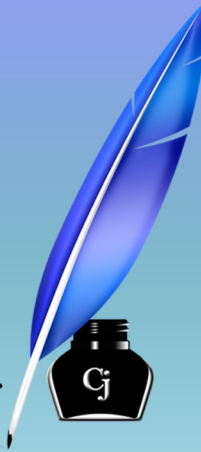


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Fear The 'Other': An Early Response of Non Indigenous to Indigenous Australians

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The study seeks to explore the role of fear in 'Othering' a whole group of native individuals of Australia and simulating the formulaic constructions of contrived myth of colonial tales. Using texts, particularly Charles Rowcroft's *Tales of the Colonies: Or, The Adventures of an Emigrant* (1843), from the colonial period of Australia, it will demonstrate that Australian literature is inscribed and re-inscribed with the representation of Aborigines as ferocious natives and bloodthirsty barbarians. The literary representations of fearful Aborigine play pivotal role in creating, permeating and perpetuating the psychic fear of 'other' and these portraits are sufficiently nuanced and elusive to sustain and exacerbate the process of 'othering'. The more animalistic brutalities on the part of the natives are portrayed, the more fear and hatred are accumulated in the form of ingrained prejudices, etched on the oppressors' memory aggravating the distance and leading further away from the possibility of assimilation with the 'others'. Changes have been attempted (in some resisting writings of Aboriginal authors) since the date of early representations, however the issues identified remain current and to a large extent unresolved. White representation of Aboriginal characters is seen as retained fragments of the deep-rooted psychic fear of other race created and inseminated in the social texts of the early settlers.

"A foreigner, returning from a trip to the Third Reich
When asked who really ruled there, answered:
Fear."

- Bertolt Brecht, *The Anxieties of the Regime*

Perhaps the above quoted lines perfectly encapsulate the ruling power of 'Fear', which is obliquely promoted in all literary discourse of colonial past. Colonial literature of the world mirrors the picture of a fearful 'Other' and by stressing this fierceness of colonized people as animalistic savage, creates a psychic fear of (an)other race. This psychic fear serves as a catalytic agent to permeate and perpetuate the binary divisions or binary relationships between colonizer and colonized resulting of with a purpose to 'Other', stereotype, marginalize, and almost negate the colonized people. The portrayal of colonized others in the form of stereotyped fictional characters and the projection of fear through the animalistic brutalities of these characters became a legitimate objective of colonial literature. This is another way of insinuating the idea of a degenerate species of man- a beastly species, under the guise of entertainment. Disgust for the species increases steadily as the narrative of fear proceeds. Thus the process of 'othering' is a literary production which is deliberately sown, watered and deeply rooted in the literary seed-bed of colonial history. Linda Miley rightly said about colonialism:

It is important to remember that colonialism wasn't just a physical movement; it was also a textual one. (9)

The concept of 'Other' was basic to colonialism and the history of Australia was no exception. The fundamental discourse of early writings of white settlers in Australia was

centered around the binary constructions of civilized / primitive, self / other, advanced / backward, white / black, human / beast, etc. The goal of this writing is to study the white representation of Aborigine 'other' in Australian colonial literature. Analyzing the theme, the content, the context and the time in which those writings were created, my study draws a critical thinking to the fact that the stereotypes about the Aborigines, being cruel cannibals and animalistic other is not simply the 'inability to understand and accept an unfamiliar culture' but a conscious mechanism of fear and willing ability to other and stereotype the Aborigine with the purpose to marginalize and master. This was the desire to negate the identity of a whole group where the narrative tented to be typical and exemplary and succeeded in conveying the writer's personal attitude and interest. The effects of these works were cumulative, creating and perpetuating a lively impression of psychic fear through the constructions of stereotyped (aboriginal) fictional characters.

Such constructions and representations of the 'Other' have been deeply rooted in past cultural practices and have become strongly entrenched social myths. (Miley 11)

Being the repository of the conservative cultural concept, early white colonial literature of Australia promotes a fancied and fictionalized picture of fearsome Aborigine. In this literary discourse, these indigenous characters are stereotyped as violent and treacherous savages; ugly and uncivilized primitives; brutal cannibals; naked like animals, to be killed for avoiding the bloody threat towards white civilization. These animalistic descriptions are 'the colonial projection of fear of the other' which is located in these Aboriginal blacks. By projecting these fabricated brutality and contemptible savagery of Aboriginal characters in colonial fictions - also in the historical records of everyday experience of the soldiers, settlers and convicted criminals - the non Aboriginal writers were successful in creating and stressing a psychic fear of a fearsome other in the colonial mind. Carmel Bird opines:

The guiding emotional response of white to black in Australia has historically been fear, both physical and psychological. Such fear often has a paralysing and mutilating effect on the realities of relationships of any kind, and when the psychic fear of another race is located in the heart of the oppressor of that race, the twists and turns of personal and bureaucratic response are likely to be very complex indeed.

The division between savagery on the part of 'other' and civility on the part of white, where the fear factor is instrumental in bringing about no end to the conflict, the early white settlers of Australia defined themselves against those they colonized, excluded and marginalized. Isolating cruel and predatory instincts and projecting them on the natives, they direct themselves to maintain a kind of distance. Thus the literary representations of indigenous people in the 19th century fictions as brutal savage practicing cannibalism or threatening the well-being of the non indigenous world by their cruelty and violence were inscribed with the psychic fear of another race, which was deep-rooted, ingrained and later re-inscribed in Australian literature.

For this moment I can remember the definition and working of fear and its continuation in the human mind proposed by the novelist Amitav Ghosh in his novel "*The Hungry Tide*":

...fear was not – contrary to what was often said – an instinct. It was

something learnt, something that accumulated in the mind, through knowledge, experience and upbringing... (322)

... it's the fear that protects you,... it's what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles. (244)

Apart from the early (19th century) stereotypical representation of Aboriginal people in different social texts, sometimes a few contemporary non indigenous writers keep them 'alive' through the continuation of this 'learnt', 'accumulated' fear. Their 'experience and upbringing' in this psychic fear often finds oblique references in their work of art. For example, Kate Grenville's portrayal of aboriginal characters in her novel "*The Secret River*" (2005) proves that something runs in her vein unknowingly and unconsciously. Her description of a young aboriginal man demotes him to the status of an animal:

He came up so close that Thornhill could smell his thick animal scent ... (147).

Samsler (a character in the novel), a settler reported the brutality and act of cannibalism of aboriginal people that could be conceived of in a white man's thinking and enhanced the settlers' deep-seated anxiety and fear of the aboriginal animality:

They had scalped two men alive up at South Creek, ... and taken a child from its cradle, slit its little throat and sucked it dry ... They had cut open a white woman, ... down at the Cowpastures. Had got the baby out from her womb and eaten it (Grenville 157).

In the novel "*Remembering Babylon*" (1993) by David Malouf, Gemmy's nakedness and his crawling "about with his nose in the dust", raising "himself on all fours" and led "about like a dog" solidifies and reinforces the question of the animalistic 'other'. After being cast away ashore onto the wild Australian land, the child, Gemmy was struck by the "the smell [Aborigines] gave off ...[a]nimal, unfamiliar" (23).

One of the earliest novels to feature Aboriginal characters was Charles Rowcroft's *Tales of the Colonies: Or, The Adventures of an Emigrant* (1843). Rowcroft was born in London in 1798 and he was educated at Eton. In 1821, he became a free settler in Van Diemen's Land, and returned to England in 1843. He also became editor of a magazine. The novel of Rowcroft captures hazardous experiences of the early settlers against the backdrop of unacquainted other land. Aborigines and bushrangers are inseparable parts of those hazards and they are viewed with the colour of the 'ideological lenses'. In his myth, if it can be described as colonial myth, by limiting human attitudes of the Aboriginal characters and by creating beastly creature out of them, Rowcroft produced the restricting dimensions of the settlers' attitude and fringed the natives within the contrived images. The *Tales* told the story of the settlers' early life in the colonies, which was unusual enough, and went on to recount the terrifying violence of Aborigines and Rowcroft achieved his effect by cumulative interaction of ideas expressed in successive set views. He remained powerfully persuasive in order to implicate his readers in the impressions and emotions he was continually striving to communicate.

The journal form of the text is meant to serve the colonial purpose to familiarize the new settlers with the unfamiliar land, its situation and disastrous experiences caused by bushfires

or the attacks by the aborigines and bushrangers. The sense of ownership on an unoccupied or “waste” land (*terra nullius*), exploitation of its resources and subjugation of its natives under imperial-colonial-economic power are reflected in the novel’s lengthy preface, where the author establishes the reasons and advantages for ‘taking up land in the colonies’.

As the title reads, this is the tale told by the colonizers and surely about a few aboriginal characters. The character of a notorious black man Mosquito is depicted and many instances of butchery are exemplified to confirm the image of the violent savage. The name of Mosquito is certainly not (ab)original one and the naming suggests and ensures his animal status and he can easily become or remain someone new, someone different, and someone other. He is the leader of the violent or ‘dangerous’ natives and a member of fierce, vindictive species of the mythical land of wild Aborigines and wild animals. Rowcroft is determined to construct and propagate this typical version of the aborigines as ghoulish savages that he describes them as: ‘treacherous devils’, ‘grave-looking black’, ‘unthinking beasts’, ‘soulless creature’, ‘demons’, ‘rascals’ and used adjectives for them as ‘infernal’, ‘hideous’ etc. Even the text holds a long discussion of white settlers on to how catch and kill the natives and their discussion draws attention to the inhuman and abominable behaviour of aborigines for the sake of legitimization of an uncomfortable truth. Most noteworthy is the title of a chapter – “A savage has a soul” or may be reworded as “A savage has a soul ?/!” [Punctuations are mine]. The fiction is replete with the first person narrator’s thinking, feeling and response as an early settler in the Van Diemen’s Land. His words effectively marshal the knowledge of despicable blacks that can be conceived of in a coloniser’s mind.

“The natives of Van Diemen’s Land,” said I, “seem to be out one degree removed from the animal creation ...” (304).

The white narrator did not labour to disguise his psychology. His own mind openly spoke about his fear generated in experiencing the traumatic realities of the land. He described every event and evidence to suggest that the dangers faced by him are all real. The *Tales* were told with a stark particularization which achieved a convincing clarity and compelled the readers into attention to the precise nature and meaning of the strange things that befell the narrator.

The narrator was “a little curious to observe” the “morning’s repast” of the natives and his curiosity was satisfied with the “ceremony”. Moreover the author’s personal wish was satisfied with his clear delineations of savagery that indicated their ordering was far from civilization:

A tall and slender young lady, with a ragged blanket gracefully festooned about her person, appeared with a net slung round her neck, in which was a large lump of gum. She handed this lump of gum, about the size of a small cocoa-nut, to one of the men. Another lady produced an opossum, which looked to me something between a dead cat and a squirrel. The gum and the opossum were thrown on the fire, the hair on the outside of the latter and whatever it had in its inside helping to its relish. After the gum and the opossum had fizzed and crackled and smoked a little time, one of the party snatched out the opossum from the fire, and plunging his face into its entrails, enjoyed himself with the delicacy for a brief space, and then threw back the remains on the fire; another of the party snatched it up, and tearing the limbs asunder and picking off the choicest bits, chucked the

half-picked bones to the ladies of the community, who stood behind them, and who received these testimonials of affection with much submissiveness and respect, and with considerable gratification (38-39).

My writing brings to attention that repeatedly Rowcroft uses animal images to describe the natives and referring to these entire images, he placed a label on and defined their animal nature as an instinctive set of characteristics, something to be afraid of. Some beastly attitudes of the natives are intensified with the help of such expressions as – ‘eating voraciously’ in ‘utter silence’ ‘without speaking or noticing’; food ‘lay in a good stock’.

It is to be observed that the repast which I have slightly described passed in utter silence, the natives eating voraciously of the singed opossum and the hot lumps of gum without speaking or noticing us. (39)

"They do eat enormously," said my companion. "Perhaps it is, that, as their food is very precarious, they think it prudent to lay in a good stock when they can get it ..." (42)

The appearance, behaviour and mental capacity of the black natives are more akin to animals than to humans which are deliberately stressed in the novel. The way they kill animals to eat is shown something similar to the way they may turn on white settlers as to make of them a rich meal or kill for their natural entertainment only.

In chapter V the New Norfolk man ,an early settler, suggests:

...they're treacherous devils. Don't let your gun out of your hand, and don't show any fear of them (38).

The narrator did not labour to disguise his own psychology. He described every event and every story as exemplary evidence to suggest that the dangers faced by him are all real. His own mind openly spoke about his fear generated in experiencing traumatic realities. He told stories simulating the manner and formulaic ideas of colonial tales. Following a black native in the wild land is one of those stories. On one occasion the narrator was ‘compelled by the necessity’ to embark in ‘an expedition with the New Norfolk settler after his lost sheep’. They were guided by a ‘black rascal’. The particular expedition helped to focus on the fantasies entertained by those outsiders in relation to the natives, which were impregnated much with hatred and fear. The fear of the narrator in following the savage tracker is projected vividly:

...I'm quite sure he's only leading us to a proper place for a mob of these devils to set on us, and devour us,--the Lord help us! To think that this should be the end of my mother's son! To be eaten up by those black villains--just chucked on the fire, and before we're half done, to have them set their teeth in us. (44)

It seems that the *Tale* is scarred all over with the mark of savage fierceness of predatory animal and is built to imprint the mark on the white psychology.

This fierceness of aboriginal characters is stereotyped and serves as primary channel through which the historical conception of ‘other’ is transmitted from one generation to the next. *Tales of the Colonies* is a closely reasoned and brilliantly phrased argument in which

Rowcroft builds up, from his analysis of aborigine, a tradition of fear as essentially instrument for inseminating perpetual conflict between white and black. This tradition of colonial tales where the early settlers' experience is transformed by the fusion of the author's personal feeling into an enchanting picture of fancied evils, is often found still echoing in present time, though a few modern Australian writers employed new perspectives and thus enable the demythologizing of disgraceful past with colourful exhortation. *Tales of the Colonies* mirrors the role of literature to create and promote a particular set of beliefs, images, ideas and values, all of which are to solidify the power relation of maintaining 'status quo' for the colonizers against the unfamiliar 'other'. Rowcroft deliberately depicts a picture of aborigine as a reprobate, degenerate and irreversible barbarian with a covetous desire for 'white blood' – a picture of fear of the 'Other' to sustain "the foundation myth of settlement" and to "exacerbate the distance of the 'Other'".

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