

# I

## A Prehistory of Frank Thomas Moorhouse Jr

‘The limits of our narrative are the limits of our experience.’ Frank Moorhouse added that handwritten line to the typescript of a talk he gave to the Nowra Historical Society in the late 1980s. Frank argued in the talk that ‘the need to be shown how to see is related to the need to have the right words or a new vocabulary to accurately describe and visually catalogue what we see’. Regarding Australian prehistory, Frank said: ‘The Aborigines as we know covered the landscape with stories, dance, and song and painting to make it theirs – narratives which were maps, history, archives, and mythology – the narratives of why we exist.’ To which he added: ‘Those of us who arrived after 1788 are still making our stories, songs and dances to help us to be at home here.’

In another set of typescript notes, Frank outlined what he called the ‘Characteristics of the Australian Style’, the ways literary imagination contributed to the making of these narratives. He suggested a fourfold historical sequence: an initial fractured attachment to the British and European cultural tradition, a fracture welded with storytelling, a storytelling deeply encrusted by the weld, resulting in ‘a storytelling which is about the need for storytelling’. Frank was deeply concerned with finding his place within that fractured

tradition, the better to orient himself towards his own experiences, his own literary imagination, in order to plot a path forward.

At the time he gave this talk to the Nowra Historical Society, he was also researching a book about the League of Nations. In an interview he described how the book he was working on was motivated by the idea of looking back at the generations who lived before he was born. 'It is part of the thesis that our lives, or parts of our lives, are formed before we are born,' he said. 'In some ways we are a walking archive of antiquated beliefs and genetic and cultural baggage . . . So this book looks at the archival ghosts we carry with us.'

It is necessary, in order to adequately introduce the subject of *this* book, to examine the archival ghosts Frank Moorhouse carried within himself, to consider the constituent parts of his life and times that were formed before he was born, if only to show how he had later been haunted, had exorcised or had come to terms with these 'archival ghosts'.

Much of the material for this introductory chapter – fragmented, overlapping, seemingly unrelated historical stories – is drawn from Frank's own archives, both public and private, including tape-recorded interviews he made with his parents, Frank Osborne Moorhouse Sr and Purthanry Thanes Mary Moorhouse (née Cutts), various political, legal and technological histories, together with cultural and familial genealogies, collected and consulted over decades, and a marginalia of books and pamphlets he read throughout his life, in an attempt to understand the world before he was born, the world he had been born into and how culture is transmitted from generation to generation. Additional material comes from the private archives of his family, supplemented by scholarly sources only in order to corroborate and provide context for this otherwise impressionistic prehistory of Frank Thomas Moorhouse Jr.

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The titular heroine of Charlotte Brontë's first novel, *Jane Eyre* (1847), in fleeing her past, spends a cold night on the West Yorkshire moors,

before being rescued by the inhabitants of Marsh End. 'Some calls it Marsh End, and some calls it Moor House,' Jane is told. And for the rest of her tale she refers to her new home as 'Moor House'.

In reality, there were many Moor Houses in West Yorkshire, and 'Moorhouse' – meaning 'the house on the moor' – was a common family name in that part of rural England in the early nineteenth century. One figure was John Midgley Moorhouse, born in 1807, in Keighley, two miles north of Haworth, where Charlotte Brontë would be born nine years later, followed soon after by her sisters. What was uncommon about this Moorhouse was that his surname, against custom, was passed on to him by his mother, Mary Moorhouse. She became pregnant to a man named John Midgley, who died before their son was born; they had not married. John Midgley Moorhouse grew to become a farmer. In 1835, he married Hannah Cook, and over the next fifteen years she bore him nine children. The fifth, born in 1843, was christened David Addeman Moorhouse.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Earth, a penal colony had been established by the British. Sailing south of Botany Bay, the explorer George Bass made landfall and, noting the shoals of sand along the coast, called the area 'Shoals Haven'. He later reported to the governor that it would make a fine 'nursery for cattle'.

In 1822, taking advantage of a colonial land-grant system, a man named Alexander Berry was assigned 10,000 acres in the Shoalhaven, occupying the traditional lands of the Yuin nation, constituting thirteen tribal groups. The original inhabitants told a story of a great deluge, when the floodwaters were said to have reached higher than the mountains. Such stories indicated areas of relative safety. A creek off the Shoalhaven River supplied fresh water, and the nearby area was high and flat enough for a serviceable campsite. 'Ngurra', meaning 'camp', was corrupted by the Europeans to become 'Nowra'. But the flood warnings were unheeded, the intruders having to learn by their own mistakes. Berry failed with various crops, mainly due to rust disease and flooding. He had more luck with dairy cattle, as Bass had predicted. By September 1824, surplus butter was sent by ship to Sydney, followed by cheese in December.

Another settlement opened up 75 miles (120 kilometres) inland, along the Shoalhaven River, a village later known as Braidwood. Land grants were awarded to settlers. They were assigned convicts, to work and occupy the land, in order to validate the grants. One convict, arriving in 1830, was Thomas Keivel. Born in Somerset, England, in 1797, he married Patience Sidwell. They had six children. The first, Caroline, was born in Wiltshire, England, in 1825. The family was illiterate. Five years later, Thomas Keivel was convicted of robbery and sentenced to twenty-one years' transportation. His family followed him to Braidwood. In 1841, sixteen-year-old Caroline Keivel married a 34-year-old man named James Lynn. Her parents acted as witnesses.

Another Braidwood convict, John Boden Yates, had also arrived recently. Born in 1812, he could read and write. A shoemaker by trade, he was convicted of larceny and sentenced to seven years' transportation. He was assigned to work for Dr Robert Huntley, a Quaker. Huntley had come from Cork, Ireland, and was travelling with a 25-year-old Irishwoman named Mary O'Driscoll, who was bonded to Huntley as a housemaid and cook.

In 1838, Huntley's maid married his convict. A year later, John Boden Yates was accused of obscenity by Dr Huntley, and charged by the local magistrate. Huntley testified that he had witnessed Yates accidentally stepping on a dog, exclaiming: 'Damn your b— eyes' (the language was censored in the court documents). He also witnessed Yates in the kitchen using an expression considered unprintable in the court papers, referenced only as '——'. The court reprimanded Yates, but he escaped the lash.

Prohibitions against obscenity and blasphemy, and the use of the lash, were only some of the measures deployed to maintain moral order in a community that was predominantly male and criminal. In February 1787, Governor Arthur Phillip had written to the colonial secretary, Lord Sydney, stating 'there are two crimes that would merit death; murder and sodomy'. By the time David Addeman Moorhouse was born in 1843, at least ten men had been officially executed, four in New South Wales and six in Van Diemen's Land, for the crime of sodomy.

In the Shoalhaven, new lease-holding arrangements saw Berry's land broken up into more manageable family plots, given over to a growing influx of settlers. Berry built family houses on the plots, in exchange for half the produce from each plot being returned to his estate. This division of labour increased the production of butter and cheese.

Families poured their daily milk into large, shallow dishes, where it was left to stand for several hours. The cream was skimmed off the top and put into wooden churns, turned by hand to create butter. Wooden kegs, carrying the butter and cheese, were sent by ship to Sydney. Hygiene and quality were a constant problem: the butter and cheese were washed with whatever water was at hand, and heavily salted. The transport kegs, which were reused over and over, were unsanitary, and the scrapings in the wood ran rank in the summer months.

In 1846, local production was increased by milking cows twice a day, instead of only each morning.

There was no underlying harmony of interests in the colonies. The patterns and codes imported from Britain fractured against the shoals of this strange reality. Conflicts occurred between the colonists and the land, and between the colonists and the first inhabitants of the land, permanently intruded upon. Conflicts occurred within the penal system, between convicts and gaolers, and afterwards between the emancipated seeking equal rights and status and the freeborn and voluntary immigrants. No hard lines existed within these conflicts, wives and children travelling voluntarily to be with their convict or emancipated husbands, convict parents giving birth to freeborn children.

Such was the case with the convict Thomas Keivel and his free wife and children, the first two (including Caroline) born in England, the remaining four in New South Wales. Complications compounded as new generations arrived. As in 1841, when John Boden Yates and Mary had a son, Joseph Thomas Yeates (his last name changed perhaps to distance him from his convict heritage).

Or in 1847, when Caroline and James Lynn had a daughter, Fanny Lynn.

Until 1824, there were only four government newspapers, after which independent newspapers were permitted. They remained subject to various forms of control and censorship, which kept their views within proscribed bounds. They required a licence to operate, for example, which could be withdrawn at will. Libel charges became a useful legal tool to bankrupt precarious editors, shuttering publications in their infancy. The first independent newspaper in 1824, *The Australian* was also the first to have its publisher charged with sedition. *The Australian* never reached more than 800 in circulation, and closed its doors in 1848 due to loss of subscription revenue.

Out of this foment came something of an official narrative, enough to sustain a governing elite and local commercial interests, as long as the threads were not picked over. Beyond this, a much richer oral storytelling culture emerged, one not requiring literacy. It began as anecdotes, spread as rumours, shared as yarns and ended up in song. Cultural fractures welded into simplistic moralities, pitching ordinary people against colonial governments, itinerant working men against the 'squattocracy'.

Between the official narrative of government decrees and newspaper columns and these unofficial oral subplots was a space in which literary fiction and poetry could emerge. Newspapers serialised imported novels, but there were few local publishers, editors or readers who might support the development of a domestic literary culture. Writing fiction and poetry was an individual and private pursuit, among a particular class, and only made public through private means. This accounts for the first collection of short stories in the colonies, *Our First Lieutenant, and Fugitive Pieces, in Prose* by David Burn (Hobart Town, 1842), followed by *Tales for the Bush* by Mary Vidal (Sydney, 1845). Periodicals would sprout and wilt after several issues. The editors were amateurs, enthusiasts driven by passion, quickly exhausted. They did, however, establish a long tradition of not paying contributors.

In Great Britain in 1710, under the Statute of Anne, an author's ownership over their work was first recognised, allowing them to

share with printers and booksellers the economic gains from selling their work. The original purpose of the statute was to encourage writing and foster an intellectual and literary culture in England. It was only superseded by various copyright acts, in 1814 and 1842, extending each time the copyright protection of a work – eventually it covered the lifetime of the author plus seven years, or a minimum of forty-two years.

This recognition of an author's copyright stretched throughout the Empire – but only on condition that the work was first published in Britain. Such laws, in their colonial context, became an instrument for promoting imperial ambitions and loyalty to Britain, at the cost of developing a local publishing infrastructure. The effect was to inhibit an Australian intellectual and literary culture from forming. The books of Burn and Vidal, for example, were not covered by these acts.

The *Literary Copyright Act 1842* met with opposition among British publishers, whose businesses were built upon the practice of exporting into the colonies cheap editions of out-of-copyright works (from recently deceased authors) and uncopyrighted works (usually those not first published in Britain, including foreign translations). Factoring in the cost of paying an author led to an increase in production costs, and so the price of books to readers. The new act authorised the customs division of each colony to search for, seize and destroy pirated books or unauthorised foreign reprints. An unintended consequence was the creation of competing book markets: a black market for cheaper imports that eluded customs, and a secondary market for second-hand books. Sales in these markets brought no economic benefit to the original authors.

One response to this situation was the introduction of 'colonial editions' in 1843. These were books published in a uniform series and imported into the colonies. Although they were the same titles available to the domestic British market, colonial editions were cheaper, printed on a lighter-weight paper – which lowered printing and freight costs – and bound in 'colonial cloth', a darkly dyed strawboard or esparto cardboard. Their purpose was to

enforce British copyright throughout the Empire, and to counter the importation of foreign and pirated books. In the background was a publishing regime selling such books wholesale to colonial importers at 50 per cent less than the cost of the same works to English booksellers, with a generously extended six-month payment period.

Until then, the lack of publishing infrastructure in the colonies could be seen as the outcome of benign neglect. Colonial assemblies were more focused on maintaining a convict system, developing an agricultural base to sustain that system, and then managing the transition from penal colony to industrious free settlement in the service of Britain. Even so, other colonies such as Canada, New Zealand and India had during the 1830s and 1840s created local copyright legislation, to foster local literary cultures. The Australian colonial authorities persistently thwarted similar attempts and would continue to do so for decades to come.

The successful introduction of legislation recognising and protecting patents, beginning in 1852 in New South Wales, suggested that colonial assemblies understood how incentives for the development of local technical and scientific inventions were linked to the legal protection of those inventions. So when those selfsame assemblies rejected attempts to foster an equivalent publishing infrastructure, it can only be considered as conscious opposition to the development of any local literary culture that might deviate from imperial British ideology.

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John Midgley Moorhouse travelled to New Zealand from Liverpool in 1860, at age fifty-three. With him was his eldest son, nineteen-year-old William. Passing through Melbourne, they heard talk of a gold rush, and so soon after arriving in New Zealand they returned to the Australian colonies, William staying to try his luck on the goldfields. His father returned alone to England.

Gold was also discovered in Braidwood in 1851 – a year after the initial rush in Victoria – but this was quickly mined out. One man who followed the gold to Braidwood was Charles Isaac Watson.

Born in 1830 in Parramatta's Female Factory, Watson was the illegitimate son of a convict, Susannah Watson. He was an unsuccessful prospector, but when the gold rush receded, he turned to various newspaper ventures, establishing the Braidwood *Dispatch*, the Braidwood *Observer* and, in 1856, the Braidwood *Daily News* – the first daily newspaper outside Sydney.

In 1861, Watson married a local girl, Eliza Yeates, the older sister of Joseph Thomas Yeates. Their father, John Boden Yates, had died in 1861. Two years later, 22-year-old Joseph Yeates married fifteen-year-old Fanny Lynn, the daughter of James and Caroline Lynn.

Meanwhile, the dairy industry continued to grow in the Shoalhaven. Alexander Berry built a butter factory, using horsepower to churn the cream in bulk. In 1855, five years after the butter factory opened, the first freehold land sale occurred in Nowra. Berry, who had monopolised and benefitted from prior property arrangements, resisted this change.

Newspapers fanned the debate, with libel laws once more used to manage the fallout. In 1859, Reverend John Dunmore Lang wrote two letters to nearby newspapers, the *Mercury* and the *Kiama Examiner* – Shoalhaven did not have a newspaper of its own – arguing that Berry's land ought to be rezoned as a local government area. He referred to Berry as 'The Shoalhaven Incubus', to which Berry took exception, suing Lang and the newspapers in five separate libel actions. The financial damage shuttered the *Examiner* completely. But it was not enough to halt progress.

The Nowra Public School opened in 1862. By then, telegraphy had arrived in the area. Over the next decade, every colony had some form of telegraphy, and many were linked by this rapidly developing technology. Its installation across the landscape was in lockstep with the extension of the railway, the telegraph running along the same routes.

This had an enormous impact on the material and administrative development of the continent, the main users being government, business and the colonial press. By 1867, Charles and Eliza Watson moved to the Shoalhaven and launched the region's first newspaper, *The News, Shoalhaven*. They were involved in building

local communities and associated infrastructures. She joined the Ladies' Working Society. He participated in establishing the first savings bank and the first literary society, supported various sporting organisations and advocated for a public library. Following major floods in 1860, 1864, 1865 and 1870, a number of smaller townships folded, their residents migrating to Nowra, which grew accordingly. It was finally incorporated as a government town in 1871.

When the 1870 flood destroyed his stock of black ink, Watson printed the next edition of his newspaper using his reserves of green ink.

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An important work of local literature emerged from this period, Marcus Clarke's historical reconstruction of the brutality of the convict system and the origins of the Australian settlement. The first instalment of 'His Natural Life' was published in March 1870, in the pages of *The Australian Journal*, operated by Clarson, Massina & Co. in Victoria. It continued for two and a half years, reaching its conclusion in June 1872.

The year before Clarke's serial launched, Victoria introduced the first Australian copyright legislation. The Victorian *Copyright Act 1869* replicated Britain's *Literary Copyright Act 1842*, except in one detail: the territory in which copyright was protected was limited to the colony of Victoria. Such copyright was not recognised in any other colony in Australia, or indeed anywhere else in the British Empire.

Newspaper publishers retained the copyright of content they commissioned, meaning Clarson, Massina & Co. held the copyright in Clarke's serial novel – albeit only in the colony of Victoria. But a distinction could be made between the serial and book forms of a novel, if there were enough substantive changes between the two forms to establish each as a different work. So when Melbourne bookseller and publisher George Robertson agreed to publish Clarke's serial as a book, Clarke spent two years revising the manuscript, halving the word count and substantially altering the story.