

Chapter 6

Love, loss and 'going Home': the intimate lives of Victorian settlers

Maggie Mackellar

In May 1885, Arbella Winter Cooke received a letter from her son Sam, who was on an extensive honeymoon in Europe. He and his wife, Alice, were having a wonderful time and liking Florence 'very much' but, Sam assured his mother, she need not fear that 'it or any other place will charm us away from Victoria'. With a flourish, he added, 'We are looking forward to our return *Home*.'¹

Samuel Winter Cooke (1847–1929) had been taught from early childhood that the great European cities on his tour were the centres of civilisation and culture. From the cosmopolitan city of Florence, however, he wrote to reassure his mother that all he longed for was held in the word 'home'. Home was 'Murndal', a cattle and sheep station three days' ride from the flourishing city of Melbourne. In this brief sentence, Samuel poignantly asserted his yearning for the bush life.

In the past year, I have been reading the diaries and correspondence of the Western District squatting families of Victoria, selecting documents for publication. This material, held in the State Library of Victoria, offers some new perspectives on the idea of transnationalism.²

As I read through the letters and journals, my knowledge of the famous names of Victorian settlement was fleshed out and, rather than caricatures of dour Scotsmen, Irish gentry and colonial Englishmen made unimaginably wealthy on the golden plains of the Western District, I began to see evidence through the letters of the anxiety, uncertainty and pain of starting a new life on the other side of the world from their homeland. These settlers did not conceive of themselves as crossing the boundary of nations. They wrote, not as new Australians, nor even as Victorians, but simply as Britons, who had travelled a long way from their homeland to establish another home. They packed their culture along with the family silver and, no matter how far they travelled, they maintained their daily rituals: dressing for dinner, observing a Sabbath day of rest, tending their English gardens. They ventured forth into new worlds in hermetically sealed units, resisting change and cultural exchange; and rather than build a new reality, they strove to make the world around them resemble the home they had left behind. Notwithstanding their desires, the new world

that had accosted them with its strangeness gradually impinged on them, forcing them to change, forcing them into a new conception of what was home.³

In all the correspondence that flowed between the old world and the new, there was no sense of displacement across nations. There was distance, certainly, and there was transformation, but it did not change their ways of cultural interaction, nor did it necessarily change their sense of a national identity. For these settlers, the very idea of 'home' was so assured and fixed, so embedded in the British Empire, that it seems the very reverse of transnationalism, representing instead a monolithic British patriotism.

Paradoxically, it is for this very reason that the colonial experience is important to analyse as one of the more common forms of 'transnationalism' in the nineteenth century. As Patrick Wolfe argues:

Putting the definitional niceties of the term 'nation' aside for the moment and using it, in a vernacular sense, as something like 'country', both race and colonialism are inherently transnational phenomena...Even in internal-colonial contexts, at least one of the contending parties originally came from somewhere else, a fact that continues to demarcate the relationship.⁴

Figure 6.1: Murndal Homestead. Samuel Cooke inherited it from his uncle Samuel Pratt Winter in 1878.



Photographer unknown. Winter Cooke Family Papers, State Library of Victoria.

Colonialism, on this understanding, is inherently transnational, and the letters I have been reading offer ample evidence of how ideas of home were maintained and transformed in this context. In this chapter, I want to coax out the peculiarities of colonial experience and ask how theories of transnationalism can illuminate the settlers' ways of thinking about home. In particular, I argue that the way settlers wrote about home echoes not only their personal experience of migration; behind their words, we can hear another echo of the trauma suffered by the Aboriginal people they dispossessed. Though settlers recorded this displacement with indifference, their words capture, however incidentally, this other story. For in the shadow of the homes the white settlers built lay the ruins of the Gunditjmarra homes they had destroyed.

What is striking about the British colonies is how settlers in their letters and journals are so confident of 'home', even though the making of it is such a fraught process. The breathtaking assurance of colonialism almost precludes a discussion of transnationalism. In the colonists' confident assertions, home could be both England and Australia. One could leave home to travel Home without any need to explain the difference. Taking these articulations of home as self-evident, however, glides over the process and experience of dispossession, on both sides of the frontier. Closer examination reveals that the confidence of these assertions of home came at a cost. As Sara Wills has argued, not all the settlers were so settled.⁵

Reading my way through many of the letters collected from Western District families, I became aware that it was the intimate spaces between people that were stretched by the experience of migration, and it was these spaces they sought to bring back into being in their letters. Their words sought connections across distance as they struggled to make sense of an experience that changed them. In these moments, a more complicated picture emerges of the tangle of allegiances that exists in the colonial world around the concept of home.

Twelve-year-old Arbella Winter (1821–92) had been an orphan for three years when two of her brothers, Samuel and Trevor, left Ireland to seek their fortunes in Van Diemen's Land in 1833. As she grew up, she remained certain that her future lay with them. After convincing her guardian of her commonsense and earnest desire to join her brothers, she left Ireland at the age of eighteen with her oldest brother, George. A whirlwind shipboard romance saw her arrive in Van Diemen's Land an engaged woman, to be married two days after the couple left the ship. In 1839, however, Van Diemen's Land offered few prospects for an ambitious colonist, for the good grazing lands had been taken up long since. With her new husband, Cecil Pybus Cooke (1813–95), Arbella crossed Bass Strait and set off into the relative wilderness of the Wimmera District.⁶

Of Anglo-Irish gentry stock, Arbella must have been a formidable woman. After losing her first baby while living in Portland, she twice gave birth in later years

out on the run her husband took up. She cooked for the men, shepherded the sheep when required, drove cattle—and after years of this was forced to give up the run when it did not make a profit.⁷ The Cookes returned to the Portland district and, in 1849, took up another run at Lake Condon, not far from ‘Murndal’, the flourishing station of Arbella’s brother Samuel Pratt Winter. In 1854, the family made the decision to take their older two boys, William and Samuel, back to England to be educated. The boys were ten and eight years old. It cannot have been an easy decision. The expense was great, and the pain of parting from these two eldest children must have been intense. Through the next years, Arbella wrote regularly to her sons, but her letters contain only snippets of the loss she felt. There is a glimpse in the letter she wrote to Willie in 1856.⁸

Lake Condon,

9th October, 1856

You will be thirteen before you receive this letter growing out of the child into the youth, it is now a whole year since I saw your dear little faces, and you must think how often I long to see you and the only alleviation we could have for the pains of absence is to hear that you are improving in every way and that our pains and expenses are not thrown away. We were very glad to hear that you had risen in Latin, I hope too you are getting on in Arithmetic.⁹

It is loss mixed with the anxiety and guilt of an absent mother. Reading this collection of letters, I was struck by how Arbella struggled to hold on to an image of the boys she had left in England. She repeatedly reminded herself and them of why they were separated, and what they were gaining by being so far away.

It is in a letter from their father, Cecil, however, that we get a glimpse of what the boys were missing while ‘bettering’ themselves in England. Reading this letter draws more than just a picture of station life; it shows us the intimate relationship the boys have with the station. We see just how involved they were, how well they knew the names of the bullocks, how they had obviously written begging for details of the changes that had occurred since they had left home. After reading this letter, it becomes obvious that the boys thought of home as a very local, specific site in the Western District of Victoria. ‘Home’ also was where they had been sent, but, between those two worlds, home was a very different place. This letter also gives an insight into just how important Aboriginal labour was to the establishment of infrastructure.¹⁰ Their father wrote:

The blacks have made me a dam about a quarter of a mile above the first Creek you cross going to the Lake Paddock.—

The Kangaroos are much more numerous than ever, (I miss poor old 'Oscar' very much) they are in large droves now 40, 50, and sometimes 60 together in a drove.—The wretches are devouring the grass of my cattle.

We have only 'Tinker', 'Smiles' and 'Prince' of the old working bullocks that you know of, the others have been sold or exchanged...[Uncle Sam] was here yesterday on his way to the Bay, he has made a stone addition to his House, it has 2 rooms below and 3 above and [he] wants Mamma very much to go and live with him but she does not like selling Lake Condah¹¹ and I expect you would miss the old place when you came back. I have written to you my dear boy all the gossip and information you wished for, about the station and I hope it will please you both, but I should not wish you to read it at school to any of your schoolfellows but you can if [you] like show it to any of your relatives, but they of course won't understand the contents of it so well as yourself.—

Try all you can to get on with your studies for recollect that time wasted and idled away is money lost, and be particular not to associate with naughty Boys.¹²

We can sense here how distance tears at the relationship between father and sons. Their mother was similarly moved to demonstrate to the boys that their English education would be vital in the Australian bush. She exhorted them to tell her what books they had read and which ones they preferred, reminding them that though their ambitions for a future might lie in running a station, they would still need an English education. '[Dr Russell] says he knows no place which requires a man to be well educated as the bush as a man's resources must all be within himself.'¹³ There was an edge of desperation to her letters as she sought to instil the values she held important in children so far away as to be lost to her, were it not for the frail connections forged by her words. 'We were very sorry to hear from your letter that you had given up all thought of being an engineer, or even studying with that aim. We are afraid you are too easily disheartened.'¹⁴ The letters are a mixture of tones: in turn cajoling, encouraging and admonishing. Within them, however, hangs Arbella's loss of intimacy with her children.

Another letter written by their younger brother Edmund managed to capture what the boys were missing most: the bustle and drama of life on the station. Edmund Cooke was just six years old when he wrote this letter to his brother Samuel in England.

Lake Condah

July 15 1862

My dear Sam,

I would like to see you very much. You have got six horses one of your mares is the finest one on the station, it would fetch fifty pounds in the Melbourne market. We have got some beautiful Kangaroo dogs...I have got one he is a half bred scotch staghound. The baby is a nice little fellow, when he is in bed at night if there is not a candle alight in the room he will scream until there is, and then he will talk himself to sleep in his own language; his name will be Herbert Pybus...he is a great little bounce, but he laughs like I don't know what.¹⁵ Papa has a splendid stockyard he has just sold 250 head of store cattle, The yard is up to your knees in mud there was one cow rushed at a black fellow and only for a tree that was in the yard she would have spiflicated him; we have them jammed between two fences and there we brand them without ropeing them Willie branded some of them. Papa Willie and Cecil went out one day and killed 33 kangaroos besides bringing in some cattle.¹⁶ I went one day and caught a lot of Fish with my hands There is a splendid stream coming down into the Lake and plenty of Fish we had a dish of them this morning they are very nice, Willie went this morning to get them, and while he was getting them he tumbled into the water and was nearly washed away but he held on by a stick. We have herd that the english mail is in...I am just beginning to read Robinson Crusoe, I think it is a stunning book. Trevor read a nice one, Cecil began to read it a good bit ago, but he did not care about it. Cecil and I went into the garden to see if there were any opossums we found one Cecil fired at him and killed him dead and *half the* tree too, and now I must conclude with my love to grandmamma and grandpapa, Encles and Aunts and all friends, they all send there love to everybody

I am your affectionate brother

Edmund Gerald Cooke

Clearly, Arbella was not allowing distance from school to get in the way of Edmund's education. He too, however, was destined for an English school. In this letter, his boyish prose etches with passion the drama and bustle of life on a working station. Caught in the images is an idyllic childhood in which the business of the station is meshed with the valorised pleasures of Victorian boyhood. So we have details of going fishing, work in the cattle yards, descriptions of his new dog and his brother's mare, shooting possums in the garden and the joy of the 'splendid' *Robinson Crusoe* to read. Through this childhood, Edmund and his brothers have formed an attachment to a particular

place. Lake Condah in the Western District of Victoria is specifically home—although they have been sent 'Home' to be educated. For the boys, first-generation Australians, home is local, specific, no longer able to be generalised. When Willie and Sam write from England therefore and ask for all the 'gossip' of the station, they are dreaming of the home to which they will both eventually return.

Edmund's story ended more tragically. He was also sent to England to school and would perhaps have been destined to follow his older brother Samuel's success academically and at the Bar. He was never to have this chance. He returned to Victoria before he could finish his education, probably having contracted tuberculosis. He died in 1876.

In their focus on the local, the Cooke letters are typical of much of the material collected from the Western District and held at the State Library of Victoria. Within the creation of this home in the new world, there was, however, very little appreciation of those who had been dispossessed in order that the cattle might be fattened, the wool grown, crops planted, fences put up and houses built. Very few of these pioneering families noticed what they had done: it seemed to take a particular kind of mind, even a sternly Calvinistic conscience, to acknowledge the wrong on which prosperity was built. One potential settler clearly articulated the relationship between his ability to make a success of squatting and the removal of Aborigines from the land he occupied.

Niel Black (1804–80) arrived in Port Phillip District in September 1839 after first rejecting Adelaide and Sydney as suitable locations in which to secure land for his company.¹⁷ He had sailed for Australia on the barque *Ariadne*, setting off on 4 April 1839. He landed in Adelaide in July, but finding the land prices too high he travelled on to Sydney. There, he set about purchasing supplies and organising all he needed to set up a station in the Port Phillip District. Black kept a journal that came to serve as an account of his time, as a confessional and as a link between his new world and the one he had left behind. What makes the journal such fascinating reading is the way Black applies his analytical mind to the new society he sees around him. He constantly noted the price of basic tools (spades, nails, candles), stock (sheep, cattle, horses) and land (in Adelaide, Sydney and Port Phillip). He wrote voluminously of the sort of people he met in his travels and scrupulously recorded his impressions of people, places and potential for profit. Within what has to be seen as one of the most thorough journals of early Australia, he also sought to describe how important the transformative act of writing was to his sense of connection with what he had left behind.¹⁸

Figure 6.2: Niel Black, who was born in Argyllshire, Scotland, shared a love of Scottish regalia with Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh.



Museum Victoria.

My thoughts are often of home and at home, and I never begin to scribble in the book but what I am in imagination holding a sort of conversation with the Friends I have left there, and telling them the truth according to my own judgement of all I hear, see and think, and this renders it a pleasure to me in place of a toil.¹⁹

As part of his analysis of his potential success, Black quickly realised the connection between the productivity of a squatting run and the ruthless

eradication of the Aboriginal people. He writes frequently that he has no stomach himself for killing people in the fight for the land, but he has no such compunction in profiting from buying the licence to a run on which the Indigenous people have been decimated. Black is careful to emphasise that although Aborigines do pose a threat to the success of a squatting run, there are plenty of ways around the 'problem' of Aboriginal resistance.

The way is to go outside and take up a new run, provided the conscience of the party is sufficiently seared to enable him without remorse to slaughter natives right and left. It is universally and distinctly understood that the chances are very small indeed of a person taking up a new run being able to maintain possession of his place and property without having to recourse to such means—sometimes by whole sale—but I do not think that this is by any means common, and it is only outside that they are ever called upon to act in so brutal a manner. It, however, seems to be little thought of here as it is only done in defence of self and property. The natives who have not been brought into subjection have a strange propensity to spearing and stealing sheep and cattle, and the settlers agree that lead is the only antidote that effectively cures them of this propensity. When a few are shot the rest become timid and are easily kept at bay...It is, however, a difficult matter to obtain distinct information respecting the murders committed on the natives. There is nothing but 'bouncing' as in [it] is called (bragging) here, and many persons bounce about their treatment of the natives. This they can only do by hints and slang phrases, as the Protectors of the Aborigines are always on the lookout for information against the whites, and anything plainly said would subject them to a prosecution...I believe, however, that great numbers of the poor creatures have wantonly fallen victims to settlers scarcely less savage tho more enlightened [than] themselves, and that 2/3rds of them does not care a single straw about taking the life of a native, provided they are not taken up by the Protectors. But this need not deter any one from coming here as they may buy a run already occupied.²⁰

A month later, Black recorded his purchase of the run that was to be the centre of his operation. He confessed that one of his main considerations in buying this run was how cruelly treated the Aborigines had been by the previous superintendent: consequently, they would give very little trouble. Black had a personal repugnance grounded in his strict Presbyterianism to involving himself in any sort of violence on the land; at the same time, however, he justified and accepted that violence as necessary to the European presence.

The run is one of the most wonderful in the colony, situated about half way between this and Portland Bay, and this makes it valuable as it will

be at least 5 or 6 years before it is sold. The blacks have been very troublesome on it and I believe they have been cruelly dealt with. The late superintendent ran off from a fear that he wd be apprehended and tried for murdering the natives. The poor creatures are now terror stricken and will be easily managed. This was my principal reason for fighting so hard for it.²¹

Black's decision to purchase 'Strathdownie' came down to the policy adopted by the previous overseer: this man's ruthless eradication of the Aboriginal people whose lands the run covered ensured that Black would not be faced with stock losses from native raids. Frederick Taylor had been established as overseer for G. McKillop and J. Smith by March 1839. Shortly after his arrival, the Aborigines began stealing sheep from the folds. His reputation spread around the district as a man who would take violent measures against the local people. In early 1840, the newly appointed Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson, heard that Taylor 'had killed a whole tribe'. According to Robinson's journal, Taylor had set out with a number of men to attack the Aborigines' camp. They were reported to have formed a long line with Taylor at the centre. The camp's occupants were asleep as the line fired on them. Only one person was reported surviving out of a camp of 35 men, women and children.

So extreme were Taylor's actions that he fled the colony, fearing a government inquiry into his role in murdering the Aborigines. Black wrote in his journal that, according to Blackie, the former overseer, 'about thirty-five to forty natives have been dispatched on this establishment and that there is only two men left alive of the tribe'.²² Jan Critchett, in her book *A Distant Field of Murder*, notes that years later James Dawson was told how Bareetch Churneen, who was also known as Queen Fanny, had swum across Lake Bullen Merri with a child on her back and thus escaped pursuing Europeans, who had murdered nearly all her people.²³

Black finished his entry on this massacre with an assurance to his financial backers and concerned relatives that the overseer 'is certain we will never be troubled with any of them on this run. I think myself remarkably fortunate in a run as well upon this acct as because I believe it perhaps all in all unequalled in the colony, and the situation, as far as I can judge, is the best possible.'²⁴

Black renamed his run 'Glenormiston'.

Black's journal sometimes reveals more than he was comfortable with, for although he wrote with great disapproval of the behaviour of settlers towards Aborigines, he could not entirely separate himself from such behaviour. In another passage a month later, Black wrote of chasing down a group of Aboriginal women on his run.

Figure 6.3: Emu Creek, c. 1880, near where the manager of Glenormiston Station, before Niel Black purchased it, led a massacre of the traditional custodians.



Photographer unknown. La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Feby 9th.

Started this morning at 7 o'clock and rode across bleak, barren and inhospitable plains. On one of the plains we spied five lubras (women) gathering roots. We were rather close upon them before they observed us, but when they saw us they fled with the fleetness of a roe. We gave them chase and came up with them. No creatures could be under greater fear [than] they were when they could not escape from us. The more we cried to them, the faster they fled, but all in vain. Such a cackling as they set up when we pulled our horses before them; I could compare it to nothing else than a whole flock of geese running together and crowding round their young when disturbed too early in the morning. One of them pulled a little female child out of a bag on her back and presented us with it. We gave it a little damper and came away; then they set up the most hideous cackling—I must mount again.

...About 6 o.c. we came to a station distant from Strathdownie (now called Glenormiston) about 10 miles, after riding 50 miles across a barren plain affording neither one mouthful of food nor one drop of water over

all its extent, excepting in one place where a brackish creek runs over it, the same that passes Glenormiston house. This was an ill spent Sabbath.²⁵

Reading Black's account, I wondered why he chose to write about this clearly distressing incident. Such an encounter partly fulfilled a sense of the exotic and emphasised Black's role in gradually controlling this strange and new world, but Black wrote almost compulsively because of the way his journal had come to serve as a confessional. It was only when Black was stirred deeply by a particular event that he would interrupt his day's activities to write by the side of his horse. He did so on this occasion and also after he witnessed a horrific accident in Collins Street in Melbourne. He turned to his journal to unburden his conscience. His admission to himself that 'this was an ill spent Sabbath' seems an admission that he has been drawn into participating in a terrifying encounter for these women. It was an encounter that might easily have ended in the violence Black so detested. The vision of the woman suddenly thrusting a child at him must surely have stayed with him long after the chase was over. Her action in that moment was possibly an appeal to his humanity. From chasing the women, Black, in sudden compunction, offers the child some damper. Did her action deter a potential rape? The menace of it lies heavy under Black's description, but I do not think it occurs. Whatever the motivation and whatever the real facts of the afternoon's activities (for there seems to be a lot unsaid between the lines of Black's description), it remains a disturbing vignette of frontier contact.

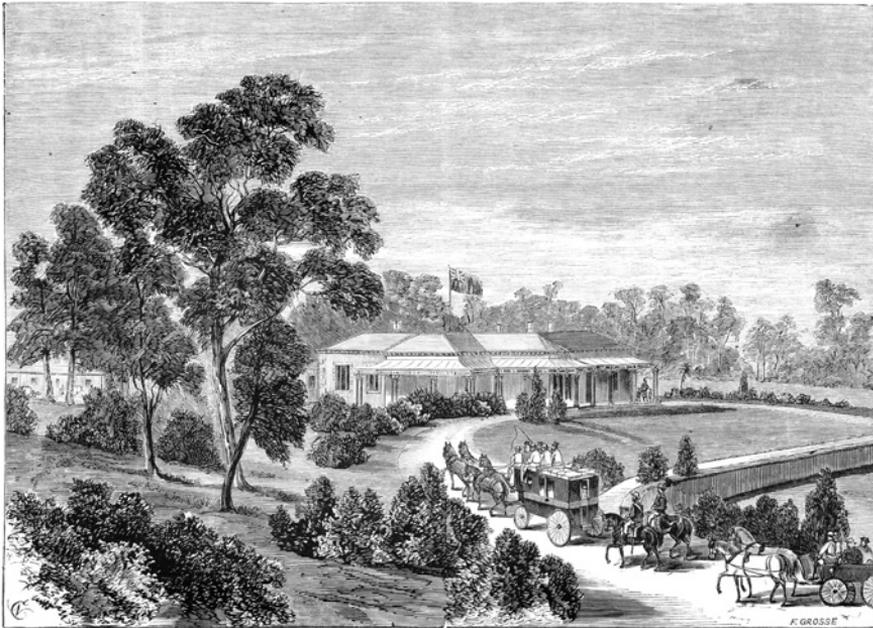
A month later, Black recorded his destruction of an Aboriginal shelter, this time with the manifest intention of forcing the Aboriginal people off their land.

On Sunday last Donald Black and I fell in with a native Chief's Myoh Myoh (native hut)—from the superior style in which it was built we judged it to be such... We ordered it to be tumbled to the ground, and a piece of paper folded up containing a small quantity of powder put into the end of a split stick or piece of wood and the other end stuck into the ground among the ruins of their hut to show them [the natives] that it was done by whites and that we did not want them near us. I believe that the greatest mercy that can possibly be shown them is to keep them entirely away.²⁶

Everywhere in his journal, Black evoked his Scottish homeland. He would draw up its recollection as he looked on a landscape and compare what he saw before him with what he had left behind. There was a strong note of melancholy in his journal, which was at its most vocal when he recalled all he had given up to make a new life or at least some money in the 'new world'. He was a relatively honest and self-reflective correspondent, one of the few who recorded openly how crucial the removal and subjection of Aboriginal people was to the commercial success of squatting. Despite this recognition, he never made the

emotional connection between his own sense of loss and his destruction of Aboriginal homes as he built a new home in the image of the old.

Figure 6.4: Glenormiston Homestead in 1868. Niel Black waits in Scottish regalia to greet Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, during the duke's Australian tour.



GLENORMISTON, THE RESIDENCE OF NEIL BLACK, ESQ.—BY N. CHEVALLER.

Frederick Grosse, *Illustrated Australian News*, 4 February 1868. Print: wood engraving. State Library of Victoria. Image no. mp001275.

If Black was one of the few pioneering settlers to articulate that his future prosperity was built on the violent removal of Aborigines, Arbella Cooke's brother Samuel Pratt Winter was even more in the minority in recognising the symbolic importance of the replacement of one set of cultural institutions with another. Margaret Kiddle wrote of Samuel Pratt Winter as a man of culture more reflective of eighteenth-century Ireland than nineteenth-century commercial Britain. He was tall, charming and exceedingly handsome, though he never married and was a renowned agnostic. Of all the early successful squatters it was Samuel Winter who might perhaps have been expected to return to live out his days in England or Ireland. He had travelled extensively and supervised his pastoral interests from all points of the world, but he returned to spend his elderly years in the Western District.²⁷

In the Winter Cooke collection, there are two letters written by an Aboriginal man, John (Jacky) White, to Samuel Pratt Winter. These letters are a powerful articulation of loss and a political statement of Jacky White's right to return

home. The letters are written from the new Aboriginal mission²⁸ at Lake Condah and though the first one starts formally, the English gradually breaks down and the words tumble over each other as the writer gets to the crux of his letter: his desire to return to his country.

Mission Station

Lake Condah

April 14. 1876

Mr Winter,

I feel great pleasure in writing these few lines to you, hoping that they will find you in good health as they leave me at present. Mr Hogan our teacher is going away [in] about two or three weeks time. we are all very sorry for him he has done all he can for us, he has taught us how to read and write, I recollect coming to your home, father said that you used to gather the natives together, and has taught them how to be civilized,

We are all very sorry that poor Doctor Russel is dead, the first day we heard of it we were very sorry, Mr Hogan told us that he died in the ship when he was coming out from England. Father said that you were the last Masters that he ever had, and also he said that he grew up to live with you, and we would all like to come and see our native land, very much, we are living very miserable, without boots and cloth, my friends are all dead, and I am left alone in the wide world, I hope to be down there [?]. . .next month before the winter comes in, I like to come and see my country whenever I come to your house and ask you to give me something, you always give it to me, I don't like to be here, I like to be in my country where I was brought up. Timothy and his wife and children do not like to come down, they sooner be in there own country. I have no more to say, so good bye,

I remain

Your Aboriginal Friend

John White²⁹

There is one other letter from Jacky White in the Winter Cooke collection. Written nine months after the first letter, it is far more desperate in tone. The change reflects White's increasing frustration at his virtual imprisonment, his exile from his country. The lack of polish could also be attributed to the absence of the teacher Mr Hogan, mentioned in the last letter. The absence of the formality evident in the first letter makes the second letter all the more gripping: 'I want to come back to Wannon.' The words shout from the page; there are no polite inquiries after Winter's health, as in the first letter. Instead, White gets straight

to the point and begs for Winter's help in removing him from the mission country, where he is a 'stranger'.

There is no evidence of a reply to these letters.³⁰ Their existence, however, in the midst of the overwhelming correspondence between settlers in the Western District and family and friends in England, reminds us of another story of home—untold among all those letters. Though the country might be described, translated and transformed by the pens and the hands of European settlers into a place they could call home, the pen and the hands of Aboriginal people resisted that transformation and continued to articulate their own understanding of their homeland. Jacky White wrote his helpless appeal therefore and, in doing so, gave us a glimpse of that other story: the flip side to the image of Niel Black destroying an Aboriginal house, piece by piece.

Mission Station

Lake Condah

January 7 1877

Mr Winters,

Dear Sir,

I want to come back to Wannon, I knew you ever since I was a boy you used to keep us live. I recollect about thirteen or fourteen years ago when you used to travel about five or six miles to bring us to your place, so will you be obliged to write to the government to get us off this place, so if you will write to the government for us, and get us off here, I will do work for you and will never leave you so I wish you get us off this place, I always wish to be in my country when I was born, I'm in a mission Station and I do not like to be here, they always grumble and all my friends are dead, I lost my friend Doctor Russel, I recollect him living at Hillgay when Mr and Mrs Russel were young, and now we are old, and I am now miserable, all the Wannon black fellows are all dead and I am left, my poor uncle YellertPerne is dead he was quiet young when he came here when I see his grave I always feel sorry. I can't get away without help from the government. This country don't suit one [me], I am a stranger in this country I like to be in my country. When I used [to go] to places where I aught not to be Mr Russel used to get me out, wherever I used to be on a station I used to work Mr Jackson wanted to give us ground and we did not take it so I am very sorry that we did not take it. This is all I have to say,

I remain you affectionate

friend Jacky White³¹

There is no evidence in the rest of the Winter Cooke papers to suggest Jacky White was ever allowed to return to the Wannon country.³² Aldo Massola, in his book *Aboriginal Mission Stations in Victoria*, lists the surnames of Aboriginal people who died at the Lake Condah Mission between 1876 and 1912. White is listed under the category 'Pure Black'.³³

The story of Jacky White's desire to die in his home country has another parallel. On the night of his final illness, Samuel Winter, White's potential rescuer, gave instructions for how his body was to be buried. He asked his brother Trevor to bury him 'in the stones where the blacks are buried...On no [account] to have any tablet inscription or memorial of any kind erected nothing but a large stone cairn.'

His instructions were never carried out; the thought was too outrageous. Instead, he was buried on the hill overlooking the Murndal homestead in the place designated as the family plot. A stone wall was put around the grave and a bronze tablet inserted.³⁴ It was a long way from Winter's wish to be buried as a native, but it leaves an interesting question as to how we think of home in the context of empire and colonialism. For, in ignoring his brother's instructions, Trevor Winter aptly illustrates the tension between the local and colonial world.

It is in this instruction, and in its being ignored, that we are left with a historical moment that can be interpreted as both recognition *and* suppression of the transnational nature of home in the colonial context. Ultimately, it is a moment of impasse between the local and the colonial world that is overcome by refusal of the local. The colonial home inscribes a transnational conception of home onto landscapes in such a way that the previous occupants are rendered invisible. In this moment, the local is transformed into a place that shifts across the boundaries of nations and in so doing is blind to those deeply embedded cultural boundaries.

Samuel Winter's deathbed request to be buried as an Aborigine was partly an expression of his agnosticism, but it was more than this. In his yearning to be buried as a native, Winter recognises the process of colonisation in which one set of cultural values has displaced another. It is perhaps his cosmopolitanism, his education and reading that leads Winter to a desire to seek his resting place in a way that will express his final acceptance of this new world as his home. Niel Black, who was Winter's contemporary, certainly recognised that the Aboriginal enacting of home had to be destroyed if his own construction of home was to be successful. Black's journal leaves us with evidence that he is at times burdened with the knowledge of the destruction of Aboriginal culture.

Black's patronising dismissal of the future of the Aboriginal people is an interesting contrast with the Cooke children's apparent indifference. If their parents' generation accepted the inevitability of the destruction of an Aboriginal homeland, first-generation Australians, it seemed, were blind to the transnational encounters that were happening all the time. Edmund Cooke could write of an

Aboriginal stockman being nearly 'spificated' by a mad cow in the newly constructed stockyards without any sense of the change that had occurred over little more than a decade for this nameless man to be working with cattle. His father, Cecil Pybus Cooke, though a man who had a reputation for treating Aborigines with kindness and respect, likewise would write of the transformation of the land by Aboriginal labour with no recognition of the process of displacement that was occurring. Within this collection of letters and journals, there is evidence of the process whereby 'Home', and the development of a national identity, is homogenised. It is this homogenising of England and Australia—home and Home—that has blinded Western District settlers and often us to the transnational encounters that occurred across the Australian frontier.

Notes

- ¹ Samuel Winter Cooke to his mother, Arbella Cooke, Florence, 8 May 1885, Winter Cooke Papers, State Library of Victoria (hereafter SLV). Samuel Winter Cooke married Alice Margaret Werge Chambers on 6 January 1883 at All Saints, St Kilda. See Bate, Weston 1981, 'Cooke, Samuel Winter (1847–1929)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography. Volume 8*, Melbourne University Press, pp. 101–2.
- ² Published as MacKellar, Maggie 2008, *Strangers in a Foreign Land: The journal of Niel Black and other voices from the Western District*, Miegunyah, Melbourne.
- ³ For a longer discussion on the ways in which the new environment influenced settlers' sense of place, see MacKellar, Maggie 2004, *Core of My Heart My Country, Women's Sense of Place in the New Worlds of Australia and Canada*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- ⁴ Wolfe, P. 2005, 'Islam, Europe & Indian nationalism: towards a postcolonial transnationalism', in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Connected Worlds: History in transnational perspective*, ANU E Press, Canberra, p. 233.
- ⁵ Wills, Sara 2002, 'Unstitching the lips of a migrant nation', *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 118, pp. 71–89.
- ⁶ For Arbella and Cecil, see Hone, J. Ann 1969, 'Cooke, Cecil Pybus (1813–1895)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography. Volume 3*, Melbourne University Press, p. 450.
- ⁷ Forth, Gordon 1991, *The Winters on the Wannon*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, p. 110.
- ⁸ William Winter Cooke would eventually leave the Western District after being overlooked by his uncle Samuel Pratt Winter in his will. Samuel Pratt Winter chose William's younger brother Samuel as his heir. See Forth, *The Winters on the Wannon*.
- ⁹ Winter Cooke Papers, SLV.
- ¹⁰ Cecil Pybus Cooke was well known throughout the district as being benevolent towards the Aborigines, offering them employment, food and shelter. See Forth, *The Winters on the Wannon*, pp. 148–9.
- ¹¹ Cyril Cooke changed the European name 'Lake Condon' to Lake Condah, which he mistakenly thought was the local Gournditch-jmara term for the black swan that was plentiful on the lake (see <http://www.walkabout.com.au/locations/VICLakeCondah.shtml>). 'Lake Condah' was sold in 1864, but the buyer could not complete payments and it reverted to Cooke. See Hone, 'Cooke, Cecil Pybus'.
- ¹² Winter Cooke Papers, 1856–60, SLV.
- ¹³ Winter Cooke Papers, 1857, SLV. For Dr Russell, see Smith, Sydney H. 1967, 'Russell, Francis Thomas Cusack (1823–1876)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography. Volume 2*, Melbourne University Press, pp. 405–6.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Herbert Pybus Cooke took Holy Orders as an adult. See Hone, 'Cooke, Cecil Pybus'.
- ¹⁶ Cecil Trevor Cooke became a station manager as an adult. See Ibid.
- ¹⁷ See Kiddle, Margaret (1961, *Men of Yesterday: A social history of the Western District of Victoria 1834–1890*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne) for Black's role in the development of the Western

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District. See also Ward, Russel 1969, 'Black, Niel (1804–1880)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography. Volume 3*, Melbourne University Press, pp. 171–2.

¹⁸ Mackellar, *Strangers in a Foreign Land*.

¹⁹ Niel Black Journal, 8 November 1839, SLV.

²⁰ Niel Black Journal, 9 December 1839, SLV.

²¹ Niel Black Journal, 4 January 1840, SLV. 'Strathdownie' was a 43,520-acre (17,612-hectare) run near Lake Terang. See Ward, 'Black, Niel'.

²² Niel Black Journal, 21 February 1840, cited in Critchett, Jan 1990, *A 'Distant Field of Murder': Western District frontiers 1834–1894*, Melbourne University Press, pp. 128–9.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁴ Niel Black Journal, 21 February 1840, SLV.

²⁵ Niel Black Journal, 9 February 1840, SLV.

²⁶ Niel Black Journal, 13 March 1840, SLV.

²⁷ Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday*. See also Hone, J. Ann 1976, 'Winter, Samuel Pratt (1816–1878)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography. Volume 6*, Melbourne University Press, pp. 424–5.

²⁸ Lake Condah Mission Station was proposed in 1867 and gazetted in 1869. Cecil Cooke had not been as clever as some of the other squatters during the *Duffy Land Selection Acts* of the 1860s; however, he managed to retain 6000 acres (2400 hectares) of land and continued to hold about 4000 acres (1600 hectares) under licence until most of this poorer-quality land was set aside for the Lake Condah Aboriginal Reserve in 1869. See Forth, *The Winters on the Wannon*, pp. 150–1.

²⁹ Winter Cooke Papers, SLV.

³⁰ Though the letters were addressed to Samuel Pratt Winter, he was very ill throughout the final year of his life and no longer lived at 'Murndal'.

³¹ Winter Cooke Papers, SLV.

³² Forth (*The Winters on the Wannon*, p. 161) mentions the letters but also couldn't find any evidence of whether Winter replied. He comments that as there is no other mention of White it would suggest that he did not come to live at 'Murndal'. See also Massaola, Aldo 1970, *Aboriginal Mission Stations in Victoria*, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne. Lake Condah Reserve was returned to the Gunditjmarra people in March 2008; see Lake Condah returned to traditional owners, Media release, Victorian Minister for Environment and Climate Change, 30 March 2008, available from http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/newmedia.nsf/b0222c68d27626e2ca256c8c001a3d2d/130628a4441c385cca25741c008206f6!OpenDocument

³³ Massaola, *Aboriginal Mission Stations in Victoria*, pp. 111–17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166. Samuel Winter Cooke, Arbella's eldest surviving son, inherited 'Murndal'; see Hone, 'Winter, Samuel Pratt'.