

# lucy frost

## DISPLAYING TRUGERNANNA

IN 1947 WHEN I was six years old, the skeleton of Trugernanna was taken off display in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart. That same year, in the late August heat of north Texas, I began school and started reading about a couple of twerps named Dick and Jane whose saccharine existence was enlivened by a dog named Spot. Infinitely more dramatic and complicated narratives spiced my own day and night dreams. Some of the stories I shared with my sister Ruth, especially when we went on excursions to our favourite picnic place, the upside-down mountain of Palo Dura Canyon. On our drive south from Amarillo across the almost featureless landscape of the high plains, we always stopped at a little

museum in a small town called Canyon. All I remember of the museum is a diorama with miniature Indians on horseback streaking across the plains from which living Indians had been driven decades before. We didn't know that, of course. Our Apache warriors existed not in historical time, but in the fantasy time of children's heads. Each warrior, dazzling in his headdress of eagle feathers, controlled a horse with one hand while holding aloft a tomahawk with the other. Ruth and I pressed our faces against the glass of the diorama, as if somehow this would bring us closer to the fascinating figures. Shut up again in the back seat of our father's unreliable post-war Studebaker, we would tell ourselves into the world of the diorama, becoming wild Indians on wild horses. The tedium of driving down straight highways no longer mattered.

If in 1947 I had been a child in Hobart, instead of Amarillo, I'm sure I would have pressed my nose against the glass of the museum's diorama where a life-size Trugernanna kneels before the fire, dressed only in a string of seashells. And then I could have stared into the display case featuring the articulated skeleton identified by a sign: 'Lallah Rooke, or Truganini, the last Tasmanian Aboriginal'. The museum offered Trugernanna both 'denuded of flesh' (as her skeleton was described in a contemporary account), and re-fleshed in plaster of Paris.

Although I have never returned to Texas since I left in 1953 and cannot be sure what has happened to the diorama of Apache warriors, I would be very surprised if they remained to lure white children like me into the fantasy of a vanished other. In Hobart, however, Trugernanna continues to kneel

before the fire, watched by her husband Woorady and a boy of six or seven, the child she in reality could never bear after sealers had infected her with a 'loathesome disease', probably gonorrhoea. Father and son wait patiently for mum to cook an enormous crayfish and serve it to her nuclear family. This is a story of Trugernanna, but it is not her story.

A few weeks ago I stood in the room housing the Aboriginal collection, and watched as children passed through on their way to this summer's most popular exhibit, 'Dinosaurs of Darkness', attracting some 15,000 visitors according to the *Hobart Mercury*. The diorama takes up one entire wall of the room housing the Aboriginal collection, and nothing else can begin to compete with it for dramatic effect. Naturally the children on their way to see the dinosaurs noticed the naked black boy reaching out to touch the shoulder of his kneeling mother, and they detoured over to get as close to the glass as a railing allows. Who are these people? the children wanted to know. Their parents floundered around for answers, trying to historicise the fantasy before them. At Woorady's feet lies the only stab at interpretation, a sign entitled 'social organisation'. 'There were three levels of social organisation,' it begins, droning on through a taxonomic account of the hearth group, band, tribe, until (if you make it through to the end), a politically charged word breaches the bland surface: 'Prior to European invasion, the population has been estimated at 3,000–4,000 people'. 'Invasion', not settlement, and yet in its context evasive. What is happening here, to this family before my eyes? What is the story of the people I am looking at? The

sign provides today's children with no more honest an interpretation of violent colonial contact in Tasmania than the display of Indians and tomahawks told me in 1947 about the violent history of north Texas. At the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, non-indigenous children are still taught the colonising gaze.

How I wish that their experience were different, that one day as they pressed against the railing Trugernanna would rise from her demurely kneeling position, turn towards them, walk through the glass veil, and begin talking. 'She was partial to conversation', wrote a journalist in the *Hobart Mercury* the day after her death on 8 May 1876, and 'always willing to give such information as was within her knowledge'. Trugernanna was born about 1812, less than a decade after the first authorised settlement in Van Diemen's Land. Her stories would have spanned the entire period of settlement and reached back to the earlier years when sealers and whalers began disrupting Aboriginal communities. To the *Mercury's* journalist, the old woman was primarily a curiosity who had moved with the Dandridge family from Oyster Cove to a house just four blocks down Macquarie Street from the museum awaiting her: 'Her short, stout figure, red turban, and dusky features were known far and wide, and always attracted great attention'.

There were some who understood her importance as a witness to history. James Erskine Calder talked with Trugernanna when he was writing the book he would call *Some Account of the Wars, Extirpation, Habits, etc of the Native Tribes of Tasmania* (1875). He asked her why she went with James

Augustus Robinson on his 'Friendly Mission' to bring in those yet alive after the Black War. 'Mr. Robinson,' she told Calder, 'was a good man and could speak our language, and I said I would go with him and help him.' It was 'the best thing to do ... I hoped we would save all my people that were left'. From the first of Robinson's expeditions Trugernanna served as 'one of the "ambassadors" who went forward to meet the local mob, telling them "why we have come and that our people were all being killed and it was no use fighting any more, and Mr Robinson was our friend, and would take us all to a good place"'. She was, says Henry Reynolds, a patriot with 'a serious political agenda'. But in the diorama, the wife and mother sitting passively before the fire bears no resemblance to an ambassador or to one of the guides who helped Robinson through a landscape as foreign to them as to the white man, terrain never previously walked by a European, too rugged ever to be tamed into farms and towns, and now designated a wilderness area preserved as world heritage. Trugernanna might have been remembered as an intrepid explorer who went with the white man on a remarkable, and successful, venture of exploration. But she wasn't. And isn't.

Members of the Royal Society saw to that. For them, Trugernanna was a collectible. The day after her death was announced, Dr James Agnew wrote to the Colonial Secretary asking that Trugernanna's body be given over to the Royal Society for its museum. His argument emphasised her value as a tourist drawcard:

At times like the present when the study of races occupies so much learned attention, types of this kind are of high value and it may safely be affirmed that in future years no specimen in our national museum would possess greater interest for the learned & scientific traveller from other lands.

Trugernanna had become valuable because hers was the last name on a countdown to extinction.

The prelude to countdown began with the Friendly Mission during which Robinson, helped by Trugernanna and the others, persuaded Aborigines from all parts of the island to end their conflict with the colonists and come in to the settled areas. In 1833 the people 'brought in' agreed to go temporarily to Flinders Island in Bass Strait, on the understanding that they would later return to the mainland. There, at a settlement called Wybalenna, two hundred survivors of the Black War discovered that the promises made by Robinson would not be kept. They were marooned in a place which was for them unhealthy, as it was not for the convicts who lived and worked there. Respiratory illnesses struck the Aborigines again and again, and they died from pneumonia, tuberculosis, influenza. In 1847, after fourteen years of exile, the forty-six who yet lived, including a few children born at Wybalenna, were once more put on a ship and transported over the sea. Their new home was to be at Oyster Cove, forty kilometres south of Hobart, sufficiently removed from town to placate those burghers frightened by the mere idea of 'a native'. Oyster

Cove had the added advantage of costing little. A gang of convicts had been sent there a few years before to construct a female prison on the site, but that project had been abandoned when it was decided to use instead a prison hulk moored closer to town, and presumably more convenient for settlers who wanted to hire convict women (as they did not plan to hire Aboriginal women).

The Aborigines who returned were initially an undifferentiated group as far as the general public was concerned. Those colonists and travellers who went down to Oyster Cove and signed the visitors' book could scarcely be expected to remember by name everyone they met, and in the early years of return, the Aborigines in residence kept changing anyway. Men came and went on whaling voyages, children came and went from the Queen's Orphan School, and anyone might be off hunting or visiting. As the numbers decreased with yearly deaths and no new births, there were fewer names to remember. Conveniently for those who might have found difficulty with Aboriginal languages, most tribal names had been changed. Trugernanna appeared in government records as 'Lallah Rookh', named by Robinson for an 'Oriental' princess from a narrative poem popular in England before the barely educated bricklayer sailed off to make a name for himself in Van Diemen's Land. At least we have a tribal name for the woman who became Lallah Rookh, even though its spelling and pronunciation remain debatable. Once, shortly before she died, a man invited her to dinner, determined to resolve the matter. Over and over he asked her to repeat the name: 'I

importuned her so much about the proper pronunciation ... that she at last grew impatient, rolled and flashed her eye, and called me, right out, a fool'.

No tribal name survives for William Lanne, or Lanni or Lanny or Lanney, sometimes called simply 'Billy' in the government records, known to the whalers with whom he sailed as 'King Billy'. Lanne was about seven years old when his family, one of the last 'brought in', left their tribal lands on the west coast for the settlement on Flinders Island, and when the exiles returned to live at Oyster Cove, he was sent initially to the Queen's Orphan School. On 3 March 1869, a few weeks after returning from a whaling voyage on the *Runnymede*, Lanne died in his room at 'The Dog and Partridge', Barrack Street, Hobart, aged about thirty-three. As the last male name on the dwindling list of returned exiles at Oyster Cove, Lanne attracted the attention of collectors for rival museums. On one side was Dr William Crowther, who wanted the kudos he could see coming his way if he managed to ship Lanne's skeleton to the museum of Britain's Royal College of Surgeons. According to Crowther, only a fool could 'suppose that a paltry little place like Tasmania had a better right' to this unique artefact than London.

The gentlemen of the Royal Society of Tasmania thought otherwise. Arguing their case for the local museum, they insisted that their claim to 'possession of the skeleton of the last male aboriginal of the Colony is altogether paramount to that of any other scientific institution in the world'.



To this Museum reference will naturally be made in future years for all details of information respecting a race which will then have ceased to exist. Although it already possesses the skeleton of a female it is evident that a male skeleton is required to complete the series, and we would beg respectfully to point out the discredit that would attach to any Government, if, under similar circumstances, they permitted so essential an element of a national collection to be lost to the country. The Council freely admit the claims which science in general has upon these valuable relics, and it is therefore their intention to have them carefully photographed on a large scale in order that copies may be presented not only to the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, but to any other kindred institutions by which they are likely to be appreciated. The Council will also afford all facilities within their power, for the execution of casts of such portions of the skeleton as may be specially interesting.

Unbeknownst to Dr Agnew when he wrote this letter on behalf of the Royal Society, his fellow medico William Crowther had already cut off Lanne's head.

Crowther emerges as arrogant, manipulative, totally self-centred, and a bully determined to get what he wanted. First, he got a coroner's order to move Lanne's body from the room where he died to the deadhouse at the General Hospital where Crowther was honorary medical officer. He then told

the newly appointed and far junior house surgeon, George Stokell, that 'the body was his, that the Col. Sec<sup>y</sup> had given it to him & he said he would have it'. Stokell, however, had already received unequivocal instructions from the rightly suspicious Colonial Secretary 'not to allow any mutilation of the body of the Aboriginal Native "Billy" now lying dead in the Hospital', and despite the pressure, he stood up to the overbearing Crowther: 'I told him that the Col. Sec<sup>y</sup> had instructed me that no one should touch or mutilate the body'. Crowther switched to flattery, and Stokell succumbed. Yes, he would be delighted to visit Crowther at home. Most probably the doctor was a bully in that arena as well. Certainly the mutilation of Lanne's corpse became a Crowther family affair – father led the charge, a son enrolled at the General Hospital as pupil to his father helped out, and Mrs Crowther acted as decoy to distract Dr Stokell, whose self-confessed naiveté is quite overwhelming.

He asked me to go to his house at 6PM. I said I could not go at that hour but I promised to be there at 8 P.M. I started for Dr C's at 7.30, I reached Dr C's & C was not there – Mrs C. kept me there talking. That he would not be long before he was home.

I got back to Hospital about 9. I asked man (Knights) at the gate if Dr. C had been there. He said Dr C & his son had been there & gone. I went straight in dead House – I found the door locked – I opened it. I looked into the coffin – & saw that the skull of Lanne

had been removed & another skull had been substituted, the substituted skull had come from the dissecting Room.

Stokell was in deep trouble. Desperate, he curried favour with Crowther's rivals, cutting off Lanne's hands and feet, and giving them to the Royal Society. Crowther's collectible was spoiled. If the locals could not have Lanne's skeleton intact for their museum, they would at least deprive Londoners of the trophy. 'The last Tasmanian male' could hardly go on display with such obvious bits missing.

On 6 March a funeral was held for Lanne, organised and paid for by the captain of the *Runnymede*, who acted as pall-bearer, along with 'three coloured seamen, John Bull, a native of the Sandwich Islands, Henry Whalley, a half-caste native of Kangaroo Island, South Australia, and Alexander Davidson; an American'. Despite a valiant effort by the whaling community to bestow upon the ceremony some of the decorum for which they were rarely known, rumours were rife, as three gentlemen of Hobart informed the Colonial Secretary: 'It is openly stated & generally believed that the body buried today in St David's Churchyard as that of William Lanni has been shamefully mutilated before interment'. Well into the twentieth century, a Crowther descendant would remember and repeat a ditty learned in childhood:

King Billy's dead. Crowther has his head  
Stokell has his hands and feet.  
My feet, my feet, my poor black feet  
That used to be so gritty  
They're not on board the *Runnymede*  
They're somewhere in this city.

Trugernanna worried. The 'last Tasmanian Aborigine', people began to call her. But she wasn't. She wasn't even the last survivor from the Friendly Mission. At the settlement on Flinders Island, a daughter was born to two of those 'brought in', Tanganutura and Nicermenic. This baby, who entered the official records as Fanny Cochrane, was among the remnant returned to Van Diemen's Land. In 1857 she escaped the dwindling lists of Oyster Cove when she married William Smith and moved with him to a farm where their family grew to eleven children. Other Aboriginal women had never been on the government records. They were gone from Van Deiemen's Land before the Black War, taken by sealers to islands throughout the Bass Strait, and as far away as Kangaroo Island. Perhaps one was the mother of William Lanne's pall-bearer, the so-called 'half-caste' Henry Whalley.

These others could not protect Trugernanna from the consequences of her fate as colonial symbol. On 8 May 1876 Mrs Dandridge reported to the government officials: 'It is with deep regret I have to report the death of "Lallah Rookh" the last Tasmanian Aborigine'. Three days later, an unnamed correspondent reminded readers of the *Mercury* of how anxious

Trugernanna had been about what would happen to her body: 'Just before the true heiress of the inheritance we have usurped, passed away, she said to Mrs Dandridge, her benefactress, and to a gentleman or two present, "Don't let them cut me, but bury me behind one of the mountains".' If many, and perhaps most, Tasmanians wanted Trugernanna buried rather than denuded of flesh and put on display in the museum, the contingent did not include members of the Royal Society, whose eager letter sent to the Colonial Secretary I have already quoted! No, said the Colonial Secretary in reply, and on 10 May sent out a press release to the editors of the *Mercury* and *Tribune*:

The Government have received an application from the Council of the Royal Society for the body of Trucanini (Lallah Rookh) the last representative of the aboriginal race of Tasmania ... This application has been refused, and the Government have given orders for the decent interment of the corpse, but to prevent a recurrence of the unseemly scenes which were enacted in March 1869, it has been deemed expedient to inter the body at the Cascades in a vacant spot immediately in front of the Chapel – The funeral will take place at noon tomorrow, and will be conducted at the expense of the Government by Mr William Hamilton the well known undertaker. – The service will be performed by the Rev<sup>d</sup> Canon Parsons, and any friends and sympathizers are invited to attend.

But the funeral did not take place at noon, the undertaker was bypassed, and few friends or sympathisers were invited. Shortly before midnight, a posse of armed men rode with a cart carrying Trugernanna's body through deserted Hobart streets, and up towards Mount Wellington, where since 1828 women had been incarcerated in the Female House of Correction, known during convict days as the female factory at Cascades. A select group, including a reporter from the *Mercury*, gathered within the high walls of the stark convict space, and stood watching.

Previous to the lid being screwed down several spectators, our reporter among the rest, were shown the face of the deceased Queen, and one lady, of eccentric habits, and who assumes to herself a title as high as that of poor Trucanini, touched the face, as if to make 'assurance doubly sure'. All this time the bell in the reformatory yard was tolling, and as none of the inmates of the institution, a few of the officials and servants excepted, were to be seen in the spacious enclosure, a death-like silence pervaded the place. The coffin screwed down, the spectators assembled in the chapel. They did not number, including some children, more than twenty-five.

... We understand that a monument of some kind is to be erected over the grave, and Mr Graves has been requested to write an epitaph for it. He has willingly undertaken the task, and proposes that it shall be inscribed in both the English and native languages.

Many people who had intended to pay their respects to the cortège felt cheated by this subterfuge. Readers of the *Mercury*, however, were reminded of the precedent to be avoided:

The requirements of so-called science, which in our case judging by what took place in March, 1869, means the indecorous selfishness of some member of the medical profession to secure to himself what his brethren desired on the part of all, and the determination of the profession to out-wit a brother medico, or some paid – in honour or cash – agent of a foreign society, imposed on Government the cruel necessity of giving to the last of the aborigines of this Island what bears so near an approach to a felon's grave that the necessity infers a disgrace on us all. ... It is a humiliating reflection, and we envy not the feelings of the unknown gentleman whose zeal in behalf of his so-called science, and whose desire to receive the thanks of some learned Society, are credited with having imposed on the Government of the Colony the necessity of taking so unexceptional a means of preserving the body from the sacrilegious hands that would, probably, had the means been allowed him, made merchandise of the body yesterday laid in the court yard of the Cascades establishment.

Since the *Mercury* had covered extensively the enquiry Crowther faced after Lanne's death, it seems rather coy to refer to an 'unknown gentleman' in this bombastic editorial.

The medico himself, for whatever reason, apparently shied away from the body of Trugernanna.

The Royal Society, however, was still in there fighting. Two months after the burial, Agnew sent another letter. Since 'all due rites of burial have now been publically accorded to deceased', it is 'difficult to conceive that any portion of an enlightened & rational community could object to have the skeleton carefully preserved in our National Collection'. No, came the reply though more muted and accompanied by no press release – the government considered 'it would be premature to exhume the body'. And then, third time lucky. In December 1878, Agnew won. His request 'to secure the skeleton of the Aborigine, Truganini, who was buried at the Cascade Establishment in May 1876', had been granted 'on the understanding that the skeleton shall not be exposed to public view but be decently deposited in a secure resting place where it may be accessible by special permission to scientific men for scientific purposes'. The removal was no secret. On 14 December 1878, *The Weekly Examiner* reported that 'the body of Truganini, the last of the Tasmanian aboriginals, which was buried in the graveyard attached to the Cascades Factory, has been exhumed, the bones denuded of the flesh, and the skeleton handed over to the Royal Society for scientific purposes. Our contemporary states that owing to the peculiar nature of the soil of the Cascades Burial Ground, the body when exposed was found to be in a wonderful state of preservation.' More than thirty years later, in 1912, an old man named Fred Seager told the photographer J.W. Beattie, 'that he



was the only one alive now that knew about the “King Billy” & “Trucanini” “business”, and gave me a few particulars’. Seager, who as superintendent of the Colonial Hospital had presented eye-witness testimony at the public enquiry into the dismemberment of Lanne, said that he had been present when the body of Trugernanna was dug up:

... they got a couple of convicts, who were under sentence for murder, to open the grave & get the coffin out.

The vault was full of water, and when they opened the coffin the water poured out of it, and the body seemed to be pulpy, the flesh was just like *mutton fat*, Seager said, ‘You just sludged it off the bones as if it were fat!’ All the ‘fat’ was put back in the Coffin again, [the coffin] closed up, & consigned to the vault, the whole being arranged as if nothing had occurred. Seager thought that this peculiar state of the body was due to mineralised water.

The spectre of Trugernanna’s flesh, reburied boneless in the coffin, haunts me ...

Flesh in a coffin, bones in a box. The box tagged with a curatorial number, and labelled. And kept within Hobart’s grand new museum building. But where were the learned travellers from far-off lands, those latter-day Magi following the star of science? Their absence did not matter: in all correspondence from the Royal Society requesting the bodies first of Lanne and then Trugernanna, the paramount argument was

the importance of collecting for a 'national' museum. Scientific knowledge was consistently written into second place. The depths of passion aroused by collecting may bewilder many of us, and yet we know that works of art too famous ever to be displayed are stolen from art galleries around the world to feed the fanaticism of collectors. The collectors of the Royal Society had Trugernanna's skeleton in their museum, and that was what they wanted. They were the reason for separating the bones from her flesh, but this does not explain how and why the bones moved from their box to become a display.

It has been said that in the 1890s, the museum's 'curator, Alexander Morton, was about to throw [a] battered old fruit box on to the rubbish heap when he "just happened to catch the writing – very indistinct – of the tag label, and the skeleton was saved"'. In this apocryphal version, the museum is an institution where happenstance rules. The actions taken seem considerably more deliberate. The bones were sent to Melbourne to be articulated into a skeleton under the professional eye of Australia's leading anthropologist, Baldwin Spencer. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery then violated the original terms of acquisition by putting the articulated skeleton on public display. Ian Anderson, descendant of Tasmanian Aborigines, reads the display of Trugernanna's skeleton for the forty years from 1904 to 1947 as 'a totem of triumphant colonialism. The displayed skeleton, and the historical figure of TRUGGERNANNA has been embellished with a potent discourse of extinction. As a colonial symbol TRUG-ER-NANNE signifies the land empty of natives, and declares the

colonial period over.' The brave and intelligent young woman who went with Robinson in the hope of saving the remnant of her defeated clansmen was employed to say 'full-stop'.

In pondering the deep and traumatising wrongs done to Trugernanna and to the Palawa people whose homeland is the island which has become my home, I have been thinking about the connection between the museum display and the creation of 'Australia'. The display was in a literal sense of the term, post-colonial. Designed in the early days of Federation, its symbolic politics reached out to the project of constructing nation. The needs of nation were different from those of the colonial society which had both eulogised and dishonoured the body of Trugernanna in 1876. Already 'Van Diemen's Land' had been wiped from the map as the somewhere-else of convicts. 'Tasmania' would in the future attract free emigrants, and generate narratives appropriate to a civil society. Sometimes, however, re-packaged history is more easily articulated than absorbed, and the *Mercury* was still trying to push away the convicts when Trugernanna died. In a history lesson for its readers, the newspaper used 'the last' to draw yet another line between the present and an admittedly violent, indeed barbaric, past:

In 1816 the number of aborigines then in the island was roughly estimated at seven thousand ... It may almost be said that with the advent of the English began the war of extermination. Some awful deeds were done in this island during the early days of its colonisation. Being

a penal settlement, all the sweepings of the English gaols were at that time transported hither – wicked, desperate, bloodthirsty men, caring little for their own lives and less for the lives of others. From these hardened criminals the blacks suffered severely ... As for the aged lady whose death we to-day record, her disappearance from the scene is rendered additionally interesting and important from the fact that with her, for the first time in human annals, dies out the last of a race, a race which doubtless has had its home in this island from time immemorial, and which never knew the meaning of suffering, wretchedness, and contempt until the English, with their soldiers, bibles, and rum-puncheons, came and dispossessed them of their heritage.

The Aborigines have gone, and their destroyers were another people, not us. Sometimes it seems as if the record were stuck in its groove, the same sentiments heard over and over, into the twenty-first century when a Prime Minister can latch onto the notion of black armband history, and say it belongs to someone else, not to him. The problem remains, how do we tell a story of ourselves which actually fits the evidence?

Though the problem persists, the stakes change. A quarter of a century after the *Mercury* described the local experience of colonial contact as a ‘war of extermination’, men framed a Constitution in which the Aboriginal peoples of the newly federated states were not to be counted in the census, on the assumption that they were members of a vanishing race.

The 'doomed race theory' was fostered by imperialist readings of evolutionary science. By the 1930s, the theory had fallen into disrepute within the scientific community, and demoted to the status of myth. In Hobart's prestigious museum, however, the display underpinned by the discredited ideology continued to perpetrate the myth which blinded the populace to the Aboriginal people in their midst. No hint of even a possibility of continuing and unbroken Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, protocols, and practices was evident in the display case which featured the articulated skeleton surrounded by artefacts coding the Palawa as extinct *because* they were primitive – see their spears and baskets and stone implements and necklaces made from shells. According to the inexorable laws of science, ran the logic, they *must* give way to 'higher forms' (the English) and disappear. Nothing to do with history, nothing to do with those English 'soldiers, bibles, and rum-puncheons, [who] came and dispossessed them of their heritage'. No mention of that 'war of extermination'. Until after the Second World War, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery continued to display the remains of Trugernanna on behalf of the nation's future, holding out a promise that what had happened in the island state would happen as well on the island continent.

While the curator responsible for selecting, placing, and labelling items in the exhibit may not have pondered its function in imagining 'nation', all museum displays require interpretation within the discourses available at the time. Museums, as Stephen Dubin has said, 'are important venues in which a society can define itself and present itself publicly.

Museums *solidify* culture, endow it with a tangibility, in a way few other things do.' Adults remember the museums they visited as children, as I do the little museum in north Texas. Images from the displays stick in the mind. We may remember the images, and yet be quite oblivious to the struggles for interpretation surrounding them. In the case of Trugernanna's skeleton, we can retrieve the museum's interpretation because a photograph was taken by J.W. Beattie, the same man who would later record Fred Seager's account of digging up the coffin buried at the female factory. Beattie's photograph was published in *The Tasmanian Mail* of 24 June 1905 under the heading, 'An Absolutely Unique Exhibit: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery – The Last of a Race'. Today that photograph travels the ether because a woman of Native American descent wrote a poem about Trucanini; the poem was selected for an anthology of modern American poetry published by Oxford University Press in 2000; a website has been designed as a multimedia companion to the printed anthology; and within the website is 'A Gallery of Trucanini' where you can follow Trugernanna's fate as visual representation.

Most of the representations on the website are photographs, the first taken at Oyster Cove on a March day in 1858. The local Anglican Bishop, Francis Russell Nixon, came down by boat from Hobart Town and unloaded the expensive and cumbersome equipment he had imported as soon as the wet-plate system made it possible for an amateur to squint behind the camera. Fascinated by the process of mechanical reproduction, Nixon had mastered the techniques of quickly

coating, sensitising, exposing and developing the negative plates. He must have set up a darkroom tent close to the huts where he posed Trugernanna and the others. Grim faces stare into the camera, resigned to repeating yet again the experience of captivity, of being 'taken'. From the plates of Nixon and his fellow recorders of the countdown to death at Oyster Cove, thousands of images have been generated. For years before Trugernanna's death, her photographs had been advertised in the local newspapers as just the sort of souvenir to send Home to your friends and relations. Later, the images were re-deployed for postcards. How bitter the irony that a body rendered sterile after contact with the invaders should be reproduced with such endless mechanical fecundity.

Trugernanna had experienced image-taking before Nixon unloaded his stereoscopic camera at Oyster Cove, though never on a mass scale and not since before the exile to Flinders Island. It was within the heroic mode that those who went with Robinson on the Friendly Mission had originally been represented. Robinson, with an eye to history, ensured that the Mission was commemorated. His Aboriginal companions had been sketched, painted, and sculpted by artists who could and did replicate and sell the images to those who valued 'art'. Though most of the representations were portraits, Benjamin Duterrau's group study, *The Conciliation* (1840), is recognised as 'the first history painting attempted in Australia'. In the composition, Robinson stands amidst fourteen Aborigines, three dogs (two very English-looking), and a wallaby. His left hand is raised as if in instruction, while his right clasps the

hand of an Aboriginal man who in his turn places a reassuring left hand on the shoulder of a fierce warrior who holds a spear and stares not at Robinson, but at the Aboriginal conciliator. Duterrau has painted connection and interdependency. What he saw, and painted for us to see, got lost as the confines of representation closed in upon Trugernanna, marking her out as 'the last', limiting her story to full-stop.

The dynamic inter-connectedness of *The Conciliation* is absent from the photographs of Trugernanna sitting for the camera, from the skeleton in its display case, from the figure frozen in the diorama. In 1978 Tom Haydon returned to Trugernanna as the subject of a film documentary he called *The Last Tasmanian*. A century had passed since Trugernanna's bones had been separated from their flesh in the coffin buried within the ironically protective space of the female factory, and thirty years since the skeleton was removed from display in the museum – and yet here was the same narrative stuck in the same groove. Increasingly, however, the symbolic politics circulating around Trugernanna made people angry or at least uneasy. As the critic Tom O'Regan put it, 'the film leaves no place for the claims of the Tasmanians' descendants to their own separate identity and authentic Aboriginal culture'. Although I doubt whether anyone would dispute that claim today, at least not in public, Trugernanna herself remains caught in the discredited narrative. 'The experience of colonialism', Ian Anderson has said, 'is to fragment and dismember. To resist the colonial project is to reconnect or to make whole.' Trugernanna and William Lanne were dismembered. Those barbaric



deeds we cannot undo. What we can re-member are the narratives through which their lives are told, the narratives which connect us back to their world and forward to the world we want to live in. 'Of Trucaninni', wrote a journalist the day after her death, 'we shall no doubt hear many interesting narratives now that she has departed this world'. I hope so.