

Frenzy: The Story of the Mount Rennie  
Outrage

Tom Gilling

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## CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

This thesis consists of two parts: a creative project, entitled *Frenzy: The Story of the Mount Rennie Outrage*, and a dissertation, entitled *No end of a yarn: Reading the Mount Rennie Outrage*.

The first part is a narrative history of events that occurred in Sydney over a period of four months, from 9<sup>th</sup> September 1886, when 16-year-old Mary Jane Hicks was raped by members of a larrikin mob near Waterloo, until 8<sup>th</sup> January 1887, when four of the teenage rapists were hanged. Most of the material I have researched to write this history is derived from three key sources: original records of the crime and subsequent trial held at State Records in Western Sydney; original records from the archives of the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services at Silverwater Jail; and contemporary newspaper reports held in various forms at the State Library of New South Wales.

My dissertation is a study of how the Outrage has been interpreted, both directly and indirectly, by participants, journalists, politicians, novelists and others. It suggests the existence of two contradictory impulses - a desire to sensationalise the facts and a contrary desire to suppress them – that, to varying degrees, have shaped every reading of the Outrage. It examines these impulses in the light of social and sexual anxieties of the period as reflected, especially, in journalism and popular fiction. It proposes two “authorised” readings of the case — as the tragedy of Mary Jane Hicks or, alternatively, as the tragedy of the youths hanged or imprisoned for raping her — and asks whether other, more flexible, interpretations are possible. It ends with some reflections about the wider processes by which history is read and written.