'SNORTERS, FOOLS AND LITTLE 'UNS':
Sexual Politics and Territory Writing in the
South Australian Period

by

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INTRODUCTION

This talk was delivered on 26 June 1991 at the State Library, Darwin, as one of the Library's 'Under the Banyan Tree' lunchtime entertainments.

Mickey holds an Honours Masters degree in history, and is currently studying for her Ph D. Her area of special interest is the way in which history and current events are interpreted and represented in Territory literature. She is presently a tutor in history at the Northern Territory University.
There has been produced, over the hundred or so years of white settlement, a strand of writing in the Territory that I believe is regionally distinct. This writing shares common preoccupations: white settlers and Aborigines, the physical landscape, economic potential and, what I want to talk about today, gender relations.

In the light of the scarcity of white women in the Territory, gender relations would seem an unlikely preoccupation of the writers. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, attempts in writing to define relationships between men and women in early Territory society occupy considerable portions of the material and display a distinct tension.

Of this early period in Territory writing two women writers are themselves significant. The first is Harriet Daly, whose publication, Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia (1887) did much to promote the economic potential of the Northern Territory. The second is Jeannie Gunn, whose books, Little Black Princess of the Never Never (1905) and We of the Never Never (1908), for many of her reading public, described the definitive Northern Territory.

Although the contents of Daly's and Gunn's books are quite different, there are many parallels in their lives and relationship to the Territory. Both these women came to the Territory at the behest of a male and stayed less than two years. They were both left widows and supported themselves by writing professionally. Both their husbands were associated with some of the darker aspects of the Territory's history: Dan Daly with speculation and shady land deals, Aeneas Gunn with killing Aborigines. Both women assert their femininity and their place in Territory society as subordinate to men, while their own lives show them as competent, intelligent and professional.

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2 Dale Spender commented on a survey of a class of thirty two mature age women students in Sydney, twelve of which 'believed that We of the Never-Never was the only book of note to have been written by an Australian woman' D. Spender, Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988, endnote 97, p. 308.


Harriet was the daughter of Bloomfield Douglas, first Government Resident of the Northern Territory. She came to the Northern Territory from Adelaide in 1870. She describes her life in Palmerston from 1870-1873 in the first part of Digging and Squatting... The second part, 1873-1887, was written after Daly had left the Territory, using secondary sources such as newspaper articles and official reports.

Harriet at first did not wish to come to the Territory, but from her descriptions of 'dinner parties, picnics, dances, and boating-parties' she appears to have settled in fairly rapidly. The presence of young white women, such as Harriet and her sister Nellie, had a 'civilizing' effect on the settlement of Palmerston: musical evenings were organised, rides and picnics were held at Fannie Bay, and sometimes the whole European community would go off on an expedition to a neighbouring beach. Harriet thought Port Darwin a beautiful harbour, but the Larrakiah women who camped nearby 'down-trodden'. Harriet was to meet the man she would marry, Dan Daly, in Port Darwin after he arrived on the Bengal with the family luggage. After the first year's stay in Palmerston, Harriet returned to Adelaide for, in her own words, 'the most important event of any woman's life'. She returned again briefly in 1873, but then left for Adelaide and eventually Malaya.

Although Harriet was mainly concerned with promotion of the economic potential of the Territory, she touched on the gender issue obliquely with the suggestion that many men turn to the bush and the friendship of men, after a disappointment in love. The story of 'Gentleman George' and his death in the bush, and of his mate, the loyal Bill, takes up three chapters and displays clearly how women are seen both as the potential downfall and salvation of the male sex.

The tale describes George, who was betrayed by a good woman, Marion, after George's 'governor' 'poisoned the girl's mind' against George. George's governor was clearly a bad egg, paradoxically because 'he had a wonderful influence over women'. The tragedy continued when Marion was unable to resist 'so grand a match ... as Lord Angerford'. But Marion wore George's flower at her throat at the wedding and pleaded 'we shall always be friends, won't we? But George went off to 'Hindostan' where 'I played hard, I drank hard, I rode hard'. If it had not been for my mother I would willingly have gone to the dogs altogether'. George eventually dies of fever in the Territory bush, calling for his mother and forgiving Marion. In the Harriet Daly view then, women are seen both as a reason for men escaping to the bush (Marion) and as a salvation against ruin (Mother).

Harriet Daly's book was really the first written work to address the idea of the Territory from the perspective of a resident rather than of someone passing through. The book itself was well received. The Adelaide Observer commented on its 'considerable humour' and 'pleasant style'. But the book which was widely read by the public, used in schools as a text book.

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5 H. W. Daly, Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, p. 2.
6 Ibid., p. 11.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 25.
9 Ibid., p. 69.
10 Murray, in Carment, Maynard, Powell, (Eds.) Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, p. 70.
11 Daly, Digging, Squatting etc., p. 130
12 Ibid., p. 162.
13 Ibid., p. 163.
14 Ibid., p. 164
15 Murray, in Carment, Maynard, Powell, (Eds.), Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, p. 70.
and generally contributed to the image Australians had of the Northern Territory was Jeannie Gunn's *We of the Never–Never*.

Jeannie and Aeneas Gunn arrived in the Northern Territory in January 1902, soon after their marriage, to begin work managing Elsey Station near the Roper River. Jeannie spent a year in the Northern Territory and then returned to live in Victoria. From the letters she wrote to friends and her memories of the year in the north, Jeannie recorded her experiences of the country and the people in two books, *The Little Black Princess of the Never–Never*, which was published in 1905, and *We of the Never–Never* in 1908. The books were well received. Of *The Little Black Princess*, *The Official Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* (no.3–1910) commented that it 'gives the most truly artistic and sympathetic description of Aboriginal character ever written'. Professor Baldwin Spencer remarked on her writing style that: 'Mrs Gunn was able to select essentials and write about them 'with great insight'.

*We of the Never–Never*, in contrast to *The Little Black Princess*, was written for an adult market. Roughly autobiographical, it explored the bush attitudes to women. Supporting the idea suggested by Harriet Daly, that the bush represented a haven for men escaping women, *We of the Never–Never* largely concentrates on the hostility and tensions experienced between men and women in the bush.

The story opens with the trip from Darwin by train and then horseback to Elsey Station. Jeannie's arrival is both resented and feared by the white male stations workers, who attempted to block her arrival by sending misleading telegrams. Jeannie, undaunted, arrives safely and throws herself into station life with enthusiasm, accompanying her husband on mustering trips wherever possible. She organises the rebuilding and decorating of the homestead, galvanizes white, black and Chinese staff into the efficient running of the station, with fresh garden produce and delicious varied meals, while at the same time managing to teach some the white and black station workers the rudiments of reading and writing.

The bushmen of the settlements along the rail line approve of Jeannie, largely because of her height (just on five foot). 'You can't beat the little 'uns,' a bushman declared, 'They're just the very thing.' Aeneas Gunn uses the nickname 'little 'un' for Jeannie, but he is called 'Man-in-Charge' or 'Maluka' (boss).

Jeannie Gunn narrates a story which corresponds almost exactly to Harriet Daly's about the mates in the bush: 'Then a man rode into our lives who was to teach us the depth and breadth of the meaning of the word mate.' The man rides in with news that his mate is sick with malaria. The hospitable Gunns offer to send the station buck-board out for him or ride out to bring him in. The man, flushed hotly and stammered: 'If you please, ma'am. If the boss'll

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18 W. B. Spencer, quoted in Nesdale, *The Little Missus*, p. 94.
20 Mrs. A. Gunn, *We of the Never–Never*, Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1977, (1908), pp. 9, 39, etc.
21 ibid., p. 145.
excuse me, me mate's dead set against a woman doing things for him. If you wouldn't mind not coming. He'd rather have me. Me and him's been mates this seven years. The boss'll understand."

The Maluka does understand, but suggests after seeing him that the man is too ill to remain out bush. Jeannie understands too for, 'again and again men had come in "down with a touch of fever", whose temperatures went up at the very thought of a woman doing things for them'. For three days the man lies out bush very ill, being assisted by his mate and selected men from Elsey, until he becomes so ill he must be brought in to the homestead anyway. The Maluka thinks he will pull through but unfortunately he dies and is buried at Elsey. The Maluka, conducting the burial service, thinks the mate will break down and asks him to help Jeannie back to the house as a ruse to take him away from the graveside. He never cries until the Maluka refuses payment for services by saying "We give no charity here: only hospitality to our guests. Surely no man would refuse that," Jeannie praises the Maluka's tact by saying, 'daily the bushman put the woman to shame'. Jeannie comments that 'again and again' sick bushmen would rather remain on their own than have contact with a woman, although one bushman comments that she is not 'A Freezer on a pedestal'.

The bush philosophy defines women as such:

"You'll sometimes get ten different sorts rolled into one," he said finally, after a long dissertation. "But, generally speaking, there's just three sorts of 'em. There's Snorters – the goers you know – the sort that go rampaging round looking for insults, and naturally finding them; and then there's fools; and they're mostly screeching when they're not smirking – the uncertain – coy – and – hard – to – please variety you know," he chuckled, "and then," he added seriously, "there's the right sort, the sort you tell things to. They're A1 all through the piece."

The Sanguine Scot was confident, though, that they were all alike, and none of 'em were wanted; but one of the Company suggested: "If she was little she'd do. The little 'uns are all right," he said.

But public opinion deciding that "the sort that go messing round where they know they're not wanted are always big and muscular and snorters...".

Women are, in a charitable view, acceptable if small (and helpless). If women are tall or strong they are likely to be opinionated or assertive. The hostility Jeannie faces is all the more amazing because it is presented as perfectly natural. There is the suggestion even that 'bush folk' are more sincere than town folk and therefore that this hostility of men towards women is an universal concept, but just more openly displayed in the bush.

It is not at first obvious why this hostility exists, but there is a strong suggestion that the presence of white women means a modification of behaviour from the bush ways. For example, one of the bush 'characters', 'Tam-o-Shanter' is an alcoholic. Forced by a public edict against drunkenness when Jeannie is in Katherine, Tam must do his drinking discreetly and quietly. Consequently he flees at the sight of Jeannie. She comments, 'How he must

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22 ibid., p. 146.
23 ibid., p. 146.
24 ibid., p. 151.
25 ibid., p. 151.
26 ibid., p. 130.
27 ibid., pp. 5, 6.
28 ibid., p. 41.
have hated women... Jack the 'Quiet Stockman' wants to leave Elsey as soon as Jeannie arrives.

Jack has always steered clear of women, as he termed it. Not that he feared or disliked them, but because he considered that they had nothing in common with men... "They never seem to learn much either," (he added) in his quiet way, summing up the average woman's conversation with a shy bushman: a long string of purposeless questions, followed by inane remarks on the answers. The presence of a woman means the enforcement of unnatural behaviour such as washing and shaving. In fact the only white male inhabitant of Elsey who does not appear to mind Jeannie's arrival is the 'Dandy', who is so-called because he likes to wear clean clothes. Not mentioned in this account are other practices that may perhaps be curtailed by the presence of a white woman, such as Aboriginal women working by day with white stockmen on the cattle mustering and at night as sexual partners. Male writers William Sowden, Alfred Searcy and 'Banjo' Paterson all note this as common practice, but Harriet Daly and Jeannie Gunn never mention it.

Whilst Sowden, Searcy and Paterson describe what might be termed a working relationship between men and women in the bush, the literature also narrates what amounts to nothing more than gross sexual exploitation. A male writer of this period who provides the best description of this is William Henry Willshire, Mounted Constable First Class. He first came to the Northern Territory in 1883 and worked in Central Australia, Palmerston (Port Darwin) and the Victoria River region. He returned to Adelaide permanently in 1895 after ten years service in the Northern Territory. He published The Aborigines of Central Australia in 1888, A Thrilling Tale of Real Life in the Wilds of Australia in 1895, and The Land of the Dawning in 1896, all of which concern his experiences in the Northern Territory. Willshire's career in the north was not without controversy. In Central Australia in 1884 Willshire was authorised to form and train a 'native police force'. It has been suggested that Willshire and his 'native police' were responsible for hundreds of deaths in this region, aided by the local pastoralists. Missionaries at Hermannsburg complained that Willshire and local whites were shooting Aborigines. An enquiry was held in 1890 and Willshire was exonerated. Willshire was committed for trial at Port Augusta in 1891 on another charge of murder. His bail was raised by the contributions of over sixty Centralian whites: pastoralists, telegraph workers, miners and bush workers, indicating a strong local support network. He was defended by former Premier of South Australia, Sir John Downer and acquitted. The Kadina and Wallaroo Times noted angrily on Willshire's treatment by 'pompous dignity' that, 'As an author and savant Willshire has shown that his mind is far above the commonplace

30 ibid., p. 48.
31 ibid., p. 56.
32 ibid., p. 41.
33 ibid., p. 1.
34 W. J. Sowden, The Northern Territory as it is, Adelaide: W. K. Thomas, 1882, p. 42.
35 A. Searcy, In Australian Tropics, p. 173.
38 ibid.
39 ibid.; see also W. H. Willshire, A Thrilling Tale of Real Life in the Wilds of Australia, Adelaide: Freason and Brother, 1895, pp. 46-65 where he includes some of the primary documents relating to this case.
level of his detractors. While in the north, Willshire also appeared on charges of drinking, insolence, insubordination and lying. In spite of the publicity and his controversial statements in his writing, Willshire finished his career with the police in the rank of Senior Constable. D. J. Mulvaney notes that after being disappointed in his application to become South Australian Protector of Aborigines, Willshire resigned and: 'He later spent twelve years as nightwatchman at the Adelaide abattoir, a post for which his career made him admirably qualified'.

I would not like to suggest that Willshire’s obsessive descriptions of rape form anything like a typical Territory attitude to women, but elements of his philosophy probably had some acceptance. They were brutal times and, as his experience at the trial suggests, Willshire had his supporters. Willshire stated bluntly:

Men would not remain so many years in a country like this if there were no women, and perhaps the Almighty meant them for use as He has placed them wherever the pioneers go ... what I am speaking about is only natural especially for men who are isolated away in the bush at outstations where women of all ages and sizes are running large.

The dislike noted by Jeannie Gunn of the stockmen's feelings towards women achieve a logical if unpleasant conclusion in the writing of Willshire. He considers women as a commodity to be used. The following account illustrates the fundamental belief system held by Willshire. Willshire describes in The Land of the Dawning a 'beautiful savage maiden ... graceful as a stag', who screams and flees at the sight of the Police party. She is captured by some of Willshire’s Aboriginal police, although she is 'as wild as a buffalo'. She makes a final attempt to escape that night and is caught just as she is preparing to jump into a river to escape. Willshire comments appreciatively, 'It was a phenomenal run'. She finds it impossible to escape, and becomes the property of the Aboriginal tracker who caught her. Willshire rationalizes the rape and her subsequent capitulation as,

This wild damsel was now over head and ears in love with the tracker who caught her. With downcast eyes and pretty blushes she listened to his stories of other lands with fertile vales and dewy meads.

The relationship between captive and captor is explored in further incidents within Land of the Dawning. There seems to be a discernible pattern in Willshire's writing. This pattern contains the elements of pursuit, death, eroticism and capitulation. Willshire describes the actions of a Police party in June of 1894 in pursuit of some cattle killers on the Victoria Run. After a search and tracking, they flush the party and cross the river after them:

...at 3 pm [we] came upon a large mob of natives camped amongst rocks of enormous magnitude and long dry grass ... It’s no use mincing matters – the Martini-Henry carbines at this critical moment were talking English in the silent majesty of those great eternal rocks ... Out from between the rocks came a strapping young girl, with

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40 Quoted in D. J. Mulvaney, Encounters in Place, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989, p. 130.
41 Kimber, in Carment, Maynard, Powell, (Eds.), Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, p. 319.
42 ibid., p. 320.
43 D. J. Mulvaney, Encounters in Place, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1988, p. 130.
45 Willshire considers all women potentially in the category for use by men, 'lubras become domesticated and attend to the requirements of their lord and master with the same attention as a good white woman would', ibid., p. 35.
46 ibid., 47.
47 ibid., 47.
48 ibid., p. 48.
49 ibid., p. 48.
the agility of a mountain creature. She jumped from rock to rock, straight to the grey horse that I was sitting upon, took hold of my stirrup-iron, and ran alongside until we were out of danger. She was arrayed in her native modesty, and I may state this was the prettiest black girl I ever saw. ... In the morning my boss tracker ... asked me if I would allow him to have this pretty girl for his wife. I replied yes ... With smiles of sweet confusion her gentle and affectionate disposition was exhibited ... We ascertained from her that her name was Pun-garra, which, in the native language, means a kiss."

Pursuit, death, eroticism and capitulation: these four elements dominate Willshire's interpretation of events. His descriptions of exploitation and rape are chilling, but the very acceptance of his behaviour indicates that for some, Territory women were regarded as less than human. It is not to be wondered then, that white women were feared and despised since it is unlikely that the kind of behaviour described by Willshire could ever be condoned by them."

But, for the most part, interaction between gender as described in the writing took on a lighter note. 'Banjo' Paterson travelled to the Northern Territory and wrote about his experiences in poetry, essays and a novel, An Outback Marriage, which was published in 1906. The novel contains many accurate descriptions of the people and of the pastoral industry in the Territory at the end of the nineteenth century.

Briefly, the plot has Carew, a London lawyer, venturing to the Northern Territory in search of a missing heir Patrick Henry Considine. He is accompanied by Charlie Gordon, an Australian employed by William Grant to oversee his pastoral property, 'No Man's Land', which is presently looked after by the competent but hard-bitten Paddy Keogh, with the assistance of his Chinese Cook and Aboriginal workers. By a twist of fate, Keogh is discovered to be the missing Considine, but the matter is complicated by his earlier marriage to 'the Opal Queen', Margaret Donahoe. Considine eventually, but reluctantly, acknowledges his marriage to Donahoe, and, by a complicated series of events, saves the Gordon family from ruin. In elaborating this very intricate story, Paterson shows some of the prevailing attitudes concerning women in the Territory.

The Territory is presented as a place of refuge for men and women wishing to live outside the law. Both Considine and Donahoe have shady reasons for staying on the back-blocks. Considine is revealed as a cattle rustler and Donahoe is given presents of opals by the miners:

"... Where on earth did she get all those opals?"

"Ho, bloks gives 'em to 'er, passin' back from the hopal fields. In the rough, yer know! Hopal in the rough, well, it's 'ard to tell what it'll turn out, and they'll give 'er a 'unk as sometimes turns out a fair dazzler. She's a hay—one judge of it in the rough, too ...."

Why the blokes give the opals to Donahoe is never explained. Paterson is much more open when describing Considine's sexual peccadilloes. Paterson described Carew's and Gordon's first introduction to his Aboriginal stock workers, Maggie and Lucy:

"Those are nice—looking boys," said Carew. "I mean the two new boys just coming in."

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50 ibid., pp. 40-42.
51 ibid., p. 61 describes the same sequence of events.
52 Peter Forrest attributes the bushman's misogyny solely to the curb on sexual exploitation of Aboriginal woman by the presence of white women; P. Forrest, They of the Never Never, Darwin: State Library of the N.T.,1990, pp. 8, 9.
53 A. B. Paterson, An Outback Marriage, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1906, p. 177
"New boys!" said the old man. "Them! They're my two gins. And see here, Mister, you'll have to keep off hangin' round them while you're camped here. I can't stand anyone interferin' with them. If you kick my dog, or go after my gin, then you rouse all the monkey in me. Those two do all my cattle work...

Considine's attachment to Maggie and Lucy appears strong. When he hears news of his inheritance, he is anxious about whether they can accompany him to England. Carew is started by the request but considers it, 'Fashion just now to make a lot of fuss over Australian chappies, whatever they do. But two black women – rather a tall order.' There is a strong suggestion that this attraction is rather one-sided. Considine wonders whether he could 'take Maggie and Lucy there' because '... as man to man, you wouldn't arst me to turn them loose, would you?' Considine uses terms which suggest he considers Maggie and Lucy as possessions rather than as women in a relationship with him. But Maggie and Lucy seem to be able to assert their own terms in this association. Considine explains how he came to marry Peggy Donahoe,

"... I hadn't long got these two gins; and just before the rains the wild geese come down in thousands to breed, and the blacks all clear out and camp by the lagoons... It's the same every year – when the wild geese come the blacks have got to go, and it's no use talkin'... one night I comes home after being out three days and there at the foot of the bunk was the two gins' trousers and shirts... they'd run away with the others.

So I goes after 'em down the river to the lagoons, and there was hundreds of blacks; but these two beauties had heard me coming, and was planted in the reeds, and the other blacks, of course, they says, "No more" when I arst them. So there I was, lonely."

Considine then goes to Pike's Pub where he meets Margaret Donahoe and after a week's drinking wakes up to discover they have been married by a missionary who 'chanced along'. But the marriage is unhappy as Considine does not like Margaret's inability to change her lifestyle after marriage,

"[I]... don't like her goin's on, and I takes the whip to her once... one day a black man from this place... says to me... "Old man... Maggie and Lucy come back." So then I says, "and it's sorry I am that ever I married you... I'm off."

Maggie and Lucy fulfil their spiritual and familial obligations annually irrespective of the demands of Considine. Margaret Donahoe refuses to give up her 'goins on' and the marriage disintegrates. Considine then, while maintaining an aggressively machismo stance of a man surrounded by women, is revealed more subtly as depending upon women. He is unable to survive without them. Paterson's images of women in contrast are very strong. Maggie, Lucy and Peggy Donahoe are all portrayed as women who are resourceful, independent and able to survive in the harsh circumstances better than most men.

Alfred Searcy's accounts of life as a Customs Inspector in the Northern Territory have been published in three books: In Northern Seas (1905), the fictional By Flood and Field (1912) and, his longest and most comprehensive, In Australian Tropics (1907). Most of the material from In Northern Seas has been repeated in In Australian Tropics. Searcy writes cheerfully and exuberantly of his experiences in the north, maintaining a stoutly racist belief in the superiority of whites and a great love for hunting and killing the fauna of the Territory.

54 ibid., p. 150.
55 ibid., p. 158.
56 ibid., p. 157.
57 ibid., p. 159.
58 ibid., p. 159.
There are not many women described in Searcy's accounts, but the women who are mentioned are noteworthy for their strength. Searcy describes 'Virtue', an Aboriginal woman from Queensland:

"This dusky damsel was very nice-looking, and had a really graceful figure. Virtue was a vixen, and her nature was just the opposite to what her name indicated. This cheerful little lady one day gave her boss a sound hiding because she caught him talking to a white woman."

Searcy describes Virtue as a 'magnificent horsewoman ... riding man fashion'. Despite Searcy's use of terms such as 'girls' and 'belonging to', it is clear from the narrative that Virtue can assert herself in the face of gross exploitation by white stockworkers. Virtue wanted to accompany Searcy and others aboard the Palmerston and attempted to swim to them from shore. 'Being determined that the girl would not again give them the slip, her owner and his companion bound her to a tree'. When Searcy meets Virtue a year or two later at Roper Bar, he comments, perhaps not surprisingly, that 'Virtue had transferred her affections to another'. In the completion of the story Searcy describes that another man had 'become so infatuated with the girl that he wanted, right or wrong, to take her to Darwin, so as to be married to her by a minister'. The man is 'dissuaded from making such an infernal ass of himself. That is the end of Searcy's account of Virtue. Despite his interpretation of events, it seems evident that white men were more infatuated with Virtue than she with them. She dominates them ('gave her boss a sound hiding') and despite her 'owner' tying her to a tree to prevent her escape, we find in the sequel that he has died, 'whisky had a lot to do with his shuffling off' while Virtue has found another man who is 'infatuated'.

Virtue, Peggy Donahoe, Maggie and Lucy all seem able to cope with the trials of association with white men and even to exert the upper hand; Peggy Donahoe by continuing her lifestyle and acquisition of opals unhampered by a husband, Maggie and Lucy by leaving annually, Virtue by restricting the access of her 'owner' to white women.

Searcy acknowledges the reliance of the pastoralists upon Aboriginal women's labour:

Nearly all the drovers, cattlemen, and station hands had their 'black boys' (gins) ... These women are invaluable to the white cattlemen, for besides the companionship, they become splendid horse-women, and good with cattle. They are useful to find water, settle the camp, boil the billy, and track and bring in the horses in the mornings. In fact, it is impossible to enumerate the advantages of having a good gin 'out-back'.

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59 Despite By Flood and Field, Melbourne: George Robertson & Co., 1912, being described by Cambell Macknight as a 'romance', (Introduction), in In Australian Tropics, facsimile, Carlisle, W. A.; Hesperian Press, 1984, (1909) women hardly enter the text at all.
60 Searcy, In Australian Tropics, pp. 114, 115.
61 ibid., p. 115.
62 ibid., p. 115.
63 ibid., p. 115.
64 ibid., p. 115.
65 ibid., p. 115.
66 ibid., p. 115.
67 ibid., p. 173.
It is not only Aboriginal women who are represented as indomitable and courageous. Searcy describes a white couple, 'Tommy' and 'Mrs. Tommy' who ride in from the outback to Borroloola to consult the local Police Officer and Justice of the Peace, Donegan, about getting a divorce. Tommy is described as 'although a bad 'un ... full of pluck' but his wife was 'a tall handsome well made women, and a splendid equestrienne'. Mrs. Tommy 'wanted to join another man, who was prepared to pay Tommy handsomely if the divorce came off'. A divorce being out of the hands of Donegan, Mrs. Tommy then exclaims, 'If you don't grant it, so help me G--- I'll shoot him'. She then attempts to shoot her husband while Tommy 'was jumping and dodging about, crying 'Don't dear, don't dear'. Eventually she barricades herself into a room and continues to fire through the door. Like the Aboriginal women, Mrs. Tommy is represented as the powerful force in the relationship who chooses her own lovers, reckless and ready to use force if required.

Women appear in early Territory literature in two ways. Firstly as protagonists, and secondly as subjects. In both these ways, the writings of Daly and Gunn are forceful and predominate within the Territory literary tradition. Both Daly and Gunn assert their femininity and powerlessness in the face of the obvious contradiction that they cope and enjoy the experience of life in the Northern Territory apparently better than many men depicted. Searcy and Paterson, likewise, portray the women of the Northern Territory as tough survivors. Willshire shows us the very depths of sexual exploitation and provides the explanation for the fear of women. The literature then gives us an interesting picture of male–female interaction in the early white settlement in the Territory, and it is perhaps easier to see why tensions between genders occupied such a prominent place in the writing.

68 ibid., p. 177.
69 ibid., p. 176.
70 ibid., p. 177.