

## 'The Little Explorer's Diary'

p.1

*'The blacks here had an idea there was no such thing as a woman among white people and thought whites were all men so I'm told.'*

- E. Carrie Creaghe. May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1883, the road to Port Darwin.

i.

Nothing is truly discovered  
until it's written about.  
Joseph Banks took a handkerchief  
moistened with saliva,  
applied it to the skin  
of the nearest Aboriginal.  
The blackness didn't rub off.  
In a settler's hut, forty pairs of  
Aboriginal ears are nailed to the walls  
like leather pelts, or whorled seashells  
fastened by the tide.  
How should I write about it?  
How will it be discovered?

ii.

We sail in the steamer *Corea*,  
and then *Truganini* (her melancholy fate  
so memorialised, the island swept  
of first inhabitants). Via Keppel Bay,  
Cooktown, Lizard Island, stopping  
at the piled-up stones called wharves,  
'doing' the towns, places we've heard of,  
names on lips, where people were attacked  
or died from want of water;  
no churches beyond this point,  
only public houses predominating  
like the ever-present flies  
(*all the passengers for Thursday Island  
most awfully tipsy*).

iii.

*'Mr Shadforth put a rope around the gin's neck and dragged her  
along on foot, he was riding. This seems to be the usual method.'*

Miss Shadforth and I help the gins  
to wash all morning. The washing  
is taken to the bank of the creek  
and boiled in kerosene tins.  
When married, the gins  
are not allowed to speak,  
communicating by signs.

/2.

The new gin, called Bella,  
 is chained to a tree a few yards  
 from the house, not to be loosed  
 until she's 'tamed'; no point  
 remonstrating, my hands are tied.  
 In the night, she decamps,  
 whether from fear of Topsy's firestick  
 or dissatisfaction with this life,  
 we don't know.

## iv.

I thought there were quills  
 in the duck curry  
 we ate after dark, by the campfire.  
 At breakfast it turned out to be  
 a plague of flies.

## v.

Travelling on horseback, consulting the compass,  
 we sleep every night now with  
 two revolvers in bed, a double-  
 barrelled breech-loader outside.  
 We're in unexplored country, Gulf country,  
 where no white man has been,  
 wind bisecting the grasses  
 like a falling spear.  
 The blacks put out their hands, touching  
 my head and arms to see if I am real.  
 Favenc is on his way,  
 a Paper Yabber\* sent from Daly Waters  
 Telegraph Station informs us  
 his party suffer from lack of water,  
 don't know when they can join us.

Ah Gow and the blackboy, Bonda, ride beside,  
 passing the goldfields where Chinese are puddling,  
 where aggressive blacks murdered  
 four Chinese and a white man  
 a short time ago.

The ant beds tower above us.

\* *'What the blacks call a letter. They have a stick in which a slit is made and the letter is placed in it. In wet or fine weather the letter is taken every care of.'*