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Dark and literary: A tour to the Isle of the Dead

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Abstract

Sites associated with the dark and literary aspects of tourism can prove beneficial to travellers since they can play an educational role while instigating an emotional and intellectual response. This article illustrates how a tour to the Isle of the Dead at Port Arthur in Tasmania provided the nescient traveller with insights into the literary and historical heritage of the place. The experience also acted as an inner journey in that it challenged the traveller to reassess his engagement with travel destinations.

Key words: dark tourism, Henry Savery, literary tourism, Port Arthur, Tasmania.

1 Introduction

Ever since very young I have been fascinated by two particular aspects of travel. The first consists of visiting places associated with the books and authors that have played a formative role in my life. In this category I could mention Fyodor Dostoyevsky's apartment at 5, Kuznechny Pereulok in St Petersburg, or else Angkor Wat in Cambodia, which is the setting for André Malraux's (1930) *La Voie Royale* [*The Way of the Kings*]. The second aspect concerns places linked to death or human tragedy. Examples of these consist of the 9/11 Memorial in Manhattan and Hỏa Lò Prison in Hanoi. Whereas the first kind of travel destination is typical of literary tourism, the second type is emblematic of what Lennon and Foley (2000) call dark tourism. Sometimes the two forms of tourism merge together in one place. For me this was most apparent when visiting the tombs of famous writers at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris and Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow, even though the darkness of these two places was somewhat lessened by their historicity.

In my travels to literary and dark places I have always sought to enrich my understanding of the human experience and by being in situ to learn further about things I might have only come across in my reading. Bendix (2002) explains that since the beginning of bourgeois travel a site's potential to generate a narrative is one of its main attractions given that tourists struggle "to wrest a personal experience and an individual memory from the thick offering of prefabricated or suggested memories for sale" (p. 474). Tourists seek "personal

authenticity in their development" and the site acts as "a landmark to distinguish the destination, participants' geographical placement and some of their travails on their journeys" (Obenour, 2004, pp. 12–13). This means that "within particular destinational contexts, tourism can begin to take on the characteristics of a sacred journey although it may not be spiritually motivated" (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005, p. 170). It is probably for this reason that Bond and Falk (2013) argue that "identity-related motivations are fundamental to all tourist experiences…suggesting that tourism is often used by individuals as a means to explore, maintain and even disengage from particular aspects of identity" (p. 430). As I show in an earlier piece (Xerri, 2014), by travelling to a place I might have only read about in literature, travel guides, newspapers or travel writing, I am usually forced to align my reading with the physical actuality of the place and in the process evaluate my own identity as a traveller and a human being.

What I seek when travelling is a transformative experience I can reflect on, ideally in writing. The idea that travel is an inner journey as much as it is an outer one is something bequeathed by the great explorers in history, whose steps the contemporary traveller cannot but retrace. Laing and Crouch's (2009) use of narrative analysis to study contemporary travellers' experiences "reveals a common discourse or paradigm of the *performance of adventure*, where the traveller is following in the footsteps of explorers of old" (p. 136). The re-enacting of these mythic journeys is both an attempt to see the places these great explorers discovered but also to experience for oneself the act of transformation they unavoidably underwent. In his literary history of travel, Whitfield (2011) proposes that in a time when travel has become another manifestation of consumerism "the worthwhile travel writer has to keep alive the idea of the inner journey, the transforming experience: he or she has to be our eyes and our conscience, reminding us of what is genuine amid so much that is worthless" (p. x). The reason why I admire such travel writers is that they not only write evocatively about the places they visit but most significantly they reflect on how the journey and the place changes them unexpectedly. Such reflection is not only the preserve of the seasoned travel writer but can also enrich the experience of the contemporary tourist. For example, the participants in Van Winkle and Lagay's (2012) study "talked about 'ah ha' moments, where something they saw during their trip caused them to critically reflect on their thoughts and experiences" (p. 352). Cultivating the ability to reflect on one's travel experiences is crucial if travel is to have a transformative effect. In this article I reflect on how a visit to a place that combined aspects of literary and dark tourism acted as an educational experience as well as an inner journey that transformed my understanding of how I engaged with travel destinations.

2 Two aspects of tourism

Literary tourists travel to places that have either featured in the books they read or else in the lives of the authors they are familiar with. These places usually bank on the fame of the writers or works in question in order to attract as many visitors as possible. Hence, such places might manifest a commodification of literary tourism. Müller (2006) contends that literary places have become tourist destinations well equipped to cater for the needs of contemporary tourists and aimed at developing the local economy. Ridanpää (2011) argues that "When an 'ordinary' place turns into a literary place, the social and cultural appreciation of it is often raised to a new level, and if local actors become interested in this, the place can be transformed into an attractive tourist destination" (p. 105). Nonetheless, visiting such places can prove beneficial for both the site and the tourist. Smith (2003) found that both literary tourists and volunteers working at sites associated with a literary figure "derive significant rewards from the literary aspects of the sites" (p. 83). According to Wallace (2009), "The literary tourist, in his veneration of an authorial site, restores the depth of memory to spaces that are in danger of being flattened by artifice" (p. 49). Part of the reason why this happens is that the visitor would probably have first experienced the site through their reading of literature or works that celebrate the life of the author. In fact, Cohen-Hattab and Kerber (2004) point out that "the creative literary approach can offer interpretations of the tourist site that might sometimes do a more adequate job of relaying its multiple social, historical and geographical particularities than more widely accepted forms of 'tourist literature'" (p. 71). A literary place has the potential to enrich its visitors, who in turn bring with them an almost singular sense of veneration cultivated by the rewarding experience of reading literature associated with the site.

In the case of dark tourism, the visitor is drawn to places that have gained notoriety because of terrible events that occurred in the past. However, the reason for which the tourist might wish to visit such places is not necessarily the morbid allure of death or tragedy. If that were the case then dark tourism would simply be "an attempt to intellectualize the uncertainty about a concern that traverses the existence of humankind, death" (Korstanje, 2011, p. 427). Moving away from the descriptive understanding of dark tourism found in *supply* and *demand* approaches, Biran et al.'s (2011) study adopts an *integrated supply-demand* perspective that propounds an experiential understanding of dark tourism: "The findings suggest that tourists' motives are varied, and include a desire to learn and understand the history presented, a sense of 'see it to believe it,' and interest in having an emotional heritage experience. Furthermore, the relative importance attributed to the motives revealed, indicates that interest in death is the least important reason for the visit. The findings indicate that

tourists are mainly motivated by a desire for an educational or emotional experience" (p. 836).

In this view of dark tourism, visitors are primarily interested in learning about the place and its history as well as themselves as human beings. This is in line with Darlington's (2014) idea that "dark tourism can provide emotional release, with the visitor gaining some kind of perspective and understanding" (p. 44). The perspective nurtured by dark places is a perspective on one's cultural and human heritage and this is mediated both intellectually and emotionally.

3 Arriving in Tasmania

My exploration of the dark and literary took place whilst on a recent visit to Australia. While literary tourism is not heavily developed in Australia (Yiannakis & Davies, 2012), its only form of dark tourism is constituted by visits to former prisons (Wilson, 2011). Even though the tourism images used to promote Australia "remain heavily influenced by Romantic notions of rural idylls and the picturesque" (Beeton, 2004, p. 134), Rofe (2013) points out that "not all discourses concerning the rural are idyllic. Darker, more sinister discourses of the rural are identifiable within Australian popular culture" (p. 270). Literature plays a significant role in articulating such discourses. In my visit to the Isle of the Dead, a tiny island off the coast of the former penal colony of Port Arthur in Tasmania, I became aware of how a dark reality resides beneath the idyllic and picturesque.

With only a free weekend sandwiched in between two intensive weeks of research at the University of Sydney, I decided to board a plane and fly to an island that had always fascinated me. Nowadays known as Tasmania, as a child I found its original name exotic, magical. Van Diemen's Land. At this stage in my journey I had not yet read Anthony Trollope's travel book about Australia. On his visit to Tasmania in January 1872, the novelist commented that the name Van Diemen's Land "is now odious to the ears of Tasmanians, as being tainted with the sound of the gaol and harsh with the crack of the gaoler's whip" (Trollope, 1875, p. 128). Lacking knowledge of Tasmania's history, I associated its original name with the mystery of an island that has given us the elusive Tasmanian devil and the now extinct tiger I had seen on some grainy, black and white video. The thylacine was an animal I grew interested in after reading the poem 'Loop' by Cliff Forshaw (2011). This island, cowering beneath the weight of the massive continent to its north, was said to bewitch visitors with the beauty of its wilderness. Even if I only had 48 hours to spare, I wanted to step on Tasmanian ground and breath Tasmanian air, experience the land I had hallowed in my childhood imagination.

My ignorance of Tasmania's history meant that it would only be later that I would find out that the island has been described as "Australia's most ethnically

homogenous and economically underachieving state with a history of violence and repression almost unprecedented in its barbarity" (Tumarkin, 2001, p. 196). All I knew at this point was that the island was named after the explorer Abel Tasman who had discovered it on 24 November 1642. Petrow (2014) explains that "All societies need heroes and, as Tasmanians perhaps have fewer of them than other places, Tasman stands out. Tasman displayed the characteristics of endurance and bravery in overcoming the fear of the great unknown" (p. 169). My journey to Tasmania was unwittingly a journey into what I did not know and the discoveries I would make would be a product of its dark and literary past, as well as of my own naivety.

I landed in Hobart late on Friday evening. The very first difference I noticed as soon as I stepped out of the aircraft was the cold biting into my bones. I reminded myself that I was now much closer to Antarctica. On the bus to my hotel I realised that Hobart was more of a town than a city. It lacked the glitter and the bustle of a big metropolis. Its suburban roads were muted; its residents seemingly tucked away inside their homes; the streets emptied of life. However, I would soon realise that I was somewhat mistaken.

Approaching the city I could see a score of searchlights crisscrossing the night sky. I knew that Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's light installation *Articulated Intersect* formed part of Dark MOFO, Hobart's annual winter festival organised by the Museum of Old and New Art. The 18 searchlights were positioned at six different points along the waterfront and were meant to beam light 15 kilometres across the city's sky. They were operated by the festival visitors by means of levers and despite consuming huge amounts of power were meant to symbolise the intimidating nature of searchlights, especially with respect to the hunt for migrants.

After checking into my hotel and changing into warmer clothes I ventured out into the cold, intent on not wasting any of the precious little time I had. As I got closer to the waterfront the streets grew livelier and music filled the frigid air. There was an atmosphere of drunken cheer and bright red lights bounced off the buildings and the water. It momentarily felt like being in a huge red light district. Tomorrow was the winter solstice and the city was in celebratory mode. It was much more subdued than the cheer typical of the southern Mediterranean countries I was more familiar with, but I could not help but admire Hobart's residents for braving the cold and putting on a show. Dark MOFO was in full swing. A musician dressed as a tiger was playing an assortment of homemade instruments, including one of those garbage cans that usually feature in New York movies. Another street performer was playing the guitar and making up rhymes by means of the words given to him by a small audience standing huddled around him. People were queuing to buy fish and chips from a number

of kiosks by the water's edge. A Ferris wheel illuminated by purple light circled above a crowd of music aficionados.

Walking along the waterfront I saw the *Aurora Australis* and the *Astrolabe* moored next to each other. The ships serviced the Australian and French research stations at Antarctica respectively. Australia lays claim to around 43% of Antarctica, which as a continent is nearly twice its size. Due to its proximity to Antarctica, Hobart has traditionally played a vital role in polar expeditions. This makes sense when you consider that the city is closer to Antarctica than it is to Perth in Western Australia.

4 Booking a tour

Determined to visit somewhere else apart from Hobart during my brief sojourn in Tasmania, the following morning I went in search of the Tassielink bus terminal on Brisbane Street. Not having a map or an Internet connection on my phone, I trusted my instincts and headed up the hill away from the waterfront. After walking a few blocks I started doubting whether I was going in the right direction. I scanned the street but it was completely empty despite the fact that it was seven o'clock. I reflected on whether the deserted streets were due to the early morning cold or the hangover that Hobart's residents must have been nursing after the night's celebrations. I kept on walking and after a while I met an old lady walking her dog. She led me downhill, apologising for not knowing where Brisbane Street was by telling me that in the past 43 years she had never felt the need to catch a bus. Luckily, before walking much further she asked a passer-by for directions and he told us that Brisbane Street was further uphill.

Arriving at the bus terminal I found it still closed. I waited for the office to open with a McCafé coffee in my hands, this being the only coffee shop I could find open at 7.00 a.m. After a short while a young woman joined me, what I presumed to be another passenger. Once the office opened I booked the first tour that departed that morning. The bus arrived and picked us up. For the entire journey we would be the only two people on the bus and yet my fellow passenger ensconced herself on a seat at the very back of the bus and by means of a pair of earphones plugged into her smartphone discouraged any attempts at communication. This seemed typical of a digitally nurtured solipsistic mentality.

My destination was Port Arthur, a penal station for repeat offenders that operated between 1830 and 1877. The place has been described as "the most effective prison ever concocted by humankind in the most remote dominion on earth" (Howard, 2011, chap. 27). Port Arthur was 96 kilometres away and the journey would take around one and a half hours. We crossed the River Derwent on the Tasman Bridge, a section of which collapsed on 5 January 1975 after a bulk ore carrier hit some of the pylons. I looked down at the water below and tried to imagine how the five motorists who died in the disaster must have felt

while driving off the bridge. The collapse of the bridge divided Hobart and led to a number of social problems on the eastern shore of the city, such as an increase in crime and neighbourhood disputes.

As soon as we passed by Hobart International Airport, which despite its name exclusively catered for domestic flights, the Tasman Highway cut low across the water, with Orielton Lagoon on one side of the causeway and Pitt Water on the other side. I immediately started to realise how spectacular Tasmania's landscape was; this was further confirmed once we passed the town of Sorell and started driving along the Arthur Highway. Valleys, forests and mountains were smothered in mist, plumes of it hanging still and low in the air. My childhood imaginings about this wondrous land were proving to be true. The yellow signs warning drivers to be on the lookout for kangaroos, in a way pictorial representations stereotyping Australia, were to be seen at certain points along the way. However, Tasmania went a step further. Signs featuring a ferocious Tasmanian Devil with its mouth open clearly underscored this island state's distinct identity while still embracing the Australian spirit celebrated in wildlife tourism brochures.

5 Touring Port Arthur

On arriving at Port Arthur I was disappointed to see the main penitentiary building clad in scaffolding and fenced around by tri-ply wooden sheets. If I had been aware of Trollope's (1875) book at that point I would have been hard pressed to identify what I saw with his description of Port Arthur: "Perhaps no spot on the globe has been the residence during the last sixty years of greater suffering or of guiltier thoughts" (p. 140). Why was it that after having travelled thousands of kilometres to visit this place it had to be spoiled by the contraptions of a $7 million restoration project? This seemed to be happening way too often on my trips. I would travel a long distance itching with anticipation to experience a place I had only read about or seen in pictures and film, longing to shoot a few memorable pictures and post them on social media, only to find there was only scaffolding with which to fill the viewfinder. Perhaps this was poetic justice for having developed the tourist's habit of pursuing the snapshot rather than savouring the genuine experience offered by the destination. In a world where every mobile phone owner is a photographer almost no corner of the globe escapes being frequently uploaded onto the Internet. This is symptomatic of what Draper (2013) describes as the "hyper-egalitarian, quasi-Orwellian, all-too-camera-ready 'terra infirma'". The places we see in photographs lure us to them and as soon as we get there we immediately seek to capture them in yet more photographs. This vicious cycle makes us impatient with the destination, unable to stand still and drink in the experience with our senses. The act of taking a

photo reassures us that we have ticked this place off our to-see list and nudges us to move on to the next destination.

At the Commandant's House I learnt how tourism in Port Arthur started immediately after the closure of the penal station. Despite the destruction wrecked by bushfires, the dismantling of a number of buildings, and the attempt to erase the memory of the area's convict history by changing its name to Carnarvon, tourists swarmed to the site and gradually carried off a large part of it with them as souvenirs. Pridmore (2009) explains that "The good citizens of Hobart had a great, possibly morbid, interest in the old convict settlement and it was only three months after its closure that visitors began to arrive" (p. 16). The Commandant's House first became a guesthouse in 1879 and then the Carnarvon Hotel in 1885. A post card from the time shows a young girl leaning on the stair railing leading up to the main entrance and looking out over the harbour. The Guard Tower can be seen in the background and this helps evoke a highly romantic atmosphere, strikingly in contrast with the brutality practised at the penal station when it was open. The Arthur Hotel stood close by, occupying the former Commandant's Office and Law Courts.

Since the late 19th century tourists have visited Port Arthur in droves, wanting to satisfy their curiosity about a place that destroyed the physical and mental health of hundreds of men. At the Separate Prison, for example, convicts were placed in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day and were not allowed to speak unless spoken to. When they attended mass three times a week in the chapel the convicts sat on rows of partitioned wooden benches so that each convict occupied a tiny cubicle from which he could only see the preacher. Port Arthur was based on prison reformer Jeremy Bentham's idea that prison was meant to grind criminals into becoming upright members of the community. According to Pridmore (2005b) "What percentage of those men were physiologically impaired when confined is unknown but *the treatment* could hardly be considered remedial" (p. 38). The Separate Prison was particularly fascinating for tourists and in December 1877 a tour made up of around 800 visitors was responsible for causing damage to the building.

The pillaging carried out by tourists and local residents as well as the bushfires that intermittently tore through the area mean that Port Arthur is nowadays only around 30% of what it once was when operational as a penal colony. At the police station, which now houses an archaeology display, I read a letter purportedly written by a man who wanted to return a brick he had stolen from the Separate Prison while visiting Port Arthur on honeymoon. In the letter he claimed that ever since stealing the brick he had experienced one misfortune after another, some involving his car breaking down, one in which he ran over a kangaroo, and others involving episodes of ill health and personal injury. The brick seemed to have jinxed him. I wondered whether this was an authentic letter

or an ingenious kind of warning to tourists against the temptation to steal from the site.

The morbidity of the penal settlement was accentuated even further by the fact that on 28 April 1996 it witnessed one of the world's worst shootings in contemporary history. Martin Bryant entered the Broad Arrow Café and opened fire on visitors and staff with a semi-automatic rifle. Then he continued his rampage in other places on the site. By the end of his shooting spree, Bryant had murdered 35 people and injured 23 others. Bryant (as cited in Frow, 1999) chose Port Arthur as a setting for mass murder because "A lot of violence has happened there. It must be the most violent place in Australia. It seemed the right place." It is for this reason that Tumarkin (2001) describes Port Arthur as a traumascape: "a time-space materially and discursively bound by traumatic repetitions" (p. 202). The café was subsequently gutted and made part of the Memorial Garden for the victims, a place where "there is no sensationalisation or dramatisation of the event. Instead, the garden provides the context for quiet contemplation and sad reflection by visitors and for emotions such as anger, pride and remorse" (Frew, 2012, p. 45). Following this tragic event, the Visitor Centre was built to cater for the needs of the increasing number of tourists visiting the site, some of whom probably visit to see the site of the massacre. More broadly, "an immediate institutional effect of the Port Arthur massacre was that it brought about the introduction of a uniform national firearms licensing and registration framework and the compulsory surrender (with compensation) of semiautomatic firearms" (Carcach et al., 2002, p. 110). Banerjee and Osuri (2000) question the Australian media's description of the Port Arthur massacre as the worst massacre in the country's history given the fact that the nation had been founded on a history of massacres. A case in point is the genocide that exterminated Aboriginal Tasmanians in the 19th century.

6 On the Isle of the Dead

After having visited the main site, which is comprised of more than 30 buildings, ruins, grounds and gardens, I paid for a tour to the Isle of the Dead. The island is one nautical mile away from the mainland and is around one hectare in size. Nearing the island on board the *MV Marana* I could that it was covered in trees and part of its shoreline consisted of steep rock face. Seals were lying on their back with their flippers protruding out of the water; sometimes it is even possible to encounter migrating whales. I partly chose to book this tour because the island's name had been used by Sergei Rachmaninov for his symphonic poem, by Val Lewton for his 1945 horror film, and by Arnold Böcklin for his 1886 painting. I had seen Böcklin's painting at the Metropolitan Museum in New York a few years before as well as behind the title credits in Lewton's movie. Moreover,

Mariss Janson's 1998 recording of Rachmaninov's composition was one of my favourites.

Figure 1 – The Isle of the Dead

When the penal station was in operation the Isle of the Dead acted as its burial ground. It served this purpose for 44 years. In 1833, the Reverend John Allen Manton (as cited in Pridmore) stated that the island "would be a secure and undisturbed resting place where the departed prisoners might lie together until the morning of the resurrection" (2009: 18). Not only convicts were interred in the island's soil, however. Ross (1995) estimates that the island is the final resting place for more than 1,000 people, including military and civil officers, their wives and children. The number of graves densely packed on such a tiny island is somewhat unnerving. Here Trollope (1875) met a certain Barron, a convict working as a gravedigger whose life "was the most wonderful" (p. 150) given the freedom he had whilst confined to the island. Barron "was in very truth monarch of all he surveyed... But he surveyed nothing but graves" (Trollope, 1875, p. 150). Just as the residential quarters at the penal station were segregated according to whether one was a convict, soldier, officer, or the governor, at the Isle of the Dead different sections of the island were reserved for different categories of people. The convicts were buried in unmarked graves at

the lower end of the island on its south side. The guide informed us that there exist theories that the convicts were buried naked in communal graves. The free men were buried in a different part of the island and each grave was marked by means of a stone: "Even beyond death it was important to ensure that the guilt-soiled soul of the convict did not mix with the free – for whose eternal rest was reserved the higher, north side; so they should be the closer to heaven" (Howard, 2011, chap. 27). Despite these attempts at class segregation, this tiny island acts as a microcosm of society at the time. According to Pridmore (2005a), "Many questions remain to be answered about the Island. What is apparent however is that all classes, officials, soldiers, wives, children, Point Puer boys, paupers, insane and even sailors are buried alongside hundreds of convicts" (p. 1). Research as to the identity of those buried on the island is still ongoing and this might help to dispel some of the mysteriousness of this place.

Figure 2 – The Gravestones of the Free

7 Discovering Henry Savery

The tour guide explained the history behind a number of graves and delved into the stories of some of the dead buried on the island. My curiosity was piqued

when she showed us a commemorative gravestone for a convict by the name of Henry Savery. Despite being a convict and hence buried at some indeterminate place on the island, in 1992 the Fellowship of Australian Writers erected a gravestone for Savery. This marked the 150th anniversary of Savery's death and the gravestone replaced a memorial plaque dating from 1978. This honour was accorded to Savery because he was the continent's first novelist. This was something I discovered on the day and when I later discussed it with colleagues at the University of Sydney they confessed to being equally surprised. They had always considered that honour to belong to Rolf Boldrewood, a romantic novelist who realistically portrayed pioneer life in Australia.

The gravestone carried the following inscription:

IN MEMORY OF
HENRY SAVERY
AUSTRALIA'S FIRST
NOVELIST
Businessman, *forger*,
convict and *author*.
Born 4th August 1791
Somerset, England
Died 6th February 1842
Port Arthur, Tasmania
1825 Transported to
Van Diemen's Land
for forgery.
1830 Released and his
novel *Quintus Servinton*
published.
1840 Arrested again
for forgery and sent
to Port Arthur.
1842 Died, possibly
from a stroke.

The inscription summarises the sad life of a man who aspired to success in his lifetime but was to gain it only after his death. Giordano and Norman (1984) claim that "it was Henry Savery's misfortune that he was too ambitious by nature" (p. 10). His main ambition in his lifetime was financial success and this led him to amass substantial debts. It was this that made him twice forge bills of exchange. His posthumous fame is not really bound to the quality of his writing

as much as to the historical value of his novel. This might be typical of the "tendency to mark down our pioneer writings and to treat them merely as passable in a historical sense" (Miller, 1958, p. 2). Savery's claim to fame rests upon the fact that his novel marks the incipience of Australian literature: "*Quintus Servinton* holds its position by setting, date of publication, and residence of the author" (Hadgraft, 1962/2000, "Biographical Introduction"). Nonetheless, his fame is of the esoteric kind. According to his biographer, "Most Australians would struggle to name the country's first published novelist" and this is probably the reason for which Savery is "destined to dwell in obscurity – an author lost to the literary backstreets" (Howard, 2011, "Author's Note"). In fact, there are only two streets that bear his name in Australia, one found in the suburbs of Canberra and the other being a cul-de-sac in a Melbourne suburb.

As a writer he achieved notoriety in Hobart once he started writing satirical sketches of well-known people in town and publishing them in the *Colonial Times*. He used a nom de plume because convicts were not allowed to write for the press. This also served to protect him from the ire of the powerful individuals he lampooned. In 1830 his sketches became Australia's first book of essays, *The Hermit of Van Diemen's Land*. The autobiographical novel published that same year was first begun in prison. Savery "had known few better places to write. The gaol walls guaranteed preservation from the temptations beyond" (Howard, 2011, "Prologue"). The novel's title was inspired by the fact that the author considered himself to be the fifth son in his family. Moreover, Servinton is very similar to Servington, the name of a noble family connected to the Saverys. The novel's subtitle hints at its autobiographical nature: *A tale founded upon incidents of real occurrence.* Many of the events that the novel's protagonist goes through mirror those in Savery's own tragic life. In fact, while Savery "may never have been master of his destiny, *Quintus Servinton* would allow him to be creator of his past" (Howard, 2011, "Prologue"). Savery's biographer recounts how "the deeper I dug the more I discovered that Henry's novel was virtually no novel at all. It was a coded diary of events cocooned within a long, desperate *mea culpa* to his adulterous wife" (Howard, 2011, "Author's Note"). When published in London in 1831, the novel did not gain widespread appeal amongst readers. This was because Savery's "relentless preaching grated with the more liberal tastes of English readers" and hence in England "his career as an author was over before it had begun" (Howard, 2011, chap. 23). Savery is criticized for adopting a hortatory style for his convict narrative: "The fact remains that the style is impossibly formal and the preaching comments on life are annoying" (Bayliss, 1973, p. 145). The novel has a number of "obvious defects: it is often long-winded, and its general comments on life in general can become tiresome; and its style is to our ears intolerably orotund" (Hadgraft, 1962/2000, "Biographical Introduction"). Despite its questionable literary merits, *Quintus Servinton* marks

the first milestone in Australian literature; that is enough to guarantee that Savery's name will live on into the future.

The reason for which the gravestone expresses uncertainty as to the cause of death is that one of his closest friends claimed that Savery cut his own throat while serving a life sentence at Port Arthur following his second conviction for forgery. Shortly before Savery's death, the travel writer David Burn described him thus: "I could not contemplate the miserable felon before me without sentiments of the deepest compassion, mingled with horror and awe. There he lay – a sad and solemn warning" (as cited in Pridmore, 2005a, p. 29). If Savery did take his own life, this would have meant he had finally succeeded after two previously botched attempts. He was 48 years old.

8 Conclusion

My impromptu tour to Port Arthur led to my fortuitous discovery of Savery's grave. This would lead me to conduct many months of research on his life and writings, as well as on the history of Port Arthur and the Isle of the Dead. What started as a tourist's desire to see a small part of a land that had always enraptured the imagination developed into an investigation of a tour destination as an embodiment of the dark and literary aspects of tourism. The Isle of the Dead enriched my knowledge of Australia's literary heritage and dark past. On the island the two are intertwined given that Australia's first novel owes its origins to the country's convict history. On this tiny island covered with hundreds of graves sheltering in the shade of weather-beaten trees I came to understand why Port Arthur "has the depth of meaning few places in Australia can claim to possess" (Tumarkin, 2001, p. 197). My visit provided me with an insight into this depth of meaning and it was only by developing my own narrative of the journey that I was able to situate myself with respect to the place.

The experience of travelling to Port Arthur was both moving and stimulating. Witnessing the remnants of its history of violence I became more aware of the complexity of the human experience as located within the social, geographical, cultural, and moral landscape. As an inner journey my tour made me reflect on the idea that my ignorance as a traveller had to be rectified or else each destination I would visit was bound to be merely another name scratched off the list of places to see. The consumption of travel destinations without a proper digestion of the experience is unedifying. I realised that in the case of a place like Port Arthur this was fundamental if I wanted to resist feeling numb in the face of two manifestations of human inventiveness: literature and punishment. The tour pushed me to question my identity as a traveller and to transform myself into someone whose journeys are in harmony with the poet Derek Walcott's (2004) notion that "We read, we travel, we become" (p. 31). Travel is an appetite for learning, for movement, for being.

My conception of Tasmania as a rural idyll was challenged by the knowledge I acquired in the course of my research into its brutal history. My tour to Port Arthur acted as a spur for me to learn further. It marked the beginning of an educational experience that I would probably not have undergone if I had not been intrigued by what I saw and felt on site. This is in line with Welch's (2013) idea that "a defining characteristic of prison museums is their sited-ness. Such sites become a major draw card for tourists because the prison and its pedagogy are viewed as authentic" (p. 483). Anticipating the closure of the penal colony, Trollope (1875) predicted that its buildings "will fall into the dust, and men will make unfrequent excursions to visit the strange ruins" (p. 153). Luckily, he was wrong. After the destruction wreaked by tourists, bushfires and years of neglect, Port Arthur is now the focus of intensive conservation efforts. Hopefully, this will ensure that many more tourists will be able to reap the multiple benefits of visiting a site that combines the dark and literary.

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