

## Articles

### From 'Miss Dalrymple' to 'Daring Dolly': A life of two historiographical episodes

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She was, German readers learned in 1823, 'Namen Miss Dalrymple'.<sup>1</sup> French-speakers were informed that she had 'une figure très-agreable'.<sup>2</sup> Her claim to international fame was, at this time, based purely on her physiology. When this description was first penned she was reportedly the oldest surviving of the children 'produced by an intercourse between the natives and the Europeans' in Van Diemen's Land. Moreover, she was 'the first child born by a native woman to a white man in Van Diemen's Land'. She was 'remarkably handsome', had skin that was 'light copper', 'rosy cheeks, large black eyes' with a touch of blue, good eye lashes, 'uncommonly white' teeth, and limbs which were 'admirably formed', 'wunderschon' even.

This account of Dalrymple Briggs, written by the naval Lieutenant Charles Jeffreys based on observations made sometime in the late 1810s, was published in 1820, then quoted extensively by George Evans in his *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land* (1822), which was translated into both French and German in 1823.<sup>3</sup> Dalrymple Briggs, by the standards of early-nineteenth-century inhabitants of Launceston, was remarkably famous in her own time, and may not have known it. Local fame came later, in 1831, when she defended her children against a group of Aborigines who had attacked the stock hut she lived in. That incident was widely reported in the Australian colonies and, for such events, relatively well documented. However, the story of Dalrymple's defence of this hut has taken on fantastical elements in both popular and scholarly memory, creating a misleading image of 'Daring Dolly Dalrymple!'<sup>4</sup>

This paper reveals how the telling of two episodes of Dalrymple's life merged and became a narrative package. It shares with Penny Russell's study of Mathinna a hope 'to unsettle the fictions that have been so long in circulation that they have taken on the appearance and solidity of fact'.<sup>5</sup> But, as well as being

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1 Evans 1823a: 14.

2 Evans 1823b: 31.

3 Jeffreys 1820: 123; Evans 1822: 18-20.

4 Pithouse 1922.

5 Russell 2012: 341.

a revision of key moments in the recorded life of Dalrymple Briggs, it is also a study of some unusual historiographical processes at work in and regarding Tasmania. Whereas Mathinna was subjected to a multiplicity of stories and vignettes, Dalrymple Briggs' life was very quickly corralled into a particular telling, demonstrably at odds with actuality, and persistently upheld despite its inherent ridiculousness and rather problematical attributes. Unpicking this strange trail of chronicled repetitions and glosses, with a sensitivity to textual borrowings more commonly applied to medieval manuscripts than records of the colonial frontier, it is possible to chart a mythologising process which has continued seemingly from the moment of her birth.

Born sometime around 1808, baptised, and raised by the Mountgarretts in Launceston, Dalrymple's name gives a clue to a significance thereafter attached to her. The first boy born in the new settlement of Port Dalrymple was named 'Dalrymple', and so it seems the formula may have been re-used for another 'first'.<sup>6</sup> She was, as Jeffreys put it, 'the first child born by a native woman to a white man in Van Diemen's Land', and so was invested with symbolic significance. When, via Evans, this description was translated into German, the translator opted more cautiously for 'das erste bekannte Kind', the first *known* child. Such caution would, however, rather rarely be repeated in the many retellings of the life of Dalrymple Briggs.

### Episode one: 'remarkably handsome'

Charles Jeffreys' description of 'Miss Dalrymple', while later having a significant impact on subsequent interpretations of the adult woman, was actually rather fleeting in the context of his experiences in Port Dalrymple in the 1810s. The girl Dalrymple's existence was only mentioned in passing as a small aside to a bigger story about her mother saving Dalrymple's younger sibling from the flames of a campfire, and the clutches of a tribe of Aborigines who reportedly so strongly disapproved of 'half-caste' children that they wished them burned. This other child was successfully extricated only to die of its injuries, apparently at Jacob Mountgarrett's house in Launceston where Dalrymple resided. Key to its textual context is the way it was given as an exemplar of the barbarity of the Aboriginal men towards their women, situated in a whole section devoted to arguing that the Aboriginal women fled to the recently arrived European sailors and sealers to escape 'considerable harshness and tyranny' they reportedly received at the hands of their Aboriginal husbands.<sup>7</sup>

This whole section of Jeffreys' text, however, has an obvious apologetic intent, perhaps because the sealers were often ex-sailors. As Clements has recently noted, there is no shortage of evidence of widespread sexual violence on the sealing frontier.<sup>8</sup> In a particular way, this frontier is crucial to understanding the context

6 *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 6 January 1805: 4.

7 Jeffreys 1820: 118–123.

8 Clements 2014: 190–203.

of Dalrymple's birth, and her first widely documented existence. James Kelly left one of the most detailed descriptions of Dalrymple's father George Briggs during the course of their shared voyage circumnavigating Tasmania in 1816.<sup>9</sup> Kelly's description has Briggs playing little role in the narrative until arriving in the north-eastern portion of Tasmania, wherein he becomes a central interface between the sailors and the Aborigines. The account shows Briggs to have been conversant in the local Aboriginal language, reportedly bigamous, and to have fathered several children. But Briggs' role is not that of an isolated European man adopting the cultural mores of Aboriginal peoples, a kind of Tasmanian version of the lone Pakeha Maori of New Zealand.<sup>10</sup> Rather he is a representative of a new community which was a growing regional power, similar to contemporary sealing communities in New Zealand, in both cases competitors for territory and women.<sup>11</sup> Kelly's account shows Briggs deliberately playing two sides of an internecine conflict against each other. Moreover, in trying to compel alliance, Briggs was reminded by one of the Aborigines of their help in capturing women for the sealers from other Aboriginal groups.

For Dalrymple the incident as Jeffreys reports it highlights a couple of themes that resonate with the way she has been presented thereafter. Although forever after remembered as the first 'half-caste', a child of the sealer Briggs, her father's absence is very notable in Jeffreys' description concerning her, and in fact her role in the narrative is primarily illustrative. She reveals the beauty of the mixed-race children, but she also reinforces one of Jeffreys' core themes: the way that Europeans were a protective force on the frontier against the ravages of violent Aboriginal masculinity. Her mother fled to Launceston, where she found security 'at the residence of a gentleman of that place'. Here Dalrymple is introduced as having been 'previously taken under their [i.e. Mr and Mrs Mountgarrett's] protection'. And, it should be remembered, Jeffreys was writing to a wide British audience through a London publisher.

But contrasting this cosy image, Dalrymple's sister Eliza was known to have been subjected to sexual abuse a decade later, with the perpetrator being one of the few 'white' men hanged in Van Diemen's Land for a crime committed against an Aborigine.<sup>12</sup> It is a salient reminder that life for pretty children with absent parents on the colonial frontier could be horrific. In 1870 the historian-ethnographer James Bonwick noted that there was 'no record of her [Dalrymple's] Launceston career after twelve years of age, but we may fear the effect of her beauty in a colonial period not celebrated for the virtues'.<sup>13</sup> But Bonwick was wrong. Evidence for at least part of Dalrymple's childhood does survive, even though he clearly had not seen it, in the form of a curious series of depositions which relate to another event in her life.

9 University of Tasmania Library Special and Rare Materials Collection, RS99/1. Available online at: <http://eprints.utas.edu.au/9819/>.

10 Bentley 1999.

11 Wanhalla 2009.

12 *Hobart Town Gazette*, 27 January 1827: 3; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 3 February 1827: 2; Clements 2013: 41-42.

13 Bonwick 1870: 322.

### Interlude: neglected episodes

She was shot. Living with Mountgarrett in July 1825, Dalrymple was wounded by duckshot, fired by Mountgarrett himself. There are essentially two competing versions of the event derived from a series of depositions made to an investigating magistrate.<sup>14</sup> One version (three witnesses, two depositions) has Dalrymple intentionally wounded, fleeing the house screaming and bleeding, Mountgarrett both drunk and aggressive. The other version, ostensibly by the illiterate Dalrymple herself (one deposition), has the child accidentally shot after alerting Mountgarrett to the presence of a possum, and not severely wounded. A medical examination identified scarring. Because Dalrymple apparently refuted the other witnesses, the charge was dropped.

Regardless of which version reflected actuality, all agreed that she had been shot. They only differed on whether it was deliberate, and how badly wounded the child had been.

In looking at how Dalrymple's life has been repeatedly recorded it is fascinating to see a cyclical historiographical process develop in tandem to Dalrymple's life, but without reference to subsequent events. The incident of 1825 has never gained widespread attention. Yet Jeffreys' fleeting description of 1820 was quoted by Evans in 1822, and translated into two other European languages in 1823. It was quoted again by Bonwick in 1870, and Roth in 1899, and, although sometimes the precise origin of the story itself has become obscured, by many since.<sup>15</sup> What is striking is that Evans, writing in Tasmania, relied on a London-published book, and was himself to publish in London. Similarly with Bonwick, this reliance on London-published material shows the Imperial centre informing the colonial periphery and vice versa in a highly cyclical and self-referential way. The account of Dalrymple passed back and forth across the globe in printed form, highlighting the way that each 'account' of Van Diemen's Land was not written in a literary vacuum. While Lawson has recently drawn close attention to the Imperial centre's familiarity with events in Van Diemen's Land, this extends that analysis to point out the Imperial centre was not just aware of events, but rather that it played an active role in a somewhat circular process of documenting those same events.<sup>16</sup>

Another important insight comes from another manuscript source, although one widely available in printed form from the 1990s, and associated manuscript sources, which help provide some context for the hut defence episode of 1831. By 24 September 1830 Dalrymple Briggs was living with Thomas Johnson at Stocker's hut. In the course of his 'Friendly Mission' George Augustus Robinson visited the property and provided a brief description:

14 National Library of Australia, NLA MS 3251, Box 1, Volume 4, not fully paginated. A transcript is available online at: <http://manuscript3251.wordpress.com/2009/10/24/ms-3251-1825-31-black-natives-also-paton-vs-gregson/>.

15 Bonwick 1870: 321; Roth 1899: 176.

16 Lawson 2014. See especially his comments on the literary culture (pp. 145–150), and his comments on Bonwick (pp. 154–157).

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This stockkeeper lives with an half-caste female, a stout well made person by whom he has had two children. They are exceedingly fine children, ... The children are very fair and their hair is white.<sup>17</sup>

So little attention did the 'Conciliator' of Aborigines give to Dalrymple, he did not record her name. The next day Robinson passed by Gibson's hut, and recorded two bits of local gossip from 'Punch' about Gibson's stockkeeper (Cubit). In the first, Robinson describes Cubit knifing an Aborigine, fleeing to Stocker's hut, and then attacking the Aborigines' camp at night by tracking the fires.<sup>18</sup> This is behaviour which fits rather well with Clements' recent characterisation of Tasmanian frontier conflict as dominated by a cycle of day-night attack and counter-attack warfare.<sup>19</sup> The second bit of gossip, however, seems to have led to some later confusion. 'Punch said', Robinson wrote 'that when the half-caste woman lived with Cubitt she assisted in killing natives'.<sup>20</sup>

While James Cubit's story is a little unclear, he certainly crops up as a figure in conflict with Tasmanian Aborigines, but there are problems with seeing him as a figure that has any major connection with Dalrymple outside of this one fleeting reference. This is a significant point to consider when assessing the strength of association between Dalrymple and Cubit commonly held in the mythologised narrative of her life. Cubit was a convict, arrived in 1820, was a labourer aged either 24 or 34 (records vary), and was sentenced to seven years transportation.<sup>21</sup> Clearly in late 1825 he was working as Stocker's 'servant', when he was speared. He received his Certificate of Freedom on 15 May 1826.<sup>22</sup> The following year, he was one of 12 men who requested permission to have their families sent from England.<sup>23</sup> In 1830 Roderic O'Connor reported to the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines that:

A man employed by Mr. Stocker named 'Cubitt' has killed a number of the Natives and they have made many attempts upon his life and speared him in several places — On one occasion when he was escaping from them they cried out to him in English 'We will have you yet.'<sup>24</sup>

From the Land Commissioner's journal, this event can be placed as late February or early March 1828.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of particularities, a number of contemporary reports, including those already cited, confirm this picture of James Cubit as one who shot and was speared, but they do not point to his having been saved by a shot-gun wielding Dalrymple as later mythology would have it.<sup>26</sup>

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17 Plomley 2008: 254.

18 Plomley 2008: 254.

19 Clements 2014: 204–209 and *passim*.

20 Plomley 2008: 254.

21 State Library of Tasmania, CON31/1/6, p. 80; CON13/1/2: 20.

22 State Library of Tasmania, CON23/1/1, no. C240.

23 State Library of Tasmania, GO/26/3: 67.

24 'Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines; Evidence of Roderic O'Connor Esquire, 17 March 1830' in Chapman and Jetson 2006: 236.

25 McKay 1962: 80.

26 Other sources are addressed in more detail below.

A year after Robinson's visit, both Dalrymple and Cubit were attacked, albeit on different days at different locations. When Cubit was attacked it was 'the ninth time this unfortunate man has been speared', and one is a little tempted to see him being singled out particularly, perhaps because he had 'killed a number of the Natives' and was well known as an enemy.<sup>27</sup> If Dalrymple had in fact 'assisted' Cubit 'in killing natives', this could also explain why she was attacked with such determined efforts in August 1831. Assuming, that is, that 'Punch' can be trusted and Robinson reliably recorded him.

### **Episode two: 'the successful resistance of a single female'**

On 24 September 1831, the *Hobart Town Courier* published Government Notice no. 196, which contained a printed copy of a letter written by William Moriarty dated 25 August 1831.<sup>28</sup> In it, the colonial government deliberately made Dalrymple Briggs famous throughout the Australian colonies. This letter, of which the original manuscript copy also survives in a form verbatim to the printed one, contains a lengthy version of events on 22 August 1831, apparently as detailed by Dalrymple herself.<sup>29</sup> The letter also contains information about a separate attack, on another person (Cubit), at a different location, on the following day, 23 August 1831, which was also printed. In both popular and scholarly memory, however, the two events have come to be linked as a single event, with grossly different characteristics than those indicated by all contemporary observations and documentation.

Moriarty's description of how 'an Aboriginal Tribe attacked the stock hut of Mr. Stocker' is quite detailed and lengthy, but the salient points form a clear sequence.

There was no person in the hut when the natives first appeared but a woman named Dalrymple Briggs with her two female children, who hearing some little noise outside, sent the elder child to see what was the matter and hearing her shriek, went out herself with a musket; on reaching the door she found the poor child had been speared; [she dragged the child inside] she barricaded the door and windows, and availed herself of every opportunity to fire at the assailants, but as they kept very close either to the chimney, or the stumps around the hut, and she had nothing but duck shot, with little effect, though she imagines she did hit one of them.<sup>30</sup>

Dalrymple's 'resolution' in fending them off prevents the attackers pulling down the chimney. They leave for an hour and return with firesticks, and attempt

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27 *Hobart Town Courier*, 24 September 1831: 2: I suspect the ninth time means individual wounds, not individual incidents.

28 *Hobart Town Courier*, 24 September 1831: 2.

29 State Library of Tasmania, CSO1/316: 941-944.

30 *Colonial Times*, 7 September 1831: 3; *Hobart Town Courier*, 24 September 1831: 2; *Colonial Times*, 28 September 1831: 4; *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 22 October 1831: 3.

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to burn the hut down by lighting the roof. From within the hut Dalrymple repeatedly shakes the roof free of the firesticks until 'the return of Thomas Johnston, the stock-keeper, pointed out to them the necessity of a retreat'. The whole episode lasted 'six hours'.

Two other contemporary accounts of the event survive which do not appear to have been utilised by subsequent historians or writers recounting the event, yet both corroborate the essentials of Moriarty's report and add a few minor details about the incident concerning Dalrymple Briggs at Stocker's hut on 22 August 1831, and the events the following day at Gibson's hut. Another letter of September 1831 printed in the *Colonial Times* noted that

on Monday the Aborigines visited Mr Stocker's stock hut, when they speared a child, who was standing at the door, through the thigh; the mother, known by the name of Dalrymple, fired six shots at them before the man in charge arrived to her assistance; they attempted to burn the hut, in which fortunately they could not succeed; and in the flight slightly speared two horses that were near them. The following day they visited Mr. Gibson's hut, and speared the stock-keeper Cupit, ... in the thigh.<sup>31</sup>

The other previously uncited account is a manuscript letter, this one from Malcolm Laing Smith, dated 7 September 1831, which described how

at Stockers they wounded a Child and made a desperate attack upon the Hut which was defended by the Child's Mother the only person in the Hut at the time ... at Gibsons Place a man named Cupid received a spear wound<sup>32</sup>

All surviving documentation highlights that a child was wounded and Dalrymple successfully defended the hut, and on the following day at another location James Cubit was speared. Moriarty's letter adds the detail that Cubit was saved by a convict. The clarity of this sequence is later muddled.

Moriarty's letter was printed because, as prefatory comments of Government Notice no. 196 stated, the Lieutenant Governor, George Arthur, wanted it 'published, in order to show how easily these wretched people may be intimidated and driven off when they are opposed with coolness, presence of mind and determined resolution'. This was, he acknowledged, despite continued hopes expressed in the same preface, 'that every possible means should be pursued, and preserved in, to conciliate the Aborigines'.

The manuscript copy of Moriarty's letter was endorsed by a hand other than Moriarty, possibly the Van Diemen's Land Colonial Secretary John Burnett, writing to Arthur with the hope that Arthur 'will cause the Heroine Dalrymple Briggs to be rewarded in some way or other'.<sup>33</sup> The same endorser particularly

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31 *Colonial Times*, 7 September 1831: 3.

32 State Library of Tasmania, CSO1/316: 955.

33 State Library of Tasmania, CSO1/316: 944.

wanted 'to publish this letter, with some remarks on the conduct of this intrepid Female'. As we know, it was.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, partly overlaying the endorsement of Moriarty's letter just noted, yet another writer, 'GA', George Arthur himself, commented on the potential significance of this event. Agreeing that 'Certainly this woman should be rewarded', Arthur was concerned to 'examine some more particular information respecting Her' before publication of the account was authorised.<sup>35</sup> Dalrymple was eventually given permission to marry the convict Thomas Johnston, and she was granted land, which shows the government making good on this suggestion.<sup>36</sup> This sequence of consequential events further helps confirm chronology, and also highlights that enquiries must have satisfied the government. Knowing that there was an investigative process between the event and its wider publicity, and knowing of Dalrymple's mixed heritage, it is both curious and perhaps quite deliberate that her particular background was not highlighted.

The event stayed in local memory for some time. In 1847, writing to the *Launceston Examiner* with an account of the troubles with Aborigines in the Deloraine area, Lieutenant Foote, an ex-navy settler, wrote how

Mrs. Johnson received a grant of land from Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, for gallantly defending herself and hut against the natives, on Stocker's Plains, beyond Deloraine, on the Meander River; her husband being in the bush after cattle at the time, the aborigines set fire to the hut, and tried to burn her with it; the grant of land is at Perth, where she and her husband reside.<sup>37</sup>

The salient details in living memory clearly conform to that of the contemporary documentation.<sup>38</sup> Referring to her as 'Mrs. Johnson', the account perhaps also suggests firsthand knowledge of the person concerned.

The combatants employed tactics which are more widely discernible.<sup>39</sup> Although Dalrymple's actions were offered to the colonial reading public as an exemplar, it was an exemplar of determination and courage, not any particular strategy. Showing the thought-processes of members of the government, it highlights that tension in Tasmanian governance between humanitarian urges and frontier realities which has already received considerable critical attention.<sup>40</sup>

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34 *Hobart Town Courier*, 24 September 1831: 2; *Colonial Times*, 28 September 1831: 4; *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 22 October 1831: 3.

35 State Library of Tasmania, CSO1/316: 944.

36 State Library of Tasmania, CON 45/1/1: 94 (request for permission to marry, October 1831); CSO1/886/18804; McFarlane 2005.

37 *Launceston Examiner*, 13 October 1847: 3.

38 Even if the inspiration for recording the recollection was to argue against the idea of returning Aborigines from the Bass Strait Islands to mainland Tasmania.

39 See for instance the account of the conflict given by Clements 2014.

40 Lester and Dussart 2014: 37-76.

### Imagining 'Dolly': the historiography

While locally famous, and certainly remarkable, Dalrymple Briggs' action in defending her hut was one of many violent encounters on the Van Diemen's Land frontier that might otherwise have been relegated to historiographical obscurity. But with a demonstrable disregard for facts and details, an ideological argument to make, and a good story, Jorgen Jorgenson seems to have created an image of Dalrymple Briggs as 'faithful Dolly' which has persisted.<sup>41</sup> Jorgenson was a Danish-born ex-convict, turned Roving Party leader, who attempted to turn writer and expert on Tasmanian Aborigines. Sometime after 1837 Jorgenson penned 'A Narrative of the Habits, Manners, and Customs of the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land'. It was never completed, and survives in manuscript form, but was transcribed and published in 1991 by Brian Plomley, who convincingly suggested the attribution of Jorgenson as the author.<sup>42</sup>

Two elements of Jorgenson's text deserve mention. The first is that he quoted extensively from available sources. This is significant to his account of Dalrymple Briggs because it is situated near the end of the manuscript just as he deliberately and openly shifts from a style of primarily quoting to one based on 'anecdotes'. In fact the Dalrymple section crosses and seemingly prompts the shift. He quotes Jeffreys' description of her physique and her sibling's fiery encounter, and then provides a version of Dalrymple defending the hut unlike any contemporary account. Although a manuscript source, it is largely a secondary source, just an unpublished one. The second point to note was that he was deliberately writing against extant literature on the subject, and held clear views about who was not to blame for the outbreak of hostilities between Europeans and Aborigines. He firmly refuted Jeffreys' (and therefore Evans') suggestions that the sealers were saviours of the women, and instead characterised them as violent sexual predators. He rejected the widespread belief that stockmen and shepherds were instigators of violence, particularly that against women. Although not published for over a century, there are clear indications in the text that Jorgenson was writing with an English readership in mind.<sup>43</sup> The account of Dalrymple defending her hut was given by Jorgenson as a contrasting story to that of the violent Aboriginal men burning her sibling that was recorded by Jeffreys. Central to this point is that in Jorgenson's account of Dalrymple defending the hut, she is not protecting her children, but a white stockman.

It is clear from the text that he had never met Dalrymple Briggs, and it is unclear where exactly the story came from other than the vague 'anecdotes'. Whatever the source of his information, however, it is clear that he was misinformed in some demonstrable ways. According to Jorgenson, Dalrymple Briggs lived with two men, Thomas Johnson and 'John Cupid'. Then, 'one day' Dalrymple saved the stockman 'Cupid' by killing 14 Aborigines with 'a double barrelled shot gun',

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41 Plomley 1991: 126.

42 Plomley 1991: 39-42.

43 Plomley 1991: 47, 49-51. Note the repeated phrasing directed at 'English readers'.

in reward for which Arthur granted land to Dalrymple and Johnson in Perth.<sup>44</sup> This all seems extremely unlikely, is fraught with demonstrable chronological tensions, and key verifiable details of the story are wrong. It is very unlikely that an individual could kill 14 people with a double-barrelled shotgun, especially since in all likelihood she would have had to laboriously re-load the weapon between each shot, as cartridges for breech-loading rifles were still largely unavailable in Van Diemen's Land at the time.<sup>45</sup> One might also question why all 14 Aborigines remained at the site after the first shots were fired, and the first individuals killed. The whole event also has an improbably convenient symmetry with 14 attackers, 14 thrown spears, and 14 dead. Moreover, by linking the miraculous shootout to Dalrymple's reward, her marriage to Johnson, and their moving to Perth, the story is linked to events which are demonstrably in the wake of the widely reported August 1831 incident.<sup>46</sup>

It seems that Jorgenson may have been conflating events of the mid-1820s that concerned the stockkeeper James Cubit (who he misnamed) when he was a stockkeeper at Stocker's hut, with that of August 1831, when he was demonstrably the stockkeeper at Gibson's hut. Because the widespread reporting of Dalrymple's defensive stand against attacking Aborigines at the hut was linked to Cubit being speared the following day – in August 1831, it is tempting to see stories and events only dimly remembered being coalesced into a single event. No contemporary records bear out a sequence of events quite like Jorgenson's account.

Jorgenson also described Aborigines killing the stockkeeper William Knight at Simpson's hut as a 'follow-up' to the attack on Dalrymple, but there are major obstacles to accepting this. Dalrymple is not connected in contemporary records with any one or more of Cubit, Johnson, Stocker's hut, or Gibson's hut at or near the time when William Knight was killed. This event was in July 1827, and it was not itself an Aboriginal retaliation as such, but in fact resulted in a well-publicised retaliatory strike on Aborigines by local settlers.<sup>47</sup> This further highlights how Jorgenson was muddling times, places, and people. He seems to have taken some of the vague gossip of the sort that Robinson encountered in 1830 concerning Cubit and Dalrymple, and have written them together into an event of 1831 with some literary flair and license. In doing so Jorgenson turned Dalrymple Briggs from a defender of her children to 'faithful Dolly', defender of the white stockman Cubit, a characterisation that well-suited Jorgenson's wider argument.

44 Plomley 1991: 125.

45 For instance, in 1822 the *Hobart Town Gazette* reprinted a report from the United States about the 'new and invented repeating musket', 2 March 1822: 2; and if we examine for-sale lists, there is little evidence of widespread rapid-fire weaponry being generally available. The list of items from the ships *Resources* and *Sovereign* in February 1831 are typical: 'Muskets, Pistols, double and single barrel fowling pieces', 'Shot, Musket ball, gunpowder in lb. canisters', 'Musket and pistol flints'; in other words, no cartridges, no breech-loaders: just old-school muskets, shot and gunpowder. *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 February 1831: 1.

46 State Library of Tasmania, CON45/1/1: 94 (request for permission to marry, October 1831).

47 *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*, 6 July 1827: 4.

Adding to the confusion, Jorgenson was the first person to name Dalrymple Briggs 'Dolly Dalrymple'. It is possibly a mistaken attribution, as there was another Aboriginal woman known as Dolly in the colony in the 1830s.<sup>48</sup> No other record refers to her this way until James Bonwick in 1870, drawing, as will be shown, on Jorgenson's unpublished manuscript to provide an unattributed but practically verbatim version of Jorgenson's description of the hut battle.<sup>49</sup>

Bonwick conveyed, without any sense of contradiction, two versions of Dalrymple Briggs' story. How this came to be so, and how this tension has been critically approached, has much to tell us about Australian historiography. When Bonwick produced his survey of the Aboriginal Tasmanians and the conflict with the European settlers *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, The Black War of Van Diemen's Land* (1870), he included both accounts, but in different contexts.<sup>50</sup> The same duality was later re-told in Bonwick's shorter but more popularly inclined, *The Lost Tasmanian Race* (1884).<sup>51</sup> Conveying the history of events in the early section of his text, he recounted Dalrymple's shootout as '[o]ne of the most stirring incidents in the history of the war', and simply quoted the Moriarty letter at length, correctly attributing the event to August 1831.<sup>52</sup> However, in a later chapter analysing 'Half-Castes', he gives an account of Dalrymple, who with 'a double-barrelled gun', 'defended her fortress, and compelled her assailants to retreat with heavy loss of life', saving 'Cupid', whereby she was awarded with land in Perth with Johnson.<sup>53</sup> This account, and the wider narrative sequence of this section, was clearly drawn from Jorgenson.<sup>54</sup>

Although Bonwick did not identify Jorgenson as the source of his information for the second version, he elsewhere described how he came to have Jorgenson's 'manuscript'.<sup>55</sup> Of the source of this story, Bonwick only noted that 'Particulars of the conflict are given elsewhere', possibly a veiled reference to Jorgenson's manuscript, but more likely a reference back 202 pages in his own volume to the Moriarty letter regarding the August 1831 action.<sup>56</sup> Readers therefore could not have known the particular source of the information or its reliability until Jorgenson's surviving manuscript was found in the Mitchell Library in Sydney and published by Plomley in 1991.

Bonwick therefore seems to be the vehicle through which Jorgenson's version, a strange concatenation of Jeffreys' physical description of the child Dalrymple

48 Melville 1835: 86, 88.

49 A letter from 'T.T.' printed in the *Launceston Examiner*, 16 June 1890: 4 says 'I was well acquainted with the mother of Miss Polly [sic] Dalrymple, who afterwards became Mrs Thomas Johnson', which could give credibility to a Polly/Dolly attribution, but it post-dates the first printed use of 'Dolly' by two decades. Most newspaper references to 'Dolly Dalrymple' are from the twentieth century.

50 Bonwick 1870: 121–122, 322–323.

51 Bonwick 1884: 68–69, 202–203.

52 Bonwick 1870: 121–122.

53 Bonwick 1870: 322–323.

54 Plomley 1991: 125–6; Bonwick 1870: 321–323.

55 Bonwick 1870: 207.

56 Bonwick 1870: 323.

and her later recorded defence of the hut, entered both scholarly and popular historical memory as a sort of narrative package. Curiously Jorgenson's fantastical 'history' was brought to a wider reading public's attention within Australia by a historical fiction writer, Horace B. Pithouse, whose novel, *The Luck of 1825* (1922), included multiple chapters addressing Dalrymple's saving of Cubit and the subsequent hut battle.<sup>57</sup> Pithouse's story dramatised Dalrymple's defence with a mixture of elements of the twin stories conveyed by Bonwick. This is made explicitly clear in a small addendum note, where Pithouse indicated that Bonwick was his source; moreover, that Bonwick 'gives two different accounts of the affray at Dairy Plains'.<sup>58</sup> Pithouse further noted that 'For the purposes of this story the incident is predated by a few years.'<sup>59</sup> Pithouse deliberately placed the events in 1825 for narrative purposes.

Dalrymple's mixed-race origins are significant to Pithouse's presentation of events, even if typified by the time of their writing. Pithouse describes Dalrymple,

a strikingly handsome personage and of almost perfect physique, though a half-caste. Yet little beyond the thickness of her lips betrayed her native origin. Her eyes, o'ershadowed by exquisitely arched dark eyebrows, shone dark, yet with a violet light, large and liquidly beneath long curled lashes. Her face, always rosy-cheeked and flushed with excitement as it now was, was a model for a painter ; but her crown of glory undoubtedly was her hair, which dropped nearly to her waist in long nut-brown, wavy locks. Athletic and intelligent, she stood now the very impersation [sic] of the spirit of fearlessness.<sup>60</sup>

This characterisation is important to the narrative, firstly for facilitating her 'so well knowing the instincts of the aborigines', but also for exploring wider tensions about race and culture.<sup>61</sup> The 'chief' Powranna appears, armed with Cubit's lost gun. He mishandles it, and smashes it in rage. Then a counter Aboriginal character Crowowa arrives, also armed with a gun, and once again Dalrymple's background is suggested by her reaction to this man: 'Why Dolly so long withheld the finger that was itching to pull the trigger on the newcomer [Crowowa] she could never explain'.<sup>62</sup> Pithouse posits a sort of mystical-sanguinary bond existing between Dalrymple and Crowowa. This mutual connection is furthered when, while the rest of the Aborigines split and move to assault the hut and encircle it in two groups, Crowowa stands off. He too, it seems, is hesitant to harm Dalrymple. For this, however, Dalrymple regards him with mixed feelings, thinking him a 'coward', but also experiencing 'a strange undefined feeling of disappointment in him'.<sup>63</sup> There is no simple heroine-coward relationship here.

57 Pithouse 1922: 216–242.

58 Pithouse 1922: addenda.

59 Pithouse 1922: addenda.

60 Pithouse 1922: 222.

61 Pithouse 1922: 223.

62 Pithouse 1922: 224.

63 Pithouse 1922: 227.

Pithouse thus explored the admixture of race and culture in fairly nuanced ways. The two senior Aboriginal men both carry European weapons into the conflict, though with different degrees of competence. Their assault is also fraught with apparent internal tensions, as frequently the Aborigines appear to be at odds over strategy; specifically, between Crowowa, who has more confidence with European ways and technologies, and Powranna, who is burdened by a lack of technological competence, base instincts of rage, and a pride that will not desert him until the very end where eventually the sounds of 'Tally ho! Tally ho! Tally ho!' indicate the return of 'a party of horsemen', which drives the Aborigines to flight.<sup>64</sup> Both of the Aboriginal gunmen get shot by Dalrymple, albeit not mortally, yet the only wound inflicted by Aborigines upon those in the hut is when the cowardly Wanba, hiding after a failed assault on the chimney, manages to jab the unconscious Cubit with a spear on his second attempt.<sup>65</sup> Only one Aborigine dies in the affray, although Dalrymple conveniently 'swoons' in time to fail to fully witness her rescuer's chase of the tribe and any retribution they dealt out.

So while the whole exchange does have elements of racial stereotyping, such as strong but kindly Cubit and cowardly Wamba, the core element of this story is the tension between the characters of Powranna (least adaptive, most traditional), Crowowa (adaptive, siding with his tribe despite failing to convince them to take another path), and Dalrymple (adaptive, whose primary loyalty is to her children). Through this sequence Pithouse explored a complex shifting of identity, between tradition and modernity, change and continuity.

In contrast, historians have generally repeated the narrative in one of two ways. The first is a local historical chronicle tradition, first exemplified by John West (1852), then James E. Calder (1875), who simply conveyed the details of the attack on and defence of the hut drawn from the printed Moriarty letter.<sup>66</sup> In these, the event was usually offered as an exemplar of feminine determination against attacking Aborigines, exactly as Government Notice no. 196 intended, albeit to later audiences. The government seems to have hoped it would allay fears about unprotected women and children at isolated huts, and later repetition of the story maintained this focus on female bravery and resolution. But in both of these cases, wider pieces of information were added. In West's case, the identification of Dalrymple as a 'half-caste woman' shows that he is not exclusively relying on Moriarty's letter, because that did not mention this detail, which implies there was a certain element of common knowledge informing his history. In a way it is a reminder that because of Jeffreys' publication, Dalrymple probably could never have realistically avoided the 'half-caste' label in ways that other mixed-race children could have done. Calder's account, which did not mention Dalrymple's heritage, suggests that the speared child 'was enticed outside by the

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64 Pithouse 1922: 240.

65 Pithouse 1922: 232; Cubitt was speared outside the hut, of course.

66 West 1852: 38; Calder 1875: 11-12.

blacks ... imitating the cries of poultry when alarmed', thus similarly showing the addition of minor details, but still bearing a general conformity to the details of the Moriarty account.

A second trend has been to invest the event with some significance, typified by academic historical scholarship of the 1990s and 2000s. The story had gained a certain popular currency in the press in Northern Tasmania in the early twentieth century, clearly in part because of Pithouse's novel.<sup>67</sup> Historians seemed to react against such popular understandings of events, but responded more at the level of meaning than detail. For instance Shayne Breen railed against the way that the story 'has been written about several times', despite himself only citing two local histories, and was more concerned with what he felt were narrow 'racist and sexist interpretations' that 'always fail to locate the blacks' attack on Dolly's hut [sic] within the wider black-white relations of the district'.<sup>68</sup> Curiously, he asserted that the Aboriginal attacks were 'not intended to kill', with the Dalrymple attack given as an illustration of this fact, even though a child was speared and concerted efforts were made to burn the hut down with the inhabitants still inside it.

While Breen's strange characterisation of the event as play fighting has not held, his suggestion that the event needed to be situated within a wider 'black' versus 'white' battle was taken up by Lyndall Ryan, who has repeatedly situated the event in a series of papers arguing that European settlers utilised 'massacre' as a tactic of land clearance in the Australian colonial frontier.<sup>69</sup> Although not explicitly citing Breen for Dalrymple's actions, it seems clear that Ryan read Breen's paper because an identical map from his paper was later published in one of hers.<sup>70</sup> But Ryan's point was clearer than Breen's, in that Dalrymple Briggs became something of an expression of settler-violence. Of the event, Ryan states that in '1825 [sic]', 'His [James Cubit's] partner, Dolly Dalrymple, saved him by fighting them [the attacking Aborigines] off with a shotgun, killing 14 of them'.<sup>71</sup>

When published in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, Ryan's sole reference for this bold claim (endnote 57) was to the 6 January 1826 edition of the *Hobart Town Gazette*.<sup>72</sup> This version of events is clearly not from that source as there was no edition of the *Hobart Town Gazette* published on 6 January 1826.<sup>73</sup> Ryan's version was rather, it seems, a combination of the Jorgenson version of events coupled with the date of the event given by Pithouse.

67 See for instance, the *Advocate*, 21 October 1931: 2; *Advocate*, 4 June 1940: 6.

68 Breen 1996: 118.

69 Ryan 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010.

70 'Figure 2' in Ryan 2008b: 491 is identical to 'Map 2' in Breen 1996: 111.

71 Ryan 2008b: 490.

72 Ryan 2008b: 490, 498 at no. 57.

73 Ryan seems to have mistaken the reference to the *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*, 6 January 1826: 4.

Ryan's various 'massacre' papers show a relatively consistent narrative about Dalrymple and Cubit, but a diversity of sources, dates, and details.<sup>74</sup> Trying to find corroborating evidence for the Jorgenson version of events, Ryan turned to Robinson's record of visiting Dalrymple and 'Punch's' gossip about Cubit, and Cubit and Dalrymple, to make the case that the hut battle preceded the killing of William Knight in 1827.<sup>75</sup> But in the period that Ryan has Dalrymple living with Cubit, she was demonstrably living near Launceston with Mountgarrett. More depositional evidence places her still living in the Launceston district in February 1827.<sup>76</sup> It is possible that she lived with Cubit at Stocker's hut prior to Cubit moving out and Johnson moving in, and at that time 'assisted in killing natives', as Robinson's informant suggested, but there is a relatively short window of opportunity. But it was not in 1825, and not necessarily the case anyway, considering the extreme vagueness of the source. Superficial similarities in the textual structure of Robinson's diary entry from 1830, and Jorgenson's description of the hut battle, seem to have led Ryan to accept, somewhat understandably, Jorgenson's conflation of events. Both Robinson and Jorgenson described Cubit fleeing to safety at Stocker's hut, Dalrymple killing Aborigines, and then each mentions Aborigines killing William Knight. For Jorgenson, the sequence was causal. Dalrymple fought to save Cubit, and the surviving Aborigines killed Knight in retribution. Robinson's diary entry is, however, a collection of stories about previous events where the sequence is incidental. I think it points to a particular oral tradition concerning Cubit, which had a clear narrative, but obvious problems. There may be something to independent elements of this tradition, but when presented as a unifying story it is clearly an elaborated conflation.

This highlights quite clearly how Robinson has come to dominate modern histories of Van Diemen's Land to such a great extent that his diaries are mined for corroborating information for obviously problematical stories. In tandem with this is a process of cyclical scholarship. Even just in Ryan's case, as the publications progressed, the amount of source material cited was reduced and the death-count became firmer.<sup>77</sup> Each time the story was published it seemed to gain credibility, regardless of how it was sourced. Conditionality went out the window like a blast of duck shot. This is profoundly interesting for being exactly what happened with the Jorgenson account in the first place: fact-making by attrition.

74 Ryan recounts the story at least four times: Ryan 2007: 10; Ryan 2008a: 4-5; Ryan 2008b: 490, and Ryan 2012: 171.

75 Ryan 2007: 10; Ryan 2008a: 4-5.

76 National Library of Australia, NLA MS 3251, Box 1, Volume 2: 295. A transcript is available online at: <http://manuscript3251.wordpress.com/2009/10/23/ms-3251-1821-1844-box-1-vol-2/>.

77 Ryan's initial view of the incident was that 'Jorgenson says 14' Aborigines were killed (Ryan 2007 and 2008a). In these two publications, several primary sources were cited, composed in and/or concerning events from the mid 1820s to the 1840s, not all of which actually concerned Dalrymple Briggs. Notably, she identified the *Colonial Times* (6 January 1826) which described an isolated Cubit being attacked in 1825, but also the printed Moriarity account of and from 1831. In two later publications (2008b and 2012), only one source was cited, the *Hobart Town Gazette* (6 January 1826), and 'Jorgenson says 14' was rendered as '14', without the conditional allegation.

But it is also interesting for dropping Dalrymple's mixed heritage. For both Breen and Ryan, the conflict was 'black' versus 'white'. Ryan placed Dalrymple firmly in the 'white' camp. She was not alone in doing this, as both Jorgenson and Robinson made comments about the whiteness of Dalrymple's children, and Government Notice no. 196 effectively made her a public example of the brave settler-woman.<sup>78</sup> Again, despite the different historiographical focus and approach, colonial-era propaganda has managed to convey its message.

### **From historiography back to methodology**

De-chronicled, Dalrymple Briggs reveals the complexity of historical memory, and ironically therefore serves again as a symbol. This is not a new biography, and was not intended to be such. There is more to Dalrymple's life, whether documented or not, which is absent from the above discussion. But beyond being a symbol, Dalrymple Briggs can serve as a methodological focal point, aptly complicating the ambiguous experiences and realities of the colonial frontier.

Jeffreys' account of Dalrymple and its many repetitions highlight how a narrative can survive multiple meanings being attached to it, and illustrates that there was not a single colonial narrative, so much as competing colonial narratives. Conversely, Dalrymple's defence of the hut shows how authoritative narratives could be created, whether by the colonial authorities, or by later historians. Only by understanding the process whereby a narrative becomes authoritative can any sensible critique be made of it.

A final part of this methodological approach is the willingness to jettison cherished narratives. The postmodernist turn had made historians wary of claiming to write a definitive 'true' version of any given event, but, as an examination of the mythology of 'Daring Dolly Dalrymple' serves to remind us, sometimes recorded history can be demonstrably wrong.

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<sup>78</sup> Plomley 1991: 126; Plomley 2008: 254.

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