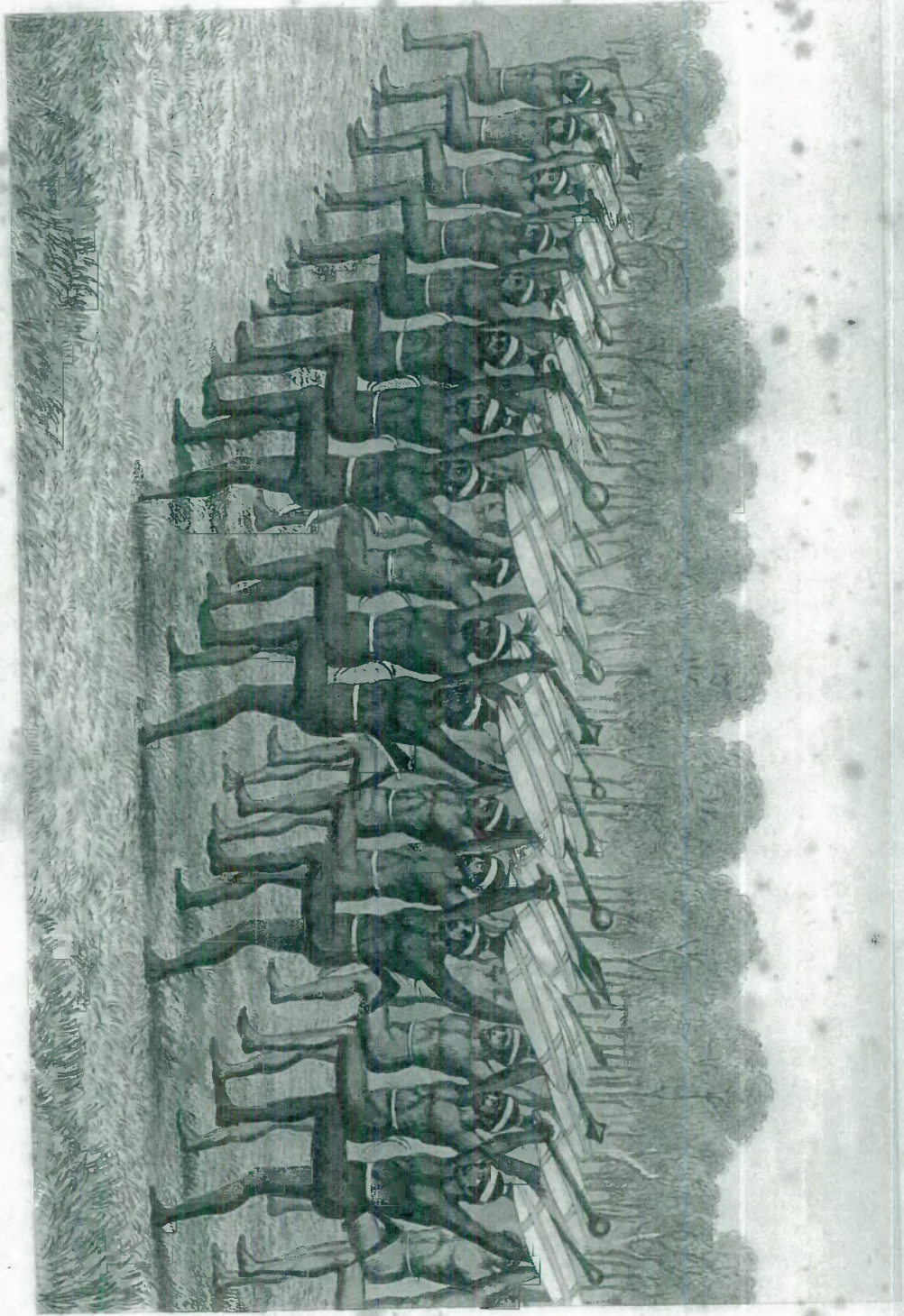
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<sup>29</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 114.

<sup>31</sup> Hodgkinson, pp. 167-173.

<sup>32</sup> Hodgkinson's example is contrasted with the failure of the Kennedy expedition, by Rod Ritchie, *Seeing the Rainforests: in 19th-Century Australia* (Sydney: Rainforest Publishing, 1989), pp. 57-58.



*Rowing team of the University of Cambridge, 1874*



different tribes of the natives themselves, unless their objects in so trespassing were formally explained by an avant courier, or herald<sup>33</sup>

Such thoughtful consideration was a rarity in early Australian travel. In Hodgkinson's case, this sensible thinking was permitted to be put into practice by fortuitous contact with 'some old friends of mine belonging to the Tanban tribe',<sup>34</sup> and so, clearly dependent upon earlier familiarity and on a store of native good-will, of which the text gives no other specific evidence. Townsend considers the surveyors, and Hodgkinson in particular, to have special advantages over settlers in that they had no direct competition with the Aborigines, and were 'not in the situation of having to justify their presence'.<sup>35</sup> Hodgkinson's base, that of a settler on the Macleay, meant that he had both roles—those of traveller and landowner—and his accommodating approach suggests the wider possibilities that were available for all involved in such early contact. Nevertheless, the Aborigines who help Hodgkinson are of great assistance over many days, through difficult terrain, and even knocking down brush with their boomerangs to help in his progress—or from the 'Aborigines' perspective more likely for the progress of the whole group. Another rarity in this early contact history, is for the European to give consideration to native languages. Hodgkinson shows awareness of the specific language that is used between the newcomers and the Indigenous people.

These [Bellingen] blacks were quite ignorant of the jargon, which the stockmen and sawyers suppose to be the language of the natives, while they suppose it to be ours, and which is the ordinary medium of communication between the squatters and the "tame blackfellows."<sup>36</sup>

He clearly can recognise a pidgin patter or words and its vast difference from the original languages. But mostly here one sees his bemused awareness of the accompanying misunderstandings—a humour that is akin to Oxley's mild embarrassment over his own canoe-making efforts, and one that offers openings for a more mutual accommodation.

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<sup>33</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 49.

<sup>34</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> Norma Townsend, *Valley of the Crooked River: European Settlement on the Nambucca*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 66.

The text shows consideration given to the relationships between the various groups of Aborigines, and Hodgkinson's thoughts on the best method in order to proceed. Between two of the incorporated journeys was a series of brutal attacks and reprisals, between natives and cedar-getters, and so Hodgkinson had good reason to be cautious when his party was so vulnerable in the brush. And here the text has an almost respectfully cautious tone, rather than the developing and more assertive armed wariness of Oxley. Hodgkinson's interest in the Aborigines is largely an attempt to learn more about how they order themselves. The illustrations in his text show an exaggerated sense of order, one that reflects a (British, and earlier a Roman) military-style regimentation. The portrayed symmetry exceeds the needs of co-ordinated effort, or shared vision. Rather, here is a likely reflection of the observer's own respect for that which he is privileged to observe. With his illustration of 'A Fight', an event which takes place on his landholding, and presumably within sight of his house, there is present a predictable relief that he and his station are not implicated in the violent events unfolding around him.<sup>37</sup> Thus he has an event where he has good reason to be grateful for the Aborigines' manifested sense of order, propriety and control. In all these positive or neutral descriptions of the natives, the text presents a calm voice, a counterpart to the poise, elegance and formality of the illustrations. Yet it is one where the tensions are not completely subsumed under the surface courtesies. For it contains an almost sad awareness of the darkness of so much inter-cultural contact.

Hodgkinson is not blind to an all too likely negative side of the dialogue with the Indigenous people, and he cites the case of:

native blacks, who have been supplied with liquor, yelling and screeching like demons, under the influence of alcohol.<sup>38</sup>

The description is part of the larger narration of the seemingly more culpable drunkenness of the cedar-sawyers. In the list of these Whites' lack of good qualities, 'drinking bouts' occurs as the last, or most telling point. The detail of a native medical

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<sup>37</sup> Hodgkinson, pp. 237-240.

<sup>38</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 12.

practice of causing blood to be ingested is given with only the qualification of a note, making the comparative observation:

Many of the superstitious practices of the American Indians are equally disgusting.<sup>39</sup>

Here Hodgkinson may have had in mind the Lewis and Clark publication which detailed many more Indian activities that would horrify many Europeans—and where one practice was considered so unseemly for a refined Western readership as to be described solely in Latin. By such comparison, while the Aboriginal practice is clearly different from that of Europeans, it can seem relatively mild.

There is also a negative side to the observer as he presents himself in this text. The repeated description of his Aboriginal assistants as 'my tame blacks'<sup>40</sup> with its perhaps unconscious link between Aborigines and animals. A contemporary opinion all too prevalent is one cited by Henry Reynolds as seeing Aborigines as 'a species of...tail-less monkeys'.<sup>41</sup> In persuading one to swim across shark-infested waters of the Nambucca, Hodgkinson threatens, promises, and finally succeeds when warning that he will repudiate the original contract, even though the Aborigines have already performed their arduous part over a considerable time.<sup>42</sup> His justification is the danger to his European companion, Boot, who cannot swim and might otherwise perish alone. The circumstances are described in insufficient detail to save Hodgkinson from an undercutting impression of lesser care for the lives of Aboriginal people, even those whom he knows well. The strongest example of cultural insensitivity is Hodgkinson's persistence in his attempt to observe the secret initiation rite, despite clear signals from the Aborigines, first of 'repugnance' and then later 'refusal'. The specific details he cites are clearly only introductory, or of the more open conclusion and at most fragmentary from a set of ceremonies covering two whole weeks.<sup>43</sup> Accepted with the women to observe the final public ceremony, Hodgkinson is concerned to record

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<sup>39</sup> Hodgkinson, pp. 227-228.

<sup>40</sup> Twice on one page, Hodgkinson, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land*, p. 111.

<sup>42</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 69.

<sup>43</sup> Hodgkinson, pp. 230-235.

minute detail, in an amazed tone that reflects some growing understanding of the importance of the secrets.

Another indicator of the lack of inter-cultural understanding by even this most sensitive of contemporary observers, is seen when Hodgkinson expresses amazement that the Indigenous people can be so strongly attached to the land—and this is despite his own (recollected) joy in its beauty:

It is astonishing what a fondness the Australian natives display for the tribes to which they belong, and the localities in which they are accustomed to roam; they cannot bear even a short separation from their fellows, and their usual haunts without feeling a strong desire to return to them.<sup>44</sup>

Although he returned to Australia after several years in England, he did not come back then but lived the remainder of his life to the south, in Victoria, and there is no evidence that he ever returned to the scenes of the North Coast which he had earlier found so sublime.<sup>45</sup>

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The intended textual centre for this work accords with a British readership, or with the curiosity of prospective settlers, or of those with scientific interests, and perhaps with the tastes of the increasing number of 'armchair travellers'.<sup>46</sup> The publishers, T. and W. Boone, had previously published Mitchell's journals (1839, 2nd.ed.), and works by Peter Cunningham, Edward Eyre. After this text by Hodgkinson in 1845, they followed quickly with Stokes' *Discoveries in Australia* (1846) and Leichhardt's journal in 1847.<sup>47</sup> With Mitchell as the successor to Oxley, in this sequence of publications there is a definite, if fortuitous, positioning of Hodgkinson's work in the mainstream of serious and what must seem 'bench mark'

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<sup>44</sup> Hodgkinson, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> The claim that Clement F. Hodgkinson did further survey work in 1879, around Mullumbimby, cannot be substantiated. See Jim Brokenshire, *The Brunswick: Another River and its People* (Eureka, NSW: North Coast Maps, 1996 [1st pub. 1988]), pp. 40-41.

<sup>46</sup> Rod Ritchie, *Seeing the Rainforests: in 19th-Century Australia*, p. 91.

<sup>47</sup> J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia; with an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed during the Voyage of the H.M.S. Beagle, in the Years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43*, 2 vols (London: T. and W. Boone, 1846). Ludwig Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia, from Moreton Bay to Port Essington, a Distance of Upwards of 3000 Miles, during the years 1844-1845* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1857).

exploration prose. In extract form, his work has been of considerable use and influence, particularly within the region. But it is also of significance for thematic studies where the interest is far broader than (modern) curiosity about the localities which prompted the original observations. Still, due to its variations in content, less nationally significant area, and awkwardnesses in structure/readability, Hodgkinson's text's absence from the familiar national canon of important exploration is stylistically understandable. This is particularly so when that canon maintained the myth of the heroic epic explorer traversing vast distances—something Hodgkinson only participates in through the actual title of his text. So complete is this erasure of his published text that his otherwise detailed obituary makes no reference to it.<sup>48</sup>

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#### **Lt. Colonel Charles Mundy**

Exploration gives way to travel when the route is well known, at least by some, and more civilised facilities begin to be present. Mundy's account of his (1847) travel in the Hastings River valley, and then up to New England, clearly shows the inevitable change from a pioneer style of text by Hodgkinson, in only a few years. Mundy was the deputy-adjutant-general of military forces in Australia, and a cousin to Governor FitzRoy—for whom this North Coast visit was ostensibly an official journey. Yet Mundy's style is such as to claim the journey for his own seeming purposes of pleasurable travel. As his biographers put it:

Aristocratic by birth and conventional in temper, he showed in his books a discerning eye, a lively pen, a keen sense of humour and a marked streak of sturdy common sense... [which] still makes entertaining reading<sup>49</sup>

Some of this humour may arise from a positioning against his more famous naval brother—Sir George Rodney Mundy—a man known for his:

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<sup>48</sup> The Late Mr Clement Hodgkinson [Obituary]', *Illustrated Australian News* (2 Oct. 1893), p. 14.  
<sup>49</sup> *ADB* Vol 2 p. 268 Russel Ward and Ken Macnab.



strict observance of old-fashioned etiquette and for a certain pomposity of demeanour, springing partly from the high value he placed on his rank and partly from his pride of birth as the grandson of Lord Rodney.<sup>50</sup>

By way of contrast, this description helps to illuminate the text of the one-year-older brother—our traveller in the Hastings Valley. Still, even taking account of such differences, the power of class helps to shape the expectations, perceptions and eventually the actual model given to the land and its people.

While the extensive journals would have been written up at the time, final publication did not take place until five years later, in 1852, with the North Coast section taking up just over one chapter.<sup>51</sup> Reaching its fourth edition within five years, the text is still used for fleshing out both local histories and wider studies.<sup>52</sup> The intended readership was a London audience eager for tales of strange places and of the derring-do of British individuals.

As with many like documents of this period, there is a straddling of maritime and land-based characteristics, reflecting the progress of the journey—but ultimately the land based section is so distinctive as to call for its inclusion here. The maritime section adds some framing to the whole, as in the following description of the coastline:

The character of the coast is scarcely highland, yet neither is it flat. It presents a wavy line of hills and hollows covered with bush, occasionally jutting into bold rocky bluffs, or green turfy knolls sloping abruptly to the surf-vexed beach. The verdure of the grass lands in the vicinity of the sea is very remarkable in this country, as compared with the pastures of the interior.<sup>53</sup>

This shows an initial engagement with a land that is increasingly seen as a byway, undistinguished by any obvious features for the guidance of the traveller, rather than the navigator. Yet the remarkable green of the grass lands strikes some specific interest, suggesting, if not the picturesque, then certain possibilities of later usefulness.

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<sup>50</sup> DNB Vol. 13, p. 1199.

<sup>51</sup> Godfrey Charles Mundy, *Our Antipodes: or Residence and Rambles in the Australian Colonies with a Glimpse of the Gold Fields*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1852), II, pp. 12-45.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Mundy's journal is cited for its description of Lake Innes House, in Frank Rogers, p. 137. For its description of ferns and comparisons between regions, the journal is a source for Rod Ritchie, p. 134, *et passim*.

<sup>53</sup> Mundy, p. 12.

Arrival at Port Macquarie causes the settlement to be presented in very small scale, identified only by its 'little wooden pier'.<sup>54</sup> The diminutive nature of the settlement is further emphasised by grand sweeping statements, followed by undercutting detail:

the Governor being received with great warmth of welcome by all the inhabitants of the town who happened to be out of bed, and by a guard of honour, consisting of the whole garrison, namely, an ensign and twenty men.<sup>55</sup>

This approach merges into a humorous clown-like image:

although a dozen or two of children were playing on the village green—*brown* rather—there was something about the place which denoted decay rather than growth. It looks like a little man dressed in the clothes of a large one. The streets are very wide, and cut out to be very long...<sup>56</sup>

A list of the town's buildings and various detail on the harbour follow—with only slight deflection persisting. The reason for the fore-grounding of the small size is soon made clear, when finally we are told of the writer's prior knowledge that Port Macquarie had lost its economic mainstay with the removal of most convicts. This initial approach, which is akin to that of the Augustan satirists, is also class-based, the writer wishing to keep a safe distance even from the townsfolk and ridiculing the retired officers as persons experiencing 'burial above ground in the bush',<sup>57</sup> after their heroic efforts at a public dinner to express their loyalty.

A change of descriptive style comes with the journey inland from the settlement to their destination at Lake Innes:

Two carriages ...conveyed us through seven or eight miles of forest land, some part of which is remarkable for large and handsome timber and carpeted with luxuriant ferns to Lake Innes Cottage.<sup>58</sup>

The description is an overlay of a model of elegant English country house and lands, upon an exotic, perhaps primeval, landscape. At the house, Mundy finds more specific joy in the new land around him, and he takes the opportunity to describe the scene as a

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54 Mundy, p. 13.

55 Mundy, p. 14.

56 Mundy, p. 14.

57 Mundy, p. 20.

58 Mundy, p. 15.

panorama—as applied on a smaller and more comfortable style than seen with previous authors:

The house is placed on the slope of a green hill, descending to Lake Innes,—a wide sheet of water, perhaps three or four miles long by two miles wide, whose banks, framed in a margin of flags and rushes, give evidence of the gradual absorption of this splendid piece of fresh water,—rare feature in a country, where perhaps, beyond all others, is obnoxious to the stigma of the Royal Psalmist—"an arid and dry land, where no water is." Beyond the lake and the bush bounding it, rises a distant background of mountains, and its head is only divided from the ocean by a wooded isthmus about half a mile in width.

The view from a hill behind the dwelling house, embracing a panorama of sea, lake, wood, and mountain, is strikingly beautiful. The roar of the surf on the rocky coast, and the silvery ripple of the placid lake, so near yet so different, present a singular and agreeable contrast.<sup>59</sup>

At times the style is reminiscent of Hodgkinson's pioneering text, with its darkness and shade, and variety in detail, yet with this writer all is in a seemingly more constrained tone—for now the landscape is often seen, and expressions perhaps rehearsed, and even expected. Further description in an evident relaxed manner causes the enthusiasm of the then participants to be transferred to details of the landscape:

we were galloping along the finest sea-beach I ever saw, (perfectly level and hard sand,) for twelve miles, between two headlands. Close down to the sea-shore grows the most luxuriant forest and brush, the trees thickly enlaced by parasites and creepers, among which a handsome kind of passiflora throws its broad shining leaves, flowers and tendrils, so as to form a canopy of verdure across the cattle-paths, into which we struck to avoid the heat and glare of the sun.<sup>60</sup>

The interest in flora shown here is in its aesthetic potential rather than the botanical or commercial aspect. There is a richness of unfamiliar detail and a holidaying delight in this natural description, that, in their inter-relationship, has parallels in many subsequent texts responding to the natural beauty of the North Coast.

In his first volume, Mundy had presented a whole chapter on the Aborigines of the region to the west of the Blue Mountains.<sup>61</sup> Having treated an expected topic for his readers, it was then possible to largely overlook those Indigenous people encountered elsewhere. The only Aboriginal presence in Mundy's account of the North Coast region is in the persistence of a mythic story—one taken from elsewhere, but

<sup>59</sup> Mundy, p. 16. For another view on this vice-regal visit to Lake Innes House see Annabella Boswell, *Annabella Boswell's Journal: an Account of Early Port Macquarie* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965), pp. 121-153.

<sup>60</sup> Mundy, p. 17.

<sup>61</sup> Mundy, I, pp. 215-252.

applied locally. Mundy recounts that in Sydney, the supposed body of a bunyip had been scientifically examined and announced to be merely that of a deformed foal.

The black fellows, however, unaware of the extinction, by superior authority, of their favourite *loup-garou*, still continue to cherish the fabulous bunyip in their shuddering imaginations.<sup>62</sup>

The account is dismissive of the belief, and of Indigenous culture's 'authority', as well as ignoring the vast differences between the Coast and the more southern bunyip-producing regions. And yet, all of this is cited by the author as background to his unwillingness to enter the water of Lake Innes, with the conceit that:

after I had looked over the gunwale of my boat into the deep mysterious gloom of its waters, despite of science I could not bring myself to take my intended plunge .

Fanciful notion or not, to some degree, herein is evidence of the unplumbed power of even popular Aboriginal culture, linked as it is to the mysteries of the timeless land.

Eventually, after leaving the hospitable surroundings of Lake Innes House, Mundy was part of an exclusive group of four men, comprising the Governor, his son and Major Innes—their host throughout. This group took the road to New England, where we see the same road hitherto praised by Hodgkinson, here denigrated as being accessible only by dray, and barely by horseback. The difference in purposes makes for a difference in appreciation, and just as part of Hodgkinson's purpose was to look to progress in the valley, so Mundy's purpose is in part to foreshadow the decline which he anticipates.<sup>63</sup> This travel is in the reverse direction of Oxley, and instead of the explorer's freedom of camps located at will on a self-determined route, the journey is now punctuated by a series of staging posts, mostly owned by their host, Innes, and each expecting and prepared for the illustrious party. Where one shelter had not existed there was an erection made so that they could be comfortably accommodated.

The land itself is described firstly in terms of ease, variety and promise, as:

alternate, low undulating ranges and rich levels on the banks of the Hastings<sup>64</sup>

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62 Mundy, p. 19.

63 In the month following this visit, the military detachment is withdrawn, and in the following October the convicts are removed. See Rogers, p. 137. Mundy may have had prior knowledge of these changes and used this to shape his text, but he certainly had time to revise his notes before the much later publication, and after the sudden reduction in Port Macquarie's numbers.

64 Mundy, p. 22.

gradually changing with their progression to the limits of current occupation, of a promising but untamed land—such as that described around an isolated dwelling:

a comparative handful of cleared land, terminating in the eternal gumtree wilderness. The soil hereabouts seemed exceedingly rich, and the herbage and foliage wonderfully luxuriant<sup>65</sup>

The location is clearly one of isolation, confronting the vast sameness of the bush, yet in all there is a certain positive suggestion of a sustainable place for people in this land. As a writer of the mid-nineteenth century could not convincingly reduce the vastness of the land in spatial expressions, in order to make it manageable, the land could be compressed in time, and be made to seem merely the result of rapid recent change. For the traveller, in the forest,

with the exception of a few patriarchal trees that have survived storm and fire and axe, he finds no object around him half so venerable as himself. Where the owls, and bats, and satyrs dwell in Australia, I cannot imagine!<sup>66</sup>

In the half-humorous exclamation at the end there is a search for mystery, and although Mundy makes no link between these thoughts and his own trepidation in entering the water at Lake Innes, the two sections concerning mythic power in the landscape are inevitably linked in the reader's mind.

In the westward journey, still well to the east of Mount Seaview, Mundy's text has nothing like the seaward movement excitement expressed by Oxley. Rather, travel over the same land begins to describe the hardship of mountain travel:

Our progress this day consisted, without exception, of crawling up and sliding down hill after hill, mountain after mountain of deep wet soil—very like the peristaltic advance of a travelling caterpillar.<sup>67</sup>

Rather than the comfort of having a known road (or path) and the evening's rest point hitherto well prepared, here is an emphasis on difficult terrain where even its wet richness can be an impediment. In all, the land makes progress so onerous and

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Mundy, p. 24. Similar expressions which reduce the significance of the land can still be seen in contemporary environmentalist/logging debates.

<sup>67</sup> Mundy, p. 24.



inelegant, that it can only be coped with through a humorous image. Soon, with its increasing forest cover, the land presents more of a challenge to the spirit:

In no part of the world did I ever see such absolute midday darkness as occurred in many spots of this forest. Not a ray pierced, nor apparently had ever pierced, the dense shade. The eye ranged through the melancholy colonnades of tall black stems and along the roof of gloomy foliage, until it was lost in the night of the woods,—literally the *nemorunque noctem* of the poet. We were, perhaps, the more struck with this peculiarity because the reverse is the usual character of the Australian bush<sup>68</sup>

This is a reminder of Hodgkinson's descriptions of thick 'brush', and also reminiscent of his aim of countering the standard image of Australia as an arid country. Gone is the comfort of a landscape seemingly younger or less permanent than oneself, a notion now replaced by a land that seems so primeval as to be older than light itself. And still, this is the road to the east of Mount Seaview. The road of Oxley's dream is now a cause for deprecating amazement, first at the bride and groom who had used it after marriage in Port Macquarie, and then that stock could profitably be taken to market via it.<sup>69</sup>

The return journey is treated much more briefly (in less than two pages) where familiarity and anticipation reduce the novelty of the land. In this text the return journey focuses on the company and its horses, with the land merely providing small, but potentially dangerous, impediments for mishap on horse-back. The journey itself is an occasion for levity, with a long description of a 'buck-jumping', the rider of a runaway horse being seriously struck by a branch, and the then injured Governor in the wagon thrown:

'fairly over the splash-board, adding more bruises to his already liberal share'.<sup>70</sup>

The almost slap-stick humour of this section would seem quite out of place for the importance of a governor's tour. Over-riding the expected dignity is a sense of release, of the sort that may accompany the return half of a journey, and in this case may reflect decisions made (regarding the road to the west, and the future of Port Macquarie). In all there appears a rush to be done with the North Coast as a distinctive

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<sup>68</sup> Mundy, pp. 27-28.

<sup>69</sup> Mundy, pp. 31, 43.

<sup>70</sup> Mundy, p. pp. 43-44.

area. Even the detail of humour and travails borne good-naturedly seems to wane, with the final five days of social whirl at Lake Innes House reduced to two sentences in the text. Perhaps Mundy wishes to elide the duplicity of the visitors' 'pleasant' behaviour, when the intention is to wind down the settlement which sustains their hosts.<sup>71</sup> Fuller release comes once the party is at sea bound for Sydney, when a long section of the text is given to recounting a woman passenger's personal story from her youth. Thus the point of departure from the North Coast—the final statement with any interest in the region— was the embarkation at Port Macquarie.

This early traveller along Oxley's road to the west finds no joy in his own passage or in the prospect of later journeys by others. The text does indeed reveal an awareness of a potential power in the land—but it was one that could be readily forgotten in the daily progress and avoided through the text's rushing the departure. This intertextual fascination with the land was one that would find it difficult to survive the necessarily utilitarian approach to the land engendered by closer settlement. For this writer, the only significant map of the North Coast is a sparse grid of occupied locations, some few details as to their type and quality, and brief commentary on the large spaces between them.

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### SEMI-SETTLED

Those whose employment in a region is but of short term, or necessarily itinerant in nature, have a different form of engagement with the region to those whose movement through it is for pleasure. The overview of a region, combined with the writer's closer links with the permanently settled and their needs and approaches can produce a distinctive stance in the account, much as in the following record.

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<sup>71</sup> Annabella Boswell's account of the same days takes three whole pages (pp. 133-135), noting the locals' sometimes over-enthusiastic hospitality, as well as noting the pleasantness of the visitors.

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### George Theodore Blakers

The young German migrant, George Blakers, perhaps under political pressure, had come to Australia in 1849 and spent several years on the New South Wales gold-fields, followed by some years in the Lower Hunter Valley and the Peel region. After this he became a police guard/escort for the gold being transported from the northern fields variously to Armidale, Glen Innes or Grafton. The text he produced covers his arrival and experiences in Australia—stopping after the North Coast section. Subsequently he became a school-teacher and served in that capacity for many years—including a period near Grafton. Close to his retirement, in the late 1880's, he completed the manuscript now under consideration. The editor tells us that the intended audience was his sister and her friends, all still living in Germany, and that the English version was written prior to his own only return visit to Germany, and that, once back in Australia, he wrote a German version and sent it to Europe, but that account has not yet been found. The English text came to light in 1968 and it was subsequently published.<sup>72</sup>

The work is the reflective writing of a young man, an outsider through birth, his first language, and his usual habits of accuracy and diligence—somewhat misplaced in a country which appeared to him as being content with a general rough practice in all matters. His difference, nevertheless, sustained him in hoping to find direction in the many opportunities offered in this new land. In some part this is a travel narrative, but it is largely a frustrated man's semi-itinerant chronicle, containing repeated self-justification, and with a note of resentment that he has to endure such a shifting lifestyle. This is a text questing for belonging and permanent abode amongst

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<sup>72</sup> George Theodore Blakers, *A Useless Young Man?: an Autobiography of Life in Australia, 1849-64* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1986), p. vii.

civilized people, and thus necessarily expressing unease with the land of Australia and all its peoples—British, European, Chinese and Indigenous.

The North Coast section of this somewhat disgruntled text is focused on Grafton and the Upper Clarence mining settlements of Timbarra, Tooloom, and Pretty Gully.<sup>73</sup> It is fragmented by sections clearly set on the Tablelands, but the many travels and varied links, and particularly the passages based on the Timbarra gold-fields, show the blurring of any meaningful concept of a regional boundary in the mountain range.<sup>74</sup> Spatial location and ease of movement are this writer's prime geographical markers, as the nature of his occupation meant frequent travel as a mounted escort, but from varying gold fields and between various central towns. Additionally there were many changes of base station, with little reason or plan sensed by him or his peers, this adding to the notion of the region's character as a very loose network.

In his depiction of the actual landscape, the predominant model is one of a rugged wilderness, as seen on this journey on the Upper Clarence north from Drake to Tooloom:

From Drake there was a track or path (thirty-five miles) leading to Tooloom. The country about there is very mountainous, rugged, and wild. This path crossed five mountains. After surmounting three mountains, the traveller had to cross the Tooloom river (which forms the commencement of the Clarence river), and then two mountains more to reach Tooloom. On the top of the third mountain (counting from Drake), a path leads to the right to another small gold-field called Pretty Gully.<sup>75</sup>

The repetition of mountain-details, and enumeration of the harsh features, suggests difficulties of movement across the land-form, and the uncertainties in location and direction that come from the otherwise undistinguished and (to European eyes) so uniform bush.

In order to better capture the physically strenuous demands of the country, the writer takes away all specific mention of topographical detail, leaving solely the struggling humans. Two outlandish stories are cited 'to illustrate the wildness of the

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<sup>73</sup> Blakers, pp. 130, 135-154, 161-165.

<sup>74</sup> For these North Coast goldfields, including Timbarra, see Isabel Wilkinson, *Forgotten Country: the Story of the Upper Clarence Gold Fields*, 3rd edn ([Lismore], [1980]).

<sup>75</sup> Blakers, p. 140.

country in that part of New South Wales.<sup>76</sup> Both are accounts of (adult) Europeans becoming lost in the bush. In the first there is a brief note on a woman becoming lost while looking for her husband's horse, and stress is placed on the distraught state she was in when found—'nearly delirious with hunger, thirst, and the heat of the sun upon her bare head.' Implied here is the waiting land's capacity to confuse, and then to destroy the newcomers.<sup>77</sup> In the second story, the lost man seems less distressed than the writer perhaps intended his readers to be:

by the time he found some habitation, he had eaten his two dogs. Not being a smoker, he had no matches with him; hence he was forced to eat the dogs raw.

For a local reader, the 'two' adds an element of calmness and even deliberation to a story which has a certain similarity to modern urban myths. Of course, for a reader in Europe, the rawness would compound the horror of the necessary eating of dog—indicating a wild, inhospitable and dangerous country. There is a deep fear of the bush in these horrific tales and descriptions. Even the benign name of a locality cannot redeem it for this writer:

This Pretty Gully was anything but a pretty place. The hills round about were frightfully steep, and so close together, that the diggers could scarcely find room to pitch their tents.<sup>78</sup>

For another writer these hills might prompt expressions of the sublime, but here, all is reduced to utility. Even the word 'pretty' is presented as contingent on convenience. Only the major centre of habitation can give relief from such negative description. A later stationing at Grafton prompts the following happier outline:

Grafton is a rising town on the Clarence river. Although fifty miles, by water, from the ocean, the river is half a mile wide at the town. The soil is of the very best in the world, being a rich black. The climate and vegetation are quite tropical. Sugar cane and bananas grow well there. The heat, sometimes is terrible.<sup>79</sup>

A longer section on the torrid conditions follows, detailing readings, the different temperatures, concern for his audience in Germany really understanding the horrible

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<sup>76</sup> Blakers, p. 140.

<sup>77</sup> Much as in the later story c. 1900, rehandled by Joan Lindsay as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967), or in the 'lost in the bush' motif in New Zealand fiction and autobiography.

<sup>78</sup> Blakers, p. 143.

<sup>79</sup> Blakers, p. 161.

heat, and finally an account of an extraordinary New South Wales period of sweltering conditions. The aim is to associate Grafton with a number of extremes—of climate, fertility, production, and yet, too, of potential. In this, Blakers is in accord with the general presentation of Australia as a land of amazing difference and excess, but also here the contemporary (1860) presentation of Grafton as a major coastal city of the future—a little restrained with 'rising town'—perhaps from the writer's 1880's hindsight. Two specific features are detailed as characterising Grafton, both of a dangerous nature—namely the abundance of snakes and floods. As with many of these nineteenth century texts, the true measure of the wealth of wildlife is in the numbers killed:

In such a climate, it is to be expected that snakes should be plentiful; and from my own knowledge, I can say that the Clarence river is a paradise for snakes. I have killed snakes in all parts of the colony, where I have either lived or travelled; but nowhere have I killed so many, or of such a size as on the Clarence. ... As it is always necessary, when meeting a snake, to act with promptness; and as I do not profess to be able to distinguish instantly a venomous snake from a non-venomous one, I have made it a rule throughout my colonial life to kill every snake I see. Up to this moment of writing [1888-1889], I can honestly affirm that I have never as yet permitted a snake to escape me if, by any possibility, I could get at it to kill it.<sup>80</sup>

There follows a rather distasteful account of impaling a snake with a sword—most probably merely a harmless carpet snake. The whole reflects a continuing unease with the land, prompting an armed wariness that in this case can be put into (generally socially-approved) instant action.

Floods are presented as another part of the danger and threat inherent in the land. Here the traveller had much more time for caution and judgement, but still the pondered choice of a crossing can prove to be fatally wrong. The Grafton account details an incident/warning given by the following:

between me and the bridge was a deep hollow, and there I found collected about half a dozen women. They warned me not to proceed, as the water at that place was very deep. But it was not the depth that caused me to turn away. I knew there was another, and a greater danger there, and that consisted in the logs, vines, and all kinds of tropical vegetation which lay in large heaps on each side of a very narrow road.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Blakers, pp. 162-163.

He proves wise in then taking another route, for later in the day a butcher's boy plunges in, despite the women's warning:

he laughed at them, and saying, 'No fear of me being drowned', plunged in. But his horse soon became entangled, threw the boy off, and swam out. The women, of course, began to scream terribly.

The screams bring another German policeman, who also drowns, in his attempt at a rescue. The whole account presents a fearful community confronting treacherous Nature, with their only aid the warnings of the strangely stationary Cassandra-like women. Seemingly limited and perhaps even doomed in this epic/tragic mood, the community is presented as separate, an 'other', against which the writer presents himself as the clear-thinking, experienced and self-controlled outsider.

On another scale, that of a general mapping of the region, the text can be seen to intuit a tension for the area's potential centre of government/administration, as between the North Coast and the Tablelands—between Grafton and Armidale, as the likely/ultimate headquarters, and as the main link to the much larger centre of Sydney.<sup>82</sup> In Blakers' work on the north of New South Wales, the gold fields there were presented as (frontier) outposts with commercial, transport and banking dialogue that alternated between Grafton and Armidale according to changing circumstances and choices. This interplay and shifts in balance seem so tentative that neither centre appears to have had the economic, political (or social) impetus to develop quickly into pre-eminence—a large centre of the kind illustrated earlier in this text by the more southern Maitland. Sydney is a very distant city, rarely visited, and of little local concern. Beyond Australia, is the vague but reassuring outline of Germany, presented now herein as a superseded centre for him, due to his determination to succeed in this new land.

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<sup>82</sup> The Armidale-Sydney link, as positioned in this text, has the intermediate centre of Maitland—but this is in sections outside those concerned with the North Coast.

There is in his work a variety of details as to his bemused identity with his own origins. Blakers shows no overt pride in his German background, with the modern editor suggesting that he may have rejected his native country over the turmoil of the 1848 revolutions.<sup>83</sup> If so, the evidence of the text itself would suggest that his thoughts were more liberal and economic than those of a romantic revolutionary. Nationalities are used as identity markers, but generally for the vulnerable or fallible—the Scotch banker, and the (drowned) German policeman; or for Blakers' fellow troopers—the cowardly ex-British Infantryman, the 'drunken, ignorant Irishman', and finally the 'ignorant, superstitious Irishman', continual conflict with whom causes Blakers to resign from the Northern Patrol. Immediately prior to his transfer to the Timbarra, the particular insult from another trooper which provokes Blakers into blind rage is 'German coward!'<sup>84</sup> In all there seems here an unease over national origins and a related residual pride that makes the migrant vulnerable in finding one's place in his new land.

While the national origins of Europeans 'are used by him more or less to distinguish them and their behaviour, but according to individual stance or need, the Chinese are presented as a special case of the 'other'. This can be seen in the following description of a police raid upon a Chinese gambling tent:

My comrades at once pounced upon a large heap of Chinese gambling cards and copper coins, and were busy searching for English money.

For my part, I cared more for the fun of the thing than for any money I might find ... [and so, on seeing one man escaping] The last part of him, which I saw disappearing through the calico, were his hindquarters; and, as the man was nearly naked, they presented such an inviting mark that I really could not resist the temptation. I made a 'point'. The next instant I heard a scream outside; and, on inspecting my sword, I found my gallant friend had got about an inch of steel. Having collected all the cards, as well as all the copper and tin coins we could find, we returned to camp.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the writer's attempt to present the raiding party as daring, dashing and rewarded, in the whole account the attitudes of these European-born police stand out as avaricious and violent. No concern is expressed for their victims, nor is there any statement of respect for their culture. The candid inclusion of this violent item—there

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83 Blakers, p. viii.

84 Blakers, p. 129.

85 Blakers, p. 137.



being no other example of unwarranted ferocity—may well reflect the increased racial concern at the time of writing, that would make such thoughtlessness the more acceptable.<sup>86</sup>

If the Chinese could be so readily grouped and set apart, and then subjected to gratuitous violence, the position of the Aborigines, as might be imagined, was even worse. On trying to cross the Clarence at an unknown point, Blakers asked two carpenters for advice.

They pointed to where some blacks were encamped, believing I might get a guide there. On riding up to the camp, I found that all the men were away hunting; but on my promising a shilling, a gin (black woman) offered to show me where to cross the river and find the path. After going up the river for half a mile, the gin pointed to the river and told me to go in there, and at once asked for the promised shilling. But I did not trust her. I therefore followed my usual custom with the blacks. I first allowed her to see the shilling; then having returned the coin to my pocket, I drew a pistol, and ordered her to go before me through the river. I had no need to swim; and on arrival on the opposite side, the woman pointed to a path which led up the bank, received her shilling, and immediately recrossed the river. But the black witch had deceived me after all. The path gradually dwindled away, and at last disappeared altogether.<sup>87</sup>

The writer's mechanistic approach contrasts with the (lightly sketched) ease of the carpenters. His emphasis now is on the stressing of his own knowledge and power, his anticipation and cunning, and so his ultimate loss in this self-styled contest prompts the derogatory expression 'black witch'. The ambivalent attitude towards Aborigines is shown in the tension between the particular individual (whom he did not trust) and his usual practice 'with the blacks'. This suggests a period where attitudes and practices towards Aborigines, as an undifferentiated group, were in place to a large extent—thus ignoring variations between tribes—and here he is unlike Hodgkinson—or between individuals.

Only one other 'black' is individualised in the North Coast text, and in both cases the portraits are derogatory. The second story is prefaced by the writer's admission of his 'own fiery temper', and it reveals some of the difficulty in attempting to conceive Aborigines as suitable servants/workers for white settlers. The specific incident comes about thus:

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<sup>86</sup> For a more accommodating view of the Chinese on these goldfields, see Wilkinson, pp. 268-271.  
<sup>87</sup> Blakers, pp. 138-139.

The black fellow... having been disturbed in his sleep, [became] sullen and sulky. He walked towards the horse in a most careless way; and as he knew very well, the horse ran away. The idea that through the sulkiness of this lazy black fellow, my intended ride would be spoilt so annoyed me, that I walked up to him quickly, took the bridle out of his hand, and gave him a sharp blow over his thighs. Being naked, I suppose it must have stung him.<sup>88</sup>

The angry response from the Aborigine is to quickly take up his spear and shape to throw it at Blakers. The text then maintains this long moment of danger, by detailing the writer's usual calm evaluation and decision. His choice is, with chest bared, to confront the Aborigine, and shouting 'Throw! you black devil, throw!' As the native took pause for thought, Blakers took away the spear, and concludes the incident with a threat, all the colder for its measured phrasing:

I took the spear out of his hand, and told him that, if ever he raised his spear again to me or any other white man, I would put handcuffs on him, and chain him up to a tree.<sup>89</sup>

The whole account has elements of demonization as well as white racial solidarity, emerging from a conflict between appropriate action and authorised violence. Blakers then takes another two pages to describe his elaborate pay-back to the native. It involves preparing a musket which will give a tremendous misfiring, and then in arranging a situation where the Aborigine would use the weapon. The description is a sustained piece of malicious hostility against the man—repeatedly referred to as 'the black' and the ironically as 'my black friend'. The final element of the punishment is to relegate the victim to the state of fearful superstition:

I may remark that whatever appears inexplicable to an Australian black, seems to terrify him. In this instance, my black friend did not see me touch the gun. He thought, therefore, that I must have bewitched the gun, to cause him to be hurt in three places at once.<sup>90</sup>

The observer's domination is complete, once he is all-seeing and can claim to know the thoughts of another—particularly another presented as being simple and uncomprehending. In order to add further Australian distinctiveness for a European audience and a seeming authenticity, the writer includes a description of a corroboree. It was clearly not a proscribed ceremony—from there being no mention of difficulty in

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<sup>88</sup> Blakers, pp. 149-150.

<sup>89</sup> Blakers, p. 150.

<sup>90</sup> Blakers, p. 152.

seeing it, or of the experience being a privileged viewing. The introduction contains an intriguing mix of the authentic and the inadequate:

I witnessed a genuine corroboree. But how shall I find words to give a faithful description of it, in order that my readers in Europe may be enabled to form a correct, if slight idea of what a corroboree really is?<sup>91</sup>

In somewhat rhetorical style, the writer's need to assert the 'genuine' and substantial coverage must reach the limits of his capacity to express such strangeness. A retrospective claim of familiarity adds to the general observations and comparisons:

(for since that time I have repeatedly been present at corroborees)<sup>92</sup>

There follows a considerable amount of detail, reflecting close observation and interest. Yet even this evidence, of how alien from his experience is this Indigenous culture, is interspersed with derogatory comments. In an awkward attempt at a fair-handed report, we are told that the music is 'uncouth', but their rhythm is exceptional. The incomprehensible is located as infernal:

Seen for the first time, especially by people unaccustomed to such sights, the men appear like 'imps of darkness', and, when the dance is in full swing, such a person, particularly if a little nervous, might imagine himself in one of the antechambers of hell.<sup>93</sup>

The expression of this indirect (faint) praise for Aboriginal singing, by comparison, becomes an opportunity for further denigration of the second 'other' group, the Chinese. Blakers reports on:

the satanic noise of a lot of Chinamen who believe that they are singing! I would very much rather stand a whole night looking on and listening to an Australian corroboree, than be tortured for half an hour by two or three 'Sons of the Flowery Land' whining (as they do) like so many whipped hounds!

In the whole approach, then, the demonic becomes a useful dismissive motif for an even broader sense of those who are already positioned as other, while the writer is presented as a calm/tolerant and disinterested observer who is reporting with great honesty.

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91 Blakers, p. 143.

92 Blakers, p. 143.

93 Blakers, p. 144.

Seemingly in imitation of Hodgkinson's detailing of Aboriginal culture through set pieces on a corroboree, a battle, and encounters with individuals—popular or reader interest is then addressed in terms with which it would be familiar and perhaps comfortable. The description of an Aboriginal battle shows the spectators at some risk, providing some sort of *frisson* for the readers:

it was impossible to keep the men from pressing as close as possible round the combatants. Even in this we ran a considerable amount of danger, for the air was swarming with boomerangs, which we were compelled to dodge by nimbly springing behind trees.<sup>94</sup>

The curiosity of the whites present (perhaps reflecting their boredom) leads to a description that is at least intrusive into the cultural practices of considerable importance to the Aborigines. Still, sufficient distance seems to have been maintained so that no injury to a European needed to be noted.

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As a memoir manuscript intended for family purposes, and only recently come to light and published, Blakers' highly revelatory work is an excellent example of what potential there still is for a profitable search for further more ephemeral texts that can illuminate quite subtle aspects of a region's unwritten history. Blaker's repeated sweeps across the northern part of the region lead to his recording what is likely to be a filtering or distillation of common elements in community attitudes to the land and its people. Additionally his confident presentation of self, the other and the region, reveals spaces in which we can see some of the process of (grudging) identification and even of appropriation. In the still largely unresearched area of itinerant workers there is the additional possibility of diaries and letters by women on the North Coast. Texts from this perspective could provide different insights into the region in this period, but none has yet come to light.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, a Chinese perspective on our

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<sup>94</sup> Blakers, p. 153.

<sup>95</sup> Baiba Berzins, *North Coast Women: a History to 1939* (Sydney: Royal Australian Historical Society, 1996), pp. 47-50.

region could bring a different construction of the land and its people. With the recent upsurge in the publication of family histories, some such texts may still emerge from neglected corners.

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### LATER TRAVELLERS

Travellers or tourists in the latter half of the century move through a land that has already been well experienced and recorded. Whether it is the generally unstructured rambles of a lone curious man on horseback, as in the case with Tom Roberts, or the passage of tourists along formed roads in an early motor vehicle as will be shown, there is a clear expectation now of a closely ordered land, incorporated into overall schemas of the country. The inhabitants of such a zone are similarly placed into an expected framework.

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#### **Tom Roberts**

The famous Australian artist of the Heidelberg school, came to the North Coast region in late 1894, ostensibly because of the contemporary enthusiasm for gold finds, but also presumably in his case looking for relief from the expenses of the city, as well as for inspiration for further painting. Leaving the train at Tenterfield he came down the range by carriage, passed through Drake, and then joined a group of miners, including one young John Le Gay Brereton.<sup>96</sup> In the mining camp, he was living under

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<sup>96</sup> Humphrey McQueen, *Tom Roberts* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1996), p. 391.

the makeshift arrangements of such locations, but within a month he ended up at Yulgilbar, the elegant home of E.D.S. Ogilvie, whose portrait he then painted.<sup>97</sup>

On this journey he wrote a series of letters to his friend/adviser Pring, who was located in Sydney. These pieces were available in part in Humphrey McQueen's recent biography of Roberts, while the full manuscripts (never published) are to be found in the Mitchell Library.<sup>98</sup> Three letters were sent from the North Coast, at roughly monthly intervals, detailing the major events and impressions of the intervening period, as well as reaction to the letters from Sydney, and his thoughts on his correspondent's family. As good-natured personal letters to a friend, these texts evidence the enthusiasm, in-jokes and hints on personal arrangements common to that literary kind. Similarly the style shows an easy familiarity of communication, with contractions, omitted capitals, slang terms, loose sentencing, and occasionally indistinct handwriting—where any 'gap' could be readily filled by a reader/friend who was familiar with the writer's communication patterns. Reading the three letters together highlights some of these distinctive expressions, e.g., 'Gehenna' for Hell. Art, as might be expected from a writer whose life's work was in painting, has a direct role in these letters. Characteristically they are illustrated with thumbnail portraits and scenes, which are incorporated as an integral part of the text's message, where additional detail and significance is pointed out in words.

The writing locates the North Coast as a lowland, adjoining and accessible from the Tablelands. Its positioning is somewhat round about—at no point does the perspective include Grafton and its regular sea link to Sydney. The Upper Clarence is a distant land, where outside information and newspapers are one week late. Sydney is conceived of as the centre of this text; it is the source of all information, the destination of the letters, and also the commercial/banking focus. While the local attraction is as a place for the possible acquisition of much wealth, when actually at the

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<sup>97</sup> For his visit to Yulgilbar, see George Farwell, *Squatter's Castle: the Story of a Pastoral Dynasty: Life and Times of Edward David Stewart Ogilvie 1814-96* (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1973), pp. 322-324.

<sup>98</sup> Tom Roberts, Letters to Pring, Dec. 1894 to Feb. 1895 (ML MSS 1367/2, 1894). See transcript, and three illustrations, included as Appendix G.

site this goal seems so uncertain as to be hardly worth the effort. Rather, it becomes a place for rest and ease. In the first letter this is expressed somewhat awkwardly:

Whether I stay &  
paint I don't yet  
know.  
One hardly sees anything at first  
damnably lazy  
went & hid in my  
little tent yesterday  
after breakfast & slept 3 hours until 11.  
[flourish]<sup>99</sup>;

while one month later there is a steady acceptance of the miner's ways:

— it's a desultory sort of  
life I lead \_ I fear somewhat lazy \_  
I debated shall I do my  
washing or write to Uncle Pring? Had  
my bucket shower in meditative leisure  
& breakfast leisurely too in pyjamas<sup>100</sup>.

The phrasing captures the bush unwinding that comes with unpressured relaxation — the vocabulary and rhythmic counterpointed expressions adding an escapist tone to the section. Yet at times of effort for the writer, the land is mostly distinguished by its mountainous and hilly country. This provides unpleasant travelling, of the sort described by Blakers in the same area thirty years earlier. For Roberts, the repeated image of the steepness of the terrain is rather strangely likened to city roofs:

again & down diving into a gully \_ like roof  
of a house only the mare not surprised<sup>101</sup>;

and

I haven't yet got a horse - but know  
the hills - they will go down one to put it  
extremely moderately, steep. if the Sydney roofs  
were not quite so slippery they would do them  
up & down bar a few of the gothic churches.<sup>102</sup>

This is an unusual and awkward image—even with the purpose of making a link between the bush and the familiar urban setting. But coming through the good humour of the writer there emerges still an apparently shared fear of passage over this land—

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<sup>99</sup> Roberts, 8 November, 1894. Original's lineation is largely preserved.

<sup>100</sup> Roberts, 8 December, 1894.

<sup>101</sup> Roberts, 8 November, 1894.

<sup>102</sup> Roberts, 8 December, 1894.

following on the steep descent from the Tablelands, with the mood continuing on into description of the river valley.

Specific sites can be found that are attractive or more manageable for an outsider. One such, Drake, was arrived at early in the evening:

Tenterfield — Coach to Drake 33 miles -  
mountain road - Township at evening - dim -  
half moon - all mysterious - smoke from cottages  
& people sitting outside.<sup>103</sup>

The list-form of travelling, in this case a rough and boisterous one, merges into a catalogue of visual impressions of the calm destination. The eye is gently directed downwards from the sky, to the smoke, to the cottages, finally resting on the comparatively dwarfed or even tiny inhabitants. Omitted altogether is the November heat that started country people on their summer evening pattern of sitting on their verandas. Yet Roberts' focus is clearly on the ordinary folk who occupy a small (even vulnerable and 'mysterious') living space in the awesome vastness of their natural surroundings. Another site singled for his amazed detail is a lush valley:

& the prize - all palms soft moisture & ferns  
festoons of creepers from strange & rich foliated trees<sup>104</sup>

Introduced as it is as a reward ('prize') for the difficult journey, the description's compressed detail shows the impact of this paradisal site. Both this and the arrival in Drake seem to be positioned as preparatory planning for possible paintings. In both cases the detail is static, devoid of all movement, save that of the reflective and appraising observer.

This interest in the specific view as well as in the human reaches its peak in the visit to Yulgilbar, where he stays for up to five weeks covering Christmas and New Year, painting the portrait of E.D.S. Ogilvie.<sup>105</sup> Here is to be found an outpost of cultured and comfortable life, including evident respect for his own artistic work and the opportunity to pursue his vocation for remuneration. Rather than a slice of

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<sup>103</sup> Roberts, 16 January, 1895.

<sup>104</sup> Roberts, 16 January, 1895.

<sup>105</sup> Used by Farwell for the cover of *Squatter's Castle*, and also shown hung at Yulgilbar in a photograph, (p. 271) which if 1894, as dated, must be late December.



cultivated Sydney, in Roberts' letters this civilised spot has a distancing from that centre that lends an unreal, even magical, air to the locale. It is an Illyrian setting—as in a Shakespearean fantasy—in which the usual rules and habits for people are seen as mere conventions to be playfully tested. What is of most value here are the revels, alertness and warmth to other human beings, and ultimately—the role for art. There is, too, an exuberance in horse-riding, a charm in the dancing, and a quiet determined delight in the breaking of the Master's prohibition against smoking (and whistling?), in the house. As an artist, Roberts was free to project different standards:

I got along first rate with  
him disagreeing at nearly  
evry point<sup>106</sup>.

What is of ultimate social importance for Roberts is the 'getting along' with others—the projected charm with which important people at best might moderate their power.

In addition to the distant location of the station, and surrounded by others with strange names, the main terrain mapped is social—the characters of its occupants are, for this writer, like 'the large collection of cameos' with which he departs. Consider the youngest daughter, dancing with her father:

... 21, tall  
& fair, both proud of each other. She,  
her face flushed, & peaceful as you like,  
as the dance ended curtseyed to him  
most exquisitely.<sup>107</sup>

Here again is the search for an image appealing to his painter's eye, yet this time its complexity and movement indicate the vibrancy of a human subject.

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Not all people encountered by Roberts are described with such complexity.

While on the gold-fields he recounts one case where he drew:

for a rattling old black fellow (head)

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<sup>106</sup> Roberts, 8 November, 1894. Contraction in original. Illustration of artist and subject at work in the courtyard is included. See Appendix G.

<sup>107</sup> Roberts, 16 January, 1895. The incident is illustrated.

he is supposed over 70 years of age - when he saw  
the painting he asked, was it a dog?<sup>108</sup>

What is presented in the text is a childlike incomprehension, and Roberts does not imagine there is any possibility of lack of knowledge of, let alone resistance to, the mode of Western art convention. Nevertheless, what impels him away from the leisure of the camp is the artistic aim and opportunity of capturing the exotic:

Went to Yulgilbah E.D Ogilvie to paint blacks  
having a letter from P.G. King. Only did one head  
of a native but an opus of "the chief"  
Ogil. & with no type of mental failure,  
military type, in mind & physique<sup>109</sup>

So the aim proceeds only so far as one Aboriginal head, supplanted by the major product which ironically is the portrait of the main dispossessor—the master of Yulgilbar. Otherwise there is no mention of the Aboriginal inhabitants in these texts—significant in that this marks a silence as to Indigenous presence, even when he is drawn to the site by his desire to observe them closely. The implication is that the reality did not measure up to the exotic expectation. This partial overlooking is also ironic in that Yulgilbar is the setting for E.D.S. Ogilvie's published encounter with the surrounding Aborigines—published fifty years earlier—a major text of conciliation that marked a European acceptance of Aborigines and an accommodation to their needs.<sup>110</sup>

This travel through the same land, and seeing some of the same sights, only thirty years after Blakers, is remarkable for the absence of the Aborigines from the text—as indeed they are from Roberts' artistic corpus (an absence in common with the Heidelberg School). The uninterested dismissal of them, even as remarkably different creatures, reinforces a silence that aids the appropriation of the land. In this way a model of European manners, heritage and even a 'natural' right to occupy this land can be reinforced. Roberts presents an accessible but island-like view of the North Coast

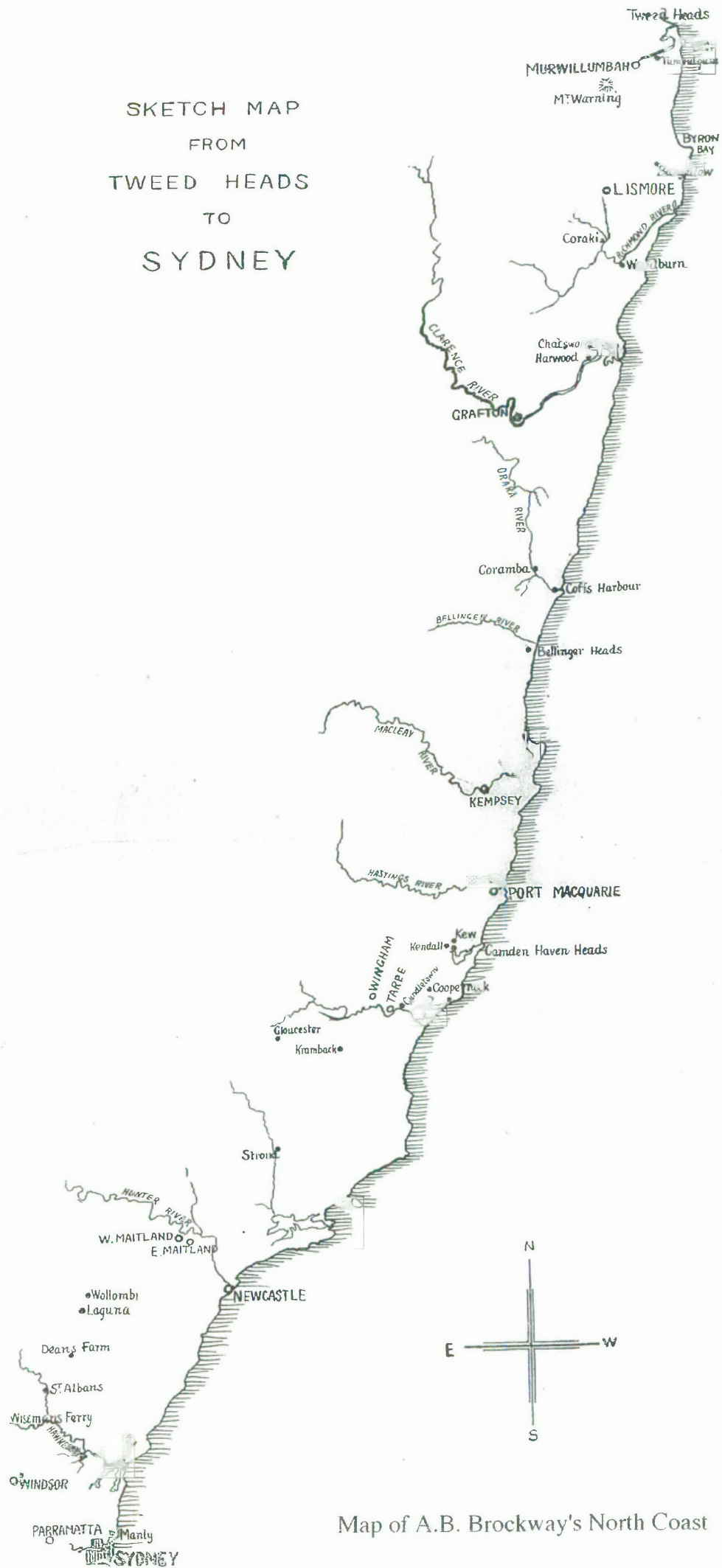
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<sup>108</sup> Roberts, 8 December, 1894. Roberts' impression of Aboriginal naiveté is reinforced by his biographer McQueen who transposes Roberts' words into direct speech attributed to the native. p. 391.

<sup>109</sup> Roberts, 16 January, 1895. A small outline of the portrait is incorporated in the text.

<sup>110</sup> [E.D.S. Ogilvie] 'E.O.', 'Clarence River - the Aborigines', *Sydney Morning Herald* (8 July 1842), p. 3. (See fuller treatment in following chapter).

SKETCH MAP  
FROM  
TWEED HEADS  
TO  
SYDNEY



Map of A.B. Brockway's North Coast

region, without the mystery seen in nature in Mundy's account, so that it becomes predominantly a separate location for (his) relaxed joy in both manners and art.

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### Dr. A.B. Brockway

Some fifteen years after Roberts' visit to the region by coach and on horseback, self-directed travel for pleasure was able to cover longer distances, and could also include women as active participants. Archibald Birt is a pseudonym for Dr. A.B. Brockway. (Unusually, both names are given on the title page of the first and only edition—and both names are different from that of the first person narrator). The text which he produced is in the style of a typical late Edwardian or early Georgian romance, based on a motor vehicle journey from Tweed Heads to Sydney. Its title, *The Locust and The Ladybird*,<sup>111</sup> refers to the names given to the two vehicles—the latter belonging to the two ladies first seen at Tweed Heads, and ending in Sydney as married to the two men. Through the two long courtships (spatially rather than temporally), the road, towns, accommodation and people encountered are described along the route, and much of this is necessarily about the (lifestyle of the) North Coast. The distinctiveness of this form of travel is noted early, as is the ability:

to see the country more intimately than is possible from a steamboat deck or a railway-carriage window.<sup>112</sup>

Self-paced travel adds to an assumed closeness to the land, which in this romance is also an adjunct to other increasing intimacies.

Surprisingly modern in some content and approach, this 'faction' text is an extended version of what we more often see as motoring articles. Here there is the construction of a North Coast that provides an easy passage and many sites of mild

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<sup>111</sup> Archibald Birt (Dr A.B. Brockway), *The Locust and The Ladybird* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1911). The North Coast is the setting for pp. 3-127. It may almost be deemed to follow the style of 'coaching romances' recounted of the Regency period.

<sup>112</sup> Brockway, p. 4.

interest. As with navigation for the earlier maritime texts, one sees the difficulties of hitherto slow progress on land now overcome so well that the North Coast can be seen as a conduit to other now accessible places. The text is unusual in both its structure and its source. Firstly it is composed almost solely of letters from the main protagonist to his sister in England, commencing with a letter from her, and concluding with several letters between the other characters—voices understandably characterised to a degree in accord with the narrator's citing of their direct speech throughout. Secondly, there is open acknowledgement in the first two letters that this work is an Australian response to a popular British motoring romance—C.N. and A.M. Williamson's *Set in Silver*.<sup>113</sup> The author goes further by including, as a preface, a letter of his to the Williamsons—but one signed with his own pseudonym. He cites the flattery of his present imitation, and the slightness of his own work, the only similarities being the prominent motor vehicles and the stories' 'epistolary nature', and finally declares his aim is 'to arouse [their] interest in Australian scenery'.<sup>114</sup> In common with the Williamsons' works, Brockway amply illustrated his text with photographs, including the vehicles and the participants. A significant difference from the contemporary British books is that their emphasis on historical detail and literary associations in the romantic settings is something Brockway could not imitate for the North Coast, but instead of keeping to scenery, as will be seen, much of the interest of his work is in people. Still Brockway's text (set in 1909) is valuable for its early twentieth century somewhat skeletal perspective on this region.

A sketch map is helpfully included in the text for reader guidance, and the narrative proceeds in a strictly linear southwards fashion, following the road towards its distant destination, Sydney. With an almost deterministic effect, the cartographical convention makes the southward travel have a seemingly gravitational inevitability. Furthermore, so linear is the north-south journey model, that it is easy to overlook the transposed east and west pointers—a detail also overlooked by those who checked a

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<sup>113</sup> The Williamsons produced several popular motoring romances, including *The Princess Passes : a Romance of a Motor*, 3rd edn (London : Methuen, [1905]).

<sup>114</sup> Brockway, p. xi.

quality production such as this book was. Significant features on this map are the towns visited, Mount Warning which is seen from the road, and the full courses of all the rivers crossed. The map has a curious omission of the actual road travelled, as if the line of progress is unimportant or limiting, and that instead, it is the reaching of towns and the crossing of rivers that gives one a semblance of the full experience of that feature—perhaps in the manner of modern tourism and its rushed package tours. The emphasis on rivers (and ports), instead of roads or inland terrain, shows the continuing persistence of the earlier predominantly maritime mapping of the North Coast. Beyond the specific map, the text itself is concerned, as a topographic exercise, to locate the hotels, the sources of accommodation, any respite from the road, and to provide all with pleasing local colour.

Thus there is a series of neat descriptions of locations dispersed through the text, as in the following view of the sea and the village of Tweed Heads:

it was so beautiful and peaceful here ...

As soon as we had had lunch we climbed Observation Hill, and we were rewarded by a glorious view from its flat "table-top." It was a perfect afternoon, with a light fleecy-clouded sky and a gentle breeze which fanned us into some semblance of coolness. As we faced the east the tiny straggling township lay at our feet, with Point Danger and its signalling flagstaff about a mile away, and beyond, the great tumbling Pacific breaking in huge rollers upon the dangerous shore. Turning to the west, Mount Warning seemed about an hour's walk distant, though really thirty miles off, and between it and us the Australian coastal landscape of river and hill and valley, of bright green sugar-cane upon the mountain slopes, with here and there in lonely simplicity a small farm homestead, and, pervading the view, the thickly-growing desolate gum-tree scrub, and puffing along on its way back to Brisbane, like a child's toy, the train by which we had come this morning.<sup>115</sup>

Here we have an exploration of the picturesque in nature—viewed from east, west and north, each view moving from the distant to the more immediate. So dominant is this mode of seeing that, in a subsequent description of the same area, there is open regret in that the whole does not conform in every detail to what the observer would wish:

A great mass of cloud is lying on the sea like heaped-up snow made pink with the dying rays of the sun . . . the pink is fading fast as I write, for we have a very short twilight, almost none, and the heap of snow is melting into grey sky. . . . The tide is almost low and it is quite calm, only a gentle breeze ruffling the surface of the Tweed and Terranora rivers. The light of the setting sun is upon the roughly-wooded slopes of the Point, and the red tiles of the roof of the Pilot's house are in sharp contrast to the dull green foliage and the grey-blue sky. I am sorry that the sun does not set behind the point—it is setting

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115 Brockway, pp. 6-7.

behind Observation Hill, the view between consisting of uninspiring, untidy backyards.<sup>116</sup>

Any local human occupation is diminished in these views, with the charm for the city-based (Brisbane) tourist residing in unspoiled nature.

Just as the model of the 'motoring romance' has been overlaid onto the region's surface setting, so also the particular pattern of the romance is an overlay drawing upon, or at least having much in common with, a very popular play of the 1890's, Brandon Thomas' *Charley's Aunt*. Set in Oxford, its main characters were two undergraduates—the ever planning and plotting Jack, and his nervous, embarrassed partner-in-love, Charley. There was, too, a reliable and all-knowing servant, and a villain whose sole concern was the gaining of money, by or through women and regardless of their feelings. In Brockway's text, however, the two men are older, and professionals, but also friends since their Oxford days. Even the British/Edwardian dialogue is similar, with its repeated references to 'beastly', 'the beast', and 'the girls', who are themselves similarly positioned as in Brandon Thomas' work—the younger and more open and determinedly in love, and the older more measured, but then revealed as being just as determined. In addition to love and marriage, money is the prize that awaits the males at the end of the work. Another early motoring work, G.B. Shaw's *Man and Superman*, takes a more philosophical approach, but its motoring section indicates the value of incorporating this then novel form of transport into writing that aims to entertain.

The consequence of the romance for the description of the North Coast is that once the men meet the women, specific descriptions of nature and surroundings become generally shorter—as the writer's and readers' attention move elsewhere. One passage captures well this transition, where the selective detail makes for a melding of motoring, the landscape and romance:

I wish I could convey to you the impression that this sight made upon me—two motor-cars, one of which was quite modern, two girls, dressed simply but well, and a well-bred dog, sitting with their backs to the great trees of the untouched primeval

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<sup>116</sup> Brockway, pp. 9-10. Ellipsis points are as in the original text.



Australian scrub, great gaunt swaying trees, and dense impenetrable shrub and creeper!<sup>117</sup>

Here is a vision, that assembles the timeless, the modern and the so much desired future, all serving to overwhelm the viewer's senses. Once the couples are travelling as a group, there is one longer description of road and scenery :

The journey from Byron Bay through Bangalow to Lismore was uneventful. The first three miles or so took us up through cuttings in the mountain side similar to those through which we had passed the day before, and for a great part of the way we seemed to be running along a high ridge with magnificent dairy farm land in the undulating valleys on either hand, with here and there a patch of maize cultivation.

The soil is rich red brown, with stone, of which latter many of the settlers have built low fences. I was very strongly impressed with the well-to-do look of this part of the country. So very different from the gum-timbered country through which one is accustomed to drive on the coast near Brisbane.<sup>118</sup>

Reflecting the new-found romantic possibilities in both characters, and sympathetically the landscape, there is now an authorial joy in the evidence of human occupation, even in a land that undulates steeply, and particularly when attention can be given to its lushness—a mood perhaps symbolic of the characters' futures.

The enjoyment of nature does not extend to snakes, but a description is given of the younger woman just being prevented from stepping on one.<sup>119</sup> Yet rather than instil any fear, the incident is presented more as part of the romance—an acceptable excuse for the man to roughly push aside the desired woman, followed by his apologies and her forgiving gratitude and admiration. Later there is an emphasis on the majestic ferns, like a reduced version of the account in Mundy's text:

The gorge scenery between Coramba and Coff's harbour and for some distance beyond is very grand, alone worth coming the trip to see, the palms and tree-ferns being very fine and tropical-looking.<sup>120</sup>

Forests to the west of Port Macquarie, the same passed through by Oxley, Hodgkinson and Mundy, still produce some degree of awe in the now romantically involved characters:

We were leaving the sea, going inland, but after a few miles of pleasant, winding road, turned to the left and ran parallel with it, but it was out of sight, hidden by

117 Brockway, pp. 21-22. Compare with the natural bareness evident in the photograph facing, p. 30, and titled 'Near Murwillumbah'.

118 Brockway, pp. 45-46.

119 Brockway, pp. 46-47.

120 Brockway, p. 66. Capitalization in the original.

the great timber, while in the valleys between the ridges, the untouched coastal scrub of palms, and tropical-looking undergrowth, held us in admiring delight<sup>121</sup>.

After the repeated emphasis on that which is 'tropical-looking', conventional eucalyptus forest has no appeal for the viewer. Yet the sudden change of perspective from the (dangerous) roadway can turn to awe:

We passed through much monotonous timber country, until we reached another range, which we slowly mounted by the roads cut in its side, the view first on one side and then upon the other being grand and inspiring.<sup>122</sup>

After the inadequate charm of the sparse examples of human habitation along the journey, even the oldest settlement on the North Coast is still unable to measure up to the depth of historical and literary associations that are the predominant mode of the Williamsons' European texts. Rather, it seems that the Australian can only rely upon an attempt at the picturesque:

Port Macquarie is a beautiful little place, and has been here long enough to look old—not old as you count things in England, but old enough, quaint and unscattered and unsquare with its red-roofed cottages on the irregular red-soil heights of the township, its old brick church falling into disrepair, and its queer old main street.<sup>123</sup>

This is similar to Mundy's account of the same town sixty years earlier, but now fallen into the decay which the earlier writer had predicted for the site. Yet, if for European readers the detail of ruins and a certain disorder in streets and houses are the signs of long settlement, then the emphasis of these characteristics in the now perceived (1909) view of Port Macquarie adds a tentative suggestion of historical depth.

The true focus of such a travel text might seem to be its destination, Sydney, or eventually the return by sea to Brisbane (with the main couple now married). Rather, the true centre of the text is its European audience, familiar with the textual models now followed, interested in some local distinctiveness, but more so to be amused by the rules of such active and largely outdoor human engagement. At a point in the arrangements—one that verges on the appearance of improper behaviour—there is an exchange reminding characters and readers of the social rules:

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121 Brockway, p. 123.

122 Brockway, p. 125.

123 Brockway, p. 108.

'Mrs Grundy would call it all the difference.'...  
'Mrs Grundy lives only in cities.' I said, feebly.  
'She lives everywhere.'<sup>124</sup>

The 'rules' of the city and conventional respectability are overlaid on the vast spaces of Australia, tacitly acknowledged by the second speaker despite his greater acceptance of human need. The breadth of application of city behaviour codes is later reinforced by the plot which gives much power to the villain by his (correct) guesses that the group slept overnight on the roadside after a motor vehicle breakdown between Kempsey and Port Macquarie.

The inclusion of Aborigines is an afterthought in the text—almost at the end of the final 'letter' in the series from the main character to his sister, in which there occurs the only mention of the Indigenous people:

. . . . Before I forget it, I want to call your especial attention to the fact that during the whole journeying of *The Locust* we saw only six Australian aborigines (did I mention them at the time?) five young men together near Grafton, and one old jinn at Kempsey.<sup>125</sup>

Here the Aborigines are relegated to local 'colour' as a tourist spectacle—one that is readily overlooked and unimportant. Thus denied the any human communication, intention or agency (why count the 'five' instead of citing a group?), it is the limitation of view which makes them easier to dismiss from mind, especially where the probably derogative ('jinn') can be used.

In sum, *The Locust and The Ladybird* constructs a North Coast that is the prototype or fore-runner of today's tourist experience—with its reduction of the long distances, and where sites have a brevity and (European) sameness that seldom need impinge on minds otherwise occupied. The structure of the work, with its fictional components set against much that is totally factual, makes for a pleasant feel of the authentic in the familiar Australian settings.

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<sup>124</sup> Brockway, p. 43.

<sup>125</sup> Brockway, p. 217. Ellipsis points are as in the original text.

All these texts of land traversal or travel demonstrate that there is no single, unchanging way of responding to or reading the country. Rather they evidence a multiplicity of backgrounds, purposes, journey enactments, and interactions with other types of text. Certain links with the distinctive perspective characteristics of maritime prose continue on from the works of land-based exploration, and ultimately develop into a similarly brief style of recording passages over the land of the region. What it is that characterises the texts of land journeys is the nature of their consciously slight engagement with the earth—passages where, in the words of the architect Glenn Murcott, they 'step lightly on the land', aware that their contact with the soil and its shy peoples is necessarily slight—yet perhaps the best that one could expect when their journeys of long traverse involve the contact of such (vastly) differing cultures. Later travellers construct a land that is an abstracted European type of settlement-outlining—an imposition of a superficial image upon the ancient Australian land. These later North Coast-set texts would convince us there is little of the awesome in its vistas. While these writings do not evidence either closeness of experience or the necessary commitment that comes from the straining to establish permanent settlement, they still contain suggestions of a possible (subsequent) closer engagement with the region and its elusive identity for those who might wish it.