





Briqita Ozolins

Grimstone & Savery

Australia's first novelists



Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts Gallery
Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
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Foreword

by IAN MORRISON, TASMANIAN ARCHIVE AND HERITAGE OFFICE



The Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts is delighted to feature this exhibition about Australia's first two novelists by Brigita Ozolins. When Henry Savery showed Henry Melville the manuscript of *Quintus Servinton*, in Hobart Town in 1829 or 1830, the local options for an aspiring author were few. There were three printers in town, three libraries (none of them 'public' in the modern sense), and one bookshop. What Melville thought of Savery's novel, and who paid for the printing, we cannot know, but publishing it was a laborious and risky enterprise. The title page is dated 1830; when the book eventually appeared in March 1831 it was advertised as 'printed expressly for transmission to England', with 'a very few copies ... reserved for sale in this Colony' (Colonial Times 25 March 1831). *Quintus Servinton* was released in London, with the added imprint of Smith, Elder & Co., in 1832. Beside such contemporaries as Victor Hugo, Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, Savery's prose looked stuffy and his tale banal. Reviewers mostly complimented the printer. Mary Grimstone published *Woman's Love* in London in 1832 and went on to critical and commercial success. Her novels were readily available, in book form and as newspaper serials, in Hobart and Sydney in the 1830s and 1840s. But, like Savery's, her life ended in obscurity. A century passed before Tasmania had a State Library. By then the novels of Savery and Grimstone were iconic, unobtainable rarities. That we have them today is due to the generosity of private collectors William Walker and Sir William Crowther. In this National Year of Reading let us salute them.



Almost impossible

BY CRAIG JUDD, CURATOR, DETACHED CULTURAL ORGANISATION

Romanticism privileges fiction over fact, the subjective over the rational, the infinite over the finite, the past over the present. Such is the intellectual cargo that Mary Leman Grimstone and Henry Savery, Australia's first novelists, brought to Van Diemen's Land. So powerful was the retreat into their unique psychological states, their fevered imaginings, that in *Woman's Love* and *Quintus Servinton* there are almost no references to Hobart and environs, the place where both lived for six years.

In contrast, an 1829 visitor to Hobart, Mrs Augustus Prinsep wrote to her son in breathless prose about what she discovered. Also a skilled artist, she was taking a break from the vicissitudes of diplomatic life in the Bengal. She called the young settlement "the land of regenerated thieves" but with good humour.

"I dare say you have never dreamt of Van Diemen's land as of any thing else than a kind of wilderness; an appropriate insular prison for the vagabonds... You have never supposed that it has a beautiful harbour, a fine metropolis, with towns, streets shops, and pretty shopkeepers, like some of the larger towns of Devonshire or Sussex, or that it consists of an extensive country, already divided into counties, townships and farms.

...I enjoyed a thousand English associations as we walked up the High street - carts and cottages, ships and shops, girls in their patters, boys playing at marbles; above all, the rosy countenances and chubby cheeks and English voices."

Accommodation was scarce in Hobart so Mrs Prinsep gained lodgings at Newtown, a place "with the best garden in the world, and one of the loveliest views before me. Every kind of English fruit is hanging from the trees in luscious abundance... I

can remember no English village that surpasses Newtown and only two or three in Switzerland. All the drives about are of the same kind; and they tell me the farther inland we go, the more beauty we shall meet."

Mrs Prinsep did find some local customs a little confronting: "Free men find so many means of making money here, that they will not take service, and so the convicts, or as they are delicately called, the prisoners, supply all the demands of this nature... Even in our small ménage, our cook has committed murder, our footman burglary and the housemaid bigamy! But these formidable truths are hushed up or tried to be so."

Full of the spirit of colonialism the redoubtable woman advises her son to embark on a sure investment of 100 or 200 pounds in wool or whaling "...two hundred pounds would purchase a noble property here, in England the interest on it would scarcely furnish two boxes of millinery annually!"

Considering this sickly portrait of transported Englishness, this cruel simulacra, Grimstone and Savery's erasure of place in their writings is understandable.

Almost impossible, *eros* over *agape*,
The dark bloom on occasion quivers in a limitless field,
Imminent, fixed close to the earth an encrypted planet
inexorably spins,
Echoes of loss and mourning seep across the dour
landscapes of memory,
Night over Day.



Footnote: Free edit from *The journal of a voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemens Land: comprising a description of that colony during a six months residence. From original letters, selected by Mrs A. Prinsep.* London: Smith Elder and Co, 1833. Pgs 44-107



*You have darkened the winter of my days, plucked the sole
flower left upon the old stem.*

Mary Grimstone
Woman's Love

Interview

with SIR WILLIAM CROWTHER (1887-1981)

Transcribed from: *My collections, Sir William Crowther: 3 interviews with Ken Gilmore*. Recorded by the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education, Audio-visual Production Unit, 1974. The audio recordings are from 3 videotaped interviews by Ken Gilmore with Sir William Crowther in his office in 1974.

Sir William Crowther: This Mr Gilmore, is really... You might not remember that the Dutch were the great dealers in ah... in ah... tulips and they made all shades of tulips but they were never able to... There was an enormous prize for what ... anybody that could produce a black tulip. And this is the black tulip of my collection. It's by Lucy Leman... Leman Grimstone and ah... And she had come with her sister, Mrs Adey... Mr Adey was the first secretary of the Van Diemen's Land Company and they came out in about 1830 or in the late 20s to ah Circular Head Stanley. And during her residence here, it is shown in the introduction she ah... I was reading it only a few minutes ago...

Ken Gilmore: This is volume one, Sir William...

SWC: Oh that's....

KG: That's volume one...

SWC: Oh thank you...

'The following pages were written in Van Diemen's Land. The voyage is said to improve Madiera. I would it had the same effect on the manuscript. I should then have had less occasion to claim indulgence for the defects and deficiencies of their production.'

As a matter of fact, although the novel was written Tasmania it was published in England so, she'd no need to apologise for the state of the binding and the typography. But the great interest of that book now is that it's ah... there's one copy known in the ah... British Museum and as far as I know, this is the only other copy that remains.

And ah... that I was lucky enough to get it through a... through a quotation from ah... from ah.. Colin Richardson, a bookseller in London who, who did a lot of work for Mr... for Dr Morris Miller. And ah... he had offered Dr Morris Miller a ah... a scrapbook by Mr Leman, for which he wanted 300 pounds and ah... and Dr Miller tried to interest the sta... the Commonwealth library people to purchase it, but they wouldn't have anything to do with it. And he was discussing it with me, and I said to him, that ah.. why not write and ask him if he's got anything else dealing with the family? And then... a letter came back to say that he had these three volumes and two volumes of another novel she'd written. And so, we telegraphed for them and I got them. Now that's their... Their great interest is that it was written in Tasmania, in Van Diemen's Land, before 1830, and it was pur... and it was published in 1831 in, in England.

The next one is *Quintus Servinton*. And this is looked upon as the first Australian novel. It's ah... It's was a... *Quintus Servinton* was a ticket of leave ahm... convict in Tasmania, and he was working in Melville's printery, and he wrote this book which is in some manner an autobiography, in three volumes, and it was printed by Melville Press and in its original form bound by Melville's Press, in 1832 and 33. And ah... these are(?) said to his English publisher – ah.. I forget his name at the moment – who has, who has had them

cut down and rebound for library use. And then their next owner was the, was the Rippon Library in England and it was from, evidently it was from them that it came into this Harrington's bookshop in, in the north of England from which ah... How I purchased it was ah... Mr ah... Mr ah... Archie Collier was the, then ah... Public Librarian was his title, and he wrote one day and he knew that I didn't have *Quintus Servinton* and that old Mr ah... old Mr ah William Walker had had it and he said, how would you like to get on to a copy of ah.. of ah Quintus? And I said, you know. Well he said I've got an offer, would it interest you? And he handed me a postcard from a dealer who asked one pound sixteen shillings for these... this, this terrific rarity, the first ah... the first novel written and printed in Australia, and ah... I said, telegraph tonight, and he telegraphed, and ah... they came in due course and the invoice. The bookseller said, you'd be interested to hear that the .. that the ah... that the first mail after, after I got your telegram, I got sixteen ah... air letter orders from Australia, so you were wise to telegraph.



*Give me your hand, and let me see your future fate,
and Heaven's decree.*

Henry Savery
Quintus Servinton

Grimstone & Savery

by BRIGITA OZOLINS

Multi-media installation with sound and moving image.

Paint, curtains, gold leaf, plywood structure

(2.2m (h) x 2.4m (w) x 2.4m (w),

2 videos with accompanying soundtracks (2" loops),

1 sound track featuring the voice of Sir William Crowther (10").

Grimstone and Savery has been specifically conceived to celebrate the National Year of Reading. The inspiration for the exhibition grew from a fascination with the intriguing lives and works of Australia's little known first novelists – Mary Leman Grimstone and Henry Savery. Savery's largely autobiographical novel, *Quintus Servinton*, was published in 1831, and Grimstone's extremely rare *Woman's Love*, in 1832. To provide some context, within those years, Eduard Manet was born, Darwin set off in the HMS Beagle, Victor Hugo published *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Goethe completed *Faust* and died not long after, and the first issue of what is now the *Sydney Morning Herald* was published.

While it is unknown whether Grimstone and Savery ever met, their lives share a number of marked similarities. Both were born in England, came from well-to-do families and were well-educated. Both wrote their novels in Tasmania in the 1820s and both experienced success in their careers, Savery as a businessman and Grimstone as a prolific writer and a champion of women's rights. But these happier periods were punctuated by much bleaker times.

Savery was transported to Hobart in 1825 after his death sentence for forging bills of exchange, which was followed by his first suicide attempt (he threw himself off a boat and banged his head repeatedly against the side of the vessel), was commuted to transportation, and Grimstone's trip to Van Diemen's Land with her sister Lucy and husband Mr Adey, the newly appointed director of the VDL company, may well have been organized to help Grimstone overcome the sudden death of her first husband almost immediately after their marriage. Grimstone and Savery thus arrived in Tasmania under different, but similarly dark clouds.

The lives of both authors were also characterised by relationship difficulties and psychological trauma. Savery fell out with his wife, Eliza, when she visited him with their son, Oliver, in Hobart in 1828. Apparently Savery had exaggerated his circumstances which didn't live up to Eliza's expectations. He once again attempted suicide, this time by cutting his own throat. To inflame the situation, Eliza is reported to have had an affair with Algernon Montagu, who was charged with her well-being on their journey to Hobart. And, intriguingly, when she left Hobart in 1829 to return to England, she travelled on the same ship as Mary Grimstone – one can only imagine the conversations that surely must have taken place between the two women. On Grimstone's return to London, she continued to write novels, poems and treatises on the rights of women, including some works written under the pseudonym of Oscar. She also married a second time but the partnership was not a happy one. She, like Savery, is said to have had a nervous disposition and it would not be unreasonable to suggest that both authors suffered from what is now known as bipolar disorder.

When Savery was first sent to Hobart, he worked in clerical positions for the government, including the Treasury, presumably writing in his spare time. As well as writing the first Australian novel, he also wrote the first book of short stories, *A hermit in Van Diemen's*

Land, 1829-30, under the pseudonym Simon Stukeley. This series of satirical observations about members of Hobart society offers a far more interesting read than *Quintus Servinton*. Savery appears to have been well-liked and did well during his early years in Hobart, earning his ticket of leave and establishing a farm in New Norfolk. Alas, when he found himself in financial difficulty, he once again forged bills of exchange. This time he was sent to Port Arthur, where he spent the last 18 months of his life. Ironically, the magistrate who sentenced him was Algernon Montagu, the very man who had allegedly had an affair with his wife.

The most unfortunate similarity between Grimstone and Savery is that both authors appear to have died as the result of suicide. The details of Savery's death are not clear – complications from another suicide attempt, a stroke, an infection - but when he died it was as a convicted criminal. He was buried in an unmarked grave on the Isle of the Dead at Port Arthur in 1842. Grimstone died in 1869 in Paddington, London, after consuming disinfectant. She was half blind and almost penniless.

Savery's life has been commemorated by a tombstone that was erected in 1992 by the Fellowship of Australian Writers. His novel was reprinted in 1962 by Jacaranda Press, and again in 1984 by the University of New South Wales Press. In 2011, Ron Howard published *A Forger's tale*, a biography of Savery. Grimstone's *Woman's Love*, on the other hand, has never been republished. And, while scholars such as Michael Roe have written about her, she remains largely unknown to the general public. The State Library's extremely rare first and only edition of *Woman's love* may well be one of only 2 known existing copies, the other held in the British Library. It has been digitized to coincide with this exhibition.

Grimstone and Savery is my response to the complex and extraordinary lives of Australia's first two novelists. I have used the contemporary art strategies of installation, moving image and sound, in an effort to both celebrate and mourn the two authors – and to evoke some of the mysterious interconnections between their tragic lives.



16 July 1832

Sir.

Presuming the £500 advance he
£50 to Mr. Day on the 1st August, he
to be deducted for discount is £5. 2. 1.
If the payment be made earlier, you may
possibly receive the additional discount at the
rate of seven pence, ~~per cent~~ per day -
if on the contrary, it is not that day, there
will be a corresponding deduction to be made.

I am, Sir, your most obed^t serv^t

Henry Grimstone

Suppose for instance you advance the money on the
1st inst. there will be 4/5 to be added to the £5. 2. 1.
if on the 10th inst. - the same to be deducted - and any other
number of days in the same proportion.

To

Lucy Seman Adley

these volumes are affectionately
presented by

her ardently attached sister

The Author

Biography

Brigita Ozolins is an artist and an academic at the Tasmanian School of Art. She was born in Melbourne of Latvian parents and moved to Hobart in 1983. Her art practice, driven by a passion for books, words and libraries, examines the links between language, history, bureaucracy and identity. It usually takes the form of installation, is often text-based and site-specific and increasingly involves working with other experts such as architects, builders, engineers, and video and sound artists. Her most recent projects include *Kryptos*, a maze-like construction built into David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) that incorporates binary code, sound and cuneiform artefacts, and *The Reading Room*, a commission for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery that featured 30,000 books and a video of Tasmanians from all walks of life reading a passage from a favourite book.

In the 1970s, Brigita studied the classics at Monash University and in the 1980s worked as a librarian and arts administrator. In the mid 1990s she returned to study at the University of Tasmania's School of Art, where she is now a lecturer. She completed her PhD in 2004 and her thesis, which explores the links between language and subjectivity through installation, was awarded the Dean's commendation.

Since 1995, Brigita has exhibited regularly in solo and group exhibitions, including completing commissions for MONA, The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, the State Library of Tasmania and the National Library of Latvia (via the Soros Foundation). She has received numerous artist grants, including the 2008 inaugural Qantas Contemporary Art Award, Australia Council residencies in New York and London, the et+t residency in Riga, the Cite Internationale residency in Paris, and Arts Tasmania residencies at Gorge Cottage in Launceston, and Port Arthur, Tasmania.

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