

CLASSIC AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

GRADE 10 'Hero Journey' unit

This unit examines the heroic quest as portrayed in the graphic novel of Marcus Clarke's epic *For the term of his natural life*. The visual literacy inherent in the graphic version is a good starting point for discussion of meta themes such as man's inhumanity to man, Australia's convict past and existentialism. The unit references text from the novel to highlight meaning communicated in different language forms. Other textual forms such as film, documentary and archived maps and posters are also used for learning activities. Historic links which allow research into the setting and context of the novel and are provided to extend the student.

➡ *For the Term of His Natural Life* Marcus Clarke

[Available free through project Gutenberg]

http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3424?msg=welcome_stranger#link2HCH0006

➡ Graphic novel Peter Foster 2012 Pikitia Press

➡ Illustrated edition: *For the Term of his natural life* : 31 drawings / Sidney Nolan 1981.

Summary:

For the term of His Natural Life is a Tasmanian Gothic tale written by Marcus Clarke as a serial in the *Australian Journal* 1870-1872. It was published as a novel in 1874. It is a tale of a 'good man', Richard Devine alias Rufus Dawes who is wrongly accused and sentenced to death. Instead he is commuted to Van Dieman's Land. The island colony had been settled by Europeans in 1803 and during a fifty year period approximately 55,000 men and 25,000 women were shipped directly to Van Diemen's Land. His journey takes him into the worst of humanity at penal colonies which include Sarah Island, Macquarie Harbour, Norfolk Island and Port Arthur. The events which transpire during the novel are based upon journals and actual events in isolation; in order to create tension, emphasise the social issues and dramatise the journey these events all occur during Dawes' lifetime: storm, typhoid, mutiny, flogging, shipwreck, escape, cannibalism and labour camps.

Contents

- Graphic Novel book notes
- Historical notes and research topics
- Learning activities
- Assessment ideas
- Comparative studies Graphic Novel, Film and Novel Text
- Visual Literacy Focus
- Language Features of text
- Themes

Graphic Novel book notes

Book One: At sea 1827

Twenty two year old Richard Devine has returned from abroad to face an angry father who cried to his mother ' if you are to preserve your good name, this imposter who so long has falsely born my name shall pack and abandon that name forever' .He leaves the house and stumbles across a man recently killed. He is arrested for the murder and put on trial. He is convicted and sentenced to labour in Van Dieman's Land. During the voyage from England, Devine (now Dawes) meets two of the main characters of the novel for the first time: young Sylvia Vickers and Lieutenant Maurice Frere. Here Rufus picks up the ball dropped by a little girl onboard the ship. Her name is Sylvia Parsons, the daughter of the ship's captain. He befriends Sylvia, and over the years falls in love with her. Sylvia becomes a symbol of hope for Rufus. Maurice Frere becomes a symbol of cruelty and violence.

The scene on board ship is characteristic of many journeys to penal colonies in that its passengers were comprised of mostly prisoners either male or female, guards and some immigrants with a Captain and Chief surgeon

http://www.jenwilletts.com/conditions_on_convict_ships.htm

This website details food, water, clothing, accidents, disease, deaths, escape attempts, mutiny and amusements on board specific convict ships

THE SHIPS

The *Malabar* was a convict ship that made two trips to Sydney from England, in 1819 and 1821. The first journey is recorded as having 170 male prisoners, 31 guards, 9 females and 6 kids. The records of the surgeon on board states 'nil deaths' and perfect health of convicts with quiet and orderly behaviour. The *Sydney Gazette* even received a letter of thanks to the Captain and Surgeon from the prisoners for their humane treatment. The ship was laid up in Portsmouth from 1821 until altered to be a floating or 'receiving' prison ship

http://www.jenwillets.com/convict_ship_malabar_1819.htm

The *Hydaspes* 1852 -1880 was a sailing ship which travelled many routes including to Calcutta. According to ship records however it sunk in 1880 after a collision- unlike the novel's version of its demise. Other ships did however have typhoid or cholera cause many deaths on board – see below

Book Two : Macquarie Harbour 1833

So Dawes and Gabbett amongst others were sent to **Macquarie Harbour**, and the cruel Lieutenant Freres was their commander. This bloody slave labour camp - Macquarie Harbour - existed in the middle of nowhere, desolate and isolated at the end of the world. For convicts sent here, there was no escape except death. Many convicts chose to kill themselves rather than live any longer under Lieutenant Frere's cruel command, or tried to escape through the 'desert of scrub, heath, and swamp which lay between prison and settled districts'.



Sarah Island Prison barracks in Macquarie harbour
SOURCE TROVE ONLINE

The black and grey mood of the illustrations on page 19 are designed to match Dawes' mood and subsequent suicide attempt. Left for dead he is washed up at a sandy point and wanders around. Frere Bates and Sylvia Vickers are left ashore with provisions after their boat *Ladybird** [Lady Bird was a ferry that travelled from Melbourne to Launceston] is taken over. Dawes arrives and saves their lives by making a shelter and killing food. Sylvia promises his pardon on return p 26. Dawes makes a coracle and they sail for help. They are saved at sea by an American ship. Sylvia is sick and gets amnesia.

FACTS

Sarah island in Macquarie harbour and nearby Grummet island ran as penal colony 1822-33 and was reputed to be the harshest penal settlement in Australian colonies. Separated from the mainland by treacherous seas and cliffs the only seaward access was through channel 'hell's gates' impossible to escape. Grummet Is was used for solitary confinement

The mutiny described in this book is inspired by the actual mutiny of *the Cyprus* in 1829, a boat which travelled from Hobart to Macquarie harbour. In the true account John Popjoy was the convict who constructed a makeshift boat and sailed in it to Partridge Island to get help. The link below relates the historical account evidently adopted by Clarke in *For the Term of His Natural Life*

www.gomezsmart.myzen.co.uk/POBJOYs/individuals/johnppj/cyprus.html

Van Dieman's Land is a 2009 film depicting the story of 'Gabbett', an escapee who ate his fellow fugitives in the novel. Both are based on the true account of Alexander Pearce who escaped twice and both times cannibalised his fellow escapees. He was hanged.



Book Three: Port Arthur 1838

Sylvia awakens from rescue at sea and believes Maurice is her rescuer. Sarah Purfoy blackmails Maurice. Dawes was told Sylvia was dead but during court hears that she is still alive. He escapes from prison and tries to approach Sylvia to jog her memory and fails. He states '*there is no justice, no heaven, no God*'



Rev North stands up for Dawes and notes the likeness between him and Rex.

Dawes befriends a young prisoner : '*a young man suffering at the hands of both prisoners and wardens bolts to the sea*'. He is given 50 lashes (excessive by historic standards). North's fatal weakness -alcoholism - prevents him from stopping the lashing and the boy dies. Dawes is forced to whip him but refuses to do more than 50.

Book 3 Chapter xv One Hundred Lashes

‘Rufus Dawes had seen this prospect before, had learnt by heart each beauty of rising sun, sparkling water, and wooded hill. From the hideously clean jetty at his feet, to the distant signal station, that, embowered in bloom, reared its slender arms upwards into the cloudless sky, he knew it all. There was no charm for him in the exquisite blue of the sea, the soft shadows of the hills, or the soothing ripple of the waves that crept voluptuously to the white breast of the shining shore. He sat with his head bowed down, and his hands clasped about his knees, disdaining to look until they roused him’...

‘So Rufus Dawes was relegated to his old life again, and came back to his prison with the hatred of his kind, that his prison had bred in him, increased a hundred-fold. It seemed to him that the sudden awakening had dazed him, that the flood of light so suddenly let in upon his slumbering soul had blinded his eyes, used so long to the sweetly-cheating twilight. He was at first unable to apprehend the details of his misery. He knew only that his dream-child was alive and shuddered at him, that the only thing he loved and trusted had betrayed him, that all hope of justice and mercy had gone from him for ever, that the beauty had gone from earth, the brightness from Heaven, and that he was doomed still to live. He went about his work, unheedful of the jests of Troke, ungalled by his irons, unmindful of the groans and laughter about him. His magnificent muscles saved him from the lash; for the amiable Troke tried to break him down in vain. He did not complain, he did not laugh, he did not weep.’

In the midst of this—when the cat was hissing its loudest—Burgess laughing his hardest, and the wretch on the triangles filling the air with his cries, North saw Kirkland look at him with what he thought a smile. Was it a smile? He leapt forward, and uttered a cry of dismay so loud that all turned.

"Hullo!" says Troke, running to the heap of clothes, "the young 'un's slipped his wind!"

Kirkland was dead.

North wakes up too late and asks Dawes for forgiveness. Dawes thinks ‘*then in this hell there is yet a man*’. The new chaplain Meekin ‘*teaches fire and brimstone with no talk of the love of the gentle Nazarene..the other one called me brother*’

Sylvia and Maurice travel to Port Arthur and Rex and Dawes work on the ‘tram’

Rex realises in ‘one of those freak intuitive mental leaps Rex learns Rufus is really Richard Devine’ and a plot is hatched for his escape. Sarah Purfoy is now a rich owner and sends her ship to anchorage near Port Arthur. The other prisoners escape but Rex separates from them and stumbles onto the edge of the Devils blowhole and is knocked in. Believed dead, he is rescued by Captain Blunt and Sarah Purfoy.

Clarke’s character Rev North is supposedly based on the Rev Thomas Rogers, an Irish clergyman who was outspokenly critical of convict conditions on Norfolk Island. His account of dismissal can be found on TROVE Online

BOOK 4: Norfolk Island 1846

Rex lives with Sarah on a Sydney cattle station but is restless and steals money to go to London posing as Richard Devine.

Dawes is at Norfolk Is convict penal settlement with his 'old friends'. Troke lashes Dawes and puts him in solitary confinement and puts him to work crushing cayenne pepper. Dawes pleads to be killed. The 'harness' is used on old blind Mooney who makes a suicide pact with Dawes.

Sarah goes to London in

search of Rex. Sylvia discovers what her husband is doing to Rufus when she visits the gaol, and insists that the warders "loose him... this is no punishment; it's murder!" She gets on her knees and begins to untie his ropes.

Sylvia saves Rufus Dawes' body, which has been on the stretcher for nine hours. (*Reverend North arrives to save Rufus Dawes' soul*). Sylvia learns that her husband Maurice is responsible for the cruel punishments which Rufus Dawes has endured. Maurice Frere's acts of violence finally result in Sylvia insisting on their departure from Norfolk Island on the *Lady Franklin**. Frere promises to change his cruel ways. Rex discovers Lord Bellarsis was his father, making him Dawes' brother. He will inherit nothing. Dawes escapes, disguised as Rev North in the boat and makes it to North's cabin. Waves flood the ship and Sylvia sees Dawes trying to rescue her and remembers.

The ending of Foster's Graphic Novel sums up the cyclonic events:

'feeling they had done with life their vision grows clear and they both recognise each other's true worth...the wretches clinging to the deck look up into the belling greenness and know that the end has come...next morning the bodies of a man and a woman lie entangled in rigging. The wreckage and its burden drift out to sea'

THE END

NOTE

Despite the death of both hero and lover, the end of both novel and graphic version is not despairing. The epilogue, which describes 'balmy air, placid ocean and golden rays of the new morning' is mirrored in Foster's illustration of a warm glowing sunrise above a rainbow coloured sea. The visual and text literacy suggests the hope of redemption, victory of love and good beyond the grave.

* *The Lady Franklin* was a ship travelling with convicts from Hobart to Norfolk Island



The ending of Clarke's novel is quite a bit more drawn out:

this much we feel and know, but who can coldly describe the hurricane which thus o'erwhelms him? As well ask the drowned mariner to tell of the marvels of mid-sea when the great deeps swallowed him and the darkness of death encompassed him round about. These two human beings felt that they had done with life. Together thus, alone in the very midst and presence of death, the distinctions of the world they were about to leave disappeared. Then vision grew clear. They felt as beings whose bodies had already perished, and as they clasped hands their freed souls, recognizing each the loveliness of the other, rushed tremblingly together

Borne before the returning whirlwind, an immense wave, which glimmered in the darkness, spouted up and towered above the wreck. The wretches who yet clung to the deck looked shuddering up into the belying greenness, and knew that the end was come.
'Epilogue

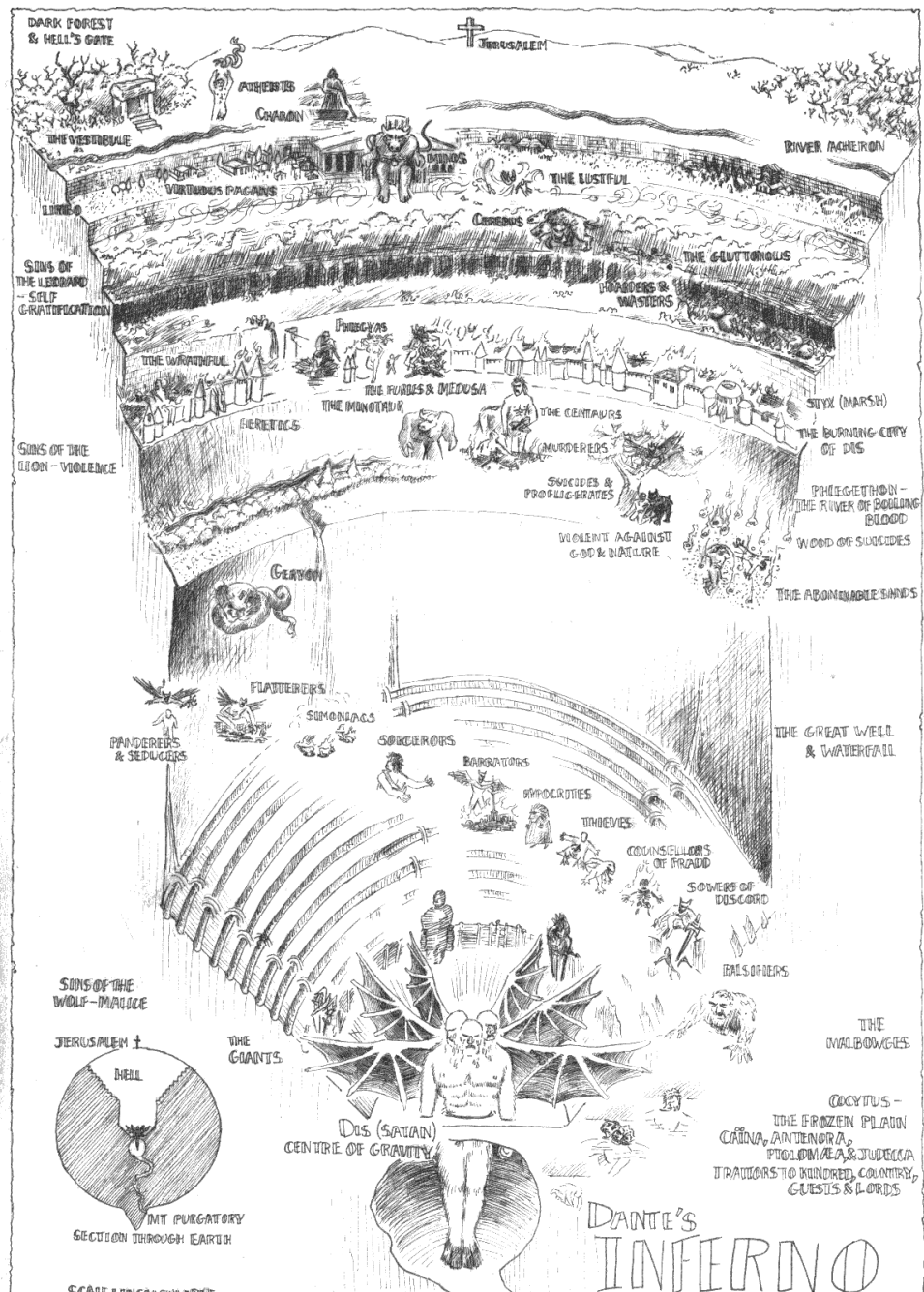
At day-dawn the morning after the storm,
the rays of the rising sun fell upon an
object which floated on the surface of
the water not far from where the schooner had foundered.
This object was a portion of the mainmast
head of the Lady Franklin, and entangled
in the rigging were two corpses—a man
and a woman. The arms of the man were
clasped round the body of the woman,
and her head lay on his breast.
The Prison Island appeared but as a long
low line on the distant horizon.
The tempest was over. As the sun rose
higher the air grew balmy, the ocean placid;
and, golden in the rays of the new risen
morning, the wreck and its burden drifted
out to sea

Literary Features:

- Animal imagery – 'twitched like that of a new killed bullock' 'bare, naked, forked animal'
- Natural juxtaposed with unnatural – 'Kirklands flogged back is compared to a 'soft skin of a ripe peach scored by a pin by a wilful child'. Idyllic tranquil bay at Port Arthur against hellish prison settlement
- Mythic scope of descriptive elements 'inexorable mountains, indifference of the sea, challenge of the sea 'mocking him from afar' 'power of the wilderness'

Cross Textual References :

Dante's *Inferno* 'nine circles of hell'



Chap XV 100 lashes

'For twenty lashes more Dawes was mute, and then the agony forced from his labouring breast a hideous cry. But it was not a cry for mercy, as that of Kirkland's had been. Having found his tongue, the wretched man gave vent to his boiling passion in a torrent of curses. He shrieked imprecation upon Burgess, Troke, and North. He cursed all soldiers for tyrants, all parsons for hypocrites. He blasphemed his God and his Saviour. With a frightful outpouring of obscenity and blasphemy, he called on the earth to gape and swallow his persecutors, for Heaven to open and rain fire upon them, for hell to yawn and engulf them quick. It was as though each blow of the cat forced out of him a fresh burst of beast-like rage. He seemed to have abandoned his humanity. He foamed, he raved, he tugged at his bonds until the strong staves shook again; he writhed himself round upon the triangles and spat impotently at Burgess, who jeered at his torments. North, with his hands to his ears, crouched against the corner of the wall, palsied with horror. It seemed to him that the passions of hell raged around him. He would fain have fled, but a horrible fascination held him back.

Robert Burns poem *'From Man was made to Mourn: A dirge'*

This phrase 'man's inhumanity to man' which is 'always used with a sense of regret', was coined by Robert Burns and used in his poem *From Man was made to Mourn: A Dirge*, 1785:

'Many and sharp the num'rous ills
Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves
Regret, remorse, and shame!
And Man, whose heav'n-erected face
The smiles of love adorn, -
Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!

HISTORICAL NOTES AND RESEARCH TOPICS

James Backhouse *A Narrative of a visit to the Colonies*

<https://archive.org/stream/anarrativeavisi01backgoog#page/n82/mode/2up>

Internet Archive –American Libraries above provides the book

It details his voyage to penal colonies around Van Dieman's Land in particular Macquarie Harbour on pp 49-51. Specific punishment and treatment of prisoners is described.

Settlers and Convicts; Or, Recollections of Sixteen Years' Labour in the Australian Backwoods. Trove

John Popjoy and Mutiny of the Cyprus

www.gomezsmart.myzen.co.uk/POBJOYs/individuals/johnppi/cyprus.html

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2012/tasmania-and-the-cinema/what-sort-of-spot-is-port-arthur-for-the-term-of-his-natural-life-and-the-tasmanian-gothic/>

Themes

- Existentialism -The novel explores the belief that man and civilisation could survive without God.
- Romanticism -the effect of the environment on man. It dealt with the question of whether a good man will succumb to an evil environment such as that found in the penal colonies. Mythic level of natural force 'inexorable mountains'
- Will good overcome evil? All of Dawes' good acts backfire on him, until he is left in total despair and utterly alienated
- Australia's convict heritage. The novel questions the future of a colony that has such an evil past.
- Crime and punishment to question values condoned by society and regarded as 'natural' ie justice, fairness, life sentence
- Man's inhumanity to man – humans turned into animals, cruel and perverse. Dawes has faced the gallows, the desert, and the sea, the worst that human and nature can inflict 'the agony of the wretched body can force the soul to quit its last poor refuge and confess itself conquered'

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

<i>Character</i>	<i>Film depiction</i>	<i>Graphic Depiction</i>
Rufus Dawes		
Sylvia Vickers		
Maurice Frere		
Sarah Purfoy		
John Rex		
Rev North		
Warder Troke		

- Complete table above comparing the early film depiction of the main characters with Peter Foster's illustration <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/the-term-of-his-natural-life/clip>
- Using the archive map attached, trace Dawes' journey to places and travel on ships between penal settlements
- Write a newspaper report on punishment measures at one penal settlement [refer James Backhouse]
- Port Arthur was a 'model' prison for its time- research alternative crime and punishment models of the 19th century[see foreword Peter Foster].
- Using the circle diagram attached, map the hero's journey from the graphic novel
- Starting from p 55 rewrite the ending of the graphic novel with a storyboard layout
- Compare two versions of film [see senses of cinema]
- Refer to colour poster attached. When this poster was used for promotional purposes the highlights of the film are the gruesome and criminal elements. Write a short 200w that describes text and style aspects which reinforce the societal fascination with crime and punishment of the time.
- Design a poster in the same style promoting *For the term of his natural life* but with a different emphasis ie: tragic love story, injustice of an innocent man, wild nature vs survivor
- Foster is particularly good at capturing facial expression in his illustrations. List examples of facial shots which sum up at one glance the meaning of the frame. Eg: Gabbett p 17 Rev North p 50.
- Look at the frames in the graphic novel which show the wilderness - describe the visual effects which are used to create tensions, suspense, fear, awe etc

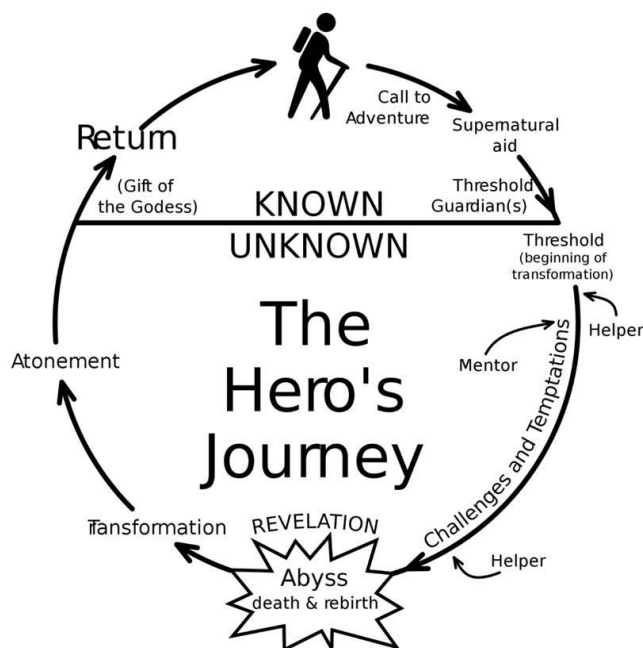
Assessment Ideas

1. From the cross textual reference notes, examine the diagram of Dante – levels of hell in *Inferno* and compare with illustration of suicide sequence in the graphic novel and novel text quoted. List common visual elements.
2. Explore theme of man's inhumanity to man found in text. List textual features which illustrate this theme: characterisation, dialogue, thoughts, setting, action, metaphor [NB Wild west coast as metaphor for insignificance of man against nature]
3. Clarke introduces Van Dieman's Land with the following words:

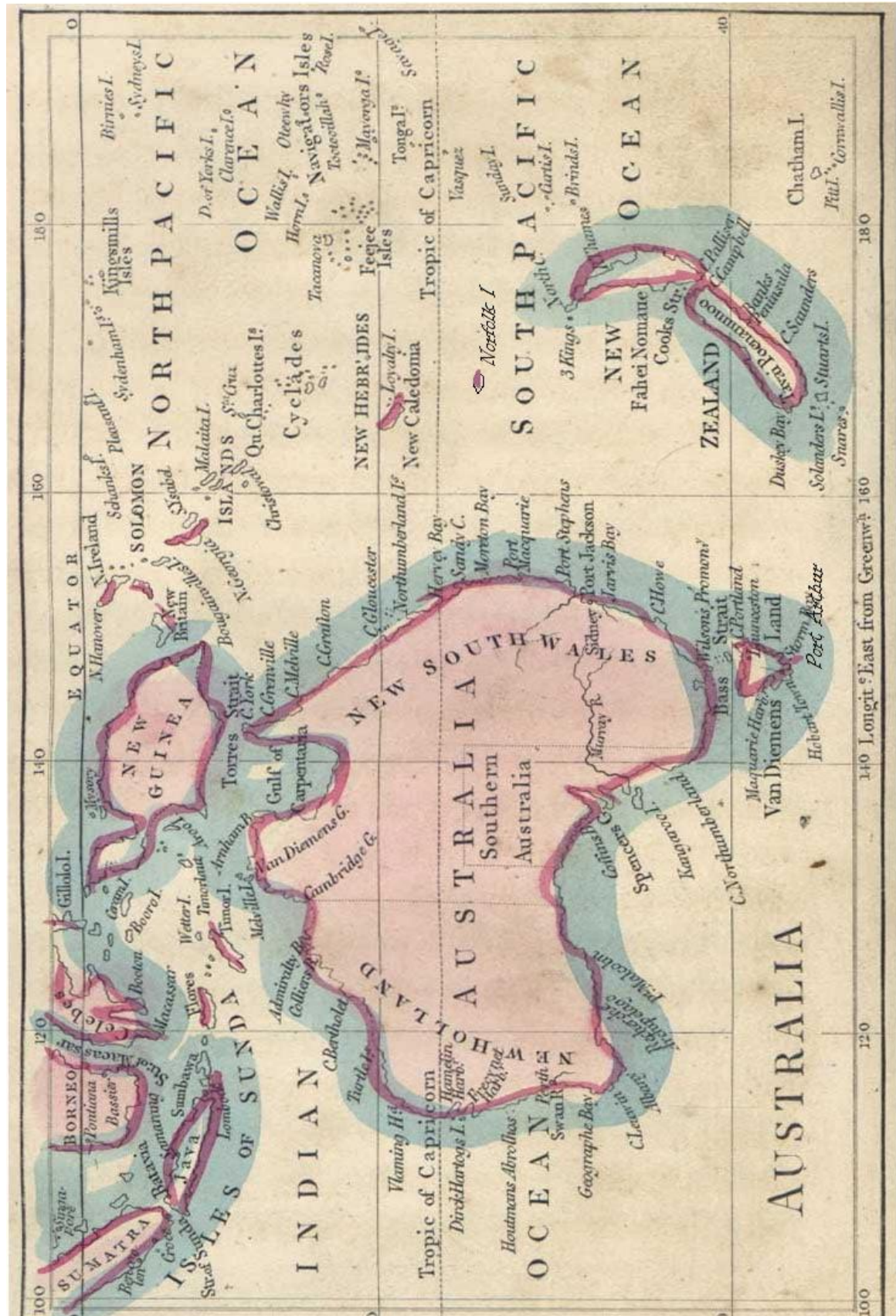
the sea-line is marked with wrecks. The sunken rocks are dismally named after the vessels they have destroyed. The air is chill and moist, the soil prolific only in prickly undergrowth and noxious weeds, while foetid exhalations from swamp and fen cling close to the humid, spongy ground. All around breathes desolation; on the face of nature is stamped a perpetual frown...

Research features of the Tasmanian Gothic novel that make it unique from other gothic texts

4. Using the illustrations by Sidney Nolan write a description of one character in the novel – one paragraph



EXTRA RESOURCES



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those constituting