Exiles and Island Wives: history, fiction and the Breaksea Islanders.

By Sarah Drummond

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

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In 1826, just prior to the colonisation of Western Australia, a disparate group of men, women and children lived on islands adjacent to what is now called Albany. They were sealers, abandoned by their bosses who had brought them from Bass Strait on the schooners Governor Brisbane and the Hunter. The small community included people native to New Zealand, Van Diemen’s Land, Canada, North America, Western Australia and England.

Exiles and Island Wives is concerned with investigating the people whom I call the Breaksea Islanders. As none of them left written records, there are three threads of this investigation: historical research, historical fiction and a discussion on the methodology of writing historical fiction.

The historical research includes individual biographies of the Breaksea Islanders and an extrapolation of their involvement of the events of 1826 – 1827, when Major Edmund Lockyer arrived in Albany aboard the Amity to annexe the western part of the continent. Here I also discuss the Aboriginal women’s responses to abduction and trauma.

The Aboriginal women and children in the small sealing community possessed little autonomy over their own lives and so the discussion on history and fiction is partly concerned with the portrayal of women’s agency in historical fiction. I also discuss the naming of Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters by both writers and people in positions of colonial power and, using Foucault’s Of Other spaces, discuss the cohesive factors unique to communities who live on boats and islands.

The historical fiction component is the novel Exiles, based on the people and events in 1826 King George Sound. The purpose of the historical fiction is to reveal aspects of the Breaksea Islanders’ lives and motivations that may not be accessible through historical research. The Breaksea Islanders silence on history’s page meant they have been previously portrayed through the lens of government and newspaper reports, and by men in positions of colonial power. The novel seeks to invert this situation by centralising the lives of the Breaksea Islanders. The fiction component of this thesis was published by Fremantle Press in 2016 as the novel The Sound.
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My most heartfelt thanks are saved for two amazing women who have been my bedrock over the last five years: my mum Carmelita O’Sullivan, and my supervisor at Murdoch University, Kathryn Trees.
Some notes on terminology

Tasmanian and Kangaroo Island terminology:

Pallawah: Self-name for people indigenous to Tasmania.¹
Tyreelore: I have used the title Tyreelore specifically for Aboriginal women native to Van Diemen’s Land who lived with the sealers on Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island.²
Kaurna/South Australia: Language group of the people indigenous to Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains.³ As South Australia was not settled by Europeans in 1826, I have referred to South Australia as ‘the mainland adjacent to Kangaroo Island’.
Kangaroo Islanders: Sealers who became residents of Kangaroo Island prior to colonisation.
Straitsmen: Sealers who became residents of Bass Strait islands.
Pallawah names: Where possible I have used the indigenous names of individual Pallawah people, but where records are insufficient I have used the names they were given by Europeans, or the names by which they introduced themselves to Europeans.
Tasmanian place names: Tasmania is called Van Diemen’s Land throughout the exegesis. Tasmanian sites and towns are given their European names due to inconsistent (or disputed) records of Pallawah place names.
Tasmanian tribal structures and names: I have referred to Lyndall Ryan, Patsy Cameron and NJB Plomley for my references to Pallawah language groups and names.

South Western Australian terminology:

Menang: (Mineng, Minang) Noongar people who make up the clans indigenous to the King George Sound region of Western Australia. In the exegesis I refer to them as Menang.⁴
Noongar: (Nyungar) Language group of people indigenous to the south west corner of Western Australia.
Sealers: Seal hunters who worked individually or for an employer in the nineteenth century.
Noongar and Sealers Names: Where possible I refer to men, women and children by their indigenous and given names. Otherwise I have recorded people by the names used to identify themselves.
Breaksea Islander community: In the exegesis I refer to the group of sealers (including women and children) who lived on Breaksea Island and other islands adjacent to King George Sound in 1826 as Breaksea Islanders.

¹ See Matson-Green, V. and Cameron, P., ‘Pallawah women: their historical contribution to our survival.’ Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Vol. 41, No. 2, June 1994: 65-70. However “There exists a majority of Tasmanian Aborigines who reject its use because it has an unsound history and has not been discussed by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as to whether it is to be used or rejected.” Everett, J., ‘Review’, Oceania Vol. 69, No. 3.1999, p. 219.
² The words ‘tyerrityer’ is translated to ‘island’ (Plomley, 1976:275) and ‘loreerne’ means ‘wife’ (Plomley, 1976: p. 472). Tyreelore has also been translated in more recent times to ‘island wives’ (Lehman in Alexander, 2005: p. 371) … See also Plomley pp. 77 and 256.”
Cameron, P., Grease and Ochre: the blending of two cultures at the colonial sea frontier, Fullers Bookshop Pty Ltd, Riawunna Centre at the University of Tasmania, Launceston, 2010, p. 154.
West Australian place names: English, Dutch or French place names in 1826 invariably reflected visitors’ approaches by sea (Recherche Archipelago, King George Sound, Swan River etc) and I have used these names in the exegesis.

Western Australia/ New Holland: Western Australia was not colonised in 1826 and therefore I have used the terms New Holland or west Australia.
Map courtesy of Christopher Cook, Country Cartographics, www.ccarto.com.au
Brothels and colonies are two extreme forms of heterotopia, and if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilisation, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development (I have not been speaking of that today), but has also been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.\footnote{Foucault, M., ‘Of Other Spaces’, \textit{Diacritics} 16. 1. (1986), pp 22 – 27, p. 9.}

Michele Foucault
Introduction

This research project, as a PhD thesis that includes a creative production, has two components that can be read independently of each other. The project investigates my research questions through two different means: a creative production and an academic exegesis. The creative component is a work of historical fiction called *Exiles.* The exegesis extrapolates the history behind the novel and discusses the practice of writing historical fiction. The thesis’ focus is a result of my research findings on two sealing gangs from the Governor Brisbane and the Hunter who lived on islands in King George Sound, now Albany, just prior to Western Australia being colonised in 1827. Both the novel and the exegesis seek to investigate and expand upon my understanding of the people within this sealing community.

When the *Amity* arrived in King George Sound in 1826, with Major Edmund Lockyer’s brief to annexe New Holland for the British Crown, a small community of sealers approached his men seeking rations. The sealers, from diverse ethnic and geographic backgrounds, said that their employers had abandoned them in New Holland for up to eighteen months and that they were destitute for supplies. Lockyer soon discovered that the same group of sealers had recently committed crimes of murder and abduction against the Indigenous population of King George Sound. He listed the names of the sealers and noted that the group was comprised of Kangaroo Islanders, Bass Strait sealers, Tasmanian Aboriginal women, a Sydney Aborigine, African Americans, a small Aboriginal child and a native of New Zealand, and wrote that they were living on Breaksea Island in King George Sound.

I am particularly interested in documenting the circumstances that led to the series of kidnappings and the murder of a Menang man by the male Breaksea Islanders in October 1826. I grew up in Albany – a military garrison formed two years before the Swan River colony as a strategic colonial post – and was aware that the region was the first site of colonisation in Western Australia. I can remember as an eight year old seeing yellow T-shirts with an image of the State of Western Australia and “Albany: 152 years!” for the State’s sesquicentenary. A replica of the brig *Amity* had recently been completed by local boat builder Stan Austin and “commissioned” by the Premier Sir Charles Court. It would be another decade before I discovered that the local Menang population were not the only people in King George Sound when Lockyer and his men stepped ashore on Boxing Day, 1826.

The story of the Breaksea Island sealing community within the context of Western Australia’s colonisation has in the past been treated with one sentence, or portrayed as an interesting but inconsequential side story to a larger colonial narrative. In writing this thesis I sought to reverse this scenario and in doing so centralise figures such as the Tasmanian Aboriginal women, the African Americans, the small child and others, and to decentre figures such as Major Edmund Lockyer and the colonial narrative. This is not to intentionally challenge the ‘mainstream’ history of colonial Western Australia so much as to investigate a largely unexplored aspect of that era. It was the Aboriginal child who intrigued me, when a friend first told me the story. So who was this child? How did she end up on an isolated island off the coast of Albany before colonisation with no parents, and a white sealer as her captor? Who were the Tasmanian and South Australian women and did they consider themselves slaves or sealers? Where were the white men from? In focussing on the histories

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7 *Exiles,* the fiction component of this thesis, is published as *The Sound* by Fremantle Press in 2016.
of the Breaksea Islanders themselves, rather than the traditional European colonial narrative, I discovered that the ripples of their origins extended to American slavery systems, internecine wars in New Zealand, English whalers, globalised labour and seal product markets and a Van Diemen’s Land on the brink of war.

The thesis is presented in three sections: history, a discussion of history and fiction, and the work of historical fiction Exiles. Each section seeks to answer my queries and expand upon my findings regarding the lives of the Breaksea Islanders. The history and historico-fiction discussions form the thesis’s exegesis and are concerned with the process and methodology of research in order to create a work of historical fiction. The exegesis imparts a broader history of the Breaksea Islanders; but it also serves as a general study of writing historical fiction within a colonial antipodean context. The novel Exiles forms the creative component of the thesis, however although the two sections of the thesis inform each other, Exiles and the exegesis can be read as standalone documents.

In Chapter One of the exegesis, I present an outline of the events of 1826-27 when Lockyer discovered the Breaksea Islanders’ crimes. I then expand on the history of the Breaksea Island sealing community to the origins of the sealing industry in the Southern Ocean.

Historical renditions are never simple in a linear sense. All events have ‘parents and cousins’. Events are also loaded with the weight of an individual actors’ culture and history. To examine the history the sealers in King George Sound, I needed to examine the people themselves. In Chapter Two I present individual biographies of the men, women and children whom I call the Breaksea Islanders. The objective of this research was to answer my own queries – who were these people who traversed the Southern Ocean in small boats, hunting seal? Why did they behave in the ways that were recorded? How much agency or personal autonomy could an Aboriginal woman possess in 1826, when white men had abducted her as a forced labourer and concubine?

The female biographies in Chapter Two Section One include those of two Pallawah women Moonie and Dinah, a Kaurina woman Sal and an Aboriginal child from the Esperance area, who Lockyer named Fanny Bailey. Two Menang women who were kidnapped by the Hunter and Governor Brisbane crews are also included in this chapter. Although the Menang women’s personal histories are not available, I have drawn upon the journals of Surgeon Nind and Captain Collet Barker among others to provide a general picture of what their lives may have been like in the first five years of European occupation of King George Sound.

Chapter Two Section Two explores the political and cultural responses of the women who were kept captive by Southern Ocean sealers from Bass Strait to King George Sound, by way of examining their individual responses to their situations. In this chapter I recount the available histories of two Pallawah women, Makerleedie and Walya who reportedly never visited the west coast of Australia but are included here to enable a discussion of Tyreelore responses to abduction by sealers, during a devastating period of war and dispossession in 1820s Van Diemen’s Land. How these women adapted, resisted and survived is vividly

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displayed by their aggressive or passive acts of Tyreelore autonomy and agency in the face of extreme exploitation.

Male biographies in Chapter Two Section Three focus on the sealers who were pivotal agents in events in King George Sound between October 1826 and January 1827. Many of the sealers’ names surfaced in documents and reports from the East coast, Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island. These include William Hook from New Zealand, Neddy or Edward Thomlin born on Kangaroo Island, Robert Williams, a whaler and native of Eden New South Wales, Pigeon, a ‘Sydney Black’, James Everett, a resident sealer of Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island, John Randall, a Kangaroo Island resident, Samuel Bailey, and the ‘Black Jacks’9 Richard Simons. Major Edmund Lockyer and the Captain of the French expedition ship Astrolabe Jules Dumont d’Urville are not included in this chapter except incidentally, as their biographies are widely available.10

Chapter Three of the exegesis is a methodology for the transforming of history into a fictional narrative. I explore ideas of how land and seascapes, cultural memory and a contemporary ‘lens’ can influence the creation of historical fiction. Chapter Three includes a review of the literature that has informed my thinking and writing. Here I am indebted to diverse works such as Michele Foucault’s superb piece “Of Other Spaces”, the journals of Matthew Flinders, G.A. Robinson and Jules Dumont d’Urville and works by James Wood, Stephen Crane, Kim Scott and Aileen Walsh.11

Although the fictional Exiles draws material from the acts of its historical characters and the vast landscape of the Southern Ocean, most of the novel’s historical characters, through language barriers or lack of opportunity, did not document their own story. A handful of European men in high positions of colonial power wrote the only first-person accounts of the Breaksea Island sealing community in 1826. Their social class, their individual missions and their preconceptions of Aboriginal women and ‘lawless’ sealers is obvious through their use of language. As a writer of historical fiction I needed to ‘rub back’ the language of the colonisers to reveal the palimpsest of the individual lives they described. My reimagining of the lives of the sealers and sealer women was to discover the liminal space between the words of the coloniser and the reality of the people who lived as colonised society’s outsiders. By returning to the Bass Straits and Kangaroo Island histories and biographies, and by returning

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10 See Johnson, L., Major Edmund Lockyer: Forgotten Australian Pioneer, Western Australian Museum, Perth, 2002. See also Duyker, E., Dumont D’Urville: Explorer and Polyath, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2015. The Astrolabe was in King George Sound in October 1826 and I have drawn from the journals and images by d’Urville, his officers Quoy and Gaimard and artist Louis de Sainson for information about the Breaksea Islanders.
to cultural motifs of the boat, the sea and the island, I was able to accurately portray aspects of the Breaksea Islanders.

Historical fiction, as is most forms of fiction, is fraught with points of decision and places of indecision, ‘crossroads’: liminal spaces where the narrative cannot continue without coercive or manipulative acts by the writer. In Chapter Three I discuss some of the manipulations I have wrought in the process of transposing the history of the Breaksea Islanders to historical fiction. I discuss point of view and narratorial voice, the naming of Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters, some of whose descendants are alive today, and the naming of characters who were historically renamed by their abductors. I also elaborate on how subjugated female characters in narrative can be problematized as facilitating male hero narratives.

History’s stories can stir us emotionally; they can disturb, delight or dismay us. To create fiction from these stories, the writer imagines the interior workings of individual player’s lives to decipher their motivations and desires. The Breaksea Islanders led hard and brutal lives and this lifestyle was mirrored by their exploitation of people weaker than themselves for their personal gain. The act of vividly and sensitively reimagining their historical lives into fiction required emotional commitment and bravery. Paradoxically, it also required a sensible modicum of ‘distance’ from the historical subjects. While writing the fiction Exiles I often felt I lacked these virtues and protective measures. Fictionalising historical accounts of abduction, murder, slavery and rape made me suspect that I was re-abusing some of the characters to produce a piece of twenty-first century entertainment. I could also no longer plumb the depths of a man’s mind who had kidnapped a child for his own use. For nearly nine months I wrote nothing on the novel Exiles. Finally I was forced to examine the dread that contributed to this creative inertia. The personal essay Predator Dreams at the end of Chapter Three is the result of this examination. Predator Dreams employs an analysis of story archetypes, folk tales and dreams. The act of writing it down facilitated my return as the author of Exiles.

The final part of my thesis is the creative component. I wrote the novel Exiles as an independent answer to my research questions about the interior and exterior lives of the Breaksea Islanders, using the language and narrative frameworks of historical fiction. Exiles is primarily narrated in the third person by the Maori sealer William Hook and the story begins proper in his fictional home town of Otakau, or Dunedin as it is now known, before he leaves on a whaler bound for the New South Wales colony. In another incarnation Exiles could have been read as a male hero quest narrative: A young man who leaves his home on a journey involving arduous rites of passage, to return redeemed, a hero. However my historical research and my queries about the lives of the Breaksea Island women and children demanded that their experiences be forefront to the story. On developing William Hook’s narratorial voice early in the novel, I portrayed Hook as a young Indigenous man whose own community is on the threshold of colonisation by the British and possible invasion by the Ngati Toa. He is a sympathiser with fellow First Nations people. He possesses a gentleness and a ‘moral compass’; ethical markers that many of the other sealers in his micro society of utilitarian violence and subjugation, lack. It is via William Hook’s gaze and testimony in Exiles, a man whose allegiances move closer to the Aboriginal women than the white men in his crew, that the lives of the Breaksea Islanders are explored and portrayed.

At the novel’s conclusion I have included a section called Relics, Curiosities and Autographs, an ephemera of quotes drawn from, among others, the journals of visitors to the south coast
during the early 1800s, and which correspond to passages within the novel. Some of the anecdotes, such as the story of a man who was swallowed by a whale, or the abandoned sealers’ dogs on Breaksea Island, were too exquisite to leave behind in my files of historical research.
Chapter One. History

In this chapter I recount the events that form the basis of my historical fiction. The first part of the chapter examines the series of events whereby the seal hunters from the schooners Hunter or Governor Brisbane who lived on Breaksea Island in King George Sound murdered an Aboriginal man and abducted women and children from various sites on the south coast of Australia. Section 1.2 details the Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island origins of the sealers from the Hunter and Governor Brisbane, and the women who accompanied them.

1.1 “It struck me there must have been some bad work going on there.”

Major Edmund Lockyer arrived in King George Sound on Christmas Day 1826 to annex the western part of New Holland for the British Crown. Captained by Thomas Hansen, the Amity was laden with the resources for the new settlement including skilled-convict labour, soldiers, sheep, seeds and poultry. As Commandant, it was Major Lockyer’s contract to construct and govern what was essentially to be the beginnings of a military outpost and to guard against French occupation.

Whilst sailing into the Sound, Lockyer saw smoke from a fire on Michaelmas Island and noted that he thought a sailor may have been marooned there. The next day he sent a boat to the island and his crew returned with four Aboriginal men, some with cutlass scars across their throats and other evidence of battle upon their bodies. Lockyer had reported thus far spending a harmonious day meeting and hunting with some Menang men. Therefore he must have been shocked as the collective mood of these men swiftly became antagonistic once they had held a meeting with their countrymen who had been marooned on Michaelmas. Several of the men left as a group and called away any Menang men who were with Lockyer. They then speared the Major’s only blacksmith Dennis Dineen, in what appeared to be retribution for an unexplained, historic insult. To his credit, Lockyer ordered that no retaliatory action be taken. The next day when he explored Green Island in Oyster Harbour, Lockyer discovered the desiccated body of an Aboriginal man lying close to a partially completed raft. At this point, Lockyer realised that he had sailed into a feud between the Menang and an unknown band of seamen, who must have taken the Menang men to Green Island. “It struck me there must have been some bad work going on there; the natives have no Boats; they never venture above Knee deep in the water.”


14 Although Major Lockyer was acting on Governor Darling’s concern that the French were preparing to annexe New Holland as a penal colony, Leslie Marchant maintains they had no intention of doing so. “In reality there was no basis for that fear. Major Lockyer’s action in coming to Albany did not thwart the French. The French then no longer had serious intentions of challenging the British there.” Marchant, L., France Australe, Scott Four Colour Print, Perth, 1998, p. 246. However Edward Duyker, in his biography of d’Urville argues that surveying King George Sound was a deliberate aspect of the Astrolabe’s ‘unofficial’ expedition. Duyker, E., Dumont d’Urville: Explorer and Polymath, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2014, p. 192.

Two weeks after the *Amity*’s arrival his suspicions were confirmed when eight sealers in a whaleboat slipped into Princess Royal Harbour. The sealers boarded the *Amity* and asked Lieutenant Festing for victuals. Festing referred them to the Major, and the boatsteerer William Bundy gave Lockyer a note from his employer Mr. Robinson, stating that the writer would ‘pick up the bill’. The seamen “proved to be part of a Sealing Gang, the Boat belonging to a Mr. Robinson of the schooner *Governor Hunter*, with some of the crew of the schooner *Brisbane*, the Master having gone off and left these men on the Islands here.” In contrast to the Major’s ethnically homogenous party consisting of English nationals, only half of the sealers he met that day were of Anglo Saxon heritage; the other four he variously described as ‘a Sydney Black’, ‘a Black Man’, and a ‘New Zealander’. This diversity of origins was common in Southern Ocean sealing communities at the time.

Major Lockyer invited the sealers to eat and stay aboard the *Amity* that night. On the morning of Thursday the 11th of January, he sent for the sealers and interviewed them in his camp. Their testimonies, in particular that of William Hook, detailed the killing of the man on Green Island in October 1826 and the abduction of several Menang women, and prompted Lockyer to request that Festing detain the sealers and their boat. Consequently, that night the *Amity* became the first watch house in Western Australia. The next day, Lockyer sent for William Hook and interviewed him again. He quizzed Hook on his understanding of the “nature of an Oath and the consequence of swearing to what was not true” and when he was assured that William Hook understood, he swore the sealer to his information and made him sign the statement. This statement, sent as part of Lockyer’s report to the Colonial Secretary, is the only known primary source that documents the sealers’ crimes of October 1826.

In the evening of October 12th, 1826, eight weeks before Lockyer arrived, a sealing gang from the *Governor Brisbane* sailed a whaleboat across King George Sound to come alongside the French expedition ship *Astrolabe*. After a rough crossing from Trinidad, Captain Dumont d’Urville had stopped in King George Sound to give his crew a rest and mend the rigging. The sealers told the captain they’d been abandoned, were living from their fishing alone, and had settled on Breaksea Island in the Sound. Captain d’Urville offered them the night aboard as well as ship’s biscuit and brandy. In return the sealers brought to the table muttonbirds, natural history and information on safe anchorages. The sealers complained to d’Urville of “a great deal of the hardships and privation they had endured while waiting for a boat to take them off.”

Four Breaksea Islanders took up d’Urville’s offer of a working passage to New South Wales. The remaining five declined; d’Urville perceived his offer as being “coldly received.”

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16 For Lockyer’s reports to the Colonial Secretary during this period see H.R.A., III, Vol. 1, pp. 457-537.
17 ‘Boatsteerer’ is a whaling term. In a sealing gang the boatsteerer was the leader of that boat’s crew.
18 Here, Lockyer erroneously names the *Hunter* the *Governor Hunter*. The *Governor Hunter* was wrecked in 1819.
21 Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 469
22 For William Hook’s statement see Appendix 1, or Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 473.
led d’Urville to thinking that most of them were escaped convicts who preferred to avoid the eastern states and the law. (Some of the English sealers had a living memory of the Napoleonic war between England and France and this may have influenced their attitude.) D’Urville expressed his distrust of the sealers, writing that he only gave them permission to stay aboard because he worried they would otherwise find his shore camp that night and he wanted to get a measure of the men first. Still, he showed some private admiration in his journal: “What an extraordinary fate for eight Europeans to be abandoned like this with a frail skiff on these deserted beaches and left entirely to their own resources and industry!...”

**Governor Brisbane,** owned by Kemp and Co. had brought approximately sixteen sealers to western New Holland in February 1826 as part of a sealing operation. According to the sealers’ testimony to Captain d’Urville, Captain Davidson dropped six crew at Coffin Bay and another eight at Middle Island adjacent to what is now called Esperance. Davidson then sailed the schooner to Timor. By June 1826, the *Hobart Town Gazette* reported that the schooner was seen off the North West coast “with only two men and the master on board.”

By January authorities at Batavia had seized the ship and put the men under guard, suspecting them of piracy. The *Governor Brisbane* did not return to King George Sound to pick up the sealers.

At this point I must mention a discrepancy with recorded dates. Because sealing operations were often covert, especially as seal resources were scarce in the east, their destinations were not always recorded. Some of the Breaksea Islanders told both d’Urville and Lockyer that they had been abandoned in the west for eighteen months, which would mean they arrived in the west in 1825. Others said they had been in the west for seven months. It is likely that the *Governor Brisbane* ventured west the previous sealing season of 1825. Advertisements placed by the owner of the *Governor Brisbane* in Hobart in August and September 1825, requiring an expedition fit-out and warning creditors of the crew members’ imminent departure, indicates that Kemp and Co. were planning a journey to New Holland that year.

Another sealing operator deposited small groups of sealers on islands along the south coast in 1826 and, like the *Governor Brisbane’s* captain, the owner of the *Hunter* George Robinson also failed to return for his crew. However tracing the movements of the *Hunter’s* sealing expedition west is easier than tracing that of the *Governor Brisbane.* A paper trail of increasingly irate letters between authorities in Mauritius, New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land – regarding the return of five Pallawah women, one child and several dogs

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“Our Readers will not confound Mr. Baxter's schooner Brisbane of Sydney. Thomas Smith master, with Messrs. Kemp and Company’s, the Brisbane of this Colony, which was piratically carried off by the master Davidson (formerly mate of the ship Phoenix) from Bass's Strait to Batavia, where it was seized by the Dutch Government, and Davidson and his guilty crew placed in confinement.” *Hobart Town Gazette* (Tas.: 1825 - 1827) 07/10/1826 p. 2. http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/articles/8790797 (accessed 10/06/14).


Many thanks here to Ciaran Lynch who has helped resolve the discrepancy in the dates that the Governor Brisbane sailed from VDL.
from Mauritius to Van Diemen’s Land – includes a signed contract between three sealers and
the owner of the Hunter, and statements regarding the Hunter’s entire western sojourn before
the sealing gangs were abandoned.

After taking several crew on at King Island in Bass Strait, the Hunter sailed to King George
Sound where the ship’s owner George Robinson deposited crew and a boat to ‘procure seal’.
According to newspapers of the time, in September 1826, the Hunter then sailed south to the
Isle of St Paul and Amsterdam Island: isolated and barren Southern Ocean islands. There,
Robinson and Captain Craig left the two sealers, Proudfoot and Paine, with limited supplies
and later attempted to land four more men and provisions. Due to dangerous winds and the
ship being sent to leeward of the island, Craig decided to leave the Isle of St. Paul. Proudfoot
and Paine were rescued from the subantarctic island nearly two years later. They had been
landed without even a knife and survived by eating muttonbirds, eggs and wild celery.

On reading the three sealers’ statements to the Chief Commissioner of Police in Mauritius, it
becomes apparent that they had embarked at King Island, along with five Pallawah women, a
child and several dogs, under the agreement with Robinson that they would also work on St.
Paul’s. The fate of seamen Proudfoot and Paine are not mentioned in this document.
Problems with broken rigging, sails and rapidly dwindling water and food supplies meant that
Robinson decided to drop most of the crew at King George Sound to work the seal there and
return to Van Diemen’s Land; the nearest port and chandler to replenish their supplies. The
Hunter returned to King George Sound in March 1826 and left another whale boat with five
men and presumably one or two Aboriginal women. They then sailed to Rodrigues Island
near Mauritius. Captain Craig was quoted as stating that if he sailed into Mauritius and met a
King’s vessel, “that the captain of the Man of War would not believe these women were free
people”. So the three sealers, one child and five women were left on Rodrigues instead.

The Hunter did not return to King George Sound. Because Robinson encountered financial
difficulties and needed to sell the Hunter, he did not return for the abandoned men, women
and children at the Isle of St. Paul or Rodrigues Island either.

Two Pallawah women, a female child and a woman from the Cape Jervis area stayed in King
George Sound with approximately sixteen male sealers. The crews from the Governor
Brisbane worked their way from Middle Island to join the crew from the Hunter on Breaksea
Island some time before October 1826. They roved the islands in whaleboats, hunting seal
between the Recherche Archipelago to the east and the Swan River to the north, using
Breaksea Island as their base. It appears from statements made retrospectively by the sealers
that for a while they had friendly communications with the Menang people of King George
Sound and that the two groups cooperated amicably in order to hunt and fish. Hamilton, one
of the sealers who embarked on the Astrolabe, described the Menang to Captain d’Urville as

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30 The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, 12/02/1829, p. 3.
31 In this thesis, I do not expand on the extraordinary journey of the five Pallawah women and one child who
lived at Rodrigues Island and Mauritius, as I must remain focussed on events at King George Sound. Among
others, academics Lynette Russell and Julie Gough have written extensively on this subject. Russell, L., Roving
Mariners: Australian Aboriginal Whalers and Sealers in the Southern Oceans, 1790-1870, State University of
New York Press, New York, 2012. Also see Appendix 5 for letters between the Port Louis Police Department,
Mauritius and the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales. CSO, Port Louis, Mauritius. 1826 – 1827.
32 Details of the Hunter’s itinerary is from a letter of information received by the Chief Commissary of Police
and signed by two sealers, December 1826. Archives of Tasmania #91. (CSO 1/121/3067).
“gentle people, kind and incapable of harm.” However, this apparent mutually beneficial relationship was about to be exploited and then betrayed.

On October 25th 1826, the Astrolabe left for Port Jackson with four Breaksea Islanders aboard as crew. According to the testimony of Breaksea Islander William Hook, the next day some Menang men approached John Randall, the boatsteerer from the Governor Brisbane, to go muttonbirding on Green Island, a tiny verdant island in Oyster Harbour. John Randall and James Everett instructed two sealers, Edward Edwards and William Hook, to take the Menang men out to the island and strand them there.

At dawn on the morning after the Menang men were marooned, four sealers went inland armed with cutlasses and guns. They were away all day and returned with four Menang women in the evening. Two of the women escaped that night, despite being tied together by their arms. The sealers then drew straws for the remaining two women. Samuel Bailey drew a long straw, as did George McGuiness. In the morning the sealers took the women out to Breaksea Island, ostensibly to imprison the captured women and escape Menang retribution.

The following day Randall sent Hook, Edwards and four other men to Green Island with a keg of water and as they approached the island, the Menang men rushed the boat. The sealers returned to the shore of what is now called Emu Point. Four ‘fresh hands’ rowed out to the island again, taking with them guns and cutlasses. When they arrived at Green Island a fight ensued between the sealers and the Menang men. Someone fired a gun but the Menang men persisted. The second shot killed one of the Menang men, who fell face-first into the water, “blood spouting out from both his sides.”

On the third day of the marooning of the Menang men, Randall went out to the island himself. To illustrate the previously amicable relations and subsequent betrayal, Hook described the scene as: “At first the Natives hid themselves; but on seeing Randall who was a great favourite with them, they came out and kissed him.” Randall took the four surviving men aboard his boat and left the dead body on the island. He was said to have intended on taking the men ashore at Emu Point but sealers later told Lockyer that “the shore was lined with mobs of natives and they could not in safety land these men on the main.” It seemed that the ‘Natives’ were no longer ‘incapable of harm.’ Randall and the sealers took the Menang men to Michaelmas Island instead and abandoned them there, leaving them “making great lamentations.”

For eight weeks the Menang men remained on Michaelmas Island. They tended to the cutlass wounds on their throats and bodies and lit fires to communicate with their country men and women on the mainland. Tiffany Shellham speculates that the Michaelmas Island fire which Major Lockyer saw on his arrival was not the Menang men’s appeal for assistance but rather to alert their families on the mainland, warning them of an unknown ship entering the Sound.

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34 The following recount of events is by William Hook, as recorded by Major Edmund Lockyer in his correspondence to the Colonial Secretary Alexander Macleay. Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 473.
The channel between Michaelmas Island and Breaksea Island is prone to tidal surges and about eighteen hundred metres in width. They may not have been able to swim the channel but if they stood on the south side of the island and looked across the stretch of water to Breaksea Island, the Menang men would have been able to see the sealers’ camp and the two abducted countrywomen. At some stage in the eight weeks between the Astrolabe leaving and the Amity arriving, McGuinness took a female Menang captive to an island east of King George Sound and Bailey took the other Menang woman and a female child to Eclipse Island.

Lockyer’s subsequent attempts at procuring justice for the Menang population could be construed as a utilitarian act for a fledgling colony vastly outnumbered by their Indigenous landlords, as a ‘law and order’ campaign against the white men who lived on the very edges of society, and to assert his authority as first Commandant of King George Sound. The day after taking William Hook’s statement, he ordered that the Amity’s naval party go to Eclipse Island to rescue the Aboriginal child, the Menang woman, and to arrest Samuel Bailey.

With the exception of the Menang population, the people who gathered at King George Sound in 1826 were people on the fringes of their known worlds. By January 1827, the story of the three communities, Menang, sealer and coloniser, who collided and clashed in King George Sound in 1826, becomes frayed. John Randall sailed with his crew to the Swan River.40 Lockyer left after one hundred days and was replaced by the second Commandant Captain Wakefield.41 The sealer Samuel Bailey was sent to New South Wales to face justice for murder. William Hook was sent to testify against him. The men who had speared the blacksmith avoided the colony for fear of being recognised by Lockyer, and the Aboriginal girl was sent to New South Wales to face an uncertain future among strangers. The Pallawah women worked the islands with sealers to the east and the north of King George Sound, and eventually they returned to an uncertain future in the crucible of violence that was Van Diemen’s Land’s Black War.

40 In 1837, Aborigines at Swan River described a boat carrying both whites and Aboriginal men up the river ten years previously, matching the crew of Randall and Pigeon or Robert Williams. Green, N., Broken Spears, Aborigines and Europeans in the Southwest of Australia, Focus Education Services, Perth, 1984, p. 46.
41 Hunt, D., Albany, First Western Settlement: Forerunners ~ Foundation and Four Commandants, The Albany Advertiser, Western Australia, no date, p. 25.
1.2. East to West: The Sweep of the Sealers

To broaden an understanding of the sealers’ lives and the crimes in King George Sound, it is necessary to go to Bass Strait in the 1820s. In this section I have used both primary sources and contemporary historians’ accounts of the sealing communities who roamed between Bass Strait and King George Sound.

Southern Ocean sealing began in earnest circa 1798 in the Bass Strait, the stretch of sea between Van Diemen’s Land and what is now named Victoria. The seal skin and oil trade between 1798 and the 1820s was intensive, lucrative and entirely unregulated. It was one of the New Holland colony’s first export industries and was worth, from its beginnings until 1830, at least $100 million in today’s currency. Sealing was connected with global economies, providing skins for the cloaks of Chinese Mandarins, hats and shoes for the British and lamp oil to light English streets. Due to the global nature of the trade, allegiances within the industry were probably closer to Britain, America or even Mauritius, than the penal colony of Van Diemen’s Land (VDL), during VDL’s initial colonial period of the Lieutenant Commanders. Between 1800 and 1806 alone, “well over 100,000 seal skins were obtained by the activities of vessels and boat crews from Sydney, Hobart and other colonial ports and by the lawless riff raff living on the Straits ...”

The sealers worked on islands where the seal colonies were numerous. Ship owners in the sealing business dropped gangs of men on islands and returned months later to pick up the preserved skins and barrels of seal oil. This transitory life afforded the sealers certain freedoms. They managed to avoid the colonial authorities who may have previously incarcerated them and/or controlled their every action; but the islands also gave sealers a position of safety from the Aboriginal people who were actively resisting the invasion of their country. Plomley writes of lawlessness and of the number of escaped convicts on Bass Strait islands, “… and the straits became not only the home of men who disliked the confines of government, but also there came many who, having escaped from the law, were bent on joining a ship to put themselves quite out of its reach.”

By 1830, the Bass Strait sealing industry had collapsed due to over-exploitation. According to Rhys Richards, ninety six percent of the total output of skins from Australia, New Zealand

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43 These figures include the sealing grounds of New Zealand and subantarctic islands. John K. Ling, ‘Exploitation of fur seals and sea lions from Australia, New Zealand and subantarctic islands during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries’, in Australian Zoologist, 31 (2) December 1999, p. 323.
45 Clements writes “the sealers could retreat to the islands, and thereby avoid the stockmen’s dilemmas of how to contain captured women, and evade tribal retribution.” Clements, N., The Black War, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, 2014, p. 193.
46 Plomley, Ed. 2008, p. 1007. The claim that Bass Strait sealer communities consisted primarily of escaped convicts does not hold up under scrutiny. Of the fifty one Bass Strait sealers surveyed by Robinson, one man was a possible escapee, nine were ex-convicts, most of whom had long seen out their term, and sixteen had arrived or been born in the colony as free men. There is no documentation of the remaining thirteen sealers’ origins. Plomley, Ed., 2008, p. 1010-1017.
and the subantarctic islands had been harvested by 1830.\textsuperscript{47} The Bass Strait sealers who stayed on the islands became permanent residents and made a living from muttonbirding, kangaroo skins, salt and vegetables.\textsuperscript{48} During the 1820s, sealing operators began looking west to previously unexploited grounds, and hired the men who eventually arrived in King George Sound.

In the 1820s sealers settled permanently at Kangaroo Island off the coast of South Australia. They brought abducted or traded Tasmanian Aboriginal women with them and raided the Cape Jervis, Murray River mouth area for more women. A society that was an amalgam of European and Indigenous in its dress, culture and hunting methods quickly developed. Kangaroo Island became a trading stop for general shipping traffic. Expansive salt lagoons meant sealing vessels stopped at Kangaroo Island to buy the preservative before setting out on sealing expeditions.\textsuperscript{49}

The small community of independent sealers attracted the disapproval of newspapers and colonial administrators alike. In 1826, a journalist from \textit{The Australian} wrote sarcastically of their autonomy that the inhabitants were “in a condition to select a King and enact laws.”\textsuperscript{50} Commander George Sutherland wrote of the Kangaroo Islanders during his visit in 1817: “They are complete savages living in bark huts like the natives, not cultivating anything ... They dress in kangaroo skins without linen and wear sandals of seal skins. They smell like foxes.”\textsuperscript{51} He wrote that the islanders were the “terror of ships going to the island for salt & etc and being little better than pirates.”\textsuperscript{52} After encountering the sealers in King George Sound, an unimpressed Lockyer described them as banditti and criminals: “a complete set of pirates going from Island to Island along the southern coast from Rottenest Island to Bass’s Strait in open Whale Boats, having their Chief resort or Den at Kangaroo Island ... at Kangaroo Island a great scene of villainy is going on, where to use their own words there are a great many graves, a number of desperate Characters, runaway Prisoners from Sydney and Van Diemen’s Land.”\textsuperscript{53} While it is often assumed in contemporary histories that Lockyer must have stopped at Kangaroo Island on his way to King George Sound, nothing in his report of \textit{Amity’s} journey west confirms this.\textsuperscript{54} He does, however, state that he formed his opinion of the Kangaroo Island sealers “from what we know as also from what I have learnt from themselves”;\textsuperscript{55} ‘themselves’ meaning the sealers whom he detained and interviewed at King George Sound, and ‘what I have learnt’ from newspaper articles and reports such as Captain Sutherland’s\textsuperscript{56}.


\textsuperscript{49} Ling, J.K., 1999, p. 330.


\textsuperscript{52} Sutherland, G., 1819, in Dickey, B. & Howell, P. Ed., 1986. Perhaps the islanders demanded a fair price for what they considered their rightful resources. Sutherland and his crew reported shooting 1500 kangaroos during their stay on the island, leaving all but the hind quarters to rot. The scale of this cull would have impacted upon the islanders’ trade of meat, salt and vegetables for alcohol, tobacco etc.


\textsuperscript{56} Sutherland, G., 1819, in Dickey, B. & Howell, P. 1986, p. 62.
Chapter 2

The Men, Women and Children from the Governor Brisbane and the Hunter.

History follows no linear narrative when it applies to individuals with diverse backgrounds engaged in complex interactions at a time of conflict. The story of the Breaksea Islanders became less like a narrative and more like a series of singular lives the more I researched. To help describe events and outcomes after Lockyer’s intervention of 1826-1827, I detail some biographies of the people involved. Some of these biographies are brief and chronological. Others, of the men, women and children who most interest me in this story, are in more depth. I have split these biographies into two sections according to the subject’s gender. After each section I have included discussions on individual agency, or the ability of people to contrive their own outcomes, to greater understand the situations of the Breaksea Islanders.

2.1 Warrior, Wife, Sealer, Slave

The Aborigines of VDL are patriots, staunch lovers of their country.

George Augustus Robinson

To illustrate the complexities of the women’s relationships with the sealing crews, I examine the available histories of six females whose interactions with sealers impacted upon their lives: the child Fanny, Tyreelore women Dinah and Moonie, the two Menang Noongar women who were abducted at King George Sound, and Sal from Kangaroo Island and Cape Jervis.

Fanny

Recently I talked to a senior social worker about the little girl who Lockyer had removed from the sealer Samuel Bailey in 1827. “I’ve often thought that it was the first child protection case in Western Australia,” he said, “and you know what? The same dilemmas that Lockyer faced still apply today – if she has no parents or carers, then where do I send this child to keep her safe?”

As well as the abducted Menang woman whom he’d ‘drawn a straw for’; Samuel Bailey took a six or seven year old child to Eclipse Island. Fanny was an Aboriginal girl whom d’Urville described as being “from the mainland opposite Middle Island.” There is a paucity of records regarding her origins. Lockyer mentions vaguely that she hailed from “the mainland Eastward of this.” D’Urville noted that although the other women had been with the sealers for several years, the child had only been with them for about seven months. Given that the Governor Brisbane or Hunter crew had been left at Middle Island seven

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57 Plomley, Ed. 2006, p. 335.
58 Travers, C., pers. comm. 11/06/2014.
59 For the purposes of identification I use the name ‘Fanny’ for the girl, as Lockyer named her in Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 472.
60 Rosenman, H., Trans. Ed. 1987, p. 32.
62 Rosenman, H., Trans. Ed. 1987, p.76
months previous to meeting d’Urville in King George Sound, it is most likely that they took Fanny from the Esperance area.

Whether Fanny was the daughter of an Aboriginal woman who had been taken by sealers, or abducted alone from the mainland is uncertain. There are no records of adult Noongar women living within the Breaksea Island community of 1826 other than the two Menang women who were kidnapped in King George Sound. I posit that Fanny was kidnapped alone and that her abduction was one of the earliest actions of the Governor Brisbane or Hunter crew when they were dropped at Middle Island.

Bass Strait sealers, or Straitsmen, kidnapped both male and female Pallawah children, as did the Vandemonian settlers. The children were used as a labour source and as concubines for those of paedophilic tendencies. Nicholas Clements writes that female Pallawah children were especially vulnerable to abduction: “For one their inexperience and lack of strength made them more vulnerable in ambushes. Taken young, they were also more likely to grow submissive, and if prepubescent, they would not burden their masters with unwanted children. What is more, they would hold their value as labourers and concubines longer.” Straitsmen also often kept their own offspring after their Tyreelore mothers had died, been sold to a sealer on another island, or been taken by the ‘conciliator’ G.A. Robinson into exile at Gun Carriage Island and later Flinders Island.

Samuel Bailey, according to William Hook’s testimony, took Fanny and the Menang woman to Eclipse Island some time during October or November 1826. There is a (now abandoned) lighthouse settlement on the island these days but it is still a wild and isolated place. Bailey would have worked the rocks and nearby Seagull Island for seal, salted the skins and tried out the oil. He would have expected the two females to work for him. He may have taught them. It was dangerous working those rocks in rough seas. Eclipse Island, bearing the brunt of the Southern Ocean, its steep granite cliffs on the south side scarred by wind and sea, is a dangerous place to work at any time of the year.

While Bailey was at Eclipse, the Amity arrived. When William Hook informed Lockyer of the girl and woman being held captive on Eclipse Island, Lockyer sent a boat out to Eclipse Island to rescue them and arrest Samuel Bailey. On the morning of the 13th of January, Menang people began gathering at Lockyer’s makeshift garrison to await their return. Lockyer pointed at the sun and drew a line to the western horizon to explain that they would have to wait until early evening before the boat returned. In his report he expressed his apprehension as to whether the boat would even get back that night and whether the Menang woman would be in it.

At sunset the boat came in through the heads and moored close to where the Residency Museum is now situated. The horror of what the Menang woman and Fanny had endured during the weeks on Eclipse Island was evident to everyone who saw them. The Menang woman was greeted with tears and consternation by her country men and women. But the

people who greeted her also indicated that Fanny did not belong with them. “The natives looked upon the little Girl and shook their heads, meaning she did not belong to them and then pointed to Pigeon and then to the Girl meaning that he must take care of her.”

At this point, Lockyer gave the child a name, Fanny. He possibly thought of his own daughter Fanny Oceana, who was roughly the same age as the child. Lockyer later decided to send Fanny to New South Wales on the Amity’s return trip. The Governor would decide what to do with her. D.A.P. West theorises that this action indicated a lack of European female presence in the settlement to care for Fanny, however records show that three women and two children arrived on the Amity and were living in the settlement. Perhaps Fanny was considered a burden, an extra mouth to feed in a fledgling colony already grappling with the spearing of their only blacksmith, feuding sealers and natives, and the death of three sheep. Perhaps it was protocol to send all Aboriginal foundlings to New South Wales. Perhaps Lockyer despaired of any other alternative. I wonder at how visibly abused she was and whether Lockyer suspected that she had been raped by Samuel Bailey and I think about what the social worker said to me.

Lockyer wrote in his report, “As the Amity is set to sail on Tuesday, I have ordered that the little Girl Fanny who was taken off the mainland to the Eastward of this, and having no means of restoring her to the tribe to which she belongs, to be taken to Sydney for the disposal of His Excellency.”

On the 24th of January, Fanny left King George Sound for Sydney in the company of Samuel Bailey and William Hook, who was to testify against Bailey on arrival. Samuel Bailey was aboard as a prisoner to be interviewed about his involvement in the Green Island murder. There were no women aboard the ship. Although Fanny had spent several months in small whaleboats, this was the first time that she had sailed on a brig. By the time she arrived in Sydney, authorities named her Fanny Bailey, after her abductor.

In February 1827, Fanny was taken to the Aboriginal School at Blacktown by the captain of the Amity Thomas Hansen. Maori, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children learned reading and writing at the school in racially segregated classes. The boys worked at carpentry and the girls at sewing and knitting. Samuel Marsden established the school under the colonial ideology of ‘Civilise, Commercialise, Christianise.’ When the school ran short of its quota of Aboriginal children volunteered by their parents, Marsden was known to ‘obtain’ residential students in order to fulfil his ideology of assimilation and civilisation.

“There are obvious discrepancies regarding Fanny Bailey’s origins,” wrote the biographers of the Parramatta Native Institution. “Whatever, she must have been awfully bewildered and confused by the time the changing events of her few years of life drew her under the guidance of William and Dinah Hall at the Native Institution. Bemused, she received two ‘shifts’ of her own and was placed on rations at Black Town on March 10 1827, so becoming the fifteenth student.” This quote below from *The Parramatta Native Institution and Black Town, a history* illustrates how Fanny’s life changed from one of violence, disorder and exile with the Breaksea Islanders to routine, confinement and exile at the Native Institution:

1. Children to be up and dressed by 6. And set to work.
2. To wash themselves at ½ past 7, go to prayers and breakfast at 8.
3. To work until 10 o’clock.
4. To wash and go to school from 10 until 12. Write one copy, read ½ an hour, cipher I hour.
5. To dine at ¼ after 12 and play till 1.
6. To school at 1. Read and cipher until 2.
7. To work from 2 till 6, the boys at carpenting, the girls sewing and knitting.
8. To play and wash and ready for supper at 7.
9. To prayers at ½ past 7 and to be in bed at 8.
10. On Sunday, morning to be devoted to instruction of church service.

Breakfast: 1 quart of Maize meal, sugar and milk. Dinner – Beef soup, meat with rice or meal, vegetables, and for supper, Bread and Tea.

At seven years old, Fanny had been kidnapped by strangers and taken away from her family. She spent nine months sailing between islands of the south coast with a strange and desperate community of Aboriginal women, hunting dogs and men from all over the world. They would have smelt of seal oil and fish. She may have been used by the men for sex. The women would have taken Fanny hunting for seal with them, lurching into rocky shores lined with toothy barnacles, the thump of club on the seals’ skulls, eyes without skin around them. They sailed hundreds of nautical miles, island hopping from the Archipelago, to Doubtful Islands, to King George Sound in a twenty foot whaleboat. On the journey, Fanny would have slept on piles of skins and canvas in the boat, or camped on the north facing side of the islands. She would have seen the *Astrolabe* get blown past Breaksea Island and return in the morning, the rigging crawling with men in hats and white shirts. The captain, a florid, robust white man would have looked at her intently when she pulled alongside the ship with the sealers. He spoke to the Maori and nodded her way. Later Fanny must have seen the Menang women brought out to Breaksea Island, bruised, bleeding and tearful, their hands tied behind their backs.

When Samuel Bailey took Fanny to Eclipse Island, the weather was foul with wild spring gales and huge seas. The Menang woman wouldn’t swim and did not know how to handle a

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73 William Hall in Marsden’s words was “one of the wore out missionaries from New Zealand.” Hall’s appointment to the school was apparently Marsden’s strategy to rest Hall from New Zealand but avoid paying Hall his retirement fund from the Christian Missionary Society. Brook, J., and Kohen, J.L., 1991, p.179.
76 As communicated by sealers to Lockyer. H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 484.
boat. Once again, the two girls were trapped on an island by a man. Sometimes they would have seen the hunting fires from Mokare’s family domain at Torndirrup on the mainland. They would have eaten the greasy muttonbirds and fish and wild celery and any of the yams and tubers that they recognised, and slept, curled together for warmth. Bailey had plenty of brandy that he had gained trading the women’s hunting efforts with the Frenchmen. When he was drinking, Fanny and the Menang woman must have roamed the island, keeping out of his way. Then the Menang woman’s arm was broken.

After being rescued by Lockyer’s lieutenant, Fanny’s fate was again directed the decisions and actions of strangers. Although I have not found records relating to Fanny Bailey after she was enrolled at the Native School, it is likely that if she survived the Native Institution, this control over her agency as an individual would have continued for the rest of her life.

A teacher from the school, Elizabeth Shelley giving evidence before the Committee on the Aborigines Question in 1838 said that she found many ex pupils had “relapsed into all the bad habits of the untaught natives. A few of the boys went to sea.” As for the girls, most of them “turned out very bad” with the exception of one who had married a white man. Frequently the ex-teacher had conversed with the girls on religious subjects but they only laughed and said they had “forgotten all about it”.

Dinah and Moonie

The Astrolabe’s Captain d’Urville reported two of the Aboriginal women living on Breaksea Island were from Port Dalrymple on the north coast of Van Diemen’s Land. However in Plomley’s ‘A Word List of Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages’, he suggests that Dinah and Moonie came from the Oyster Bay area, given that the word list they had given to the officers of the Astrolabe derived from the regional language of the Mairrenmmener. Whether they hailed from the north or east coasts of Tasmania, both areas are commonly recognised among historians as the ‘sea frontier’ of early interactions and conflict between Pallawah and Europeans.

At around the time that Dinah and Moonie were born in the 1800s or 1810s, the Mairrenmmener people would have begun to encounter sealers who were working the adjacent islands. Lyndall Ryan writes of the initial caution of the Pallawah people to the sealing gangs but that “it was not long before they were willing to exchange seal and kangaroo skins for tobacco, flour and tea.” When women were introduced into the exchange it was initially an “attempt to incorporate the visitors into their own society.” Because the sealers made no claim on Aboriginal land, the reciprocal relationships were often successful. Pallawah women were engaged to work for sealers for a season and Dinah and Moonie would have been involved in the winter coastal gatherings to exchange women for dogs, flour and other resources. Their fathers, interested in establishing stronger trade,

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77 Ferguson, W. C., ‘Mokare’s Domain’, in Australia 200 Years and Beyond, Fairfax and Sons, Sydney, 1987, pp. 6-10.
allegiances and kinship networks in Bass Strait, may have offered Dinah and Moonie as seasonal workers. Dinah and Moonie would have gathered with other men, women and children on a sheltered beach and waited for the sealers to come ashore in their whaleboats. By then, they would have known the Europeans well enough to understand what the spider crawl of boats towards the shore meant for them. According to Ryan, there would have been a conference, a discussion of terms around a fire and then the older women would dance, to reiterate the agreement.

Then Dinah and Moonie were guided to the boat. Once aboard, they were pushed out into the surf and rowed beyond the breakers, into the open sea. They didn’t know where they were going as they watched the land disappear. They may have talked to other women who had returned after a season on the islands but no matter the story she had to tell, it would have been a frightening experience to leave their families behind, huddled aboard in choppy sea in the company of five or six white men who examined them as they rowed.

This description of trade is only one version of how Dinah and Moonie become residents of the islands. During the time that sealers were trading with the Pallawah people for women and resources, they also raided Pallawah women from various tribes and these raids were notorious for their violence and opportunism. There is little evidence to prove exactly how Dinah and Moonie became Tyreelore, and whether it was through violence, outright abduction or trade.

When Dinah was at the Wybalenna mission in 1833, George Augustus Robinson wrote that she had been with the white men seventeen or eighteen years, which would have made Dinah in her early teens when she was taken to the islands. Her Pallawah name was Pierrapplener, also known as Perruple or Warkerlarepeterner. She was the sister of Plorenernoopperner Fanny/Jock/Warterpoowidyer, who was born around 1805.

Apparently Dinah was with James Kirby in 1824 and worked the islands between Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island with him. During this time the crew of the Nereus had reported seeing Dinah and Kirby sealing with James Everett and Henry Whalley, Kangaroo Island residents. By 1826 Dinah and Kirby were sailing from King Island to King George Sound aboard the Governor Brisbane. Moonie sailed with James Everett aboard the Hunter.

Dinah and Moonie appeared to be physically thriving in King George Sound, if the descriptions by the Astrolabe’s officers were accurate. M.M. Quoy and Giamard wrote that Dinah and Moonie had been abducted by the “English sealers in this emaciated condition, after living with them and eating meat in abundance, had very well developed even obese extremities.” The women were apparently the main hunters in the group and the sealers communicated to the Frenchmen that “the women were an enormous help, and that without them they would perhaps have died of starvation.” Dinah and Moonie were highly skilled and adaptable hunters: catching lizards, fish, diving for shellfish and hunting with dogs. The Frenchmen also commented that the Pallawah women were “very skilled” with a gun.

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84 Rosenman, H., Trans. Ed. 1987, p. 43.

85 See discussion in Chapter 2 Section 2 regarding guns and Pallawah women.
The women through their skill and industry were extremely useful to the Englishmen; it was they who did the fishing, went hunting with a gun or after kangaroos with dogs, and they who went diving to bring us oysters and other shellfish, and procured a large number of lizards for us that would have been impossible to get without their help.\textsuperscript{86}

In a statement that reflect more upon attitudes of the French officers and their male sealer informants than it does on the welfare of the Pallawah women, Quoy and Gaimard claimed that “Once these unfortunate women have forgotten their state of freedom, in which they are ill-treated by their husbands anyway, they can only find pleasant the lives they lead with the Europeans who treat them far better.”\textsuperscript{87} Even after detailing the women’s hunting skills which had prevented the sealers from starving to death and provided for the meat-hungry French sailors, Quoy and Gaimard wrote that “Life could not have been too bad for them with men who provided well for them and cared more for them than their own menfolk.”\textsuperscript{88}

The officers described Dinah and Moonie’s physical appearance as “almost negroid: wide cheekbones, thick protruding lips extending into a kind of snout ... these women were close cropped except for a fringe of hair which surrounded the crown of the head and was no more than a fraction of an inch long; this was accurately compared by Cook to the tonsure of Roman monks.”\textsuperscript{89}

At some time between the Astrolabe leaving and the Amity arriving, one group of sealers went north to explore the Swan River. However it is likely that Dinah and Moonie were both in King George Sound the day the two Menang women were kidnapped: their partners James Kirby and James Everett are named as being present in William Hook’s statement.\textsuperscript{90}

Lockyer met Dinah and Moonie on a wet and gale-lashed Saturday in March 1827, weeks after Fanny, Bailey and Hook had left, when two sealing boats came into the harbour. Lockyer reported that he promptly detained the sealers and took away their seven rifles. To their credit, he wrote, the sealers were effectively ‘handing themselves in’ and volunteering statements regarding the Green Island murder. He locked the nine men and three women in the store hut for the night and put a sentry at the door.

Lockyer made an application to Captain Stirling, whose brig Success was in King George Sound, to take the men and women on his return voyage to Sydney to face justice for their crimes. Captain Stirling refused, writing that a ship in His Majesty’s service was not supposed to take passengers and that they should wait for the colonial ship Isabella. He did however accept Dinah’s partner James Kirby and John Randall as crew. Lockyer was then obliged to provide the rest of the Breaksea Islanders with his scarce rations until the Isabella arrived. The men received one and a half pounds of flour per day and the women one pound.

The women, along with twelve sealers, stayed in the tiny colony for another two months before they were able to return to Bass Strait aboard the Ann. Some of the sealers stayed in King George Sound, including John Hobson who worked as Acting Pilot. Lockyer had

\textsuperscript{86} Rosenman, H., Trans. Ed. 1987, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{87} Rosenman, H., Trans. Ed. 1987, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{88} Rosenman, H., Trans. Ed. 1987, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{89} Rosenman, H., Trans. Ed. 1987, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{90} See Appendix, also Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 457.
finished his post in King George Sound by May 1827 and the new Commandant Wakefield expressed a quiet relief in reporting to the Colonial Secretary that the sealers had left the Sound.91

The *Ann* arrived in Sydney in June 1827, having called at Port Dalrymple in Van Diemen’s Land to let off the two Pallawah women. Moonie is difficult to find in the archives after leaving King George Sound because I do not know her Pallawah name. However Plomley writes that Dinah was probably the same Pierrappler who was the subject of George Augustus Robinson’s records of the Pallawah people he’d taken to Flinders Island.92 If this is the case then on returning to Bass Strait, Dinah became the partner of sealer James Thompson and then after that John Myetye, a Maori sealer who appears to have had two or three other Tyrellore living with him at the time and “whose chief resort was the Hunter Islands”93. When John Myetye died, sealer Robert Drew ‘obtained’ Dinah. Under the directive of G.A. Robinson who was trying to remove the Tyrellore from the sealers, W.J. Darling captured Dinah at Circular Head in November 1832 and took her to Flinders Island. A few weeks later Robert Drew wrote a letter to Robinson, petitioning to have Dinah returned to him. He wrote that he had been given Dinah after John Myetye’s death and that she had been with him for three years.

Drew’s plea was unsuccessful and G.A. Robinson writes that Dinah was then baptised by the Reverend Youl and that she had “lived from infancy among the whites; domesticated sealers’ woman – lived with Robert Drew.”94 While at Flinders Island Dinah married a Pallawah man, Leepuller, who is in the 1837 census as having died and been buried on the island.

It is likely that both Dinah and Moonie were living at Wybalenna, the Aboriginal mission on Flinders Island that was the outcome of G.A. Robinson’s civilising and Christianising mission for the Pallawah of Van Diemen’s Land.

**Kaurna Sally**

Sally was from the Kaurna people, from the mainland adjacent to Kangaroo Island, in the Gulf of St Vincent, south of what is now called Adelaide. The *Astrolabe*’s Officer Gaimard recorded the first known word list of Kaurna language, using Sally and her countryman Harry as informants in King George Sound, 1826.95

Given evidence of other sealers’ raids in the area, it is probable that Sally’s arrival on Kangaroo Island was not the result of a reciprocal arrangement between her family and the Kangaroo Island sealers like some that occurred in Van Diemen’s Land. Resident Islanders’ forays on the mainland for women were regular, brutal and created political animosity between Kangaroo Islanders and Indigenous peoples.

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To illustrate the circumstances of how Sally arrived on Kangaroo Island and what her life there may have been like, I give the following examples of women taken by Kangaroo Islanders:

Albert Karloan, a Yaraldi man from the lower Murray, told the Berndts in the late 1930s that sealers had caught a Ramindjeri woman from near the mouth of the Inman River. She had had a child with her, but they left it on the mainland. “Then they took her to Nepean Bay, where she was ‘passed around the camp’. After this horror, she had managed to crawl away exhausted. She hid that night and most of the next day. When she had rested enough, she swam across the strait and recovered her child.”

In ‘The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines’, women tell the story of two women who were collecting shellfish on the shore at Rivoli Bay and surprised by some white men who came ashore. The woman who stopped to pick up her child was captured and taken away. Three months later she escaped when the same boat put in at Guichen Bay and she returned “to find her country women lamenting her loss. She did not give a very favourable account of the treatment she received from the crew. Even as late as 1846, the black women, in speaking of this event make all sorts of grimaces, signifying disgust.”

When the Rapid Bay woman Kalloongoo was taken to Flinders Island after several years on Kangaroo Island and Bass Strait, she gave the following testimony to G. A. Robinson. I have quoted a large section here to show what Sally would have experienced, from her abduction to her life on Kangaroo Island.

The woman states that at the time she was seized and torn from her country, Allan the sealer was led or guided to her encampment and where her mother and sister then was by two blackfellows her countrymen but not her tribe and who had been living with the sealers on the island [Kangaroo Island].

Said the blackfellows came sneaking and laid hold of my hand; the other girl ran away. The white man put a rope around my neck like a dog, tie up my hands. We slept in the bush one night and they then tied my legs. In the morning we went to the boat. They took me then to Kangaroo Island.

She remained there a long time until she was brought away in the schooner [Henry owned by J. Griffith] to the straits. She said there were several New Holland [mainlander] black men on Kangaroo Island. Said two of them died from eating seal; her brother died also from eating seal. Said the sealers beat the black women plenty; they cut a piece of flesh off a woman’s buttoc; cut off a boy’s ear, Emue’s boy. This woman [Emue] is now on Woody Island with Abyssinia Jack. The boy died in consequence of his wounds. They cut them with broad sealer’s knives. Said they tied them up and beat them and beat them with ropes. Bill Dutton beat her plenty. Said the sealers got drunk.

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The Backstairs Passage between Kangaroo Island and mainland Australia is roughly thirteen kilometres.
plenty and women get drunk too. Said the country where she came from was called BAT.BUN.GER.98

Sally sailed to King George Sound with either James Everett or John Randall in 1826. When they met with the crew of the Astrolabe, the officers Quoy and Gaimard described her and her countryman Harry as not being disguised by the ochre that the Menang people smeared over their bodies but with “black, their skin was very smooth, their hair long, black and smooth.”99 D’Urville was less detached in his journal, writing that Sally was “quite well proportioned” and possessed “rather beautiful eyes.”100

Sally stayed in King George Sound with Dinah, Moonie and twelve sealers, until they were taken to Sydney aboard the Ann in May 1827. It is not recorded whether the Ann stopped at Kangaroo Island or whether Sally disembarked with Dinah and Moonie.

However, it is definitely recorded that Sally was living on Kangaroo Island in 1831, having participated in an extraordinary interaction that gives a picture of her strength of character. Sal is documented in an extract regarding the death of Captain Collet Barker. Barker had just completed his post as the fourth Commandant of King George Sound and was sailing east on the Isabella when they stopped at the Murray River mouth. Barker, wanting to explore, had stripped naked, strapped a compass to his head and swum the Murray River. He climbed over a sixty foot sand dune and was not seen again by his friend, assistant surgeon Robert Davis. Barker had apparently been stalked and speared to death by three men. It was speculated by the Europeans that the spearing was in retaliation for the Kangaroo Islanders killing and abducting Kaurna people, and that Barker’s naked, white body was to them fair game.

Although Barker’s crew did not see the murder, they knew he’d been attacked and the only men who could swim refused to cross the river, because they could see the warriors and their spears on the other side. Davis sought assistance from a group of Aborigines at Cape Jervis. Here, the crew from the Isabella recognised Sally as one of the women who’d been in King George Sound four years previous. She suggested that they sail to Kangaroo Island and seek help from the resident sealers to find Barker or retrieve his body. On Kangaroo Island, Sally led Robert Davis to a party of sealers on the island and two of them agreed to provide their services as guides. Together with Sally, her father Condoy and another Encounter Bay man, they sailed back to the mainland. They then constructed a traditional reed raft to cross the Murray River and contacted the local people.101

The theory that Barker was killed due to the Aborigines’ fear and hatred of the Kangaroo Islanders is complicated by the fact that two Kangaroo Islanders acted as negotiators between the same Aborigines and the Isabella crew. Robert Davis wrote in his report that the sealer George ‘Fireball’ Bates was essential for obtaining the information of the circumstances of Barker’s death, due to the “knowledge he possessed of the language and manners of the natives.”102

98 Amery, Rob, 1996, ‘Kaurna in Tasmania; A case of mistaken identity’, p. 41. (BAT.BUN.GER translated as Putpangga, or Rapid Bay, to the south of what is now called Adelaide.)
100 Rosenman, H., Trans. Ed. 1987, p. 34.
But the death of Captain Collet Barker also lends to an interesting discussion of a cross cultural communication between sealers, colonial military and Aboriginal women. Although Sally was probably abducted during an Encounter Bay raid and imprisoned on Kangaroo Island for several years, after travelling to King George Sound in 1826 she became trusted by the Commandant’s men and by the Kangaroo and Breaksea Islanders; she was also still able to maintain a utilitarian relationship with her country men and women.

Between Sally, her father, George Bates and the other Kangaroo Islander, they ascertained the names of Barker’s killers. The three spearmen were named as Cummaringeree, Pennegoora and Wannangetta. Davis paid the Kangaroo Islanders twelve pounds, one shilling and sixpence and commended one of them in his report to the Governor, then gave the receipt to those officers handling the ex-Commandant’s affairs.103

Moennan and Manilyan

The two Menang women who were kidnapped by the crews of the Hunter and the Governor Brisbane were not named by Lockyer, nor the officers and Captain d’Urville, who did not meet any female Menang. Thus the abducted Menang women remain ‘the Menang women’: their anonymity guarded within written historical records, much the same as rape or child abuse survivors are today. For the purpose of identifying the two Menang women as individuals in this section, I refer to them as ‘Moennan’ and ‘Manilyan’.

According to Neville Green, Moennan and Manilyan’s typical October habit would have been to gather with their families around Oyster Harbour for the spring fishing season, when “groups of twenty or more women and children armed with branches drove schools of mullet into the shallows to be speared by the men.”104 Food was readily available and kangaroos were driven into hastily-made but effective entanglements. They lived and slept in small, semi-permanent villages of ‘beehive’ huts built in the same manner as the European Romney’s ‘bender tents’105.

Both Green and Ethel Hassell write of the kangaroo skin bags or coot that Noongar women carried; the body of the skin making the bag, the kangaroo’s neck hide making its flap and the long, sinewy leg skins creating a shoulder strap.106 The contents of this bag could include a hard grinder, resin collected for their husband’s tools, chips of quartz, lengths of kangaroo tail sinew for sewing and a kangaroo bone skewer used to drill holes in hides or the ends of spears.107 The coot was also used to carry babies.

In October 1826, James Kirby, John Randall, George McGuinness and Samuel Bailey raided Moennan and Manilyan’s home in daylight; an unusual act for sealers who tended to attack Aboriginal camps at night. D’Urville wrote of seeing a native camp somewhere in the vicinity of what is now called Lake Seppings, a one or two kilometre walk inland from Emu Point and that was possibly where the women were living at the time.108 The sealers grabbed

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104 Green, N., 1984, p. 11.
107 Hassell, E., My Dusky Friends, C.W. Hassell, Western Australia, 1975, p. 17.
108 Green, N., 1984, p. 15.
109 Hassell, E., 1975, p. 121.
four women, tied their arms together and dragged them through the bush to where the boats lay on the shore at Emu Point. At some time during the night, two of the women escaped from the sealers.

Given the circumstances, the abduction of Moennan and Manilyan was undoubtedly violently executed. It is possible the four women were forced to leave babies or toddlers behind and that other family members were harmed trying to protect them. It is also possible that it was the women’s husbands who had been marooned on Green Island. The act of abducting the women was an aberration of Menang law and diplomacy, a violation that demanded retribution, and was a betrayal of the previously utilitarian economic relationship that appears to have developed between the sealers and the Menang people.

Samuel Bailey and George McGuiness were the two men who won ownership of the Menang women through drawing straws. Green also writes that the sealers gambled for the women. The escape of the other two women during the night would have caused tensions among the sealers in a camp where the ratio of men to women equalled sixteen to three for at least six months. It was probably this pressure that led sealers to go back and search for the two escapees in the morning, leaving William Hook to guard the boats again. They returned again in the evening, saying that the native camp was now abandoned and that they had only found a pocket compass and a knife that d’Urville had given the Menang, hanging in a tree nearby.

The sealers then took Moennan and Manilyan out to Breaksea Island, joining the boat which carried the four Menang men to their exile at Michaelmas Island. If, as William Hook testified, the boats left Oyster Harbour at the same time, Moennan and Manilyan would have seen their countrymen, possibly their husbands, in the boat beside them. They also would have seen their families lining the shores of the channel into King George Sound, remonstrating and calling out. Sometime between October and December 1826, McGuiness took Manilyan to an island east of King George Sound, possibly Bald Island where sealers were known to camp. Samuel Bailey took Moennan and the little girl Fanny out to Eclipse Island.

While living on Eclipse Island, Moennan was no doubt forced to work Bailey’s sealing operation, clubbing seals and then skinning and salting. She would have been proficient at cleaning carcasses, scraping skins and curing them, given how the women prepared their cloaks from the skins of several female kangaroos, but the killing work would have been dangerous.

“Sealing itself was extremely arduous,” writes Russell. “The sheer physicality of the activity should not be underestimated; both men and women involved in sealing would have been tremendously strong.” She goes on to write that the New Zealand fur seal and sea lions’ size and agility “are striking, and although they look docile they can move with remarkable speed.” But as I have previously documented, for an Aboriginal woman living with sealers was even more dangerous than the work of killing seals. Moennan was badly injured.

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109 Green, N., 1984, p. 41.
112 Hassell, E., 1975, pp. 15-17.
114 See Chapter Two Section One, ‘Sally’.
possibly several times during her time on Eclipse Island. Whether her injuries were caused by seals, a boat accident or by the hand of Samuel Bailey is unclear.

On the 13th of January Lockyer sent Festing out to Eclipse Island to rescue Moennan and Fanny, and arrest Samuel Bailey. Later in the morning Locker noticed that one of the Menang men, a man he’d not seen before, seemed sullen, “it was evident that he was meditating some ... I frequently heard in their conversation with each other the word woman distinctly mentioned, and thought it right to request Pigeon to tell them that a Boat was sent to bring one of the women, and that the other should be sent for, who was far off.”

All day the group of Menang men waited anxiously for Festing’s boat to return. As the sun went down, they were the first to see the boat come through the heads of Princess Royal Harbour. “Their anxiety was now wound up to the very utmost as was plainly to be seen by the frequent change to their countenance, from smiles to a stern fierce look and then disponding.” At this point Locker became fearful that the woman would not be aboard and that he would look foolish. “However we were not long in suspense; after a short interval of the boat going alongside we saw her put off for the shore.”

Perhaps having learnt the hard way from the blacksmith’s spearing to prevent an event of high drama from spinning out of his control for a second time, Lockyer then enacted a piece of perfect theatre to show the Menang people a British version of justice. He asked that the Menang men stay at his tent and watch from a distance. He organised for a ‘File of the Guard’ to arrest Samuel Bailey and march him back to the tent. But first Lockyer went down to the shore himself and “returned with them up again, having the poor woman and the little native Girl in front.” Behind Lockyer, Moennan and Fanny, walked Samuel Bailey, handcuffed and in the charge of an escort.

Moennan was greeted with cries of relief and happiness by her family. Her right arm was “much injured from a blow and on meeting her friends,” Moennan sobbed and didn’t seem able to stop. “I think I never saw so miserable an object in the shape of a Female, which was probably considerably worse for the ill-usage and hard living she had been compelled to undergo.”

Lockyer gave a blanket to the man he assumed to be her father and to Moennan he gave some biscuit. He then explained to her family that Samuel Bailey was to be gaoled, and hoped that they understood that Samuel Bailey would meet his due punishment for his crimes. Surgeon Nind bandaged Moennan’s arm and asked that she return the next day so he could change her dressing. It is not recorded whether or not she came back, and Lockyer does not mention Samuel Bailey’s captive again; she left that day with her family and headed in the direction of Oyster Harbour.

When Festing left on the Amity eleven days later, he took Samuel Bailey and William Hook to face examination in Sydney. He also took sealers John Hobson and George Thomas and dropped them at Middle Island with their boat, so they could collect their possessions and probably their stash of seal skins that they had left there nearly one year before. Hobson, Thomas and some other sealers returned to King George Sound on February 14th, the same

day as the *Isabella*, slipping into the harbour beside the schooner. Someone aboard the *Isabella* gave them the tip to be off, as Lockyer still desired to resolve the Green Island murder.\(^{119}\)

Lockyer later expressed his irritation with Surgeon Nind, who had talked to the sealers on the 14\(^{th}\) and knew that Lockyer wished to detain them, and yet had said nothing to Lockyer until after they had left the harbour again. Probably another reason Lockyer was so irate about this was that the sealers had the other Menang captive, Manilyan, in the boat with them that day. Her presence means that on returning to King George Sound from Middle Island, the sealers would have picked up George McGuinness and Manilyan from an island on the way. To Lockyer it was a lost opportunity for him to orchestrate another woman’s rescue and restore her to her people.

It would be nearly one month before Lockyer was able to interview the sealers again and Manilyan was no longer with them.\(^{120}\) This time he was able to speak to George McGuiness, the man who ‘drew straws’ for Manilyan. McGuiness claimed that he had landed Manilyan “upwards of two months ago on the Mainland of the Sound,”\(^{121}\) however his claim does not align with Nind seeing her with sealers more than a month after that.

I suspect that, on returning to King George Sound from the east, McGuiness was made aware by Hobson and Thomas of the furor surrounding Moennan’s rescue, panicked, and left Manilyan on a beach in King George Sound in mid February. I also think that the reason for an apparently unprovoked attack by Menang men upon the sawyers at the base of Mt Melville at the same time\(^{122}\) was because the Menang men had just found Manilyan and that she had told them of her ordeal at the hands of the sealers.

**Conclusion**

In ‘Warrior Wife Sealer Slave’, I have written about the lives of six women and girls who lived in King George Sound with the sealers in 1826-1827. To the best of my ability I have stayed true to historical records but occasionally I have speculated as to what their lives must have been like. The empty spaces in history, those silent spaces where I know there are voices that are not speaking, or have been silenced, are intriguing and provide much information. My next inquiries are: How did the women and girls respond to their circumstances? How did they survive?

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\(^{119}\) Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 496.

\(^{120}\) Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 484.

\(^{121}\) Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 484.

\(^{122}\) Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 478 “the other Natives pointing to the spot and shaking their heads and then pointing to Oyster Harbour as the place of their residence.”
2.2

Women with Guns: Pallawah, Noongar and Kaurna women’s’ responses to abduction and forced labour in the Southern Ocean of the 1820s.

In the fiction section of my honours thesis, I wrote of the Pallawah women in King George Sound hunting with dogs and guns. “Why would they give their captives guns?” wrote the examiner in the margin. But Tyreelore often used guns and dogs for hunting and were renowned for being excellent markswomen. The fact that captive women were given guns highlights the nature of their captivity and how the women accommodated their captors and survived. In this section I explore the complexities of subjugation, agency and autonomy in Aboriginal women’s lives in the Southern Ocean during the 1820s. I discuss the Pallawah woman Walyer’s warlike response to abduction and invasion, and the failure of Australian historical narratives to recognise her warrior status. In this section I also focus on some responses to abduction that are consistently unique to Tyreelore and similar to other Aboriginal women taken by sealers: infanticide in Islander communities on Bass Strait, the Tyreeloree’s Devil Dance, hegemony and survival strategies, and the women’s use of firearms.

Resistance

By 1837 the Bass Strait Tyreloore were understood to have become a “significant dissident group.” Merry writes that after their years of living with the sealers and subsequent exile to Flinders Island, something in their psyche snapped. “The few Aboriginal women who survived exile on both Flinders Island, and later at Oyster Cove, near Hobart, became rebels against white authority and refused to become submissive participants in the re-making of Aboriginal society.”

The response of Pallawah woman Walyer or Tarernorerer to captivity and conflict was particularly extreme. Walyer was born around 1800 to the Tommeginne people in the northwest. Ryan writes that Walyer was initially abducted as a teenager by the Punnilerpanner people of the Port Sorrell region on the north coast of Van Diemen’s Land and sold to Bass Strait sealers.

Aside from the sealers’ kidnapping of women for labour and sexual purposes, warring tribes whose territories were being eroded by the white settlers also kidnapped Pallawah women from other tribes. The kidnapping of women by rival tribes and sealers in Van Diemen’s Land could be viewed as an act of reproductive warfare; wherein women’s fertile bodies become the site of conquest. Reproductive warfare has had a long history: and an extreme,
sexually violent form is currently being perpetuated in the Congo. It has been historically and ethnographically documented as an effective method to destroy an enemy and maintain economic status. To paraphrase Lyndall Ryan, to take ten women of child-bearing age from a Pallawah band, takes away the future of the band.

Walyer spent the next decade on Bass Strait islands. Given evidence from the journals of travellers to the Straits during this time, and Tyrelore testimonies to G.A. Robinson, Walyer was probably subjected to a harsh regime of violence for minor misdemeanours such as stealing food, and she may have been traded between sealers for sex and labour. Despite the hardship of her existence, Walyer exploited the cross cultural relationship between Tyrelore and sealers to her advantage. She learned to speak English, to handle small boats, and most importantly, Walyer learned how to use and maintain firearms.

Walyer escaped the sealers in 1828. She returned to Van Diemen’s Land where she gathered together a band of guerrilla fighters, mostly Tommeginne people including two of her brothers, Linnetower and Linnlikaver. She taught other Pallawah people the use of firearms, knowledge she’d gleaned from the sealers. Her organised attacks are said to be one of the first occasions of Aboriginal Tasmanians using muskets against the colonisers. During these attacks, Walyer was described as carrying a fowling piece and standing away, often on a high hill or rock. She would call out to her victims in abusive language, goading them out of their huts to face her spears and if they did so, her warriors shot them.

In December 1830, G.A. Robinson wrote:

By these men [the sealers] she has been tutored in all sorts of mischief. She became so desperate – and possessing a great deal of cunning – she was not only dreaded by the whites, numbers of whom have been massacred by her, but she was a terror to all the natives she came in contact with, a great many of whom this Amazon caused to be killed.

Robinson was also the subject of one of Walyer’s attacks:

“On another occasion he was tracked by an escaped lubra Tererenan or Walyer, “the Amazon”, who, at the head of some desperate Aborigines, declared a war of extinction against all Whites and any Natives who were friendly with them.”

When the situation in northern Tasmania became too dangerous for Walyer and the Black War intensified in its ferocity, Walyer returned to the islands – and the sealers. Her two brothers and two sisters also went with her.

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129 Ryan, L., 1996, p. 38. (Here Ryan was specifically referring to the impact of Straitsmen, not rival tribes, removing Aboriginal women.)
134 The Black War occurred in Van Diemen’s Land between 1824 and 1831. For more information please see Clements, N., The Black War: Fear, Sex and Resistance in Tasmania, University of Queensland Press, 2014.
“It would appear that Walyer ran away from the natives and made her way to the sealers in consequence of one of the black men trying to kill her. One of the women informed me that the black man beat her and broke her back with a waddy (Walyer states that her back was broke by a fall from a tree but this I don’t believe), and intended to have her killed but she got away and made her way to the sealers, with whom she had formally cohabited and where she considered she would be safe.”

Although historians have stated that Walyer was kidnapped a second time by the sealers, Robinson’s account and the fact that she took four siblings to the islands with her seems to counteract this claim. For two years Walyer lived with a sealer John Williams on Penguin Island, working, sealing and muttonbirding between Penguin, Bird and Forsyth Islands with several other Tyreelore. In December 1830, John Williams and seven other sealers were wrecked off the Low Isles between Clarke and Penguin Island. They were marooned for eight days and survived by drinking a seal’s blood and eating the flesh raw. Williams and John Brown made a little boat out of seal skin and tried to cross the ten mile passage to Clarke Island to get help. They were never seen again.

Whilst the men were marooned, G.A. Robinson sent his agent James Parish to Penguin Island. He wanted the Tyreelore to be taken from their sealer husbands and sent to Swan Island, the first of Robinson’s ‘exile islands’, as he had promised their wives to their Pallawah countrymen. Walyer was one of the women captured that day. “The straitmen who had survived their ordeal returned to the comfort of their island homes after being rescued by James Parish. However Parish took away all of their wives to Swan Island,” writes Tyreelore descendant Patsy Cameron. Lyndall Ryan writes that the sealers were very pleased to give up Walyer, indicating further her fearsome nature and that she was no passive kidnap victim.

On Swan Island, Walyer’s identity was quickly discovered despite her changing her name to Mary Ann. The Pallawah man Peevay saw her recognise and call to her old dog Whiskey. Three survivors from one of her attacks were also on the island. Walyer dealt with this situation by attempting to create Anglophobic panic among the inmates of Swan Island, claiming that soldiers were coming from Launceston to shoot them; that they would be chained or gaoled. This wasn’t an unrealistic claim, given that martial law had just been called in Van Diemen’s Land, meaning it was now legal to shoot or capture Aborigines who entered the ‘settled districts’ of the north. But the resulting anxieties were enough to justify Robinson exiling Walyer further and isolating her from the other Tyreelore. In March 1831 he evicted the sealers on Gun Carriage Island and moved the captured Aborigines, including Walyer, into the empty sealers’ huts. Walyer died on Gun Carriage Island in June 1831, from complications of a common cold.

Walyer, who had witnessed first contact with Europeans and the Black War in her lifetime, came from a culture where women were not traditional leaders of war parties. “The emergence of such a female leader, at the time an unprecedented event, says much about the

136 Cameron, P., Grease and Ochre: The blending of two cultures at the colonial sea frontier, 2011, p. 130. As well as the women, Parish took sixty pounds of muttonbird feathers and sixty kangaroo skins which he claimed as his own, despite the produce resulting from the labour of the women. Plomley, Ed. 2006, p. 331.
137 Ryan, L., 1996, p. 150.
way Tasmanian Aboriginal society was breaking down. Throughout the island, the traditional power structure was collapsing.”

Women fought beside Walyer, including her own sisters. G.A. Robinson claimed that other Tyreelore were apparently present with Walyer at the Thomas/Parker killings.

Walyer’s attacks on fellow countrymen and women make her a problematic character in a narrative of internecine battles during a third party invasion. McFarlane writes that she returned from the islands with guns and therefore wielded “an inordinate power over the relatively defenceless Aborigines who still inhabited the coastal region.”

That she possessed firearms and readily taught others how to use them quickly inverted the power structure of Pallawah society. Walyer has been criticised in historical narratives for attacking rival tribes already made acutely vulnerable by disease, the sealers’ predations upon fertile women, attacks by the agents of the Van Diemen’s Land Company and the toll of the Black War.

Walyer was also criticised by writers during her own lifetime as a pugilistic but inconsequential pain in the neck who shouldn’t be taken seriously. Black Line veteran and ‘Last King of Iceland’ Jorgen Jorgenson attempted to shut down all future narratives of Walyer being portrayed as a female hero of freedom and resistance in Van Diemen’s Land. She was no Antipodeans’ Boadicea, was Jorgenson’s argument, fighting for her “native woods”, “resisting the Roman arms for nine years,” though it would be tempting for future historians and storytellers to portray her that way. Thank goodness, he wrote, for the “fidelity” of colonial records, which made it clear that the warrior woman of the 1820s was no more than a bloodthirsty troublemaker who showed little discrimination between her attacks on coloniser and colonised.

Jorgenson’s attempt to ‘set the record straight’ regarding Walyer’s potential Boadicea status also expresses the colonial desire to control the narrative of invasion and the forcible appropriation of another people’s land. A black woman with guns, a black woman who cohabited (and eventually sought refuge) with the ‘banditti sea-wolves’ of Bass Strait and rallied a guerrilla band to fight for her country is not conducive to Van Diemen’s Land’s settlement narrative.

Matson-Green tends to omit details of Walyer’s attack on other Pallawah and presents her within the context of an anti-colonial resistance fighter. “She fought on behalf of her people with bravery and tenacity in a war for which there are not memorials.” Jebb and Haebich write that Walyer’s “individual resistance campaign in north-west Tasmania shows that she deserves epic status.”

References:
Walyer that *The Companion to Tasmanian History* has not one but two, contrasting, biographies of her.

Australian women rarely feature in nationalistic narratives of warfare. The story of Walyer’s revenge attacks upon Van Diemonian and Pallawah people who had wronged her has been downplayed ever since, whereas revolutionary narratives of the wronged-man-turned-outlaw, such as Ned Kelly or Ben Hall, have inspired books, songs and film and formed part of our national identity.

As a Tyreelore, Walyer’s response to crimes against her body, her family and her country was extreme, unprecedented and the reason why I have included her in the chapter. However she was not the only Tyreelore to practise a violent form of resistance. ‘Some, who had been either coercively taken by sealers or had been sold or bartered by husbands and fathers, occasionally escaped to rejoin their tribes after which, Calder claimed, they could not be restrained from joining in, ‘sometimes leading the attack.’ Walyer was one such leader, who crossed all social borders ...’

**Hunting, Dying, Surviving, Adapting**

Walyer, despite being sold to sealers and held by them for more than a decade never displayed ‘trauma bonding’ in her dealings with the Straitsmen or with white men in general. “She was reported to have said ‘she liked a *luta tawin* [white man] as she did a black snake’,” Robinson wrote that another Tyreelore Morterpyerernane “has frequently said that if she was on the main she would teach the black fellows to kill plenty of white men. She so mastered the sealers that she would do very little for them.”

“I have reason to believe that my people were afraid for their lives, as these men threatened to shoot the first man that should attempt to take any of the women. It was not a little amusing when my people told me that one of the men had given one of the women a gun and told her to shoot the first man that should attempt to take her.” Here Robinson reflected upon the irony of captive women given guns to protect themselves against their potential rescuers.

As well as keeping Robinson’s agents from taking the Tyreelore away, the sealers gave the women guns for hunting purposes. “One of the sealer women goes shooting with a musket and will kill a swan with a ball; she is with the sealers at this place.” A single ball as opposed to shot which scatters requires a good aim and this was the reason for Robinson’s approval. The French Captain d’Urville and his officers during their sojourn in King George Sound noted that the Pallawah women used firearms, usually fowling pieces. The Breaksea Island sealers claimed that the Pallawah women were the primary hunters in the group.

G.A. Robinson’s observation of several Tyreelore wielding guns undermined his whole narrative of the Tyreelore as passive victims who apparently needed him to rescue them. Why were captive women given guns and why didn’t they use them more regularly against their abductors? Why didn’t more Tyreelore escape their abductors, given the evidence of

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145 Merry, K., 2003, p. 84
atrocities committed against them, and despite their access to boats and guns? Where the Tyreelore in Van Diemen’s Land had occasionally used guns to protect themselves and attack others, it appears that the sealers of the Hunter and the Governor Brisbane trusted the Pallawah women with guns.

At least three women were shot and killed by sealers on Bass Strait for little more provocation than refusing to work. Violence and trauma perpetuated against Tyreelore was either constant or sporadic over four decades depending on individual circumstances; however violence seems to be a consistent element in a number of relationships between sealers and Aboriginal women. I argue here that some reasons why more Tyreelore did not turn on or escape the sealers, despite having access to boats and guns, were their manifestations of trauma bonding as a survival adaptation. But I argue too that other women aligned themselves emotionally, financially and politically with the sealers to the point where they considered themselves (and indeed they were) functioning members of sealing communities. “Men, when they receive good from whence they expect evil, feel the more indebted to their benefactor.” Centuries ago, Machiavelli explained how a kidnap victim could feel indebted to a captor who has given them life ostensibly by not removing it. “Basically, one’s identity with powerful individuals who can exact terrible punishments and withhold the necessities of life can be understood as a regression to a childlike state. This response is not gender specific, but human; it derives from a state of powerlessness and regression under situations of extreme stress.” Long term kidnap victims tend to conform to the lifestyles of their captors in order to survive. In 1976, Patricia Hearst’s legal defence unsuccessfully argued that Hearst was influenced by ‘coercive persuasion’, or psychological duress, when she aligned herself with the Symbionese Liberation Army and that Stockholm Syndrome could be used to explain her evolution from kidnap victim to bank robber. It has been generally agreed that several conditions must be in place for the Stockholm Syndrome to take effect: the captive cannot escape and depends upon their abductor for survival: the hostage-taker threatens to kill the captive and demonstrates that they are capable of it: and the captor shows some kindness towards the captive, or acts perceived as kindness that are actually absences of mistreatment.

As well as accommodation and violence it is possible that Tyreelore caught in these circumstances actually aided their captors to abduct other women. This situation has been documented of the Tyreelore Matilda enticing several Bonurong women and a boy away from their families at Port Phillip in c1834, so that sealers could capture them and take them to Bass Strait.

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151 Plomley, Ed. 2006, pp. 1053 and 1054.
As I have previously written in ‘Women with Guns: Resistance’, Pallawah tribes raiding others for women occurred after colonisation, if not before and “marriages which were exogamous, took place after gaining the consent of the girl’s father, or, failing that, by elopement or capture,” Pallawah women may have already possessed adaptive strategies to politically strategic marriages and alliances over which they had little power to negotiate. It would have been a survival imperative to adapt swiftly to their circumstances.

Makerleedie of Bruny Island was a woman who displayed such adaptability throughout her life as a Tyreere. She was Truganina’s sister and was allegedly kidnapped by John Baker with her other sisters Lowununnie and Murrerninghie in 1826. It is unlikely that Baker acted alone but in 1829 it was he whom Governor Arthur gave orders to apprehend for taking the women and removing them to Bass Strait. Governor Arthur has appeared historically disinterested in the fate of Tyreere but perhaps because these women were Truganina’s sisters and Truganina was so instrumental in Robinson’s mission to conciliate or capture Aborigines, that Governor Arthur “wanted to know particularly what had become of the women.” John Baker was arrested and taken into custody in Hobart and later released for lack of evidence against him.

By the time Baker was taken into custody, Makerleedie was on Kangaroo Island and according to Tyreere Mother Brown, living with William Cooper at Point Marsden, where Cooper had dug a freshwater well. It is possible that she had been sold to another sealer before Cooper. G.A. Robinson recorded that her sister Lowununnie was also at Kangaroo Island. The third sister Murrerninghie stayed in the Straits, where she was shot dead by the sealer Robert Gamble on the Kent Group islands in 1830.

Due to the roving sealing operations and the trafficking of Tyreere between Kangaroo Island and Bass Strait, Makerleedie would have been privy to regular information from the Straits and Van Diemen’s Land. She would have heard about the escalating Black War, of Walyer’s escape from the sealers and her consequent rampage around the north of the main, of her sister Truganina’s work with G.A. Robinson to rescue the Tyreere from the islands and of Truganina’s epic journeys through Van Diemen’s Land with Robinson. She would have heard of her sister’s murder at the hands of Robert Gamble and she may have even received a relic of her sister which was bound in kangaroo skin, peculiar to certain Pallawah burial rites, from a fellow Tyreere.

Lynette Russell writes that “creolized societies were based around community members expanding their cultural repertoire for the purposes of the new community,” and this reflects the culture that emerged on Kangaroo Island. As the male sealers began to dress in clothes made of wallaby hide and adapt their speech to communicate effectively with the Pallawah and Kaurna women, Tyreere maintained their own cultural practices whilst learning English and the use of firearms. From Plomley, Ryan and Taylor’s historical work, it

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162 Plomley, Ed. 2006, p. 1051.
is possible to collate an understanding of what Makerleedie’s life might have been like on Kangaroo Island.

Makerleedie danced and sang her stories and news with the visiting Tyrellore. She hunted with snares made from canvas string and hair, clubbed seals with waddies, scrubbed the flesh from seal skins and worked the glaring salt pans to cure their hides. She pulled fluffy muttonbird young from their burrows, plucked them and dressed them. She trained her dogs to hunt kangaroo. She dived for shellfish, abalone and crays. She may have been tied to a tree once and beaten with ropes, or seen it happen to another woman, seen her haunches cut away with a skinning knife, seen Emu’s boy have his ears cut off, saw the boy die, seen Emu try to knife the man who did it. She made shoes for the men from kangaroo hide, sewed them together with the sinew from the kangaroo tails. She tried to stop a terrified Ngarrindjeri woman from swimming the Backstairs passage back to her homeland. She smoked a pipe. She tattooed her body: about her hips, perfect circles cut into her flesh with a forked stick. She gave birth and killed the infant just out of her womb by stuffing the child’s mouth with dried grasses and she buried her in a quiet place. She wore a beanie and a kangaroo skin frock. She went on a sealing expedition with George Meredith and an Aboriginal crew. She watched the men kill Meredith with waddies on the beach and take his boat. Sometimes she drank. Some of what the Islanders called her Bumblefoot. She lost two toes from sleeping too close to a fire.  

Makerleedie did not return to Van Diemen’s Land. She lived on Kangaroo Island until her death as an old woman. According to Rebe Taylor’s informant, it was 1887 when she died. She spent many years roaming the island with her countrywoman Suke and their fourteen hunting dogs, refusing welfare and upsetting the new wave of settlers, the croppers and graziers, with her dogs and sporadic firestick hunting. To adhere momentarily to the narrative of extinction regarding the Pallawah people, Truganina was not the last ‘full blood’ Tasmanian Aborigine. Her sisters, who held somewhat lower profiles on Kangaroo Island, lived up for a decade after Truganina’s death. Makerleedie’s survival, I believe, was due to her adaptability in the face of abduction, to her ‘creolization’ of her traditional cultural practices, and her swift accommodation to her new community and environment.

“Without Names, She Threw Them”: Infanticide and the Devil Dance

“Children murdered by Black women in the Straits.

Pol-ler-wot-tel-ter-run-ser Alias Mrgt. Informed me that Bel Smith killed two boys at Presvn [Preservation Island]. One of whom a Big one – by thrusting grass in their mouths. She was at the time living with Tucker by whom she had these children – Bullra – Jumbos sister killed a girl at Ferneux [Furneaux] Island think she buried it – Jumbo killed one child at Port Island before its birth by beating on her belly. Pleen-per-ren-ser Alias Mother Brown – has killed several children. Numerous are the children thus destroyed.

Mee-tone-er-paer-pipe-er-wore.Kan.er – About 20 years of age Nt. Of the Dt. Of Wh.House Pt. Was forcibly taken from her Country by George Briggs. Has got a Husband amongst the Blks she afterwards absconded and went on the main – and

164 Taylor, R., 2008, p. 36.
was subsqty. Taken by Tucker by whom she is a present concealed, has killed several children since she has been with the Sealers.”

G.A. Robinson often alluded to infanticide practices among Tyreelore women and here I discuss infanticide as a Tyreelore response to their forced appropriation by sealers. In this section I focus only on infanticides as reported by Tyreelore and not practices that may have occurred within traditional Pallawah societies. I am aware that this focus will disallow a comparison between traditional Pallawah and Tyreelore responses and thus compromise the argument that infanticide was primarily a response to Tyreelore trauma or lack of autonomy. However I believe that the resources available to examine traditional practices of infanticide, if they did exist, are inadequate, given that written documentation only became available after sealers began abducting women and taking them to Bass Strait.

In her novel Beloved, Toni Morrison writes of Sethe, an escaped African American slave who, when faced with her ‘owner’ arriving at her refuge to recapture her, takes her babies into the cold room and tries to kill them, succeeding when she cuts her infant daughter’s throat. Sethe’s motivation was her desire that her children should never have to endure the ownership and resulting violence that she had endured. In the paragraph below, Sethe remembers her grandmother telling her about the babies born of white men’s rape that Sethe’s mother had birthed during the trans-Atlantic voyage from Africa to America on the slave ship:

“Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe,” and she did that. She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. “She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew, she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you, I am telling you, small girl Sethe.”

From the Victoria River region in the Northern Territory, Deborah Bird Rose wrote: “The Berndts too noted the small amount of children – only 6 percent of the total Aboriginal population. They, or perhaps Catherine alone, asked the women about this fact, and they learned that abortion was also a factor. They state the women’s attitude could be summed up as: ‘Why should we have children? ... why should we breed more people for kadia or kardiya [Europeans] to use the way they use us?’”

Pyromancy or devil’s dance:
The rite of the TYRE.RE.LORE women consists in devil worship. They affirm that the devil comes to the women when they are hunting on Flinders and has a connection with them, and that they are with child with this spirit and which they kill in the bush.

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The Tyreelore invented a dance that was unique to the women on Bass Strait islands, a piece of Pallawah theatre that simultaneously expressed the accommodation and the rejection of a malevolent male spirit. G.A. Robinson described the dance as obscene. “These devotees of the devil are excessive in their devotions. They continue to chant their devil song and perform their rites at every opportunity.” A few months later, Robinson wrote that the songs of the Pallawah consist of expressions of their circumstances but he still continued to describe the Devil Dance as a form of devil worship. He wrote that the Tyreelore Mother Brown, one of the Tyreelore he had reported having killed many of her own children, had invented the “demoniacal dance” and that she possessed considerable influence over the other women on the islands.

These examples of infanticide and abortion from different cultures were women’s responses to trauma and extreme cultural upheaval. Perhaps, as well, they are examples of women taking control of their own lives and outcomes by controlling the number of offspring they bear and to whom. In Russell’s chapter on Tyreelore infanticides she quotes Pamela Scully’s analysis of nineteenth century infanticide in the Cape Colony of South Africa: “In killing her child, a woman declared sovereign power over both her body and the body of her child.”

“In this sense,” writes Russell, “infanticide might well be seen as both autonomous action and cultural continuity. That the sealing women practised infanticide without the permission of, and in what appears to be in direct opposition to, the men, suggests levels of resistance and autonomy that at first appear absent from previous discussions of frontier domesticity.” In the songs and moves of the Devil Dance, Tyreelore may have articulated loss, trauma and asserted personal autonomy and power in one of the few areas they had control over; their ability to bear heirs to the men they chose, not the men they were forced by.

It is impossible to accurately and sensitively divine the motivation and emotional impact of infanticide practices in a culture and era so different to that of this twenty-first century female writer. However, despite failing to find conclusions, answers, and perfectly reputable historical ‘facts’, I believe the subject of Tyreelore infanticides is an important addition to the discussion of Aboriginal women’s responses to abduction and appropriation by sealers of the 1820s Southern Ocean. When framed with a twenty-first century feminist and political viewpoint, infanticide by the Tyreelore must be seen as a family-planning, decision-making crisis for every woman put in that situation.

Lynette Russell writes that without diminishing or trivializing the violence that women kept by the sealers endured, “it is possible to see them with voice, with autonomy, and personal capacity, and with that they were able to survive.” Sally managed to mediate and navigate a dangerous situation between her own countrymen and women, the Kangaroo Islanders who had originally abducted her, and the crew of the Isabella. Sally, Dinah and Moonie also conversed and traded goods with the English and French crews of the Amity and the Astrolabe. These three women had access to guns and boats, were trusted and their skills were anecdotally appreciated by the sealers. I wonder if Sally, Dinah and Moonie, among certain other Tyreelore of Bass Strait considered themselves as part of the sealing crew, as sealers, and whether they considered the men they worked and slept with as their partners or their captors.

The women who were signed aboard the *Hunter* to work the Isle of St Paul, King George Sound and Rodrigues must have been adventurous, stoic and brave people. Their adaptation to their circumstances was a utilitarian, Aboriginal one: the sharing of resources and labour in order to survive. Their isolation and then abandonment on the western side of the continent meant that their coexistence with the sealers was utilitarian, and vice versa. I believe that Dinah, Moonie and Sally were aligned politically and financially with the sealers as well as maintaining ties with their home country. The financial aspect of their relationship is evidenced by the contract that the *Hunter* sealers signed. As Captain Craig said as the schooner crewed by men, Aboriginal women, children neared Mauritius “the captain of [a] Man of War [who approached us now] would not believe these women were free people”175

The experiences and responses of Dinah, Sally and Moonie were markedly different to those of the three Western Australian females who were kidnapped by the Breaksea Islanders. The two Menang women did not have the decades-long island culture developed by Tyreelore and Straitsmen, until the moment it was violently and unexpectedly thrust upon them. Ultimately, the Aboriginal females who survived the sealers and colonisation did so through varying degrees of accommodation and resistance, and by maintaining aspects of their cultural art, diet and work. They had little choice in their circumstances. The women in this particular story had their lives controlled by men such as Samuel Bailey, James Everett, George Augustus Robinson and Major Edmund Lockyer.

175 My in-text brackets. See Appendix 5 for letters between the Port Louis Police Department, Mauritius and the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales. CSO, Port Louis, Mauritius. 1826 – 1827.
2.3

Seawolves and Banditti: The Men of the Governor Brisbane and the Hunter

In this section I present biographies of men who lived on Breaksea Island in 1826 and were key players in the abduction of the two Menang women, the child Fanny, and in the murder of the Menang man which took place on Green Island. At the conclusion of the biographies is the section ‘Good Men and Bad Men in Small Boats’ where I discuss ideas about the kind of men the Breaksea Islanders might have been, using both an historical and a contemporary lens.

William Hook

One evening in October 1826, William Hook and seven of his crew mates rowed a whaleboat from Breaksea Island to come alongside the French expedition ship Astrolabe. Captain d’Urville offered them the night aboard and a dinner of ship’s biscuits and brandy. That night the sealers told of how they’d been treated abominably by their employers who had not returned for them, and how they were now living from their fishing and quite destitute.

D’Urville observed William Hook:

A young man with a very swarthy complexion, a broad face and a flat nose looked to me a completely different type from the English; I soon learned, on questioning him, that he was a New Zealander, a native of Kerikeri, attached for nearly eight years from a very early age to the miserable lot of these vagabonds. He speaks English and seems to have completely forgotten his homeland.176

Six months later William Hook’s name appeared in The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser and he became a public player in the colonial history of Australia.177 In January 1827, one week after Major Edmund Lockyer’s busy pacifications of Menang men aggrieved by the sealers’ actions, a sealers’ boat approached the Amity asking for provisions. Lockyer let them aboard the Amity for the night and, suspecting the sealers were responsible for the murder of man on Green Island, interviewed them the next day. On the 12th, William Hook made his statement to Lockyer, testifying that he had been present at the Green Island killing and had witnessed the kidnapping of two Menang women.178

Although William Hook did not say in his statement who had fired the fatal shot, Lockyer concluded in his correspondences to the Colonial Secretary that it was Samuel Bailey who had assisted in the “atrocious murder”179, the only evidence being that William Hook declared that Samuel Bailey was present on the boat at the time. When Festing brought Samuel Bailey back from Eclipse Island with the two captured Noongar females, Lockyer arrested Bailey. He then sent Samuel Bailey to Sydney and sent William Hook to testify against him. Once in Sydney, William Hook testified to an examining officer that Samuel Bailey had not shot the man on Green Island, which led to all charges being dropped.180

178 See Appendix 1
180 See Appendix 4
Lockyer and d’Urville’s accounts and descriptions are all I am able to find on the young Maori sealer. After Bailey’s charges were dropped in Sydney, William Hook’s name disappeared from official records. However to gather an estimation of his actions and character, I have sought information ‘around’ William Hook. I have also made tentative links between Hook and other Maori sealers on Bass Strait. In 1824, John Boultee kept a journal of his sealing expedition through Bass Strait. In the Hobart Town Gazette, the fellow crew of Boultee’s schooner Sally were named as: “Mr A. Hervel, Mr Smith, James Duncan, Robert Robertson, William Aldridge, John Richardson, George Belsey, Tiger New Zealand (a boy), Billhook (a boy) and John Smidmore.”

John Smidmore was present at the killing of the Menang man on Green Island, two years after he worked with Boultee on the Sally. In fact, after Samuel Bailey was transported to Sydney with William Hook, John Smidmore admitted to Lockyer to shooting the man himself. It is a leap of pure speculation that one of the boys aboard the Sally with John Smidmore in 1824 was William Hook: Tiger, described in Boultee’s journal as a teenage Maori, or the boy called Billhook – a name that could easily be made official by extending it to William Hook. Aside from my ‘leap’ it is still likely that William Hook worked in Bass Strait or on Kangaroo Island, as those sealing grounds were where most of the Hunter and Governor Brisbane sealers were based before travelling to the west.

It is also likely that when William Hook first arrived in Sydney, he did so through the auspices of one Samuel Marsden. Samuel Marsden had set up New Zealand’s first Christian mission station in William Hook’s home of Kerikeri in 1814, buying five thousand acres from Nga Puhi Chief Honi Hiki “for the princely sum of forty eight axes,”

setting up the mission at around the same time that William Hook was a child there. Marsden appears to have engaged in a firearms trade with Honi Hiki, who was interested in gaining ascendancy over other tribes in the area.

Marsden brought Maori children to Australia. He “confided to Pratt that he intended to bring back from New Zealand to Parramatta a number of ‘children of the chiefs’ for education.”

Samuel Marsden took the Kerikeri children to his Native Institution in Parramatta (where Fanny was placed in 1827), using the excuse of ‘education’ in what was ostensibly holding Maori children hostage in return for favorable treatment from their parents and to ensure that no harm came to his missionaries in New Zealand.

Another way that William Hook may have crossed the Strait was by being sent out as an adolescent by his family for seafaring, agricultural and cultural experience, or even to earn money to purchase muskets in Sydney. As Dieffenbach wrote in the 1840s, “This spirit of curiosity leads [Maori] often to trust themselves to small coasting vessels; or they go with whalers to see still more distant parts of the globe.” Maori were traditional voyagers and had excellent reputations as seafarers among the European and American sealing and whaling

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Hobart Town Gazette, 20/08/1824, p. 4.
http://theprow.org.nz.maori-and-whaling/ (accessed 09/03/12)
operations. “Captains and mates relied on their cheap labour, sobriety and skill as harpooners and topmen.”\textsuperscript{185}

In the early years of New Zealand offshore whaling and sealing, young Maori were sometimes ill-treated aboard ships; flogged, humiliated or abandoned thousands of miles from their homes. To be fair, some captains treated their crew with absolute equality. Ill treatment by their employers was by no means confined to Maori seafarers, as I have demonstrated previously by outlining the actions of the captains of the \textit{Hunter} and \textit{Governor Brisbane}, who abandoned all of their crew, never to return for them. But many young Maori were sent to sea by parents who ranked highly in Maori society. Events such as the burning of the brig \textit{Boyd} in 1809 alerted colonial administrators to the Maori ‘ship’s boys’ who may have been vulnerable to abuses of power, but were also connected to powerful hierarchies within Maori societies, and that abuses of \textit{mana} and dignity could be met with terrifying consequences.\textsuperscript{186}

The history of post-contact Kerikeri, of young Maori seafarers in the nineteenth century and of the company that William Hook may have kept in Bass Strait gives an indication of the cultures which William Hook lived and worked within. His connection with Samuel Marsden is interesting for several reasons, including that, as a child, he would have interacted with other Europeans and Christianity far earlier than Maori from other parts of New Zealand. He was a young Indigenous man who successfully straddled cultures, ethnicities and cultural values during the trans-Tasman colonisation. What especially intrigues me about William Hook is that his statement to Lockyer in 1826, whether or not coerced, does not answer to an assumedly tight allegiance to his fellow sealers, especially Samuel Bailey, during the crew’s time of extreme isolation and stress. Yet, it was John Smidmore, the sealer who had possibly worked with Hook before in Bass Strait, who later confessed to shooting the man on Green Island and Hook does not mention him once in his statement.

\textbf{Samuel Bailey}

Major Edmund Lockyer, January, 1827: Thursday, 11\textsuperscript{th} – Sent for the sealers from the brig and, on questioning them, ascertained that the native we found dead on Green Island had been murdered by a party of these sealers, and that the four men we had taken off Michaelmas Island had been placed there after the murder had been perpetuated, and that they had also forcibly seized and carried off two female natives. One of them was now on Eclipse Island with Samuel Bailey, who was present and assisted at the Murder of the Native.\textsuperscript{187}

In 1827, Samuel Bailey of the \textit{Governor Brisbane} sealing crew was accused of murder at King George Sound. Major Lockyer wrote that William Hook was certain “Samuel Bailey was in the boat at the time that the native was shot.”\textsuperscript{188} Hook also stated that Samuel Bailey was one of the four men who went into the bush the previous night armed with cutlasses and guns to kidnap four women. On learning that Samuel Bailey was at Eclipse Island, Lockyer

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\textsuperscript{186} Chaves argues that the \textit{Boyd} massacre resulted from Maori seamen aboard the whalers being treated disrespectfully. Chaves, K., \textit{Great Circle}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{188} Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol. 1, p. 469.
requested that Lieutenant Festing take a boat out to the island, apprehend Bailey and bring
with him the woman and child said to be there.

Later, Samuel Bailey protested that he was not present at the murder of the man on Green
Island “but admits he drew cuts, as he terms it, with his companions for the woman, and is
aware of the four men being placed on Michaelmas Island.” It transpired that Samuel
Bailey’s version was closest to the truth at the time, albeit a confession by omission.

The Menang woman returned from Eclipse Island in a terrible condition that shocked the
Major. It is unclear whether any other sealers were residing at Eclipse Island at the time. If
not, then Fanny was also Samuel Bailey’s captive. This also makes it most likely that Samuel
Bailey had been responsible for kidnapping Fanny from the mainland near Esperance nine
months earlier.

Lockyer expressed some anxiety in his report as to whether Samuel Bailey could even be
tried for murder, considering that the crime was committed before Western Australia was
legally annexed as part of New Holland. From William Hook’s statement, he must have
been aware that Samuel Bailey was never actually named as the murderer. I suspect that
Lockyer simply wanted Samuel Bailey removed from King George Sound as quickly as
possible and used an accusation of murder to achieve this. After travelling to Sydney and
interviewed, Samuel Bailey was not charged with murder, because William Hook was unable
to positively identify Bailey as the killer of the Menang man. Samuel Bailey was free to go,
not being required to answer any other charges, such as the abduction, imprisonment and rape
of Aboriginal women and children.

Brook and Kohen write that after Bailey’s first captive Fanny had been accepted into the
Parramatta Native Institution, there was no further newspaper information about the inquiry
into the Green Island murder. However “in the 1828 census there is a Samuel Bailey
recorded as being on Norfolk Island. It seems likely that he eventually received the
punishment he deserved.” Looking through convict registers causes me to dispute this and
think that Samuel Bailey escaped all punishment. The convict Samuel Bailey was recorded as
transported in 1817 and granted ticket of leave in 1839 and is unlikely to be the same man
who roamed Western Australia, Kangaroo Island and Bass Strait during this period.

It is possible that men who were escaped prisoners changed their names when signing aboard
sealing operations. In 1831, G.A. Robinson described a Bass Strait sealer Thomas Bailey as
having a light complexion, dark Hair and five feet eight inches tall. “Has a cut to the tip of his
nose.” Thomas Bailey told Robinson that he came to the NSW colony free aboard the
convict ship Atlas in 1819. In Friendly Mission’s appendix, Plomley notes that this could
have been William Balley, a labourer from Bath, who received a sentence of seven years
transportation and arrived on the Atlas on the same date. It is possible that ‘Thomas’ had

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ame:Bailey;Firstname:Samuel (accessed 12/03/12)
194 G.A. Robinson, Correspondence And Related Papers, Both Official and Private, 1829-1850. Van Diemen’s
Land, 1829-ca1865 Records of the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston (Locn No: A 7509).
changed his name before, from ‘William’ to ‘Samuel’. William Balley would have had to change his name to sign aboard the *Governor Brisbane* if he had absconded. Escaped convicts were common on the Bass Strait sealing grounds during the 1820s. Boutlbee describes the *Sally’s* captain (“a drunken little Tartar but a good sailor”) covertly picking up some convicts when the schooner was abreast of Bruny Island, who “immediately skulked below where they continued till we cleared the port.”

Robinson states that in 1831, Thomas Bailey was living on Gun Carriage Island with a Pallawah woman called Little Tuery. “In 1832 Little Tuery went to the Aboriginal settlement. In 1836 Bailey was living with a New Holland Woman whom he had obtained from George Meredith.”

If Thomas Bailey and Samuel Bailey are the same person, then after a short stay in Sydney in 1827, Bailey returned to Bass Strait and to sealing work. On the north coast of Tasmania between Tomahawk and Mt Horror is a small hill called Bailey’s Hill. Whilst we were driving past the hill, Tyreelore descendant and historian Patsy Cameron told me the hill was supposedly named after the sealer Thomas Bailey. Thomas Bailey also worked with James Everett, my next subject.

**John Randall, John Kirby and James Everett**

James Everett was in King George Sound in 1826. According to Lockyer’s notes he was boatsteerer of the *Hunter* crew. Trouble in King George Sound seems to have begun when John Randall and his men from the *Governor Brisbane* arrived from Middle Island to join Everett’s *Hunter* crew on Breaksea Island. Everett and Randall were the men who ordered William Hook to maroon the men on Green Island and Hook obeyed because as he stated, he was afraid to do otherwise.

Tindale in his Bass Strait genealogy cites James Everett as being British, born in 1794. He shipped out from England on the whaler *Echo* which was wrecked on Cato Reef in 1820. The crew made it to Sydney four months later. When the brig *Queen Charlotte* left Sydney for Van Diemen’s Land in September 1820, she carried three of the men from the *Echo*, one of whom was named ‘James Everest.’ And so Jimmy Everett arrived in the Southern Ocean and made the islands his home.

Rebe Taylor writes that when George Bates arrived at Kangaroo Island in 1824, James Everett was there to meet him. Bates had said he reached for his rifle when he first encountered Wallen, Everett, John Kirby and an Aboriginal woman dressed in skins, thinking they were all ‘blackfellows’.” According to George Bates, both Randall and Everett had jumped ship from the *Nereus*.

197 Plomley, Ed. 2006, p.1051.
199 Although Lockyer and others use the spelling Everitt, I will adhere to contemporary spelling of the name.
203 Taylor, R., 2008, p. 76.
Randall and Everett lived and worked on Kangaroo Island along with John Kirby who was also in King George Sound in 1826. They must have spent a considerable time sealing at the Recherche Archipelago before arriving in King George Sound in 1826, because Lockyer reported the two boatsteerers to have seven hundred skins on an island near Mondrain opposite the mainland by Thistle Cove and Lucky Bay, and only one hundred skins between them at King George Sound.\textsuperscript{204}

After Samuel Bailey was arrested, James Everett disappears from Lockyer’s records until the 10\textsuperscript{th} of March 1827, when two whaleboats arrived in Princess Royal Harbour. On learning they were the sealers involved with the Green Island murder, Lockyer ordered them arrested and took away their seven fowling pieces. It seems that Everett, along with Randall and several others had been to the Swan River since January 1827. They gave Lockyer information on the coastal journey to what would soon become the Swan River Colony. It was the sealers’ knowledge of the boat harbours, weather, soil conditions and safe anchorages that Lockyer relayed in his report to the Colonial Secretary and that would prove so useful for settlement of the new colony.\textsuperscript{205}

Lockyer provisioned the sealers with rations of flour and meat until he could send them to Sydney. He requested a berth for them aboard Stirling’s ship \textit{Success} but Stirling refused. However John Kirby and John Randall did leave King George Sound serving aboard the \textit{Success} as crew, along with Lockyer, who had been relieved of his post as Commandant.\textsuperscript{206} Everett and several other sealers spent two months employed in the new colony as pilots, sail makers and fishermen.

Despite his best efforts, Lockyer was not able to rid the settlement of sealers during his jurisdiction. Captain Wakefield was the new commandant when, on the 21\textsuperscript{st} of May, the \textit{Ann} left King George Sound carrying horses from Timor for Sydney and “twelve sealers and three black women”\textsuperscript{207}.

After his time in King George Sound and arriving in Sydney aboard the \textit{Ann}, Everett returned to the islands of the Southern Ocean. In 1831, G.A. Robinson described James Everett in Bass Strait:

\begin{quote}
James Everett 5ft 9in Fr Complt – light Brown Hair light Hazel eyes age 29 – Sealer 11 years. Place of resort Woody Island one Nt woman who has been taken and placed at the Estbmt. This man’s character is infamous having been guilty of murder in deliberately shooting an Abgnl female on Woody Island at a recent period.\textsuperscript{208}
\end{quote}

Everett allegedly shot the Tyrelore Worethmalyerpoodner through her chest or stomach, for refusing to skin muttonbirds. “One of the females ... was present when the unfortunate woman was shot by Everett ... she positively declared that the man had deliberately murdered the woman close to the house; that he concealed himself and waited, and when the woman

\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{204} Lockyer, H.R.A. III, Vol.1, p. 499.  
\textsuperscript{208} Correspondence And Related Papers, Both Official And Private, 1829-1850 1. Van Diemen's Land, 1829-ca.1865 Records of the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston, (Locn No.: A 7059) Papers Of George Augustus Robinson - Miscellanea - 1829-1833.
\end{small}
came near then deliberately took up his musket and shot her through the body.”209 “Jumbo said all the people saw it, and that some of the men said shoot her. He murdered her because she did not clean the Muttonbirds to please him.”210 After he killed her, Everett was given another woman by one of the sealers.

When Robinson ‘evicted’ the sealers from Swan Island and took their huts for the exiled Pallawah to live in, he encountered some resistance from the sealers. In particular, James Everett wanted his Tyreeore back.

At 10 am a party of armed sealers headed by Munro came to my encampment with four muskets and behaved in a very abusive manner towards me, and set me and my authority at a defiance. The murderer Everett demanded an Aboriginal female named Jock who was with her brother ... The sealers eventually went away and Everett placed himself on a hill with his gun in front of the people, and when I sent a messenger (Geary) to order him away he set me at defiance and said they should do as they liked.211

John Randall and John Kirby do not appear in G.A. Robinson’s 1829-1834 journals. Therefore it is likely that, given Robinson’s meticulous inventories of Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island sealers, the two men who shipped out to Sydney on the Success from King George Sound did not return to Bass Strait or Kangaroo Island.

James Everett remained a Straitsman for the rest of his life. He married a Pallawah woman, having several children with her, and later a Maori woman named Betty, or Elizabeth. Tindale’s genealogy shows an extensive list of descendants from these three people.212 Living descendants now work as activists, writers, seamen, heritage officers and other occupations in Tasmania. One descendant, Jim Everett, lives on Cape Barren Island and is active in Tasmanian Aboriginal politics and philosophy. In 2015, he wrote the following comment in an online article about an Aboriginal response to Australia Day:

It’s quite simple really, my traditional grandmother was Wapperty, daughter of Manalargenna. She had a baby girl named Elizabeth to a Maori, Miti, son of Te Pahe. Elizabeth married sealer James Everett, naming one of their 6 children James. James married Florence, an English woman, a son was named Keith, he was my father. We were always blackfellas to white people when my grand-parents and parents were trying to be accepted as white people. But once we acknowledged our Aboriginal identity white people would not accept it. The Tasmanian Aboriginal community carries a living memory of the killings by colonists, the rapes and plunder, and every other atrocity committed against our people. Whether white-Australians are convinced or not, the fact remains, our community cannot accept any form of celebrating these atrocities, the stealing of our lands, and the destruction to our environment. It leaves white-Australia in a sad light with its endemic racial hatred against almost everything

or people who are not ‘like them’. Not a good look at all, and nothing worth celebrating by civilised people. Lest We Forget!²¹³

The James Everett of the 1820s appears to be the quintessential nineteenth century sealer: anarchic, island dweller, brutal, pragmatic, misogynistic and tough. When he died in 1876, aged 82, Tindale notes that a memorial card was sent from England to his daughter Jane Beeton. It bore a different name.²¹⁴

Pigeon, ‘a Sydney Aborigine’ and Robert Williams, ‘a Black Man’

Pigeon introduced himself to Lockyer and later John Batman as Pigeon and this is the name I shall use here. However Pigeon was also known as ‘Beewhurher’ or Warroba’.²¹⁵ He was an Aboriginal man from the Shoalhaven area in New South Wales. D’Urville and his officers noted Pigeon in King George Sound on the 17th of October 1826, when he and his crew mates pulled alongside the Astrolabe. It was the second day in a row that the sealers had approached the Frenchmen and d’Urville realised that there were more sealers in the Sound than what he had first thought.²¹⁶ “At 3oclock their boats came alongside and they informed me that the second one was manned by five Englishmen and an Australian from Port Jackson, all from the Hunter.”²¹⁷ The Officers Quoy and Gaimard wrote, “These men seemed more contented with their lot. On board there were exchanges of seal and kangaroo skins for brandy and tobacco.”²¹⁸

Pigeon was next mentioned on the 10th of January when he and seven others approached the Amity in their whaleboat, seeking provisions. Lockyer wrote down the sealers’ names and described Pigeon as a “Sydney Black” from the Hunter, and his crew mate Robert Williams as a “Black Man”, also of the Hunter. The next day, while Lockyer interviewed the sealers about the Green Island murder, the marooning and the abductions, Pigeon offered his services as an interpreter and guide to Lockyer. Lockyer employed him on the same day, as Pigeon appeared to be “an intelligent fellow and was willing to be employed.”²¹⁹

Two days later, while Lieutenant Festing sailed to Eclipse Island to rescue the two Aboriginal females and arrest Samuel Bailey, Pigeon employed himself communicating to the families who waited anxiously for the Menang woman. “I frequently heard in their conversation with each other word the word woman distinctly mentioned,” wrote Lockyer, “and thought it right to request Pigeon to tell them that a boat was sent to bring one of the women, and that the other would be sent for, who was far off.”²²⁰ When Festing arrived back in the harbour with his passengers from Eclipse Island, the Menang people shook their heads at the little girl who’d been abducted by Samuel Bailey and seemed to suggest to Lockyer (or at least he perceived their gesture as thus) that the child should go into the care of Pigeon.

²¹⁴ Tindale, Norman B., 1953.
Lockyer did not grant this request, deciding to send the child to Sydney instead. Pigeon stayed in the colony and spent the next few months working for Lockyer, along with the other sealers in exchange for flour and beef rations. For the next few months Pigeon carried out tasks such as tracking Aborigines after their thwarted attack on the sawyers and collecting shell at Limeburners Bay to make mortar. Robert Williams would also have been employed by Lockyer during this time.

Pigeon and Robert Williams both returned to Sydney aboard the Ann with the remaining sealing parties from the Hunter and the Governor Brisbane. By 1831, both men were in Van Diemen’s Land. Here their movements are comprehensively recorded, due to their subsequent engagements with two other pivotal events in Australia’s colonial frontier.

At this point I shall take a ‘leap’ regarding the identity of Robert Williams and argue that, because of his association with Pigeon in King George Sound, that Robert Williams “a Black Man” is the same man as William/Williams/Budgerorry or Willimanan who was recorded by G.A. Robinson and John Batman as being a native of the Koonametta tribe, possibly from Eden in New South Wales. Willimanan, who worked for both Batman and Robinson in Van Diemen’s Land told Robinson that he had spent “five years sealing on islands in Bass Strait, ‘during which time I did not get any money, but was supplied occasionally with Spirits in lieu thereof ... the greater part of the time we lived on Kangaroo ... we were quite destitute of clothing.’”

As a child Williams/Budgerorry worked as a farm hand and then went whaling. Eden being the home of the Twofold Bay whaling operations, Williams would have been involved with, or at least witnessed European bay whaling since he was very young. Plomley writes that Williams later joined a sealing vessel bound for Kangaroo Island where he remained for five years. At Kangaroo Island, Williams would have known Sally, James Everett, John Randall and Harry who travelled to King George Sound aboard the Hunter.

Pigeon and Williams next worked together during Van Diemen’s Land’s Black War. Plomley writes that the earliest reference to Australian Aborigines being employed in the roving parties of the Black War was in September 1829 when the Hobart Town Courier reported that “two Sydney natives Pigeon and (?) Crook were in a party led by John Batman which captured eleven natives.” In early 1832 Williams travelled by schooner from Kangaroo Island to Launceston to join John Batman’s ‘Sydney natives’; a group of ten Aboriginal men who were imported from tribes and allegiances other than Pallawah to assist Batman on his government-sanctioned roving parties. The nature of Pigeon and Williams’ employment was to be the trackers; “tracing guides” and body guards in Governor Arthur’s campaign to rid the island of ‘the native problem’.

Nicholas Clements writes “Pursuit parties and roving parties were the government’s primary martial response to the native problem.” Roving parties were “full time patrols in search of the blacks. They were of two types ... Military parties comprised of soldiers and convict field
police, while the civilian parties were composed almost entirely of assigned convicts ... and their leaders were ‘trustworthy individuals’ such as Jorgen Jorgenson, Gilbert Robertson and John Batman who offered their services in exchange for grants of land.”

John Pigeon/Beewurher, or Werroba as Batman wrote his name, was instrumental in helping Batman ‘capture’ Aborigines in Van Diemen’s Land between 1828 and 1835. The word ‘capture’ does not fully define Batman’s job however. Capturing Pallawah resistance fighters also included several massacres and indiscriminate shootings during night time raids on sleeping families; acts that met with the Governor’s unspoken approval. “Neither Danvers nor Batman expressed the slightest concern that they might attract censure for firing upon masses of sleeping men, women and children. And neither did. The roving parties were the colony’s primary defence against the blacks, and Arthur was unwilling to compromise their authority.”

In April 1831, after several of the convicts Batman had hired for the roving parties were granted tickets of leave, Batman sent Pigeon and another Sydney Aborigine to Sydney to recruit more Aboriginal men. It may have been then that Pigeon recruited his old crew mate Robert Williams. In 1832, Pigeon was shot out of a tree by a shepherd while hunting for possum. He was not fatally injured and recuperated at Batman’s Ben Lomond home. Apparently by this stage Williams was working with Cottrell and G.A. Robinson on their own roving parties in the north west of the state.

Most of the Sydney Aborigines had their employment in Van Diemen’s Land terminated by mid-1833. Williams was “apparently sent to Sydney about January 1833 with a reward of £7. For six others their sojourn in Van Diemen’s Land ended about the middle of March 1833, when they were sent back to Sydney in the Ellen (Captain Dixon), with a reward of £10 each for their services.”

In 1830 the Colonial Secretary’s office reported that John Batman had also recommended that John Pigeon be given a grant of one thousand acres of land for his services, however it is unclear whether the land was in Van Diemen’s Land or elsewhere.

When Batman went to Port Phillip in 1835, he took several Aboriginal men with him. The shipping register for Launceston gives the names of these men and John Pigeon is one of them. “When Batman left on the Rebecca from Launceston to ‘found’ Port Phillip on 9 May 1835, he went with seven NSW natives: PIGEON, JOE THE MARINE, BILL BULLETS,
JOE BANGETT (BUNGETT), JOHN STEWART, OLD BULL, MACHER and three white servants."

Pigeon was present during meetings between Batman and the Kulin people at Merri creek in what is now an inner city suburb of Melbourne. With his help “Batman came to practical terms with a section of one of the two Aboriginal tribes who respectively occupied the western shores of the bay and the Yarra valley, to their joint boundary along the Saltwater River.” Along with Batman’s other Aboriginal employees, Pigeon also worked as a guide and tracker in what is now called Victoria. Between 1835 and his death in 1839, Batman became debilitated from the effects of syphilis, and estranged from his wife and family. According to his biography, Batman was cared for until his death by the Aboriginal men who had worked for him in Van Diemen’s Land.

Pigeon’s involvement with John Batman’s roving parties and the founding of Melbourne has been the subject of several novels and paintings. In *The Roving Party* by Rohan Wilson, Pigeon is depicted as one of the slightly sinister ‘Dharug’ thugs that Batman imported from New Holland. The painting *Batman’s treaty with the aborigines at Merri Creek, 6th June 1835* by John Wesley Burt, shows Batman liaising with Aboriginal men who are dressed in skins and hold traditional weapons. In the background are other Aboriginal men dressed in European seamen’s clothes; white shirts and trousers rolled up to the knees. These men are mostly clean shaven. One man is holding an animated conversation with a traditional owner. Another is unpacking a box of items to be used as trade as part of Batman’s proposed deal.

Pigeon deliberately placed himself at what would be three significant sites of colonial conquest in the 1820s and 1830s. He persuaded Lockyer of his usefulness within hours of meeting him and was present in King George Sound on Proclamation Day in January 1827. He worked as a tracker, guide and mercenary for Batman’s roving parties and Black Line activities and recruited other Aboriginal men from New South Wales to assist. After this campaign was finished, he was involved in the negotiations for a treaty and later the ‘founding’ of Melbourne. His acts reveal him to be a strategist; a man who aligned himself with the most powerful players in whomever history he found himself a part of.

**Richard Simons/Simmons**

Richard Simons was an African-American born in America or Canada around 1793. In London, 1817, he was sentenced to seven years transportation and arrived in Sydney as a convict. In April 1819, he was charged with bushranging and given fifty lashes. In August

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Macher was apparently Pigeon’s brother: see Plomley, Ed. 2006, p. 506.


238 *Batman’s treaty with the aborigines at Merri Creek, 6th June 1835*, John Wesley Burt (1839-1917), La Trobe Picture Collection State Library of Victoria, b28769.

239 Thanks to Ross Anderson, Archaeologist at the West Australian Museum for sharing his ideas and knowledge of Pigeon with me.
1819, he was charged with assaulting a police constable and given another fifty, and then transported to Newcastle for three years.²⁴⁰

At some stage Simons was taken aboard the Hunter, possibly at Sydney from where the Hunter’s owner Robinson had departed in early 1826. He worked with the sealers for several months between the Recherché Archipelago and King George Sound. Simons was later taken aboard the Astrolabe by d’Urville, along with Breaksea Islanders Cloney, Brook and Hamilton, and sailed to Sydney with them.

“At 3 oclock their boats came alongside and they informed me that the second one was manned by five Englishmen and an Australian from Port Jackson, all from the schooner Hunter. I allowed three men from the first boat to remain on board, to wit; Hambilton, Brook and Cloney; and from the other boat I only took a coloured American named Richard Simons. This man claims to be originally from Canada and speaks quite good French.”²⁴¹

Richard Simons travelled aboard the Astrolabe to Port Jackson, stopping in at Western Port on the way. On the 4th of November the crew celebrated a feast for the patron saint of King Charles X and d’Urville noted that Simons and another Breaksea Islander “took very active part in the festivities” and were appreciative of the coffee at breakfast and double rations of wine at dinner.²⁴² I cannot find information on whether Simons’ disembarked at Port Jackson.

These histories of the sealer men present in King George Sound in 1826 are sometimes little better than biographical guesses peppered with convict records, aliases and the journals and papers of d’Urville, Lockyer and G.A. Robinson. However collating as many details as possible and making comparisons with similar, known historical figures, has allowed me to estimate their calibre and their culture, and to understand how they survived in such harsh circumstances. An adjunct to the men’s biographies is section 2.4 where I discuss some further ideas about the kind of men who were in King George Sound in 1826.

2.4 Rough Lives in Small Boats: some thoughts on the natures and historical representations of the 1826 Breaksea Islanders

While writing this thesis, I worked as a deckhand with men who netted the estuaries and inshore waters for fish and crabs. The irony that I was writing about men who also worked these shores in small boats, albeit more than a century dead, did not escape me. One of the fishermen I worked for was proud to relate that he was a fourth generation fisherman and that one of his ancestors, a sealer, was accidentally shot through the neck and killed while working beaches east of Albany. The fisherman had a keen sense of ancestry and natural history and working for him was an ‘embedded’ process of research for me while I spent long hours on the coast learning how to handle boats, nets, stingrays, small sharks, and some interesting weather.

Contemporary commercial fishers can be clannish, with slightly anarchic tendencies towards the government arms of law and order, only complying for utilitarian reasons. They are comfortable living in bush camps and shacks for weeks or months at a time. They understand the cycles of nature – the winds, swell, the natural predators and the seasons – intimately through their work. Their income derives from a maritime-based primary industry plied from small boats. In these ways contemporary commercial fishermen are similar to yesteryear sealers.

In other ways, these modern day commercial fishers are certainly no duplication in sentiment or actions of the 19th century sealers: they are usually happily married, own land and pay large annual fees to maintain their fishing licences. They do not kidnap women and imprison them on islands or shoot Aboriginal men and each other (though there are a few historic yarns of weapons being brandished over access to fishing spots).

However I do wonder what kind of men the fishermen would have been if they were placed in the same situation as the Hunter and Governor Brisbane crews in 1826: abandoned thousands of nautical miles from the nearest point of white population and legal censure for months or years on end. Phrases like ‘the thin veneer of civilisation’ and ‘men of their time and circumstance’ go through my mind. These phrases are also common responses given to my wonderings out loud. There is really no way to answer this question, other than to judge each individual by evidence of their actions, either today or 160 years ago.

The ‘men of their time’ argument can be a simplistic way out of explaining a history of ill deeds, and of opportunities taken by powerful people to exploit those less powerful. But then communities do respond to learned morals, new legislation and social mores. Societies and laws change to censure behaviour that may once have been deemed inoffensive. Some examples could be giving a child a ‘belting’, driving under the influence of alcohol, refusing to employ a married woman or forcing her into unpaid servitude, or leaving a child in the car outside a pub. The actions of twentieth century men compared to the nineteenth century sealers is complicated by cultural and societal mores of the era. I have yet to find more than one example of the attempted (and ultimately unsuccessful) prosecution of a sealer for
kidnapping and enslaving a Pallawah woman, reflecting the unwillingness of the Van Diemen’s Land colony to legally censure such actions.\textsuperscript{243}

Arthur Veno, in his book on Australian outlaw motorcycle clubs \textit{The Brotherhoods}, explains how young men with a background of familial violence and a self-perceived or overt exile from ‘normal society’ can form groups that are insular, violent and reliant upon an internalised structure of regulation and law. In many ways the sealers of 1826 remind me of modern day bikies and the reception with which their self-government is still met by the legislators and media.

These clubs are characterised as having a constitution, a rigid organisational structure, and heavy levels of commitment to ensure their survival. They exist in their own world, cut off from mainstream society through a rigid system of rules and an inherent belief system.\textsuperscript{244}

I grew up in a town when many men were forced out of occupations by the closure of the whaling industry, the imposition of tuna quotas and environmental disasters such as mass deaths of pilchards in the Southern Ocean. Some of the more disaffected joined up with Vietnam veterans to create a local bikie gang who were overtly misogynistic and racist. People spoke in whispers about the drugs, gang rapes of women, and fights or attacks between the gang and local Noongar people. In observing interactions between contemporary groups of men such as bikies or commercial fishers and the law, I noticed that power relationships were often the same as the ones describing the sealers in the 1820s journals. It seemed to be a point of masculine pride: both parties distinguished themselves by their positions that they never ‘cross over’ to the other side. Commercial fishers historically do not defer to fisheries officers unless forced to by law and bikies historically will not defer to the police or the media.

The language used by journalists and police regarding outlaw motorcycle clubs is remarkably similar to the language used in documentation by men like Lockyer or d’Urville. The word ‘gang’ is used as a collective in both instances, described in the \textit{Australian Modern Oxford Dictionary} as: “1. A band of people going about or working together, esp. for some antisocial or criminal purpose.”\textsuperscript{245} Veno writes that the term ‘bikie gangs’ is a huge issue with motorcycle clubs, in quoting a Hell’s Angel: “It’s a law enforcement term. It’s used to try to make us worse than what we are. Once a club becomes a gang, then the police can get all the support from the citizens they need.”\textsuperscript{246}

Some of the historical characters appearing in d’Urville’s, Robinson’s and Lockyer’s papers do appear to be people who were compelled by justice and the wellbeing of others. Certainly the men who wrote the journals represented themselves as virtuous and astute, (which is not to say that these representations are mistruths) intent on preserving their legacy upon the page. In a land without access to European law I believe that both Lockyer and d’Urville knew the imperative of quickly assessing the characters of the sealers who rowed to their

\textsuperscript{243} John Baker was arrested for the kidnap of Trugernina’s sister Makerleedie in 1826. Plomley, Ed., 2006, p. 1051.


\textsuperscript{246} Veno, A., 2009, p. 56.
ships and asked for assistance, and that they were neither naive nor generous in their first impressions.

There is also the language and actions of the potential coloniser. Within days of the Amity weighing anchor in King George Sound, Lockyer knew that he must assuage the turbulence created within the Menang population by the sealers. He managed the situation by staging the rescue of the four men from Michaelmas Island, the rescue of Samuel Bailey’s captives and the arrest and handcuffing of Samuel Bailey in front of the Menang population, consulting with them throughout the process. Major Lockyer was probably motivated not by humanitarian concerns but utilitarian – his was a career colonisers’ post and he understood that for the settlement to succeed among a people who, though so far extraordinarily generous in their hospitality, heavily outnumbered the occupants of the Amity. He had to establish a relationship of trust and to physically and morally distinguish his own European charges from the Breaksea Islanders.

Still Lockyer and d’Urville granted men such as Hamilton (d’Urville) and William Hook (Lockyer and d’Urville) some humanity in their journals. D’Urville also expressed a grudging admiration for the abandoned Breaksea Island community who survived for so long in isolation with only whaleboats, guns and the women to aid them. Generally though, their depictions of the sealers and the women were disparaging, distrustful, full of loathing or exasperation at the mob of ‘sea wolves and pirates’ cruising the Southern and Indian Ocean islands. Then of course, was the evidence: the dead man on Green Island and the state of the woman rescued from Eclipse Island.

The sealers who lived in King George Sound did not record their own thoughts for posterity but their attitude towards authority comes through in the journals and despatches. D’Urville notes their recalcitrance and their aloof manner when he asked if any of the men wanted a working berth to Port Jackson. Despite them having been marooned, he was amazed that they rebuffed his offer and, no doubt chagrined by their cool manner, he withdrew the offer. Whether this snub was a result of the sealers and the Frenchmen distrusting one another as left over sentiments from the Napoleonic war, a breakdown in communication or simply that the sealers preferred to stay in West Australia to await the arrival of an Englishman, is uncertain.

The biographies of the Breaksea Island men can explain, though never mitigate, their attitudes towards Aboriginal women. As Rebe Taylor observed of the Kangaroo Islanders, “These men would not look upon themselves as cruel or manipulative exploiters: their captains and merchants filled that role. These men had been toilers and survivors, the poor bastards who had felt the cat on their backs and had been buggered as boys, who received a measly portion of an unguaranteed profit, who had to hustle for a swig of a bottle, a better knife, a warmer jacket. This was the life they had left for the freedom of Kangaroo Island.”

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Conclusion to ‘Bound for King George Sound: Men and Women from the *Governor Brisbane* and the *Hunter.*’

In researching the personal histories of select men, women and children who lived on Breaksea Island in 1826, I think that most of the crews248 of the *Governor Brisbane* and the *Hunter* were connected well before they reached Breaksea Island, and that Kangaroo Island and the islands of Bass Strait were centres to recruit sealers and Aboriginal women to go west.

Another conclusion I have reached is that all of the Breaksea Islanders shared a history of dispossession and exile from the communities they were born within, whether they were Aboriginal, European, Canadian, African American or Maori. Some of them chose to head to New Holland. Some did not have that choice but did so anyway. The choice in venturing to a part of the continent unpeopled by Europeans seems to have been cleanly divided by their gender, race and circumstances. Looking at their personal histories can explain their desire for autonomy, for agency and to explain why the islands of the Southern Ocean were so alluring.

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248 Here I include all people aboard the *Governor Brisbane* and *Hunter* as ‘crew’.
Chapter 3

Methodology
Bluebeard, Billhooks and Sealers: creating fiction from history

“There is only one recipe – to care a great deal for the cookery.” Henry James.

In this chapter I discuss methods of transforming an historical event into fiction and in particular the historical events that informed the novel Exiles. There are two central, connected focuses for the thesis Exiles and Island Wives: history, fiction and the Breaksea Islanders: to investigate the characters of the men, women and children who made up the Breaksea Island community of 1826, and to understand the levels of agency, or personal autonomy demonstrated by these characters, particularly the Aboriginal women and children who were stolen by the sealers.

Although extrapolations of character and agency are possible within the confines of nonfiction, fiction is a malleable form of literature to explore the character and motivations of historical subjects. This is especially the case when the subjects have long since died and, in this particular history, did not leave written records of their thoughts and world views. Iain Stuart writes of trying to construct an historical image of the Bass Strait sealers:

Sealers themselves do not figure prominently … except as signatories to agreements on how they were to be paid and as litigious and angry men who were abandoned on some desolate island by their employers … Sealing is seen at a distance. Those who speak are the Government Officials, Merchants and ships’ Captains rather than the sealers. There is no sense of what the sealers were like.249

In a discipline such as Australian History, records kept in the English language are crucial to the research. The primary sources recording the story of the Breaksea Islanders were largely written by a small group of white men in positions of colonial power and these men are not the main protagonists in my fiction.

Importantly, fictional narratives are no heroic, complete-within-themselves reinterpretations of historical events but merely an interpretation, a departure point for further exploration: just as the telling of historical events are strengthened by narrative, indeed hardened into narratives and some would say fiction, by their repetitive rendition. However, Kim Scott writes that “… it [historical fiction] is a form that is conducive to generating empathy and creating space for further negotiation and dialogue, and can thus play a part in a collaborative reclaiming or re-interpreting of aspects of the past.”250

To tease out the intricacies when creating the fictional lives and motivations of the Breaksea Islanders in the novel Exiles, I present this chapter in sections: In William Hook: boats,

islands and heterotopias, I discuss the rationale for creating William Hook as the informed narrator in the fictional work Exiles and how Foucault’s work ‘Of Other Spaces’ helped define William Hook’s social, ethical and spacial environment as a fictional character. Bestowed, borrowed or brokered is about naming of characters and places in historical fiction, and how names change according to who bestows and records the names for historical or fiction posterity. Women with guns discusses how the fiction Exiles explores the different levels of agency that the sealer women and children possessed and were able to exert. The last section of the methodology is Predator Dreams, a personal essay explaining aspects of the challenges I faced whilst rendering the Breaksea Islanders’ story into fiction.
3.1 William Hook: boats, islands and heterotopias

A decade ago, my friend Bob Howard told me about the Breaksea Islanders of 1827. He described them as a bunch of vagabond sealers, Aboriginal women and children, living on the island and causing trouble at the same time as the Amity arrived in King George Sound. “They were like pirates,” he said. “And one of them was even called Hook!” In my mind, I immediately conflated this William Hook into a combination of Queequeg, Ishmael’s Maori bed mate in Moby Dick, and the dastardly Captain Hook from Peter Pan. As I settled down to search for William Hook in the history books, my central preoccupation with him became the circumstances of his formal statement to Lockyer: Why did he inform on his crewmates regarding the murder on Green Island and abduction of four Menang women? These were the very people whom William Hook depended on to survive when they were abandoned by their sealing company bosses; a tight community of men, women and children who banded together in a strange country. Was he coerced into providing the statement; was he trying to manipulate his way home from the fledgling colony and the chaotic group of sealers; or did William Hook possess some kind of moral compass when it came to the kidnap of the women and child, and subsequently appealed to the British rule of law for help? These are all questions that the limited available historical evidence raises but cannot answer. Fiction allows the writer to conjecture, to reveal core human truths within facts. The historical questions raised can form metaphorical bricks with which the writer can ‘build’ a character.

Historical fiction requires a narrator able to provide the reader with relevant information in a timely order and give context to historical events happening simultaneously in different geographic locations. By the 1820’s Maori were familiar with European invasion and trade, and were themselves invaders and colonisers of other tribal lands in New Zealand and the Chatham Islands. Although d’Urville wrote that William Hook was a native of Kerikeri on the north island of New Zealand, I have changed his country of origin in Exiles to Aromoana, adjacent to what is now called Dunedin on the south island. My reasoning was thus: I wanted to create a narrator whose formative experience as a child was his village being attacked by outsiders in a first-contact scenario.

Further, a character’s formative experiences can help ‘backlight’ a history to contextualise contemporary events occurring in the novel. For example, in 1826 King George Sound, William Hook was the ‘other’, the outsider whose mission required him to cross oceans and cultures, as were the other Breaksea Islanders. In Exiles, the south coast is also where he evolves into a narrator personally compromised by perpetrating violent acts reminiscent of the attack on his home village of Aromoana: a visiting, seafaring crew subduing an indigenous population by force and with the advantage of firepower.

251 An example of Bob Howard’s work on Noongar language and history is his essay Noongar Resistance on the South Coast:


253 For more information on the 1817 attack at Murdering Bay, Dunedin see:
William Hook’s increasing sense of self-compromise in Exiles creates a narrator who is constantly trying to redeem himself from the day he assists Samuel Bailey in abducting the child at Doubtful Island Bay. His need for redemption drives the fictional narrative of Exiles, which is largely derived from a one-page statement of events in the Historical Records of Australia. However his need for redemption also casts him as unreliable, in that the reader is aware of William Hook’s failings long before he recognises them himself. Examples of Hook’s unreliability in Exiles are illustrated by his unrealistic moral expectations of his sealer cohort, while the reader is already aware of their intentions, and his internal conflict between his lust and ethical behaviour. He is shamed to be associated with the men who kidnapped the Menang women, but at Moennan’s glance, he still wants the woman. He knows that Everett and Bailey will eventually find Tama Hine, Moennan and himself at Waychinicup and yet he indulges in the idea that he is taking them there to create a utopia for the three of them.

Good fiction can encourage the reader’s empathy for historical figures and in this context the fiction writer is privileged with choosing a main narrator’s point of view. For William Hook’s character in Exiles, I worked with what James Wood calls a “free indirect style” in the third person, where “… the narrative seems to float away from the novelist and take on the properties of the character, who now seems to ‘own’ the words.” This style frees up William Hook’s reactions to other characters and scenarios, simultaneously creating, exposing and alerting the reader to his viewpoint. In scenes where the narrator is alone and the plot may slow pace, it also allows the reader access to his internal monologues, imparting backstory to the narrative.

William Hook’s character narrates in the first person in the first and final two chapters of Exiles. At the time of writing, I wasn’t sure why this was happening. Creative writing can be a mysterious kind of witchery. A writer cannot always engineer the process by conscious thought and style manuals alone, and often the meaning of the writing becomes apparent long after completion. “I didn’t fully understand what I was doing at the time, but a lot of fiction [writing] is like that. One uses it to think things through,” writes Kim Scott on his process of writing his first novel True Country. Later, I realised that the first and last few chapters outline the process by which the character William Hook achieves self-determination. He has made a complete and permanent break with the Breaksea Islander community. His return to Sydney on the Amity, written in the first person, is the period in which he plans a future for himself and seeks to teach the child Tama Hine to become an autonomous female. After several years of working for men who wield power over him by way of obligation, violence or survival, Hook dismantles the Breaksea Islander community by way of a statement to Major Edmund Lockyer, and determines his own path.

The phrase ‘dismantles the Breaksea Islander community’ leads to my next point about Foucault’s heterotopias, particularly in respect to communities living on boats or islands, and how the idea of heterotopias is relevant to the character William Hook and to the work Exiles.

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255 For an example of Hook coming late to his failings, please see Exiles, p. 228 for his internal conversation with his mother during which she castigates his actions. See also, Wood, James, 2000, p. 6 on the unreliable narrator.
256 See Exiles, p. 200
257 See Exiles, p. 217 See also following discussion on Foucault’s definition of a utopia.
259 Wood, J. 2000, p. 9
260 Scott, K. 2010, p. 46.
In 2009, when I first began investigating what had happened in King George Sound in 1826-7, I camped for five days on Breaksea Island. I experienced the phenomenon of thousands of returning muttonbirds darkening the sky at dusk and spent long nights listening to crying penguins, the suck of the sea and a peculiar whistling tune in a bar of five notes. I slept during the afternoon and spent nights in a state of lucid awareness. Timekeeping proved unnecessary; the sun, the moon and the tides had their rhythm. I spent hours watching the light change on the water.  

It felt like a period of inactivity but despite my short stay I learned something of the nature of living on an island. It was a furtive existence. I could not light a cooking fire as I had no permission from the relevant government department to camp overnight there, and someone may have seen smoke rising from the island and reported me. Occasionally a boat, usually with two men aboard, would moor near the island to fish. Then I would hide. I hid for a few reasons. I didn’t want anyone ringing Sea Rescue mainly. But there lurked a deeper reason, a will for survival and protection. I felt safe if the anglers stayed in their boat but if two men landed on the island, I knew I would have to navigate a new protocol that didn’t exist anywhere else. Islands are a liminal space: a space not subject to the social contract between seafarers, nor the social contract wrought between land farers over millennia. In short, on an island deserted but for rabbits, penguins and muttonbirds, neither the law of the sea nor the law of the land appeared to exist there. So I would remove my bright red jacket and squat in my black clothes behind a rock, until the anglers gave up their fishing and motored away.

This experience helped me understand a little of how vulnerable nineteenth century Aboriginal sealing women were with no rule of law to protect them, and I address that subject later in the chapter. It also showed me the nature of liminal spaces in western society and how we negotiate them. Michele Foucault’s ‘Of Other Spaces’ describes these spaces and I shall explain how his work resonates with the fiction Exiles in contemplating the condensed societies that exist on boats and islands.

In discussing how the delineation and formalisation of spaces preoccupied nineteenth century colonial expansion, Foucault stresses that alternative spaces functioned and continue to function as counter-sites, “in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or even invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect,” and that inhabitants, intimates and inmates of such a counter-sites possess a commonality, a passport if you like, to enter and remain there. He divided them into two categories: utopias, “fundamentally unreal spaces” and heterotopias, where a space is connected with society and yet, in its most basic function, serves to disconnect from society and becomes a space within itself. In ‘Of Other Spaces’, Foucault names such places as prisons, asylums, hospitals and cemeteries as heterotopias. “Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public space. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else

261 Drummond, Sarah, Exiles and Island Wives: imagining history’s silent voices, 2009, Murdoch University, p. 57.
262 For my explanation of contemporary and historical anxieties regarding the sovereignty of West Australian islands, see Drummond, S., Exiles and Island Wives: http://thawinedarksea.blogspot.com.au/2012/06/exiles-and-island-wives.html
264 Foucault, M., 1986. p.2
the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in, one must have certain permissions and make certain gestures.”

In the final paragraph of ‘Of Other Spaces’, Foucault writes that the boat is the heterotopia par excellence:

Brothels and colonies are two extreme forms of heterotopia, and if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilisation, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development (I have not been speaking of that today), but has also been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.

Here he suggests that the heterotopia of the boat is connected with the history of western colonisation, the journeying of condensed societies from one place to another. In Exiles I have explored ideas about heterotopias to focus on how a seemingly disparate group of people achieve a kind of collective mindset to ‘colonise’ an island or a boat and to move their imperfect society from one island to another. Boats and islands signified to them such paradoxes as freedom and slavery, escape and obligation, and the same Kauri planks or stony shore bound each individual. In particular, the boat motif in Exiles is a primary agent of both escape and bondage. In 1826 the French captain d’Urville marvelled at the abandoned Breaksea Island community and their reliance on boats:

“I never tired of wondering at this strange gathering of wretched mortals of such different origins and education that capricious chance had nonetheless gathered together, in order to subject them to such a miserable and precarious existence. Their boats represented their entire fortune and their whole existence relied upon them.”

Many writers have suggested that sea-going people adhere to social contracts alternative to, and not negotiable with, mainstream society. Patsy Adam Smith, who worked on service and fishing vessels in Bass Strait suggested that sea-going people possessed a certain psychic solidarity:

The constant danger, the hardship, the heartbreak you knew instinctively not to mention; the storms that threaten your very life, which seamen through their very silence had taught you to ignore; the squalls that soaked you through and made your clothes stick to your skin; the people whose unspoken word was that of their forefathers, to rise up after death as a white man in the

267 D’Urville, in Rosenman, 1987, p. 34.
islands of Bass Strait; the hard menial work that healed your mind or your heart or whatever it is that gets hurt – there was no way to explain all this.\textsuperscript{268}

Likewise Stephen Crane’s short story ‘The Open Boat’ is a fictional rendering of his own ordeal at sea after a shipwreck and shows the unspoken solidarity between people aboard the heterotopia of the boat:

Thereafter he knows the pathos of his situation. The men in the dinghy had not discussed these matters but each, no doubt, reflected upon them in silence and according to his mind. There was seldom any expression upon their faces save the general one of complete weariness. Speech was devoted to the business of the boat.\textsuperscript{269}

The Breaksea Islanders would have endured extreme hardship after being abandoned by their ships’ masters for eighteen months. They moved constantly from boat to boat (for example their visits to the \textit{Astrolabe} and the \textit{Amity} to trade rations and supplies) and used boats to access and move between islands. Boats were, as I have quoted d’Urville above, their primary means of survival and trade. I argue that Foucault’s heterotopia of the boat is a good explanation for the Breaksea Islanders’ primary cohesive factor.

Theoretically given these circumstances, the incoming colonial administrator Major Edmund Lockyer should have had little success in prising apart this miniature colony that had formed in such adversity, and yet he extracted a signed statement within twenty four hours of meeting William Hook. Hook may have been coerced or enticed into signing the catalyst statement with an ‘X’. Perhaps Lockyer singled him out as the youngest or the most naïve of the men (in regards to age or gender there is no record of Lockyer interviewing the women or children) or perhaps William Hook was manipulating the situation to his own best ends – or to those of the two Aboriginal girls whom Samuel Bailey kept on Eclipse Island.

In \textit{Exiles}, John Smidmore wades ashore from the \textit{Amity} to accost William Hook before dawn and threatens to kill him. Smidmore has no quarrel with Hook taking Moennan and Tama Hine away to Waychinicup. Even Hook’s theft of the boat is of little consequence to Smidmore. His problem is that William Hook has violated a code, an unspoken law: Hook has engaged with a system of law other than that of the Breaksea Islanders.\textsuperscript{270}

When juxtaposed with twenty-first century codes within similar heterotopias of deviance or difference such as those spaces inhabited by bikie gangs or prisoners, William Hook’s written statement to Lockyer could be construed a subversive, final act that exiled him from those he’d previously depended upon for survival and protection. By signing ‘X’ at the end of his statement, William Hook effectively dismantled the Breaksea Islander heterotopia.

My reading ‘Of Other Spaces’ located the tap root of my queries about William Hook’s motivation when he informed on his crew mates to Major Edmund Lockyer. Foucault’s piece has informed my fiction in other facets of \textit{Exiles}. ‘Of Other Spaces’ never resolved my queries about William Hook but provided me a framework upon which I could invoke and

\textsuperscript{268} Adam Smith, \textit{Patsy}, The Moonbird People, Rigby, Australia, 1975, p. 178.


\textsuperscript{270} \textit{Exiles}, p. 241.
‘build’ his character in *Exiles*: a man conflicted by his past, his present actions and his allegiances to the people he was controlled by, was obliged to or cared deeply for.
3.2 Bestowed, borrowed or brokered: the naming of people and place in *Exiles*.

“The names Europeans gave to Aboriginal people functioned to label one aspect of an Aboriginal person’s identity, a colonised identity, based on a European way of knowing Aboriginal people.”

William Hook was not named so at his birth, just as Fanny Bailey was not named so by her birth mother. In the late 1820’s, West Australia’s administrative centre was not called Perth. 1820’s King George Sound was not named Albany. As this section’s title implies, the recorded and unrecorded names of people and places is mercurial and subject to change, negotiation or imposition by several interested parties. Explorers, expedition leaders, Menang and the sealers informed or influenced the recording of names in King George Sound. Within the context of my thesis, Matthew Flinders, Major Edmund Lockyer, George Augustus Robinson, Jules Dumont d’Urville recorded and renamed peoples and places for posterity and as acts of colonial power. In this section I outline the names accorded to the historical figures William Hook, the child and others. I have reinterpreted these names for the purposes of writing historical fiction and in this section I explain my methodology. Finally I outline the naming of places in south coast histories and in the novel *Exiles*.

In October 1826 William Hook told d’Urville he was from Kerikeri on the North Island of New Zealand. D’Urville did not record his name but he described him as a ‘young man’, which would make him between seventeen and twenty five years of age in 1827. Therefore Hook was born before Samuel Marsden’s mission settlement at Kerikeri in 1817. This is the reasoning I employ to argue that William Hook was given a traditional Maori name at birth. It is possible that missionaries baptised the young Maori after 1817 and anglicised his name.

An approximate Maori transliteration of the English name ‘William’ is ‘Wiremu’ and in *Exiles* the main narrator is Wiremu Heke. His name changes throughout the novel according to whom he introduces himself or who is introducing him. He tends to introduce himself to indigenous people with his indigenous name and to European people with his anglicised name. He first assumes the name Billhook when he meets Samuel Bailey in a Hobart tavern. Bailey is unable or too drunk to pronounce Wiremu Heke and settles for Billhook, introducing him to the captain of the *Governor Brisbane* as Billhook.

*The Hobart Town Gazette* mentions a boy or young man named Billhook, in its claimants’ section, working aboard a sealer off the coast of Van Diemen’s Land in 1824, along with Maori boy called Tiger. The billhook is a sharpened blade generally used for agricultural work not sealing, but as it had historically been used as a nickname for a young sealer, I used it again in my fiction. In *Exiles*, when the young man now known as Billhook is introduced to Major Edmund Lockyer in January 1827, Corporal Shore translates ‘Billhook’ from ‘Bill

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271 Walsh, A., *The European Naming of Aboriginal People in Western Australia: Names, language and colonial ideology*, Curtin University, 2005, p. 4.
273 This transliteration can be reversed from William to Wiremu. Pers. comm. Tuaari Kuiti, Albany, 17/02/2015.
Hook’ to ‘William Hook’. Major Edmund Lockyer writes it down and Wiremu Heke enters the historical record as William Hook.

The female Aboriginal child, apparently taken from the coast between Doubtful Island Bay and Israelite Bay by one of the sealers from the Governor Brisbane, was also officially renamed by Major Edmund Lockyer as Fanny. His own daughter Fanny Oceana Lockyer would have been nine years old in January 1827. I have not been able to find evidence of the child’s birth name. When Fanny arrived at the Blacktown Native Institution, she was presented to the Institution’s board by the Amity’s master Thomas Hansen as ‘Fanny Bailey’. That she was named after Samuel Bailey, who had kept her on Eclipse Island and possibly sexually assaulted her, appears to be a utilitarian act by either Lockyer or Hansen, feeling they needed a surname to enrol her at the Institute.

However as Professor Aileen Walsh said to me, colonial administrators renaming Aboriginal people was often a deliberate act of imposing “relations of power via language” and was also connected with redefining “human identity” on the colonial frontier. In the child’s case, being renamed ‘Bailey’ legitimised her tormentor Samuel Bailey’s relations to her as either father or husband. She was henceforth folded neatly into a patriarchal Christian naming system by either Lockyer or Hansen. She is recorded in the archives nearly two centuries later as Fanny Bailey.

The imposed naming of the Aboriginal child ‘from east of here’ preoccupied much of my thinking about naming my characters while writing drafts of the novel Exiles. Throughout my Honours dissertation on the same subject and a year into the PhD, I could not locate the child in the archives after she left King George Sound aboard the Amity. She seemed to disappear between the lines of colonial reports and newspaper articles and I found it difficult to resolve her disappearance in the novel. In 2011 it was by accident, whilst researching 1880s incarcerations of Noongar people on south coast islands for another paper, that I found a reference to Fanny’s admission to the Blacktown Native Institution in New South Wales. I also discovered her new surname:

Fanny Bailey. She’d been named after her abductor. I have yet to find out whether or not the authorities, the Reverend Cartwright, or Fanny herself kept that name. But as she was presented to the Native Institution as Fanny Bailey, then I am guessing this name was kept, at least formally. She would never wash that man off her. Her naming made me think again about her naming in my fiction. Samuel Bailey calls her Weed. She thrived in marginal soil; tenacious, a survivor … But it is also a derogatory name and Bailey names her so because when he grabbed her off the beach, she weed all down his leg.

But now, my naming the little girl Weed in the fiction feels as presumptuous as Lockyer naming her Fanny (possibly after his daughter), and Hansen presenting her to the Native Institution as Fanny Bailey. What right do have any of us to name her?

277 Professor Aileen Walsh, pers. commun., 12/03/2015.
278 Professor Aileen Walsh, ibid.
What happens when we do not? 279

Here Aileen Walsh writes on when words or labels become names:

The words become names that have a particular meaning for the namer, of which the person with the word/name would not have known. Often they are names of association, between the person named and a coffee pot for example, or a monkey, or a hay-bag. This name equates them with the social value of a thing, like a coffee pot or a shirt, or an animal like a monkey or a spider instead of a person. What happens to these people when they inevitably learn the meaning implicit in the name, how do they feel knowing they have voluntarily responded to a sound without knowing what it means? What happens to a person when they find out how meaningless or derogatory their name is, the name they have been identified by, and the name they have identified with? 280

In Exiles, the child has a series of names from ‘the kid’, to Weed, Tama Hine, Fanny Bailey and back to Tama Hine. The names Weed, Tama Hine and Fanny Bailey are imposed upon her by men who, whether by ill or good intent, seek to incorporate her into their own culture and to define her future. William Hook calls the child Tama Hine and the literal English translation is tama: ‘child or boy’ and hine: ‘girl’ but culturally tama hine could be construed as a parent’s endearment rather than a simple classification of age and gender. ‘Tama Hine’ is the only name that the child herself negotiates in Exiles. She rejects the name Weed the day she tells Hook that Samuel Bailey had raped her, and she insists on being called Tama Hine.

In the final chapters of Exiles, William Hook discovers during his conversation with the Amity’s Captain Thomas Hansen that Tama Hine has been renamed Fanny Bailey and is destined for the Native Institution. He is dismayed (as I was, and I have drawn from my dismay whilst creating the scene) that she was named so; that she would be forced to answer to Samuel Bailey’s name at every morning’s roll call for as long as she remained at the Institution. His distress at this potential scenario for the child motivates the outcomes in the final chapter.

Kim Scott writes that whilst creating That Deadman’s Dance he “… combined and elaborated on historical figures, sometimes invented names for them, sometimes used names from generations back in my own genealogy.” 281 Unlike Scott I have no indigenous Australian ancestors and my non-indigenous Australian ancestors are limited to a single generation. As a writer, I was sensitive to and appreciative of cautions that Bob Howard attached to his database of Daisy Bates’ Noongar genealogies: “The names in this archive belong to real people with descendants who are alive today. Use of this material for fictional purposes is strongly discouraged. Ask yourself how your father or aunt would feel if their grandmother turned up as a character in a novel.” 282

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281 Scott, K., 2010, p. 56.
To complicate these issues, attaching non-fictional names to Menang participants in the novel Exiles was frustrated by the fact that Major Edmund Lockyer did not record the names of the Menang men who were marooned on Michaelmas Island, nor the Menang women who were kidnapped by the sealers. It was an unintended irony, I feel, that Lockyer did not record the kidnapped women’s names despite renaming the Aboriginal child and assiduously recording the identities of all Breaksea Islanders he encountered.

D’Urville’s officers recorded names of the Menang men and boys with whom they spent a night singing in 1826. Surgeon Nind recorded names of Menang people and later, Captain Collett Barker detailed the names of Menang people in his diaries. However it is difficult, if not impossible, to cross-reference those recorded names with the men and women whose lives were so directly impacted upon by the Breaksea Islanders in pre-colonisation 1826-27.

Therefore attaching the recorded names of Menang people living in King George Sound in the 1820s to Menang characters in Exiles would not be historically accurate. It would cause confusion and consternation to a reader who is familiar with or related to 1820s Menang people. It would also prove destructive to the reader’s suspension of disbelief due to the conflict between the creative freedoms of historical fiction, and the required consistency of incontrovertible facts.  

The historical figure Mokare is present in only one scene in Exiles; where he sits for a portrait by the Astrolabe’s Louis de Sainson. My reasoning is that the portrait-sitting was a historically accurate event. The short scene allowed me to include a figure who was well known as a skilled and personable negotiator during the early years of colonisation and would most likely have interacted with the Breaksea Islanders; indeed it would have been a spurious omission had he been left out. Because he was so well-known and documented however, including him in only one short scene prevents a distracting or inaccurate portrayal of Mokare as a character central to the novel.

To counter or at least alleviate the problems described above to the best of my ability, other names of Menang characters in Exiles are fictional. The character ‘Twertayan’ is a fictional name of Noongar prefixes, words and name suffixes. Moennan and Manilyan, the two women kidnapped by sealers in Exiles, are fictional names and based on conversations Captain Collet Barker recorded with Mokare:

“Wanting to know the ideas of the blacks of the origin of mankind, I got him [Mokare] this evening after some difficulty to understand my questions, when he told me that a very long time ago the only person living was an old woman named Arregain who had a beard as large as the garden. She was delivered of a daughter & then died. The daughter called Moenang grew up in course of time to be a woman, when she had several children, (boys & girls), who were the fathers and mothers of all the black people.”

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283 In historical fiction, the writer has certain freedoms but owes the reader certain responsibilities, such as the accurate representation of incontrovertible facts.

284 Thanks to Aileen Walsh for helping me resolve this problem. Pers. Comm. 12/03/2015.

I named one of the Menang women Moennan after reading this story. I liked the sound of the name spoken aloud and the way you have to move your lips around it. Mokare's information is interesting on other levels though. His ancestral story has a distinctly maternal genesis; that the ancestral mother of the Menang people is called Moenang. I believe that there is a firm link between the matriarchal figure Moenang and the name of the people indigenous to King George Sound.

Manilyan, the character who does not feature as largely in my novel because she was taken away to Bald Island by a sealer quite early in the drama, was named after a star. Again, from Collet Barker's journal:

“[Mokare] Told me this evening that Moken had commenced, which he knew by the situation of the Black Magellanic cloud near the cross (Whitepepoy). They have some story which I could not clearly make out, of its being an emu and laying eggs. The larger White Magellanic cloud he called the Chucadark & mentioned the names of several stars. One brilliant one was shortly to be seen, called Manilyen. By his description I think it must be Jupiter & if so there is a rather singular coincidence as ‘Man’ in their language signifies ‘father’.”

In other Noongar wordlists, ‘Manilyan’ means ‘Venus’ or simply, ‘a star’.

‘Albert’ is William Hook’s misinterpretation of a Menang man’s name during a friendly but uneasy first meeting. This mistake is an example of Hook’s unreliability as a narrator, as I have alluded to previously in this chapter. His ongoing mispronunciation of the man’s name could be considered a narratorial conceit, just as Walsh’s thesis that, within the context of colonisation, the act of imposing a name whether it be intentional or not is the act of a coloniser.

I often queried the naming of historical characters in Exiles, especially after I discovered the child’s new name when she disembarked in Sydney. Recorded or self-reported European and Aboriginal names such as Sal, Dinah, Samuel Bailey or Pigeon, despite often being imposed by others, proved relatively easy to either manipulate or remain faithful to within the confines of historical fiction.

Just as people’s names and their renaming can be imbued with ideology, colonial power, function and history, place names reflect their namers’ political preoccupations and contain stories within the name. In the genre of historical fiction, writers can play upon cartographic markers to either disrupt or ground the reader’s knowledge of geographical location. Kim Scott, who fused, invented or reinterpreted place names in That Deadman’s Dance “sought to obliquely refer to a particular history and, sliding from one point-of-view to another, shifting like the yet unformed spirit beneath the sea’s skin, to convey a historical sensibility …”
Apart from descriptions approximating what is now referred to as Albany and the Stirling Ranges, the setting is an amalgam of a number of south coastal easterly facing beaches protected by a granite headland with islands close to shore and with an estuary or river nearby used as a route between there and the inland; I fused the Pallinup, Kalgan and a couple of smaller rivers to do this. I took the name “King George Town” from an old Noongar song, and used it to approximate the place usually referred to as “Albany.”

With the exception of the place name Waychinicup, I used colonial or pre-colonial European place names from expeditions prior to 1826. Firstly because, in the interests of historical accuracy, the primary narrator William Hook relies upon his bosses’ maritime knowledge and charts to sail from Bass Strait to King George Sound. Secondly, I wanted the reader to remain grounded in geographical knowledge. I felt that accurate place names such as the Breaksea and Michaelmas Islands were intrinsically valuable to the novel. Thirdly, European naming of Australian places in the nineteenth century belied the era in which they were named by reflecting the primary European mode of transport: the boat. I have previously compared Australian nineteenth century sea-farers to twenty-first century ‘truckies’ and their trade routes as ‘highways’: “Once the dependence on sea highways lessened and the roads and rail prevailed, place names began to lose that salty flavour: King George Sound became Albany, the Swan River colony became Perth.” Therefore, the place names in Exiles reflect the fact that nineteenth century travellers approached the land from the sea, as opposed to our current society which in general approaches the sea from the land.

As any seafarer can attest, this approach of land from the sea is both a psychological and spacial anomaly to most twenty-first century experiences of our island continent’s sea boundary. In Exiles I sought to identify the psychological state of seafarers from the characters’ world view; where their trajectories are mapped by their proximity to or distance from ports, islands, beaches, capes and inlets, “from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel.” With historical accuracy, geographic awareness and the development of seafaring characters in mind, I wrote Exiles using recorded place names.

The most consistent European place names and the best charts available in the 1820s were arguably due to the work of Matthew Flinders in the first decade of the 1800s. Biographer Ernestine Hill states (albeit from a colonial and non-indigenous perspective) that Matthew Flinders’ “… charts and navigations are foundations of all our geography and all our sailing directions, charts as near to perfection in their time as human hand and eye could make them, and forever a model of cartography.” A Voyage to Terra Australis, Flinders’ account of his circumnavigation of the continent, is a text luminous with descriptions of the land as approached from the sea. It is also a rich source of anecdotes and imagery that I have mined when writing fiction: Mr Thistle’s drowning death at Cape Catastrophe is referred to by the Governor Brisbane crew and more minor events, such as Flinders’ crew cutting open a

290 Scott, K., 2010, p. 56.
292 “We stand at the water’s edge and dream but beyond the lacy breakers is the domain of itinerants, roamers, pirates and guys like Salt.” Ibid.
293 Foucault, Michele, 1986, p. 9.
white shark to discover the decomposing carcass of a seal with a spear sticking out of it, have made it into Exiles.\textsuperscript{296} Cool relations between the French and English during a truce in the war, were evident from Flinders’ diaries of his meeting with Baudin at Encounter Bay where they dined together and compared their place names. Flinders’ accounts of this encounter are enlightening.\textsuperscript{297} Flinders’ subsequent incarceration for years at Mauritius during a resumption of the war undoubtedly influenced his accounts of these meetings. As the shadow of the war between French and English lingered on into the 1820s, I have portrayed sentiments similar to Flinders’ and Baudin’s distrust fused with a seafarers’ imperative to share knowledge and assistance between the French and English in my fiction.

“First is the realisation that maps do not reflect reality but produce it in a number of ways, and in so doing represent particular interests and create various realities,” wrote Simon Ryan in The Cartographic Eye.\textsuperscript{298} As well as people, the names bestowed upon country are also ideological tools, and disseminating these tools is useful to interpret sentiments, political symbols and eras when writing historical fiction.

\textsuperscript{296} See ‘Relics, Curiosities and Autographs at the conclusion of Exiles. 
\textsuperscript{297} Flinders comments on Baudin’s criticism of the Bass Strait charts: “On my asking the name of the captain of Le Naturaliste, he bethought himself to ask mine; and finding it to be the same as the author of the chart which he had been criticising, expressed not a little surprise; but had the politeness to congratulate himself on meeting me.” Flinders, Matthew, 2012 (1814), p. 101.
3.3 Women with Guns 2: Depictions of women’s agency in historical fiction.

In this section I discuss women’s agency as depicted in the novel *Exiles* and how to afford the women and girls agency in fiction that they were not afforded in history. The word ‘agency’ in this respect can be construed as the personal autonomy granted to an individual within the structure and culture of a community that allows them varying levels of self-determination.

In the time between slave trading being made illegal and slavery being abolished throughout the British Empire (1807 – 1838), the sealers of Bass Strait prospered and survived mainly due to the appropriation and free labour of Aboriginal women, whom they cohabited with and/or traded.299 The labour resources of women in the Breense Islander community were entirely owned by white male sealers, however there is no evidence to suggest that the women were ever actually paid money for their labour. The Bass Strait sealers and their employers also dictated the women’s geographical movements with little intervention from government authorities until 1828. Although these arrangements alone may have differed little from traditional marriages within European or Aboriginal communities in the same era, the difference between traditional partnerships and those of sealers and Aboriginal women lies with the Aboriginal women’s lack of choice in their partner. With some exceptions where long term, legitimate relationships flourished, the sealers generally considered the women as trade items.

The Tyrelore of Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island adapted quickly to their circumstances however and they developed a means of survival through their preserved culture and diet, as well as evolving a new culture of dance, language and song. An illustration of how they were valued is when the Straitsmen fought for the women to be returned to them after the women were removed to Flinders Island by authorities. The Straitsmen cited that the women were their legitimate partners and crucial to their economic activities.300 G.A. Robinson also documented that some women resisted returning from Bass Strait islands after creating families with Straitsmen.301

A fictional rendition is useful to examine these apparently paradoxical relationships. In *Exiles*, the women of Breaksea Island respond to frontier slavery and casual violences inflicted upon them with utilitarian accommodation, expansion of their traditional culture and subversive acts. Post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak, reflecting on her seminal piece ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ said that “You don’t work to give the subaltern a voice. You work against subalternity itself.”302 The characters Sal, Mary and Dancer do not occupy a subaltern status in the fiction, albeit being situated below the dominant ranks of the male sealers by their ethnicity, gender and colonial circumstances. I have sought to reconcile Spivak’s statement to the fiction by centralising Sal, Dancer and Mary in the narrative. I afford them an agency as far as practicable within their circumstances that I agree, from my research, their historical counterparts would have possessed. Although Sal and Dancer do not speak as

informed narrators in *Exiles*, I have used visual and verbal signals as devices to centralise their characters and voices.

In *Exiles*, Dancer tells the child and Sal of how she came to live with the sealers. In what are historically relevant events, Dancer was kidnapped from a beach as a teenager by white sealers. She is then traded by her captors several times, the final being when the Policeman sold her to Jimmy the Nail for some seal skins. Hours after Dancer is injured after escaping a great white shark, she has no choice but to comply when Jimmy the Nail commands her to his bed. She is later prostituted by Jimmy the Nail to the whalers at Doubtful Island Bay. Sal’s relationship with John Smidmore is portrayed as more consensual than Dancer’s relationship with Jimmy the Nail. I have implied that Sal and Smidmore were running away together, or at least that Smidmore had lured her from John Randall, when they boarded the *Governor Brisbane* at Kangaroo Island. However both women, in the public sphere of the sealers’ camp, possess little agency in their lives.

Despite their circumstances, Dancer and Sal have ready access to firearms and are skilled hunters. Jimmy tells Billhook that Dancer is valuable and that her reputation as a good worker preceded her. As were their historical counterparts, Dancer and Sal are characters who know they are intrinsic to the fabric of the sealing community and yet are constrained and controlled in a gendered sense by their ‘husbands’ and by their geography. They respond in their own unique ways. Dancer’s two recurring, autonomous acts are her refusal to speak English to the sealers and her refusal to bear children to them. Dancer’s muteness has little practical consequence but for a consistent mark of disdain for her captors. Sal uses her proficient English readily to ridicule the sealers, especially Samuel Bailey, or express disgust at treatment of her or the other females. She also uses English to mediate between Palla war, French Kaurna and Noongar languages.

Given that historical records have been primarily written by, or from the point of view of, men in positions of power, a writer of historical fiction must delve beneath those words to find the voices and world views of the powerless. However fiction also affords the writer the freedom to reimagine the private spheres of the powerless and the dispossessed, and to depict the acts of power that they are able to wield within this sphere. In their public spheres, the subjects of oppression are written about, described anatomically, interviewed and renamed. Their lives are often organised and controlled by bureaucratic letters and reports. Their private spheres are places where the oppressed can exert power to affect their own outcomes; lives lived away from the constant gaze, violence and demonstrations of dominance.

The Tyrellore acted in various ways in their private spheres to maintain autonomy over their bodies and I have reflected this in *Exiles*. As I wrote in Chapter Two of the thesis, infanticide is documented by G.A. Robinson as practiced among Tyrellore in Bass Strait. Dancer’s refusal to give life to her babies by the sealers, whether it be by abortion or infanticide, demonstrates an act of ownership over her own body. When framed within this context and given Dancer’s circumstances, her refusal to cede control over the paternity of her children is a radical act. Infanticide is also portrayed as a manifestation of female suffering: Sal wears the newborn child’s skull as an amulet, and the skull serves as constant, visible reproach to her childlessness.

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303 *Exiles*, p. 114.
When Mary reunites with Dancer on Breaksea Island, the two women resume their traditional culture, and together they teach Sal and the child the Devil Dance. I have framed the Devil Dance in *Exiles* as a response to trauma and to facilitate their spiritual and personal survival. The continuation and adaptation of their culture was vital to Tyrellore on Bass Strait islands, and the two Pallawah women bring their culture to their private camp to teach other women and girls.

The long and short term responses of the child and the two Menang women to abduction in *Exiles* differ to those of the Pallawah women. I sought to illustrate that, unlike Pallawah and Kaurna communities, Noongar communities’ exposure to sealers and whalers was minimal and unstructured in the early 1820s. Noongar knew only sporadic experiences of foreigners compared with north and east coast Pallawah communities who had been seasonally trading with sealers for two decades. In *Exiles*, I have attempted to lead the reader into believing that Mary, Dancer and Sal were participants in the sealing operation, whereas Tama Hine, Moennan and Manilyan were forcibly taken and had no choice in their circumstances. Indeed, the three women who sailed across the Southern Ocean on the *Governor Brisbane* were adjusted to such a lifestyle and long developed strategies to navigate or avoid the sealers. Unlike Sal, Dancer and Mary, Tama, Moennan and Manilyan had little time within the structural chronology of the novel to develop long-term survival strategies. The initial historical insults of being abducted or traded become a reality when Dancer tells Tama and Sal of her own abduction. Her story shows the reader that Dancer herself had a similar introduction to the sealers and that she had developed methods to accommodate her lack of freedoms and human dignity.

I wrote in Section 3.1 how my experience of being on Breaksea Island highlighted how vulnerable the women and children were made by their situation, with no recourse to British or Indigenous law. I wanted to examine how the Breaksea Islanders, in particular the women, responded to such hardship in subversive or utilitarian ways. The knowledge of their vulnerability to the crimes of the sealers led me to thinking about whether or not they were protected, and by whom.

So how to grant Aboriginal females agency in pre-contact era historical fiction? To depict their situation as historically, poignantly realistic, their characters needed to be innocent, powerless participants in the face of frontier violence, however much inner fortitude they may have possessed. Refraining from using clichéd tropes in my historical fiction and avoiding such unhelpful character binaries as good and bad, black and white, victim and villain, has proved the literary equivalent of navigating a series of reefs in a channel, at night.

In 2010 I talked with Menang Elder and Mokare’s descendant Lynette Knap who said that, for the two Menang women kidnapped by the sealers, the experience was a cut into their culture they had probably never known before. “These men took those women for one thing – comfort. He wouldn’t have meant anything to her and she wouldn’t have meant anything to him because there was no love in it. It was just like going to the toilet for them (the men). And they didn’t see the women as being human. They saw them as inferior to that. That’s how everyone saw Aboriginal people then.”

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304 Personal correspondence, Lynette Knapp, Carlisle Street Albany, 30/03/2010
In recognising Knapp’s view of the sealers denying Aboriginal women their humanity\textsuperscript{305}, I wanted to occasionally shift the narratorial gaze away from William Hook and into the private realm of the female. I’d asked Lynette Knapp about writing the characters of Moennan and Manilyan. I expressed to her that I was worried their characters would be read as ‘others’ due to my anxieties of trespassing Menang world views as a non-Aboriginal writer. She answered simply; “Us people are just the same as you. Write it how you feel it would be if it was you.”\textsuperscript{306} I created selected sections with Dancer, Tama Hine and Moennan narrating in the informed third person to allow the reader into their private world views.

A common, recurring narrative arc in fiction across all genres and mediums is where female suffering is situated within a male hero narrative. These hero narratives are predicated upon the primary male character avenging sexual violence against women; and they adhere to an archetypal story template. The rape-as-a-narrative-device plot is repeated over millennia in order to reinforce the dominant societal norm of woman as property: that a female’s defilement and injury amounts to a crime of dishonour and larceny against the male protagonist: and that the level of male commitment to avenging that theft depends upon how highly the woman is valued.\textsuperscript{307} This bothers me. I wanted to avoid this narrative arc, a trope identified by comic writer Gail Simone as ‘women in refrigerators’, whereby the primary male character’s narrative arc is propelled and sustained by avenging the sexual assault/mutilation/murder of his female lover.\textsuperscript{308}

In Exiles, Hook’s desire to protect Tama from Samuel Bailey is compromised from the day he assists Samuel Bailey to abduct her. His desire for the woman compromises his protective desire when he takes Moennan and Tama away to Waychinicup. Depicting Hook’s flaws and compromises in Exiles makes the reader aware that despite his protectiveness for the two Noongar females, his motivations and outcomes are not always heroic. In taking the child to Otakau he is not saving her, merely continuing the paternal actions of other adult males in Exiles.

The novel ends uncertainly, ambiguously. The historical version was grimmer: Samuel Bailey got away with the kidnapping, sexual assault and imprisonment of two Noongar females, William Hook reneged on his statement and the child was stolen from her home country, never to return. There could never be a wholly positive outcome to Exiles, not while acknowledging that the chronological progression of Aboriginal women and children’s appropriation and dispossession within the colonial context went from abduction to slavery to institutionalisation.

\textsuperscript{305}This denial of humanity is also referenced in Aileen Walsh’s thesis on European naming of Aboriginal people. See Walsh, A., p. 25.

\textsuperscript{306}Knapp, L., pers. comm., 30/03/2010.

\textsuperscript{307} Sarah Projansky demonstrates the malleability of rape narratives and how they have successfully operated in the U.S. throughout history to “define the masculine familial subject; to structure women’s relationship to love, family and the law; to define property; to transform the structure of the novel; to justify and perpetuate US colonialism; to define the nation; to produce masculine spectatorial pleasure predicated on illicit (violent) sexuality and culturally sanctioned racism; to resist slavery; and to perpetuate racism.” Projansky, S., Watching Rape: Film and Television in Post-Feminist Culture, NYU Press, New York, 2001, p. 7.

In this section I have sought to demonstrate that to successfully locate a strong voice for an historical character dispossessed of personal autonomy, the writer of historical fiction can access the aspects of the character’s life that are situated away from the centre of power. Writers of historical fiction can give an account of how women act in private spaces, how they maintain an agency in the private spaces that they don’t have access to in public spaces.
3.4 Predator Dreams

“This is what I am, a woman watching the spider,”309

A common observation of historical fiction is that it allows the writer to inhabit the inner thoughts of characters, facilitating a reader’s empathy and a fresh relationship with historical figures. When Lynette Knapp said “Write it how you feel it would be for you,”310 she appealed to the writer-as-medium. As the writer of Exiles I entered spaces historically occupied by a community of people who left no written thoughts of their own. In giving voice to history’s silent players, I sought to portray the state of bodily and cultural annihilation by reimagining their plight in fiction.

My initial need to portray the lives of the women and child on 1826 Breaksea Island arose from the history. My disturbance at their plight intensified when responding to what happened to them by creating their fictional characters. Focussing on a character such as Pigeon would have been simple. His life could almost have been portrayed as a ‘Boys Own’ adventure manual, and the women and child’s trauma, and their abused bodies could have been a quiet, colonial side story. But good historical fiction should have bodily effects on the reader. Its purpose is to create an empathy with the historical figures. It should take us to the bruise somewhere within ourselves and help us understand where it hurts and why.

The paradox of writing the historico-fictive characters in Exiles is that it required a level of empathy that I had to periodically censure; it was important I stepped back from trying to understand my characters emotionally and engaged more critically with the men, women and children who lived on Breaksea Island. I also learned that the stories I am attracted to and have recreated over and over in differing genres and media were generally older sagas I needed to resolve within myself. Therefore engaging with characters such as Moennan, Tama Hine or Samuel Bailey may have been emotionally exhausting but ultimately fruitful in developing both authentic writing and the self.

Eduardo Galeano wrote that writing can answer “… sometimes years in advance the questions and needs of its audience …” but only if “… the writer has known how to experience them first, through inner doubts and agonies. Writing springs from the wounded consciousness of the writer and is projected onto the world.”311

I wrote the following essay ‘Predator dreams’312 after an intense week of investigating the source of my nightmares and how they were connected with writing the novel Exiles. I include it here in the Methodology chapter because it outlines one facet of my process in the rebuilding of the historical characters of Breaksea Island.

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310 Knapp, L., pers. comm., 30/03/2010.
The predator dreams have returned.
_Dreams_ I call them though their lucidity is so frightening that they wake me; gasping for air, blinded and paralysed.

A week ago a friend drove me to another town to see a psychic. “You’ve got plenty going on,” he’d said. “Go and see this bloke. My shout.”

The psychic, or seer, I’m not sure what he calls himself, his face was round like a coin and he told me that he used to be a cabinet maker. Silver and turquoise feathers hung around his neck. He sat opposite the table to me and nodded when I asked him if we could turn off the flute music. Then he slipped a cassette into the player and pressed record.

That day, the psychic went over my body without touching me; my organs, limbs and brain, piece by piece, speaking very fast and casting out all sorts of invisible slithery, scaly critters with rather theatrical flourishes. He described my personal archetypes: Kali, freedom fighter, queen, witch. (“Anyone can just look at you and see those women,” said a sceptical friend later. “Did he mention Boadicea?”)

The psychic worked on me for nearly two hours. I began to understand how he operated. The mimed evictions of gremlins that were attached to me or cork-screwed into my body – creatures that he claimed to see in those moments when he quietened and his eyes became blank – were mere physical suggestions for an emotional purging. His was not dissimilar in method to a placebo effect. I felt peculiar releases as he extracted a snake from my heel, ordered the Minotaur standing over my left shoulder to blunder unhappily from the room, removed porcupine spines from beneath my shoulder blades that had long ago been inserted by a woman who wished me ill. The sustained attention to my physical and psychic self felt like a reiki session or a massage.

As he progressed, the man became more confident. He described my addictions and expressed concern for the health of my thymus and my left ovary. Finally he was quiet for almost a minute and then said, “I could be wrong here and forgive me if I am ... I don’t want to offend you but you were harmed as a girl child. Yes?” I didn’t say anything.

“There is a tiny black snake curled into your tailbone, your coccyx. You’ve been carrying this snake for a long time. Would you like me to remove it?”

Knock yourself out, I thought, suddenly exhausted. But I nodded and as he sat opposite me and enacted dragging out the tiny black snake, I felt part of me break away. The loss produced in me a relief – and a most perverse grief. As he bit the head off the black snake and threw its body into the corner of the room, tears leaked from my eyes until I was sobbing and unable to stop. He handed me a box of tissues covered in pictures of panda bears, and waited.

_I am climbing down a cement manhole. I know I’m climbing down into a kind of hell where he waits for me at the bottom but I can’t stop going down. I can’t go up. The rungs of the ladder are rusting steel, they are untrustworthy and my steps are unsteady. The cramped cylindrical space is lit a greasy yellow. In each square space between the rungs of the ladder there is a picture sticky-taped to the concrete. As I go down, the pictures become more graphic. Flesh. A woman’s tortured flesh, her face, her blood, and her mouth twisted in pain. Every picture is worse as I go down but I can’t stop. I know he’s already killed her, that I can’t save her but I can’t stop climbing down to where he is waiting for me._
My week was bookended by the psychic and then a psychologist. She began: “How is the family/book/Phd?”

I told her about the dreams and how, in these dreams I am never protected. Even potential saviours tend to run off.

“When did these dreams start?”

“When I was a teenager, maybe younger. They came back when I was with my son’s father.”

“You were afraid of him?”

“Not really. Sometimes, yes. Yes, I am.”

“And now your dreams have come back again?”

“About a year ago, they came back.”

“Describe one to me.”

I was in a little fishing shack behind the dune of the beach. I stood in the doorway as two men drove past in a four wheel drive. The passenger saw me standing in the doorway. He was blonde, a bit ferrety. He came back, on foot, alone. I knew he would. He started coming for me and he cornered me in the back room of the shack, where light came through the windows and it was dusty in the air. Somehow I got past him and ran outside. He chased me. There was a heap of scrap metal outside the door in the long grass and he picked up a length of steel with a bit of square steel welded to its end. All I could do for a moment was stare at the steel corners and think he’s going to fucking brain me and then he’s going to rape me. He’s going to kill me. I picked up a piece of wood but it was too short, shorter than his length of steel. He smiled at me. Then two middle-aged women walked down the track with a dog. They both wore pale shorts, they had thick legs and their hair was dyed brown. I didn’t ask them for help. I asked them to witness because I needed someone to see what was going to happen. But they were scared and ran away. Then he started swinging for me with that piece of steel.

“That man when you were a kid, he used to corner you in a shed.”

I nodded. “But there’s no particular reason why he should be coming up at the moment.”

“What about those sealers and Aboriginal women you are writing your thesis about?”

Could he? Thought Bailey, as he wiped his hands over the little girl’s face with her lying like a corpse, cold and still. He could. He could do whatever he wanted. He put his hand on her flat chest and felt her galloping heart. He could do whatever he wanted.

Moennan, lying a few metres away in the dark, watched as Bailey swept back the little girl’s hair and whispered to her.

“You want to go home, hey little Weed? I’ll take you home. I’ll get you home Weed.”

Weed could see the whites of Moennan’s eyes. She nodded at Bailey. Then Bailey crawled across the skins to Moennan and her eyes were obscured Bailey’s body. The sounds of the dark sea became second to that of the grunts from his throat and the fleshy thuds from his fists.

In the morning Moennan was bleeding from her nose and Weed stared at her and went down to the rocks on the skirts of the island to wash herself. She scooped fresh water from the spring that seeped under the granite and poured in streaks down to the sea, brought handfuls to her mouth.

“I’m completely stalled with that writing. I just don’t want to go near it,” I whined. “Straight history is easy. ‘He did that in such and such a year’ etcetera. Fiction is different. You have to be emotionally available to your characters. It feels like channelling. I can’t write about these guys at the moment. I don’t like them. I don’t want Samuel Bailey camping in my head
anymore. He does my fucking head in. I feel crazy by the end of the day. I just want to climb out of my own brain.”

“This might sound pretty left of field coming from me but what do you think about an afterlife?”

“Pardon?”

“What do you think happens to people when they die?”

“I think people can stick around for a while after they die. I think their spirits attach to the physical realm in some way. Other than that, I don’t know. I don’t know.”

“The men you are writing about from the 1820’s ... and believe me I know people like them. I’ve worked in the corrective services ... they don’t see themselves as bad men but rather, hard done by the system or by people. They always have a justification for abusing another human being, if they admit to it at all. You are working on these people, long dead, writing them ... you mentioned channelling before ... have you ever wondered if you might be stirring them up?”

“Um.”

“Has anyone else in the last few hundred years given this group of men the same, sustained attention that you are giving them right now?”

“No.”

“What you are doing, getting into their skin, it is a powerful invocation. They might be getting upset about your investigations. They may not like what you are saying about them. They may be trying to attack you.”

What I love about this therapist is her courage to say outrageous things.

“And you are wide open. Wide open. Your ah ... other foibles, your inability to set limits on yourself are making you pretty vulnerable. You’ve also told me before that your moral centre is, well, it’s not holding. You don’t know what your rules are anymore. This state will also make you weaker.”

The following day I talked to a Noongar man who knew about the work I was doing, whose ancestral country was the same as the child I was writing about.

“Yeah, those sealers, they were bastards,” he said.

I tentatively broached the subject of the psych’s hypothesis; that I’d been summoning malevolent, long dead characters, and I told him about the disturbing dreams I’d been having.

“This sort of thing is seen as a bit left off centre in my wadjela culture. But I’m wondering if in Noongar culture, there is any parallel to what I’m experiencing.”

“You’ve gotta learn how to look after yourself, girl,” he said immediately, “Because it’s real alright. In my work there’s the everyday stuff to deal with and then there’s the Old People. Only last month I was helping with the reburials on the west coast. I have to check myself over emotionally every week. You have to look after yourself.” He said that he often used smoke – sandalwood was his favourite – to clean himself after a week’s work. He offered me some sandalwood and I said yes, but I never picked it up. His advice and verification that I wasn’t going mad were gifts enough.

When I told a friend about my week, she said, “You’ve been writing and thinking about this story for a long time now. Those characters must hold some kind of resonance with your own journey.”

Michelle is an artist who works with Jungian archetypes and the word archetypes came up several times in our conversation. I have long been suspicious of labelling the beings within me; witch, wife, waif and whore feel too convenient to pigeonhole my shambling, chaotic
self. I tend to agree with Camilla Pinkola Estes who writes “Some psychological technologies suggest we arrest these beings, count them, name them, force them into harness until they shuffle along like vanquished slaves.”

Then again, there are the selkies. When I first heard the story of the sealers and the Aboriginal women they abducted from the beaches, I thought of the selkie myth. It’s like the women’s ancestral skins were stolen, as well as their bodies. They were taken to islands and they must have longed for their country and kin and language. And like the selkie myth, the women’s stories resonated with me. They were owned. It goes back to the fear of the masculine, of being appropriated, the female spirit being taken and dismantled. Sometimes I think that my fear of the masculine has been my driver, however dysfunctional it all is. Those kinds of men, the dangerous ones, are also really attractive. There is a thrill in taking them on. I never win. I never win. But there is the battle, and the glamour of it all.

But selkies, sealers, women, children and dangerous men were all external factors. Despite the psychic’s best efforts, my inner stalker, that insidious little black snake, was still unfurling in my spine.

Later Michelle sent me a text message: ‘I just thought of Bluebeard. Remember that story? Would that one work for you?’

I am towing a boat from Darwin to Perth. In the red evening I drive towards a dusty town and when I get to the bridge that is the boundary to the town, the trailer breaks and the boat begins to fall off the trailer. I have to stop on the bridge. A man drives up behind me in a four wheel drive with lights on the roof. He gets out of his car and helps me push the boat back on. He says that I must stay the night here and not drive any more. He leads me to a bush camp on the outskirts of the town where I can stay. He goes into the bush and brings back some firewood. I think he is kind, for a stranger. He gives me some food to eat. Then he goes away. I light a big fire and sit there alone. In the middle of the night, as the light of the flames loom against the trees, the stranger comes back. I know then that he was not being kind or attentive: he had set me up in a kind of boudoir, for his own use. I can see, the way he shuts his car door and walks towards me, that he has done this before.

“The predatory potentate shows up time after time in women’s dreams. It erupts in the midst of their most soulful and meaningful plans. It severs the woman from her intuitive nature. When its cutting work is done, it leaves the woman deadened in feeling, feeling frail to advance her life; her ideas and dreams lay at her feet drained of animation. Bluebeard is the story of such a matter.”

In Estes’ version, Bluebeard wooed three sisters, unsuccessfully at first. They were afraid of him and his blue beard, but he was dogged and cunning in his pursuit of them. He invited them on a ride through the forest and met them with three horses festooned in crimson ribbons, bells and brightly coloured plumes. He fed them a picnic of delicate morsels in the forest and finally the sisters thought that he was a civilised man who was interesting, if a little eccentric and dangerous. The two older sisters were still frightened of his blue beard but the youngest sister was attracted to him and said to her sisters ‘his beard is not quite so blue as

you would think.’ Her intuition was blinded by his bright glamour and his dangerous calm. They both recognised the corruptible within the other. He took her for his wife.

Of course there is a forbidden room in his magnificent castle. Of course Bluebeard leaves for a few days and entrusts his new wife the keys. She invites her sisters to keep her company and they roam the castle in his absence looking for the forbidden room because they are naturally curious women who want to know the man, and they have this key. When they find the room, they discover that it is filled with the dismembered corpses of Bluebeard’s past wives.

Of course Bluebeard returns and knows from the key that bleeds and bleeds and cannot be staunched, that his new wife has discovered what is in store for her. He drags her by her hair to the bloodied, stinking chamber. She pleads with him for her life and when that doesn’t work, for fifteen minutes to pray and say goodbye to her sisters, which he grants her.

In Jane Campion’s The Piano, a Bluebeard production is staged in a small church hall. The young Maori warriors in the audience see Bluebeard return with his axe to murder his wife and they seize weapons and storm the stage in what is represented as a comical confusion between theatrical and actual violence. In the original story it is the brothers who storm the castle when they are summoned by the three sisters. They attack Bluebeard just as he is coming for the young wife, and dismember him, leaving for the buzzards his blood and gristle.

I am as guilty of romancing the predator as the little sister, star-struck by promises of excitement, danger and paradise and ignoring impending annihilation with the qualification ‘well, his beard is not quite so blue’, to the point where I have experienced my erasure; a rubbing out from the inside.

“You seem to almost justify the behaviour of these sealers, like ... ‘they’re not that bad’ ...” the psychologist said to me once. “It’s like you are identifying with an abuser. It’s not an uncommon trait in victims of childhood abuse. People often really love or admire their abusers and then how are you supposed to reconcile that regard with how much they have damaged you?”

When the locked rooms were opened up to display the carnage, I could no longer say ‘well, his beard is not quite so blue’. Perhaps she is right about my invocation of Samuel Bailey: a Bluebeard who returns from the past to find the bloodied key and takes a fistful of my curious womany hair.

While investigating the cultural mores that enabled a man to openly kidnap a seven year old girl and imprison her on an island, the predator dreams returned. I stopped writing the fiction and non-fiction parts of the thesis and busied myself with plenty of other fascinating projects. Samuel Bailey was too much to bear. Writing about the story of the child he’d abducted began to feel like I was summoning her to undergo her whole traumatic experience for a second time, only this time for the outraged entertainment of future historical fiction readers. I decided the best thing for me would be to go to sea, sail off in a boat to somewhere else and call it ‘research’. Meanwhile the dreams became more frequent and so was my panic at looming deadlines and my apparent inability to exert some control over my flight desire, to ‘step off’. The whole time I was stalking myself in my head.
“Ironically, both aspects of the psyche, the predator and the young potential, reach their boiling point. When a woman understands that she has been prey, both in the inner and outer worlds, she can hardly bear it. It strikes at the root of who she is at centre, and she makes plans, as she must, to kill the predatory force.”

I have seen both dark and light in this story of the Breaksea Islanders. I have the saviour brothers in the form of the Major and a Maori man called William Hook, who initiated the rescue of the two Aboriginal girls from the island by testifying against his own crew mate. But to mangle yet another metaphor, when you shine a light in a dark cave, the crevices and corners become all the more dark. Despite no direct references to Bluebeard in *Exiles*, I believe that the Bluebeard motif has seeped into the narrative by osmosis. The challenge, for me, of writing men like Samuel Bailey and the child Tama Hine back into existence is to control their trajectories and avoid being damaged by their re-emergence.

It’s a funny thing that the whole time I’ve been writing my conversations with a psychologist, a psychic healer, a student of archetypes and a Noongar man (and after a relatively snake-free summer), a little black dugite hangs around on the back veranda. Sluggish, unafraid or insolent, whatever, this snake refuses to leave. I have to stamp my feet every time I go out to the washing line, to let it know that I’m approaching.

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Conclusion

In the project Exiles and Island Wives: history, fiction and the Breaksea Islanders, I have investigated the lives of the Breaksea Islanders and queried how certain individuals within the small community of such diverse origins thrived or failed in pre colonisation Western Australia. To look into the world of the Breaksea Islanders I used historical research, investigated methodological processes of translating historical archives into fiction and created an exegesis and a novel based on my findings. In this thesis, I have queried, investigated and given answer to the origins, lives and world views of the Breaksea Islanders.

We understand the career and life trajectories of such figures as Jules Dumont d’Urville, George Augustus Robinson and Major Edmund Lockyer because an aspect of their work was to record their achievements for their contemporaries and for posterity. They were privileged, by both their whiteness and their literacy, to record their observations of people such as the Breaksea Islanders. While I am privileged as a writer to access their papers for a glimpse into the world of the Breaksea Islanders, I discovered these writings of men were often hostile to nineteenth century sealers; and frustrated by the sealers’ perceived obstructions to their missions to colonise, civilise or Christianise peoples indigenous to Van Diemen’s Land or King George Sound. Their papers often also belayed a paternal attitude towards the women and children of Breaksea Island.

The Breaksea Islanders had no such recourse to recording their own histories due to the circumstances of being in the wrong class, gender or ethnicity in the nineteenth century. In 1826, Aboriginal oral histories were well into their first generation of disruption by war, colonisation, displacement from home countries, and entering a period of forced or hegemonic adaptation to the colonisers’ language. On the fringes of the new settler society, sealers of European extraction, with odd exceptions such as John Boultbee, were often illiterate. My thesis was to find out about the lives of the men, women and children who lived on Breaksea Island and by way of research into the figures themselves I was able to construct their biographies. To investigate the nature of the Breaksea Islanders it was necessary to view the colonialists’ papers as a palimpsest – writings that required a rubbing back, a paring away to reveal the Breaksea Islanders’ character beneath.

Writing fictional characters and stories based on people who had left no records of their own can be paradoxical in that it allows the writer leeway to reimagine the lives of people long dead while navigating a dearth of evidence as to their world views and experiences. To counter, or to accommodate this paradox, I have resorted to the visual art’s maxim of utilising negative spaces as positive information. To use life drawing as an example; when the artist is collating information to recreate the nude model’s figure into art, the negative spaces around the model’s figure such as the space between the model’s arm and their hip, provide as much information to the artist as the model’s actual arm and hip. Taoist philosopher Lao Tse simplified the Japanese concept of negative space (ma) in his poem The Uses of Not when he wrote, “Thirty spokes unite in one knave; but it is on the empty space (for the axle) that the use of the wheel depends./ Clay is fashioned into vessels; but it is on the hollowness that their
When writing historical fiction, the silences, the gaps and the ‘hollowness’ in material knowledge can be information for the writer. For example, French expeditor D’Urville’s mention of Sal as being “well formed, with rather beautiful eyes,” provides a fertile departure point for the writer of historical fiction.

Similarly, liminal spaces in history and ideas about how the Breaksea Islanders behaved when they were not being observed by figures of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authority is an instructing metaphorical and physical landscape when planning a fictional rendering of their lives in King George Sound. The Breaksea Islander men operated entirely within their own system of law once they were abandoned by their bosses’. As I wrote in the methodology, to this day an uninhabited island is still a liminal space where the social agreements that we adhere to on the mainland are altered and renegotiated. In my fiction I have recreated nineteenth century spaces that were subject to extreme renegotiation. These spaces such as the boat, the island and the open sea helped define the narrative arc of *Exiles*. It is at the axis of interaction between men, women and children, and the isolation of boats, islands and the sea – during a time when the Breaksea Islander men believed themselves beholden to no one but themselves – that the story of *Exiles* was created. Foucault’s *Of Other Spaces* helped support the creation of historical fiction from the negative and liminal spaces in the history of the Breaksea Islanders. I used Foucault’s piece to explore a society cast away from the mainstream, from their origins, and to examine the motivations of these characters’ actions within that society.

The act of creating historical fiction is fraught with decisions and points of departure from a ‘factual’ rendering of events. Naming of characters whose ancestors are living today, attaching fictional names to nonfiction characters, naming Indigenous characters, naming places and altering the plot outline the suit a more convenient narrative arc; all these things can be both prerogative and pitfall for writers of historical fiction. In the exegesis methodology I have explained my reasoning for the names I have given characters and places. Sequences of events have also been changed to build a narrative that operates successfully as a work of fiction. The novel rests upon an essential historical ‘scaffolding’: although some names and scenarios have changed in the fiction, it was important that incontrovertible facts contributing to the narrative remained consistent. Such truths can be arrived at in differing ways. The types of guns or boats used by nineteenth century sealers are relatively simple research exercises. Investigating the levels of agency women such as Sal or Dinah would have been able to exercise over their life choices was complex, but in the genre of historical fiction these kinds of historical ‘scaffolding’ cannot be speculative or revisionist.

William Hook, the principal narrator in *Exiles*, is a man whom in fiction and history straddled cultures, continents and conflicting ethical viewpoints. In fiction as in history he is a person written about, as opposed to actively recording history himself. When writing William Hook, I was the ‘other’ as recorder. He is a nineteenth century Ngai Tahu male. His life experiences are a universe away from this twenty-first century Caucasian female. I sought to centralise William Hook’s world view in the novel *Exiles*. Although I have allowed the reader access to some of Hook, Tama and Moennan’s internal thoughts during sealing, abduction or confinement, it was impossible to write *Exiles* from a place of similar experience or world view to any of the characters. I have sailed or motored much of the Southern Ocean between Albany and Tasmania, worked in isolated fishing camps and searched for the Breaksea Islanders in historical archives, but as a writer, I will always be alien to the Breaksea...
Islanders by dint of my ethnicity, gender and my inhabiting a twenty-first century world. To find the voices of Hook, Tama and Moennan, when it was impossible to physically see them, read their written words or hear them speak, was a process of listening and watching for cues, to understanding and finally hearing them; to invoke the silent voices from Breaksea Island in 1826. As a reader of history, I have explored the past by reading historical and contemporary literature. As a writer, I have explored the past to create a new contribution to the existing works of Australian history and historical fiction.
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Fiction component:

*Exiles*
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My name is Wiremu Heke. Some call me Billhook and on this day, with the story I have to tell, the Major calls me Mister Hook. I stand outside a canvas tent on a reedy foreshore in the cleavage of two mountains, from which grey plates of granite channel water down to the inlet. There are no buildings here, no roads or even horses, only a few tents, the bush and a brig sitting out on the water. I am oceans away from my home and I am waiting to be interviewed about a murder.

Beside me a soldier jingles the keys to my handcuffs. My stomach feels sharp and tight. Golden light filters through the canvas tent, musty from the ship’s hold. I stand at the flap looking in. A young man stares out at me, like a child who has heard stories of savages and cannibals. Only his white man’s stiffness stops him reaching out to touch the *pounamu* stretching my earlobe, or the huge, shining teeth around my neck. The young man sniffs and touches his nostrils with soft fingers. From the set of his eyes and jaw, I think he must be the son of the man writing at a desk behind him.


The Major twists in his chair and I look down to the frayed canvas feathering my feet. The Major has just shaved and his jowls gleam. He stands, a straight man.

“Are you from the same gang as Samuel Bailey?”

“*Gov’nor Brisbane* sir, yes.”

“Where are you from, Mister Hook?”

From the little bay, where the eels are, near the *marae*, before the sand spit, before the open cliffs where the kelp surges like great, black snakes in the swell.

“Aramoana. Otakau.”

“A native of the south island of New Zealand.” He sits and writes. “Maori.” His hand stays on the paper and he looks at me. “The *Sophia*?”

*Ae*, they all know, these men under the banner of the King. They know who did the burning and the killing. My father on the beach, bleeding, his fleet of *waka* sawn in half by Kelly and
his thugs. But those men don’t know the smell of my charred Otakau. The work of a torch and a following wind.

The Major’s grim smile makes me want to turn and leave his stinking golden tent but there is the idling soldier, and there are things that I need done.

“I was a boy sir.”

“Approximately twenty years of age.” The Major writes. He asks me questions and the same questions again. He runs around my story of the killing and then around it again. The Major writes all of the names down carefully. His son returns with sweet black tea in white cups and the tent grows warmer with its steam and our bodies and the climbing sun. Finally the Major dips the end of a pen in ink, blots it on rough paper and hands it to me.

“Sign please.”

I stare at the black lines tattooing the paper. “If I do this, then you will go to the island and rescue Tama Hine and Moennan.”

The Major sighs. “Your … sort are called sea wolves and pirates and that is in polite society, Mister Hook. Worse down on the docks. Your crimes in King George Sound have created tremendous hardship for my men and myself. Your actions are –”

“I beg your pardon, sir. But will you get them from the island?”

“My pardon is the least of your concerns.” But he nods. “First light. I intend to have Samuel Bailey arrested.”

I bend over the table and sign the paper.

X.
Wiremu Heke was newly a man when the chiefs called a public meeting about Captain Kelly and the *Sophia*. Wiremu’s father limped along. He was too broken to work but the elders held him in high esteem. Eight years after the attack and the people still wanted revenge. Several young men needed to avenge fathers and mothers who had died from the bullets. It was part of their heritage and their right, they argued, to gather up honour the way the white man gathers up medals and stripes.

They had to find the sea captain. For all the rumours and stories from visiting whalers, Kelly and the *Sophia* never returned to Whareakeake or Murdering Bay as the whalers called it. Wiremu’s father knew of his son’s hankerings and volunteered him to the sea and a seaman’s life in search of information on the Captain’s whereabouts. “Send young Wiremu. He is hungry for the ocean.” Wiremu was hungry for the girl Kiri too but the sea collected him up like a cuttlebone.

The chiefs ordered him and five other young men to work aboard the whalers, to collect crop seeds and knowledge from the shores of New South Wales, and find Captain Kelly. If they found him, they would entice him to return on a peace mission to Otakau where the chiefs would be waiting for him. No man explained to Wiremu how to garner a sea captain.

Life for this Otakau boy changed quickly after the meeting. A sealing schooner arrived and its captain offered to take him aboard as a mate to Van Diemen’s Land, where he could then work his way to the New South Wales colony. He had time to romance the girl but briefly, in a sweaty rush by the river. She had a knowing glint in her eye that he would leave soon. Kiri’s breath whistled as she cried out, and later as she slept on the thatch mat he’d laid down for her, he watched her breathe. When she awoke, he asked her about her wheeze. She did not think of herself as unhealthy or ill. “Born on the river, Wiremu,” she said, stroking his face. “Born on the river.”

His father arranged for Wiremu to be tattooed. He squatted on the mat beside his son and talked as the tattooist worked. His father told him stories to distract him from the pain of the chisel. He talked and talked. It seemed rudderless talk until Wiremu realised he was talking
his way into ancestral stories, carving them into Wiremu’s memory while the tattooist carved the spirals into his flesh.

He told Wiremu how he came to build boats, the same boats Wiremu would paddle out beyond the heads to catch barracouta. He had learned his trade from his uncle who had learned from his grandfather. Wiremu’s great-grandfather was a boat builder but when he was broken by his enemy’s mere, he became a carver of wood and then a tohunga tā kaue, a carver of flesh.

Wiremu’s great-grandfather had fallen in love with a Ngai Tahu girl. She was the daughter of a visiting chief. She wore a necklace of orca teeth. She saw Wiremu’s great-grandfather carving into bartered kauri, on the edge of the river where he lived with his wife and son. She watched him carve the ocean into the wood with chisel and hammer. He may well have been using a leaf; his blows and strokes were so fine. He asked the wood politely to work for him. She saw that and she asked him, “Why don’t you work it harder and it will be quicker?” He replied that he must ask or the ocean would be lost. It was a mere he was carving and as he smoothed his hand over the wood, he thought that one day it may kill a man or break him, and his blood would fall over the earth like resin. Only when she said she had sought him out because she was told he could give her moko, did he look up at the girl.

“Ae,” Wiremu’s father sighed and smiled.

The next day Wiremu’s great-grandfather laid her down on reed matting in a cool shelter. She turned up her chin to him and he gripped it in his hard carver’s hands. She was sweating. He gave her narcotic seeds to chew and told her to leave the pulp under her tongue so the juices would spread to the back of her mouth. It made her saliva rise and she was soon light-headed.

He stirred the liquid in the bowl beside him, the ash of burnt shit and fish oil, water. He laid out the contents of his tool bag: a handle of manuka and blades made from the wings of albatrosses, some with serrated edges and some flat and sharp. He wound the handle to the blade with string. Then he began to carve her, tapping the bone blade against her face with a small wooden mallet.
He carved for most of the day, rubbing his black concoction into her wounds, wiping away her spills of blood with a softened flax cloth. At first the pain was unbearable but her flesh grew numb with the drug and the hammering. The sound of the chisel thudded against her skull, eased by his softly spoken voice as he told her stories of his ancestors.

One of the *kuia*, her grandmother, helped her to her feet and they left the shelter. She could not open her mouth for three days. She felt unable to breathe. She could not eat. Her belly an empty hut. Her grandmother had *moko*. Now very old, she sat with blankets around her shoulders and knees. When she spoke, she pointed out the girl with lips long ago blackened by the ink of burned caterpillars and tree resin, and it was like an accusation when she told her she was under the spell of the *tohunga tā kaue*. She liked to smoke a pipe, though she told her granddaughter never to do this. She also instructed her not to eat fatty foods or embrace a man until her *moko* was healed. If she did these things, the black lines would bleed and disappear and she would be forever shamed as a woman who had disrespected her *moko*.

She stayed in the hut, hiding her swollen face. On the fourth day she emerged to see the tattooist being chased from his hut by an angry woman wielding a stick. After the *kui* had given her leaves to protect her lips, she went to see her father. He told her off for taking *moko* without asking his permission but she was ready for womanhood and quietly he was pleased, she knew. She asked him about the *tohunga tā kaue*.

They married, the girl with the orca tooth necklace and the carver of wood and flesh. Together they travelled around the island. He tattooed many other people. His tattoos always depicted the sea, the waves and the spirals of the spirits that eddied in the shallows. Everyone who saw Wiremu Heke’s great-grandfather’s *moko* recognised his work.

Wiremu’s father talked all day. He gave him all of his stories before Wiremu sailed out of Otakau with tender, freshly tattooed buttocks, to cross the sea to Van Diemen’s Land.
“Go west. Go west!” The man who leaned into Wiremu’s face had piano-peg teeth. “Boss Davidson doesn’t mind playing his chances. We’ll make a good lay from the seal skin and be out of the way of the Governor and King. Not a white man to be seen in the west.” Seal were getting fished out of the Strait, he said. Seal were getting scarce and the Islanders controlled their patch with firearms. A good time to go west.

It was a tavern at the Hobart docks, where men heaved and swayed like the sea inside the sandstone walls. Samuel Bailey gave Wiremu another mug of wine and spoke to the red-faced man who was his boss. “His name is Billhook. Easier to say than his real name. Billhook will do. He’s a real good blackfella. Take him on, eh?”

All the sweat, the people so close, the wine and then Boss Davidson’s offer; it was as confusing as it was intoxicating. Wiremu, christened Billhook by his crewmates, stood on the docks the next day and watched the Governor Brisbane shifting against the pylons.

Not north to New South Wales for Billhook. He shipped out of Hobart Town three days later bound for the west country. Men crawled amongst the rigging like possums in trees. It took them another three days along the Derwent and through Storm Bay to get to the sea. They were becalmed in the mornings, drifting under hills made smoky blue by the mist, and then away as the midday wind worked up the water writhing black with the shining spines of humpback whales.

During the three days, Billhook began to know the crew. It was said that Samuel Bailey was a swell’s son run out. He was wind burned, with deep cracks around his mouth. A white man. Billhook quickly realised he would never know the weather coming with Bailey. His eyes clouded all the storms in his heart until the moment he lashed out. He got wild alright but Bailey getting wild made him steady as a snake.

Pigeon was a black man, a Sydney native, who quickly got on side with Boss Davidson with his clever wit and his great strength, which belied his lanky frame. There was a boy called
Neddy, born on Kangaroo Island to a black woman and a sealer there. The brothers Jack and Tommy Blunt were the first white men Billhook had met who were born in this country. Two black men: Black Simon towered over Billhook, his back ribbed with scars of the lash, he spoke with a strange accent and Hamilton, a small, very dark man with an easy smile who could speak many languages. Jimmy was the crew’s boatsteerer. The men called him Jimmy the Nail because he had once driven a pike through a rival’s hand and nailed him to the starboard gunwale of his whaleboat. He was a short, sandy man with a ready humour and a scar down the side of his nose. Pigeon told Billhook that Jimmy the Nail had shot black men at their fires, to get women. Pigeon knew this because he’d helped him find their camps at night.

At Robbins Island in the Strait, they weighed anchor and went ashore to gather more crew and supplies for the journey west. Boss Davidson and Jimmy the Nail haggled for pork, seal skins and women with a bluff sealer, who introduced himself as the Strait’s policeman.

The first time Billhook saw Vandemonian women, they were returning to the hut from muttonbirding, long sharp sticks slung across their shoulders, threaded with fluffy grey chicks. Seven women. One child. Twenty dogs. Big dogs they were, some as high as the women’s waists. Long-legged hunting curs, all lolling tongues and ears askew and whiskery grins.

The women walked over the bald hill towards the hut, spread out in a line, the sun behind them, so that their dark shapes with the sticks looked like the white man’s martyr. Some of the impaled birds flapped wearily in the wind as though still alive. The wind tossed the island grass like an ocean about the legs of the mob. If the dogs hadn’t been moving, their shaggy brindle pelts would have made them near invisible against the grass.

Billhook watched the women walk towards them.
Bailey muttered, “Which one do you want?”
“We got plenty pork,” said Billhook and realised his mistake when Bailey laughed and pointed to the woman on the far right.
“That one.”
She was short and strong and wore a frock of skins with the fur on the inside and a red knit cap. She was laughing but she stopped when she saw Bailey point her out. The clanswomen
walked wide of the two men and cast down their eyes. They looked angry or shamed and not as strong as they did on the hill. Billhook’s mother had made his sisters smear their faces with stinking dirt and messed their glossy hair with manure, when the white whalers first came to Aramoana. His sisters were only little girls then but his mother knew to keep them safe.

Bailey stood looking at the woman, chewing tobacco and spitting, his mouth moved around his screw jaw as if it hurt to speak. He took off his cap. He was not an old man but his hair ran away from his head, thin, soft wisps over pink skin.

From the highest point of the island Billhook could see a conical hill on the coast of Van Diemen’s Land. In the evening, a single line of smoke bloomed from the top.

“See that smoke?” he asked the Policeman. “On top of the mountain over there.”

“It’s the blackfellas,” said the Policeman. “The fellas. That’s why the Worthies light a fire up here too.” He gestured behind him to the dark shapes of the women laying swathes of green branches over a frugal flame. A quick burst of smoke floated into the sky. “They’re saying hello back to their fellas. Hello. Goodnight. Whatever they say.”

“Worthies?”

“Titters. Tyreelore. Island Wives. Worth their weight, Billhook. We’d starve without em, hear me.”

The women worked hard in the sea and on the land, the Policeman said. Scraping skins, collecting salt, hunting tamar and giving succour to men who smelt like muttonbird and seal. He talked of muttonbirding. The women went out to the muttonbird grounds with their dogs, spent the day putting their arms down burrows until their faces touched the ground. They showed the Straitsmen how to do this when they were first taken to the islands. Crouch down and thrust your arm into the hole after the parent birds had gone out hunting for fish. Crouch down until the grass and stones scratched your cheek. Feel the wriggle, the bleating heart of the fluffy chick, its feeble pecks at your hand, haul it out, break its neck over a stick, leave it on the ground for one of the other women to thread onto a stick before the dogs got to it. The worst job was draining the oil from the muttonbirds after they were plucked, and squeezing out the gurrey. And the black snakes in the burrows. Snakes everywhere. Lurking in the bushes they called barking barillas. Full of snakes after baby chicks and eggs. But no one ever seemed to get bitten by the snakes. Sometimes they felt the dry slither of a tail but if snake felt you coming they left you alone.
“You hunt and clean muttonbirds too?”

“Nah,” said the Policeman. “That’s the Worthies’ job.”

“That woman Mary,” the Policeman pointed to one of the women. “She’s the wallaby woman. She’s got six dogs. Between all the women there be twenty-eight dogs so they’re a job to feed. Fine dogs they are. Quick and quiet. Like the lurchers from the old country. Their husbands steal them from the shepherds over on the mainland, or trade them and breed them up. Good hunters they are. Never rush a mob of kangaroo without knowing which one they want. Twenty roo in one day once and the Worthies had their skins pegged out by dinnertime. She’s good with dogs, that Mary, but she’s gettin’ difficult. I reckon she’ll be aboard with you lot.”

The Policeman sold Boss Davidson two women, Dancer and Mary, to take west aboard the Governor Brisbane. The strong one, the woman Bailey had pointed out to Billhook, the Policeman wanted to keep her. He was attached to her, he said. He fingered the hard edges of the seal skins that Jimmy had traded him for Dancer. Behind him, a girl child of about eight peered around the doorway and spoke to Mary in her native language. The Policeman turned and spat, “Git!” and she snapped her head out of sight.

In the morning Boss sent his crew in to the island. On the shore, Dancer and Mary waited until the pigs were dumped in the bottom of the dinghy and then climbed aboard and sat on the warm carcasses. Mary turned her face away from the island and from her dogs, which milled about the shoreline, crying for her.

The Governor Brisbane shipped out mid-morning. Billhook looked down from his spar in alarm as Dancer began to wail loudly. She and Mary sat huddled on the foredeck, Dancer’s face greying as the swell rose. She cried out in her language and threw up. Boss Davidson, standing at the wheel, grinned at her and shook his head.

“You must have a padlock on yer arse, Dancer, shitting through yer teeth like that.”

“The water makes her sick,” said Mary and stroked Dancer’s short cap of hair. She took her amulet pouch and sprinkled something powdery and red into Dancer’s outstretched palm. Then she held the pouch against Dancer’s belly and spoke in swift, watery language. “And
there’s Devil in this sea ‘ere,” she called to Boss Davidson, and Boss nodded like he knew what she was saying.

Mary was right. Currents sucked away from sand bars and surged into strange whirlpools. Westerly winds crashed into the easterly swell, complicating the backwash from the rocky cliffs. It was a glad feeling to be away from the islands and into the open sea, away from those uncanny surges, to see the islands sink away and become a mere smudge on the horizon, the sea glittering with an aslant sun and deep blue, rising up to meet the schooner. Dancer quit her crying and vomiting when the islands were out of sight.

They butchered the two pigs on the first afternoon and salted the pork into barrels. They used most of the salt aboard as Boss had plans to get more at Kangaroo Island.

“There’s a few tars there too, who’ll want a lay,” he said that evening.

Kangaroo Island came up on the horizon on the morning of the fourth day. The island rose beast-like out of the sea in the heat’s magic haze. They sailed through the Backstairs Passage, where Jimmy the Nail, who’d lived there, told Billhook that a woman had escaped her island captors by swimming seventeen miles back to the mainland. “With a baby strapped to her back.” They sailed past the cliffs of the cape and into American Bay. Billhook, Bailey and Jimmy the Nail rowed the dinghy towards a white shore, the boat swishing over seagrass beds, the water flattened by the lee of the island. It began to rain softly.

Three men and a woman ran down the rocky hill to where the boat rocked in the shallows. Dogs yapped around their legs. Two more black women dressed in wallaby smocks and knit caps dragged sacks of salt along the beach. One of the women smoked a pipe as she worked.

“See those tars?” Jimmy the Nail pointed to the men gathered on the beach to watch them wade ashore. “See their uniforms? Those ones still wearin’ slops. By the time they been here five years they’ll be in skins like the blackfellas and will have some say in matters. Now see that bloke. That’s Jim Kirby. He bin here a while.”

Kirby was red-faced with hair once orange and now faded to a bright yellow. His long beard was red and white. He was dressed in skins which he couldn’t have cured too well for they smelled bad and rotted off his body, falling into tatters about his knees.
“And this is Smidmore,” Jimmy muttered to Billhook. “Me old mate.”

Smidmore was dark but no native. A Gael perhaps or one of the Black Irish with spiralling black hair that he tied behind his neck with a leather thong and an eye that turned. He carried a fiddle, like the one played in the Hobart tavern, a gear sack and a gun. Smidmore hadn’t been on the island long, from what Jimmy had told Billhook, for he wore the canvas slops given to all new sealers. Despite his clothing, Smidmore acted with Kirby as if they were lords of the island. Billhook wondered aloud to Jimmy why they would take on a lay as tars when they could be island chiefs. Jimmy replied quietly that they were being run off since Johnny Randall planned to go west too. And something about women. There had been some trouble with the women.

They loaded the little boat with two guns wrapped in oiled cloth, two bags of cabbages and potatoes and fifteen sacks of salt sewn closed with the sinew of kangaroo tails. One of the women climbed in, calling her two dogs after her. Kirby and Smidmore got in too. The men and women left on shore pushed out the boat until they felt it free from the sand. Bailey and Billhook grabbed at the oars. The women waved and sobbed and called to the woman in the boat. They rowed out to the channel that would take them through the breakers.

The black woman stood at the bow holding a rope, her feet planted firmly on the thwart. She was magnificent and when he could, Billhook turned to look at her. She looked different to the two Vandemonian Worthies. Her face was thinner, her hair straighter and she didn’t have strings of tiny shining shells about her throat. Instead, so tightly thonged that it dug into the hollow between her collarbones, she wore the whitened skull of a newborn baby.

The crew wriggled the boat alongside the Governor Brisbane. The wind had come up in the absence and it blew the boat off before anyone could get a rope. Hands grabbed for flying ropes on the next try and they fastened the dinghy. The island woman pointed to the salt and let Samuel Bailey know in good English that she’d collected it herself and it must be looked after. She had Bailey on the edge of nodding in obedience until he grunted and turned away.

Mary scowled at her from the schooner’s deck. Mary had been boss woman on Robbins and Billhook could almost hear her thoughts. Who was this uppity sprite? And how was she allowed to bring her dogs and Mary not?
The woman threw one of her dogs up to the ship. The short, whiskery terrier landed on deck and turned to snarl at the black jack Hamilton, then looked over the side at his owner, wagging his tail. On her next throw the bigger dog, a lean hunting dog similar to Mary’s, hit the stringers and dropped, shrieking, into the sea. She let out a cry of dismay. Bailey laughed. The dog swam around the dinghy, shaking water out of its ears. She hauled it in by the skin of its neck. The islander Smidmore grabbed a rope dangling from the gunwales and she tied it around the dog. She nodded to the black jack who hauled the animal up, its body hanging from its elbows, tail between its legs and looking down at its mistress with wrinkled brow.

Once her dogs were safely on board, she nodded again at the sacks of salt. “Don’t you drop that salt. Plenty hard work,” she said to Billhook. She looked at him hard. “You no white man.” She pointed a good true east with long fingers. “You from over there?” Billhook nodded. “K’ora!” she said grinning, her teeth as white as her infant child’s skull and Billhook grinned back in spite of himself.

Rope ladders tumbled down. He watched her climb and wondered how many rope ladders she’d climbed in the cover of night to see a white captain moored at American Bay; a man who scribbled in his books about timber and soil and wallabies and winds but never of the black girl who climbed onto his ship and shown to his cabin.

“Sal,” said Smidmore to the men in the dinghy who were watching Sal climb aboard. “That’s my Sal. She’s mine.”
The days were much the same until the storm hit. Wind blew over the starboard shoulder in the mornings and port side in the afternoons as the land warmed up and sucked the air in from the south. They rarely saw land and when they did, it was only to find anchorage. Then the land was a thin shabby strip misted and hazy with the afternoon salt spray.

Ten days into the journey across the Southern Ocean, the sky became a frightening greasy yellow, with fleeing petrels and tiny spotted clouds heralding the storm. At midnight Boss Davidson ordered the sails shortened. By dawn the Governor Brisbane was running under bare poles at ten knots, sideways. She careened towards the coast, slapping against white caps and lurching into valleys of sea. Boss ordered up the main, to get some reach.

For three days without sleep the crew fought to keep her off the red cliffs, where country looked broken off and dropped into the sea. None of the men knew the colour of the sky during those days and nights, only the light on dark and heaving water. The cliffs stayed a smudge on the horizon, always present but no one wanted to look any closer.

The beach near the island was a shock of white sand after the long days of red cliffs. It was near here that one of Flinders’ men met his maker, Boss Davidson said on the quiet morning after the storm. But not to worry of dead men. The Blunt brothers were to stay and get their lot of seal here. Elephant seal were fished out of the Strait and there was some oil money to be made.

Jack and Tommy were born in this country. Tommy had said that when they were babies the colony was starving because no one knew how to live there and they depended on ships for supplies. They grew all the wrong vegetables and the sheep and cattle ran off into the bush where they ate poisonous plants or were speared by blackfellas. When their mother’s milk ran out, Tommy said, he became sick from dirty water and almost died. Lucky they were, Tommy said, with both parents sent out on the hulks, to be born free men. Jack said he just remembered being hungry.

Jack had the build of a coursing dog, all sinew and bone. He shaved his head every other day and wrapped a cloth around his skull. His eyes were thin. Wrinkles rippled around his lashes.
Jack talked fast like gunshots, hard and sharp. He moved quick too and worked in bursts of speed. When Jack wasn’t talking his silence was as hard as his words, like the stillness of a bad sky. Jack held his rage, nursed it.

He tattooed himself all over his forearms; one was of a seal with the breasts and head of a woman, with no arms and bound in rope. In the nights after leaving Bass Strait, he’d pricked an image of the Governor Brisbane into his skin. He tattooed the ship so that when he stood, the ship was upside down with the roiling sea above her keel and her sails blooming towards the real sea. For the crew it was too bad an omen to look at without shaking their heads.

Jack talked about his twin brother, his carelessness, his untidiness or his clumsy feet. Tommy never seemed to notice the injury he caused Jack. Tommy not bothering to clear the gun. Tommy leaving the embers of a fire all wrong and out of place. Jack seethed with small hurts. When they split in their mother’s womb it was as if they’d been cut away from one another. Tommy had long hair that he never tied back. Shanks of it were always across his face. He never wore shoes or a hat. His feet were furry, his eyes wide and brown. Tommy had landed in a gentler, softer place than Jack, where he was never blown sideways in a gust, never narrowed his eyes against the midday glare, nor picked the gun stock’s splinters from his skull after a beating. His legs were short and he was strong. His hands and wrists were chunky with muscle. He moved slowly but he got the work done. He was clever with boats and could spot a riff on the water long before it hit the sail.

The two young men were given knives, a gun a water barrel, empty oil barrels, rations of salt pork and cabbages and one of the dinghies. At the cove, a small island broke the back of the open ocean and was supposed to be comfortable living. Boss Davidson cautioned the Blunt brothers to make their hut on the island as the natives in the area liked the white man a little too much.

“Weren’t far from here that the Aida foundered and the last man to survive told of cannibals who came down from the desert and found his shipmates dying of thirst on the beach. And then they had worse things than dying of thirst to think about you mark my words. He was raving, mind, when they found him. Worse than Billhook’s mob, the blackfellas around here. You’ll know the beach they washed up on when you find their oars stuck in the sand. Five oars standing up like saplings Five oars.”
Jack and Tommy’s eyes flared at this. “I’m not getting’ eaten by no blackfella,” said Jack. “You’d better be givin’ us more powder than what we got.”

As the little boat was lowered past the planks of the Governor Brisbane, Tommy looked up to Boss Davidson. “You be sure to return for us,” he shouted. He looked afraid. “Four months,” said Boss Davidson. “You be getting’ those seal for me.”

Billhook could hear the sharp patter of Jack as the brothers rowed towards the island. “Of course he’ll be back, you dolt. Plenty of skins and oil. Too greedy not to come back.”
He wasn’t sure about Samuel Bailey. Bailey never looked frightened. Not even when that wave rose right up from the sea like a kraken and spilled the whole boat and crew onto the rocks, sucked back and dropped them again onto the barnacles. Barnacles the size of a man’s hand. Good enough to eat but no good coming towards Billhook’s face, straining brine through their teeth. Bailey was the only calm one that day. He lay in the belly of the whaleboat, facing the mess of clouds. He was laughing while everyone was white and silent. And he was laughing when he told Neddy as he found his seat again that he was going to fucken kill him next time he let the boat get that close to the rocks on a swell. He knew what had happened to Neddy’s brother on Kangaroo Island and he told Neddy he’d break his arm over his knee, break it off and chuck it to the gloamy-eyed devils that hunted seal too.

His laughing and his curses made the crew lighten after their fright but Billhook could not laugh. There was something in Bailey’s way that shivered him. The next morning it was the solstice. One of Neddy’s black fingers was but a bleeding stump and he would tell no one what became of it.
The Eyes 1826

The granite cliffs loomed over the whaleboat, streaked black with plant tannins and white with the water of lime. “The Eyes,” said Jimmy the Nail, pointing out a deep pair of round holes in the sheer face of stone. “The Eyes.”

The Eyes stared down at them as they neared the ledge where a crèche of young fur seals lolled. A single clapmatch, nursing the pups while the other seals hunted, rose to her front flippers as the boat inched closer. Two pups played, flashing their teeth and snaking around each other’s sleek bodies. Sal’s dog barked at the seals and she shushed him with a quick word. On the lee side of the island, the water close to the ledge was flat. Albatrosses and the big gulls waddled over the surface chasing up a school of whitebait. Muttonbirds sheared the water in quick, black arcs. Everett and Smidmore raised their guns and shot the clapmatch and one of the larger pups before the rest of the crèche slipped, yelping, into the sea.

“Better off clubbing those big girls,” said Jimmy the Nail as the seal writhed on the rocks, and he smirked at the still body of the pup he’d shot. Smidmore rushed to reload, stuffing down wadding and pouring powder from his horn. He sighted again. Billhook and Sal kept their oars sculling at the bow, holding the boat off the rocks. Smidmore’s second shot boomed against the island, the bullet sparking on granite and pinging away into the water. He cursed. The seal grunted and squealed beside the dead body of the pup, her chest running with dark blood.

“Take me in,” said Jimmy. He clamped his skinning knife between his teeth and looked around for the waddy. Smidmore handed it to him, silent. Jimmy the Nail nodded and climbed over the barrels and stowed mast and sail to the bow, where he stood with his bare feet clutching the gunwales. Billhook and Sal worked the boat in to where water sucked at the rocks. A small surge and the boat bunted the rocks. The moment when the wood hit stone, Jimmy leapt and landed sure on the slippery ledge. Billhook used his oar to push away and the boatload of sealers stood off to watch Jimmy the Nail work.

“Wind’s turning,” said Smidmore. Out to sea, feathery tips began bothering the water. He looked up at the sky. “Jimmy’ll be wantin’ to flinch that bitch this week.”
After whacking the female seal across the snout, STILLING HER, Jimmy turned her on one side. He crouched and cut a sure line along the belly. As he cut, the animal’s blubber flashed white and then clouded with red. Blood ran over the rocks and into the sea. He peeled back her belly blubber until her guts spilled in silken, colourful heaps over his feet. He continued cutting around the flippers and head until he had a raft of skin and blubber. The seal’s peeled body shone red and white. Her eyes rolled back in her head.

“Get that pup aboard,” shouted Smidmore to Jimmy. “Wind’s coming up.” He nodded to Billhook and Sal. “Bring her in.” Sal threw Jimmy a rope and he tied it around the body of the pup. They hauled it in as they would a tuna or shark. Then Jimmy floated the blubber and skin of the clapmatch to the boat. As it rafted closer, Smidmore gaffed at it until it lay draped over the gunwale leaking brine and blood, swilling into the sea that had seeped in since the boat was last bailed.

Jimmy the Nail waited on the edge of the rocks for the boat. By then the wind was blowing her towards the rocks and it took four oars to hold her off. The bow bashed against stone. Jimmy hurled himself into the boat, landing badly against a thwart. Billhook felt the deep bite of his oar as they struggled to get the boat off the rocks. The bow smacked into granite again. The wind grabbed at the stern and started swinging it around towards the ledge.


Jimmy, shaking blood from his eyes, felt around for an oar. He closed his hand on the waddy, felt its weight and threw it down again. The sea rose under the boat and hefted her sideways onto the rocks. Sal screamed something. Twenty-four foot of men, woman, dog, seal and clinkered wood lay suspended for what felt an age, the oars writhing in the air.

Billhook was on his back and scrambling for his seat when he saw the Eyes again. The boat crunched down as the swell sucked away. They clambered to the windward side of the boat ready for the next wave. Nobody spoke. It was silent but for the wash of water and the second crash of the boat against the rocks. They all knew the next wave would flip the boat and crush them against the rocks. Billhook saw there would be a time when he would dive over to save
himself but it wasn’t yet. It wasn’t yet. The others looked the same. Keep her off. We can get away yet. All of us.

“Well,” said Smidmore. The seal skin slid off the gunwale and into the sea. “When she comes in next, we row like fuck. We row her out, yes? Are you ready?”

* 
Fairy Island 1826

After a month working the western islands for seal, Boss Davidson left Jimmy the Nail’s crew and a whaleboat on Fairy Island, on the far fringes of the Recherche Archipelago. Pigeon, Hamilton, Black Simon, Mary and several others including Kirby as boatsteerer were left at another island to the east. Boss Davidson was taking the schooner on a trade run north to Batavia, a colonial outpost Billhook had not heard of before, to sell the skins and pick up spice and linen for the Sydney market. After making rough copies of his charts onto canvas for the two boatsteerers, Boss Davidson instructed them to meet him in King George Sound in six months’ time.

There was plenty of seal about Fairy Island for a good moon or so. The crew put the boat in on the north shore every morning, rowing the boat around to one of the outcrops and shooting seal while they still had gunpowder. It was good, to shoot seal and not wade around through their barking and snarling and crying, belting them with waddies and watching out for their stinking teeth. Billhook and Bailey swam to the rocks, fast if the blood was running into the sea, looking around them for fins with their knives between their teeth. They hauled the bodies and flensed them until the rocks ran with blood mixing into streaks of algae and lime from the bush above. Maybe ten seal on a good day. Ten skins and half a barrel of oil. The pups left behind mewled for milk.

Jimmy and Smidmore went into the forest in the centre of the island with axes and returned dragging peppermint branches for the try pot. They needed plenty of wood to try out the oil and plenty of salt for the skins. They lit a fire beneath the iron pot and boiled the blubber for hours, skimming off the scum, gaffing out any meat or bones and then ladling the oil into barrels. It would be a long day to try out ten seal. Boss Davidson would be happy on his return.
Billhook set up the drying racks on the beach and watched as the women scraped skins on the long slope of granite above the shoreline. Dancer and Sal sang as they scraped. Although they could have used knives, Sal told him her stone knives were better because they didn’t break the hide. The furry ring of hair around Dancer’s head bobbed when she nodded at Sal and stopped work to correct Sal’s song. She looked to Sal, paused and then sang the same bit again. Sal knew none of her songs and Mary, Dancer’s clanswoman, lived on another island now. Dancer repeated the last verse, Sal picked it up and they began scraping again.

The women wore their wallaby smocks even in the heat of late summer. Salt stained white their feet and calves. On the rocks, scrubbing at the skins, they seemed almost seal-like, lolling about on the rocks. Two seals, slow and brown, crouched over their kin. But he had seen them dancing at night and he had seen them emerge sleek and shining from the water, holding aloft a cray or a New Holland paua. Gleaming and black they were, shining women, alight with the sea or the fire.

He watched Dancer often. Sal would talk to him and tell him things but Dancer refused to speak to the sealers. He didn’t even know if she spoke to Jimmy the Nail in the night.

“That Dancer, she knows what she’s doing with seal.” Jimmy tied off one of the racks and cut the ropey vine with his knife. His feet squeaked in the fine, white sand. “She’s been with the Straitsmen for years now.”

“Where is her country?”

“Oyster Bay area? Dunno. Maybe Bruny Island. Johnny got her first. He grabbed her and then later he sold her to that bloke Cooper, after he shot his own woman. Shot her through the stomach, Cooper did, when she was standing in the doorway of his hut one day. Shot her in front of all the other Worthies.”

“Why?”

“Make an example of her to the Worthies. This is what happens when you don’t work, ladies. That’s what Cooper told me. Then he got Dancer and sold her to the Policeman a year or so ago. Cooper’s on Kangaroo now. He’s got another woman. Onkaparinga woman. I told him he was stupid. Killin’ a Worthie. They’re worth more alive than they are dead. Some men just don’t know how to handle them. When they make trouble fighting, or not working or looking like they gonna mutiny, I just give them a gun. I give them the gun and send them off into the bush. They come back a while later with possums or parrots or pigeons. Happy. Everyone is
happy. That’s how you handle them. You don’t need to shoot them. Dancer’s good anyway. Known her for a long time.”

Jimmy wrinkled his nose in distaste. “She kills all her babies, is all. Stuffs grass in their mouths the moment they are born. No white man’s been able to keep his children with Dancer.”

On the first of their days on Fairy Island, they found the cave. Sal’s two dogs killed and ate the clutch of fairy penguins sleeping in its deepest recesses. Within hours their trident footprints were gone from the white sand as the crew flattened out the floor and built a fireplace at the entrance.

In the evenings they retreated from the constant easterly winds to the limestone cave gaping to the north sky. Their path from the beach to the cave soon wore into a track from their feet and the dragging of barrels. Grasses that Billhook stepped warily around in the first week, remembering the barking barillas from Robbins Island, wore away to sand to give him a clear view for the dreaded snakes. The path widened halfway up the hill and became stony, lined with bright green shrubs sprouting tasty red berries. Here was the cave, made by edges of limestone, the sandy floor falling away down the hill. Here was the cave where they lived, for the moment.
Two moons of working Fairy and the islands clustered nearby brought several barrels of oil, plenty of skins rolled tight and dried with salt, and a sudden silence of live seals. As they had seen no other vessels in the area, Billhook reckoned that his own crew had cleaned them out. Only the bones of their previous kills populated the regular ledges and outcrops they visited.

“West ... Investigator, the Doubtfuls, then King George Sound,” said Jimmy the Nail one night. Billhook’s shoulders still ached from the day’s rowing but the crew were relaxed. They hadn’t been skinning or trying out oil for a week or more now and fruitless days were days easy on the body. “We’ll pack up tomorrow and ship out the day after.”

The next day, after stashing the skins and oil in a remote cave, Billhook stopped to stroke one of the skins, one of the plusher he’d tanned. The ashen tips of the hairs were white against the deep pile of black. Underneath the hair lay the felty soft fur, dense and warming. He held it against his cheek. It bristled slightly before yielding to the warmth beneath. The big female had taken several blows from his whalebone club before she stilled.

Being one of the few who could write, Bailey scratched Gov. Brisbane into one of the barrels. “Not that it will stop any bastard,” he muttered. He looked up in the dim light of the cave to Billhook silhouetted against the opening, stroking the skin.

“Fuck, you’re hard up, you knob. We gotta find you a wife.”

“I am keeping this one for my bed,” answered Billhook, rolling up the skin.

At dawn Billhook, Bailey, Sal, Neddy, Dancer, Jimmy, Smidmore and the two dogs piled into the boat. They sat on thwarts or piles of nets and canvas. Sal stood at the bow, as she always did when she wasn’t on the oars, hanging onto the rope. Billhook had lashed down the heavy iron try pot in the centre of the boat, beside the masthead, so that it didn’t roll about. They tied lengths of canvas to the gunwales, lacing them with rope and tensioning them to make a soft deck, to keep out the sea.

Currents moved at a few knots as the tide swelled around Fairy Island and they let it carry the boat away. There was no wind in the early morning. The men rowed until they were in the open ocean with the land only a flat strip overhung with a thin cloud to their north and the
island a speck to the east. Dancer huddled her body into the mess of canvas and gear and held tight Sal’s big lurcher, moving only to vomit over the side. The piebald terrier dashed about, searching for sea spray to tussle with. In the water, cuttlefish bones dotted with teeth marks bobbed like strange faces in the glittery morning sea, merging into the little colonies of green and yellow weed.

The wind came up mid-morning and changed the sea from deep blue to turquoise. Investigator Island was a long sail west from Boxer. They’d lost sight of the mainland by midday and Jimmy the Nail kept checking his compass, saying, “Keep her over, over to port. Thirty miles offshore.” Albatrosses and gannets were gathering, attracted by the boat and the lure Billhook dragged in its wake.

As the sun fell, the island lay like a seal on the horizon. Two peaks at either end.

“Is that the island? It’s too far north!” Jimmy pulled the canvas map that Boss had given him from his belt and glared at it. He looked up to the island and then to his compass. “Must be it. Not the mainland. That’s not the Barrens. That’s Investigator Island.”

“The Barrens,” muttered Bailey. “Jimmy’s losing it. That’s another day away.”

It took three hours after they saw the island to be within its reaches. Reefs spumed and sprayed to their starboard and the sun left only a yellow glow on the horizon. They rounded the nose of the island in the dark, the roar of the swell bashing against the rocks and the flash of white foam their only reckoning. The wind ceased in the island’s lee. A quiet little atoll with a black hill to each side embraced them. The sail whispered, whipped and stilled.

Jimmy nosed the whaleboat into the breath whistling over the saddle of the island and trimmed the sail. He tied it off. Smidmore stood at the bow with an anchor.

“Keep her ahead.”

Billhook could just see the jagged boulders and the water lapping against them.

“Keep her ahead, another length ... one more length ...”

The rocks were closer, until Billhook could smell the covering of green weed and the earthy funk of the island. The crew, even the dogs, were silent as Jimmy edged the boat towards the rocks.

“Let her off!”
The sail flapped madly and Billhook rushed to furl it, grabbing armfuls of canvas. The anchor splashed. Chain rushed, clanked over the side. As the anchor took, the boat blew off the rocks and held firm against its rope.

In the night, the boat rocked and lulled Billhook’s flesh about his bones. He heard waterfall tinkling against the hull.

“What is that sound? Are we gaining water?” he asked Jimmy the Nail.

Jimmy lurched over the gear to find the bailer. He pulled the coiled rope away from the stern and felt the planks. “No,"

“Then, what?”

Jimmy shrugged. “Naiads. Sea lice. Mr Thistle’s doomsayer. Go to sleep Billhook.”

The bristly seal skin tickled his neck. The anchor chain thudded against its bridle. Jimmy snored, one arm around Dancer’s neck and Neddy whimpered like a dreaming dog.

Billhook slept. Water wraiths played against the hull, thrumming their fingers up and down the planks. Undersea songs trilled in the dark, singing and humming. Little feet clattered on the foredeck. The water wraiths climbed over the sides, small creatures with cat eyes, raked their long fingernails in shining lines of phosphorescence down his neck, over his nubbly nipples and twirled around his stomach.

The quarter moon and naiads slid away when Bailey shook him. “Get up, Billhook.”

“Taipari wahine.”

“What? Speak the Queen’s.”

“Huh?” Billhook sat up to see a brown gull staring at him from the deck.

“The wind’s changed. We gotta put another anchor out.”

Billhook sat upright. He could see the spray of onshore waves just to the starboard. Smidmore and Sal looked up from their shared sleeping skin. The boat had swung on its anchor and was blowing onto the rocks. He could feel the anchor loosening its hold on the bottom through every buck of the carvel.

“Get an oar. Let’s get her out!”

“Boss said it happens a lot here,” Jimmy the Nail murmured, as the boat tugged at two picks east and west. “Anchor up in a sou’-easter at Investigator and the wind goes around to the
north in the night.” He took a swig from his flask and passed it to Bailey. “Him – he’s the only man woke up when she blew around.”

Billhook watched Bailey’s starlit face wrinkle into a grimace as he swallowed the rum. The weeks on the islands without a razor had produced a beard the colour of kowhai flowers that climbed his cheeks towards his eyes.

Before dawn, Billhook awoke on the pile of skins, nets and canvas and looked around him at the mess of bodies; people and dogs crammed against each other in the clinker boat. The young Pacific gull was still holding place on the deck, clattering its feet on wood. As Billhook wriggled away from the sleeping bodies, the bird eyed him, alarmed, and rose into the air to hover above.

The island glowed golden with the rising sun, its mossy skin bursting with huge boulders. In the sea-blackened saddle between the two hills, surf surged in from the east. Dark shapes moved amongst the rocks on the shoreline. As the day lightened, the seals emerged from their hollows. Two young pups fought, yawning open their mouths to show teeth not yet fetid, yelping and screeching as they gnawed and slapped at each other. Crowning the northern hill, a big male watched over his domain.

Schools of herring drifted around the boat. Billhook found his line in his kit, threaded on some seal meat, threw it over the side. The fish swarmed around his hook and soon he was reefing herring over the gunwales and throwing them into the hollow beside Smidmore and Sal. He’d caught a dozen before a seal swam through the school and the fish peeled away. Sal awoke, slapping the flapping herring from her face. He apologised, but she rose and found a knife and started filleting, using an oar as her board.

Billhook chewed on a piece of raw herring and considered the bull silhouetted at the top of the hill.

“I call ’im down,” said Sal. She put her hands around her mouth and yelped, calling out to the old bull. She laughed uproariously as the seal cocked his head and started lumbering down the hill. “Took ’im all night to get up there, I reckon.”

“Keep calling,” said Billhook, strapping his waddy over his back. “Keep him coming down.”
Sal continued her clapmatch call and the bull lolloped towards them, rolls of fat and muscle. Billhook dived into the water, his scalp tightening with the sudden chill, and swam to the rocks. He slipped and crawled over the glossy black algae, hiding himself behind a boulder on the dark side of the island. He heard the ponderous undulations of the seal as it came towards him, and he clenchd the whalebone waddy and his short lance, ready for the kill.
Billhook stood on the peak of the island, looking down to where their boat was anchored. He scratched at his hair. Fine and oily, it was laced silver with lice and salt and felt thick with itchiness. He wondered what the women did to rid themselves of lice. Mud? Oil? There was no lice where he came from until the pakeha came. Then it was fat that his mother rubbed through the hair of her children.

About a chain from the rocks, he saw movement, a shining flash of wet skin picked out by the low afternoon sun. ‘But we got them all, all their skins stashed, and still the seal are coming,’ he thought. No, it was not a seal but Dancer surfacing for air. She shook water from her short, frizzy hair and disappeared again beneath the waves. Sal stood above the barnacles on the rocks, her fur frock flapping in the wind. She was holding a woven bag and watched the waves for Dancer.

The skirts of the island were studded with the peeled carcasses of seals bleeding into the sea. Yellow fat melted away from their flesh in the midday sun, revealing dark mounds of meat and bone covered in squabbling bands of petrels and gulls that rose and fell with the wind. Wherever the wind came from in the days the crew stayed on the island, they could smell the evidence of their slaughter, a rancid rotting of fat and flesh. The try pot stayed aboard the boat – there was no timber for fire to boil down the carcasses for oil and the nearest landfall was a day’s sail away. They kept the seal skins and left the bodies to rot on the rocks.

Dancer rose again from the sea and swam over to Sal, her arms slicing through the waves. Billhook could see her toothy smile as she trod water away from the barnacles, holding aloft a wriggling cray and a fistful of the weed that she ate raw. She threw the cray and the kelp to Sal, who stuffed it into her bag and shouted, waving Dancer back out to sea, laughing.

Billhook knew the area from the weeks he’d spent here. He’d pulled a few paua off those rocks but Dancer was the diver, yes. This is reason why the Straitsmen used the Vandiemonian women, he thought. Pallawah women are fearless when hunting the sea bottom. That Sal, she is no diver and not even much of a swimmer. Sal is an estuary woman whose country was the still waters and fish traps across the channel from Kangaroo Island. Like the men, she preferred something solid; planks, stone or sand beneath her feet. Dancer,
whose clumsiness around the fireplace angered the men, she who refused to speak their language and who spent her sea miles vomiting into bilge water, Dancer was a seal in the open sea.

Smidmore climbed up the hill stepping over the tussocks and stones. He stood, as he always did, with Billhook on the side of his good eye and ear. “Movin’ on tomorrow, Billhook.”

“Yes.”

“You seen a big old Noah hanging around?”

For days, small sharks had been slicing around the island, sniffing out the bloodstained rocks and frightening off the herring.

“No. No big ones. Just those whiskeries. A few bronzies.”

“I saw ’im this morning ... Christ ...” Smidmore breathed and squinted. “That Dancer down there?”

Dancer dived again and disappeared. Billhook watched Sal shout to Bailey, who was working the boat into shore. Bailey looked startled, out to where Dancer was diving.

“Fuck,” said Smidmore. His neck muscles tightened as he watched the water intently. “Fuck. There ’e is. Big bastard.”

As each wave rose, the shark appeared in the window of water, its ghostly belly white and the rest of its body shadowy. It did not look to be in a hurry but intent, circling the area where Dancer was diving.

“Where is Dancer?” Billhook called, panic rising in his belly.

“She’ll be hiding.” Smidmore gave a short laugh.

The shark slid beneath the water, flicking its tail with a splash, almost a salute. Billhook could hear Sal shouting now. Jimmy and Bailey hopped across the rocks towards her and the three stood dark and ragged against the waves. Minutes ... hours passed. Smidmore growled deep in his throat when he saw Sal throw up her arms and turn her face away from the sea and onto Jimmy’s breast.

“Dancer!” and he started the run down the hill.

Dancer.

Billhook watched Smidmore’s black hair flying around his shoulders, his wallaby-clad feet leaping from stone to stone. Smidmore was half the way down when Dancer crawled out of
the sea. The waves scraped her over the barnacles. She grabbed at them as a wave sucked back and hung on. She dropped her face against the stone and razor sharp shells, unconscious.

In the evening they lit a fire of dried grasses and fuelled it with penguin skins, bones and dried kelp to keep warm. Sal packed seal fat and ash into Dancer’s wounds and spoke to her swiftly in a creole of Vandiemonian and English.

“She was hiding!”

Smidmore nodded to Billhook. “See, Billhook?”

“Dancer hide under the weed. She pull that kelp right over her, like a skin. She lie on her back and watch the shark,” Sal waved her arms in circles above her head, “swim all around over top her.”

Dancer spoke to Sal in a low voice.

“If she go up, he get her. She don’t breathe long time. A bubble and that shark would see her so she not breathe.”

Dancer’s back and arms were lined with deep gashes, scored by her landfall upon the barnacles. Her body shook with shock and her feet and hands twitched. She said her chest was hurting too. Sal held Dancer’s hand and looked at it. “Squeeze,” she said. Dancer couldn’t move her hand. Sal shook her head. She tore off some canvas and bound Dancer’s hand. “She broke her hand. On the rocks.”

“No good for nothing else,” said Jimmy the Nail, staring at Dancer’s bare breasts. “Not ’til she heals.” As he did every night when the fire died down, he flicked his finger at Dancer.

“Come with me now.”

Dancer groaned and rolled her eyes. Silence fell upon the small group as they waited to see if Dancer would defy him. Smidmore and Bailey looked on with interest. Sal and Billhook both shook their heads and then Sal eyed Dancer with resignation. Dancer didn’t move.

“Come, I said.” Jimmy grabbed at Dancer’s bandaged hand and jerked her to her feet. He was still clenching her hand, with Dancer’s whining pitched almost to a whistle, as they disappeared into the night.
The black easterly wind strengthened through the day. Sometimes they sailed close enough to land for Billhook to see the yellow stain of flowers spreading like clouds across the coast hills. By afternoon the land was misted over with dust and spray and the wind beat at their backs until the boat was hurtling down waves and broaching at the bottom.

As the day wore on and the crew wearied, it became a given that they would not make landfall that night. Though they were close to the Doubtful Islands, the onshore winds meant the breakers would be too big. It was safer to head back out to sea and spend the night away from the rocks. The little boat surfed wave after wave with white foam leering at its peak when Jimmy the Nail gave the order to go about before the next set came through.

The crew knew what it meant. The sails must be trimmed and they would have to beat into the wind just to hold their position. There would be no sleep. A night of listening for the sounds of the sea changing, listening for the reefs and the bombies, watching for the glint of white water in the distance, in a sea that was already a knife-like swathe of cold wind and flying spray and the sound of roaring water in their ears.

As the sun set, the sea turning silver with the horizontal light, Dancer pointed her bandaged hand towards a wave on their port side.

Sal started yelling too. “That big old boy, he’s after us!”

The shark surfaced near the boat and turned its head up to them so they could see its glossy black eye, then sank beneath the waves again.

“Put that Splinter on as bait,” laughed Bailey. Sal hugged the little terrier to her breast and glared at Bailey. “We’d get ourselves a good feed.”

Throughout the night, the shark followed them. Sometimes all they saw was the flick of its tail or its snout rising from the water. Once Dancer saw the shark, she stopped vomiting overboard. Instead, she heaved her stomach into the boat and Sal’s dogs licked it up.

“Can you take an oar?” Every hour or so, a tired rower would call to be replaced. They would fall back into the belly of the boat and soon be shivering with the cold and pulling skins around themselves, trying to steal a short sleep. Another would row then, or handle the
mainsail, their oars sometimes missing the choppy sea, skimming through wind and spray. Sal bailed out the boat until she was scraping the tin against the wooden boards.

The men and women were silent except for the occasional, “Can you take an oar?” or “Can you rest me now?” They stared mutely into the darkness, watching for reefs and the shark. Nobody sang, as they did often on their long journeys. Nobody spoke.

In the middle of the night, the wind changed. Everett looked at his compass, squinting, slanting it towards the light coming off the water. “Sou’-west.” Billhook could smell the rain before it arrived. A chill roared through the air. He sighed, glad that the rain would flatten out the sea a little but when the rain started, it blew sideways. It was a stinging rain that soon turned to hail. Small shards of glassy hail hit his face. The crew pulled their caps as far over their eyes as they could and kept rowing. Billhook could no longer feel his fingers.

The hail blew over and out to the north and the rain followed too. Over the flapping of the sail, Billhook heard a knocking sound around the boat. He nudged Jimmy who started upright from his slumber.

“That bastard,” said Jimmy. “He’s gettin’ cocky.”

The shark knocked again.

“I will put out a line,” said Billhook.

“Then what’ll you do? Bastard’ll scuttle us.”

“We’ll tow him dead.”

The rope twanged against the mast an hour later, rattling Billhook from his reverie. He stowed his oar and checked his knots on the line. Thirty yards away, the water bulged and churned with the fighting creature.

“You’d better get on two oars now, Billhook” said Bailey. “Makin’ us tow the bastard. Givin’ him a free ride, you are.”

The rope slackened as the shark swam towards the boat. Then it ripped tight again. For the rest of the night, until the sky whitened with the new day, the rope flicked and loosened and hummed with the might of the great shark. Billhook played, guessing what the shark would do next. His only thoughts were of the shark and the rope and the oars.
The wind dropped just before the dawn. Around Billhook, the crew lay or sat, their faces lined and etched with salt. The oars lay with their handles starred into the centre of the boat. The dogs slept with Sal, the lurcher almost the same length as her body and the piebald terrier lying across her throat. Billhook’s hands were crimped into pincers and he could hardly use one to loosen the other. His fingers tingled. He tried to force them straight against the wooden thwart and winced.

Jimmy raised the head sail and they headed for the coast again. Smidmore awoke as the boat’s motion changed under sail. “How far off are we?” Jimmy pointed to the thin strip of land on the horizon. “Morning tea, sir,” he said in a toff’s voice, then laughed. “Dunno where the Doubtfuls are, though. We could have blown back to Bass Strait in the night.”

They sailed along the coast until the sun was above their heads. The Barrens, a long range of black mountains, stayed on their starboard. Finally Billhook sighted the islands hunched against the red cliffs of the mainland. As they drew closer, he could feel the air from the previous night’s storm, a cool chill, creeping from the land. It was always warmer out to sea.

The wind had freshened again but they were able to sail around through the channel and into a sheltered cove on the north side of the island. The six of them swung their bodies over the gunwales and into waist deep water, their feet hitting hard white sand, and they pulled the boat into shore.

“This is a good place,” said Sal, looking around. “Plenty fish. Trees. Water.” She pointed to the green seam of reeds running through the bush down to the beach.

“Let us get this Noah in, hey,” said Bailey. “Before all his mates come to the funeral.”

As they hauled the fish towards the shore, Billhook saw it was still alive. “We should have tied off its tail and towed it dead,” he said. The shark was tired and close to death anyway. It rolled lazily on the beach, twisting the rope around its body, the sand covering its glossy grey skin.

“Must be twelve foot,” said Smidmore. “But look how fat! Nearly as round as the bastard is long.” He whacked an oar against its nose and the fish slumped, stunned. “That smell ...”
The stench of the dying shark was terrible. When they cut open its belly, the smell became intolerable. Even Jimmy the Nail turned away, his hand over his mouth in a failed effort to staunch his vomit.

With the gaff, Billhook delved into the shark’s stomach and reefed out a young seal, bitten in two, a native’s broken spear still sticking out of her greasy pelt.
“What fate brought you west?” Smidmore asked Billhook one night.

“The *Sophia*,” he answered. “I was looking for the ship,” and said no more for he did not know whose ears were pricked for their mate Captain Kelly.

The sealer William Tucker had washed up on Otakau shores one year before the massacre. Wiremu Heke must have been eleven a boy, yes, when the Australian Tucker managed to ingratiate himself with Chief Korako and taken a local wife. It was Tucker who one year later had led negotiations between the ruddy captain of the *Sophia* and the Chief. Suddenly the Chief suspected Tucker’s translation as devious and the deal went awry in the meeting house. Whisperings in the room turned to a rising murmur, then the angry hum of a disturbed hive.

The boy Wiremu remembered Tucker and the day that he was no longer an honorary Otakau. He saw him on the beach screaming, “Captain Kelly! Please! For pity’s sake, don’t leave me!” as the New South Wales crew and the captain fled to their ship, fighting off the furious *toa*. Wiremu later saw Tucker hatchetted, and his pieces carried away.

Overnight, the still water shone with the moonlight and the *Sophia* remained at anchor in a dearth of wind to get away, her rigging and ramparts holding men with guns. All night, shots echoed against the sides of the inlet.

At daylight the Australians stormed back through the village armed with guns and crosscut saws. Chief Korako, dead from a bullet through the neck during one of the night’s many failed ambushes, was not there to see forty-two of Wiremu’s father’s boats sawn in half. Even as Kelly’s men laboured over the cross saws, covered by guards, their country man Tucker was being thrown in pieces into an earth oven several hundred metres away.

The crew of the *Sophia* took flaming torches to the end of the village where the warm nor’-easter blew in, and razed the houses. Within an hour scarcely a single dwelling was left standing. Wiremu’s father was suddenly smaller, older amidst the screams of the women. He lay on the beach badly injured, his power as master artisan leaching from him, shuddering and bleeding.
Gunpowder won that war, like so many others. Eight days later, fifty warriors washed onto the beaches from the *Sophia* battle. The bodies caught in the brothy corners of the harbour, snagged on trees, bloated in that strange manner of drowned men. Knees bent, legs and arms spread, their bodies plump with water and gases, bullet wounds and cutlass splits marring the faultless etchings on their warrior skins.

No one fished the waters of Aramoana for a long time. His mother repeated the mantra of *tapu* waters to Wiremu, weeks later when he was hungry and asked her why they’d not yet harvested the eels.

“*He kete kai nga moana katoa.*”

All the oceans are a food basket.

“*Na reira I te wā ke mate tatou, e tika ana kia hoki atu o tatou Tinana ki a Papatuanuku.*”

We are all born of Rangi and Papa, the Sky Father and the Earth Mother. When we die it is right that our bodies return to Papa.

It was a thin year.

Captain Kelly and his ship were marked. Any ship under his name entering the quiet stretches beyond Aramoana, past the sand spit where the octopus traps lay in shallow waters, did so knowing the grievance, knowing the risk. The Ngai Otakau knew that Kelly grew fat in New South Wales on the proceeds of his trade, and that he did not feel any pressing need to return.

For the boy, Kelly’s Irish blood spilled would have renewed the honour of his broken father but James Kelly never returned. In late life, his father sat on the marae, watching the young men prepare their waka for this war or that battle. There was anxious talk of the Ngati Toa coming down from the north after *pounamu* and power but that was yet to pass. Wiremu’s sisters grew into beautiful young women and, with their friends, married or cooked for the tide of sealers and whalers who sailed into their town. Wiremu, the son of a master boat builder, [he] wanted to go to sea and his father knew his hankering.

“You don’t say much, do yer?” Samuel Bailey picked at his teeth, threw the twig in the fire and looked curiously at Billhook. Behind Sal, the big dog sighed in its sleep.
Billhook and Samuel Bailey took the boat to the mainland to set fishing nets from the shore. It was early but already the wind had freshened. They rowed towards the rocks, crossing into a windward slop. Bailey stood and steadied himself against the waves. He pointed for the shore and Billhook took his oar. Bailey started flicking directions at Billhook with his fingers, directing Billhook to the place where he wanted to drop the net but Billhook was having none of it. He didn’t need navigating. He knew where to go. He worked the boat along a bit until he got to the crevice where water was sucked and spat out again. Closer to where the paperbark trees grew almost to the water. The morning sun turned them a naked-white-man pink. Billhook rowed forward to the north-east, then went astern to the south-east and backed the boat right into the shore. Bailey fiddled with the nets, sorting through the stone anchor and corks.

Their wake arrived after them, swishing into shore. Billhook heard the cawing of the crows and the thump and crack of waves further along the beach. The nets smelt mushroomy as he rowed away, Bailey played them over the side, the little floats bumping over the gunwales and spilling into the sea.

When he’d thrown over the last float and stone, Bailey looked around and lined up where the island folded into the last saddle of the land, got a bearing on the net’s position. Then they rowed the boat back to the shore to wait while the fish meshed.

They found a crescent of stones built facing the sea. Stuffed into the wall of black basalt, red lichenched rocks and brown granite, Billhook removed a tattered piece of canvas sail that must have been a roof for the shelter.


Billhook sat on the flat stone in the centre of the lookout and thought how in the winter the wind would have been at his back and in the spring the water and skies would be clear and bright, not hazy with smoke and dust like it was now in late summer. With the south-westerly at his back a man could sit here for weeks watching for whales.
Bailey muttered, “Having a look around,” and Billhook watched his figure wade through the dense shrubs of fading blue fan flowers and balls of bright pink against the grey-green bush. Waves curled into the rocks and nudged the boat against the rocks. The breeze blew light spumes of spray and arcs of rainbow across the water. He slapped at a stinging fly, saw the massive sand slips on the hills opposite the bay, rolling fields of stark white dunes. The clouds parted to let the sun in. At his feet lay a midden of paua shell. Ahh.

Once he was out of his pants, he tied off the legs to make a bag, crept along wet rocks until he was able to glide out into the sea with a knife between his teeth. It had been weeks since he’d dived for paua, for anything. The cold hit his chest. He struck out for where the lump under the waves made a flat footprint on the surface. Dived down, spilling his hair behind him, found the rock. He could feel the mossy mounds under waving fronds. He knew how to find paua, or muttonfish as the sealers called them. He felt his way, sliding back and forth over the weed with the surge, levering away the shellfish with his blade against stone and the sure suck away from the stone. Then he could see the clean oval shape where the fish had been clamped.

Up, gasp, two deep breaths and back down to that rock, thanking the Mother as he levered more paua away from their home and stuffed his trouser legs full of clicking, oozing meat with the smell of a woman on them. He climbed out of the water, dragging his catch along behind him, blinking the salt from his eyes to see Bailey stumbling down the hill towards him.

Bailey’s face looked strange, set and hard. He was scanning for the quickest way to the boat. He was carrying something; an animal. It wriggled under his arm.

“Get the boat. Get it.”

Then the naked, struggling child kicked at him and he almost dropped her.

Billhook did as Samuel Bailey told him. He swam to the boat and rowed it to the rocks, backed it in so that Bailey could climb in, dragging the child after him. The girl was whining and grunting with fear and Bailey put his face close to hers until her running nose nearly touched his. He just growled at her. Nothing else. He growled at her like a dog and she was silent.
“Better get that net up Billhook.” Bailey looked behind him to the shore. Smoke rose in a thin, vertical line from behind the hill, blowing off with the sea winds. Billhook hauled up the net, silver sickles of herring and yellow-eyed mullet flashing and writhing in their cotton bonds, into the deck of the boat, pulling the boat away from the rocks.

Lean black men ran down to the shore, shouting. They began throwing spears into the water but their reach would not answer. The boat was too far away and the spears slid into the water.

“A kid, Bailey. Why a kid?” Billhook’s voice sounded vague and thin. He struggled to give it more strength when he spoke again. “What do you need a kid for?”
“Prefer a woman myself,” said Bailey. “But she didn’t wanna come.”

Bailey’s trousers were bloodied and wet. There were flecks of flesh on his bare feet. Billhook looked at the little girl. She didn’t seem to be injured. From under Bailey’s arm she stared at Billhook’s nakedness with flared eyes. She stared at the inky spirals that the tattooist had carved into his buttocks before he left for New Holland. Her fleshy, hairless cleave and her staring eyes made his tattoos, his very flesh, dirtied and, quite strangely, dishonourable.

Billhook knew when he saw the blood on Bailey’s trouser cuffs that he should never have obeyed him. That he should have gone back to the Doubtfuls and left Bailey to the blackfellas and their spears. But too late.

“You done well, Billhook,” said Bailey, as Billhook dumped the anchor and the last of the net into the boat and collected his oars, the spears well out of range now. “I owe you.” Billhook rowed against the wind once they moved out of the sheltered bay. Bailey sat in from of him, holding the girl. She stared at him, terrified. He tried to say something gentle but his words came out as a grunt and he gave up, taking a bead on the smoke rising from behind the hill to keep his course straight. They moved closer to the island.

Jimmy the Nail met them in the shore of the cove. Billhook threw him the rope. Jimmy whistled low when he saw the child.
“Whatcher got there Bailey? Dinner? What the hell did yer think yer doing?”
Bailey repeated something of what he’d said to Billhook and picked up the girl, trying to climb over the side and hang on to her at the same time. She shrank away from Jimmy standing in the water, her arms flailing, her legs pushing against the planks.
“Get one of the Worthies,” said Bailey.

Sal was already coming down the hill, then Dancer followed her, her wild halo of hair bobbing as she walked. They stared at Billhook’s tattooed nakedness and then they saw the girl. Dancer stood in the water and became quite still. Sal’s face crumpled. She shook her head and wailed, “No, no, no,” broke into her own language.
Jimmy the Nail cuff ed her. “Talk her out Sal, or she’ll go over the side.” To Bailey, he said, “Though she’d be better off in the drink than with you, you fucking prick.”

The women hauled the girl into the water. Dancer picked her up and piggybacked her to the shore. They stepped out of the water and walked along the beach until they reached the damp corner where the spring came out of the hill.

Billhook stayed in the boat. He sorted through the net, unmeshing the fish that were dumped into the boat in their haste. He pushed their heads through their tight bonds, their air sacs bursting from the pressure. Scales fell away from the mullet as he pushed them through. He sharpened his knife and set to cleaning the fish, throwing the guts overboard. Petrels and gulls clamoured and fought over the scraps in the water. He dropped the cleaned fish into the bailer full of salt water. A skin of oil clouded on top. He sharpened his knife again. He would not think about the girl. But he kept looking over to where she sat with the women near the spring.

* 

The two women and the girl sat in the sand. Dancer reached into her bag and showed the girl a ball of ground seed paste. The child looked at the ball with its flakes of husk and seeds. Her eyes travelled from Dancer’s bandaged hand, up her plump arm with its scrapes and gashes, to Dancer’s barnacle-slashed face. Her breath sucked in and then came out in great racking sobs, snot and tears gathering on her chin.

Sal hauled over the big dog to sit beside the girl and held out her hand to stroke her.
“What is your name?”

The girl shook her head. The dog rolled over and Sal picked fleas off the clear skin around his genitals.

“Sal not nice to him,” Dancer said to the girl. “Sal tiall wee pella kaeeta. She beat him and throw him into the sea.”

Sal frowned at Dancer.

“What is your name?” she asked again.

Silence.
“Another titter?” Jimmy the Nail picked at his scabby knuckles and then squinted at Billhook.  
“You want me to get another woman for that kid thief?”  
“Tell him he can have the next one. A bleeder.”  
“Didn’t you help him snatch her?”

Billhook closed his eyes. “She is little. Too little for Bailey. Let the Worthies look after her. She can work.”

“Bleeders are one fuck away from being with child, Billhook. That’s why Bailey got her little, like that.”

“She’s too little. He will hurt her.”

Jimmy laughed. “... hurt her ...” he laughed again and then coughed. He swept one arm around the bay across from the island, to the dark mountains beyond, the unravelling threads from his canvas sleeves whispering against his wrist. “Tell me Billhook. Do you see law here? Do you see some knob with a wig, a hanging judge, a captain with a gun, a preacher, a peeler, a keeper of my fucking conscience?”

“No,” said Billhook.

“Well, what then?”

“No one here but us, Jimmy.”

“Well, tell me. What do you want me to do then?”

“Tell him. Tell him he can’t have her. Tell him he can have the next one we get.”

“What the fuck does this have to do with me?”

“You are boss,” Billhook nodded at him. “Trouble with the Worthies, if he takes her.”

“Trouble if he don’t,” Jimmy sighed. “And we all done things. Bailey’s not the first tar with a black child wife.”

“It’s different to shooting some blacks at their fires and getting out.”

Jimmy narrowed his eyes at Billhook.

Billhook knew about Jimmy killing those black men on the cape near Kangaroo Island. As well as Pigeon, Sal had told him of a gang of men going to the mainland, hunting for women. One woman with an infant at her breast was stolen away to Kangaroo Island and passed around the camp that night. After they raped her, she crawled away from the sleeping men, gathered her baby from Sal and was never seen again.
“She swam,” Sal had told Billhook. “She swam with baby on her back, long, long way home. Baby died.” When Sal said that, she fingered the little white skull at her throat.

“This is different,” Billhook said to Jimmy. “Bailey getting a kid like that. I’m not like Bailey. I don’t need a poor kid. You are not like Bailey but you have Dancer. There will be trouble. Trouble with the women.” Billhook tried to harry away the desperation from his voice.

“He should just take her back then,” Jimmy said. “Or drown her. Either way, we’ll have to ship out of here if we can’t go ashore. Just be thankful those blackfellas don’t have a boat or we’d be stuck like pigs in our sleep.”

Bailey left the child alone. Wherever she was, the lurcher, the piebald terrier or one of the women were beside her. Billhook wondered if Jimmy had talked to Smidmore because neither men made use of Sal or Dancer at the same time. Bailey seemed to retreat from his claim on the girl but Billhook saw him watch her, and snake his eyes at Sal, especially Sal. He looked to have it in for her and whenever he had a chance, he would aim a kick at one of her dogs.
For the next few moons they roamed the islands and rocky headlands looking for seal and watching out for the natives’ fires. The days became shorter, the air stilled and cleared as regular rains cleaned away the dust. They worked to the east and west of the islands. Jimmy watched the coast through his looking glass for seal on the rocks. When he shouted, the men slowed at their oars or slackened the sails and they cruised in to where the sea swayed against the land. On days when the water sparkled with sunlight, they could see the seals stark against the rocks, rolling about like maggots. But on days when the westerlies blew over the land and harried the waves offshore in fizzy rainbow plumes and blew the rain sideways, the seal were not so easy to sight.

Neddy and Smidmore came back from exploring with news of a cave on the seaward side of the second island. “Full of seal, a dozen at least,” said Smidmore. “They’re resting up in there. Ready to get cornered.”

“Let’s go then,” said Jimmy the Nail. “Before the tide comes in.”
They packed wick, a crock of seal oil and extra ropes into the boat. They crammed cooked seal meat and damper into their pockets. Sal directed Dancer to stay behind with her big hound and the child.

“What are you bringing the runt for then?” Bailey asked, nodding at the terrier.

“Keep you company,” Sal grinned at him, her eyes dead. “You like the little ones, yes?”
Smidmore snorted with laughter and Bailey’s jaw tightened.

The cave gaped its enormous maw at sea level but the tide was low. Neddy pointed out the bridge where two men could stand, while the others went into the cave. They would have to swim into there, to get the seal.

Bailey and Jimmy jumped overboard feet first and rose to the surface, their hair slicked over their faces, spouting water from their mouths. They swam to the bridge, each holding a rope that spooled from the deck of the boat. Billhook and Smidmore placed match tins and the oil-soaked wicks under their beanies, strapped clubs over their backs, and eased themselves into the water. They swam past where the two other men were climbing onto the low rocks at waterline in dripping shirts, their clubs readied, and continued into the cave. Billhook swam on his side, reaching his right arm towards the darkness, keeping his head dry. He couldn’t
see further than a body’s length in front of him. He willed himself not to turn and look for the light. He knew it would destroy any dark vision he had. Water sucked at the rocks as the light swell moved into the darkness. He could smell the seals but he couldn’t see anything, only feel the rocks beneath his hands and feet. It became shallow. He heard the shuffling of bodies against stone and Smidmore climbing, dripping, across the submerged rocks behind him.

A breathing, a snorting, as the seals scented the men.

Billhook stood up on a slippery rock and felt above him for some dry stone. He struck a light, put it to the wick and orange light flared against the walls.

“Look,” Billhook whispered to Smidmore, pointing to the ceiling.

The ceiling bulged with boulders held together with mud or clay and the light wavered against the concentric circles cut into the stone, perfect round holes pocked into the granite in symmetrical lines. Light glittered against hovering droplets of water about to fall.

“What are they? Someone was here once. Who would live in this wet hole?”

“Before the seas rose up maybe,” said Smidmore. “Let’s get on with it.”

Around them seals, males and females and pups, lay across the rocks at shoulder height, on the lower, wetter rocks, and rolled in the small pools at the men’s feet. A small seal child, its eyes glowing orange against the flaming wick, teeth and saliva flashing, turned to Billhook and shrieked in alarm.

The two men worked as fast as they could, before the wicks burnt through or the seals escaped. They crashed their clubs across whiskered snouts and cleaved open heads. The older seals shouted and barked and the pups gave low-pitched screams as the men stepped and slipped between the rocks. The stench of the seals’ breath, their blood and their fear, mingled with the earthy, weedy scent of the cave. Billhook heard Bailey’s shouts and then Jimmy’s laugh as the first escaping seals were slaughtered at the cave’s mouth.

After a while Billhook felt water rising up his trousers, so that wherever he went, his knees were wet. Around him dead seals floated, knocking against his legs and swilling against the walls. The light flared once and then they were in darkness.

“Bring in the rope,” said Smidmore and Billhook stumbled along the dark passage, towards the mouth of the cave and the blue sky. He saw the silhouettes of Bailey and Jimmy hanging
onto to the stone bridge. Outside, the boat bobbed on the rising swell as Sal and Neddy hauled a brace of bound seal pups aboard.

Swell burst into the cave. Jimmy and Bailey jumped on to higher rocks at the mouth as a wave threatened to suck them both out to sea.

“Rope,” shouted Billhook and Jimmy climbed down after the next wave to retrieve the coil of rope. He hung on to one end and Billhook turned back to the dark tunnel and the stench of dead seal. Hanks of wet, tarred rope played out from across his shoulders. He could hear Smidmore dragging a carcass towards him over the rocks, water dripping and the odd, anguished cry of an injured animal.

They hauled nine seals bigger than men as close as they could to the mouth of the cave, tied them off and shouted to Jimmy and Bailey to pull them out. Smidmore cursed as he stumbled about. Billhook repeatedly bashed his shins against the slippery rocks and then crushed his big toe in a crevice. His eyes never adjusted with the constant movement from light to dark. He began thinking the two gatekeepers had it good until he saw Bailey get knocked over by a wave, hit his head and lose his rope. It was bloody work all round.

Once the stress of hauling out the seals to the boat was over, the men grabbed the rope and were hauled themselves. Bailey missed his rope, cursing. He had to swim. Sal and Neddy had let the boat blow off the shore. Billhook, already aboard, watched Sal’s curious satisfaction. She would have been happy to see a huge fish rise out of the water and swallow Bailey whole.

“Go in and get him, come on,” said Jimmy.

“Ahh, he’s alright,” said Smidmore.

The boat continued blowing away from Bailey, swimming over the chop, his shirt billowing behind him in the water, trying to catch the end of the rope that lay on the surface like a taunt, a little wake behind it. Finally Billhook and Jimmy took the oars and rowed in to get him. Bailey gripped the gunwales. The terrier, having been kicked so many times by the man, took his chance and leapt forward to bite his hand. Bailey hauled himself over the side. When he wriggled into an upright position, he was furious.
The little dog growled at Bailey. Hardly a raised lip but enough. Bailey looked over to Sal, grabbed an oar and it fell behind the strength of his rowing arm across the nose of the piebald terrier, a killer blow for the old dog who fell to the bowels of the boat, silent, his gnarled paws twitching.

Sal shrieked and went for Bailey, grabbed his wet shirt and bloodied his nose, whilst he was one-armed trying to stow the oar. His fleshy thud into her face flew in amongst all this. A creamy slop rocked the boat, broaching it sideways. Seal carcasses rolled to one side. Billhook fell to starboard against Smidmore, who swore at him, trying to bring the boat about and head back into the chop.

The little whale boat fairly throbbed with grunting, shouting men, Sal with her bloodied nose and the dead piebald dog.

"I’ll get that lurcher next and you’ll have no dog to look out for her then," Bailey said to Sal.
In the night Billhook heard shouts and the clanking of an anchor chain. The dawn revealed a whaling barque holed up in the lee of the island, sitting in the calm waters like a mirage.

He kindled a fire and lit it, holding his hands over the flame, waiting for the sun to come over the island and warm him. Winter was setting in and the ground was chill beneath his bare feet. He looked back out to the whaler. Three of its spars were broken and one of the furled sails looked torn.

“Yanks.” Jimmy appeared beside Billhook and he too reached for the fire. “They’ll have some rum.”

Billhook didn’t ask what the trade would be. Skins he hoped but already he knew.

“We visit them, before they visit us,” said Jimmy.

The whalers looked tired as they lined the deck and waited for the small boat of sealers to come alongside. They smelled bad too. The whole ship reeked; even the stays were coated in whale oil.

“The boat ahoy!” shouted the second mate.

“Permission to board!” shouted Jimmy the Nail, and a black jack threw down the rope ladder. Sal, Dancer, Neddy and the little girl stayed in the boat, while the men climbed aboard the whaler.

Billhook tried to hide the assault on his nostrils but still, the whalers smirked at this attempt. As he trod the boards, he realised that in all the filth and stink, the deck was scrubbed clean.

Jimmy the Nail shook the captain’s hand. “James Everett.”

“Jeremiah Gleeson, of the Sally. Who are you working for in these parts?”

“Governor Brisbane. We’re meeting Boss at King George Sound in one month.” For a Kangaroo Islander, Jimmy the Nail sounded strangely formal addressing the American. Billhook realised that he had slipped back to his whaling way of speaking with the master.

Gleeson laughed. When the other men heard the name of the sealers’ mother ship, they laughed too, their faces cracking around their beards, stumps of teeth and yellow tongues. The only man who didn’t laugh was a mad man who paced, muttering into his scorched hands.
Jimmy looked to Bailey, at Billhook and then back to the captain, puzzled and angry. “Is there a lark here?”

Some of the men were still sniffing but they settled at the look on Jimmy’s face. The captain disappeared into the hold and returned with a newspaper. “Hobart Town Gazette. We were there three weeks ago. Shipping news.”

He opened to page three and poked at a column. “The Governor Brisbane has been seen on the north-west coast of New Holland with only two men and the master on board,” he read aloud. “But then, further down, it writes, ‘The Governor Brisbane has arrived at Batavia’ ... ahh ... ‘Some suspicions were entertained at Batavia that the Governor Brisbane ... In consequence of this, and some circumstances of a doubtful nature, which appeared on examination of her papers, she was seized, and put under the charge of a guard ship lying in the roads.’”

“What does all this guff mean?”

“My friend,” the captain addressed Jimmy the Nail with genial broad vowels, “it means your boss has shafted you. He’s accused of piracy, of trying to sell the Governor Brisbane in Batavia. He won’t be back for you anytime soon, was never planning to do so.”

Billhook remembered the Blunt twins at the bay near the islands, the upside down tattoo on Jack’s arm, and Tommy’s pleas for Boss Davidson to return. The meagre pile of skins that Boss took to Batavia.

“That fucking dog,” said Smidmore.

“But he’ll want the skins and oil,” said Jimmy, his jaw working as their predicament became clear. “If they let him go, he’ll come back for the skins. There’s money in them.”

“The market bellied out a few months back, mate, when the Brits took the tariff off foreign skins. He won’t be wanting skins. He probably knew that.”

Silence then, as the gang realised that as well as being abandoned, they weren’t to be paid their lay.

“Want some work?” asked the captain.

Billhook, Smidmore and Jimmy took in the oil-stained stays, the stinking ship, the sores about the mouths of the men and the dull looks to their eyes.

“What happened to him?” Jimmy pointed to the man muttering at his hands. “He don’t look so good.”

“He’s mad. Got swallowed by a whale and he’s not been right since.”
While the captain launched into the story of the man who was swallowed by a whale, Billhook looked around at the crew. A tattooed man was watching him intently. North Islander, judging by the *moko* and the shape of his face, his squat, strong legs and curly hair knotted on top of his head. Billhook nodded to him and he nodded back. Good to get some news later, he thought.

Gleeson and Jimmy began negotiating the rum, tobacco and women. The captain peered over the side at Sal, Dancer, Neddy and the child. “You can leave the kids out of the deal,” he said, frowning with distaste. “Get some trousers on her too.”

He went down into the hold again and returned with a small pair of canvas slops. “She can have these.”

“A kid’s trousers?” Jimmy the Nail looked around at the crew. “Don’t see any naked cabin boys aboard, Captain.”

Every man standing on deck bowed their heads. The mad man set up a howl. “The lad went over the side, the day Bartley got swallowed by the whale,” said the captain. “A sea burial off the coast of Otakau.”

“You took the clothes off his dead body?”

“He didn’t need them where he was going,” the captain shrugged. He nodded towards the child. “And this one does.”

“They won’t take long to blow,” Smidmore said to a furious Sal, as they rowed back to the island. “Dinna worry girl. They’ve not had a woman in an age.”

Jimmy the Nail whooped. “We gotta spree lads! An evening of drink and song to ease our sorry situation.” He tweaked Dancer’s ear as she helped the child into her new trousers. “Make the most of it won’t you, Dancer. No crying now.”

“So long as those dirty bastards don’t turn ’em into fireships. Don’t want no pox on my house,” said Smidmore and Jimmy laughed.

Billhook wasn’t listening to Smidmore and Jimmy’s banter as he pulled at the oars. Otakau. Hearing the name of his home country spoken aloud sent a shock through his body. Gleeson had come from Otakau.

“We’ll be wintering about these parts,” said Gleeson that evening, settling himself into a comfortable position by the fire. “Going after the humpbacks until October, then offshore
after that, off the shelf after some fin, then home to New Bedford.” He seemed relaxed and pleased with himself. “It’s been a good season.”

The first mate, a burly white man with woolly hair, gave a small cheer. “That’ll make it eighteen months,” he said.

Smidmore tuned his fiddle and the second mate took a harmonica from his pocket and grinned at him. Despite the disappointing treatment of them by Boss and the ripening scent of the whalers warming by the fire, the sealers were exhilarated by the strangers after so long in their own company. Sal and Dancer had snared some potoroos and the Americans brought tobacco, rum and fresh vegetables from their itinerant gardens along the coast.

“Wiremu Heke,” Billhook said to the North Islander. He grasped his hand.

“John te Marama.” The two men touched their noses together, staring into each other’s eyes. Then they squatted on their haunches and began to converse in language.

“What is your home?”

“Kiri Kiri ... but now the missionaries have moved in, we have to go away to make any trouble or fun! The women and the old men, they like the singing in the church. Me, not so much and that Parson ... they call him the Flogging Parson.”

“Ah! I’ve heard of him! My country is Otakau.”

Marama nodded. “I thought so. I saw you when Gleeson said it. And now I know your name ...”

“Did you go there, after ...”

John te Marama nodded again. “After we cut Bartley out of the whale, his skin was burnt by the whale’s stomach juices. His fingerprints are gone now but when he came out he looked like he’d been skinned all over. His body was all red. We took him to the village and the women healed his skin with special leaves and smoke. They couldn’t fix his soul though. Fled from his body.”

“Who did you see there? Did you see my father? The old boat builder. Did you see a woman called Nga Rua?”

Marama paused. “The woman who healed Bartley was Nga Rua. She’s a good woman, Wiremu.” Marama smiled. “Still cheeky she is. But Wiremu – while we were there, your father died. He died suddenly, in his sleep. Your mother said it was the white man’s fault.
That he died in her arms, broken. Nga Rua will never forgive those men who destroyed her husband. She said this thing at the tangihanga. I am sorry, Wiremu."

Billhook dropped his head into his chest and ran his hands along his scalp. Oh my father ... gone.

“There is more news,” Marama said gently. “We went back to the North after we left Otakau. The Ngati Toa, Te Rauparaha’s men. They are coming.”

“Te Rauparaha?” Billhook snapped up his head. All he had ever heard of that man was the carnage he left behind, the heads on sticks, children impaled on pikes and left facing out to sea to warn him off. Te Rauparaha and his toa were the bogeymen, the angry ghouls that he had only ever heard hushed talk about. Blood-stained teeth and handfuls of women’s hair.

“He’s coming?”

“He wants control of the South Island – and your pounamu. He’s preparing to invade. I know this because he saw the Parson in Port Jackson when he went there to get guns. When he gets to Otakau he will walk the country claiming ownership. Anyone who resists will be slaughtered. His toa are too many.”

“My people have guns now, from the whalers. Maybe ...”

“There are too many.” Marama said with simple fatalism and felt around in his kit bag. “I am very happy to find you, Wiremu.”

“I’m not so happy with your news, brother.” Billhook took a deep draught of rum and felt it burn down his gullet.

“It is terrible to have to say these things. Nga Rua thinks that you are working out of Hobart Town.” When Marama said familiar names like ‘Hobart Town’ or ‘Otakau’ out loud, it warmed Billhook. It was an age since he had talked with his own people. “When she heard that the Sally was going to Van Diemen’s Land, she honoured me and invited me to your father’s tangihanga. Later she asked me to find you and give you this. So you see, if I had not found you, then Nga Rua would be unhappy with me and she is the last woman I would want to offend.”

*Oh Sally, she’n the gal that I love dearly,* the men sang.

*Way, sing Sally oh*
Sally she’n the gal that I love dearly,
Hilo Johnny Brown stand to your ground.

Just out of the firelight it was quite dark but Billhook knew what John te Marama placed in
his palm without looking. The weight, the cool, glossy curves and stiff strands of ancient
sinew against his fingertips told him that it was the orca tooth necklace.

Oh Sally she’n my bright mulatta
Way, sing Sally oh
Sally gal she do what she ought to do
Hilo Johnny Brown stand to your ground.
Billhook climbed to the highest part of the island, away from the fires, past the sweet-scented flannel flowers and over sheets of cool granite. There was no moon, yet. He climbed until he could see the dark mountains crowding the long white bays in the east. He lit a small fire and sang his father’s *waiata*.

Sal’s lurcher followed him and slumped into the grasses eventually, twitching with hunting dreams while Billhook sang and sang, fed by grief and rum. Finally he quietened and the words, laughter and music travelled up the hill to him.

“What’s he doing?”
“Blackfella stuff.”
“Leave him alone.”
“Heathen.”
“You’re no man to talk ... fucking heathen yerself.”
“Who’s got that Sal?”
“Got a dud deal with that cut-up woman.”
“Cries all the time, she do.”
“And then we fastened on the bull.”
“Try some o’ this.”
“And after a day we dragged him alongside and flensed him.”
“You never want to see a face like his in yer life, mark my words.”
“That bull’s stomach was wrigglin’.”
“The lad Kim.”
“I don’t want no fireship whore.”
“He came up out of the sea like an angel, Kim did.”
“Like an angel, he was.”
“This one here, she looks like an angel.”
“Where’d you get the kid from? She’s real pretty.”

When Billhook heard that he galloped down the hill, stumbling over mounds of grasses and rocks, cursing as best as he’d learnt from the sealers. He’d forgotten all about her. He stopped again to listen.
Bailey.
“Well, don’t I get a go at Sal, then?”
“Nah. You got a fucking useless prick, Bailey, and where’s your rum?”
“I’ll earn me some.”

The dog woofed at Billhook’s side.

And so Billhook ran again, until he was standing on the outside of the firelit party, panting and bloodied, breathing in the alcohol fuming from the men’s bodies. He saw the captain unconscious, the little girl gathered onto the first mate’s lap, him undoing the flap of his pants and Bailey looking on, smiling like he had in his mind the sweet memory of something good. Billhook had never seen Bailey smile before. He’d seen the look on that child’s face though, that look the day she was stolen. Beyond the light of the fire and Smidmore’s fiddling, he could hear the grunts and crying of Sal and Dancer and the men.

He reefed the child from the whaler by one arm, yanking her up to his chest until he could feel her heart beating against his. She screamed with pain and started up a whine. He did not know the deep, steady authority in his voice when he said, “No one! No one touches this child.”

The music stopped. John te Marama, for no other reason than he was Billhook’s countryman, leapt to his feet and glared lizardly around at the group, daring anyone to act. No man spoke. They were all too shocked or drunk or both, though Jimmy the Nail and the captain were disturbed enough in their sodden slumber to roll over and snore deep draughts.

Billhook withdrew from the light with the child still clamped to his chest, as Smidmore struck up a new tune on his fiddle.

So the ne’er do well,
The son o’ a swell,
He’s bin cuckolded
By a sharpish blackfella.

Laughter.
Billhook stood in the dark beyond the bed of skins in the tea-tree forest where two men laboured over Dancer and Sal. He listened to the whalers climax with their odd, boyish whimpers, and watched their shadowy figures shamble away towards the fire still doing up their trousers. He shushed to the whimpering child. Then he gave the women a low whistle. They came out of the forest towards him, both of them limping, stooped and beaten.

“Get your skins,” he whispered in English. The child whined softly. “We’ll go the other side of the island tonight.”
Doubtful Islands 1826

“You pulled out her arm,” Sal said to Billhook.
Despite the darkness he saw the accusing flash in Sal’s eyes.
“Ae?”
“You pulled out her arm. Now do as I say, Wiremu! Just do as I say and quick!”

Sal gestured to him to distract the child, anything, anything, away from her port side. While the girl sat on a smooth chunk of basalt weeping with pain and cradling her left arm, Billhook obeyed Sal and took the only prop he had, the orca necklace. He rattled it against his palms, shaking the teeth against each other. The child turned and looked at Billhook, trying to see where the sound came from. He reached the white teeth towards her and as her hand stretched out, Sal, in one quick, brutal movement, grabbed the child’s other arm, twisted it and pushed it back into its socket.
The child screamed. Then her cries fell away to whimpers of relief.
Dancer nodded and said something in her language.
“No one to look after her tonight, Billhook. Dancer, she said that,” said Sal.
“Will she be, will her arm be ... where I pulled her ...?”
“She will be sore.” And in the first moment of collusion with Billhook since the day that she greeted him at Kangaroo Island, she grinned and said, “But plenty, plenty sore if you didn’t pull out her arm.”

They waded through prickly waist-high scrub and fell down muttonbird burrows until they found a place far enough away from the party of men; a reedy hollow where the only sounds that reached them were the wind and the swell against the granite. Even the penguins were quiet. In the morning, before dawn, Billhook left the women, the child and the dog and trekked over the penguin tracks back to the camp.

The scuffed dirt around the fire was littered with sleeping bodies, their faces cracked and the bush flies beginning to find them. It looked as though they’d been fighting, with blue bruises gathering on reddened brows and chins. Black flies clustered around the tattered remains of the first mate’s ear.
Bailey was the only man awake, lying on a skin, still drinking from a bottle of rum, so far
gone that he had come back again.

“Thanks for stealing me the child, Billhook,” he slurred. “She’ll make me some money one
day, not this day, but one day. Beautiful girl. She reminds me of Elizabeth.”

A kennel confession it was, because talking to Billhook did not count for Samuel Bailey.
Billhook heard Bailey’s accent change, from rough tar language, to the talk of some white
men Billhook had met; the Englishmen with no beards and a scribbler in their soft hand. It
made him listen; Bailey’s slipping into another world. Billhook stepped over the captain to
kindle the fire with brush wood. He blew on the coals and watched the curl of smoke seep
through the twigs. He knew Bailey wanted to talk and he felt disgusted already with his
wanting to hear it.

“It’s against the law to sell a person these days.” Bailey struggled into a sitting position and
nodded over to the tea-tree forest where he must have thought the women were sleeping,
worn out from their labour. “Not illegal to own a slave, only illegal to sell one.” He slugged
from the bottle of profit. He breathed in and started.

“That Weed. Weed because she wee’d all down my leg when I got her. She’s a fey sprite.
Never seen a girl so pretty except one ... she reminds me of those children, like beggars they
were but worse, trying out the streets, just babies. Where were their mothers? Couldn’t see
what was going on under their own noses, too drunk, too poor, fathers away fighting
Frenchmen. T’was not my fault Billhook. They needed a feed and a bed. Mine own mother so
ill with the melancholia and a doctor who gave her pills. Father worked at the victualling
office, supplying the war. He watched those children come and go, he did. He knew which
ones needed his help. He would have them home – but only for short stays lest they stole
something. Got so the kids would come up to me in the street and ask for food and a bed. I’d
run home and ask my father. ‘Is it William?’ He would ask. ‘Solomon? No, not that Solomon
boy. He’s trouble. Elizabeth. Go and get me Elizabeth.’

“So I’d find her. That girl, eight or nine, she would follow me home in the cold, with rags
wrapped about her feet. Father would take her hand and lead her down the hallway. The day
the war ended I was sickly, had messed my own bedclothes and the servants were sleeping.
Mother was sleeping. She always slept. I walked down the hallway towards a crack of light,
dragging my stinking vomity blankets.
“Elizabeth looked straight at me when I opened the door. She still looked hungry ... no not hungry. Nothing. Elizabeth was on my father’s lap, he with a blanket over them both and the fire blazing merrily. He was lurching and squirming ... she didn’t look hungry, she looked pinched, like someone had pinched her face into a point, pinched her so hard all the blood had gone out of her.

“Now that was no hanging offence, Billhook. No money changing hands there. Those kids just needed a feed. Ha! They got one too. I was a boy of twelve when old Scarface quit his war and I wanted to go to sea with the merchants but father wanted me to complete an education. He must have wanted me to get him kids, too. Still I took to skiving off school and going down to the docks. Watching the ships coming back from the Antipodes and the Americas. Watch those tars disembark and head off for the drinking houses or the brothels or their homes where the wives were. But I was still tied to my home by father’s wishes and the money that went with it.

“I saw Elizabeth one day, at the docks. She must have been about eleven or twelve by then. She looked at me askance and I knew she knew who I was but she didn’t want to say. Her eyes were gone all hard and grey. They were once so pretty and blue. Her lips were so full and now they pressed tight. The pox was about her mouth and she seemed a bit wobbly on her feet, but not in the manner of a drunkard, though she took a bottle from her skirts and tipped it above her head, poured red wine into her mouth so her lips bloomed again. No she didn’t walk like a drunkard. She walked through the piers on air, not quite touching the ground, not wafting in an unearthly way but like the girl didn’t want congress with such coarse things as cobbles and planks.

“She walked through crowds of men. Her skirt was fine red velvet but the hem was ragged and torn. A gift from a john, no doubt. She wore a green waistcoat and a shirt that was white once.”

Bailey stopped, returning to that day in his mind.

“She walked through a mob of tars and they all stopped talking. They turned to look after her. One nudged the other and then he caught up with her. She didn’t need to hustle, with those nice baby tits. The man caught her arm and she turned to him with a smile trained to turn upon any strange sailor she needed money from. For the next
bottle, I suppose. Something to eat. Tobacco. Some rouge for all that unwrecked beauty. I watched her walk away with the sailor towards the bridge under croft, hips swaying, slim hips swaying like a child trying to be a woman, by the sailor’s side.”

Bailey slugged from the bottle of rum, spluttered and then farted. “So I was right. She was just a whore.” He nodded again towards the tea-tree forest. “Just like those whores. Little Lizzie was always a whore, giving up herself to any scrawny syphilitic tar. She was better off being fed by father had he not lost interest in her when her tits sprouted. But ... looking back ... that day the Elk came in fresh from the Cape and looking for crew and that’s how I came to be in the colony. Without father’s blessing. Although he victualled an entire navy, he failed to victual me for my troubles.”

He turned to stare at Billhook with scorched blue eyes. “He said something odd the day after I saw him from the hallway. He said, ‘Samuel, what you observed is an ancient manorial right.’ An ancient manorial right. But I’ll never live in a house again, Billhook, let alone a manor. The halls ... the hallways do me in.”
Jimmy, Smidmore and the captain spent an age in earnest debate, on the beach beside the whaleboat. The captain, with his florid face and waistcoat over his corpulent, barrel body looked as though he was winning. Jimmy’s rags and kangaroo skins, his scarred face and Smidmore’s long hair and turned eye, those things and their predicament lowered their ranking in the captain’s eyes below that of pirates and just above the black women they had, and made grounds for a good deal.

Smidmore and Everett walked back up the hill to the camp where the sealing party waited.
“Two barrels.”
“Two fucking barrels!” spat Bailey.
“And three iron pots, two oars and a mainsail.”
Sal gave a short, ironic laugh.
Jimmy turned and backhanded her so that her head rocked sideways. “Don’t think you’re worth that much, Sal. That’s for all our skins.”
“Do they have gunpowder?” asked Billhook.
“Yep, but they ain’t parting with any.”
Bailey said in his quiet voice, “How do we know this American is telling us any truth at all?”
Jimmy had already thought it out. “If he’s lying and Boss turns up at King George Sound looking for us and a good market for skins, then we’ve got the skins on Fairy plus the skins we get at the Sound, plus we got two barrels of rum for our own trouble. Fair enough. If he don’t, we have some rum we can sell on if need be. Always said I won’t work for no man again.”

Jimmy told his own story of working for the whalers. That he’d come out from England on a whaler that wrecked on a reef on the north east coast. They were marooned for two months before rescue. During that time, they caught seal and ate it raw, drawn its blood to drink. One of the men made a boat from seal skins, paddled off towards the mainland never to be seen again. After their rescue, the whaling company Jimmy the Nail had worked for started fitting a new ship and hiring crew in Hobart. The captain didn’t hire Jimmy the Nail when he went asking. “Reckoned I was bad luck,” he laughed. He gave up on the whaling life and went to live on Kangaroo Island. “No more working for the man.”
“Organised that one well, then didn’t yer,” commented Bailey.
Billhook was unconcerned with the story or deals between the whalers and the sealers. His motivation for journeying to the colony was never based on commerce. But he also understood that a drop in the market for seal meant his people would not be able to buy as many guns as they needed to fight off Te Raprahau. He walked away from the small knot of men and women, his mind worrying at the Ngati Toa invasion, at not being able to see his father’s body, at his missed chance to settle James Kelly in Van Diemen’s Land. He was on the wrong side of the wrong country, futile and powerless.

“We’ll be off to King George Sound, then?” he heard Smidmore say.
“Yep, on the morn. No need to hang around here, workin’ for the Yanks. Best to be away. There’ll be more people through the Sound too. We’ll get back to Van Diemen’s alright from there.”

The sealers began breaking camp in the afternoon, pulling the shelter sails away from rough, peppermint bough frames and folding them neatly in the boat. They rolled any surplus sleeping skins around cleaned guns into tight wads of fur and steel. They collected bladders of water from the spring. Smidmore went over the boat, checking every rope, clew and block. The sealer women gathered seed from the acacias and rushes, for they knew they may not make landfall for days and then, not for long enough to forage. They dug through the rough soil by the reedy hollow with their sharpened sticks for grubs that were tasty and fat and checked their lizard traps for the last time.

In the evening, they drank rum around the fire and ignored the carousing noises drifting across the water from the whaling ship. The women threw three of the black lizards they’d caught onto the coals, belly down. The child gasped as the lizards’ carcasses stiffened in the heat and stood up as though they were about to run out of the coals, their heads moving from side to side. Jimmy snorted with laughter. “Bet she never gets sick of seeing that.”

Smidmore gave Sal a flask to drink from and she and Dancer passed it between themselves. Like some of the men, both women had swollen eyes and grazes from the previous night. Sal touched Dancer’s face and Billhook heard her mutter a question. Dancer shrugged and smiled ruefully, showing dark gaps where her teeth had been incised. Later, as Billhook huddled into his skins, he heard Dancer singing the chanting story that she sang often in the eve; the child
and Sal patting the earth in rhythm. No one talked about the child, nor did they argue for whether or not to take her to King George Sound. Why would they? She was coming too.
Dancer took Weed out shooting. She walked ahead with the gun slung over her bare shoulder and Weed picked through the scrub that was so much taller and different to her own country. The small red-berried bushes looked familiar but she knew not to eat them. Dancer reefed at some reeds and examined the tubers. Weed nodded at her. Dancer broke away the roots from the foliage and stuffed them into her bag.

The sealing crew were one day’s sail from King George Sound, Jimmy told them, when he put into a tiny cove at the end of a long, wild beach. The cove was habourred by a granite outcrop. Beyond the sweep of loose sand blown along the bay by the sou’-westerly, an estuary lay quiet and black among the paperbarks. While Everett and Neddy filled the water barrel from the spring, Billhook carried the net over his shoulder, corks bouncing against his bare back, and swam it out into the centre of the inlet, hoping for bream. Swans honked and took off in a flurry of black water and feathers, all red beaks and flashes of white under wing.

Dancer and Weed crossed the dunes, Dancer snatching at the reeds in the hollows as they passed. They walked over the brilliant white sand towards the peppermint forest. They arrived inside a bubble of green; a cool, scented grove, the fallen leaves making a soft, damp floor in the hollows and sprinkled with the purple flowers of a twining pea-like plant.

One of the groves smelt of roo and Dancer stopped to examine some scat. She had only shot – too small to bring down a boomer. She shrugged and looked up the hill to where the big gum trees grew. If it were anything like her home, that hill would be where the sea eagles built their eyrie, with an eye to the ocean and the inlet alike.

Dancer had shaved her head the previous night, cropping her woolly locks close to a berry fuzz but leaving a ring of hair that bounced like possum fur. Her black scalp shone through the bristles. She’d removed her wallaby frock on board and thrown it over her sleeping skins. Now her only adornments were the strings of tiny Van Diemonian shells at her throat, her belt of several layers of hair string, a powder flask, a pouch of heavy shot, and her bag.

Cockatoos worked red gums in black, shrieking mobs. Dancer and Weed stopped on the edge of the forest to watch them as they ripped away grubs from shaggy bark, or clawed at the
gum nuts and pulled the seeds from their casing. Dancer whispered that she had not seen so many birds like these before and Weed nodded.

Dancer poured some shot down the barrel of the gun, tamped in a wad and primed frizzon, closed it down. One shot, she had, before they took off. She raised the gun and sighted the densest mob of birds. The shot boomed through the trees. They saw the leaves splash with sunlight, sprayed with pellets. The birds rose in panicky clusters, shrieking into the sky. Weed cried out and Dancer stroked her head, grinning.

Three, four cockatoos flapped in the reedy undergrowth beneath the trees, their heads in the dirt; a crimson flash of striped tail feathers. Weed climbed a tree to retrieve the fifth bird. Dancer walked about the reeds, picking up the flapping birds and snapping their necks. She fumbled in her bag for her knife and cut purple flowering vines and tied them around the birds’ feet, slinging them together in one bunch.

They walked back through the still peppermint forest and over the dunes where wind whorled middens and skeletons of ancient and yesterday feasts into busy little pockets. The birds’ wings swished against Weed’s side. The roar of the sea and the wind hit them at the last dune. They stopped at the spring to drink, the hard sand around the seeping water busy with the men’s footprints. Weed looked at Dancer’s bag. She gestured that she wanted to look inside.

Dancer smoothed the white sand to a blanket or the sheet of a sail. She put her bag down. Made from the hide of a whole kangaroo, its shoulder strap was the animal’s hind legs, the body was the body of the kangaroo and the flap that covered the opening was the kangaroo’s neck. Dancer had sewed the sides with the sinew from the same kangaroo’s tail. It made excellent sewing, she explained to Weed in a creole of Pallawah and English, strong and easy to split into plenty of ply. Weed nodded seriously and fingered Dancer’s work. Then, item by item, Dancer laid the contents of her kangaroo bag on the sand blanket.

A *num’s* flint, a white man’s flint, for lighting fires and guns. Several gnarled lumps of reed roots. Two needles made from the leg bones of a tammar, flattened at one end and sharpened at the other. Dried sinews of roo tail rolled into a neat hoop and tied off so they wouldn’t unravel. Lumps of resin – tree blood. Dancer patted her stomach and rolled her eyes, showing Weed that she should eat the resin when she had a crook belly. A stone the size of a cockle
shell. It was hard and pocked and lay heavy in Weed’s palm. Dancer pointed to the sky. “Star,” she said. Two knives. A metal knife whose blade felt like the star stone, and the knife that Dancer made herself from very hard wood, with a kangaroo’s tusk embedded in gum. The tusk was filed sharp and she used it for scraping skins. She told Weed that it was a better knife than the white man’s steel for scraping skins but not as good for other tasks. Two digging sticks she showed her; sharpened at one end and worn smooth and oiled by Dancer’s labouring hands at the other.

Finally she brought out a possum pouch and from the furry pocket, she removed three back bones; too small for a kangaroo. Dancer put the vertebrae on the possum pouch with her slender fingers, so they didn’t touch the sand. Beside it, she lay her tooth, pointing to the dark gap in her mouth. Then she lay smaller bones into the soft fur, tiny vertebrae, blackened by fire. Even the child Weed could hear Dancer’s heavy silence and she knew not to reach out and touch the relics.

Then Dancer began talking in her language. Knowing the child may not understand all her words, she stroked the white sand into swatches and marked it with her knuckles or fingertip tips as she talked. She told the little girl the story of how she came to the islands to live with the white men.

She told of the day she was stolen. When she was not really a grown woman and the worst thing she had in her life was hating her sister for her lucky betrothal to a man that Dancer loved. Her jealousy made her hateful, made her behave in a cold way to her favourite sister. She’d thought about it a lot since then.

So they sat apart in the sand this day that they were stolen, bare bottoms chafed by middens of shell and crunchy dried kelp. They gathered the tiny shells, pointed cones and blue with the skin of the sea. When the little mariner shells washed into the high tide eddies, beyond the black rocks where the inlet flushed out to sea. That was a good place to sit and gossip and work, yes.

Babies scattered the high tide harvest with their little fists. Some of the other women chanted, sang and laughed. They picked at the shells, finding the perfect one that shone in the sun and threaded them onto stiff, dried strands of kangaroo tail sinew.
Bombies surged over submerged rocks just offshore, making white hills in the bay and the wind was hard that day. Sheets of sand blew along the beach and stung Dancer’s skin. Babies screwed the sand into their eyes and their mothers showed them how to make tears and wash them away.

Dancer’s sister threaded the shells onto sinew and tried to draw Dancer’s attention but the cool silence from Dancer held her away. So she kept threading, breaking tiny holes in the outer lip of the shells with a fish spine, then poking through the thread. The little shells sat at angles to each other in a neat rhythm, in and out, in and out, like the spine of a snake. The shells caught the sky and reflected the silvers and greens, an undersea journey in something the size of Dancer’s little fingernail. The older women were swathed in them. Dancer and her sister had two strands each. Now Dancer wrapped another strand around her neck and tried to tie off the sinew. She asked one of the women to help her and her sister, who wasn’t asked, looked on.

After the necklaces were wound around so many necks and tied off tight, they rose and dusted the shell fragments and sand from their bodies, leaving patterned marks in their skin. Clatters of tiny sea creatures and their jetsam fell to the sand. The older women slung babies over their shoulders and inserted their chubby limbs into furry pouches. Dancer and her sister carried the bags full of shellfish. Their feet plunged into the deep, course sand. Older children struggled behind them, their hair blown into urchin spikes.

The two sisters climbed the rocks first at the headland and picked up salt lying crystallised in small bowls of stone. Dancer’s body felt scorched and fragile against the stone, after the soft sand. Her monthly bleed made her flesh tender to the hardness of the granite. They filled empty barnacles with sweet flakes of salt, put them in their bags.

The women caught up with the sisters. As they rounded the last boulder before the next beach, Dancer’s sister laid her hand upon the stone, as though she were patting a beast. Dancer looked at her hand, her pink, pearly fingernails and gentle knuckle wrinkles against the orange flare of lichen. She saw the curve of her sister’s breast outlined by the wild sea and her round little stomach. The nasty creature within her surged again, trying to fight its way out.
Dancer saw the boat and her sister stood, stiffened and alert, but very still.
Another face rubbed out Dancer’s view with her huge wild eyes. Another woman cried, “Ghosts! Num!” and the little children and women were all backsides and bobbing hair as they bolted back over the rocks towards the necklace beach.

A boat. Sand, just as it was every day but marked now by a huge creature that had dragged itself from the sea. As big as a whale but made by men. A boat. Men’s footprints crawled straight from the boat to the freshwater crack in the dune. It was not good that the sisters couldn’t see the men.

Dancer knew what the red men looked like. She saw some when she was younger. Their noses came first sniffing and pointed. They looked like strange animals and their eyes had nastied when they saw Dancer’s aunties. Some women went missing after that and when they returned they wouldn’t speak of what had happened to them. They never spoke of what happened, but as Dancer began her bleed, one of them showed her quietly how to fill her vagina with sand to protect herself if the Ghosts ever stole her.

Dancer stayed, thinking about all this, the men, where they were. Her sister stayed because Dancer stayed. They pressed themselves into the warm wall of stone, backs against the land, looked out to see and tried not to be seen.

Dancer smelt him first. He smelled like tree fruit when the little flies came around. He rounded the corner, head down like a sniffing dog and stopped short when he saw the girls.

“Whoa!” spurted from his bristled mouth.

He reached for a strand of Dancer’s sister’s shells and she shrank away. He reached out again and she turned her head. Dancer could hear them all breathing above the ocean’s roar. She saw that he was curious and shocked, like she’d found him squatting over a hole in the ground, that she was the one to surprise him. Hair straggled out from beneath his woollen hat and despite the heat he wore a jerkin of seal fur and long trousers. His nose was red and deeply pocked. He breathed sourly over her. Dirt cracked in his fingers. He bared mossy teeth at her and reached for her neck.
Then Dancer’s sister screamed and jumped sideways away from the stone. Her scream brought the answering calls of the women but they sounded far away now, beyond the dunes of the necklace beach. The scream brought more men from around the stone. They did not look at the sisters’ faces but straight to their breasts and thighs. Some of them laughed. One man clawed at her sister’s neck and pinned her to the stone. Another grabbed Dancer’s arm. The burn of his skin on her flesh reminded her of her angry father when she’d run away from her new husband the first time. He’d grabbed her like that too.

She pulled against the man’s grip. She knew that her indecision, her stupid moment of stillness, could cost them both their lives. There were stories of these men raping women and cutting open their bellies, spilling their insides over the sides of the boats.

The sea surged into the crevice below. Her sister gurgled and tried to breathe against the man’s hand. There were six of them now. Dancer knew the men would take them. She’d wished illness and unhappiness on her own sister for her lucky betrothal to the beautiful man and now their necks were being fingered by a cloud of ugly ghosts. They were still ghosts, even though their skins were red, underneath they were white like ghosts. They were bloodless. All windburn and sun and underneath there was no blood.

The shells dug into the back of her neck and then clattered onto the rock. The man stood with his gang around him, her necklace in one fist. He lurched forward and took her body and lifted her onto his shoulder. She saw sky, then laughing faces, then the rock, then his back. It was the first time she ever felt her nakedness. Her head hung down. He wrapped his arms about her knees. When she hit back with her fists, another man grabbed them and tied them together with her broken necklace.

She could smell the rancid oil on the back of his shirt. Blood rushed to her face. He was carrying her across the rocks, her body flopping uselessly with every step. Someone laughed and slapped her bare skin, a stinging sound sharp in the air. They were on the beach now. Coarse grains of sand travelled through her vision. Shells. Dark, leathery coils of kelp.

A hard thump against the boat. Like stone, this wood. Dancer hurt already. Her sister landed beside her, her arms tied, her skin feeling cold despite the sun. They squirmed together in the
bottom of the boat as men tied their legs together, their flesh pricked all over with salt and pain and fear.

The man who took her that day, his name was Johnny. The man who took Dancer’s sister was called Cooper. They lived on different islands and Dancer never saw her sister again. After Cooper killed her sister with the gun, Johnny gave Dancer to Cooper and she had to go and live with him.

Thousands of sea miles from where Dancer was stolen, in the corner of a bay, Dancer and Weed sat still and quiet. Any Pallawah she had learned was from Dancer’s songs as she worked but she understood enough of what had happened to her from Dancer’s lilting words, her movements and drawings in the white sand. The little girl crawled into Dancer’s lap and Dancer held her and nodded, singing to her a long, quiet song.

Weed’s skin prickled with sun shadow. Samuel Bailey was standing behind them, over them, looking down at the collection of treasures.

“Where’d you get that knife?” he asked, though he’d seen Dancer using it on the seals before. Dancer didn’t answer. Suddenly hunched and scarred, she packed away her kit carefully, in the same order as she’d revealed it.

“Jimmy the Nail reckons on getting to King George Sound by dawn,” said Bailey. He nodded over to the boat, where Everett was stowing a barrel. Neddy threw in some banksia cones for firewood. Along the beach further, Billhook was walking with the net over one shoulder again, now gleaming with a sprinkle of struggling fish. Bailey nodded to the dead cockatoos scattered in the sand around Weed. “We’ll cook up aboard tonight.”
Baie de Deux Peuples 1826

They sailed along the coast by the light of the quarter moon, watching out for the white sprays lacing the reefs and islands. They passed a small island beside another long, white bay and then another craggy granite rock set into the sea. Dancer gutted the birds, split open their carcasses and laid them flesh downwards in the try pot full of coals. The smell of roasting meat mingled with that of burning feathers and winter flowers breezing off the land.

Embers still glowed in the try pot as the skies lightened into day. A breeze made the water black as it riffled across the water towards them, snapped taut the main and brightened the coals.

They passed through the narrow channel between Bald Island and streaked sheets of stone lying stoic to the coast’s battering. As they rounded the headland and tacked to the west, the rising sun lit up a mountain scattered with massive rocks. Atop the mountain and all along the ridge, the rocks stood like silent sentinels.

“Reminds me of Salisbury,” said Bailey. The sun glittered on the stones, matted over the hills of deep green and glittered again on the sea. “Like those heathen cathedrals.”

Billhook strained to see across the waves. “There be safe harbour in there! Where the mountain comes down.”

“Not heading in to those windward rocks to find out,” grunted Jimmy the Nail.

But Billhook took a bearing for himself as they sailed past the place where the hills slid down to meet its dark and secretive crevice.

The sun had only climbed a notch or so when Jimmy said, “We’ll put in over there,” pointing to a little cove.

“King George Sound!” shouted Neddy.

“Nah mate. Another half day. That big bay just to the west of us is the Bay of Two Peoples.”

“To the west. Bay of Two People,” parroted Weed. Dancer chuckled at her, despite her dark face lined and grey from the night sail.

“Bay of Two Peoples. Two Peoples Place. A Yank and a Frenchman got on the grog here one night, twenty years ago.”
At the cove they headed for, ochre stones crouched around the white sands and above the rocks, the hill glowed magenta and green with the rising sun. They reefed in the sail and rowed towards the shore. Sal stood at the bow pointing out the submerged rocks, dark, submarine shapes on the turquoise bottom, flat circles of sea above them. Jimmy steered using the sweep oar. “Hang back! Go astern! Wait for this wave,” on the outside of the breakers, watching the white water roll in ahead of them, then, “Pull! Pull!” and the rowers pulled hard at the oars until the keel bit the sand and Sal pitched forward from her perch and tumbled into the sea.

By the time she’d found her feet and pushed to the surface, the men were in the water with her, holding the boat straight with the waves and running it into shore. Still aboard, the lurcher looked worried and never took his eyes off his mistress. Dancer sat in state on the pile of skins with the child on her lap, both looking straight ahead to the land. The men pulled the boat in the sand until she was hard and fast and they could pull no further. Jimmy said, “It’s high tide anyway. We’ll just tie her off here.”

Billhook stood in the lacy wash and looked around him. A small flock of white birds worked a school of fish. A sea eagle, its up-tilted wings a familiar silhouette against the fat clouds, cruised high above, watching. Bay of Two Peoples was now obscured from his view but beyond the headland of the cove, a grey green, conical hill scattered with stones towered. Towards the peak, from one cluster of boulders, a thin line of smoke stitched itself into the sky. Their arrival had been noted.

“Have a look at this,” shouted Smidmore from the rocks. He was carrying his sleeping skins, intent on finding a spot out of the sun to lie down and rest after the night’s sail. He stood holding the roll of skins against his chest, looking strangely childlike for such a rough head. He pointed to the dark hole in the hill.

It was chill inside the cave. It smelt earthy and damp but the floor was white beach sand and dry. Chambers like the hallways of the hotel Billhook had ventured into in Hobart Town meandered into darkness. He could hear a steady drip coming from one of the chambers and echoing around the walls. Smidmore brought in some reedy kindle and struck a light. As the fire flared, the walls glowed orange. Small circles and dots of yellow and red ochre were pasted on the walls. They looked like the canvas map Everett kept tucked in his belt. Billhook
fingered one of the daubings and it crumbled under his hand and sprinkled to the floor. Other pictures were flaking away naturally as the granite shed its skin.

Neddy dragged bigger sticks and driftwood into the cave and set them upon the flames. The room filled with smoke and stung their eyes but nobody cared. It was warm now, and dry. After a wet night out on the water, their skin stretched tight with salt and fatigue, this was a ‘good place’, as Sal had said of the Doubtfuls. Smidmore lay down his skins and settled into them. One by one, the others did the same, until the cave was ripe with the sounds of their breathing, their snores, the water dripping into a hidden, dark pool and the ever present suck and boom of the unplumbed sea.

Billhook was awoken by Sal muttering at her dog. He rolled over to see it nudging her, a bush rat struggling between its teeth and dampened with saliva and blood. Sal tried to slap the dog away, groggy with sleep. The child sat, copying the wall’s circles into the sand, humming to herself.

He climbed the stone steps out of the cave and scrambled down to the beach. Jimmy the Nail stood at the shore, silhouetted against the reddening eastern sky.

“Smoke,” he said, when he heard Billhook beside him. “Yonder.” He pointed to the hill where Billhook had seen the smoke when they arrived.

“Blackfellas,” verified Billhook, nodding. He pointed to the headland closest to the cave where another fire burned. “That fire was not burning this morn.” He looked around to the north. “Nor that one.”

Everett sighed. “Ahh well, Billhook. We’ll not be murdered in the night.”

“No?”

“Scared of the dark.”

“The Vandiemonians, yes. This mob?”

“All the same. You know the story in Van Diemen’s Land? The night and day war. Lags would take a flogging rather than go into the forest during the day to cut wood. They were terrified of the blacks. Take a flogging instead, they would. Reckoned it hurt less than a spear through the guts or a waddy cracking their skull. Poor bastards; them and the shepherds. No guns and watching all day for things that moved – or didn’t move. It’s the ones you don’t see that get ya. White folk get killed in the day time, killed or worse.”
Jimmy shaded his eyes against the sky to see the northern-most smoke better. “Then the sun sets and the game changes. That’s when you find whole villages of blacks huddled around their fires or sleeping in their little huts. The only way to go hunting blacks is at night. It was said to be good pickings, really good, before they got dogs. The dogs bark and wake the village up; shame.”

Billhook tried to ignore the hunger stirring in his belly. “Did you ...?”


Billhook pictured Sal’s easy smile, then was reminded of Te Raprahau about to raid his country. “Sal does not look like a woman whose whanau is dead.”

“They’re still around, most of them anyway but they didn’t have much choice about us taking her that night. I wouldn’t be hanging around her country in the middle of the day though. No way. I’d be a pile of bones on the dunes by now.”

The beach grew dark as the sun slid behind the hill.

“If we leave for the Sound tonight ...” said Billhook. “... there are some islands, yes?” He hoped that Jimmy would not take his suggestion as disorderly, was happy if Jimmy claimed it as his own.

“Oh yes. There are islands ... I say we go tonight. The wind looks good.” He looked up at the long streaks of cloud that covered the first stars on the horizon. “Might be a bit different in the morn.”

“Ae!” Billhook turned and shouted towards the cave. “Ae! Wake up!”

Bearded faces and then the round, berry face of Sal, appeared at the mouth of the cave.

“We’re leaving tonight for King George Sound!” yelled Jimmy the Nail.
The moon had set by the time the sealers sailed around the outside of Michaelmas Island and sighted another island lying behind it.

“That’s it. That’s Breaksea,” said Jimmy the Nail.

Currents between the two islands surged and swayed but the sails sagged in dirty wind then cracked taut again as Smidmore tacked.

“A light! There is light!” Sal whispered. “Someone is on the island.”

Indeed, a cooking fire burned, an orange glow on the darkened, north-facing side. Now Billhook could smell the smoke mingling with the pungent scent that he recognised as the white heath flowers.

“Blackfellas? On the island?”

“Nah,” said Bailey.

They pulled down the sails, trying to stifle the sound of flapping canvas as quickly as possible. It was past midnight and whoever was on the island would no doubt be sleeping but Jimmy wanted to keep his advantage. The men each took an oar and fitted them to the rowlocks. They rowed towards the rocks, their oars dripping with shining blue phosphorescence.

Once they’d reached the island, Jimmy ordered them to row along the rocks quietly, looking for boats, ropes or gear that would identify the island’s occupants. They rowed for a short while, steering clear of the sucky holes between the rocks, listening to the crying penguins. They rounded a smooth curve of streaked stone and when Billhook looked up, all he could see was the stone sweeping up to the sky full of stars.

A gunshot boomed over the water and echoed against the sheer wall of Michaelmas Island.

“Jesus!”

The boat load of women, men, children and dog, shocked from their midnight reverie, scrambled to find shelter behind the gunwales. A minute or so later, another shot cracked into the night air and pellets sprayed the water on their port side.
“Four o’clock to starboard, Jimmy,” chorused Billhook and Bailey at once, when they saw the second flash of gunpowder amongst a dark jumble of boulders. The shooter had watched them pass before taking a shot. Billhook heard the clasp of his powder horn snap shut. Smidmore wriggled his fowler from its oilskin cover and loaded the gun in the dark. When he fired towards the rocks, the powder fizzed in the frizzon with a green spark and sulphur smoke and then went out. A flash in the pan. He cursed and started reloading.

“Just made us all a fucking nice target, Smidmore,” muttered Jimmy.

“Who goes?” a voice from the rocks shouted across the breeze.

“Crew of the Gov’nor Brisbane,” shouted Jimmy.

For a moment the man with the gun was silent.

Smidmore tamped another wad down and withdrew the ramrod with a steely flourish.

“Jimmy the Nail?”

“That’d be me.”

“It’s Hobby here. Hobson.”

Jimmy laughed and turned the tiller back to where the shooter was spotted. “Hobson! Stop trying to kill us, you merry-be-gotten bastard.”

Dark ghoulish shapes, attracted by gunfire, stumbled down the hill from the little cooking fire to the sea. They stood on the rocks beside Hobson. Billhook saw the outline of Mary’s fuzzy halo, her plump body encased in skins; and the black jacks Simon and Hamilton standing behind her. The others, he couldn’t make out in the night.

Dancer called to Mary using her native name and Mary replied in language. Hobson directed Jimmy back to the cove they had just rowed past, where the surge was at its weakest. Soon the keel of the boat bumped against submerged stones and the islanders waded out to grapple at the gunwales and hold it steady. Dancer was the first over the side, slipping on the slimy rocks and stumbling through the water to Mary, sobbing and singing a greeting and holding her old friend. The third shot, when Smidmore discharged his loaded rifle towards Michaelmas, made them both scream and clutch each other even tighter.

It was only then that Billhook noticed the two other clinkers and a jolly boat nestled into the rocks like flotsam. Once they’d pulled their own boat out of the water and tied her off, the newcomers followed their fellow crew up the winding bird track to the camp.
Hobson’s crew had followed in Jimmy’s wake from the Archipelago. He said that at Investigator Island, judging by the state of the seal carcasses that lay all over the island, he must have only been ten days behind Jimmy. They’d stashed the skins, the skins they’d gleaned from the bay of islands where Boss had left them, in a rock shelter atop Investigator and kept heading west. Once Hobson had seen the carnage at Investigator, he’d decided to bypass the Doubtfuls and move straight on to King George Sound to wait for Boss Davidson and his schooner. It was a waxing quarter moon, Hobson said, when they arrived at Breaksea, and another one since, so they’d been here two months and taken four score skins.

While Dancer and Mary talked softly and the child slept huddled between Sal and the dog, the same conversation as the one between the Yankee captain and Jimmy’s crew played out with Hobson and his men. Expressions of mistrust and anger clouded their faces when they learned that Boss Kemp would likely never return for them. The errant Boss was subject to similar curses and obscene titles, and then they questioned the whaler’s honesty in the same manner as Bailey had.

They drank grog and talked until the early hours, until the fire burned out and no one could be bothered hunting for more wood in the scrub. They fell into exhausted, uneasy dreaming slumbers; men who knew themselves to be the only exotics on the western edge of a continent so vast it took a month to sail its breadth.
Breaksea Island 1826

Michaelmas Island rose up, implacable and green, guarded from the harsh southerly swells by the island Billhook stood upon. He could have swum the five hundred yards to Michaelmas, he mused, if he needed to. Past the island he could see the wide stretch of Nanarup Bay and to the east, the stone-speckled mountain they’d sailed past the previous morning. In the other direction, beyond the western most point of Breaksea, clad in lichen-stained granite, a wide sea glittering with early morning sun heaved and rolled. The Sound was fringed with low hills, hazy and blue, all the way around to the south, where the head sloped down into heavy seas. Tommy Tasman told him it was called Bald Head, and that around that windswept and roiling point, it was a half day sail to Eclipse Island, where the seal were plentiful.

He walked back to where the two crews sat by the fire still swapping news. As well as Hobson and Tommy Tasman, there was George Thomas, Hamilton, Mary, and Black Simon living on the island. Black Simon spoke in his deep, slow voice of the American whaler that had stopped at Two Peoples and built yet another stone lookout. The captain sold them some canvas and they’d used it for their huts. The way Black Simon talked, with a thick French-Canadian accent, he sounded like an ill-born child, but Billhook knew that he was smart as a whip. His towering height, his arms like muscular, thick-boned weapons and his tree trunk legs made for the image of a man that Black Simon was not. He preferred the quiet life with no bother and so, if ever he spoke, his voice was soft and slow, considered.

Then Hobson mentioned the other sealing schooner that had arrived in the dead of night one month ago. The next morning, Hobson and his crew were startled to find the Hunter moored in the Breaksea road. The owner-operator of the schooner dropped five men and two dogs on the island with two small boats and few provisions, and left bound for Mauritius the same day.

“He had five titters and their dogs aboard the Hunter too: Vandemonians,” said Hobson. He scratched at a sore at the corner of his mouth and the scab came away through his beard. “Coulda been so kind to leave them with us, keep dear Mary company.”

“Who was boatsteerer?” asked Jimmy the Nail.

“John Randall.”
“Randall?” Jimmy laughed. “Randall. So what happened to that mob? They’re not here on Breaksea are they? Shit, I’d like to see old Randall again.”

“Randall’s no mate of mine,” grumbled Smidmore and Jimmy laughed.

“We reckon they left for Chatham Island and the Swan River. They went around Bald Head. Took a bit of persuading ...” said Hobson.

Tommy Tasman laughed. “Persuadin’! George got himself a busted arm. One o’ Randall’s men, Tommy Toolin, he got a busted eye socket. Both from swingin’ oars at each other. Then Black Simon here came out with his cutlass and cut through the mob like a fuckin’ orca through squid. Should have seen that Black Simon work when they got on his bad side. They got back in those boats after that and took off.”

“Shouldna come here with no food nor supplies,” Hobson said, defending their exiling of Jimmy’s old friend. “The Hunter shouldna left no one here to leech off of us. This is our patch anyway. Don’t need no other bastard fishing it out.”

Jimmy didn’t look too worried. “They’ll be back sooner or later,” he said.

Whenever it was calm enough or boredom struck them, Hobson and his crew showed Jimmy’s men the lay of King George Sound and its surrounds. From their talk of the place, Billhook could see that the sealers, despite now knowing they’d been abandoned, were happier with the Sound than anywhere else they’d been. Their watering point lay in a quiet turquoise bay sheltered from the winds by granite outcrops. A stream of clear, fresh water sliced through the white sand and it was an easy task to siphon it into barrels. Hobson’s crew called the bay Catshark Bay, after the small, striped sharks that lived in the sea grass meadows there. Through the stone-bound channel at Point Possession lay the huge, protected Princess Royal Harbour where a man could always find somewhere out of the weather. They showed the newcomers dappled, shady forests on the south side where there was timber aplenty for boat repairs and building huts, and grass trees packed with resin for caulking. At the northern boundary of the Sound was another harbour, shallower with long banks of seagrass and commonly called Oyster Harbour for all the shellfish that crowded the red rocks.

In the centre of this harbour was a small island that Hobson called Green Island, dotted with pink mallows flowering against a verdant green.

Their camp on the north face of Breaksea was made of two huts, fashioned from solid timber poles they’d cut on the mainland and the whaler’s canvas lashed to the poles with hemp rope.
Between the two huts was the central fireplace ringed with white limestone and the shells and bones from various feasts. King George Sound seemed to be as good a place as any to be marooned. It was a safe harbour for the big ships whose captains would normally stay several miles out to sea, wary of the winds that beat straight onto rocks. The sealer’s best chance for rescue was to stay here and wait.

The women’s defection from the camp happened quietly. Gradually their tools and skins moved down the hill a little way, until one night Billhook looked around and realised that they were all men sitting around the fire drinking and that he hadn’t seen the women for several nights. Another fire burned and he heard the women singing quietly, or shushing Weed’s occasional eruption of tears.

It was a bitter winter, huddled together at night around smouldering fire with the wind at their backs, and few seal to be found. Damp leaves stuck to their feet. Randall and Jimmy the Nail rationed the shot and powder to occasional kangaroo hunts on the mainland, meting out the powder in careful measures. The women worked harder.

Sal, Dancer, Mary, Billhook and the child took regular trips across the channel to Michaelmas Island to find food. On one of these forays they sat beneath a massive boulder at the south eastern end, watching rain move across the Sound towards them. The women clutched at their bags of that night’s meal, morsels of reed roots and shellfish, and the child pulled her cloak tight about her shoulders.

Sitting in the boulder cave, the scent of shellfish and briny weed around him, the hammering of approaching rain drowning out the noise of the waves, Billhook listened to the women talking, and to the child who was copying their words. His gnawing hunger, the brittle cold and a kind of bewilderment reminded him of how he felt sometimes during that lean Otakau year when people were grieving and they would not eat eel from the tapu waters.

Ae, there was no purpose in this adventure west.

As if she’d seen his thinking spread out for her like a blanket on the sand, Sal broke away from talking with Dancer and Mary and said, “What are you doing here, Billhook?” He was shocked away from his thoughts of the oily flesh of eels and all he could think to say was, “Here? We are looking for food.”
The women were quiet as they stared at him.

“No, no! In King George Sound. With that mob,” she flicked a finger towards the sealers’ camp on Breaksea Island.

“Same thing you are doing here, Sal,” he said.

She looked upset and reached out to pat his arm. “Oh … poor Mister Hook. Did some whitefella grab you off a beach too?”

Dancer and Mary laughed. Their laughter seemed to infect the child until she was hiccupping and out of breath. Sal smacked the rock with her palm, nodding, her eyes shut but her lips split into a wide grin.
King George Sound 1826

They were not the only people living in the Sound. From his favourite granite perch on the western end of Breaksea, Billhook saw the small fires that burned daily in the hills and hollows around the Sound. During their forays to the mainland, Jimmy the Nail would take a party of men to target the recently burnt-out swamps for kangaroos coming in to feed from the fresh new shoots. It was then that a black man would deliberately step out into clear view in their path. Sometimes painted with ochre and oil, or dusty and covered in ash from firing his country, the man would gently lay his spear on the ground when he saw the sealer’s guns. There were always more men waiting, unseen. He would stand quietly. Sometimes he had a boy with him. The two parties would stare at each other in the quiet, still glades, until Bailey or Jimmy the Needle lifted his rifle. The black man would shove his wide-eyed, protesting boy sideways into the scrub, not far behind himself, and leave his spears lying on the track.

Billhook despaired at his crew mates for another opportunity lost. He was busy on the island as the evenings grew long, carving hooks, lures and sewing awls from whalebone, polishing the barbs with the skin of the shark they’d caught at the Doubtfuls. Then one day, just as the honey eaters were getting into the tiny red woolly bush flowers, he set off alone in the little jolly boat and only a dilly bag of his makings instead of a gun.

He put in at the long white bay, in the corner out of the surf. He stashed the sail and walked a mile along the beach until he could cross to where a thin plume of smoke hung above the lake behind the dunes. Here, the same man he’d seen several times before was stalking through the reeds and stopping to hold something small and solid against dry tinder. His brow was knitted in concentration or thought. When the fire took, he would step back, his face easing its stern expression and softening to approval as he watched the reeds smoulder slowly into a widening circle. The crackling and small explosions of wet wood and gum, along with the smoke, meant he did not hear or see Billhook watching him, until Billhook cleared his throat and said “K’ora!”

The black man jumped and the skin across his chest twitched. Billhook held out his hands with the bag and the man, who seemed embarrassed, had the presence of mind to look around for more sealers, or even his own countrymen who may have seen him taken unawares and
laugh at him. By his side he held a smoking banksia cone and he blew on it to create sparks, for wont of another gesture in his moment of discomfort.

Billhook held out his hands again and the man stepped forward, took hold of his right hand and shook it like a white man. By now, both men were surprised by one another. The black man’s hand was sinewy and his glance was now strong and reckoning.

“Wiremu,” said Billhook with his left hand on his breast.

“Wirddemu,” said the man, rolling his r’s like Billhook’s own accent.

“Yalbert,” he returned.

“Albert,” said Billhook.

The man talked, waving his hand over to Breaksea Island and then to where he had last seen Billhook and the sealers, when he’d been firing a swamp on the western end of the harbour. He pointed to the fire he’d just started, still talking. He spoke in his own language but his message was simple. This was his patch. It was bad form for Billhook and his mates to shoot kangaroo here after he’d fired it for hunting himself. He couldn’t argue with a rifle, but hunting on his land without permission made for problems between people.

Billhook nodded, a lot. Finally, when the man stopped talking, Billhook handed him his bag full of treasure. Albert sat down and spilled the contents over the ground. He fingered the whalebone shark hook and felt its barb, nodding. He examined the sinewed join between paua and wood and put it back in the bag. He took all three awls and tied the whalebone hook to his possum string belt, clucking happily. Then he handed the bag with all the items he didn’t want back to Billhook. He said a few words to him and jogged away down the track, the white hook bouncing against his bare thigh.

Billhook waited for a while, amongst the acrid stench of burning swamp wood, not sure of what to do, or even if the meeting had been the success he’d planned. He began the trek back to the beach, to where his boat lay in the corner by the rocks. Even if he honoured Albert’s wishes and hunted for roo away from his fired country, he had no hope of persuading men the like of Bailey or Hobson to do the same. They’d already reminded him of the folly of going ashore unarmed against the blackfellas.
He was treading around the sharp, broken scallop and helmet shells on the shore, thinking about all this, when he heard a shout. Albert picked his way over the grassy dune and down to the shore where Billhook stood waiting for him. He no longer held his smouldering Banksia cone but instead, a grey, furry bundle of limbs and tails. He handed it to Billhook.

Four huge eyes stared at him. Two thin white tails wrapped themselves around his wrists. The fur was impossibly plush and smelt like rutting marsupials. As they were. It wasn’t one creature but two. The black man had given him a mating pair of ringtail possums, their bodies bound tightly together with hair string, with instructions to allow them to breed on Breaksea Island.
The sealers stamped out their fires and watched the ship for a good part of the day. The man-o-war worked with short tacks on a north wind to stand off the Breaksea Island. They looked to be waiting for favourable wind to come in, positioning themselves for an entrance into the Sound. In the afternoon the wind turned to the south-west and the ship sailed slowly between Breaksea and Bald Head, its tattered white sails vivid against the streaky bosses of granite.

On the windswept peak of the island, the sealers gathered: Jimmy the Nail, Billhook, Samuel Bailey, Neddy and Sal, Dancer and Mary, Tommy Tasman, Weed, Hobson and the others. They passed Jimmy’s looking glass around and strained to see the man-o-war’s sails furled at the channel entrance to Princess Royal Harbour.

“French,” said Jimmy, lowering his glass. “They’re putting out an anchor on the port side. Not going to try scudding that sandbar in the harbour by the looks. Must be sixty fathoms where they are now.”

“They’d be resting up for wood and water,” said Bailey. “And to fix that rigging. Looks like they had a rough crossing.”

In the evening the wind dropped. The sealers lit a small, furtive fire on the north side of the island and discussed their situation. There were opportunities for gunpowder and rope, items they were now in dire need of, and also a berth from the Sound to Sydney. As they talked, hope rose in each of them like reptiles feeling the first warmth of sun after sleeping season.

“Tomorrow we keep a weather eye on them,” said Jimmy the Nail. “See what they’re up to. You women,” he nodded to Sal, Dancer and Mary, “you get some muttonbirds in the morn. They’ll be wanting fresh meat. Where are those possums, Billhook?”

“Best to leave them til after they’ve kidded,” said Billhook. “Plenty more then.”

“Nah, they’d be worth a skerrick of powder,” said Bailey. Billhook flashed with anger. He’d worked hard for that deal. “They’d be worth more later when I’m in Port Jackson and you’re still here looking for a feed, Bailey.”

The men were quiet for a moment.

Jimmy said finally, “You’re my crew, Billhook. And now that Boss Davidson is out of the show, I’ll say who stays and who goes.”
Billhook stood up and walked out of the camp.
My parents were proud when I was given the berth aboard the sealer, he thought. They knew it to be my future as a seafarer and adventurer. They saw me as the seed that flies through the air and travels on the water to other lands or the bird who returns with a twig in its beak so they can grow that twig into a tree. Jimmy the Nail is not my decider.

The Pakeha only want a man who can kill. They know that we Maori are brave in the face of a whale or a seal; we have no fright to come alongside and drive in the pike, hold it fast, dodge the slimy brown teeth of the bull. That’s why the white men like us, for we are strong and we are brave. What they don’t know is that the young men they gathered from the bays and inlets of Otakau were offered up by our families as a privilege because we have strong hearts and are sons of high birth.

Jimmy the Nail had made it clear that Billhook was a mere minion to Boss Davidson – who was more interested in selling a ship that didn’t belong to him than honouring a promise – and a sidekick to Bailey’s folly with kid thievery. Bailey holding that wriggling child under his arm, Tommy and Jack standing on the white beach and waving, and Dancer’s lifeless body mauld by barnacles and later by Jimmy the Nail.

At that moment on Breaksea he wanted nothing more than to be away from these useless violences. There was Captain Kelly to find and Otakau to defend. There was his father to honour. The arrival of the Frenchmen had cleared this position in his mind, the way autumn rains wash the dust haze from the horizon.

He sat on a rock that still seeped the warmth of the day’s sun, above the women’s camp, and looked out across the water to Michaelmas Island. Beyond the island, a swelling moon rose over a hill on the mainland. Four dark figures – three women and the child – trod silently along the path in front of him and made their way to their fire. They didn’t notice him sitting there as they passed but he could smell the muttonbird oil that they smeared on their bodies.

Sal placed more wood on the fire. Dancer and Mary pulled off their sealskin frocks. They warmed muttonbird fat in their palms and smoothed it over their breasts, stomach and thighs in long, sure strokes. Weed sat in the dirt beside the fire and watched them.
Mary spoke. “We cry on the islands. Plenty blood. Plenty cry, yes, us Tyreelore. Island wives. We cry for our families.”

Dancer laid huge hands over her breasts and rubbed in glistening fat. “Plenty cry all over country,” she said and then she told her story in language and Mary repeated her, translating. “Her sister ... three shepherds hanging her by her feet from a tree. Sister ... dead from a gun in her stomach. Brothers killed by guns.”

“Clansmen bones on every beach.”

“People getting sick inside.”

“My mama’s head. I found it in the hole.”

“Take us little girls away to the islands and make us their wives. Call us [their] Worthies.”

“Babies buried all over the islands.”

“Fill mouth of my white man’s baby with grass, bury her on the island. We cry, we cry plenty then.”

Dancer and Mary kept anointing themselves with ochre and grease and saying terrible things of finding the mutilated bodies of their kin, of killing the offspring from their repeated rapes, their kid siblings stolen for farmers’ slaves, an old man who bled to death with stumps where his hands once were.

They stopped talking. Mary breathed in deep. Her torso gleamed as she straightened. She seemed to suck all those stories inside herself. Billhook saw her body lengthen. The short, stumpy woman was suddenly tall. Dancer stood tall also.

“Renner – Mother Brown – she made this dance for us. Devil Dance is the dance of the Tyreelore. All women like us on the islands, kept on the islands by the Ghosts. Devil makes you sing plenty and sing good.”

Dancer and Mary looked across the fire to Weed.

“Devil Dance sends all your crying away. Devil Dance makes you strong again.”

Sal set a rhythm with her sticks. The Pallawah women began singing. Billhook had heard the song’s strains through the night air from the women’s camp in the days since Mary was reunited with Dancer. But he’d not understood that it was the famous Devil Dance song. Every Vandiemonian sealer he’d met spoke of this dance with a certain look in his eye: lust and fright.
Fire gleamed against their limbs and splayed fingers as the women danced. Hips forward, Dancer and Mary thumped their feet towards the flames, their hands steepled into diamonds over their wombs, chins and lips thrusting their singing up with the fire sparks that plumed into the black sky. Their shell necklaces fell back, clattering between their shoulder blades.

Weed was staring at Dancer and Mary. She seemed unable to move but her eyes were wild and her teeth shone. Sal nodded to her and Weed began patting the ground, thumping it in unison to the women’s feet.

Billhook climbed off the rock as quietly as he could and followed the track back to the sealers’ camp. His own problem with being dishonoured and disrespected by the likes of Jimmy the Nail and Boss Davidson now seemed a petty quarrel. Behind him, he heard laughter and a clatter of Sal’s sticks as the song ended.
They watched comings and goings from the French ship for two days. Small whaleboats beetled across the Sound to Oyster Harbour, or into Princess Royal Harbour from the channel, returning in the evenings. One tender ferried back and forth from the ship to the nearby Watering Point inside the channel heads.

On the evening of the third day, Jimmy, Bailey, Hobson, Smidmore, Black Simon, Hamilton, Billhook and Neddy prepared one of their boats and sailed across the Sound. They intended to arrive under the cover of darkness but the rain cleared and the moon picked up their white sails above a glittering sea. At nine o’clock they arrived in the port shadow of the ship and the sailors were waiting for them.

“Permission to board!” shouted Jimmy, and Black Simon repeated him in French.

Captain d’Urville of the Astrolabe must have donned his regalia to receive the visitors. His brocaded high-necked collar was brass-buttoned around his white shirt, so tightly about his throat that it resembled armour. His florid face, resolutely pressed lips, waving red hair and snakey eyes indicated that he would give no quarter to the men whom he had doubtless already assessed as brigands. There was nothing for it but to appeal to his sympathy and his need for the brace of freshly killed muttonbirds in Billhook’s hands.

“We have been shamefully treated by Captain Davidson of the Governor Brisbane,” said Jimmy the Nail, and went on to say how Boss had left two men at Israelite Bay and then their present group at the Archipelago and Fairy Island. They were living from their fishing and birding, having run out of gunpowder. They had no flour, rope or rum left either. The sealers were, in effect, destitute. Jimmy didn’t need to embellish the truth. He told d’Urville of the meeting with the Yankee captain and the news they’d gleaned from the Hobart Gazette.

When Jimmy finished his sorry tale, d’Urville looked at the circle of eight men intently and launched into his own.

“We have had a ... a ... very bad cross from Tenerife,” he said in poor English. “One hundred and eight days, half of them in appalling weather and big seas. I lost a man during this voyage. Today I have discovered that, from three hundred tins of braised chicken, one hundred and forty tins were spoiled, completely putrid, and we have thrown them overboard.
There are all sorts of damage to be repaired and all rigging must now be inspected. The time keepers need regulating so that we can navigate. My men need resting. They are very tired and sore.”

D’Urville sighed. His speech seemed to have annoyed and exhausted him further. To Jimmy he said, “I do wish to husband my supplies cautiously until we reach Port Jackson. In the meantime we will be anchored here for several weeks until we are refreshed and replenished, Mr Everett.”

“Would you accept these birds, in return for your hospitality tonight?” Jimmy took the muttonbirds from Billhook and held the brown bundle of feathers out to d’Urville. D’Urville’s nose twitched and his lips clamped even thinner. He looked quickly to the shore and Billhook followed his glance to the thin orange light of a fire behind the trees. D’Urville had some men camped there. A sail-making or coopers’ workshop, perhaps.

D’Urville made up his mind quickly, calling over the cook and nodding to him to take the birds. The cook, a short, pointy man, hurried across the deck to Jimmy the Nail, grabbed the bunch of birds by their feet and disappeared into the galley.

“Stay aboard tonight,” d’Urville said to the sealers. “I would like to know things about this King George Sound. Guilbert! See that these men get some ship’s biscuit and brandy. Plenty of brandy.”

It was well after midnight before Jimmy and his crew turned in, climbing into the empty bunks and hammocks. Above the sound of two dozen snoring, snuffling men, Billhook heard the strains of singing on the wind from the shore. French lyrics wove into familiar melodies that he’d heard on ships and islands all along the Southern Ocean. Then the blackfellas replied in song, one child shrieking exuberantly above the other voices. Billhook guessed it was Albert, his boy and his countrymen singing with the sailors of the Astrolabe. The music faltered and ran out. Laughter. The Frenchmen began another song.

Lying in the hammock, woozy with brandy, he went over the night’s talking in his mind. D’Urville seemed reluctant to trade his powder and shot, though he was stocked well enough, and offered up his men for a hunting trip within the next few days. The Captain did not trust them with powder, Billhook knew this. He did not trust them at all. The Captain offered the sealing crew a night aboard where he could keep an eye on them, so they did not wander
ashore to invade the land party. Judging by the ship’s empty bunks, half of the Astrolabe’s men were staying the night there.

“I can take three as passengers as far as Port Jackson,” d’Urville said the next morning.

The sealers were shocked into silence at the implications of this unexpected offer, and Jimmy did not answer for a minute. He worked his jaw and looked at his knuckles. He looked angry at d’Urville’s undermining of his boatsteerer status.

“You’ll have to take all of us, or no one,” he said coldly to the Captain.

It was the best answer, reflected Billhook. A bluff yes, but one that would keep Jimmy’s crew resined together.

D’Urville shrugged away the rebuff. “Perhaps, Mr Everett, you are hardly eager to put yourself or your men within reach of the law again?”

“I beg your pardon, Captain! We are not escaped convicts seeking refuge from the law. And any man freed after servitude to that Vandemonian prick Governor Arthur are quick to sail far from his fresh hell. We are free seamen who have come west after seal and have since been cruelly abandoned.” Jimmy the Nail took a moment to breathe and light a pipe before he stalked out of the hold and into the rain, muttering about having to justify himself to a ‘fucking Frenchman’.

In Jimmy’s absence both Hamilton and Black Simon said, “You could take me, sir.”

D’Urville looked at them, quite sanguine with Jimmy’s outburst. He nodded at Black Simon.

“You speak Français, oui? Then you can come on as a seaman.”

Black Simon and Hobson looked pleased with this arrangement but Billhook could see that the crew were anxious for when Jimmy found out.

At dawn, the rain set in from the north again. The Astrolabe swung on her anchor overnight and was now backed by a second anchor on the starboard side. Shouts drifted up from the little boat that came alongside. Seamen threw down the ladder and who should climb over the line but Albert and his son. Another man called Mokare climbed aboard. Albert’s long beard was caked with red ochre, he wore one of Billhook’s whalebone sewing awls through his pierced septum and his teeth were brilliant with the huge smile he presented to Billhook. His son looked tired and wary and his eyes cast down as soon as he recognised Bailey and Everett from the day they’d pointed their rifles at him.
Two of the officers who had rowed the father and son to the ship rushed about, finding some biscuit for them to eat, then disappeared below deck. Albert and his son sat on a comfortable bed of canvas sail, sheltered from the rain and chewed at their strange food. D’Urville and some of the other seamen stood and watched them curiously, talking among themselves about the previous night’s celebrations. One of the men used pencils and paper to sketch a profile of Mokare; a fine recreation thought Billhook, looking over his shoulder.

The two officers returned with an armful each of booty for the three blackfellas. ‘Australians’ they called them. While the artist battled with sharp, impatient words to keep his subject still, Albert laughed with delight as the two officers loaded his lap with a steel knife, an axe, several blankets, a shirt, two pairs of trousers, a compass and a mirror.

“And our piece of biscuit,” grumbled Jimmy, watching this tin-pot diplomacy, “speaks plain enough to where us English folk stand in their book, compared to the blackfellas.”
In the three weeks that the Astrolabe had been moored at Point Possession, the sailors were sustained with fresh meat from the sealers. It became obvious to Billhook after an expedition with Smidmore, Sal’s hunting dog and three officers that the Frenchmen could be relied upon to waste every grain of the precious gunpowder and shot that they guarded so jealously. They crashed through the bush in heavy boots, frightening game, rather than waiting quietly for the birds or kangaroos to settle, crashed onwards to flush out more. A huge buck stopped fifteen feet from Officer Gaimard and glared at him. The man took a shot and missed. The pellets whooped through the trees. The gun’s echoes sounded long after the roo bounced away. Without their ship’s biscuit, remaining tins of unspoiled chicken and the constancy of the sealers and the blacks to trade with them, Billhook thought that the French would surely have starved to death.

But they would not trade their gunpowder and shot. The sealers had brought the Frenchmen fish, fairy penguins, possums, pigeons, marsupial rats, muttonbirds and seals. The women gathered red berries on the island and dried them in baskets, set lizard traps, dug tubers and picked samphyr fruit. In return d’Urville gave them rope, tea, tobacco and rum and shook his head firmly at all requests for powder.

Of course fresh meat was not the ultimate trade. The Captain and some of his men talked often with Black Simon in their own language and, during his last days on the island before he embarked as their seaman, the big black man would recount their conversations.

“They asked me if we ever see the native women,” he said. “The men are hungry for women. They say the women are never seen. The French, they sing all night with the blacks and that one Albert says ‘Oh yes! Tomorrow we will show you the women,’ and then in the morning the blacks are all gone. The same every day. ‘Show us your women?’ ... ‘Oh yes, tomorrow!’ the blacks say.”

“They won’t give them up. You just gotta take them,” said Bailey, and Billhook looked sideways at him and shook his head. “Anyways, we got women. And they got the gunpowder.”
They all ate the women’s gatherings that night. Billhook picked the oily, fishy meat from the baked carcass of a muttonbird chick and scooped out the stuffing of damper and wild celery with his fingers. He threw the bones to the dog. Before it grew too dark, he turned to his other project, weaving sleeping mats from the strap leaves of the rushes. It was a womanish task but no one else would do it. The Pallawah women were too handy with their snares, digging sticks and waddies to worry about sleeping mats. Weed helped him. She sang funny little songs and Billhook sang some back. She looked over to his hands sometimes to see how she was going.

The muttonbird mothers began to wheel in, black and angular against a pinkening sky. Suddenly thousands of birds thickened the air looking for their chicks and the noise grew *cheep whip* *cheep whip* *cheep whip* *cheep whip* until the sky above the ridge was hectic with their dark, arcing forms. The penguins began then a song of a singular, whistling man in four or five notes. Venus revealed herself in the west.

“That Captain of the *Astrolabe,*” Black Simon nodded his head towards where the Frenchmen were moored below Venus, “he is famous in his country for finding Venus in a field in Greece.” When Black Simon spoke he was frugal with words, meting them out like precious shot. The whole camp stopped what they were doing to listen. “She was six foot tall and cool, white stone, as beautiful as the inside of a seashell. Her ears were pierced and her hair was coiled around her neck and she held an apple in her hand. He pulled her out of the earth, from a tomb.”

“No wonder the officers are asking after the women,” laughed Smidmore. “He’ll get no classic Greece in the Sound,” said Jimmy the Nail, “just mullet and muttonbirds and blackfella women smeared with fish oil and red clay, feathers in their hair.”

“Venus,” said Bailey. “The oldest whore in the world. First one out at night and the last one to leave.”

“*Meremere, ah Meremere,*” sang Billhook quietly over his weaving. “*Manilyan, Manilyan, Manilyan,*” chanted Weedchild, who seemed to understand which star they were talking about, and then she burst into tears.
“We got Venus of Breaksea Island right here,” Smidmore nodded towards the women’s camp.
“Shut that kid up, Billhook,” Jimmy said, irritated, and returned to the subject of women and gunpowder. “So we send Sal and the girls on a trading run.”
“Yep.”

The Captain looked over the side of the ship, wiping the remains of his muttonbird dinner from his face. What he saw made him drop his napkin.
“We have tucker for you, Captain,” shouted Sal.

At the sound of her voice eight more men, some wearing hats and others bareheaded, showed their faces at the gunwale, nudging each other and staring.

It was the first time the Frenchmen had seen the three sealer women and girl child. Billhook imagined how the scene would look from the decks of the Astrolabe. The little whaleboat was crowded with exiles of Breaksea Island. Mary, plump in her sealskin frock, black face, red knit cap with tufts of wiry hair escaping it and rows of gleaming marineer shells strung tightly around her neck; Weed, a tiny, waif-like creature in boy’s trousers, her wild halo of hair buffeted by wind and salt, resembling a sea urchin; And he, Wiremu Heke, standing at the tiller, his tattoos spiralling over the belt of his canvas trousers, no shirt or shoes, beardless, wearing a slender length of green stone from his left ear and a necklace of huge white teeth; Smidmore, his ruined face, turned eye and stoved-in cheek, his long black hair not quite concealing the gold earring; Dancer, naked but for her scars and shells, her ring of furry hair framing her round glossy face; and Sal, with the skull of the child strung about her throat, her long straight hair held back with a scrap of bright woven cloth, wearing a wallaby frock, standing with one brown foot on the thwart and the toes of her other foot gripping the gunwale.

Sal held up a heavy sack dripping with blood and circled by blowflies to show the bemused sailors. From the sack, she produced a fat black skink the size of her forearm, its triangular head bashed in. “It’s good!” she said.
D’Urville ogled Sal, Mary and Dancer, his thin eyes and nostrils widening. He looked over to the cook, questioning the lizards and the cook shrugged, smirking.
The Captain said little as he conducted the deal. They were given ten yards of frayed rope and some eyelets for their sails. Tied to the rope was a scrap of parchment with two lines written in French.

They hoisted the main and sailed back to Breaksea Island. On the rocks Bailey, Hobson and Black Simon helped them haul the boat high and dry. Billhook gave the rope and the bag of trivets to Hobson. Hobson looked at the note, tore it from the rope and handed it to Black Simon, who read it slowly out loud.

“M. Simon shall bring the black lizard woman to starboard at midnight. You shall have your powder and shot.”
With fresh supplies of powder and shot, William Billhook, Hobson, Jimmy the Nail and Samuel Bailey sailed to Whalers Cove. The heavy rains of the previous few days were blown away, leaving scudding clouds and flashes of sunlight. They pulled the boat onto the beach. Jimmy and Hobson agreed to head sou'-east over the hill towards the point. Billhook and Bailey walked west along the little beach, over the sheets of granite that sloped down to the sea and along the next beach to where the spring seeped out of the hill.

Billhook stopped to drink the brown water. It tasted good, if a little of the antiseptic trees that grew above. They climbed the isthmus until they could see the harbour, stepping over the short, scruffy reeds, using the plates of stone as their path. As they walked down the other side towards the karri forest, Billhook found one of the roads the blacks had made, a neat path of chopped grasses, worn with many feet. The only sound was their footfall on the slippery leaves blown down from the last northerly.

Bailey started baiting. “How did you find that Captain Cook, Billhook? Tasty?”
“Did not meet the man, Bailey.”
“He musta been a tough old man, an old boiler, hey Billhook?”
A thorny branch with yellow flowers flicked past the fowler Billhook was carrying and into Bailey’s face. He swore.
“Something impolite about eating your own kind,” Bailey said.
“Too salty anyway. The white man’s flesh is tainted.”

Bailey’s silence quickened around him. Sometimes Billhook watched his broods and imagined that inside his chest, things crashed around and tore at each other like crabs in a barrel. He glanced behind him and saw Bailey’s face. One day, Samuel Bailey would like to leach my body of blood, he thought. But it is not my destiny to die in this country, with its fires and pale skies and dry, prickly earth. Where would my soul go?

Suddenly, there was Woman. She stood shining and brown, naked but for the possum string wrapped around her waist. Her sister, for they had the same shaped faces, sat on the ground, her bony knees butterflied. Billhook breathed in a quick shock of delight and felt that breath course down to his loins and stall.
Her heavy hair swayed as she raised her head. She looked straight at him. She was not afraid. All was swollen silence with that stare. The clouds flew across the sky but they were in the forest now and the air was oily from the sweating trees. There was no sound in that moment, not even the alarm calls of the birds.

Her sister leapt from the ground and stood by her side. Bailey thudded into William Billhook’s back, lost in his own dark meanderings. He swore again and then stared. When he spoke, his voice was rocks in a hopper.

“So this is where they hide their titters.”

The skin of quiet broke and everything fell through. The young women shrieked together, an unearthly noise in that thick still air. They ran into the forest, a splash of brown knees, feet, hands, hair. All that was left was the Frenchmen’s compass, shining all moony on a flat, lichenened stone. Next to it was a woven bag half full of tubers. While Bailey sniffed into the deep, dappled green, Billhook weighted his pocket with the sun-warmed compass.

Between the two parties, they shot two kangaroos, gutting and bleeding them in the bush. They traded one of the carcasses with the cook for more brandy and rum, hanging off the Astrolabe while the red-faced d’Urville watched. Black Simon was already aboard the ship and the Captain seemed to want him quarantined from his crewmates. As there was only he, the Maori heathen, in the boat and three white men whose shifty, chancer eyes seemed to irritate the Captain, they were not invited to board.

As they sailed home, Billhook scooped his hand into the briny, a quick moment of grabbing the floating pumice, and picked up the sway of the tiller again before the others noticed. Two treasures for the day.

Later when the sun hit the water low and made it bright, Weed sat next to Billhook on the rocks skirting the island. She laughed at the oystercatchers, at their red stick legs running up the granite away from each frothy surge. It was a game to her, watching them gamble every wash on the rocks.

“Tama hine,” Billhook held out two clenched fists to Weed. “A gift – which hand?”
Teeth gleaming, she laid huge eyes upon his hands and chose the right one. He opened his fist and she took the pumice stone.

“Came all the way from a fire mountain,” was what he had heard his mother say, “all the way across the sea to you, tama hine.”

She folded the holey stone into her tiny palm. “You good, Wiremu.” Her words, from over the ranges and across the plains melted into the lingo of the sealers. “Not Bailey. He no good. He call me Weed. Why?”

She could have broken William Billhook in half then, this stolen child with her tammar cloak and the woollen trousers of a drowned American boy. Her smile fell away quickly and he saw her remember that day. He was not a good man, not as good as she said he was.

That night as the fires cricked and cracked and became quieter, Billhook carved sheoak into trolling lures and sealed them with grasstree resin. While he worked, he kept an ear open towards the boatsteerers, where Bailey had ventured to barter information.

“They were in the karri forest, on the south side of the harbour, up the hill from the reed swamp, a clearing ... beautiful, as beautiful as they come.”

“They like tiger snakes, Bailey,” said Jimmy the Needle. “You’ll never see ’em in the same place twice.”

“Wait ’til the Frenchmen leave,” said Bailey. “We’ll get them then. I’m owed a woman.”

An hour before dawn, Billhook was kicked awake with a blow to his ribs and the next to his kidney as his body recoiled and rolled away from the pain. Around him he heard the grunts and thuds of flesh on flesh and then the crack and thook of wood on bone. An Aboriginal voice shouted at him. “Get up, yer useless whitefella woman. Get up and fight me!” The kicks shuddered through Billhook again and again until, in his dozy state, he woke enough to realise what was going on. He leapt to his feet. Tangled in skins and dazed, he threw his arms around in the gloom, hoping to connect his fists with his attacker.

Whoever it was stepped back and laughed and all Billhook could see of the man was his teeth. Something hard and unyielding whacked him across the side of his head and Billhook went down.

He lay on the ground not sure what had happened. Scuffles and shouts continued around the camp but Billhook was too dazed to understand. Beside him in the gloom lay Smidmore, still
sleeping. Billhook shook him by the shoulder but all he did was breathe a groan. Billhook’s hand came away from Smidmore wet with warm blood. Down the hill, the women were screaming.

Billhook rolled over and got to his knees, put out a bare foot and tried to stand. As soon as he was upright, someone, the black man, hit him again. In the haze of sparkles at the corners of his eyes he heard Tommy Tasman and Hobson shouting.

“Randall! Where are you, ya fucking snake?”
“I’m gonna fucking kill you, Randall!”

A shot blasted through the air. Jimmy the Nail lit a brush torch from the dying embers of the fire. Billhook was on his feet and saw Hobson standing with the rifle, busy reloading. “They reckon we got no powder, the fuckers. I’ll show them,” he growled. Jimmy prowled in a circle, holding aloft his torch. “C’mon! C’mon!” But the attackers had left the camp as furtively as they arrived. The islanders threw some brush on the fire until the flames reached high enough to see about the camp. Smidmore was still down. Neddy sat on his haunches, rubbing his neck. Samuel Bailey wasn’t to be seen.

From the women’s camp they heard Sal sobbing.
“Randall’s got his woman back then,” said Jimmy the Nail. “Only took him a year.”
“What,” said Billhook. One side of his head hurt. He still didn’t know what had happened.
“Randall’s back,” said Hobson. “He’s got those two blackfellas with him. That Pigeon from Sydney and the kid from Kangaroo Island.”
“Budgergorry’s no countryman of mine,” said Neddy, indignant. “He’s from New South Wales land.”
“And Tommy Toolin and Bill Bundy,” continued Hobson. “The mob that turned up here months ago, that I saw off.”
“What about Sal and Dancer?” said Billhook. As his mind sobered he realised the women’s screams meant they were being attacked by Randall’s men.
“Fuck ’em,” Tommy Tasman laughed. “At least Randall’s not hitting us anymore.” But he looked sideways at Dancer’s owner Jimmy, ready to dodge a blow from him.

“Send off that next shot, Hobson,” said Jimmy the Nail. “Just to let ’em know the time.”
King George Sound 1826

“If you don’t want to kill anyone, you gotta get the blackfellas out of the camp for the night,” Randall said “You know that, Jimmy. Cleaner work that way.”

Despite being ejected from Breaksea Island months ago, when John Randall returned to claim Sal from Smidmore, he had Jimmy the Nail’s allegiance. It was Jimmy’s guns that had procured Sal for Randall three years before. That night the two men had sailed from Kangaroo Island to the mainland, walked over moonlit grassy dunes and into the samphireflats of the lakes system. They stepped with stealth through the tea-tree swamps until they found the village of huts where a quiet fire was circled with men, women and children sitting on beds of dried grasses eating and talking. In the screaming chaos that followed the two men walking out of a night forest with guns, Sal’s father and uncle were shot dead and a three-month-old baby burned so terribly in the fire that it did not survive.

By the time the sun rose and shone on Breaksea Island, Randall’s men had done with the women and they walked up the track to the main camp. Bailey, holding a bloodied piece of cloth against his temple, glowered at Randall. The two black men squatted at the fire and the two white men stood behind them, watching. Jimmy the Nail and Randall shook hands and gave each other a wry smile.

“Why didn’t your dogs bark?” asked Jimmy.

“They’re muzzled in the boat.”

“Hit him on the other side with the ugly stick this time, Randall,” Tommy Toolin laughed, noting Smidmore’s scars and turned eye.

Billhook sat Smidmore up and leaned him against the hut. Smidmore lay his head against the canvas wall and groaned again. Billhook peeled away some of the Gael’s hair to look at the wound. He put his hands around Smidmore’s head.

“I think your bones are not broken,” he told him and set about cutting the long black hair away from the wound with his good knife.

“Not like my bleedin’ face last time I was on this island,” said Tommy, pointing to his left eye. “Now that was a fight.”
Jimmy and Randall continued to talk in low voices. Samuel Bailey positioned himself closer so that he could hear them. Hobson was furious after his first successful eviction and stalked about with the rifle. He couldn’t override the authority of the two other boatsteerers when they were chatting like the old mates they were. It looked like the Hunter crew were here to stay until someone came to take them all off the island.

“Hunter’s not comin’ back,” said Randall. “Robinson’s left his crew on Rodrigues last I heard and was trying to sell the Hunter in Mauritius. Market’s dropped. No good, these bastard nobs. Left two men on St Pauls with nay more than a knife. Blew off the island and didn’t go back to supply them. No food, gunpowder. Nothin’.”

“Jesus! St Pauls. That’s down near the Pole.”

“Yep. They’ll be raving, or dead, next time a ship gets down there to carry them off.”

On the boulders where the sea sucked in, Dancer, Mary and Sal squatted in the water to clean themselves.
King George Sound 1826

A still dawn the next day and the muttonbirds rose into the sky to circle the island. A living chill seeped up through the ground. The islanders gathered on the western point and watched the *Astrolabe* weigh anchor and drift slowly out of the Sound. Frenchmen lined the decks or wriggled over the newly mended rigging. The yawl sailed ahead taking soundings. No thwack of wind hitting sails, just a gentle shooing out to sea, past the smoking breakfast fires on Breaksea Island.

All of the men stood watching the *Astrolabe* leave and Billhook knew that many of them were thinking they were abandoned again. He was. It had been a slim comfort seeing the ship anchored every day for a month. It was a sorry feeling, even if he did not like the Frenchmen. Randall and Jimmy would have to keep the crew in line now that they were alone and getting hungrier. Now the *Hunter* crew was here, everyone would be hungry.

“Godspeed to Hamilton and Black Simon,” said Hobson as the ship sailed by, like the two men had just died. “They were good men.”

As they watched the white sails grow smaller, Jimmy the Nail said they were camping on the mainland that night. He picked out five men: Billhook, Randall, Pigeon, Bailey and Neddy. They readied the boat and sailed from the island towards the white stretch of the bay pushed up against the mountain. They beached on a gathering swell near the channel to Oyster Harbour, where the old whalers’ vegetable garden lay behind the dunes.

“Right,” said Jimmy. “Neddy, find that blackfella always on at you about muttonbirding.” Jimmy knew the blacks’ hunger for the oily, salty muttonbird and Neddy had fished with the locals and said they asked often to be taken to Green Island to hunt them. Neddy also said they liked to spear groper and kingfish from the high rocky ledges facing away from the sun, dark water they could see into. They burleyed up the sea with smashed periwinkles and crabs and, resting on their hams, watched the water. Neddy talked of the patience and good hand of the tall, quiet Twertayan. Billhook hadn’t met Twertayan but it sounded like he had *mana* with his people.

When Billhook gave Albert his namesake – hooks made from sheoak and resin or carved from the bones of seals and whales and deep sea fish – Albert hadn’t appreciated their use but
still he unwound yards of hair string from his waist, tied it around two mating possums and
gifted the bundle to Billhook. Albert preferred to fish his own way, waiting with a spear or
days spent building arcs of stone for trapping fish washed like spawning flotsam out of the
rivers.

Neddy returned a few hours later with Twertayan, Albert and three other men, their kangaroo
cloaks slung open to the warming morning. Albert wore the whalebone fish hook as a clasp
for his cloak. They wore their hair clubbed, like Billhook’s countrymen. Red clay caked their
straight bodies. They carried sticks to hang their quarry and spears, for fish.


“They all want to go.”

Twertayan gestured to his brothers: an older man with a long beard and intricate scar work
over his chest, a small man with curled fingers, Albert and a young man about the same age
as Neddy.

Jimmy pointed to the rowlocks. “Neddy and Billhook will row you,” he said to the men.

Neddy and Billhook climbed into the boat after the black men. Randall stood beside Neddy as
the others started pushing her out. “Neddy, Billhook. Take these men to Green Island,” he
lowered his voice, “and leave them there.”

The sea took the boat and the two sealers began rowing hard to get it past the breakers before
the next set. The black men talked to each other, happy to be heading out to hunt and
shrieking when they were hit by a wave. Neddy didn’t talk to them. He didn’t know their
language. His face was different, his straight hair and canvas clothes made him different too.
As a group, the black men treated him the same as they treated all the sealers: one eye on his
cutlass and the other on the opportunity.

The oars were wrapped in spirals of kangaroo skin inside the rowlocks, fastened with copper
nails, and they creaked as Neddy and Billhook laboured out to the island. With each creak
and splash, Billhook wondered about Jimmy, whose mind was always on the game and the
trap.
They beached on the north side of the island where it met the deeper water and crunched gently into the rocks. Twertayan tumbled over the side and the four others followed him, their spears clattering against the gunwales. They waited for Neddy and Billhook to stow the boat. Neddy hefted his oar out of the rowlock. Billhook watched him.

“Push off!” Neddy hissed at him, his eyes wide.

Billhook knew what they were about to do. He looked back to the best of the black men in King George Sound – the five strongest, the five best hunters and protectors – grinning, rubbing their thorny feet on their slim shins in anticipation of the bird hunt. Those two girls, foraging for tubers in the forest. Billhook knew all about it then. He could have stopped it but he did not.

“They do not swim, Neddy.”

“Push off, Billhook. Randall tol’ us so.” Randall had broken Neddy’s little brother’s arm over his knee on Kangaroo Island.

“They do not swim!”

Neddy shoved an oar against a stone scrawled with the white markings of strange creatures and the little boat heaved away from the island. The whaleboat, with its pointed bows ahead and astern was perfect. No going about or shoving a clumsy transom against hard water, just turn the body and row the other way fast. A quick lurch away from a cranky humpback, from swell smashing against granite, from desperate people.

Billhook tried to ignore the lamentations of the marooned men but he watched them the whole way to shore. Checking over his shoulder for bearings was his only reprieve. Five dark figures, their arms waving, silhouetted against their green and pink meadowy prison. Billhook rowed with a deadening in his stomach, that same blackness, when the only reward for his ill deed was shame clawing deep into his body.

“There is no water for them, Neddy.” Billhook’s concern, spoken aloud, did not unravel his guilt but made him a weaker man.
They slept on shore that night in the reeds, listening to the thumps and growls of the kangaroos in the bush at their backs. Billhook watched the little fire on the island, knowing that Albert and his countrymen would be picking at the dark flesh of muttonbirds. In the morning, the chill crept from the swamp. Dew soaked the carcass fireplace.

Randall sat, knapping dulled flint with a little hammer. It was a black art, he said, a job best left to a man with teetotaller hands and a lucky streak. He wrapped fine pieces of roo hide around the readied flints and clamped them into the cocks.

Purpose dogged the other men. Jimmy the Nail, Bailey and Pigeon stalked around the camp, their ears pricked like hungry dogs. They moved with short, urgent actions; stowing chunks of cooked roo meat, skins of water and cutlasses about their bodies. Randall sat, working on his flints and measuring out heavy shot.

“Need rope for a roo hunt,” said Samuel Bailey.

Jimmy looked at Bailey. Billhook saw a glint of new respect in his slatey eyes when he smiled.

“Keep the boat stowed but ready,” he said to Neddy and Billhook.

The day stretched away from Neddy and Billhook waiting on the beach. There was no easterly, strange, for the season was changing fast. Water glossed silver between the little beach and the island. The sun reached midday when Billhook saw the plume of smoke pour into the sky from the island, bright orange from green fuel. He could not see Albert or the other men, only their message. He walked along the beach to the channel and looked out to Breaksea Island. Hunting muttonbirds sheared the water with their wingtips, looking for sardines.

He heard the women before he saw them, a strange crying of words in a rolling water lilt filtering through the marri trees. Neddy looked at Billhook, panicked. They heard Randall’s laugh, someone grunted and the woman’s voice stopped.

It was her: the woman in the clearing. Her body was not gleaming now but covered in grey dust. Grey streaks of dirt and tears marked her face. French rope bound her arms to those of
her sister. They were both wracked with shivers. Billhook had seen that terrible tremor of shock before. A yellow dingo clung to their legs, his ears back, tail sagging.

Billhook met her eyes. This last year of nights when he’d thrashed awake in his bed, dreaming up the velvety skin, the breathing womb of Woman ... he’d danced them into his greasy bedding, against the cool damp of harbour side sandstone, tethered them to a tree. She saw them all. He bowed his head in hot shame.

Bailey came out of the trees with two more women, their arms also bound, their eyes flat with fear. He had a job holding the ropes and keeping a grip on his shooter. He yanked on the rope around their necks. He raised the butt of the gun to see their bodies flinch, and laughed. He dragged them over to the boat, where water eddied around the stringers. Bailey was proud, brought his catch home to gloat. It was only the second time Billhook had seen him laugh or smile.

“Billhook! One each!” Bailey nodded to the rest of the hunting party.

Billhook did not want to ship out to the island. Dread coursed through his body. He wanted to be back in that clearing, with dappled sunlight warming his face and the beautiful girl staring at him. A strange heat filled the air. He saw the sisters look at him again.

“Wiremu,” Billhook pointed to himself. “My name is Wiremu Heke.”

A mad thing to do. She stared. She was scared but angry too. She clutched her sister’s free hand. “Moennan.”

“Don’t fucking talk to the merchandise.” The muzzle of Bailey’s gun pressed against Billhook’s neck so hard he could feel it under his tongue. “I’ll break your fucking neck you black bastard if you even cast an eye on my doxy.” His canvas shirt ran with fishy sweat. Billhook didn’t know if Bailey’s gun was packed when he pushed Billhook to the ground with the muzzle, so that he fell all wrong and was pinned to the ground like an underling dog.

Neddy cried, “He alright, Bailey!”

Billhook could not see the sisters but he felt something move through the air, an imperative, a silent order. He saw Pigeon holding the sisters now that Bailey had him held down. Jimmy
was struggling to get the other two women into the boat. Pigeon, he could not see Pigeon. Jimmy was cursing. The women started screaming and hurling themselves against Jimmy. A splash as Jimmy floundered in the warm shallows. Bailey let the pressure off Billhook’s throat.

Then Jimmy’s women hurtled past his head, their feet thudding dark against the white sand. He saw her toenail, pink. They ran with their arms tied together, touching. Jimmy patted for his powder flask. He packed and tamped the flintlock with dried bark before the girls reached the marris. The sisters screamed to their two running countrywomen. They kept yelling, urging them on, despite Randall swinging the butt of his gun into one of their chins. Jimmy’s hammer fell but the powder only fizzed and the marri trees folded around the escapees.

Billhook sniffed the salt sand. Jimmy the Nail walked around in a circle, swinging his rifle, head down. When Neddy had packed the boat with their sleeping skins, Pigeon and Bailey bundled the two women in and sat them atop the skins.

“Wait,” said Bailey, as Jimmy started to push out the boat. “I’m sure we’re long established that this titter has been owed me since Doubtful Island.” He pointed to Moennan and looked meaningfully at Billhook and Jimmy the Nail. “But you should draw cuts for that one,” he pointed to her sister, “before you get to Breaksea. Fair’s fair. A day’s work.”

Jimmy and Randall nodded. “Neddy.”
Neddy broke three twigs in the gathering dark. One for Jimmy, one for Randall and one for Pigeon. One woman. He broke two shorter. The women whimpered, lashed tight to the mainstay. Neddy made the sticks flush against the wrinkled curve of his thumb. He held them out to the men.
Breaksea Island 1826

On their return to Breaksea Island, Jimmy the Nail ripped down the sea eagle’s nest and the skeleton tree it straddled on the highest point of the island, for firewood.

Tommy Tasman played treasurer, preparing measuring cups of American rum and French brandy and guarded the coin stash as trade for Bailey and Randall’s women.

Tommy Toolin and Hobson presented the dressed, stuffed carcasses of a mating pair of possums for dinner.

The Breaksea Islanders readied for a spree.
So. So this is where the serpents lived. They hated her, they hated her to do this to her. Dark faces beyond the fire watched her, orange light tracing the lines of their scowls. Is this the way of the Ghosts, she wondered. The taste of their fingers in her mouth, crunchy hair and red skin, holes pocking their noses, and a blue-eyed bleakness deep behind their angry jubilance. She was forced to her knees over and over by stinking hands grabbing at her hair. Stones cut her skin, grit in her teeth. No softness in this world, only sharp, hard stuff and hate. Some men laughed the whole while they raped her, some were silent and angry. One Ghost took her away from the others, pinched her again and again trying to make her scream. When she stayed silent, he did worse things to her, enough to make her cry out in pain, enough so that their laughing echoed from the camp.

Her body stopped hurting after a while. Her mind turned away, she closed myself away from the world of men. It was not the fear of a spear through her thigh for betrayal of her betrothed. It was not her shame. She sank into the feeling of the river when she was a little girl. She was in the river, just up from the stone traps where the black water pools deep. She fell through the water and her legs and arms tangled in the gloomy embrace of a drowned tree. It was the same painful squeezing of her chest. The same honey swim, the sound of bubbles. Strange voices shouting. Then cold and numb and still she breathed not water nor air.

She wanted her skin-warm mother but not to look into her eyes. She wanted to know the little girl was not watching. This was no dream. She knew what was happening. She was drowning.
Breaksea Island 1826

Dawn. Billhook awoke fighting away visions of the sisters. He saw the woman crawl between the sleeping bodies, down the scrubby hill, avoiding the sandy muttonbird burrows, trying to find a place without barnacles to bathe. He watched Dancer creep out of the bushes from where she’d been hiding, to follow her.

They sat, looking at the snarling suck and breath of froth over the rocks. Dancer reached up to put her own softened cloak over the woman’s bruised shoulders. The dingo sat next to them. The three made a dark row against the low sun, looking across the channel to the magenta glow of the sister island.

The woman, Dancer and the dog. Billhook watched as the woman spoke to Dancer. He could see it was a story the way her arm stretched out, Dancer listening intently, the woman fanning the cloak and her long fingers pointing out a story, a journey all around the Sound. He didn’t even know if she had a name for the country she lived in.

They all saw Hobson drag Moennan’s sister down to the rocks. She was crying. He carried a gun. They slid together, down the steep sandy hill. Moennan’s sister grabbed a bush, the one with red berries. The plant ripped out of the hill and stayed in her hand. They both went down, the roots of the bush spraying sand. Billhook saw the sister’s mouth open. She was far away and her cry drifted slowly in the sharp dawn air. They stumbled together to the boat that lay on the rocks. Hobson picked up the girl with her thin legs still running and threw her aboard, so that her head flopped strangely over the thwart and her hair followed like kelp in the surge. Moennan sat slumped. Dancer looked away.
Hobson had gone, taken the girl east to Bald Island. His crew now looked to Jimmy the Nail and Randall for leadership. Randall and Jimmy fell straight into the partnership they’d enjoyed on Kangaroo Island and set about organising their next moves.

“There’s a water run to do.”
“And get those blacks off the island before they swim back.”
“They don’t swim,” said Bailey.

Billhook was standing beside Bailey. He looked at the wound on the side of his head, where Bailey’s gingery hair was thinning. He must be a fast healer, thought Billhook. It was now barely more than a scratch, like he’d snagged himself on a peppermint tree.

“They may not swim but they could build a raft. We’ll get them right out of the way,” said Randall.

After watering at Catshark Bay, the crew caught the easterly and tacked across the Sound to Oyster Harbour. They reached the wind shadow in the channel, pulled down the sails and rowed the rest of the way to Green Island.

The black men were waiting for them, spears shipped to their sticks. Jimmy gripped his gun.

“Don’t give them any reach,” he said. “Stand off.”

“Show them the shooters,” said Randall.

Neddy lurched against the gunwale as the keel hit a rock and the surging tide swung the boat around. Twertayan, Albert and the others began running over the rocks and into the water towards the boat, shouting. Bailey tamped his rifle and then raised it to his shoulder.

“If they mob us I’m shooting.”

As a boy, Billhook had seen an invading chief try to walk Otakau land, bristling with feathers and power. They did that when they wanted to take over. The smell of Billhook’s own Chief Korako’s anger, a sweet, strange smell, like death shivering out of his body, his eyes turned orange, his face packed with fury for his enemy’s insolence. Twertayan was a man like Korako in his prime. Billhook wanted his cool anger on his side, not facing him on a stony island rattling his spears.
Twertayan and his men rushed the boat. The crew fought them off with gaff hooks, oars and cutlasses. Billhook’s oar thudded against Albert’s waddy. They stared at each other over their weapons. His eyes, bloodshot and wide, were rimmed with dark, long lashes. Albert smelt of fish oil, his face whitened with ash.

“Manilyan! Moennan!” he spat at Billhook. Albert’s betrothed had been taken to Bald Island that very morning. They must have watched the previous evening’s scene on the beach. Twisted grasses sprouting perky bunches of emu feathers bound his wiry arms. There was something of the emu about Albert, his height, his heavy brow and his glare.

Neddy screamed as Twertayan’s rock hit him. He dropped his gaff, crimson seeping through the fingers over his forehead.

A shot blasted. The air still, contracted.

Jimmy the Nail reloaded with buckshot and extra powder.

Twertayan was lighter than Randall and Randall pushed him off the gunwale with his oar. He stumbled back in the water, found his balance and went straight into his deadly stance, his spearing stand.

A second shot.

“Got yer,” said Smidmore.

The shot spun Twertayan around. He fell forward into the water, facing the island. Blood clouded over the shining darkness of his still body and bloomed in the green water. His countrymen cried out and stood together, shocked.

Neddy pushed away from the rocks, shaking blood from his eyes.

They got the boat beyond the reach of spears, watching the current to make sure they didn’t drift back in. Smidmore cleared his rifle and turned to Randall, “Well whose fucking idea was that?”

“We’ve gotta get them off,” said Randall. “Otherwise it won’t be long before one of you useless bastards get three spears put in you, next time you go to the watering point.”

They went back to the island again an hour or so later. Albert and his men had pulled Twertayan’s body from the water and laid it amongst the pink mallow flowers, his ruined chest open to the sky and surrounded with spears driven into the ground.
They were squatted, crying over his body but got to their feet as the boat approached.
Smidmore, Bailey and Jimmy stood with their rifles raised. “Don’t hit any rocks this time,”
Jimmy said with a grin. “Tell them to get in, Neddy. You speak blackfella dontcha?”

Neddy shook his head but waved the men towards the boat and shouted in English, “No
shoot! No shoot! We’ll take you back!”
The men crept forwards without their spears, across the stones, and climbed into the boat.
Why was it so easy? Billhook wondered. Then he saw the state of the men. Their hair, clean
and daubed with red ochre on their way to the island, was now matted with grief. Two men
had cutlass wounds to their throats, the bleeding staunched with mud. Even if they didn’t
swim, as Bailey seemed so sure, there was no wood or bark on the island to build a raft.

Neddy pushed off.
No man said a word. Jimmy the Nail raised a sail and they gathered some wind and made for
the channel, towards King George Sound.

People began gathering on the wet, white sand of the mainland by the channel. Their shadows
lengthened into the sea. More people came. The shadows grew until there were three dozen
or more. Women, whose long, decorated breasts told their age and their rank, stood by old
men with dusty knees and elbows, shining children, young men trembling their spears. Their
shadows made a deep, jaded mark of black against the white sand, standing on the tideline,
their feet toeing the water. They stood absolutely still once they had reached that tideline but
still more were coming from the forest to join them.

Billhook felt fear thicken the air and the heat of the four black men. They sweated over the
knives held against their bleeding throats and eyed the barrels of the rifles pointed at their
families. The sealers sailed so close in that narrow channel that Billhook could see the raised
flecks of flesh on the arms of the women and the lines cut straight and neat across the
muscled chests of the men. Then he saw the missing tooth behind the incisor of every single
woman as she opened her mouth.

It was a shattering holler, a noise that came from deep within, gathered and clotted together to
make a whole sound. The sound of all those women together could put a hole in the sky, as
they sang for the return of their women and men. The children began wailing.
The noise surrounded the little boat like a sea wraith. It crept every crack and sprung every uncaulked leak. It stiffened the hair of every man and itched every skin. Billhook smelt that sound and saw it; a black swarm of bugs trying to feed off him.

Since the day now nine years ago when the bodies washed up in Otakau, Billhook wanted the murderer Captain Kelly’s fingers in a bag around his neck. He thought that he would find him working the Southern Ocean, but here he was in King George Sound helping the white man kill the black man. His need for revenge on Kelly had turned him into a man he could not like. Those screaming wahine told him, somewhere in their deafening cloud of sound, that he had to move to get Weed away from Samuel Bailey before he sold her. And, Billhook wanted the woman.

They made it through the channel with no spear in their sides but every sealer was wiping themselves, scratching their hair and trying to plug their ears against that terrible sound. They would all dream their demons that night.
Breaksea Island 1826

“There’ll be no telling no bastard about shooting the blackfella,” Randall spoke to the men on the rocks of Breaksea Island before they joined the rest of the sealing crews. He looked around at the bloodied men before him. Smidmore glowered back at him. “It’s one thing to carry off a couple of girls, another to shoot a man dead. You think there is no law here? You think it is only blackfella law and us? There be an Englishman with the law and a noose here soon, you mark my words. Won’t be long before one of you swings for some fool bashing his gums and so we’ll say no more about it.”

Albert and his men were pushed out of the boat on the southern side of Michaelmas Island and left to flounder ashore. Billhook could see their dark forms from where he stood on Breaksea, which also meant that the black men could observe the sealers’ camp. Within an hour of them being on Michaelmas Island, they started a fire that took off up the green slope.

In all the wreckage of the last few days, Billhook had not seen the child. From the boats he walked along the rocks and up a track to the women’s camp to seek her out. Sal looked up, startled. It was the first time Billhook had come into their domain. Mary slept in the shade of their bark shelter. Sal sat on a bed of dried grasses next to Dancer and was applying some marri resin mixture to a deep wound on Dancer’s thigh. “That Pigeon,” she said. “He no good.”

“Are you alright?” Billhook asked her. “Where is Weed?”

“We alright,” Said Sal. “Child ran away when Randall came. She lucky. She was gone over the hill before I woke up to that Randall beating me.”

“Over the hill?”

“She been hiding. Hiding for two days now. I saw her watching from the bush in the morning when Hobson buy that girl and take her away.”

“Today?”

“Yes, Billhook.”

Mary rolled towards them in her bed. “She’s up near that big eagle nest in the forest.” She’d been listening. She rolled over and turned her back on Billhook.
Mary probably didn’t know that the eagle nest had been burnt in the fire. He waded through waist high scrub, fell down muttonbird burrows and made his way towards the forested island valley, sharpening his eyes for a sight of the child. The jagged stump of the nest tree was on the outer reaches surrounded in soft, waving grasses.

There was little reason in crashing through the forest looking for her if she didn’t want to be found. He called out a few times “Tama Hine! Weed!” and then sat next to the stump of the tree and waited. He lay down and stretched through the grass, wiping curious ants from his arms. He crooked one arm across his eyes to blot out the sun and soon he was asleep.

Billhook woke to see the little girl’s face peering into his bleary eyes, the sun boring from one side of her fuzzy head. It was a strange awakening; her peeling back his eyelids to see if he were alive. He started and she did too, leaping back and sitting in the grass, watching him warily.

“Weedchild,” he said softly, once he’d recovered himself. She dropped her head and stabbed a sharpened digging stick into a clump of grasses. “No Weedchild, Tama Hine,” she said. She didn’t have her fur cape on, only her trousers, stained with spots of dark brown.

“Where is your bookah?” he asked. “Have you been sleeping in the bush with no blanket or fire, Tama?”

She shook her head. There were many questions but he said simply, “I came to find you.” “The men came,” she said. “Mister Bailey, he woke me before they came up the hill.” Billhook felt a cold, deadening in his stomach. “What did Bailey say?”

“He say ... he say, ‘Come with me Weed. We being attacked. Come with me.’”

* 

Billhook stumbled through the scrub, unable to get his dark visions of the child and Bailey out of his mind.

When he reached the cairn on the plate of stone at the highest point on the island, he stood before it, dizzy with fury, and punched into the manmade pile of rocks. It didn’t hurt enough. He hit them again and again until his fists were a mess of blood and gristle.

He took her in blood. He cut her with his knife so he could take her. He took her in blood.
Billhook grabbed a stone from the top of the cairn and smashed it against the sheet of granite. Sparks flew and the stone rolled, clattering down the steep, southern face of the island. He could not see it when it crashed into the sea. He threw another and another until the cairn was just a small pile of litter. Then he grabbed the green glass bottle that had been nested inside and dashed it on the rocks.

He could see the camp from where he stood amid a mess of broken glass. Figures moved about the fireplace and the shelters. One man lolled like a seal beside the fire and Billhook guessed it was Bailey, drinking his proceeds.

*An ancient manorial right.*

*Ae! He would kill him! Blood dripped from his hands and splashed crimson into a ring of green lichen.*

Samuel Bailey had woken before anyone else the night that Randall and his men arrived. He did not seem to sleep at all or if he did, he slept like a dog with one ear cocked. Bailey was the first man alert to the wind change at Investigator Island and the only man to take advantage of Randall’s chaos. Samuel Bailey had been waiting for his chance. He took the child away and raped her in the bush because Billhook and the women were busy getting bashed with oars and waddies. As the sky lightened in the east, Bailey finished with the girl. He told her to stay in the bush or he would take her again. Then he scrambled away, striking his head with a stick to make himself bleed, for effect.

Billhook crouched amongst the glass, held his fists to his face and wept. He was there for a long time until the knowledge of what he must do became clear. Then he made his way back to talk to the child.

* *

Tommy Tasman held the Frenchman’s compass and tipped it from side to side. “It’s a shitty old piece. You been gammoned if you paid anything for that.”

Billhook wouldn’t commit to the jibe but nodded over to the hut, where Moennan sat lashed to one of the beams. “It’s for the girl. I want her tonight.”

Tommy looked at Bailey who was still lying by the fire, drinking from a crock.
“You haven’t had a go at her yet?”
“I like to take my time.”
“She be well poxed by now. A right fireship.”
Billhook was silent.
“As it be,” said Tommy Tasman, looking curiously at Billhook. “Tonight then.”
Hobson’s little skiff fidgeted against the barnacles. Billhook held the rope and waited. When Bailey was finally paralysed by liquor and the rest of the men asleep, Tama Hine crept into the camp, untied Moennan’s bonds and coaxed her away.

“You brave, Tama Hine, bravest I ever seen,” Billhook whispered to her when she arrived on the rocks with Moennan and the dingo. Moennan’s eyes were wide and both of the girls were very frightened. He could smell the fear in their sweat.

All four of them were spooked by the silent arrival of Dancer. Billhook hadn’t mentioned the night flight to the Tyreelore, not wanting to implicate them.

“I’m taking them away safe, Dancer,” he said.

“So you do good work,” said Dancer in perfect English. “At last Billhook, you do the good thing.” And then she did something else quite out of character. She took Billhook’s bandaged hands in hers and looked straight into his eyes. “You be good to those girls now.”

They sailed all night to the east. The flames of burning Michaelmas Island became smaller behind them until they rounded the pocked monolith of Rock Dunder. Tama Hine clung to the gunwale, terrified by the dark sea. He could not get her to sit trim. She clutched that stone of grey pumice. It was the shape of her heel, something else he had seen her hold when she was too scared to run.

Moennan watched ahead. She held the child’s hand sometimes, or she ran her hands through the coarse hackles of her dog, ran her hand against his grain, ruffled up his spine and hugged him close to her.

The sky was lightening by the time he found the inlet, marked by the two stony mountains. They surfed a rush of tide through the stone-bound channel and into quiet, breathing waters, ringed with granite, flowering with orange lichen. They spread skins in the belly of a huge cave that curved into the mountain, and slept.

In the gloom of the cave, Billhook woke, wretched and sore, confused and dark dreams still soaking his body. Being in the lee of the mountain meant no warning of the squall that ripped
across the sky, rubbing out the sun. That brave yellow dingo whimpered and crept closer to
the side of the cave with every bright flash or thump of thunder. The stone on which they lay
began to run with water. Muttonbirds kept up their crying and the fairy penguins sounded like
babies that would not thrive.

He looked out of the cave to the mountain above, where huge rivers rushed down the stone
gullies. He knew that Bailey would find them. He peered past Moennan’s matted hair,
looking for the quicksilver splash of oars. He listened for the grind of a keel against granite.
Then he rolled over and sought warmth in the furry bundle of Moennan, her dog and Tama
Hine.
We shall live like oystercatchers, he thought. Red-eyed gamblers watching the tide surge ... 
chancing our lives every day.
Waychinicup 1826 - Moennan

There was a big moon and then another, her belly swelling. All the time they lived on the quiet water she did not question the Maori’s lack of kindness for keeping her from her people. She was glad for the peace and frightened too, for what would happen to her on her return. Something terrible had happened to the child. Moennan saw her eyes as she saw her own and they both knew. All that time on the inlet Tama Hine was her precious baby and her friend and her sister.

At night, they fished.
Moennan was the tallest girl, the tallest thing on the whole inlet and above her the sky blazed and the black emu stretched out her wings. Quarter moon glowed the water. She forgot her sadness, her loss and the angry tingling of her diseased sex when the little boat swished over the seagrass and she spread her toes over the nets and used the stick to push the boat into clear water again. Wiremu forced a stick into the soft sand of the shallows, moving it in a circle to ease it in, looped the cork line around the wood. The boat lurched with his weight and Moennan spooled out a ragged net while he rowed. Later, they went back to his stick.

“Feel this,” he handed her the rope. She took the wet, muddy cork in her hand. She felt fish hitting the net; a sharp tug on the rope, a lighter hit from the smaller fish, a flutter as they struggled. He wriggled a big silver fish out of the net. “Hauture,” said he in his countryman’s language. “Skipjack of the sealers.”
“Madawick,” said she.

She woke early when the air was still and cold. The wind had stopped. She left her skins to squat a little way from the cave, drove a neat hole into the gritty sand with her stream. She watched the dark loom of the Maori.
“Get up Tama Hine,” he shook the little girl. “See this ... something in the water. He stood right on the lacy edge of the beach and strange blue lights shot out of his toes. He waded in further and hot blue bullets fired away from his legs. She heard the girl breathe in quick.
“Fire in the water, Tama Hine.”

Each step in the sea as they pushed out the boat made the fire sprites flare. Every stroke of the oars made a sparkling rush of sun diamond water in the inky inlet and then the dripping
airborne oars traced arcs of wild colour in the water beside the boat. Shrimp became brilliant drawings, stars falling through the sea. Fish flew away from them leaving a comet tail of blue fire in their wake. The Maori rowed and rowed straight past the stick that held fast his net and none of the dreaming three even noticed until they were well into the centre of the inlet.

“There be no fish tonight,” he said. “Net is lit up like a Chinaman’s party.”

Moennan could see every mesh of the net illuminated shining blue soaring up towards Wiremu’s grappling fingers. They caught a few fish, yes, some gleaming fat madawick. But the sky was pinkening and all the blue fire creatures melted back to be secrets of the inlet.

After they ate a feast Tama and Moennan walked over the mountain to the women’s place, to show Tama Hine for when she was older and betrothed. But there was a fire burning inside the great stones and so they didn’t go inside. On their way back to the inlet they broke touchwood from a rotten tree and found some good grubs. She showed the child how to carry the grubs in her hair and to peel a stick from the tree and push it into the ground nearby, so the people whose tree it was did not get angry with them.

Billhook waited above the carpet shark’s stone grotto, throwing in the crushed pieces of crab, bits of their bright yellow bodies and black claws. He ate the claw meat raw, broke them against the rocks or crunched the shells open with his teeth and then threw in the rest, carapaces floating to the surface, the meat and guts trailing down through the water.

The wobbegong waited beneath a ledge. Billhook could see whiskers and the snout of the shark poking out. He threw in the last crab. Waited. He saw his reflection looming over the pool, his wild hair waving against the blue and the clouds. He saw himself as a shark would see him, looking up through the skin of the water to a waving sea urchin creature waiting, a wild predator, the gidgee a black line in the sky.

The fish inched its way out of the grotto, snapped at a piece of crab and withdrew, stirring up plumes of silt to cloud the water. Billhook waited. The striations of stone and weed became clearer as the silt settled again. Sea lettuce lined the orange stone, a neat emerald line at the high tide mark. Billhook moved so the shark could not see him and crouched over the grotto, waiting.

When the shark emerged again, he threw and felt the gidgee go through its hide in one sure stroke. He held fast the rope as the shaft lolled about in the water and the shark thrashed. The
stingray barbs held and he jumped down into the water, stumbling over the slippery underwater stones. He hauled at the stick and dragged the wobbegong from its grotto. The shaft of the gidgee took on a life of its own as the shark raged. Billhook couldn’t see anything in the foaming, churned up water.

Despite his bare feet in cold water, sweat ran down his temples as he tried to slow the shark and impale it against the sandy bottom. He felt a stabbing pain in his calf. Billhook swore, in English, and reefed his knife from his belt. He could see the whiskers of the shark curling against his leg and its mean little eyes watching him and blood from the creature and from him staining the water. He couldn’t stab the fish without dragging its teeth further down his own flesh. The shark let go and he pushed the spear in further, dragged the fish onto the rocks and looked at it. Its gills undulated. For a moment it lay still, its patterns in mustard and deep browns failing already in the sun. A perfect seagrass creature, thought Billhook, almost invisible hovering there on the bottom waiting for fish to swim overhead. He stabbed the knife through its head and cut through cartilage. A black rush of blood. He turned over the fish. Female. Her claspers lying white and useless now, against her belly.

He cleaned it, slicing through the tough skin, its gizzards falling through the hole of its gut and spilling onto the rock. Sea birds began to gather. He lay the fish on its side and cut away a slab of flesh, skinning it in the next sweep of his knife. He wrapped the meat in tight parcels of shark skin and paperbark and took his catch back to the cave and the hearth.

Moennan and Tama Hine came back to the cave. Wiremu was cooking a fish Moennan did not like to eat. He stood, his rough face gentled by the sliding down sun. He saw the grubs and the blue flowers in her hair and he laughed and laughed. He picked a grub from her hair and ate it. Then he picked out a blue flower from her hair and ate that too.
Moennan, Tama and Billhook had been at the inlet for two months when Billhook went diving one day, hungry for cray. He dived down a wall of stone near the inlet mouth, where the sea came in. Down past the swarms of little fish, down past a glossy kingfish. Down past towers of stone and kelp that rose as kauri pines to the mirrored surface.

His thoughts grew thinner and thinner, the deeper he dived. His thoughts were a string of singular things when he saw the crayfish, the twitching of its feelers in a hole, surrounded by silent, waving weed.

The water suddenly grew cold.
He grabbed the cray and struggled through the heavy water towards the sky, holding up the spiny creature, a strange, new fear of the deep making him kick his legs harder. The crayfish made its own wake in his hand, its waving legs collecting air and streaming it into his face.

A keel broke open the mirror skin of the sea.
Billhook burst into the world of air.
Moennan and Tama Hine. He saw them before the next wave in the channel crashed over his head. When he surfaced again, he saw the white sail of Jimmy the Nail’s whaleboat and, closer to Billhook, four faces in the little boat he’d stolen the night they escaped the island.

Samuel Bailey, Hobson, Moennan and Tama Hine: the girls’ dark faces thumb-smudged against a parchment sky.
Waychinicup 1826

For two days Billhook walked across the hills, following the blackfella roads. He saw no one. He gave himself up to the track, wondering whose it was, passing through cosy thickets of peppermint trees that smelled of rutting kangaroos and camphor chests. He ate berries that stained his lips red. They’d grown on Breaksea Island, and on the Bass Straits’ Robbins too, he remembered now. At the saddle between the two mountains he found a fresh track that headed through a hakea forest and then south to the sea. The prickly hakeas snagged at his vest and scratched his arms, their sharp nuts opened like hungry birds ready to peck at him.

He climbed down a stone gully stoppered occasionally with rock pools, to a tiny cove. Two fins sliced through the water ahead of him, oily and languid. He watched them, looking for the tail fins of the sharks before he saw that it was a mature porpoise and her pup. She was teaching the child to hunt along the shallows. Black periwinkle buttons dotted the rocks at the tide line. The little shellfish closed their doors to him but he prised them away with the tip of his blade and worked out the meat. Put it in his mouth. Shelly grit and salty meat the size of a fingernail, with a squirt of black iodine. He had to eat plenty to fill his belly.

He headed along the rocks of the beach and towards the next headland, where the scrub was lower and looked easier going than the high ridges of the mountain with their red gum forests and hakea. He climbed up to a scarp of granite, watching the pearly clouds. Weather coming in. Crows saw off a swamp harrier, swooping and shouting at the hawk, noisy black scratches in the sky. The hawk dawdled in the crow country, insolent to the birds’ territorial onslaught but moving away, moving away, until the crows were satisfied enough to return to their rooks.

And with all that sky gazing ... a tiger snake flattened its head at him and refused to move, didn’t disappear into the bush but flattened its head, lying right in the place where he would have stepped next with his face turned up to the sky to those birds and clouds. A thrill coursed through his body and the soles of his feet tingled and sent him backwards three steps until he stumbled and landed on his backside. By the time he gathered himself the snake was gone.
No heads on sticks in this country. No impaled children to face off the invading wakas. No Te Raprahau and his mob coursing the land like meat ants to slaughter for pounamu. Just snakes and prickles and thirst. And the kid thief Samuel Bailey.

Some sort of summary justice must be meted by Jimmy the Nail for the theft of a woman and a boat, of that he was sure. He went over and over the confrontation he walked towards. He’d seen the things they could do. What to do. No man with Wiremu Heke’s history could grovel before the likes of Samuel Bailey.

He found another blackfella road and the regular beat of his wallaby skin shoes against the worn track with its roots and twigs helped him think clearly as he walked. He reckoned on another day of walking before he made it to King George Sound and by then his mind would be where it needed to be when he found Bailey.

No. No negotiation. He had to kill him. His crew would not bother him after that. And Moennan. Back at the island with all of them. He should have killed him that day. A good part of that afternoon’s work stealing women and Bailey’s blood wasted, trying not to look at the man and knowing what he had done with the child. Who knew what crimes he had forced on Weed by now? It had been eight hours since they sailed out of the inlet. Two days of walking and no boat to get to the islands and Bailey will have already done more damage. And sold her too.

That Bass Strait sealer, the Policeman; so he had a child bride. A black sprite with twig legs and no taller than Billhook’s waist. Called himself a law man. Negotiator, mediator, diplomat, owner of a girl he’d stolen as a baby. No pregnancies: that was what Jimmy the Nail had said, wasn’t it? It’s better like that. Before they bleed they can fuck and work and work and fuck and not have babies. Billhook thought about Dancer’s words before her Devil Dance: babies getting grass stuffed in their mouths or given to missionaries in Launceston, taken as servants by settlers who then ‘set them free’ in a foreign country when they get too difficult. If they were lucky, the children stayed alive on the island and worked catching muttonbird chicks for their upkeep. That island, Robbins, was seething with snakes. Snakes everywhere, going after the muttonbird eggs and chicks. Kids with their arms down muttonbird holes getting bitten. Getting whipped when they didn’t want to get bitten again. They gave the women gloves but the kids had to work barehanded.
He saw a plume of smoke blowing west from the peak of Mt Gardner and wondered at the
daily talking done with spires of smoke. As he walked and watched the smoke, he felt
helpless and adrift amid his thoughts of the children. Those men on Michaelmas were not so
subtle with the fire that ripped up the side of the island. Talking to their whanae any way they
could. Smoke. Always smoke in this country. After Kelly and his men had been through his
village, burned the marae and all the houses and sawn the canoes in half, Nga Rua had
smoked the old men and the crying mothers of dead sons. What leaves did she use? It smelled
lovely and clean, that smoke. Black Simon said that the Indians did that too. Not that the man
had ever seen a real Red Indian with smoke and arrows. The only Indian Black Simon saw
was aboard a whaler out of Nantucket. He’d been crimped as a child by the Quakers in the
middle of the Indian wars, said Black Simon. Those men who preached against war and
slavery had found a berth for both Indian, and Black Simon, whose hulking frame still bore
the scars of his bondage. Folk from all nations and wars, all sitting on an island now with
their different scar stories, different smoke stories, abandoned by their pirate scum of a Boss
Davidson, waiting, waiting for something to happen.

The country changed to burnt patches of bush making his travel easier. Fresh new shoots
gleamed green against the blackened earth and crimson regrowth budded from burnt
branches. Christmas tree flowers flared the colour of flames. The trail was still stark through
the red gum forest and Billhook’s fur shoes quickly turned black with ash.

That night he set a small fire and lay down beside it on a flat face of rock. He watched the sky
darken beyond the nipped mountain, one eye level with a platoon of tiny ants cutting an
ancient track across the granite. No breathing sighs, snores of fellow travellers, no shouts nor
grunts or the whimpering dreams of dogs and men, no fireside songs of the women. He could
not remember the last time he’d lain down alone by a fire. The dusky birds’ melodies, the
twitches and slithers seemed to conspire against him. The sea was miles away and its usually
close comfort was a distant rhythm. Currawongs mocked him while alerting their mates to his
presence. He heard the clicking of a possum. Red gums swished with tree top fights and
romances and the ground thumped with wallabies. And somewhere, the mournful wooing of
a ground frog.
Then, after a few moments of ominous creaking, a shotgun bang cracked through the night air. Billhook leapt to his feet and sparks exploded around his waist. He stood, bewildered for a moment, not understanding. Someone had shot at him. He dropped down, waited for the next shot.

Lying belly down on the rock, looking away from the fire to steel his night vision, he peered into the gloom of the bush. He heard a startled snake slither past him and into the grasses surrounding the stone. Felt that fright hammer at his breast again. Lizard, he consoled himself. Lizards’ legs make rustling noises. Serpents are silent.

Billhook turned back to the fire, a thing that he knew on this dark night. He nearly laughed out loud when he saw the heaved up stone and caved in coals. No gunshot that bang. No one had shot at him. No, it was the fire itself, cracking the stone with its heat, breaking it open like an egg.

Rattled and hungry, he lay awake long after the quarter moon sank behind the land. When he slept, his dreams were infested with cold-eyed sharks. Instead of the long-fingered naiads, toothy swathes of small reef sharks hunted him in packs as he dived down through granite towers to find the two brown girls. He couldn’t see Moennan and Tama and he couldn’t form their names in his gluey mouth to call for them. He looked into caves and the flowering grottoes of crayfish homes. The sharks nipped and harried at him as he swam. The small, triangular punctures in his hands and feet gave him no pain or sensation. But the kelpy streams of his blood pouring up to the curve of the sea’s surface terrified him and still he could not see the girls proper, only their faces gauzy in the water like wraiths and sharks wriggling, frenzied through the red plumes of his blood.
Bai ley lowered the child on a rope, down the southern cliffs pocked with wind and sea, down to the where the water boiled, and deposited her in a cradle of granite. She threw the tracer heavy with lead and abalone bait into the groper hole. Muttonbirds and terns wheeled about, nearly touching her body, excited by berley and bait. The rope chafed and cut at her armpits but she didn’t remove it, knowing it would save her from the sly surge of a rogue wave. She saw the big shark come out of the water below her, lift its head and watch her with one eye, slide past and return, checking her, as if she was a seal, just waiting for her to slip into the water. When she caught the groper, she knew, she saw the big blue fish eye off her crab burley and go for the chunk of abalone on the gang hook. A wash of white water hid the fish, slid away. She let the fish run until she felt the hook bite. She looked up to Bailey watching from high on the cliff. He put the line over his shoulder and hauled the fish out of the water. It slid over the barnacles gasping. The fish was as big as Tama Hine and deep, glossy blue with fat lips and teeth that looked like her own.

Bailey lurched up the hill with the groper struggling on the line behind him, laughing. He ignored the girl left alone at the bottom with the swell bashing about her feet and a rope around her chest. The blue fish slapped its tail against the top of the cliff and disappeared from sight.

She sat there for a long time. She wanted to climb but the stone was a straight face and it meant travelling along the sucking water’s edge, to where a thin crack streaked up through the granite that she could insert her fingers and toes into. Her feet tingled with fear, just looking at it. Her stomach began to growl, anxious and hungry.

Tama Hine worked for Bailey now, since Jimmy the Nail and Randall left them on the island several days ago. She was a long way from Dancer and Sal. She couldn’t even see Breaksea Island from the peak of the island Bailey had taken them to. Just her and Moennan and Bailey. Bailey’s first move after the other sealers sailed away was tie Moennan’s dog to a tree. A good hunter, that dog. A good birder too and warmth at night, but the first thing Bailey did was tie it up and kick it to death in front of Moennan and Tama Hine, so they could see what he could do.
Tama Hine sat for hours, thinking about the climb. When the sun began its descent to the west, Moennan’s shining face appeared over the ledge, her hair wild against the updraft, smiling with relief as she clenched the stray end of the rope. “Ah Tama!” she shouted in language. “Thought you were gone, girl!”

That night, Bailey wiped his hands over the little girl’s face while she lay like a corpse, cold and still. He could. He could do whatever he wanted. Tama Hine knew that. He put his hand on her bare, flat chest and felt her galloping heart. He could do whatever he wanted. Sparing her life was his only kindness.

Moennan watched Bailey with the child. He tied up Moennan every night, bound her arms with rope and kept her tied all night, so she lay hard on her side with her arms behind her. He swept back Tama Hine’s hair from her face as she lay, frozen. He whispered things to her.
“You want to go home, little Elizabeth? I’ll take you home. I’ll get you home Elizabeth. Give me a little kiss and I’ll take you home.”

Tama Hine could see the whites of Moennan’s eyes in the fire’s light. She nodded at Bailey. Bailey’s beard scraped her face and his hot, fetid tongue was in her mouth and she felt his teeth. Then Bailey crawled across the skins to Moennan and her watching eyes became obscured by Bailey’s body. The sounds of the dark sea became second to that of the grunts and moans from his chest and the fleshy thuds from his fists.

In the morning Moennan’s face was bleeding and her nose was swollen. Tama Hine stared at her and went down to the north side rocks to wash herself. She scooped fresh water from the spring that seeped from under the granite and brought handfuls to her mouth.

Bailey roamed the island during the day, carrying with him a large stick, a knife and a bladder of the Frenchman’s brandy, leaving Moennan and Tama to get his food. He started drinking more when the swell came up and they could not go out for seal. They caught muttonbird chicks, or lizards. Bailey roamed the island, not working, shouting sometimes into the wind, came back to some food. Bailey was not so frightening when he drank all day from his flask. It was easier to avoid him and when they could not, his blows failed to find purchase. Bailey did not sleep though, when he drank the brandy. The nights were long and Tama and Moennan huddled together to keep away the screaming, ceaseless wind and the
restless pacing of their captor. They listened to him curse and rant, stumble over rocks in the
dark, his body slump into a nearby hollow, branches cracking and his muttering.

When Bailey was straight, he frightened Tama Hine. He’d look right through her with bleak,
blue eyes, as if something else was running through his mind. Stared straight through her,
always thinking what game to play.
“You’re the quick one, Weed. You are clever. A herring queen, you are. Not like that dozy
wench, cryin’ all the time.”
Tama Hine nodded quickly.
“Help me get this wood in, girl.” He beckoned her down to the block where he kept his axe.
“Go on. Hold the wood for me, Weed. Don’t be afraid. Hold it like this.”
He placed her hands around a lump of wood with his red, freckled fingers.
She held the wood and he swung the axe. She moved both thumbs and watched the axe bite
into where her thumbs were a moment before. The log cleaved in two and spilled with
startled ants.
“You a brave girl, Weed. Brave.” He nodded at her in approval and stumped up the hill,
swinging his axe and whistling.

She was the brave one, and the lucky one too. Moennan, maybe ten summers older than she,
was the one he bit and hit at night, who squirmed underneath him, a pinned skink under the
skins. He didn’t bite Tama Hine. Bailey bit Moennan. Touches for Moennan were not
stroking or pats. Touches had to hurt her.

He hit Tama Hine when she lost the groper rig. He hauled up the rope with her head banging
against the rocks on the way back up the wall. But she deserved that. She turned as the fish
sped off with the line trailing along its body and looked up the rocks to see Bailey’s furious
face and felt the rope around her armpits tighten. He hauled her up as he would a big fish,
struggling against the line. Her head hit the rocks and she tried to keep her body away from
the jagged maw of stone. When she was at the top of the cliff, Bailey held the rope tight and
struck her hard again and again across her face until her jaw hurt so much she couldn’t open
her mouth and she fell in the scrubby dirt bewildered and sobbing.

“Where are those leaves?” she asked Moennan one day after her beating.
The wind began to rise against the granite cliffs, whistling through the reeds, blowing them flat against the stone like wafting smells. “Where is the plant? We gotta be rid of this here Bailey.”

Moennan knew which leaves. She’d showed them to Tama Hine when they were with Wiremu Heke at the inlet. The leaves, shaped like a woman’s bosom crushed together. Three would kill a man. Tama Hine wanted to pack it into the guts of a fish and feed it to Bailey after dark, wrap the fish in bark, take out its guts and fill it with bosom shaped leaves. Poison him and that poisoned Bailey would kill all the big grey sharks that fed from his body.

Whenever Bailey went off on his wanderings, Tama Hine and Moennan talked about the leaves and the fish and the boat that was coming for them. They talked about what they would tell Randall and Jimmy the Nail. They began to plan their escape from the island.
Baie de Deux Peuples 1827

On the second day of his journeying to King George Sound, Billhook found the cave on the beach where the crew had stopped to sleep. He lit a swatch of reeds and went inside. The child’s drawings were still there, pressed into the hard, sandy floor. Billhook squatted, his thighs tingling from the day’s walk, and touched the etching. Granules of sand tumbled into Tama Hine’s marks.
Ae Tama. You were here.

He stood and climbed back through the hole of the cave into the orange light of the evening. Crows cawed from the top of the hill and the honey birds harassed their neighbours over flowers or chicks. At the peak he saw the Bay of Two Peoples stretched into a long, white sickle, dotted with mounds of seagrass. He could walk at night on that beach, no matter the dark, and he would be closer then, by the morning.

Hunger harried him as he walked. His skin shoes squeaked in the soft sand, above the high tide mark, and he began marching to his breath and the thoughts tumbling through his head. Walking on the sloping soft sand was hard work after crashing through prickly hakea thickets all day. It was several hours before he reached the end of the bay.

A mushroomy scent and croaking frogs. The cool loom of paperbarks. There was no way he would venture into that tiger snake swamp. Not in the dark. Billhook’s travelsome spirit made him one who thought oceans ahead but this night he ached for his Otakau home: a place where he could creep through a swamp hunting all night and never see a serpent. A warm fire and his whanae, a woman to get him grains and lizards and always plenty of good meat to eat.

He sat on the beach and looked across the bay, chewing on the edge of his sealskin until it was loosened enough for him to suck some sustenance from. No wind and the water glassed off, the moon far enough west now to let the stars shine. Beyond the mountain that pressed dark against the sky, the mountain he climbed around, there was the inlet where they had lived.
Tama, Moennan and me, Wiremu Heke. Over there. That was where we lived.
He awoke before dawn, before a delicious dream was ended, by the birds yelling and brightness behind his eyelids. Hungry. He rolled over on the seagrass, his swollen cock springing away from his belly. He lay looking at the brightening sky, stroked himself. Gently at first, until warmth seeped into the base of his shaft and then he chafed at himself with calloused fingers, trying to capture that smoky dream woman, she with the seashelly scent and a dirty laugh. Dream woman morphed into Dancer, oiled and gleaming by the fire, into Sal and her long hair sweeping between his thighs, into the white woman he had in Hobart Town with her muddied skirts and button eyes. Moennan.

The rush fired from his loins, his chest and from the soles of his feet. He lay feeling his heart slow its galloping beat. Sea grass pricked against his cheek.

The sun rose and shone orange on the speckled mountain. In his mind, he asked his mother what he should do. He already knew what she would say: How dare you? She hissed at him. You just wanted the woman. Thought you could take her away for yourself. She would have been better off if you’d left her on a beach somewhere for her to go home to her people, his mother said. You saved her from no one. No one! You only made it worse. You are one of them. One of them, Wiremu, my son. You are no better than that Bailey.

Billhook rolled his whalebone club into his skins and slung the swag’s strap over his shoulder. He turned his back on the mountain and on the Bay of Two Peoples and headed south for King George Sound.
Oyster Harbour 1827

At the French River, he followed a trail through towering red gums. Drinking from the river at one point, he tasted salt, where the waters met. He stepped across a fish trap and stared down at the young bream idling in the murky water inside the stones. The tide was too high for them to be trapped yet. But it was a triumph and a solace to his troubled stomach when the fresh water crayfish backed into the reedy snare he’d hastily woven. He ate the muddy tail raw, wary of creating smoke, and chewed the juice from its blue black claws.

He avoided the fireplaces of others too, cutting wide arcs around sections of the river ahead where he saw wreaths of smoke curling through the trees. Once over the river he was roaming on Albert’s country and there was one man he did not want to meet.

A pair of ospreys high on a gnarled limb were unworried by his presence, each gripping a flapping salmon trout in their talons, ripping out its flesh. Further along, he came across the crescent of spears stuck hard and angled into the loam, where Moennan’s family ambushed the big grey kangaroos, drove them onto the sharpened pikes. By then he could smell the rotting weed of the harbour and soon he began to see sea grass in the river. He nearly stepped on a snake. Billhook and the black snake each frightened the other, as the snake tried to climb a steep, lichenized granite away from the man, failed, and landed unhappily at Billhook’s feet. He shrieked, shrieked like a woman, he cursed at himself; if he had been brave enough he would have clouted the creature right there, cut open its belly to check for a poisoned prey and eaten the snake. No, he just screamed, and leapt away. And as his cry fell away he heard the gunshots.

The shots came from the direction of the harbour. He hurried along the riverbank as it widened and spilled into Oyster Harbour. Tree carcasses washed down from storms past littered the mouth of the river. A cloud of plovers took off as he jogged towards them. He saw the boat out by the island. A boat. And men crawling over the gunwales onto the shores of the little dome of green that was the island.

Pelicans swarmed the island, scattered into the steel-grey sky and flew as one flock over the water towards where Billhook stood. He stumbled along the rocky shore on the eastern side of the inlet. As he grew closer, he could see that the men wore shirts, hats and trousers, not
the ragged skins and knitted caps of his own crewmates. New people. White-men visitors to
the Sound. Men who did not know it was impossible to surprise a pelican long enough to
shoot it.

The men climbed over the island to the northern side, where Twertayan’s body lay beside the
raft he had tried to build to escape the island before he was killed. Billhook couldn't see the
black man’s corpse but he saw the men standing around the body, looking at it, discussing it
and turning it over with the barrels of their rifles.

Billhook moved away from the shore, where he made too fine a silhouette against the dull
estuarine sand, and worked his way along the tree line. Soon he was opposite the island. He
crouched in the bush and watched.

Four men. A British soldier, his red coat opened to expose a white shirt, wore a stiff-looking
black soldier’s hat. Two men in white shirts and cotton trousers, and a fourth man whose
jacket displayed his status as major. All four of them carried guns, although the soldier was
the only man who leaned on his stock like one made for a life of carrying rifles. They stood
by the body of Twertayan for a long time. Then they walked around the rocks to the little
skiff on the east shore of the island. One of the men in white shirts unfurled the sail with a
quick flick of the main sheet, while the other pushed off. They sailed towards the channel at
Emu Point; past the shores where two moons before, the stolen blackfellas’ families stood
screaming at Billhook and his crew.

Billhook continued along the shore until he arrived at the little beach of bleached white sand
at the channel. The skiff was most of the way across the Sound and heading for the channel
into Princess Royal Harbour. The pressure from the approaching storm began building in his
ears and he could see the line of clouds coming in over the hills. He wondered at what to do.
The wind blew a warm nor’-westerly from the inland but it would change soon. What to do.

At the Emu Point channel Billhook made his choice. This was the arrival of the British that
Randall had spoken of when he first smashed his way into the Breaksea Island camp. The
British law that Jimmy the Nail had warned them about. They were here. The men in red
coats with white crosses emblazoned across their chests. They gave Billhook a new hope of
retrieving Moennan and Tama without being killed himself. It was a folly to think he could
fight his way through the sealers for the women. He would go straight to the Englishmen and their soldiers.

He took off his pants and his wallaby skin shoes and rolled anything else he was carrying into his swag, strapped it tightly. He stood on the shore of the channel, watching the water. The tide was going out and a strong current surged from the Oyster Harbour into King George Sound. It meant he would have to swim diagonally and then run with the tide, so as not to get tired and drown.

He waded into the water and pushed the swag in front of him, using the bundle as a float to push against. As he went deeper the fresh water beneath the salt stung in swathes of freezing fingers that grabbed at his toes and nipples and penis. By the time he was almost halfway across the channel, crabbing through the water using one hand to paddle and the other to hold the bundle, the swag became soaked and began to sink. Here the current was at its strongest, pushing Billhook into the Sound and dragging the swag along behind him. Over the waves that sprouted against the outgoing tide, he could see the opposite shore slide by and become further from him with every stroke. The swag, he held by one strap, but it was sinking and pulling him down until finally, he had to let all of his possessions slip into the steel-grey depths of the channel.

Once his bedding, whalebone club, hat, flint and things had sunk away from him, it proved an easy swim ashore. He jogged along the long bay to warm himself again. He was naked now, except for his tattooed buttocks, the orca necklace and a sealskin jerkin. Despite his tired body and his hunger, he smiled as he jogged, to think of Albert again, his attire so closely resembling that of the Australian. He felt light, lighter than he felt at sea, as unburdened as a child by the river with the girl.

All burning thighs and heaving chest, he reached the rocks at the end of the bay. He was climbing the rocks around the point when he saw Jimmy the Nail’s whaleboat sliding over white waves, halfway across the Sound. Jimmy had let head sail out to port and the boat slewed down the swell, the nor’westerly buffeting it towards the heads of the harbour. Billhook kept climbing, resolute. If British law were in the harbour, Billhook would be protected from the likes of Jimmy and Samuel Bailey, what with the tales he had to tell of murder and the theft of children.
The wind began to turn to the south-west. He reached the point where boulders nestled into paperbark trees, their creeping, fingerling roots exposed by the onshore swell. Jimmy’s boat was close enough that he could see five figures, but not identify them. One of the sealers bailed rhythmically and Billhook remembered the groove wearing into the stern of the boat from its constant worrying by the bailer. He always moved across rocks swiftly, and so Billhook was standing on the sloping, barnacled Point King by the time Jimmy the Nail headed into the channel.

He watched the wind rip dark blotches on the water as it raced across the harbour. Several shouts went up just before the squall hit the boat. Pigeon loosed the head sail and canvas flapped wildly about. Smidmore reefed it in but not before he copped a metal clew on the bad side of his face. Neddy kept bailing. Jimmy the Nail struggled to trim the main and control the tiller. It was Dancer who looked over to the lee shore to where the boat was being blown, staring fearfully at the barnacles and surging waves, and then raised her eyes and locked eyes with Billhook.

She cried out at the same moment as thunder rumbled around the hills of the harbour. In the chaos of the squall, no sealer heard her shout, “Billhook!” but he saw her mouth his name and her face break into a rare, luminous smile. Billhook held out his arm in greeting. The air chilled suddenly and hailstones smacked onto the water around the boat, beading the surface. Billhook squatted as the force of hail hit him, and pulled his leather jerkin over his head.

The crew bowed their heads and kept working. Smidmore pulled down the main and the canvas billowed into the water. Pigeon threw an anchor as far south as he could and started fitting the oars. Fork lightning worked steadily across the harbour, stabbing into the sea, and the thunder thumped closer and closer until it was cracking above them. Billhook could only dimly see the boat now. It was cloaked in hail and spindrift and he knew that if he could see the boat clearly, they would have blown too close to the rocks to bear away.

The lightning storm roared through the harbour and was sucked through the granite heads and out into the Sound. He felt as though he’d been squatting all day, battered by hailstones, but it
probably wasn’t more than ten minutes. Shouts and curses bounced across the water. He couldn’t see the boat through the rain that tracked the hail.

He would meet them again soon enough. Billhook’s stomach churned with nerves and hunger. Jimmy’s crew must be looking for supplies. It was many moons since they had tasted the Frenchmen’s biscuit. He hadn’t seen Bailey in the boat, Tama, Moennan – where were they? He stepped around pockets of gleaming hailstones on the track, the cold cutting into his bare toes, making everything he touched sharper, harder. Prickly bushes scraped at his calves. He found a path running west, just above the reaches of granite, and jogged along.

The weather cleared and only the metallic scent of warm, wet rocks and a tingling buzz remained of the lightning storm. Steam rose from the track and hailstones melted. Around the next corner, he saw the ship, a twin-masted brig, her spars wrapped in sail, swinging on her anchor a few hundred yards from the shore. A small boat moved away from the ship. Billhook hurried along. He wanted to get to the shore camp before Jimmy the Nail. He felt his nakedness and flushed at the memory of scratchy sea grass against his skin that morning at Two Peoples Bay. If he knew there were no white women at the shore camp to shriek at his naked heathen self emerging from the forest, he would feel more at ease. A soldier bent on avenging a sweetheart’s modesty by way of his gun. A Vandiemonian lag ready to mete out authority on any man lower than himself. A lieutenant with brass buttons and jingling handcuffs. Just no white women.

At the peak of his worrying at his lack of dress he saw the trousers draped across a large boulder on the beach, as though their inhabitant had lay down for a sleep in the sun, and disappeared into his own dreams. Billhook scurried down the path and looked around. No footprints, only the white sand scoured by hail and rain. He trudged across the beach to the single boulder and picked up the wet canvas. They were torn about the waist, perhaps even cut with a knife. Dark stains of blood flowered around the jagged edges of the cloth. Billhook tore away the trousers’ cuffs to make a crude belt, shook out the sand and then donned the wet, bloodied pants.

He ran along the beach and over the next outcrop of rocks until he could see the tender boat land. The boat bit into the sand and two men leapt out, carrying long sticks. They hauled two sheep from the boat and untied their legs, using the sticks to fend them along the shore. The
beach smelled the same, the fuggy smell of low tide and rotting weed, the wind full of rain that swept over the blinding white of the sand dunes on the hills opposite the harbour. Everything else had changed from the last time he had been in this place. Two cannons crouched just above the beach, their barrels pointing to sea, and a flagstaff lofted a fluttering rag of the British Empire. The shouts of the herders floated along the beach towards him, then the thwack of their sticks against flesh, a squeal from one of the sheep.

Billhook headed for the lone man tying off the boat to a craggy paperbark tree on the shore. He looked up, surprised, when Billhook greeted him, and brushed the tree’s flowers from his hair.

“Well, you’re a sight then,” the man straightened to just over five foot, looked closer at Billhook. “What heathen hole did you spring from? Not a blackfella, are you then?”

“Billhook,” he shocked himself by saying his name out loud. He had not heard his own voice in several days. Images of the times he had introduced himself on a beach filled his mind. Albert. Moennan. “My name is Billhook.”

“Pleased, I’m sure Mister Hook. I’m Mister Jimmy McCones, pilot of this establishment.” He mistook Billhook’s questioning look. “That is, I look after the boat side of affairs.”

“What is the … establishment?” Billhook tried out the word. “English?” He scratched at his groin where his sandy new trousers chafed.

“We just took New Holland for the King,” McCones said, his shoulders squaring and pride gleaming in his blue eyes. Then he checked Billhook’s scratching and his eyes widened, until Billhook could see his reddened veins streaking from his lashes, and his pride fell away to dismay. He stepped back. “Christ, lad! What kind of cannibal wears the pants of a man speared by blackfellas?”

“Hmm?”

“Where did you get those trousers?”

Billhook, bewildered by his offending pants, said. “On the beach … I had no clothes.”

“They cut them away from the blacksmith Dineen only yesterday, Mr Hook. To be sure.”

“What happened?”

“Them navvies went out to one of the islands and took four blackfellas off who reckoned they been stuck there. They got off the boat wanting to kill a white man. Any white man. The blacksmith were the first one who didn’t have no shooter. Stuck three spears into him.”

McCones warmed to his subject, speaking faster as he became excited. “Before they was rescued, the blackfellas around here were happy and talking. The Major gave them some axes
and shook their hands. Then he had to send out Festing to get those ones off the island and
sweetness all turned to shit. Those blackfellas they rescued were pretty angry. They didn’t
care who they struck, see. The Major wouldn’t even let the regiment answer with their rifles.
‘No retribution!’ he said. ‘But keep at least one barrel loaded at all times, to be sure.’
McCone lowered his voice. “The attackers buggered off and the Major couldn’t find what it
was they were angry about. Dinneen was carted back to the doctor in a wheelbarrow, all
white and shaking he was, with broken off spears still sticking out of him. But one of the
soldiers who went out with the Major this morning told me they saw a dead blackfella on
another island. Said his legs and arms was dried up in the sun like jerky. The Major is saying
that sealers have done some bad work in these parts.”
“I must speak with the Major about the dead man,” said Billhook. “Is he ashore?”
Princess Royal Harbour 1827

A soldier stumped over the grassy knoll, sighted Billhook talking to McCone and fixed his gun.
“Convict McCone! You be afforded the pleasure of a decent flogging if you stand about. Get those stores up to the hut.”
His prestige as pilot shattered, McCone shrugged at Billhook and used what he had. “I have encountered a heathen, Corporal Shore. Mr Hook swears he has news of the dead man. He wants to speak with the Major.”
“Fine irony that, a Galway thief calling other men heathens.” The soldier looked closely at Billhook. “Though I’d wager, Mr Hook, that you have the stink of a sealer about you. Come this way. You shall have your audience with the Major as soon as he is finished his work. McCone – that flour keg – and quick about it.”

The foot soldier led Billhook past the cannon and the flag staff, up through the beach reeds where a thin track had already been trampled by cattle, sheep, pigs and men. McCone laboured over the keg behind them, muttering that Britons didn’t know their County Mayo from their Galway. They walked into a clearing where the place was changed from the last time Billhook was there, by two huts of wood, bark and thatched with reeds, several white canvas tents and rough yards for the stock. The two sheep had already been hobbled.

A convict stood with his arms tied around the warty trunk of a gum tree. In a strange embrace, his cheek was pressed to the peeling bark as though the tree were his lover. Two steps away, the Major had stripped away his jacket as his efforts in flogging the man was making him hot. Sweat ran from his forehead, through his side burns and dripped from his florid jowls. Beside him, the surgeon checked for broken skin and counted out the strokes on slim fingers, a small smile on his pinched face.

“No man would flog Ryan: soldier, navvy nor convict. Private Dickens said no. He’ll be sent away for that.” whispered McCone to Billhook, as he rolled his barrel alongside. “So the Major said he’d do ’im himself.”
“What did the man do?”
“Started trouble about the meat rations. See, there is only food in the settlement for one month.”
Billhook grunted and smiled, thinking about red berries, seal meat, fish and muttonbirds, and of the island pelicans who flew away from futile English rifles. He watched the Major shake out his lash for another go at the man.

Thwack. “Sixteen, sir,” said the surgeon.

It was a dull kind of beating, thought Billhook. The soldiers were trying to ignore it, stifling yawns. The other convicts were forced by the overseers to stand in a row behind the heaving shoulders of the Major and not turn away their heads. Only the surgeon watched with any interest. Billhook wondered at the bone-hard form of this white man’s punishment, this banal exercise of power and demonstration, so different from the chaotic bloodspilling that happened in his own world of islands and boats.

“Twenty-five, sir.”

“I trust you will cease questioning my authority, John Ryan,” said the Major to the convict’s welted, reddened back as he threw down the lash. He nodded to the overseer. “You are hereby on half flour and beef for a week. Back on full rations in seven days, pending your good behaviour.” He looked disgusted with his work but he did not spit.

The overseer untied the convict from the tree. He shook the tension out of his arms, turned around and flicked shanks of black hair from his face. “You are welcome, Major,” he said in an American accent, and looked his flogger straight in the eyes. The Major held his stare.

McCone sucked breath in through pursed lips. “He’d not want to make trouble for us all, that John Ryan.” Billhook looked at him. “I have been on Maria Island in my recent past and this place is a heaven compared.”

Clouds cleared away from the sun and the damp earth steamed. The garrison relaxed their shoulders after standing to attention during the flogging and began to move about. Prisoners wandered away to their work. Someone called for dinner. Corporal Shore spoke to the Major, who was shrugging into his coat, and nodded towards Billhook. As the Major raised his eyes to the sealer, another man in naval costume walked over the knoll from the sea and called the Major aside.
His words ‘sealers’, ‘boat’, ‘during the storm’, ‘native women’ floated across the muddy, trampled ground to Billhook. He wanted to hear more. Jimmy the Nail must have spoken to someone aboard the brig. Asking for rations no doubt. Offering up Dancer and Sal for flour even.

Again, the Major looked at Billhook. He waved him over.

The Major smelled like salted pork and sweat. Although he had not broken the prisoner’s skin during the flogging, his fingers were spattered with blood. He held Billhook with blue eyes so clear and knowing, that after watching the prisoner’s punishment and challenge, Billhook struggled to maintain his gaze. His shame surprised him. He could see the right and the power in the man; that the Major was happiest being in the control of other men. But his wasn’t the look of a tyrant. His entitlement as leader was earned by steady, clever labour and by knowing when to beat a man and when to be kind.

“William Hook, I have word that your friends are aboard the Amity requesting victuals.”

“My friends,” Billhook repeated. “Victuals.” He was hungry and the words he had been planning since he saw the Englishmen on Green Island ran away from his mind, not to be found.

“They tell the lieutenant that they are crew from the Governor Brisbane and the Hunter and that they have been cruelly abandoned by their masters for up to eighteen months now.” Billhook nodded. The Major continued. “Are you associated with these men?”

“I have been so, sir, though I am now cast out from them.”

The Major considered this piece of information, his chin and eyes turning to one side. “Mmm. I have given orders for your crew to be kept aboard the Amity tonight. In the morning I will conduct interviews.” The Major sighed. “One of our best men was speared by the natives yesterday. The blacksmith.”

“By the men on Michaelmas?”

“You know of the natives who were left on Michaelmas Island?”

“I do.”

“You have much to tell me.”

“Yes, sir.”
Billhook breathed in and with a ragged voice, told the Major of his concern for Moennan and Tama. “Returning the girl Moennan to her people will make the blackfellas pleased with you,” he said. “You could do that, sir.”

The Major looked intently at Billhook. “The women who presented today were from Van Diemen’s Land, not King George Sound.”

“Sir, three are from this coast. Two were carried off when we marooned the black men on the island.”

“And were you present during the killing of the native on Green Island?”

“Yes, sir. I know who shot him, sir.”

“William Hook, you will provide a statement to me naming this man and the events on Green Island in the morning.”

“Yes sir.”

“Is this murderer one of the men who came into the harbour during the storm today?”

“I do not know sir.” Billhook fingered the orca tooth at his throat. His belly grumbled. After the intense exchange of information, he became aware again of the strange people, animals and labour around him. The order of things was about to change, he thought. He didn’t like it. But he understood it. He laid out the mistruth to the Major in his most careful English. “He is the same man who took Tama Hine and Moennan away. His name is Samuel Bailey.”
Princess Royal Harbour –1827

He woke in the bottom of the navvie’s jolly boat, wrapped in a sail. Something stabbed at his ribs, and then again. He grunted away from the pain and shut his eyes but the poking continued. What was this? This sharp shunting at him?

In the gloomy sky, he saw the outline of a man, leaning over the boat.

“Smidmore. Stop. Stop it, man.”

Trying to sit up, he remembered the tousle-headed lieutenant handcuffing him to a shackle on the boat, before tucking him in to his sail. He wrenched at his chain in frustration.

“Thought I saw you on the rocks yesterday,” said Smidmore. Water dripped from his long hair and onto Billhook’s chest. “Right before I fetched that tack in my eye. Dancer, I reckon she saw you too. What you doing here?”

“Where are the girls?”

“Sal’s gone with Randall to the Swan River, looking for seal.” Smidmore was heavy on Randall’s name. He still smarted from his loss of Sal. “Mary is out on Breaksea.”

Billhook wriggled upright and wiped aside the canvas. His back ached from the boat’s ribs.

“No. Where is the kid?”

“Oh!” Smidmore laughed, nastily. “Of course. The kid.”

“Where is she, Smidmore?”

“She ain’t with us.”

“Where is Tama Hine?”

Smidmore leaned in to stare close at Billhook. “I should kill you now, you fucking black traitor. While I got the chance.”

“I took the girls to keep Bailey off them.”

“I have no quarrel with you there, Billhook. Even pinching the boat. Everyone for themselves. Nah, the story you been giving to that Major nob about the blackfella on Green Island. You told him I shot the man dead.”

“No.”

“The lieutenant came aboard and said we was to give statements today. That they knew about the shooting. They took our guns. Six guns they got. And our boat. I’ll swing for that killing, Billhook.”

“No white man ever swung for shooting a blackfella.”
“Makes it a better reason to finish you off now. I’ll not be going back to captivity, nor threats of the rope, Billhook. I be going back to Kangaroo Island. I’ll take you and this little boat, right here and now.”

“I said Bailey did it. I said Bailey shot the blackfella.”

John Smidmore began to laugh quietly, as the sky was lightening in the east and he didn’t want to be heard by stirring soldiers. “Bailey.”

“Where are the girls?”

Smidmore pushed himself away from Billhook and the gunwales of the boat. He turned and walked back into the water, wading through the shallows. Just as he began to despair of an answer, Billhook heard the sealer mutter, “Bailey’s got them on Eclipse Island.”
Princess Royal Harbour – 1827

From early in the morning, people from the country surrounding King George Sound began arriving at the English garrison. First came two young men, their chests and arms painted. Then three older men and some boy children dressed in small cloaks. As the shadows began to shorten, one of the boys left and returned with three elderly women, one of whom walked with the aid of a stick. The two other women helped her when she failed. Billhook watched her fold her legs and sink down onto a kangaroo skin prepared for her. Powerful old kui, that one, he thought. The warriors had decreed the scene safe enough for her to attend. The shape of her face traced echoes of Moennan and he wondered if she was Moennan’s grandmother.

All day they waited. Occasionally one of the men would groan with impatience and leave the garrison. The old women and a boy sat under a tree, looking glummer as the sun climbed the sky. The Major busied himself with domestic matters: transcribing Billhook’s statement of the killing in his tent, occasionally coming out to clarify something with Billhook, or inspect the construction of the livestock yards. Major was as impatient and nervy as the country men and women. He needed this day to go well.

Pigeon was shipped to shore from the brig, where the other sealers were still being held. “Major Boss wants me to talk to these blackfellas here,” he told Billhook, looking proud of his new role as negotiator. “Keep ’em happy, you know.” Billhook shook his head and walked away, remembering Pigeon’s gleeful face as he dragged a teary Moennan out of the bush. Something dark in him hoped the old kui would recognise Pigeon. But the old people would get no justice from this sorry tale and as the day wore on, he became afraid that they would not even get their countrywoman back.

As the sun started its decline into the western coast hills, a great shout went up. The country men had been watching the channel and they were first to see Lieutenant Festing’s skiff sail into the harbour. The Major quickly told Pigeon to explain to them what was going to happen. If she was in the boat, the Major would personally walk her to her family and present her, he said. He directed Pigeon to stay with them and comfort them until she arrived at the garrison.

“You, William Hook, you stay here with Corporal Shore.”
He spoke to the other soldiers in hushed tones, so that Billhook couldn’t hear his words. The Major must want a show here, he thought, a show of English power. No more blacksmith’s ambushes.

The Major paced back and forth, waiting for the boat. He snapped at the surgeon who hovered about him like a terrier. Then he walked down to the shore. The soldiers followed, some hastily donning their red jackets, others checking their guns.

Billhook could see the skiff’s sails being lowered and the men fitting oars to crab into shore. Then his view was ruined by a dozen Privates crowding the boat. He saw one man lift out a ragged bundle and walk to the shore. Another man carried a larger cargo ashore. At the garrison, the mood intensified. The Kui talked quickly, her words pitching into short wails. Her countryman patted her, soothingly.

Live fish could have swum in Billhook’s stomach. He tried to see between the soldiers as they closed around the boat again. Was it them? Tama Hine? That little bundle? And Moennan? Were they alive? For a moment he closed his eyes and appealed to his mother. Mother, what have I done? Have I done right this time?

In swift, coordinated movements, the soldiers stepped away from the boat. They made two lines from the boat to the reedy dune, faced each other and placed out their arms to space themselves. They turned about until they were facing the strange crowd of exiles and countrymen at the garrison.

“Forward march,” shouted the sergeant. There were other people, including the Major, behind them but Billhook could not see them for soldiers. They marched in two lines towards the garrison, past the white tents and the storehouse. When the first soldiers arrived within twenty steps of where the families, Billhook and Pigeon stood, they stopped suddenly.

Through the avenue walked the private who’d refused to flog the prisoner Ryan. He led Samuel Bailey, his hands cuffed in front of him. Bailey raised drink-ruined eyes to Billhook but gave little sign he knew him, a slight twitch at the corner of his mouth and that was all. He was shambling, taking small steps. Billhook realised that he wore leg irons. The soldier dragged him from the column of soldiers and took him to the storehouse.
Billhook expected cries of anger or outrage from the old women, or even a warrior stance from the young men. But they seemed disinterested in Bailey and were either entranced by the Major’s theatre of British justice or, as Billhook was, more intent on seeing who came next.

The Major carried her. She cried out as he shifted her body in his arms. As they came closer, the kui woman shouted what sounded like a lament and then “Moennan!” Her young countrymen began to weep first, tears streaming down their faces, their hands making graceless, angry gestures. The face of the older man, possibly her husband, hardened, his jaw clenched. The Major put her down and stepped back. A shocked hush fell over the entire congregation as they saw what Samuel Bailey had done.

*Ae, my mother, my mother, you are right. I am one of them. All I wanted was the woman … and I delivered her to this.*

She stood alone with the crowd of people circled around her. Her hair was matted, not with dirt or salt, but blood. One eye was swollen shut. Moennan’s legs were covered in grazes. The deeper cuts looked like knife wounds. Some wounds were festering. She held her left arm against her cloak as though it were broken.

The old woman was the first to move, helped by her sisters to stand before Moennan. She wept as she gently touched Moennan’s face with her big hands. She spoke to her quickly and softly and Moennan too began to cry. Gradually others came to her side, even the boys who were at first too awed by the sight of her to come near.

Billhook stood well away, held his hand to his mouth. The Major, who had flogged a man only days before, whispered to the surgeon, “Never before have I seen a person so ill-used by another.”

Small fingers tugged at his. He looked down.

*Tama. Tama Hine.*

“*Ae, Tama!*” He went to grasp the child, to swing her up and into his arms but felt her flinch away just before he touched her waist and so he tugged back at her fingers instead.

“*Tama Hine, my child. Tama.*”
He squatted down to see her proper. Around her neck lay the gleaming string of shells that Dancer had made for her. She looked uncertainly at Billhook and grasped his hand tighter.

“Did he hurt you? Are you hurt, Tama Hine?”

Tama still wore the bloodied pants of the drowned American boy and her fur cloak. Her hair had grown, she had grown, since he last saw her sailing out through the inlet mouth with Bailey and Jimmy the Nail. She nodded and her lips trembled before they squared and tears leaked silently from her closed eyes.

For several minutes the young Maori and the child stayed where they were, holding hands, eyes closed and weeping soundless tears. He could never make it right again. Not ever, not since the moment he saw Bailey rushing through the scrub with her wriggling under one arm.

His tears were not for the child but his knowing what he had done, enough that she stood here now and told him that she was hurt. Leaving his home Otakau on a grand mission of vengeance, to right a man’s wrong that happened years before and here he was helping the wrong man along. As he was happy to see Tama alive, he also felt broken with shame and could not muster the anger he needed to rebuild himself again.

The Lieutenant’s man who had carried her ashore stepped between them. “I’ll take her to her family now, Mr Hook.”

“No.”

“They are waiting for her,” the ensign pointed to Moennan’s family who were clustered about her. They were still sobbing and one of the old women wailed in what sounded like one of Billhook’s family waita. A funereal, yet strangely celebratory wailing.

“No. That is not her family.”

“Mr Hook, it is not for you to instruct me.”

Billhook released the child and smiled at her through bleary eyes. The ensign took her hand and led her over to the tight, noisy knot of Moennan’s family. The Major and the surgeon went with him and together, the three men presented Tama Hine to them.

The wailing stopped as they considered the child. The old women looked at her curiously. The young men had seen her with the sealers before. They muttered to the old women. She belonged with the sealers.
“Tama! Tama Hine!” said Moennan. She spoke to the young men in language and then looked beyond them. She saw Billhook.

He could see, despite her broken face and closed eye, the same look she’d given him when she’d been surprised in the forest clearing. Startled, defiant, beautiful, but now something new, a knowing coolness. He shivered with that cool glance and then flushed hot.

Moennan nodded to Billhook and he nodded back. But she was indicating him to her family, not greeting him. She spoke to them and nodded his way again. One of the older men spoke in language to the Major, shaking his head at Tama and pointing to Billhook. The Major, in a moment of bewilderment, called on Pigeon to translate. Pigeon, although he knew no local language, was happy to make himself useful in a transaction that seemed quite obvious to everyone.

“The child, she not with these people, Boss. They say Billhook. Billhook looks after her.”

The surgeon gave a blanket to Moennan. She sniffed at it warily and offered it to the old woman. He began to inspect her wounds, applying salve and bandages. She shrieked when he touched her broken arm. He spoke to her gently as he treated her. Finally, with Moennan trussed in white bandages around her head and her arm, the surgeon handed the old woman a small calico bag of ship’s biscuit and indicated that they were for Moennan.

There was an odd, formal moment, spoken in two languages from opposite ends of the world, between the surgeon, the Major and Moennan’s family. When they had finished talking Moennan left the garrison, one of the older men walking close and guarded beside her as though in a marriage ceremony, the old women and children following behind them. They stepped through the reeds and purple flowers, around a perfectly round granite boulder, and into the red gum forest where the sea eagles nested. Billhook saw a flash of her stark, white bandages, and then he never saw her again.
The Maori left on the ship with the little girl and she did not see Wiremu Heke or Tama Hine again. Six moons later she birthed a child, a fine, strong boy and she named him after the surgeon who had cared for her when she returned from the island. The surgeon continued to give extra food to her and her boy and he was the only white man the other women would talk to, for a long time.

It was good that Bailey and Heke and even Tama were gone, for they brought only chaos with them, and no law. But she still thought of them. When she remembered those terrible days on the island and the fear and the shame, she made a picture of the inlet again. That night on the water, when she was the tallest, moving that boat across the water with her big stick. How powerful she was. How quiet they were. Only the drips falling from her stick into a sea flashing with light and colour. And Wiremu Heke whispering to the child, “Fire in the water, Tama Hine. There. Tama. There. Fire in the water.”
The brig is a pig. The brig is a pig, was Bailey’s song as the Amity rolled with a following wind, sloughing and wallowing into the troughs. She’s a nasty little pig, this shit of a brig. His hands grasped at me whenever I passed the crate he was locked within. At night, as we tried to sleep in the swinging hammocks under deck and Tama Hine shut her eyes tight and pretended to sleep, I heard him singing his grievous, shambling versions of a sea shanty. Give me truth and give me clemency. Darky Hook, for I did not shoot the blackfella.

I knew Bailey’s crimes and I wanted him to swing. I wanted to drive a splicing pike through one of his eyes and throw his body to the monsters that dogged our wake. But there was just one man to be tried for murder upon this ship borne east and it was not to be me.

“Where, Wiremu? Where we go?” Tama Hine asked me as we stood at the bow, sailing through the heads of Princess Royal Harbour and into the Sound. She scratched at her new clothes. Before we left, the surgeon had taken her fur cloak and her trousers and thrown them on a fire, shaking his head at the bloodstains. He dressed her in a sackcloth frock and a cap made of spun wool.

We passed between Breaksea and Michaelmas, the channel ringing with barking dogs on the island.

“Who will look after Splinter?” Tama asked.

I told her that the lurcher would feast on fish and berries and birds, and grow fat and old on the island with his friends. “We go to Sydney town, Tama Hine. Long way.”

“Can I go home, Wiremu?” She knew her way home, that sprite, for she had travelled these waters several times now.

“I will talk to the Lieutenant,” I told her. It was all I could do, for our lives no longer belonged to us but were mapped by the Major’s scrawls upon sheafs of paper.

The child is to be taken to Sydney on the Amity for the disposal of the Governor.

I was to testify to the sergeant there, the Major had told me. I was to tell the law man the story of the Green Island killing and that the prisoner Samuel Bailey did this crime. My statement was locked in Lieutenant Festing’s safe, to be presented in Sydney. “There is no
recourse to law here yet,” the Major told me. “Samuel Bailey is not a convict but a free man and not subject to arbitrary punishment. He must go to Sydney to face British justice.”

I do not understand the white man’s law. I do not understand why they must send the child away to the other side of her world. I do not understand why Pigeon, Jimmy the Nail and Smidmore were accepted into the fledgling settlement and given rations for their skills alone, for they too had done terrible things, and why Tama Hine must leave. Mary and Dancer came in from the island with Tommy Tasman and Neddy and were given rations too. The islanders were shunned by the soldiers, who held no power over them, and by the convicts for the same reason. Smidmore, Everett and Pigeon, even the Vandiemonian Worthies, they treated the land people with contempt. They carried their own mana, for they had seen things that land people never saw. And yet Tama had to leave.

“We are close now, Wiremu,” said Tama after three days at sea, and sure enough the Doubtful Islands appeared on the horizon: misty, grey mounds squatting in the sea just off the red cliffs.

I spoke to the ship’s captain Hansen. He squinted at the hazed horizon and called over the Lieutenant.

“Mr Hook is requesting that we take the child back to her people who live near here, sir. But we shall soon have to beat out to sea by the looks of those clouds.”

“Then let’s beat out,” said Festing. “The Major’s instructions are that I take the child to Sydney.”

The Lieutenant would not move from his orders. Tama sat with me on the bridge and we watched her country slide away. The hazy clouds on the horizon brought on the weather and the captain screamed to the men on the spars as he turned the ship into the wind. “Harden them up, yer bastards. Harden up!”

Three days and three nights with no sight of land. Tama pretended to sleep in her hammock and when I looked over during Bailey’s fruity ramblings, she quickly shut her eyes. Bailey stayed in his cramped little cage and every morning a ship’s mate took away his bedpan that lay pitching and stinking all the night. The hold smelled of vomit and the left over scents of animals and people from its last voyage.
The Lieutenant ordered the captain to bring the ship in close to Israelite Bay, to rescue Jack and Tommy. It was nearly a year since they were abandoned there by our Boss Kemp. We lowered a little boat into the sea. The Lieutenant, two of the mates and I rowed towards the blinding white shores of the cove. We circled the island, part of what the Lieutenant called The Eastern Group, searching the sky for smoke and the craggy, stone edges of the island for people or huts, but saw nothing, only clouds of terns rising from the island.

The boat grunted onto the rocks. We climbed out and waded through the water. “Up here,” I told the Lieutenant. “This is where Boss told them to camp.” Over the reddening succulents and the reeds and into the grove of peppermints, we found the hut made from bent saplings and branches. It was cool and green in the forest and vines grew through the hut and over its doorway. Jack and Tommy had not been there for a long time, I could see.

“Their water cask is not here,” I said to the Lieutenant.

The men threw half a dozen rolled and salted seal skins into the boat. We took the short journey to the beach and split up to search for the brothers. It is a lonely thing to search for men, to not know where to look and what you may find. The Lieutenant and I walked along the shore to the western end of the beach. Neither of us spoke but listened instead to the squeaks of our feet in the sand.

We climbed the rocks sprinkled in shattered turban shells, to a tiny bay gleaming white as the one before but broken in half by a freshwater stream. The Lieutenant saw the cask before I did.

“They must have gone for water,” he said, hurrying along the beach.

The twins lay on the sand above the high tide mark on the other side of the creek. Their bodies were dried to leather and bone and their shredded clothes flapped in the light wind. Eyeless sockets opened to the sky. Jack’s tattoo of the upended Governor Brisbane was touching his brother’s arm and they clasped sinewed, fleshless hands.

The Lieutenant knelt beside the bodies. Tiny black ants scurried around his knees. I roved my eyes over the bush that surrounded us, breathing in sweat of the trees in the midday heat, listening.
“Death spear, this one,” said the Lieutenant. He’d pulled aside the rags of Tommy’s shirt to show the jagged hole in his breast. “The barb is lined with tiny pieces of knapped quartz. Look. The quartz falls off like sharks teeth. Push the spear in and out a few times and death comes as fast to a man as cutting his throat. Cuts every artery. But this one,” he moved to Jack’s body. “This one …” He peeled away more cloth. “I cannot find a mark on him.” He rolled Jack’s body towards his brother’s. Maggots spilled away onto the sand. “There is no way of knowing.”

“Jack was not a man to lay down and die.” I touched their clasped hands. Where Tommy’s fingers were open and straight, Jack had gripped his brother’s hand tight before he died.

The two other men found our sorry party and we buried Jack and Tommy where they lay. We used the oars as shovels. Jack’s hand could not be prised from his brother’s and so they were buried that way. The Lieutenant sacrificed an oar to the double grave, driving it deep into the sand so that it stood as a marker, ‘like a sapling’, as Boss Davidson had said all that time ago. One of the ship’s mates said a brief prayer. We carried the oars along the lonely beach, climbed into the boat and rowed back to the ship.

The rest of the journey to Sydney was slow and we waited out a stilling of the wind in Bass Strait for days. At night I lay with my flesh rolling over my bones in the gentle sway of the brig. I did not sleep often, for Bailey did not sleep. I knew the man could go for days without shutting his eyes and that he dreamed more when he was awake. During the nights Bailey pestered me with his stories of Elizabeth.

“That child Elizabeth,” he croaked from inside his crate one night. “She was mine too, you know. It wasn’t only father who had her. She was always a whore. I went back for her later. Before father was done for embezzlement we had a fine time, my father and I. No wonder mother died from the melancholy. She had no money left for the high life and then it was just father and I and Elizabeth.”

“Be quiet, Bailey.”

People have always told me things. Bailey seemed to warm to telling me his scourge of a life, wanted to confess and was not quiet. He took pleasure in telling me the black children he’d had in Van Diemen’s Land. Other things I shall never say aloud for fear of rotting my own tongue in my mouth. I was filthied by his stories. I would have asked for the night watch but then Tama Hine would be alone with him.
“What will happen to the child, Captain?”
“Ah, you are a New Zealand native then, Mr Hook!”
The ship’s master Hansen was a doughty, bluff man in his sixties with a neck that fell in two giblets. He was drinking whiskey in the companion way and willing to talk. Always been a seaman, he said, although he tried farming once, sold the land and went back to being master. “My most pleasant memory is the service we held on Christmas day for the Maori.” He told me, most prideful, that he was a close associate of the chief chaplain, Reverend Marsden and that together they had set up the first English settlement in New Zealand. I searched my mind for the name Marsden and it was the whaler at Doubtful Island Bay, John te Marama from Rangihoua Pā, who had lived with the Reverend.

“My daughter Hannah is married to one of his missionaries, see … though there was a spot of trouble for a while there with my wife regarding muskets. That wife of mine never did give up meddling when it comes to trade and helping our daughter and son-in-law. Never til the day she died. God rest her soul. Gun-runner and drunkard, the Reverend said. Giving the natives muskets made for a lot of trouble between them and the missionaries, he said … ahh well … perhaps Marsden and I aren’t such close associates anymore. He shouldn’t have said that about my wife. He was wrong. Dead wrong.”

“Where will the child go?” I asked again.
“What child?” The master was lost to his memories. “Oh, the native kid. I’ll take her to William Hall. A good man, a good man. He’s in charge of the Native Institution at Parramatta now. Knew him well from the Rangihoua mission. One of Marsden’s men. Good man. Fanny Bailey will be Christianised. Christianised, Mr Hook.”

Fanny Bailey.
I left Hansen to his drink. My thoughts jammed upon that name. Fanny Bailey. I knew that Lockyer had called her Fanny after a child of his own. But her name was not Fanny Bailey. Her name was … Tama. To me. Tama Hine. And to her now. That she was named after Samuel Bailey made my stomach lurch. Her name, scratched out on paper by the white man. She would hear his name called aloud every day at the Native Institution. Her name was not Fanny Bailey.
My sick feeling led me to the stern to stare at an idling, flattened wake. My mind cleared. It was as we were becalmed in Bass Strait, that I decided what I must do when we arrived in Sydney.

Every night I distracted Tama from Bailey’s night ranting and mutterings, teaching her my language. The ship’s timbers creaked and shackles clanked against the masts. I squatted against the planks and Tama sat on a pile of rope facing me.

“Ko Tama toku ingoa means ‘my name is Tama’,” I said. “What is your name?”
“Ko Tama toku ingoa,” she said.
“What is your name? Say it again Tama.”
“Ko Tama toku ingoa.”
“Ae, you are clever, Tama Hine.”
She nodded to me and looked nervously to Samuel Bailey’s cage.
“Yes,” I nodded. “Ae.”
She nodded again. “Ae.”
“No,” I shook my head. “Kahore or kao.”
She shook her head too. “Kahore.”

“I am hungry. Ka hia kai ahau. I am hungry.”
“Ka hia kai ahau,” she said.
“I am full, not hungry. Ka ki ahau. Ka ki toku puku. I am full. I am not hungry.”

“I come from Doubtful Island, from west coast of Port Jackson Land.” Because I knew that when asked, Tama Hine could not say where she came from. As a seven year old, her country was the centre of her world and did not need a name. But if ever she wanted to find her way home without me, she needed to name it.

“I come from Doubtful Island, from west coast of Port Jackson Land. Say this now Tama Hine: Ka hoki mai au ki Doubtful Island nō te tai Hauru Poihākina. Say where your home is, Tama.”
“Ka hoki mai au ki Doubtful Island – “she faltered.
“– no te tai Hauru Poihakina.” I prompted.
“Ka hoki mai au ki Doubtful Island ... no te tai Hauru Poihakina. My home is Doubtful Island.”
“In your statement, William Hook, you say that the prisoner shot dead the man on Green Island.” The sergeant became angry and shoved a scrunched paper at me. The air was silky and hot in Sydney town and the place where I sat with the sergeant was thick with heat and flies. I heard the music of a metal cup bouncing on stone in the next room.

“I did not say Samuel Bailey shot the black man. I said Samuel Bailey was in the boat when the black man was shot.”

The sergeant straightened the paper on his rough table, held it at arm’s length and read again.

“I am telling you the truth, sir,” I said.

He shook his head and I became afraid that I would not make it back to the docks and to Tama before she was taken.

“But Major Lockyer states clearly in his letter to the Colonial Secretary that Samuel Bailey …” he wiped his freckled hand through his hair. “Mr Hook, can you read English?”

“No sir.”

“In your statement to the Major, there is nothing of Samuel Bailey killing the man. And yet the Major wanted him charged with murder. This puzzles me.” He threw my statement onto the table and I stared at the strange marks sloping across the page. “I shall keep the prisoner here until I hear otherwise. You are free to go.”

I ran to the docks. I ran through streets paved in wood and stone and past the horses, dodged the people who sold or begged food from their hands, past the gangs of men heaving adzes into the ground and the clanging of metal against stone. At the docks I ran towards the twin masts of the *Amity* and a cart waiting alongside, the horse champing into a nosebag, resting one leg. Straight up the gangplank and down the hatch to where Tama Hine swung in her hammock. The glee that spread across her face crept away when she saw my panic.

“Where is Hansen? Where is the Lieutenant?”

“They talking, Wiremu. In their cabin,” she whispered and pointed aft.

“Do you have your things, if we go now?”

Tama Hine pretended to busy herself looking around the hold for a sack of her belongings. She pulled a piece of pumice stone from under her frock and grinned at me. “This.”
For seven days we lived like ghosts on the docks, sleeping during the day in places nobody could find us. At night I went to the bars where men and women swung out of the doors and the place heaved with music and the people swayed and sang together like one great monster of the deep. I cut Tama’s hair short with a knife so that she looked like a ship’s boy and taught her more of my countryman’s language.

On the eighth day Tama and I found a berth on a whaler bound for my southern island Otakau. And so we were going back to my home, together. I did not know what awaited us there. Maybe Te Raprahau had already cut his way through our village. I did not know. I did not know. I did not know anything of James Kelly. I had given up on that vengeance long ago.

Maybe one day Tama Hine will decide to journey to her home country. For now I will teach her to be strong, to protect herself and to ready herself for when that day comes.

A storm stood like a grey wall out to sea.
“In times of trouble,” I said to her as we sailed through the heads of Sydney harbour towards the storm, “be strong! Be brave! Be of big heart, Tama Hine!
And she shouted my words back to me as the rain smacked into the sails:

ā hākua nga uaua
Kia Kaha!
Kia Toa!
Kia Manawanui, Wiremu Heke!”
Relics, Curiosities and Autographs

On being swallowed by a whale:

The Star of the East was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands and the lookout sighted a large Sperm Whale three miles away. Two boats were launched and in a short time one of the harpooners was enabled to spear the fish. The second boat attacked the whale but was upset by the lash of its tail and the men thrown into the sea, one man being drowned, and another, James Bartley, having disappeared, could not be found. The whale was killed and in a few hours was lying by the ship’s side and the crew were busy with axes and spades removing the blubber. Next morning they attached some tackle to the stomach which was hoisted on the deck. The sailors were startled by something in it which gave spasmodic signs of life, and inside was found the missing sailor doubled up and unconscious. He was laid on the deck and treated to a bath of sea water, which soon revived him … He remained two weeks a raving lunatic … At the end of the third week, he had entirely recovered from the shock and resumed his duties.


The War of the Worlds:

The inspiration for The War of the Worlds came one day when Wells and his brother Frank were strolling through the peaceful countryside in Surrey, south of London. They were discussing the invasion of the Australian island of Tasmania in the early 1800s by European settlers, who hunted down and killed most of the primitive people who lived there. To emphasise the reaction of these people, Frank said, ‘Suppose some beings from another planet were to drop out of the sky suddenly and begin taking over Surrey and then all of England!’


On disabling a navy in 1817:

… as we were unable to leave owing to the wind being dead against us. Early next morning there was a great crowd on the beach making a great noise of lamentation over the death of their chief. Closely watching their movements, we concluded that they were about to launch their canoes and make another attack upon us, and we deemed it advisable to prevent them doing so, if we could. Accordingly we immediately manned our two boats, taking arms and ammunition with us, and pulled close to where the canoes were lying, determined if possible to destroy them at once. As the boats neared the shore the Natives made back into the bush. One of the boat’s crew landed: the other kept afloat, to cover the men on shore with their muskets. With three long cross-cut saws the whole navy was speedily disabled. On seeing the havoc that was being made of their canoes, some of the more daring of the Natives ventured out of their cover and made a rush at our men, but a well-directed volley levelled several of their number, and terrified the rest so that they again took to the bush. Both sides are now highly excited and bent on revenge.

Unknown informer, 1817,
Dear Mr Kelly:

21 May 1833
Otago, New Zealand.

To Mr James Kelly.

Sir,

This to certify that the Natives of Otago have threatened to take your ship from Capt. Lovett, stating that you had formally (sic) killed or wounded several years ago some of their people and that they would have revenge. Most of the people also deserted the vessel at the above Port.

I have the honour to be,
Your obedient Servt.
J.B. Weller,


On writing the other:

“Somehow writing the black experience confounds us. Meanwhile: HOBBITS.”


The spear in the seal in the shark in the sand:

Several seals were procured on this and the preceding day, and some fish were caught alongside the ship; but our success was much impeded by three monstrous sharks, in whose presence no other fish dared to appear. After some attempts we succeeded in taking one of them; but to get it on board required as much preparation as for hoisting in the launch. The length of it however was no more than twelve feet three inches but the circumference of the body was eight feet. Amongst the vast quantity of substances contained in the stomach, was a tolerably large seal, bitten in two, and swallowed with half of the spear sticking in it with which it had probably been killed by the natives. The stench of this ravenous monster was great, even before it was dead; and when the stomach was opened it, it became intolerable.

Matthew Flinders, the Investigator, January 12th 1802

Mr Thistle’s Doomsayer:

This evening, Mr Fowler told me a circumstance which I thought extraordinary; and afterwards it proved to be more so. Whilst we were lying at Spithead, Mr Thistle was one day waiting on shore, and having nothing else to do he went to see a certain old man named Pine, to have his fortune told. The cunning man informed him that he was going out on a long
voyage, and that the ship, on arriving at her destination, would be joined by another vessel. That such was intended he might have learned privately; but he added, that Mr Thistle would be lost before the other vessel joined. As to the manner of his loss, the magician refused to give any information. My boat’s crew, hearing what Mr Thistle went along also to consult the wise man and after the prefatory information of a long voyage, were told that they would be shipwrecked but not in the ship they were going out in: whether they would escape and return to England, he was not permitted to reveal.

This tale Mr Thistle had often told at the mess table; and I remarked with some pain in a future part of the voyage, that every time my boat’s crew went to embark with me in the Lady Nelson, there was some degree of apprehension amongst them that the time of the predicted shipwreck had arrived. I make no comment upon this story but recommend a commander if possible to prevent any of his crew from consulting fortune tellers.

Matthew Flinders, the Investigator, 22nd February 1802 (Mr Thistle had drowned the previous evening)

**Cave Sealing:**

The other youngster and I stayed on the bridge to drag out the seals from the two inside. They kindled a light, and when they reached the end of the cave, there was a beach full of seals there – big and little, male and female. Bainirseach is the name of the female seal, and the male is called the bull. There are some of them that it’s absolutely impossible to kill.


**Romancing the Sound:**

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<tr>
<td>Listen</td>
<td>Yuccan</td>
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Simon Smale, Wylie Crescent, Albany, telephone, email, 21/05/2009.

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“Unquoted”: Texts that informed the novel *Exiles*


Gough, J., *Brown Sugar*, 1995/6 Acrylic paint on ply, mixed-media, 1800 x 3000 x 120 mm (This is a 6 x 10 foot work based on the two-year journey of Julie Gough’s ancestor Woretemoeteyerner, who travelled from Bass Strait to mainland Australia and across to Rodrigues and Mauritius from 1825 - 1827.


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Appendices

Appendix. 1.


INFORMATION of William Hook, Native of New Zealand, Mariner and late belonging to the Schooner Brisbane of Hobart Town, touching the murder of a Male Native on Green Island, Oyster Harbour and King George’s Sound, and also forcibly taking away from the Main Land at Oyster Harbour four Male Natives, and landing them on Michaelmas Island in King George’s Sound, and there leaving them to perish, of the truth of which he, William Hook, voluntarily maketh Oath before Edmund Lockyer, Esquire, Major of His Majesty’s 57 Regt. Of Infantry, and Justice of the Peace of His Majesty’s Territory in New South Wales and Commandant of the Settlement at King George’s Sound, this Twelfth day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty Seven.

“That he, William Hook, being with the following persons at Oyster Harbour that composed the crew of a Boat employed sealing, John Randall Steersman, James Kirby, George Magennis and Samuel Bailey, with another Boat belonging to a Mr. Robinson of Hobart Town, and of which one Everitt was Steersman, the names of the crew he does not recollect, whilst there, had frequently been visited by the Natives, who were friendly, accompanying the Sealers fishing in their Boats, though the Native Women were never seen or came to the place where the Sealers were huddled.

That, about Eight Weeks ago, a French Man of War anchored in the sound and remained some time. That, one day after this Ship had left, Five of the Natives came to where their Boats stopped and requested to be taken to Green Island in Oyster Harbour to catch birds, when this Informant and another Man of the Hunter’s Boat, by name Ned, was ordered by John Randall and Everitt, the Boat Steerers, to take the Natives there and land them and come off, leaving them there, which they did; the Natives, perceiving the Boat going away, called out to the Informant to return, making all the signs possible for that purpose; but, having been ordered to leave them, Informant was afraid to act otherwise.

Next day Randall set out, accompanied by Kirby, Magennis and Bailey, armed with Guns and Cutlasses, soon after five OClock in the morning, and returned about Four or Five in the Evening bringing with them Four Native Women; that during their absence Informant was ordered to stay and take care of the Boat; during the night, two of the women made their escape though the Sealers had tied them two together by the Arms; next Morning both Boat’s Crews again went off armed, leaving Informant and another to watch the Boats; in the Evening they returned saying they had not seen any of the Natives or the Two Women that had made their escape, but had found hanging to the Trees at their encampment a Pocket Compass and a knife that had been given to the Natives by the Captain of the French Ship.

That, on the next day, Informant was sent with Ned and four others in the Boat to Green Island with a keg of water for the Natives; and, on the boats approaching the shore, they made a rush
to get into it; the people in the boat shoved off to prevent them, and returned to the Party on shore, when four fresh hands got into the Boat, taking with them two Guns and two Swords and again went to the Island, and one Man got out to take a keg of water on shore; the Natives making a rush to get into the Boat, the Europeans resisted by striking them with their Oars and Swords; and, finding that they persisted, a Gun was fired with slugs over their Heads to frighten them, which did not answer; when a second shot was fired the Informant saw one of them fall forwards on his Face in the Water and the Blood spouting out from both his sides.

Kirby, who steered the boat, fired the first shot, but Informant cannot tell who fired the second.; the Boat was then shoved off and went to the Shore, and the next Morning Randall went again to the Island, and at first the Natives hid themselves; but on seeing Randall who was a great favourite with them, they came out and kissed him; he then took the four into his Boat, leaving the dead Body on the Island, and left Oyster Harbour and landed the four Natives on Michaelmas Island, and left them making great lamentations; Randall then went to Breaksea Island where the other Boat joined, bringing with them the Two Female Natives that they had taken away from the Main Land at Oyster Harbour.

One of these Females is now at Eclipse Island with Samuel Bailey, also a native Girl, a child Seven year old; the other Female taken from this is with George Magennis with the Boat to the Eastward; and this Informant further states that these men have other Native Women that they take about with them, Two from Van Diemen’s Land taken in Bass Strait and one from the Main Land opposite Kangaroo Island.

The Mark of X WILLIAM HOOK

Witness: - E. Lockyer, junr.
Appendix 2.


MAJOR LOCKYER TO COLONIAL SECRETARY MACLEAY.
(Despatch No. 2)
Princess royal Harbour
King George’s Sound, 22 Jany., 1827.

Sir,

I have the Honour to transmit to you the Information of Wm. Hook, a Native of New Zealand, respecting a Murder committed by Samuel Bailey, Seaman, and others on the Person of a Male Native on Green Island in Oyster Harbour by shooting him with a Gun.

Samuel Bailey is in custody and with William Hook forwarded to Sydney by the Brig Amity.

I have, &c.,
E. Lockyer, Major, H.M. 57 Regtm,
Commandant.
Appendix 3.

Reel 2807 Colonial Secretary Copies of letters address to Benches of Magistrates, Justices of the Peace and Superintendents of Police 6 Oct 1826 – 18 Oct 1827 Vol 1
(Original location 4/3825) p. 194.

F A Hely Esqu JP
Acting Supt of Police
(in margin) E Lockyer JP

Colonial Secretary’s Office
16th February 1827

Sir,

I am directed by His Excellency the governor to transmit to you the enclosed deposition made by William Hook respecting the death of a native said to be caused by Samuel Bailey. Hook and Bailey have arrived from King George’s Sound, and have been ordered to be landed from the brig Amity and sent before you for examination.
I have &c&c
Alexr McLeay.
Appendix 4.

Reel 2807 Colonial Secretary Copies of letters address to Benches of Magistrates, Justices of the Peace and Superintendants of Police 6 Oct 1826 – 18 Oct 1827 Vol 1 (Original location 4/3825) p. 194.

The Honourable
The Colonial Secretary &c&c&c

Police Office Sydney
17th February 1827

Sir,
In returning you the examination of William Hook a New Zealander taken by Edward Lockyer Esq JP at King Georges Sound on the 12th January last, in the case of the alleged Murder of a Native black man at Green Island, I beg leave to acquaint you that the white man calling himself Samuel Bailey, this day forwarded to me with Letter, cannot be identified as the man who committed the Murder; in fact William Hook positively says that Bailey is not the man, and that he was not in the boat at the time the murder was committed.

Under the circumstances I beg leave to return the examinations, and pending your further discretion shall detain Bailey in custody.

I have the honour to be
Sir
Your obedient Servent
F A Hely JP
Acting Supdt of Police

(note on reverse) If nothing further transpires he must necessarily be discharged.
F A Healy 17 Feby 1827.
Appendix 5

Papers 12th. December, 1826 Police Department Port Louis 15th Dec 1826

Process: (verbal) taken from Joseph Peters who was mate of the “Deux Charles”.

Arrival at Mauritius from Rodrigues with 4 native women and three children and a whale boat containing one native woman and two men. The women being natives from Van Diemen’s Land. One man being English (Taylor) the other an Otahitian who had been left on the Isle of Rodrigues by the “Hunter” on her voyage to this port in May last with a promise to return for them. Finding the Hunter did not return they availed themselves of the arrival of the Deux Charles to come to this island. I have therefore to beg I may be favoured with his Exc. Command how these persons are to be disposed of until the appointed time offers of conveying them back to New Holland.

* The English sailor having in his possession a document which proves his having been embarked from Pt, Dalrymple on board a vessel in 1823. He may be employed in some vessel sailing from the port if it should be his Exc. Pleasure.

Ref: CSO1/121, p. 51, Tasmanian Archives.
Appendix 6.

Interview with Lynette Knapp. 30/03/10, Bob’s Place.

Lynette’s great grandmother was called Mederran, ‘Daughter of Mullet’. ‘Mederr’ or ‘mederrong’ means mullet and the suffix ‘an’ means ‘of mother’ or ‘of queen’. Mokare’ was Mederran’s uncle. Her mother was his sister.

She said that the Nyungar system of governance was circular. People would sit in a circle and talk. They’d go back to their own people and confer with them to see what everyone wanted and then they’d go back to the circle with that information and talk again. This, she said, is very different to the British system of hierarchy, where groups of people at the bottom are large and power trickles upwards, with the people involved getting less and less until the final decision-making involves one person, right at the top.

She said the dot paintings show this system of governance; all the campfires and the people sitting around them. But that also dot paintings are the product of astral travelling – country viewed from the sky.

She said “Nyungar people have no view of the future,” when trying explain the cut through their culture that happened when white people got here. “It spins me out that any Aboriginal people have savings at all. They don’t look forwards. Everything is for today and today only. You get something and you share it around until it’s all gone. Comes from take what’s there, at the time.”

She said the only hierarchical system in Nyungar culture is of totems – one per family or skin group. The top of the totems are the birds of prey, then the birds, then the tree dwelling animals, then the animals that run around on the ground, then the snakes and lizards. The sea dwelling creatures are next but they are a different class of totems.

Mineng are a coastal people. Miruneng (Murnang?) are whale people, from South Australia. Miruneng and Mineng people are closely associated through the coast. I think they have the same skin groups. Lynette and her sister’s boys were initiated there and then they went up to Alice Springs and back down again.

She said that Jimmy Newell’s wife was a Tasmanian Aborigine. His descendants in Albany are called Newell with two I’s. Also, the Fitzpatrick’s are descendants of Jimmy Newell. She hasn’t got the heart to tell them they are not Nyungar, but Pallawah. She said the young secretary at D.I.A. is a descendant of Jimmy Newell and his Pallawah wife. Jimmy Newell was Dorothea Newell’s brother and was on Middle Island with Black Jack Anderson, who had several Pallawah women with him, in the 1830’s. (Skins). I mentioned this book to Lynette and she said she is not a reader but what she knows is from oral history.

We talked about her building some fish traps over near Quaranup, around the corner. She said the D.I.A had rung her to say they’d found some fish traps, possibly they’d been there for a long time and just uncovered with sand. She said, “Oh yes, me and my daughters built them.” There is a cave there that I visit from time to time. She said it might have been a women’s place. She said there were nine burials on the hill just up from there. How you can tell is by the crescent shaped cairns. They are placed a small distance from the grave, so the bad spirits fly over and don’t find the body. It reminded me of people camping in the desert who light a fire and then sleep fifty metres away, so they can avoid enemies.
People were buried in the foetal position with their heads facing north and their faces towards the rising sun. Their feet pointed towards wherever was home.
I told her about trying to write the characters of Moennan and Manilyan as complete, whole people and that sometimes we as white writers create Aboriginal people as ‘other’ because we don’t want to trespass. She said, “Us people are just the same as you. Write it how you feel it would be for you.”
I asked her what would happen to a woman if she was stolen away and lived with another man, especially a white man. She said that for those women, that cut into their culture would have been a cut they had never known before. “These men took those women for one thing – comfort. He wouldn’t have meant anything to her and she wouldn’t have meant anything to him because there was no love in it. It was just like going to the toilet for them (the men). And they didn’t see the women as being human. They saw them as inferior to that. That’s how everyone saw Aboriginal people back then.”
When the women returned to their people, they were probably welcomed, Lynette said. Lockyer’s journal entry of the day when the kidnapped women were returned, confirms this. But if they had been betrothed to someone beforehand, then after they’d been welcomed, it was up to the men to decide whether or not she would be punished. Many women didn’t survive this. They got speared and died.

As she left, Lynette said she wanted to read what I’d written so far. Then she said, “You got my permission to write about those girls. What you’re doing is a good thing.”