

Not Lost

*If not we ourselves, the day will come
when our children will undo what we have foolishly done.*

- Edward St James

*We shared their delight.
Their festival mood became our mood;
we all revelled in a common abundance
& in each other's wellbeing.*

- Aldo Leopold

I.

Some dark secrets run so deep that they slip from view.
The hole left in our conscience
is gradually plugged,
with shallow distractions
and awkward half-truths.
Questions, if uttered, pass unheard.
An uneasy and enduring silence prevails.

So it has been since the end of our war
When we were imprisoned at the Settlement.

II.

I have been here from the first time of the Settlement

I have been here since the beginning of the Settlement

You brought me to the Island and I have been here ever since

When I was in my Country
I seen many of them in the bush
For there was Natives at their Country

& now my dear friends

What was it that kept you out so long a time

My friends can't you tell me what it was kept you out so long?

Why I think they were looking out for the sick

My brothers
in our own Country a long time ago
we were a great many men
A great number
But the white man killed us all
They shot a great many
We are now only a few people here
& we ought to be fond of one another

The native People of Van Diemen's Land is gone out hunting
& some of our men has got some books out with them
And they are singing and reading
out in the bush

We never were taught to read or write
or to sing to God

Now my friends I should like to tell about something
what yourselves to not like to hear it mention to you
This is you have got to die some time or another
Yes you must all die
We have not got to stop in this world
where there is having no peace
& where there is always sickness
Would you like to stop here
this wicked sinful world
where there is always fighting and Growling?

Me like to tell true
& me tell you true

The way in which we are treated
it is shameful for any Person of any feeling to hear

You put arms into our hands
& made us to go to fight the Soldiers
we did not want to fight the Soldiers
but you made us go to fight

You do as you like with my things
& take away my Garden
and make me a prisoner

You used to carry Pistols in your pockets
& threaten'd very often to shoot us
& make us run away in a fright

Our houses were let fall down
& they were never cleaned
but were covered with vermin

You did not care to mind us when we were sick
until we were very bad

You put many of us into Jail for talking
because we would not be slaves

You shot our dogs before our eyes

We are free Aborigines
We are free Children, not taken Prisoners
We freely gave up our Country
after defending ourselves
You made for us an agreement
which we have not lost from our minds since
& we have made our part of it good

III.

Fix your mind on that other pole
& the four stars our Old Ones knew
to guide you through the darkest forest
& past the coming Inferno
There is a path not wholly lost
Often spoken
Seldom walked

Other voices
Inhabit this garden
Their echoes move without pause
Over ashes freshly burned
But rich with bursting life
A bird calls
A dry pool,
filled with light
beckons.

*This vanishing world is beautiful beyond our dreams
It contains in itself rewards and gratification
never found in the artificial landscape
or man-made objects so often regarded
as exciting evidence of a new world in the making.*

*The natural world contains an unbelievable diversity
and offers variety of choice
provided of course that we retain some of this world
& that we live in the manner that permits us
to go out
seek it
find it
and make those choices
- Olegas Truchanas*

Endnote: The voices in this assemblage, other than exact quotes from those named, are based on (I.) the author's original text, (II.) the writings of Tasmanian Aboriginal people (including Pallooruc, Drinene, Nomome, Walter George Arthur, Thomas and David Brune, Wooreddy, Maccamee), held in permanent detention at the Wybalenna Settlement on Flinders Island between 1833 and 1847; (III.) remix of Dante, T.S. Eliot and the author's original text. Wybalenna text is drawn from Leonie Stevens; *Me Write Myself: the free Aboriginal inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land at Wybalenna*, Clayton, Monash University Publishing, 2017. Quotes from St James, Leopold and Trukanas are drawn from John Griffin; *On the origin of Beauty: ecophilosophy in the light of traditional wisdom*, Bloomington, World Wisdom, 2011; and Max Angus, *The World of Olegas Truchanas*, Hobart, Olegas Truchanas Publication Committee, 1975.