

**Craig Cormick**

## **Writing or Rewriting History**



### **The Creation and Recreation of Alexander Pearce – the ‘Cannibal Convict’ of Van Diemen’s Land**



#### **Abstract:**

This research presentation looks at the role of the creative author in writing about history and the impact of the History Wars on writing historical fiction, asking whether creative writers are writing history or are rewriting history. Is a creative imagining a valid way to write of the past, particularly when historical sources are lacking, or is it a manipulation of the past? Are creative historical fictions mutually exclusive from historical non-fiction, or do they both use similar techniques to explain the past and sometimes overlap in their writing? Do historical fictions and non-fictions provide different levels of truth about the past? Or has all historical writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, always relied on creative imagining? This presentation examines these questions using the writing of the creative thesis *The Last Supper*, based on the life of Alexander Pearce, the ‘Cannibal Convict’ of Van Diemen’s Land.

#### **Biographical note:**

Craig Cormick is a Canberra-based author and science journalist. He has published ten books and his awards include the ACT Book of the Year of the Award for *Unwritten Histories* in 1999, and a Queensland Premier’s Literary Award (Steele Rudd Award) for *A Funny Thing Happened at 27,000 Feet...* in 2006. He has tutored in Creative Writing at the University of Canberra, has been a guest speaker at several literary festivals including the 2005 Kuala Lumpur International Literary Festival, and in 2007 received a PhD in Creative Arts from Deakin University. In 2006 he was Writer in Residence at the University Sains Malaysia in Penang and in 2008 he will be an Antarctic Arts Fellow, travelling to Antarctica.

### Once upon a time ...

It is a cold and blustery February day in 2004 when I first walk upon Sarah Island in remote Macquarie Harbour, looking for traces of Alexander Pearce – the ‘Cannibal Convict’ of Van Diemen’s Land. I stay back after the tour group has gone, to tread the island in isolation, hoping to get my teeth into some sense of the past. Hoping to find some feeling of Pearce there. I fossick amongst the ruins, and stare off to the distant mountains ringing the harbour that Pearce fled through, with his seven ill-fated companions, trying out my ideas of Alexander Pearce upon the landscape here. Little remains of the buildings of the first few years of the island, and even the later brick buildings have been reduced to crumbling piles of small dark red bricks.



Remains of the penal settlement on Sarah Island [Photos by C.Cormick]

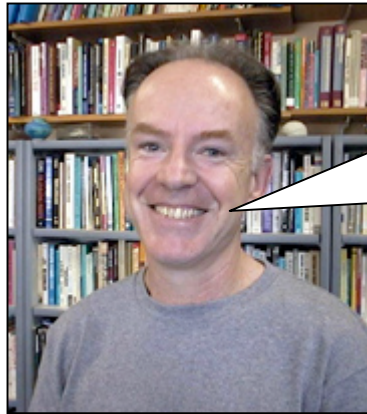
‘He stood here,’ I mumble to myself. ‘He walked here.’ The journey of travelling to Sarah Island had been a long one, but I feel it is important, to get some sense of place. Some sense of the past. But, I’m also asking myself, where does a writer stop in their research? Would I get a greater insight into Pearce if I’d sailed into Macquarie Harbour in chains, in the hold of an old sailing vessel? Or should I trek through those mountains surrounding the harbour with seven scrawny companions, with little food, and try out the idea of killing them and feasting upon them?

Visiting modern remains of the past seems crucial for an historical writer, yet I often ask myself, how many times did Shakespeare visit Denmark or Egypt?

In truth, there are scant traces of Pearce here, and I know that I will ultimately have to find him in my imaginative responses to this place. That further journey, into the psychological and physical wilderness beyond, is one both the reader and I will make in the darker realms of our imaginings, creating the unknown aspects of Alexander Pearce’s life.

I will also have to trek through the smouldering skirmishes of the ‘history wars’ – in particular the claims and refutations that non-fiction or fiction have to best portraying insights into the past. Mark McKenna, an historian and champion of the non-fiction battalions, states that historians are best placed to write our history because they deal with empirical facts, and fiction writing is, by comparison, but a ‘truth of the human heart and the human condition... unbound by historical accuracy, unfettered by what

actually happened'.<sup>1</sup> He has fired off a salvo stating that the rise of the novelist as historian has accompanied the decline of critical history in the public domain and that fiction's claim to writing historical truths is paradoxical, because:



[Griffith.edu.au]

'In fiction it's only the freedom from historical sources, the freedom from the historians' obligation to be true to those sources that allows the restitution of the past to occur.'<sup>2</sup>

McKenna is particularly critical of Kate Grenville's probing sortie that her novel *The Secret River* (Grenville 2005) was 'as close as we are going to get to what it was actually like', when several key facts in the book, including a massacre of Aboriginal people on the Hawkesbury River, were lifted from a different time and place.<sup>3</sup> He is perhaps a little harsh, but it is obvious to see the defensive line he is drawing in the sand to defend the historians' point of view.

Stella Clark provided one of the better counter attacks to McKenna, stating that it was surprising to find him caning novelists with the stick of accuracy, as he was 'a contemporary intellectual attuned to the difficulties of accessing the past via the fragments and memories available to us, and the consequently constructed nature of truth'.<sup>4</sup> She added:

The reading public, however, can tell the difference between imaginative interpreters and the services rendered by workers at the coalface, obligated to the discourse and practices of their profession ... Let's not imagine that it is only professional historians ... who approach it with integrity ... Since our hunger to understand the past is emotional and psychological as much as it is intellectual, we need what help we can get.<sup>5</sup>

We're going to talk a lot about hunger before this essay is over, as you can probably guess.

This particular battle within the history wars, between historians and fiction writers, may take some time to play itself out and see some sort of truce declared, but to my mind there is a point of reconciliation through the types of fiction that place themselves solidly within the boundaries of historical accuracy.

Hayden White has said that what should interest us in the debate over 'the literature of fact', or as he prefers to term it, 'the fictions of factual representation', is the extent to which the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or even correspond with each other.

He has written:

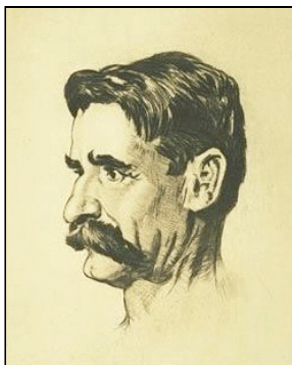


[www.uv.es]

Although historians and writers of fiction may be interested in different kinds of events, both the forms of their respective discourses, and their aims in writing are often the same, as they are equally trying to explain both actions and motives of people who lived in the past.<sup>6</sup>

In my search for the best way to write the past I also find it useful to tread the paths of literary critics who have grappled with the nature of fiction and history. Helen Daniel has described a counterfeit history of Australia that exists inside contemporary Australian fiction. Not the publicly documented history, but an imagined history that declares itself a fabrication, a history unconstrained by public registers of time and public versions of history, as demonstrated in the work of writers such as Thea Astley, Peter Carey, Brian Castro and David Foster.<sup>7</sup>

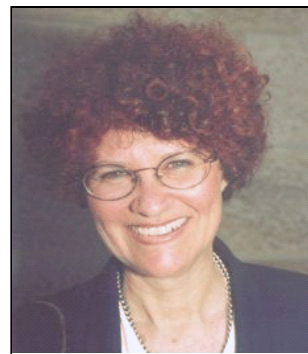
Bruce Bennett says it another way, that in Australia we are inheritors of a proud tradition of forgery, which, although it was considered a crime by the masters of our convict forebears, became sanctified in Australian art and culture. And he cites authors Henry Lawson, Peter Carey and Kate Grenville, as some who have done this as a principal way of exposing insights into the human condition.<sup>8</sup>



[www.anu.edu.au]



[www.albany.edu]



[www.usyd.edu.au]

While there are two main opposing sides in this battle of the history wars there are also two main ways that Alexander Pearce has been recreated to date. On the one hand his biographers have used the written records left to us to put together a portrait

of the man. These tend to be very detailed where records allow, but more sketchy when Pearce steps outside the records. The other approach is a much more creative one, interpreting Pearce and his motivations based on a creative imagining, as was done by Marcus Clarke in *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874), recreating Pearce as the monstrous character Gabbett. However, any reading of the two portrayals of Pearce will show they are strongly at odds with each other. Clarke's Gabbett is 'horribly unhuman' while the historical Pearce is described as 'an illiterate Irish labourer caught in a web of circumstances'.<sup>9</sup>

Clarke's Gabbett is presented as:

The wretch himself, chewing hard at his tobacco, had relapsed into his restless silence again, and was as though he had never spoken. As he sat there gloomily chewing, he was a spectacle to shudder at ... chiefly because, in his slaving mouth, his slowly grinding jaws, his restless fingers, and his bloodshot, wandering eyes, there seemed to live a hint of some terror more awful than the terror of starvation – a memory of a tragedy played out in the gloomy depths of that forest which had vomited him forth again – and the shadow of this unknown horror thus clinging to him, repelled and disgusted, as though he bore with him the reek of the shambles.<sup>10</sup>

Marcus Clarke's fictionalising of Alexander Pearce as the monstrous and ugly Gabbett is more the Victorian personification of turning cannibal by choice and is far from the historical facts of Alexander Pearce, for his death mask sketches show him to actually be quite mild of countenance, if face can be any indication of character. Indeed it is worth questioning whether the quotes used in this essay are given more or less credibility by the quality of the accompanying photos of the authors and historians used. Which pictures are more fetching and give more an air of authority and would the quotes read differently without the accompanying photos?

An example of character being determined by appearance was shown in the portrayal of the character Gabbett (based on Pearce) in the 1927 film *For the Term of His Natural Life*, whose monstrous appearance outdoes even Clarke's description of Gabbett.



[Thomas Bock's death's head sketch of Alexander Pearce, 1824. Dixon Library, Sydney].



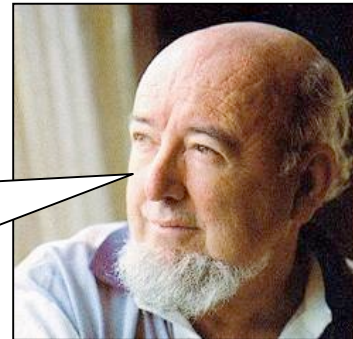
[Arthur McLaglen's portrayal of Gabbett (right) in the 1927 film *For the Term of His Natural Life*. Screensound Australia]



I am seeking to recapture and reclaim Pearce in a fictional narrative, drawing much more closely on recent historical documents, broadening his character beyond a repellent caricature to one that is more humanly believable. By writing Pearce's story in a way that combines the strengths of historical fact and the insights of creative imagining it may be possible to demonstrate that fiction and nonfiction need not be incompatible, and both can add to our understanding of the past.

After all, the test of a good historical novel, as Thomas Keneally has said, is rarely just how accurate the history is, but how good a novel it is as.<sup>11</sup> And while historical veracity can certainly give an historical novel more credibility, it's the veracity of the characters and the deeper understanding of them that a reader takes away from the book, upon which an historical novel most often succeeds or fails.

'An historian must prove his reliability to other scholars and to his readers. The only warrant a novelist needs for his ideas about the past is that they reek of human, poetic, dramatic, symbolic veracity and resound in his imagination.'<sup>12</sup>

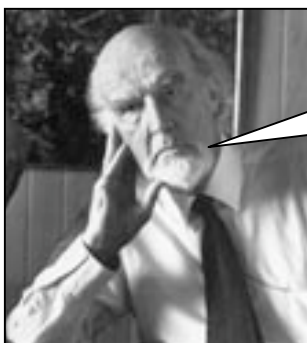


[www.middlemiss.org]

Some historical novels may take large liberties with historical facts, of course, yet portray a richness of facts about the human condition – sometimes contemporary truths rather than past ones, such as Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001), also set on Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbour, which can be read as much as a commentary on contemporary Tasmanian political policy towards commercialisation and globalisation as it is a book about the convict past.

This is not just an attempt to write history, but more to rewrite history, and needs to be understood, and read, as such.

To quote yet another Clark, Manning Clark, one of our foremost historians, said:



'The rewriting of our history will come from our creative writers.'<sup>13</sup>

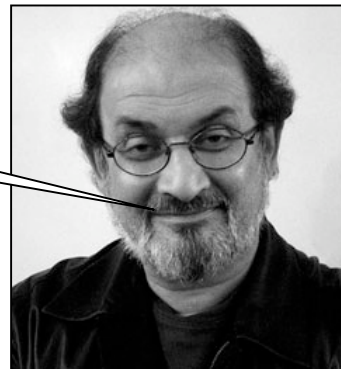
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So there I am, standing on Sarah Island, imagining Alexander Pearce as he imagined his escape from the brutal penal colony. We know that he escaped from with seven comrades in 1823 and after almost two months in the wilderness he alone survived to reach the settled districts to the east and to tell his story. He was eventually recaptured and made a confession about having escaped from Macquarie Harbour and having eaten his comrades one by one, but he told that he was a victim of cruel circumstances and had never supported the slaying of the men. And it is Pearce's own stories that have found their way into history books, for there is no one to refute his accounts.

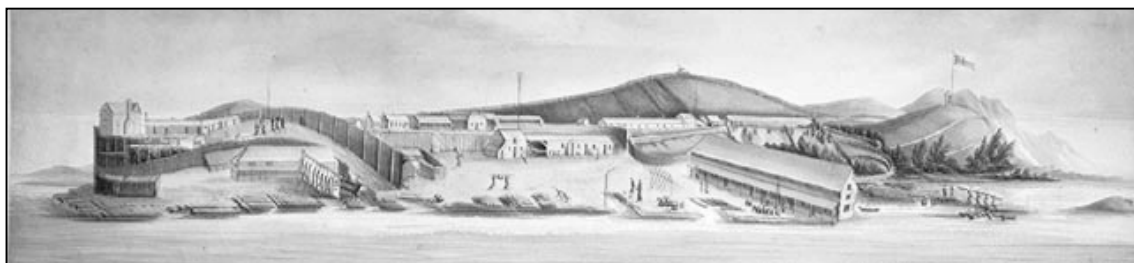
As Salman Rushdie put it:

'History is an interview with the winners.'<sup>14</sup>



[News.emory.edu]

Yet strangely enough the authorities found his story difficult to swallow. While it was a horrifying thought that a man might devour his companions to survive, it was more horrifying to the authorities of Hobart Town that a band of escapees had successfully crossed the mountains from Macquarie Harbour and were hiding in the bushland around the township waiting to rob and raid. Pearce's story was obviously a fabrication to distract them from the truth, and Pearce was sent back to Macquarie Harbour in February 1824.



Painting of the Sarah Island Penal Settlement by the convict artist William Gould  
[State Library of NSW].

But Pearce's tale doesn't end there, for before the year was out he had escaped again, with a lone companion, Thomas Cox. They only got as far as the banks of the King River on the north western shore of Macquarie Harbour. And I walk along the riverside there too, gazing out over the slow wide river, imagining that I'm sitting beside a small fire with the young English lad Thomas Cox. And I imagine that Pearce asks Cox to tell him the stories he's heard about him.

More stories within stories.

And of course I'm not the first author to try to write a creative response to history that melds both facts and fiction. British Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion, said in his creative biography of Thomas Wainewright, another convict of Van Diemen's Land, that it was almost impossible to find the facts of Wainewright's life through orthodox biographical methods as not only was the overlay of legends about him very thick, but he fell out of the historical record very often, making it impossible to construct a complete linear narrative of his life, forcing him to invent the gaps.<sup>15</sup>

Pearce's story as it has been recorded and retold to date is a similar mix of fact, myth and gaps in the records, which provides a similar strong basis for a creative interpretation to fill those gaps, delving deeper into the unknown feelings of Alexander Pearce. How is a reader otherwise to try and feel what Pearce is feeling, as he sits on the edge of King River, with his young companion Thomas Cox, who reluctantly tells Pearce that he cannot swim to cross the river? How otherwise could a reader begin to feel the fear in Cox when he tells Pearce this, knowing he will likely become murderously enraged?

The historical records do tell us that Pearce is captured soon after and confesses to his captors that he has killed Cox and eaten him. And this time they do believe him, as he still carries some of the remains of the unfortunate man with him.

Pearce said:

At night we tried to make a fire, but could not. We travelled on several days without food, except the tops of trees and shrubs, until we came upon King's River. I asked Cox if he could swim; he replied he could not: I remarked that had I been aware of it he should not have been my companion ... the arrangement for crossing the river created words and I killed Cox with the axe ... I swam the river with the intention of keeping the coast round to Port Dalrymple; my heart failed me, and I resolved to return and give myself up to the Commandant.<sup>16</sup>

But what story might Thomas Cox have had to tell? What stories might Pearce have told him in their short time together? We'll never know for certain, but it can be imagined, drawing on facts and documents.

We do have some good records of Pearce's life, including four recorded confessions he made, but they do not take us very deep into an increased understanding of his motives, and differ markedly in details in several places. Many of the narratives in my novel are based upon the four recorded confessions that Pearce made, and there is a wealth of material in these, but it is uncertain how much is factual and how much is Pearce's preferred retelling of events. The confessions were told at markedly different periods, but we might assume that the details that are consistent are most likely true,



and the details that change are those most likely to spring from Pearce's changing preference as to what should be viewed as the truth at different times.

Pearce's four confessions, named after the men they were narrated to, are:

1. The Knopwood Confession, made to the Reverend Knopwood, in Hobart, early in 1823 after his first capture.
2. The Cuthbertson Confession, made to Commandant Cuthbertson on Sarah Island, after his second escape, late in 1823.
3. The Bisdee Confession, made to his gaoler, Mr Bisdee, after Pearce's trial in June 1824, following his second escape.
4. The Conolly Confession, a narrative written by the Catholic Priest, Father Philip Conolly, based on a confession given to him by Pearce the night before he was hanged in Hobart, in July 1824.<sup>17</sup>

The details that Pearce provides in the first two, and longest narratives, is very precise, giving great detail on the number of days travelled, and the climate and conditions of the land. But they are contradictory in several places, such as the details of the first murder. According to the Knopwood confession the man first killed by the escaping convicts was Thomas Bodenham, and it occurred after three other men, Dalton, Brown and Kennely, had left them to return to the penal settlement. Pearce said that Bodenham 'did not appear the least affected' and only asked a few moments to make his peace with his maker before he was slain and eaten.



Thomas Bock's death's head sketch of Alexander Pearce, 1824 [Dixon Library, Sydney].

'Then Greenhill taking the Axe gave the unfortunate Culprit Bodenham a Severe blow on the Head which soon deprived him of his life – then taking his knife began to cut the Body to pieces on the return of the other two who were gathering Wood a fire was immediately kindled & several pieces of the Body placed thereon to Cook which they soon devoured very greedily.'<sup>18</sup>

However in the Cuthbertson confession, Pearce stated that Thomas Dalton was the first man killed, and Bodenham was second. He also stated that Robert Greenhill was the one who instigated the killing, and after slaying Dalton, cut him up and cooked him:

... we then consulted who should fall. Greenhill, said 'Dalton', as he had volunteered to be Flogger, we will Kill him. When we Stopped at night, Dalton, Brown & Kennely had a Fire by themselves and a little break Wind. About 3 oClock in the morning, Dalton was asleep. Greenhill got up, took an Axe and struck him on the Head with it,

which Killed him as he never spoke afterwards. Travers took a Knife, Cut his Throat with it, and bled him, we then dragged the body, to a distance, Cut off this Clothes, tore his inside out, and Cut off his Head, then Mather, Travers and Greenhill put his Heart and Liver on the fire to Broil, but took them off and cut them before they were right Hot, they asked the rest would they have any, but we would not eat any that Night. Next morning the body was Cut up and divided into equal parts which we took and proceeded on our journey a little after Sun rise.<sup>19</sup>

In the Cuthbertson Confession he also told that Kennely and Brown slipped away, after the killing, returning to Macquarie Harbour, where we know they were to perish soon after from the deprivations of the journey. Yet in the Bisdee confession Pearce reverts to the story that Dalton ran away with Brown and Kennely before anybody was killed. A story he also uses in the final confession to Father Conolly, stating however that the three men fled ...<sup>20</sup>

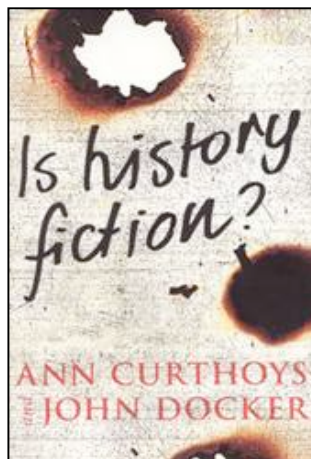


'on account of Greenhill having already said that lots must be cast for some one to be put to death to save the whole from perishing'.<sup>21</sup>

We will never know which narratives may have been the most true, and in fact, to Pearce, the truth of events may have altered in his mind over time, supporting the notion that the most misleading of all narratives are the lies that a man tells, and at last comes to believe about himself to himself.<sup>22</sup> In my novel, *The Last Supper*, however, each different possibility can exist, and can be made to co-exist, through the use of the multiple narratives.



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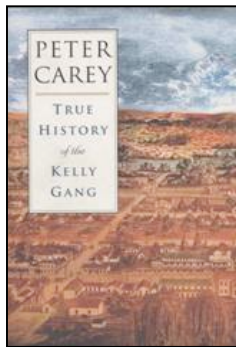


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Australian historians Ann Curthoys and John Docker, who grappled with this issue of fiction in tellings of the past, refer to the ‘Rashomon effect’,<sup>23</sup> after the 1950 Kurosawa film of that name, that tells of a rape from multiple and contradictory perspectives of different witnesses – leaving the viewer with a multiplicity of voices all purporting to be the truth. But such voices can reveal some truth, even in their contradictions, for they can reveal the different biases and values with which different people interpret events.

Pearce’s confessions, however, also add another element to our understanding of him, in that they give us his voice, even though they were not written by his hand. Yet, neither was Ned Kelly’s famous Jerilderie letter written by him, but was dictated to Joe Byrne, although it is taken to be the document that gives us Ned Kelly’s voice.

Peter Carey used the letter as the source document to capture Ned Kelly’s voice in his award-winning novel *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000).



[UQPress]



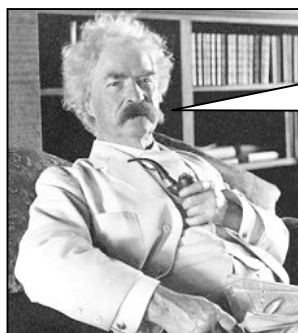
[Literature today]



[Southdown Press]

Likewise, Pearce’s confessions give a unique insight into imagining his character, and the lies he tells within them reveal truths about him.

In my novel I have combined Mark Twain’s adage that Australian history is like the most beautiful lies,<sup>24</sup> and Picasso’s that art is lies that make us realise truth,<sup>25</sup> to demonstrate that Australian history can therefore validly be told by lies that invite us to ponder other possible understandings.



[US Fisheries]

*Awstralian history is lark  
the most bea-utiful lies,  
and that’s the truth.*

*El arte es las  
mentiras hermosas  
que dicen  
verdades.*



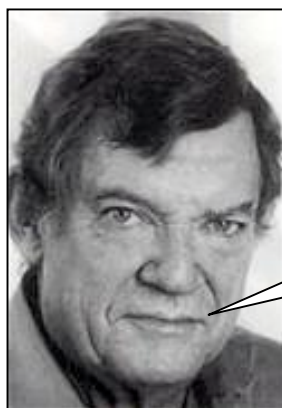
[Biografias Y Vidas]

My novel attempts to take the reader on the journey with Pearce into the wilderness of Van Diemen's Land, after he escaped from the penal settlement at Sarah Island, crossing the mountains into the realm of the unknown, where the men descended into starvation and cannibalism. And I am seeking not just to express one of the most horrific of convict experiences in a more humane and nuanced manner, but to show how interpretations of history are dependent on the teller, and how Pearce's story can be imagined differently from many different perspectives, including Pearce's own multiple perspectives, leaving the reader to ultimately imagine and create their own Alexander Pearce out of the different perspectives presented.

For surely there can be as many ways of writing a story as there can be of reading it.

There are many Pearces in my novel, with his story being told by many narrators, there have always been many Pearces, with his name being recorded as Pearce, Pearse, Pierce and Peirce. Warwick Hirst, writing in *Great Escapes by Convicts in Colonial Australia* (1999), described Alexander Pearce as 'a small pockmarked Irishman' of 'insignificant appearance'.<sup>26</sup>

Robert Hughes, in *The Fatal Shore* (1988) describes him as:



'A little, pockmarked, blue-eyed Irishman from County Monaghan who had been transported for seven years at the Amagh Assizes in 1819 for stealing six pairs of shoes.'<sup>27</sup>

However George Mackaness, writing in *Lags and Leg Irons* (1944), described him as 'of low type, powerfully built, but stubborn and stupid'.<sup>28</sup> Dan Sprod, the best biographer of Pearce, describes him as:

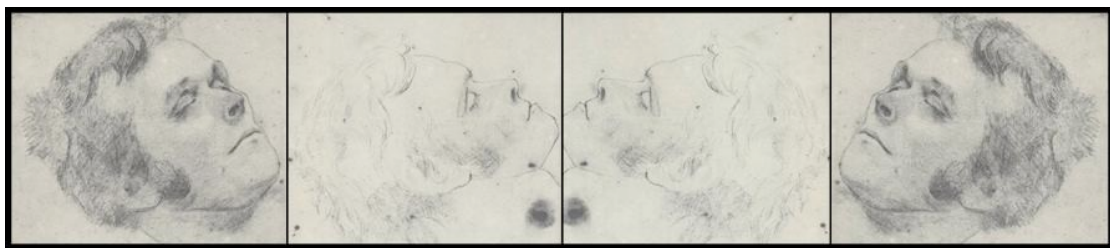
... five foot four inches in height. His eyes were given as 'blue' and, in another source, 'hazel', his complexion as 'dark, ruddy' and his hair 'brown'. Like so many of his contemporaries his distinguishing marks were noted as 'pock-pitted', a legacy of an earlier small-pox attack.<sup>29</sup>

And the convict known only as Davis, who penned a description of Pearce on Commissariat Department order forms in 1843, who may have actually known Pearce, said: '... he had nothing peculiar about him at least outward appearance he was man about 5 feet 7 inches in height dark brown hair heavy eyebrows rather stout made and stood much after appearance of a Farmers Servant...'.<sup>30</sup>



And there are other Pearces that have been created. Pearce as told by the newspapers of the day. Pearce as reinterpreted by historians since. Or the Pearce of legends who roamed the bush around Macquarie Harbour for many years, hoping to coax fresh victims to go with him so he could kill and eat them. Or Pearce the pie man who lived somewhere in Hobart and killed people and put them into his pies.<sup>31</sup>

So many Pearces in so many stories. And who is the Pearce that the reader will create in their minds, based on all the shades of Pearce from records and imaginings that I present to them? Pearce who steals attributes from the comrades he has eaten when telling stories to Thomas Cox? Pearce, as Cox has heard stories about him in prison? Pearce, as described by the Commandant of the penal colony, Lieutenant Cuthbertson?



So many Alexander Pearces, yet the final recreation of Pearce will be something that the reader creates from the mosaic of the multiple narratives of Pearce that I provide, all circling around a central character of Pearce as an historical figure – yet one who has also been imagined.

In truth I have become a little obsessed with Alexander Pearce, as all writers become a little obsessed with their characters, grappling with his remains in the historical records, in artefacts and in fiction, and through all these creating an Alexander Pearce who, to me, seems more real than imagined.

One crucial imagining, however, in my story is that of Alexander Pearce sitting on the edge of the King River with Thomas Cox, after his second escape. And in my imagining Pearce is playing a game with his companion, teasing him and playing on his fears.

I imagine the stories they're telling, each skirting around the issue of cannibalism – something that is so horrific to Cox that he cannot speak of it – but something that Pearce can allude to and joke about as he has crossed some dark boundary and can freely speak the unspeakable:

‘Moss isn’t so bad when you start eating it. But after a mouthful or two it clings to your mouth and won’t sit in your stomach. After more than one mouthful you feel sick on it. Have you ever eaten grass? You wake up in the night coughing up large clumps of it, like a cat might cough up a hair ball. All this grass and moss in a little sticky ball. Do you know that in the mountains of the home country they feed up cows before eating them and then cut open the stomach and eat the grass what’s there. The cow’s stomach has done what a human’s stomach can’t, see, and then you can eat it. ... We tasted



everything we could, see. We even chewed upon a few things we had no idea what they was. Small dark soft things rotting on the ground. Might have once been an animal of some kind, we hoped. You can tell that to yourself if you need to. Look at a pile of something dark and rotten and think how it might carry the shape of a small forest beast. Hold it under you nose and think perhaps it is meat you're smelling. Then you bite into it and find it tastes like eating dirt. Can you imagine anything lower than that? Eating dirt? '

'So what did it feel like when you did it the first time?'

'Did what?'

'You know.'

'What?' asks Pearce. But of course he knows. Like he knows this question has been on Cox's mind for the past few days...<sup>32</sup>

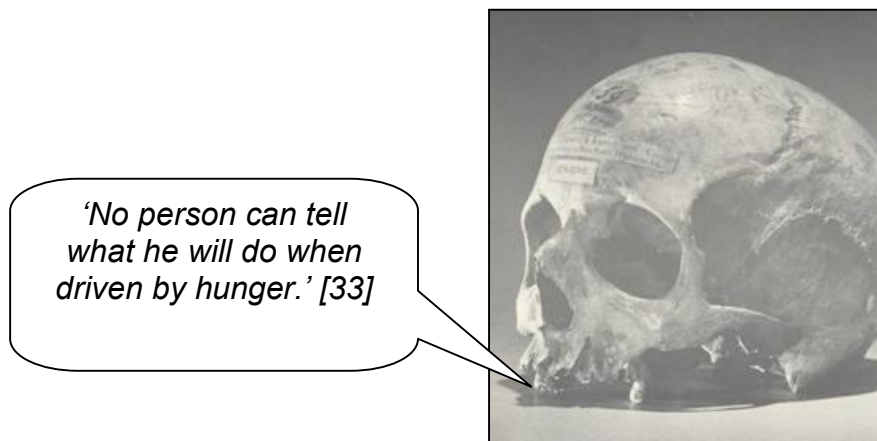
But is it just my imagining of what may have happened? Are there really three of us sitting around that small campfire? Or just the two men, but both of them are really me? Or do all these, and other possibilities exist in the telling of my story?

To return to known facts, on his last living day, 19 July 1824, Alexander Pearce, the cannibal, was led to the gallows, having been found guilty of the murder of Thomas Cox, and he was hanged until dead. But his story doesn't end there – it begins anew, as his remains have been feasted upon and picked over by the storytellers ever since.

And there is always one more Alexander Pearce to create and tell of.

Always one more writer hungering to understand him through retelling his story.

As Pearce himself said, when captured with the remains of Thomas Cox:



[The skull of Alexander Pearce,  
held in the University of Pittsburgh.]  
[Sprod, Alexander Pearce of Macquarie Harbour]



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18. Few of the confessions are in their original form, and many are given from the point of view of the writer. The Knopwood Confession exists in two transcripts from the missing original manuscript. One is in the State Library of NSW and the other in the National Library in Canberra. Both are a mix of first person and third person narrative, obviously based on the original confession with added interpretation by the unknown scribe. The original document of the Cuthbertson Confession is also missing, but two slightly different transcripts exist, one in the records of the 1838 Select Committee on Transportation of the House of Commons, and the other in a manuscript in the Mitchell Library in Sydney. The Bisdee Confession appeared in print in 1825 in a book, *Tales of today; or, Modern Facts containing Narratives of the most extraordinary occurrences of recent date*, and the Conolly confession was printed in the newspapers of the time.
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20. Cuthbertson Confession, in Sprod, 45.
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