Hobart and 'Home' in Tasma and Mrs Humphry Ward

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This essay is an obeisance to the literary heritage of Tasmania, which addresses the coincidences and contrasts presented by a curious symmetry in the careers of two notable women of letters, in terms of the discourses of empire and gender in their writings. The two are Tasma and Mrs Humphry Ward.[1] My discussion concentrates on Tasma's *Not Counting the Cost* (1895), the only one of her six novels that features the place from which she took her pen-name and which provides the setting for a number of her short stories and sketches. Given her family history, Tasmania is a curious absence from the writings of Mrs Humphry Ward: however, the issues of imperialism and identity that circulate in Tasma's fiction are evident also in Ward's colonial novel, *Canadian Born* (1910; published in America as *Lady Merton, Colonist*). These two novels provide a piquant case study of the genre of colonial romance. They respectively celebrate the material and spiritual possibilities of Britain's Australian and Canadian colonies, given that raw New World energy is appropriately tempered by European culture, but where *Canadian Born* simply subscribes to a romance discourse, *Not Counting the Cost* calls into question the wish-fulfilling assumptions of romance.

The coincidence that provides my starting-point occurred in London in 1888, a year whose significant publications included Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills* and Hardy's *Wessex Tales*. One of the publishing sensations of 1888 was Mrs Humphry Ward's third novel, *Robert Elsmere*, in standard three-volume format, from the important house of Smith, Elder, publishers of the Brontës. George Smith in fact published the novel as a favour to the author's uncle, Matthew Arnold (whose *Essays in Criticism*, second series, also appeared in 1888, the year of his death). *Robert Elsmere* was already in a fourth edition when in May a hostile review by ex-Prime Minister Gladstone, '*Robert Elsmere* and the Battle of Belief', appeared in the weighty monthly, *Nineteenth Century*, and assured even greater success for this drama of religious doubt.[2]

Published later in the year, in time for Christmas (though dated 1889), the first novel of Tasma, *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill: An Australian Novel,* also attracted favorable attention. In one volume, from a good but less prominent publisher Trübner, *Uncle Piper* had already been serialized in the *Australasian* and now cashed in on the vogue for colonial romance exemplified by Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1887) and Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms: A Story of Adventure in the Bush and in the Gold fields of Australia* (1888). *Uncle Piper* is a comedy set in Melbourne which plays off the affectation of British immigrants boasting of their noble connections while sponging on lower-class relations, against the honest pride in material achievement and affluence of the titular Piper, a butcher. In this novel, the figure of the intellectual young woman torn between the robust Australian hero (who may need to be educated in matters cultural), and the effete English or European suitor, is a relatively minor character who comes to prominence in Tasma's subsequent works from *In Her Earliest Youth* on (1890) (Harris; Giles 119-21).

When Jessie Fraser began to publish in journals such as the *Australasian* and the *Melbourne Review* in the late 1870s, she chose her pen-name in honour of Tasmania where she had arrived with her family in the early 1850s, and lived till her first marriage in 1867. Born Jessie Catherine Huybers in London in 1848, Tasma lived and worked mainly in Europe from the mid-1870s to her death in Brussels in 1897. She seems not to have returned to Tasmania after a holiday there with her husband in 1878, and her last visit to Australia was in 1883-4, when she secured a divorce in Melbourne. Tasma enjoyed success in both literary and political circles in England and Europe, especially in Belgium where she lived following her second marriage (in 1885), to the Belgian socialist politician and journalist Auguste Couvreur: she took over his role as Brussels correspondent for the London *Times* after his death in 1894. At least until her second marriage, she was an informal ambassador for Australia, lecturing – sometimes in French, and generally to great acclaim – on Australian subjects. Herself childless, she assumed considerable financial responsibility for the Huybers family, and took up a range of causes including cremation (as a more sanitary process than interment).

What of the writer with whom I am pairing her? 'Mrs Humphry Ward' is always referred to in just that way, even on the title-pages of her books. Born Mary Augusta Arnold in Hobart in 1851, she was the daughter of Julia Sorell, grand-daughter of the former Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell; and of Thomas Arnold, second son of Thomas Arnold of Rugby, who had turned his back on the prospect of a brilliant Oxford career and emigrated to a democratic life of labour in New Zealand in 1847. When some of the realities of this choice had been borne in on him, on the strength of his name he was appointed inspector of schools in Van Diemen's Land, arriving in Hobart to take up this position in January 1850, aged 26. He is a story in himself (partially told by his daughter in *Helbeck of Bannisdale,* 1898, and elsewhere): his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1856, then back to Anglicanism and again to Rome had profound economic and emotional effects on his family. Mary was the eldest child of eight, of whom three more (sons) were born before the family left Hobart for England in July 1856. As John Sutherland points out, 'That she was an

Arnold was the most important single fact in Mary's life' (1). But the patronymic was overlaid when in 1872 she married Humphry Ward, an Oxford don who subsequently turned journalist and art collector. Their son was christened Arnold, but the name brought troubles with it, mainly financial demands resulting from his gambling debts. Mary, like many other women of letters, wore herself out supporting her extended family – including her brother Theo, as it happens the last of the family to be born in Hobart, who having eventually graduated from Oxford went to Tasmania and later also New Zealand to farm. He too gambled, and moreover drew on his older sister to subsidize his several marriages. Mary was sending him £100 p.a. in 1914. My point is that Australasia continued to be a presence in Mrs Ward's life, though it does not figure in her writing as far as I know (I have not made a comprehensive check of her letters and periodical publications).

Mary Ward published prolifically in both fiction and non-fiction genres from the 1870s until her death in 1920, strongly advocating women's education – like Virginia Woolf, she felt keenly her exclusion from the kind of university training her brothers had – but opposing the suffrage. She moved from the exploration of Christian unbelief that made *Robert Elsmere* famous, to take up social welfare issues in her fiction in the 1890s. This shift accompanied her activity as a prime mover in the establishment of a 'settlement' in University Hall in Bloomsbury in 1890, followed by the Passmore Edwards Settlement, formally opened in 1897. Her popularity as a novelist waned with the turn of the century, but she resourcefully continued to rework both fictional conventions and topical material, most successfully after the outbreak of World War I.

Through the various phases of her career she was consistent in her moral and political position. By late 1907, she was contemplating two 'stories of Empire', Canada 'of the old Régime', and 'of the Far West' (Sutherland 285). Her investment in fiction of Empire developed out of a conviction that the new millennium would usher in a new 'rational' Christianity with which British imperialism would be closely aligned. *Diana Mallory* (1908) contains a good deal of political material, the titular heroine being provided with Liberal Imperialist principles at odds with the radical Liberalism of her eventual husband but close to the ideas of the author. This novel marked Mary Ward's turn to colonial themes, which are most fully developed in her sole colonial romance, *Canadian Born*.

During the time she was working on *Canadian Born*, she became a political front for the anti-suffrage cause, and was badly trounced in a public debate with Millicent Fawcett in February 1909. Her speech on this occasion spelled out the direct connection between her views on the suffrage and on the British Empire. The danger inherent in women's suffrage, she maintained,

> is simply because of the vast growth of the Empire, the immense increase of England's imperial responsibilities, and therewith the increased complexity and risk of the problems which lie before our statesmen – constitutional, legal, financial, military, international problems – problems of men, only to be solved by the labour and special

> knowledge of men, and where the men who bear the burden ought to be left unhampered by the political inexperience of women. (*The Times*, 27 Feb. 1909, qtd. Sutherland 302-3)

This position strongly informs *Canadian Born*, though its heroine is educable, and acquires vicarious political experience which enables some reciprocity with the hero. The novel works rudimentary variations on the tropes of nation and gender I have outlined in *Uncle Piper* (though if Mary Ward were to have identified literary affinities, she might have been more likely to see herself in relation to depictions of the dialectics of Old World culture and New World energies in the fiction of her acquaintance Henry James). In Mrs Ward's novel, an Englishwoman, Lady Elizabeth Merton (whose first husband has died on an expedition to Africa after only months of marriage), learns to love George Anderson, a (Scots-)Canadian with a dark secret in the form of a drunken criminal father. They meet on board the Canadian Pacific Railway on a journey across Canada, the publicity for the company being Mary Ward's return for its hospitality during her North American tour of 1908. In no time, Elizabeth is in a quandary:

> Could she – *could* she marry a Canadian? There was the central question, out at last! – irrevocable! Writ large on the mountains and the forests, as she sped through them. Could she, possessed by inheritance of all that is most desirable and delightful in English society, linked with its great interests and its dominant class, and through them with the rich cosmopolitan life of cultivated Europe – could she tear herself from that old soil, and that dear familiar environment? Had the plant vitality enough to bear transplanting? She did not put her question in these terms; but that was what her sudden tumult and distress of mind really meant. (219)

(This is a not unfair representation of the prose of *Canadian Born*, which I have quoted at a little length in order both to illustrate the tenor of the heroine's concerns, and the imagery drawn from the natural world used to express them.)

After the death of her sickly and effete younger brother – a surrogate child – Elizabeth leaves decaying tradition in England (having sweetly rebuffed the advances of an ex-Viceroy of India and other suitors) to make a new life with George in Saskatchewan. The Epilogue begins with their honeymoon in a remote part of the Rockies, 'Where no white foot had ever before trodden ... first invaders of an inviolate Nature, pioneers of a long future line of travellers and worshippers' (325), and where they claim dominion over the wilderness by arguing about whether to name a great lake George or Elizabeth. Via snapshots of George's political success, we move to the wintry finale in which the Andersons are recreating old England – purified – in their homestead on their 'ample farm of nearly two square miles' (338). The farm has been bought and stocked with Elizabeth's money, which she hopes to use also to assist 'the young University of Strathcona', and to set up a cottage hospital

and 'a training college for farm-students – girls and boys' (338). They are served by 'Indian half-breeds' (331), and by migrants from the Old Country, some stalwart and ready to rise to fresh opportunities, others needing to be regenerated. The trope of England as motherland is not explicitly invoked: however, Elizabeth is pregnant, confident 'in the deep poetic faith that Anderson's child in her arms would be the heir of two worlds, the pledge of a sympathy, a union, begun long before her marriage in the depths of the spirit, when her heart first went out to Canada, – to the beauty of the Canadian land, and the freedom of the Canadian spirit' (346).

Clearly, this ideologically transparent account of an imperial fresh start rewrites various Arnold emigrations as they ought to have been. It is testimony to the paternalism evident both in Mrs Ward's activities as daughter, sister, wife and mother, and in her public roles as author and social worker, which includes recognition of particular inspirational female powers. More important than the financial means which enable her philanthropy, Elizabeth has a poet's imagination, bred in Europe, which provides a vision of which George alone is incapable. She inspires and educates him, as he explicitly recognizes: 'For her sake he was ready to do a hundred things he had never yet thought of, reading, inquiring, observing, in wider circles and over an ampler range. For as the New World, through Anderson, worked on Elizabeth, – so Europe, through Elizabeth, worked on Anderson' (332). At a practical level, they discuss politics on an equal footing, and both contribute to domestic management.

An analogy among Australian texts is Rosa Praed's *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land: A Story of Australian Life* (1915): the Irish noblewoman (radical, socialist, proponent of Aboriginal rights) leaves the redoubtable Colin McKeith and returns to Ireland, only to come back after a vision (and an inheritance of £50,000 from her aunt) just in time to save him from burning all the relics of their life together including the bark plate he had made for her during an idyllic night under the stars. In both Praed and Ward, the Old World woman endorses the vigour of the New World man (a Celt, not an Anglo-Saxon in each case), underwriting him both by money and by affirmative imaginative vision. In each case, the woman's commitment to her man is conditioned by her Romantic response to the wilderness with which he is identified. Both novels effect closure in a traditional romance celebration of fecundity and freedom, using the variant of romance plot represented by *Jane Eyre*, in which the agency of the male, who is in some way damaged, is affirmed by his female mate in marriage. (Incidentally, the ending of Ward's *Diana Mallory* is an even closer parallel to that of Charlotte Brontë's novel, when the hero's sight is restored at his marriage.)

To turn to Tasma. While her six novels, set mostly in Australia, all centre on their heroines' negotiation of identity in marriage, such a generalization belies the intensity of her obsessive interrogation of gendered behaviour, particularly her frank examination of men's physical and mental abuse of women. *The Penance of Portia James* (1891), her only novel set wholly in Europe, is a darker exploration of the possibilities available for women than was conducted in her previous works, *Uncle Piper, In Her Earliest Youth* and *A Sydney Sovereign and Other Tales* (1890). The Australian

heroine turns away from the attractions of London and Paris, to return to Australia with her repellant husband and his illegitimate child. The vitality of Australia by comparison with the Old World is affirmed, but at considerable cost, especially to the heroine who is denied either the fulfilment represented by her artist suitor or her suffragist friend, and awarded merely surrogate maternity. Tasma's fifth novel, *Not Counting the Cost*, by contrast, is set one-third in Tasmania, two-thirds in Europe (mainly Paris, and the Latin Quarter at that). These two locations support an explicitly thematized counterpointing of the basically realist mode of her previous novels with a romance discourse. The first chapter ends by identifying the 'hidden meaning' of 'myths and fable-lore', as 'physical force led captive by imagination' (21). The implication here, as in *Canadian Born*, is that the transforming power of imagination is vested in women. Tasma's novel, however, tests both romance and Romantic assumptions, demonstrating that imaginative vision can be destructive unless it is combined with mundane clear-sightedness, and while it may be a feminine attribute, imagination is not found only in females. Like *Northanger Abbey*, *Not Counting the Cost* is an anti-romance novel, demonstrating the dangers of misguided imagination. It works with a similar paradox to that developed in the Austen novel, that 'everyday' or domestic life in the real world includes marvels and horrors as sensational and threatening as those in any romance.

Not Counting the Cost opens on pastoral idyll, in 'The bright summer air of Christmas week at the Antipodes' (1), where in a hay paddock on the slopes of Mount Wellington we meet the Clare family at play. The game involves bundling children in hay and sending them rolling in a race downhill: they always manage to pull up just in time to avoid going over the edge, in a nice intimation of the trajectory of the action to follow. That action will turn the world upside-down, exposing the dangers that accompany the glamour of the Old World, and revealing too that 'home' in Hobart is marvellous in both beneficent and maleficent ways. The opening trades on the distance of this colonial setting from a metropolitan British readership, for which is depicted, as in *Canadian Born*, an Old World settlement in a better physical environment. The Clares do not appreciate the dimensions of their freedom, and are oblivious to the bounty of their Tasmanian heritage. They regard Mount Wellington merely 'as a kind of huge weather-glass', not as 'an element of happiness' in their lives, let alone a guardian, 'like an ancient patriarch who sees his children playing at his feet' and 'keeps his counsel' (13). The narrator knows better, intimating that that this landscape has a history as long and as savage as that of any northern hemisphere counterpart:

> He has no legends of medieval days to recount, though, for all we know to the contrary, he may have a thousand tales as wonderful and dramatic as any of these locked up in his gloomy fastnesses. He has seen a primitive race swept from the face of the earth, goaded convicts hiding like rats in holes and caves, and runaway prisoners hunted to their doom. (13)

The ability of the Clares to read the Australian landscape has been compromised by their mother, who as a family friend points out with an accurate prediction, 'has filled all your minds with a kind of glorified image of England that will make the reality a disappointment when you come to see it' (67). In fact, the minds of the children have been variously filled, for instance with Herbert Spencer's ideas on evolution and individual development in lieu of Christian orthodoxies (and they shock visitors by not saying grace before meals). Although one mythology has been rejected, they are still susceptible to others. Some of the children have exotic physical features, due to gipsy or Indian blood on the mother's side – an ancestry which underwrites Mrs Clare's fantasy of claiming kinship with the aristocratic branch of her family, and the whole myth of origin inculcated in her children.

The action proper commences about six years on. Eila, the eldest Clare and the central character, declares to her suitor Reginald Acton the family's intention of going home: 'Why, Home with a capital "H," of course. England – Europe, that is to say. What other home is there?' (27). Reginald does not respond directly, though he does try to alert Eila to the risks they are taking. Like the dead Mr Clare, to whose patriarchal role he will eventually succeed, Reginald is an Englishman who has chosen to make his home in Tasmania. He has resigned from active service in the Navy, in order to care for his aged mother: at once rational and responsible, tender and introspective, he balances masculine and feminine qualities, appreciating both physical freedom in Tasmania and the cultural traditions of Europe – yet for all his worth, he lacks charisma.

The family packs up (with special attention to the portrait of their ancestor, the Chevalier), and takes ship in search of their cousin, and their birthright, which includes a fabulous ruby. Mr Clare had bluntly disparaged his wife's dreams, as Eila tells Reginald: 'he looked upon the ruby rather as moonshine. It was his opinion that we had no legal grounds to go upon, and he said we had better not let our imaginations run upon impractical dreams' (79). But Mrs Clare is intent on embarking on a journey which fulfils every romance archetype down to the quest for treasure, and will involve much physical danger, including considerable sexual threat.

By the time they embark, Eila (her forename is Russian for mountain) has been for four years Mrs Frost (a chilling surname with which to overlay her maiden name Clare). In supporting the enactment of her mother's fantasy, Eila puts behind her marital suffering and disillusionment. As a seventeen-year-old bride, she was traumatized on her honeymoon by the revelation that due to 'former excesses' (40), her zealous Presbyterian husband was liable to fits. He has subsequently been committed to a lunatic asylum following his attempt to kill Eila, 'a Bible in one hand and a knife in the other' (41). There is resonance in this gothic situation of Jane Eyre's learning of the existence of Rochester's mad wife. The narrator spares little sympathy for Eila – 'She had been madly in love with a creation of her own that she had fastened upon a flesh-and-blood lover' (42) – but does not dwell on the character's apparent repression of this episode and failure to learn from it. The retrospect describing this marriage at once subverts the image of the family as cohesive and nurturant, and complicates a correlation of the New World with

innocence. Eila is not a widow, like Elizabeth Merton, nor is she a wife, but she is sexually experienced; and she has quasi-maternal responsibility for her siblings.

The next oldest Clare is solid, stolid Willie, whose lack of imagination balances Eila's excess of it – a conventional gendered dichotomy, a variant of which is seen in the twins Dick and Mamy. Mamy is 'completely Dick's double' (11): where he is dark, she is fair, and so on. In Paris, Dick goes through a repertoire of male sexual adventure, in part set up as victim of a girl of the streets; while Mamy plays the coquette, possibly sending their childhood friend Sydney Warden to death by drowning on the Riviera after she rejects him. The youngest child is, extraordinarily, named Trucannini, though nothing is made of the apparent fatality of this implied affinity with Tasmania's indigenous people beyond the unfortunate observation that her best friend is Daisy, the cow.[3]

The arduous and at times perilous sea voyage – they sail via Cape Horn – is described in some detail: such accounts of the actual journey, whether 'out' or 'home', are not uncommon in colonial romance. When England, indeed, turns out to be dirty and expensive, the Clares go to Paris and live uncomfortably in an attic apartment. There is no sign of their cousin, and their money is running out. One of Eila's delusions has been that there will be greater opportunities for her as a woman in Europe: that she will be taken seriously there, and be able to find work if necessary. Her only earning capacity, however, is through prostitution, though in her wilful naiveté she does not realize this implication of entering a beauty contest, in which she aspires to win second prize, since that will suffice to tide them over. Repressing the trauma of her sexual initiation, she dresses as a Bacchante, tacitly assuming that the reverent terms in which Reginald has thought of her in Hobart will apply also in Paris (in a meditation on her 'elastic figure' he sees her as 'Diana-like', and compares her to the Biblical Rebecca at the well [31]). When she realizes that the event is not quite as she thought, she faints, and is assisted by two men who happen to have turned into the Folies-Fantessin, a tall fair Australian and his French companion, a hunchback. The latter hears Eila's tale, persuades her she has won; he brings her money and meets the family ...

Who are they? Partners in a fabulous Australian silver mine, figured as Vulcan and Apollo. The hunchback is none other than cousin Hubert de Merle, who has overlaid his aristocratic background by participation in the Paris Commune of 1870-1, which it seems has earned him both a period of political exile and the sobriquet 'Commandant', used by the honest blockhead Australian Jack Wilton. The appearance of this pair of rescuers, explicitly described as Prince Charming, and Beast to Eila's Beauty, seems to fulfil the desire of the Clares to find family and fortune – and so it does, but not in the way expected. Jack will marry Mamy, and prove the financial saviour of the family in an aboveboard transaction, a 'purchase' underwritten by true love. By contrast, Hubert virtually blackmails Eila, more explicitly malign in his sexual predatoriness than the usual run of European suitors in Tasma. In a powerful scene in the Luxembourg Gallery, a site sanctified to high art, he presses her to be his mistress, offering access to the riches of his Aladdin's enchanted cave, his Australian mines, if she will agree to be the Beauty of his dreams.

She recognizes that as funds are again running low she may have to yield. Her father-in-law has rightly predicted that 'if you go 'ome, it won't bring you happiness ... You're going to run counter to all the laws, human and Divine, and you haven't counted the cost' (58). However, Reginald arrives in Paris at the critical moment, with £500 he has scraped up, and the news for Eila that her husband has died.

The novel ends with Reginald expressing his fear that the hunchback cousin will reappear. Eila's incorrigible riposte makes a facile exorcism of the malign power of the fairy world: 'What – Hubert! Oh, he will never come back! ... I have a feeling that he wasn't a real person at all, only a shade we evoked from the nether world by our determination to discover the owner of the ruby' (460). In this case, Tasma's heroine avoids damage, unlike Portia James, and Linda Robley in *The Knight of the White Feather* (1892), who goes mad. But there has been suffering and damage, including the death of Sydney, in the course of the exposure of the capacity of romance both to direct and delude. Eila has been shown from the beginning to have the storyteller's power – and here she rewrites her family's quest in such a way as to repose in the 'happy ever after' ending which banishes the Beast. The renovated family, Reginald taking over as *pater familias*, heads home to Hobart.

The truly marvellous has been in Australia all along, unseen and unrecognized. It is inarticulate Jack Wilton who has unlocked the treasures of the Australian earth, in finding the silver mine (on the mainland), assisted by Hubert, a political refugee from Europe. The extent to which the Clares' quest for their origin, and identity, has been misguided is very plain: they have failed properly to read their (relative) Australian wealth and its origin in place. They have needed to go 'Home' in order to realize that Hobart is truly home. Tasma makes for Tasmania and for Australia a powerful identity. Perhaps the most distinctive achievement of this curious, wild novel, especially by contrast with an ideologically innocent text like *Canadian Born*, is its gothic destabilizing of the categories and conventions of colonial romance. So there it is. As far as I know, Jessie and Mary, Madame Couvreur and Mrs Ward, never met, either as girls in Hobart or women in London (though perhaps the Thomas Arnolds bought wine from Mr Huybers?). I can't produce one of those strange fringe encounters of literary history like that between Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens, police magistrate, son of Charles Dickens, and Frederic James Anthony Trollope, chief prosecution witness, son of Anthony Trollope, at Wilcannia, New South Wales, in 1885 (Edwards). Nor can I show that either writer read the other's work. But the coincidences in the careers of Tasma and Mrs Humphry Ward provide some illumination of the genre of colonial romance.

Notes

[1] This discussion has been generated by work in progress on nineteenth-century Australian fiction in the context of British fiction of the Victorian period. For biographical material I have depended on Clarke and Sutherland.

[2] For a full account of the reception of the novel, see Peterson, chapter 8.

[3] Trucannini appears to have been born after the death of her father: in the exposition of family history, at one point there are said to be four Clare children, at another five (33). The charac-

terization of this child is rendered even more equivocal by consideration of an earlier version of some elements of *Not Counting the Cost* in Tasma's short story, 'An Old-time Episode in Tasmania', where a similar character is called Trucaninny, 'the name of a black gin that some "clay-brained cleric" had bestowed upon her irresponsible little person' (292). In the story, the Paton family lives at Cowa Cottage, as do the Clares, but the family name Clare is given to a comely convict, Amelia, to whom the widowed father of the family is attracted but who goes off with her sweetheart Richard. The story is typical of Tasma's curious mixtures of liberal social comment (on the harsh and arbitrary treatment of convicts) and idiosyncratic plots sometimes drawn from versions of her personal experience.

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