

Title: A Creature's Tale

Accompanying exegesis: Exploring otherness through the human-animal relationship

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Degree: Master of Arts in Writing (Research), UTS

Year: 2011

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it 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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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank UTS for my place in the Master of Arts in Writing (Research) program and my principal supervisor, Dr Gabrielle Carey, for her support and advice.

I also thank my earlier supervisors, Dr Catherine Cole, who provided positive feedback when I had little more than the germ of an idea, and Dr Paula Hamilton for her input on historical details.

Many people supported me through this project. The eclectic collection of writers who form *The Beak* writing group contributed much-valued feedback on my writing and shared many convivial dinners. Thanks to Jon for passing on useful research material on whaling and the co-operation between killer whales and humans at Twofold Bay.

Also, many thanks to Melissa Beit for lending me a copy of Roland Robinson's collection of Aboriginal stories, *The Man Who Sold His Dreaming*, in which he recorded the whaling story of Percy Mumbulla of Wallaga Lake. This story provided much inspiration for my fictional interpretation of whaling and life at Twofold Bay in the 1800s.

I am indebted to my parents and sisters for our many holidays together on the far south coast of NSW. Those times planted the seed for this story and for my love of that part of the world.

Finally, I am especially grateful to my children, Nyssa Miller and Tasman Miller, who read my work along the way, encouraged me to keep writing, and put up with me while I did so.

Abstract

This creative thesis and exegesis explores the experience of the outsider and the concept of ‘otherness’. In the creative thesis, a novel titled *A Creature’s Tale*, the experience of otherness is many faceted – it is the otherness that separates different races and cultures, that which separates white Australian settlers and Aborigines and, most extreme of all, the otherness that separates humans and other species. At its heart the story is about the links between all animals, human and non-human.

The novel, narrated by a now deceased dog, tells the story of life in the 1850s and 1860s in a whaling community on the far south coast of NSW and in Kiandra, a gold mining town in the Southern Alps. Through the perspective of the dog we hear the story of the two young protagonists, Hannah Conway and Ah See Quong, both displaced and both outsiders. The dog is also an observer of the various disparate communities of colonial Australia, the indigenous people, the white settlers and the many immigrants working in the goldfields. Through the narrator’s commentary the reader is given an insight into these communities.

The protagonists in the story struggle to find their place in the Australia of the mid 19th century. Hannah Conway is the daughter of entrepreneur and pioneer Arthur Conway and after the death of her mother she is brought to Conway Town, a half built whaling town on the shores of Twofold Bay. She is left to her own devices much of the time and finds solace in painting and drawing, for which she has considerable talent. Ah See Quong is a young boy when his father dies in the Kiandra goldfields, leaving him alone in a strange land. He is taken in by the local schoolmaster and life is relatively stable for a short while. With the death of the schoolmaster, Jimmy, as he becomes known, leaves Kiandra to make his own way, ending up eventually at Twofold Bay.

By the time Hannah and Jimmy meet, Arthur Conway’s investments and many ventures have gone sour and life at Conway Town is beginning to unravel. Central to the story is the co-operation between humans and killer whales, or Orca, in the hunting of the various species of whales that visit Twofold Bay. The success of the land based whaling venture is dependent on the intense working relationship between the whalers and the killer whales, the killers rounding up the humpbacks as they pass Twofold Bay and herding them into the bay so that the whalers can

finish them off. So close is the relationship that the Orcas even tell the whalers when they need to come out in their boats, continuously thumping their tails on the surface of the water to summon the men. This working relationship originates with the indigenous whalers who pass on the knowledge to the white whaling crews. It is the refusal of Arthur Conway to acknowledge the importance of this relationship that is his undoing, and after the killing of one of the killer whales by his white crew, the story comes to a dramatic conclusion.

The accompanying exegesis explores the concept of otherness through the human/animal relationship. The introduction poses some questions that surround this relationship, such as why humans feel compelled to both understand and to dominate other species. In Part I these questions are then examined through the prism of a dog-focused business, Café Bones, and also through the legal system as it relates to animals. Part II examines some of the ways that both writers and philosophers have tried to unravel the mystery of animals and their ‘otherness’.