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1. Introduction

1 Over the last three decades a rich seam of Indigenous life-writing has emerged in Australia, much of which (since it is an essentially female phenomenon) is devoted to Aboriginal women's recollections of working as housemaids in white people's homes. During the same period Aboriginal domestic service during the first half of the twentieth century has become the focus of extensive investigation by a new generation of Australian historiographers. The relationship settler Austra-

lians had with their Aboriginal servants was, both sets of textual evidence attest, for the most part, controlling, sadistic and deeply rooted in feelings of racial superiority. It bore, in other words, more than a passing resemblance to that which flourished under regimes of formal enslavement in other parts of the world.

2 The analogy of slavery is far from hyperbolic, the defining elements of the slave's experience being easily recognisable both in autobiographical portraits of the Aboriginal servant's life and in the realities of indentured domestic service for Indigenous women recently illuminated in research conducted by academic historians.[1] Instances of concordance include: the lack of financial remuneration for work done; the absence of holidays or any free time; the impossibility of quitting 'employment' however intolerable the treatment inflicted by masters or mistresses; the floggings to which runaway servants were routinely subjected; the common perception among pastoral station owners that Indigenous domestic workers were station property; the forced removal of children born to black servants; and the threat of psychological and/or physical aggression that overshadowed the domestic's daily existence. Of the many points of convergence between the academic literature and the autobiographical accounts, one of the most recurrent is the emphasis given to the sexual abuse of Aboriginal domestic servants by their white masters. It is this aspect of the master-servant interface and, more specifically, its representation in two iconic works of Australian literature that constitute the main focus of the following article.

2. White settler desire for black bodies

3 White settlers' predilection for sex with Aboriginal women was known colloquially as 'black velvet', a term which, as Liz Conor explains, is an "explicit reference to the tactile sensations associated with illicit white contact with racialised genitals". (Conor, 2013: 51) While not openly referred to in polite society, both the term, 'black velvet' and the phenomenon it signified were well-known and widely recorded in colonial Australia. Hannah Robert reports that references to settlers' sexual liaisons with Aboriginal girls and women are found "in official records, missionary reports, journals, oral histories, litera-

ture and popular culture". (Robert, 2001: 71) John Chesterman and Brian Galligan assert, more astringently, that the archival evidence supports "the fairly uncontentious conclusion that Aboriginal women and girls were regularly and often systematically abused by white settlers". (Chesterman and Galligan, 1997: 35)

4 Displacing their lust for Indigenous women onto the objects of their fantasies, white "gin jockies", as they were lewdly described, spoke of Aboriginal girls "as founts of insatiable libidinal desire" (Evans, 1999: 206) – a discursive manoeuvre that conveniently absolved them from having to restrain, or even acknowledge, their own voracious appetite for black women's bodies. Given the context, it is hardly surprising to find that, as one of the contemporary commentators quoted by Robert observes, "raping an Aboriginal woman was a common enough fact of life" in Australia. (Robert, 2001: 75) In her analysis of the coercive sexual relations that white males had with native women in early twentieth-century colonial cultures, Ann Laura Stoler makes the important point that "sexual abuse of black women was not classified as rape and therefore was not legally actionable". (Stoler, 1989: 641) Commenting on this anomaly, Native American legal specialist, Sarah Deer explains that: "[t]he colonialist mind set could not conceive of a legal wrong in raping a Native woman. Native women were devalued and debased, and their abuse was seen as being outside the law". (Deer, 2004: 125) While the legal situation in Australia was somewhat different, the final outcome was substantially the same since "[c]ases of white men raping Aboriginal women were rarely brought to court and tended to have low success rates". [2]

5 The sense of impunity with which white Australian males felt able to act out their predatory sexual impulses was, of course, considerably reinforced in circumstances where the prey was a servant girl and the predator operated from a position of both social and racial superiority. The opportunities offered both by daily contact and the private spaces that most middle-class homes afforded further facilitated white male access to the bodies of young black subalterns. Indeed, many Aboriginal servants remember the experience of working for white people "as involving the complete control and ownership of their bodies" since "[d]omestic work and sex work went hand in hand for these girls". (Lowrie, 2006: 5)

6 Meanwhile, Aboriginal Protection Boards responsible for the early twentieth-century schemes that removed Aboriginal girls from their families and indentured them as maids in white households, did nothing to stop the sexual exploitation of their young charges. [3] And yet, as historian Shirleene Robinson points out, "high-ranking officials" were only too well aware of what was going on since "[i]n 1924, Governor Leslie Wilson informed the Deputy Premier that 95% of the young girls who were sent out to domestic service from Queensland's Aboriginal missions and reserves were returning to these institutions pregnant". (Robinson, 2003: 177)

7 Aboriginal servants had first become a common fact of colonial life in the first half of the nineteenth century. The destitute remnants of tribal groups that had survived the trauma of frontier violence and set up camp close to pastoral stations located on their ancestral territories constituted a convenient labour pool for white settlers in the labour-impoverished Australian outback. For Aboriginal people, the attraction of working for white station owners lay mainly in the opportunity it afforded them of maintaining their all-important spiritual relationship with the land. A further major incentive was the possibility of feeding their starving families with the rations they received in lieu of wages.

8 Pastoral stations – the setting for both of the texts discussed in this paper – were, however, particularly dangerous places for Aboriginal women since, according to historian Henry Reynolds, it was there that "[they] were preyed on by any and every white man whose whim it was to have a piece of 'black velvet' wherever and whenever they pleased". (Thomas, 1993: 140)

3. The romance of master-servant relations in Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* (Prichard, 2000) [4]

9 As Drusilla Modjeska indicates in her 1990 introduction to *Coonardoo*, it was thanks to a lengthy stay with friends on a remote pastoral station in Western Australia that Prichard was able to glean the first-

hand observations of master-servant relations in the outback that form the basis of her novel. The "accuracy of naturalistic detail" that, Modjeska claims, characterises Prichard' work, is exemplified in the detailed account *Coonardoo* provides of "station life, the daily routine, the stores, the kitchen, the stockyards, the mustering, the Aboriginal camp, the homestead verandah" (vii).

10 Yet, though *Coonardoo* was ground-breaking for its time, both in having an Aboriginal heroine and in the attention it paid to Aboriginal culture, Prichard's portrayal of life on the fictional pastoral station of "Wytaliba" and, in particular, her representation of the quintessentially colonial master-servant dyad are less realistic than Modjeska's assertion would have us believe.

11 While the autobiographical writings of Indigenous women published over the last three decades have consistently underlined the punitive regime under which Aboriginal servants laboured in white households, one of the main discursive features of Prichard's portrait of inter-racial relations on Wytaliba is its emphasis on the humane nature of the control the station-owner exercises over her Aboriginal servants and the cheery willingness with which the latter perform their duties. So devoted are the black workers to their mistress, in fact, that, on her death, they "wail […] and howl […] as though it were one of their own people who had died" (67).

12 As for the eponymous Aboriginal heroine, Coonardoo, she is a paragon of servantly dedication. Not only is she a loving and dedicated housemaid to Mrs Bessie Watt, she is "worshipful and devout" (73) in serving her mistress's son, Hugh, and "humble and untiring" (146) in her efforts to satisfy the demands of Hugh's exigent wife, Mollie.

13 For her part, Mrs Bessie or "Mumae," as the natives fondly call her, is said to "pride […] herself on treating her blacks kindly and having a good-working understanding with them" (8). Not that she shuns more orthodox, disciplinary practices in her "handling" of them – like the matriarch that she clearly aspires to be, Mumae is reported to be a firm believer in the efficacy of "the iron hand in the velvet glove" (95) and will occasionally resort to corporal punishment. In the moral economy Prichard's novel appears to endorse, this authoritarian approach is seen as both a necessary and an essentially benign corrective to the shortcomings of the 'childlike' natives. It is, however, the

very different relationship between Coonardoo, Wytaliba's principal domestic servant, and Hugh (who takes over the running of the station when his mother dies) on which Prichard's narrative focuses.

14 According to the author herself, *Coonardoo* was strongly motivated by her desire "to draw attention to the abuse of Aboriginal women by white men – a subject that," she believed, "demanded immediate attention". (Irwin, 1956: 31) Yet the representation of the sexual encounter in which Hugh realises his long-repressed desire for Coonardoo is a site of consummate ambivalence in the text. For, both in the prolonged narratorial foreplay leading to the incident and in the depiction of the act itself, it is, perplexingly, the Aboriginal servant's inherent sexuality rather than the white male's legendary voracity for 'black velvet' that is foregrounded. As Marion Austin-Crowe points out, "there is never any doubt that Coonardoo is sexually available to Hugh."(Austin-Crowe, 1996: 81)

15 Indeed Prichard's portrayal of Coonardoo – a woman whose uninhibited libido is, the reader is invited to infer, largely to blame for the cruel fate that eventually befalls her – is clearly tainted by the settler Australian construction of Aboriginal women as "sexually loose and a danger to the morality of the white society".(Walden, 1995: 12)

16 As an adolescent Coonardoo is already the embodiment of what, in today's vernacular, would be described as a 'prick-teaser'. Flaunting her nakedness as she walks back to the native camp after the day's work, she is depicted "swaying, jerking her small rounded buttocks and casting sidelong glances with back-flung words at the men she passed" (27).

17 In the scene leading up to the climactic act of inter-racial copulation, Coonardoo (by now a mature woman) is pictured "stalking" Hugh through the bush with "passion and tenderness" (70) until he is no longer able to resist the erotic charge of her presence. Rather than exposing the casual brutality with which white masters were known to indulge their desire for 'black velvet', Prichard shows us instead an Aboriginal woman who is the purposeful instigator rather than the abused object of her master's desire.

18 The "rampantly sexual" (Lake, 1993: 382) behaviour attributed to Coonardoo is at its most caricatural, however, in the narration of the

period following her Aboriginal husband's death – a time when, his own wife having long since left him, Hugh, too, is alone. Unable to imagine why the master does not come to "take her as his woman" (157), the sexually frustrated Aboriginal servant is portrayed "writh[ing]" on the homestead veranda "a prey to all the tugging and vibrating instincts of her primordial hunger" (207). When, therefore, in her master's absence, Sam Geary, a neighbour of the Watts and a sleazy aficionado of 'black velvet,' resolves to have his way with her, it is, again, not an act of coercive sex that is described but one of consensual coupling. Despite having "loathed and feared [Geary] beyond any human being" (203), Coonardoo's over-determined sex-drive is such that, "she could not resist him. Her need for him was as great as the dry earth's for rain" (203).

19 Though the powerful taboo regulating inter-racial relations in colonial societies prevents Hugh from ever openly acknowledging his real feelings for Coonardoo, the reader is left in no doubt as to the essentially sentimental nature of his attachment to his servant,[5] his interest in her being repeatedly flagged as devoid of sexual intention. Restrained by a moral conscience that prohibits him from viewing Coonardoo as the sensual woman the reader is given to observe, Hugh regards her, in the episode leading up to the single act of intercourse that takes place between them, as an "old playmate" with whom he is sharing a "childish adventure" (71). As they ride companionably together in the bush, his image of her is that of "his own soul riding there, dark, passionate and childlike" (68).

20 The absolute antithesis of the sexually predatory white master for whom rape is the default mode for coitus with an Aboriginal woman, (Goldie, 1989: 76) Hugh passively surrenders in a moment of transcendental yearning to "[d]eep inexplicable currents of his being [...] [giving] himself to the spirit which drew him [...] to the common source which was his life and Coonardoo's" (71).

21 If the sexual nature of the act that takes place between the two characters is so deliberately de-emphasised in the narration, it is because it is Hugh's love for Coonardoo that the author is intent on communicating. Rather than constituting an unequivocal indictment of white men's sexual abuse of Aboriginal women, Prichard's novel can, thus, be more accurately described as that romantic cliché, the

doomed, inter-racial love-story – doomed because, as Robert reminds us, in white Australian society, "Aboriginal women were conceptualised as a vice – tempting yet destructive". (Robert, 2001: 76)

22 In the event, Coonardoo's destructive impact on Hugh's life reveals itself when she disappears after a violent scene in which his jealousy explodes into a vicious verbal and physical assault upon her. Thenceforward, Hugh's involvement with his Aboriginal servant is clearly, if tacitly, designated as the primary cause of his emotional unravelling and, concomitantly, the disintegration of Wytaliba, the Watt family's beloved pastoral station.

4. The double-entendre of 'familial' master-servant relations in *My Place*. (Morgan, 1987) [6]

23 I turn now to that section of Sally Morgan's iconic autobiography in which the author transcribes her illiterate grandmother, Daisy's, oral account of her life as a servant.

24 Like Prichard's heroine, Daisy was born in a native camp on a pastoral station in the Western Australian outback in the early years of the twentieth century. Like Coonardoo, Daisy worked from infancy in the home of the same white settler family and, like Coonardoo, Daisy was also, Morgan's text insinuates, impregnated by a white master who did not acknowledge his paternity of the child his servant bears. There the similarity ends.

25 Narrated from her own perspective and in her own words, Daisy's story of working for the Drake-Brockman family presents a radically different image of the master-servant interface to the sentimentalised version proposed in *Coonardoo*. In sharp contrast with the agreeable relations Wytaliba's native workers enjoy with their bosses, Daisy's recollections of her life as housemaid and nanny underscore the harsh and exploitative conditions under which she toiled. As she puts it, "There wasn't nothing I didn't do. From when I got up in the morning till when I went to sleep at night, I worked. That's all I did, really, work and sleep" (326).

26 The two mistresses Daisy served in her youth are, furthermore, (unlike the kindly Bessie Watt) callous women. While the first Drake-Brockman wife, Nell is in the habit of inscribing her displeasure on her servants' bodies with a bull cane (323), the second, Alice, arranges for Daisy's illegitimate daughter, Gladys, to be placed in a children's home at the age of three because the little girl "cost too much to feed" (332).

27 Yet, ironically, when interviewed by Morgan for the book she is writing, Alice Drake-Brockman presents much the same sentimental gloss on master-servant relations as Prichard does in *Coonardoo*. Daisy, she reminisces "grew up loving us and we were her family; there were no servants. It was just family life" (167). Like a mantra the Drake-Brockman clan passes on from one generation to the next, the words Morgan reports here were later reiterated by Alice's granddaughter who claimed in a much publicised TV interview "we [...] loved [Daisy and Gladys] and we [...] looked after them, and they were *our family*". (Dalley, 2004 my italics)

28 Daisy, on the other hand, indignantly contradicts what, she insists, is a complete mis-representation of the treatment she received. "[I]t's no use them sayin' I was one of the family, cause I wasn't. I was their servant" (326). In light of the information subsequently uncovered by Morgan's investigations, there is, however, an excruciating irony in the old lady's denial of kinship with her employers.

29 From early on in *My Place*, the white family is, as Marguerite Nolan points out, "a haunting presence, introduced in whispered tones, [...] and it is only as the story unfolds that allusions to the significance of the Drake-Brockman [sic] begin to emerge". (Nolan, 1999: 192) What Morgan's research reveals, in fact, is that both Daisy and her brother, Arthur, are the fruit of a nine-year sexual liaison Howden Drake-Brockman had with their Aboriginal mother.

30 According to Arthur, though he and Daisy went by their white father's name throughout the early years of their life, their surname was suddenly changed to Corunna when Howden married his first wife, Nell (155). Thereafter, like most white settler males, Howden sought to hide the fact that he was the father of 'half-caste' progeny.

31 The smokescreen created by Howden to conceal Daisy and Arthur's paternal ancestry is later redeployed by his surviving kin when, decades after his death, Morgan tries to uncover the past her grandmother refuses to discuss. According to Howden's daughter, Judy, Daisy is the daughter of an English engineer named "Jack Grimes." Alice, on the other hand, tells Morgan that her grandmother was fathered either by a mystery man known as "Maltese Sam," or by some unidentified station hand.

32 Unconvinced, Morgan opts to follow the trail of evidence embedded in her own relatives' testimony – a decision that leads to the discovery of a family secret so deeply hidden that, despite her relentless digging, even she is unable, finally, to fully expose it.

5. Truths about masters and servants that are "too shameful to tell"

33 Though Daisy never explicitly refers to her own experience of sexual exploitation as a servant, the reader is enabled to fill in the gaps by the clues that Morgan regularly scatters throughout her text. One example – during a conversation in which she is recounting to her grand-daughter how black servants were treated when she was a young woman, Daisy is suddenly overcome with the sense of impotence and vulnerability that this memory of sexual abuse revives:

> We had no protection when we was in service. I know a lot of native servants had kids to white men because they was forced. Makes you want to cry to think how black women have been treated in this country. It's a terrible thing. They'll pay one day for what they've done (329).

34 This *cri du coeur* against a system that allowed white bosses to 'take' their Aboriginal domestics by force is just one of several textual hints suggesting that Daisy herself was once subjected to such violation. Her withdrawal into impenetrable silence when questioned by Morgan about the past is, for instance, a key symptom of trauma. But other aspects of Daisy's behaviour also identify her as victim of rape.

35 Her repeated denials of her Aboriginality attest, for example, to the psychic suffering Judith Butler evokes in her discussion of the traumatised subject's "disidentification with a position that seems too saturated with injury or aggression, one that might, as a consequence, be occupiable only through imagining the loss of viable identity altogether". [7] Rejecting her identity is, in other words, Daisy's way of dealing with the trauma of rape to which her black body and her subaltern status have exposed her. Corroborating this interpretation is Smith's observation that in her "experience as a rape crisis counsellor every Native survivor I ever counseled said to me at one point, 'I wish I was no longer Indian'". (Smith, 2003: 71)

36 As for Daisy's implacable refusal to disclose what it is that has so affected her – "Some things I can't talk 'bout. […] They for me to know. They not for you or your mother to know" (341) – this should be understood, I think, in the light of Indigenous Australian novelist, Alexis Wright's comments on Aboriginal people's reactions to traumatic events:

> We […] have a saying in our family – *Don't tell anybody*. So I learnt to imagine the things that were never explained to me – the haunting memories of the impossible and frightening silence of family members. […] I can only now feel I can tell the story of our family revealing the voices of loved ones who never, ever told a story that they felt was *too shameful to tell*. (Wright, 2002: 10, my italics)

37 As we can see from her many remarks associating blackness with dirt, Daisy's silence on the 'shameful' subject of her sexual abuse does not preclude her from indicating the site of her shame (notably her defiled body). For, we must remember, the other side of the white Australian male's powerful sexual attraction to black women (so graphically conjured up by the phrase 'black velvet') is the equally powerful revulsion that settler Australian society expresses at the idea of physical intimacy between black and white bodies. As in other colonial societies, such intimacy was construed in Australia as leading to moral and physical pollution, the bodies of Indigenous women being regarded as sources of dirt and contamination. [8] That Daisy has internalised this degrading image of Aboriginal women is made clear in one of her last conversations with her grand-daughter when she describes herself

as “Just a dirty old blackfella” who has “been treated like a beast” all her life (344).

38 In the absence of any *explicit* reference in *My Place* to the incestuous abuse of which, we are led to believe, Daisy was the victim, the unspeakable ‘truth’ about Howden Drake-Brockman’s relationship with his servant/daughter is simply allowed to emerge, like ectoplasm, from the corpus of inter-linking testimonies that Morgan assembles.

39 Questioned by Morgan as to who Gladys’s father might have been, Alice Drake-Brockman replies tangentially by emphasising that she was “absolutely ignorant” of the fact that Daisy was even pregnant until, on the night the latter gave birth, Howden woke her up to tell her that Daisy was in pain. According to Alice’s explanation, Daisy’s bedroom was “just off” that of herself and her husband, Howden’s old dressing room having been specially adapted in order to provide their young servant with sleeping quarters. It is, however, difficult to accept the innocence of such sleeping arrangements when we consider Francesca Bartlett’s assertion that Aboriginal servants typically slept “out of the house, past all the amenities, further away from the master’s home than the dogs”. (Bartlett, 1999: 16)

40 A further oblique hint as to the identity of Gladys’s father can be glimpsed in the vehemence of Daisy’s assertion that: “Everyone knew who the father was but they all pretended that they didn’t. Aah, they knew, they knew. You didn’t talk ’bout things then. You hid the truth” (332). Most direct and compelling of all, however, is the photographic evidence Gladys discovers of the striking physical resemblance that exists between herself and the Drake-Brockman patriarch (233).

6. Conclusion

41 I would like to conclude this discussion by way of Deborah Bird Rose’s observation apropos of the ‘History Wars’ [9] that “Among the issues at stake, is a perception of White Australian innocence”. (Rose, 2004: 12) For it is, I think, this perception that continually blinds Australia’s settler colonial population to the truth of its past relations with Aboriginal people.

42 Particularly germane here are Fiona Probyn-Rapsey’s comments on the existence within many white families of guilty secrets that are

kept hidden for decades. Underlining the "lack of inquiry [...] from one generation to the next", (Probyn-Rapsey, 2011: 68) Probyn-Rapsey quotes from sociologist Stanley Cohen's analysis of 'micro-cultures' in which "a group censors itself, learns to keep silent about matters whose open discussion would threaten its self-image". (Probyn-Rapsey, 2011: 68-9) As I have sought to show in this article, the white pastoral family milieu where so much of the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women took place, was one such micro-culture.

43 And that explains why, for all her avowed intentions, Prichard is unable to do more than gesture towards (as opposed to problematizing) the kind of master-servant relations that were the norm on pastoral stations throughout Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century. By focusing the diegesis on a white station-owner's romantic love for an Aboriginal servant whose sexual agency leads them both to destruction, Prichard is able to avoid exposing the negative image of outback society that would have resulted from the portrayal of violently coercive sexual relations between white bosses and the Aboriginal women who serve them.

44 Turning, finally, to the image of master-servant relations *My Place* conveys, Morgan's multivocal autobiography was, as I indicated earlier, forcefully rejected by the pastoralist family for whom Daisy worked. Appearing together on a national current affairs program in 2004, several family members dismissed the story of Daisy's life in service as mere "fabrication" on the part of her grand-daughter. "Sickened" by the suggestion that her father had indulged in not just sexual, but incestuous relations with the family's Aboriginal servant, Judith Drake-Brockman suggests that both the sense of grievance Daisy's recollections express, and the innuendo of sexual abuse subtending the metanarrative into which the old woman's story is inserted, are the malicious inventions of Morgan herself. The housemaid and nanny that the Drake-Brockmans "revered" and that Judith herself regarded as "a second mother," could *never*, she declares, have said such terrible, untruthful things about the way she was treated.

45 Given that Howden had a very censorious attitude towards sexual intercourse between white and Aboriginal station workers, the idea that he had an incestuous relationship with his servant/daughter is, Judith maintains, simply preposterous. Moreover, as she disinge-

nuously explains to her interviewer, "He and my mother were living together so happily, happily in the same bed, double-bed always. *He wasn't denied anything*". (Dalley, 2004, my italics)

46 Pre-dating the Drake-Brockmans' TV performance is the family history Judith published in 2001. Entitled *Wongi Wongi: To Speak*, this memoir offers a fascinating insight into the lengths to which White Australia is prepared go in order to counter any threat to its self-image. For it is by enlisting the posthumous oral testimony of Daisy herself that Howden's daughter exculpates her parents from the accusations *My Place* directly or indirectly lays against them. As she tells it, five years after the faithful old servant's death, a ghostly, lachrymose Daisy came to stand next to her bed. Demonstrating the ventriloquial capacity of the settler for articulating her/his own reasoning and desires through the mouth of an Indigenous person, Judith claims that Daisy

> …repeat[ed] that she didn't say all those things about Mum and all those other things in Sally's book. Her face wasn't moving but I could hear and understand every word she was saying. 'I know you didn't,' I tried to reassure her. 'It's alright, I know'. (Probyn-Rapsey, 2011: 70)

47 What better proof of the white family's innocence than the word of their faithful servant herself?

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1 In his submission to Australia's "Senate Inquiry into Stolen Wages", historian Stephen Gray argues that many Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry "lived and worked in conditions which would satisfy the definitions of 'slavery' contained in the 1926 Slavery Convention, and in the applicable law under the *Slave Trade Act* (UK) 1824".(Gray, Stephen (2006). "Submission regarding the Inquiry into Stolen Wages by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee", Melbourne: Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, Monash University, 1-27, 27.

2 Robert, 2001: 75. On the continuing tendency of Australian courts to operate from the assumption evoked by Deer, see Behrendt, Larissa, (2000). "Consent in a (Neo)Colonial Society: Aboriginal Women as Sexual and Legal 'Other'", in : *Australian Feminist Studies*, 15/33, 353-367.

3 See, for example, Haskins, 2004: 33-58. Haskins has devoted several other excellent articles to this question.

4 All page references to the novel will hereafter be given in parenthesis in the body of the text.

5 Hugh's amorous feelings are clearly signalled in the many allusions to the light in his eyes when he sees Coonardoo, the tenderness of his voice when he speaks with her, his evident affection for the son she bears him etc.

6 All page references to *My Place* will hereafter be given in parenthesis in the body of the text.

7 Quoted in Nolan, 1999: 200. See the comment by psychologist, Leslie Korn that "rape leaves an individual disconnected from her[self] and others and in somatic, psychic and spiritual pain". (Korn, 2002: 2)

8 A breath-taking demonstration of this assertion can be seen in an Australian soap advert dating from the early twentieth century. Around the neck of a grotesque-looking Aboriginal woman hangs a label bearing the word 'DIRT'. A white hand wielding a 'nulla-nulla' (an Aboriginal club) is hitting the woman on the head. The caption above the image reads: NULLA-NULLA "Australia's white hope, the best household soap." Parallel to the four sloping sides of the image's octagonal frame are printed the words of the advert's slogan: "KNOCKS/ DIRT/ ON THE/HEAD". (See Bartlett, 1999: 12). N.B. Smith's suggestion that constructing Native American women's bodies as dirty is precisely what makes them "'sexually violable and 'rapable'" in the eyes of settler colonial American males. (Smith, 2003: 73).

9 The term refers to the acrimonious debate, begun in the 1990s, in which Australian intellectuals and other public figures dispute the truth of the nation's colonial past.

English

This article examines the relationship between Anglo-Australian masters and Aboriginal servants during the early decades of the 20th century. Having first raised the question of "black velvet" (the graphic expression used by white Australian males to refer to sexual intercourse with Aboriginal women), I will then provide an *apercu* of what recent Australian historiography tells us about the sexual abuse of young Aboriginal women forced to work as indentured servants in white Australian households.

The second part of the discussion will be concerned with two iconic literary texts – *Coonardoo*, the Anglo-Australian author, Katharine Susannah Prichard's famous novel, published in 1939 and *My Place*, the best-selling autobiographical work written by Sally Morgan, an artist of Aboriginal descent, at the end of the 1980s. My analysis will focus on the very different ways in which Prichard and Morgan represent the daily life of an Aboriginal servant who is said to be "part of the family. It will also examine the type of the sexual relations (between master and servant) that are shown to result from this so-called "family" intimacy.

Français
Cet article étudie la relation entre maîtres anglo-australiens et domestiques aborigènes pendant les premières décennies du XX^{e} siècle. Après avoir abordé le sujet du « velours noir » (phrase imagée inventée par le mâle blanc australien pour désigner ses rapports sexuels avec les femmes indigènes), l'auteure donnera un aperçu de ce que nous apprend l'historiographie australienne récente sur l'abus sexuel de jeunes femmes aborigènes contraintes à travailler en servitude pour des familles australiennes blanches.
Dans un deuxième temps, seront étudiés deux textes littéraires emblématiques – *Coonardoo* le célèbre roman de l'auteure anglo-australienne, Katherine Susannah Prichard, publié en 1939 et *My Place*, livre autobiographique à succès que l'artiste d'origine aborigène Sally Morgan a écrit à la fin des années 80. L'analyse portera essentiellement sur la représentation très contrastée que proposent Prichard et Morgan avec, d'un côté, le vécu de la domestique aborigène qui « fait partie de la famille », de l'autre, le type de rapports sexuels (entre maître et domestique) qui, de toute évidence, découlent de cette prétendue intimité « familiale ».

Mots-clés
aborigène australienne, abus sexuel, historiographie, représentation, fiction, autobiographie

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