

VOICING THE DEAD

Gary Crew

SYNOPSIS: *Voicing the Dead* is based on the true story of Jack Ireland, a survivor of the wreck of the barque *Charles Eaton* which ran aground on the Great Barrier Reef in August, 1834, close to the entrance to the Torres Strait.

While some of the crew escaped in a ship's boat, the majority of those aboard (including women and children), were obliged to make two rafts and take their chances in the open sea. (Figure 1)



FIGURE 1: Original image of the second *Charles Eaton* raft reproduced in *The Birmingham Post*, 22 November, 2013

Most persons aboard these rafts were captured by Torres Strait islanders and beheaded and their skulls mounted on a ceremonial mask. (Figure 2)

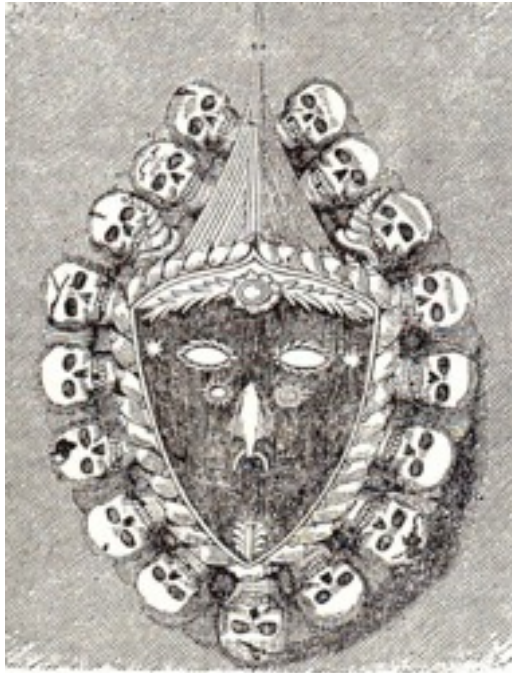


FIGURE 2: *Sydney Herald* illustration 20 Oct 1836, 3 in Lahn, J 2014, ‘The 1836 Lewis Collection and the Torres Strait Turtle-Shell Mask of Kulka’ *The Journal of the Pacific History*, vol. 48, no. 4, December

Those who did not die at the hands of the head hunters were cabin boys John (known as Jack) Ireland and John Sexton (both about fourteen years old) and two small boys, the brothers George (aged about 8 years) and William (aged about 18 months), the surviving sons of Mrs Charlotte D'Oyley and Captain D'Oyley who were killed in the massacre. Exactly why the islanders kept these boys alive is unknown, but it is thought that the islanders took the white boys for ‘lamars’ meaning the ghosts of their own dead sons. Whatever the reason,

the D'Oyley brothers were separated, George being taken away with John Sexton and William being taken with Jack Ireland. George and John were never heard of again and presumed to have died of disease or been murdered, but being adopted into a genuinely loving family, Jack and William survived.

Finally after years of captivity, Jack and William were rescued by the *Isabella* (Figure 3) and returned first to Australia, then England.



FIGURE 3: *The rescue of William D'Oyley*, 1841. Artist: Carmichael, John Wilson (1800-1868). National Gallery of Australia

William was taken in by his wealthy family at home in England but although he also returned to England, Jack continued to struggle on alone. Being a plucky

lad, he did, however, manage to have the tale of his sufferings told in an extraordinary autobiographical publication entitled:

The Shipwrecked Orphans:

A True Narrative of the Shipwreck and Sufferings of John Ireland and William Doyley Who Were Shipwrecked in the Ship Charles Eaton on an Island in the South Seas.

By John Ireland.

S Babcock, Publisher, Chapel Street. New Haven. 1845.

What became of him thereafter is lost in the mists of history....

RESEARCH:

- (1)The wreck of the *Charles Eaton* is a genuine historical event. Find out more about the passengers and crew of that vessel and their fate. Is Jack Ireland a genuine historical character or did Gary Crew make him up.
- (2)Find out more about the writing of Professor Greg Dening and express in your own words what you believe he meant by the expression ‘Voicing the Dead’.
- (3)*Voicing the Dead* is written in an emergent and experimental genre called ‘fictocriticism’. While this genre has many and varied definitions, Dr Ross Watkins (TEXT, Vol 19 No 1 April 2015) suggests that Fictocritical writing is a plaiting of ‘fictional and critical modes’ of expression. Elizabeth Pattinson (‘Discovering the Self: Fictocriticism, flux, and the authorial identity’: http://www.aawp.org.au/the_creative_manoeuvres_making_saying_being_papers) describes Fictocriticism as, ‘the most interesting form of non-fiction writing, unhampered by the generic stricture of autobiography, the narrativisation and preconceived affect of memoir, and the circuitous tradition of the

essay.’ Do some more research on Fictocriticism and discover what elements of the genre Gary Crew has utilised in writing *Voicing the Dead*.

WRITING:

- (1) If you could experience ‘Literature Tripping’ as Jack Ireland says that he can, which novel that you have read would you Lit Trip into and why?
- (2) If Jack Ireland was to meet Tabernacle Delaney when he was twenty one years old, what might their relationship be? Write a conversation between the adult Tabby and Jack, the man.
- (3) Given Duppa’s many gifts and kindnesses to Jack, the lad is pretty tough on his adopted father. Write a full apogee from Jack to Duppa, including specific details of their relationship drawn from the novel.
- (4) Write the (reimagined) biography of Jack Ireland after he has disappeared from the pages of history
- (5) Write a description of the landing on the beach by the D’Oyle family aboard the first raft.
- (6) Write the last letter that Mr Clare might have written home to his clergy man father had he lived long enough to do so.
- (7) Write a character study of Jack Ireland. Do you imagine him to be a wimp, an egotistical boaster, a humble intellectual or none of the above?
- (8) Jack Ireland often refers to ‘crossings’ as metaphors for transitions in his life. With specific reference to *Voicing the Dead*, establish which of his many ‘crossings’ was the most important in his life in your opinion.

- (9) Assuming the persona of the much maligned Mr Thomas Teller, the original editor/publisher of Jack Ireland's original narrative, write a book review of *Voicing the Dead*.
- (10) Research the breed of Newfoundland dog and write a narrative re-imagining the future life (and fate!) of Portland.

READING:

- (1) Find another of Jules Verne's amazing novels. Would you describe his genre as Fantasy or Science Fiction? What are the differences between those genres? Would young readers today find these works dated and/or out of fashion?
- (2) Gary Crew refers to numerous historical texts in *Voicing the Dead*. He even challenges his reader with the lines:

You ask, 'So is this History?'

I answer, 'If it bores you, shut the book - but you will not silence my voice.'

Do you find the historical references boring? Is reading history boring? If so, why?

- (3) In response to the above, how would you define history? Write a definition of history.

SPEAKING:

- (1) If Jack Ireland had been allowed to defend himself before the court in London before the Mayor shouted 'Enough', write and deliver the text of the speech that he would have presented.

- (2) John Sexton does not have much to say in the novel. Given that John Sexton is considered by Jack Ireland to manlier and more physically mature than he is, write the thoughts (and opinions) that John might have had regarding the character of Jack Ireland. Share these with your class.
- (3) For discussion: Jack Ireland declares that if he is to tell his tale 'in truth', he must give voice to 'all the dead'. What does he mean by this statement and do you think he has (a) told the truth and (b) given voice to all the dead?

LISTENING:

- (1) Choose a section of *Voicing the Dead* written primarily in Jack Ireland's voice. Have a class mate read that section aloud and make a list of all the words that Jack uses which are now dated or old fashioned. In the context of the narrative, are these words difficult to understand nowadays?

VIEWING:

- (1) Is the depiction of Jack Ireland on the cover of *Voicing the Dead* (Figure 4) as you would have envisaged him, or is the drawing of him on the deck of the *Isabella* taken from his book, *The Shipwrecked Orphans* (Figure 5) more what you expected him to look like? Compare and contrast these images and give reasons for your opinion.

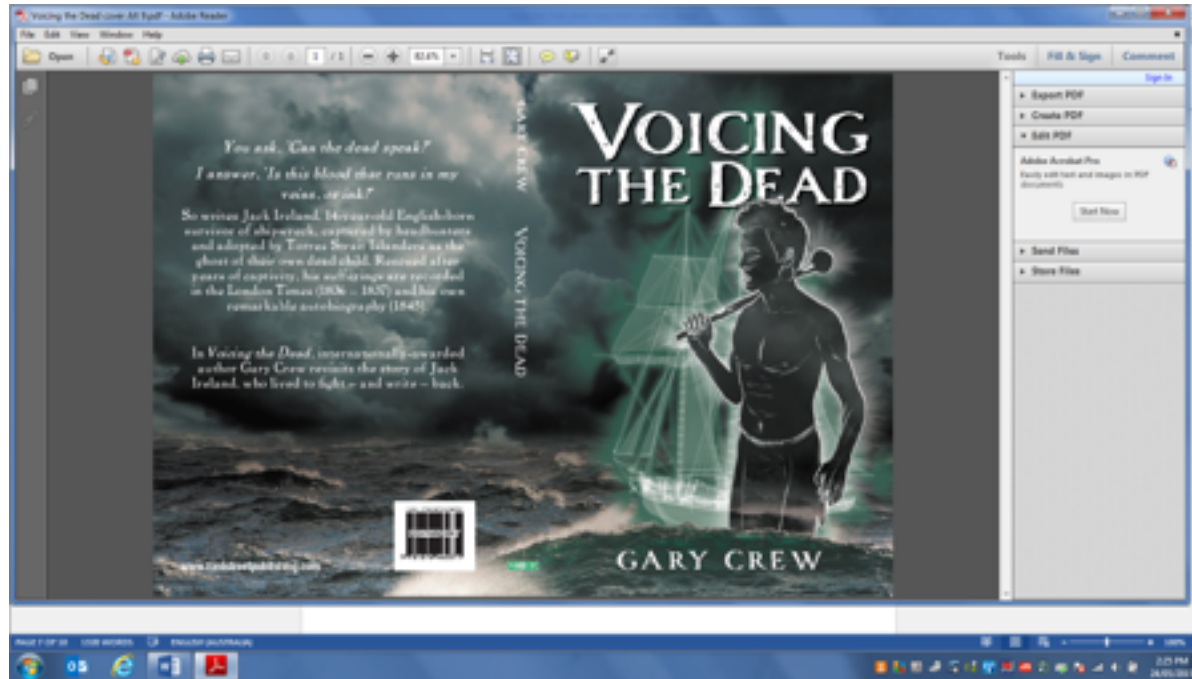


FIGURE 4: (Insert cover of *Voicing the Dead* here)

(2) Draw the floor plan of Captain Moore's cabin (showing his library bookshelves, the magnificent window in the stern of *The*

Charles Eaton and where Jack may have slept in relation to that cabin).

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*The kind Murray Islander taking leave of the Orphans.
See page 61.*

FIGURE 5: The rescue of William D'Oyle and Jack Ireland by the crew of the *Isabella* from Jack Ireland's, *The Shipwrecked Orphans*. (1845)

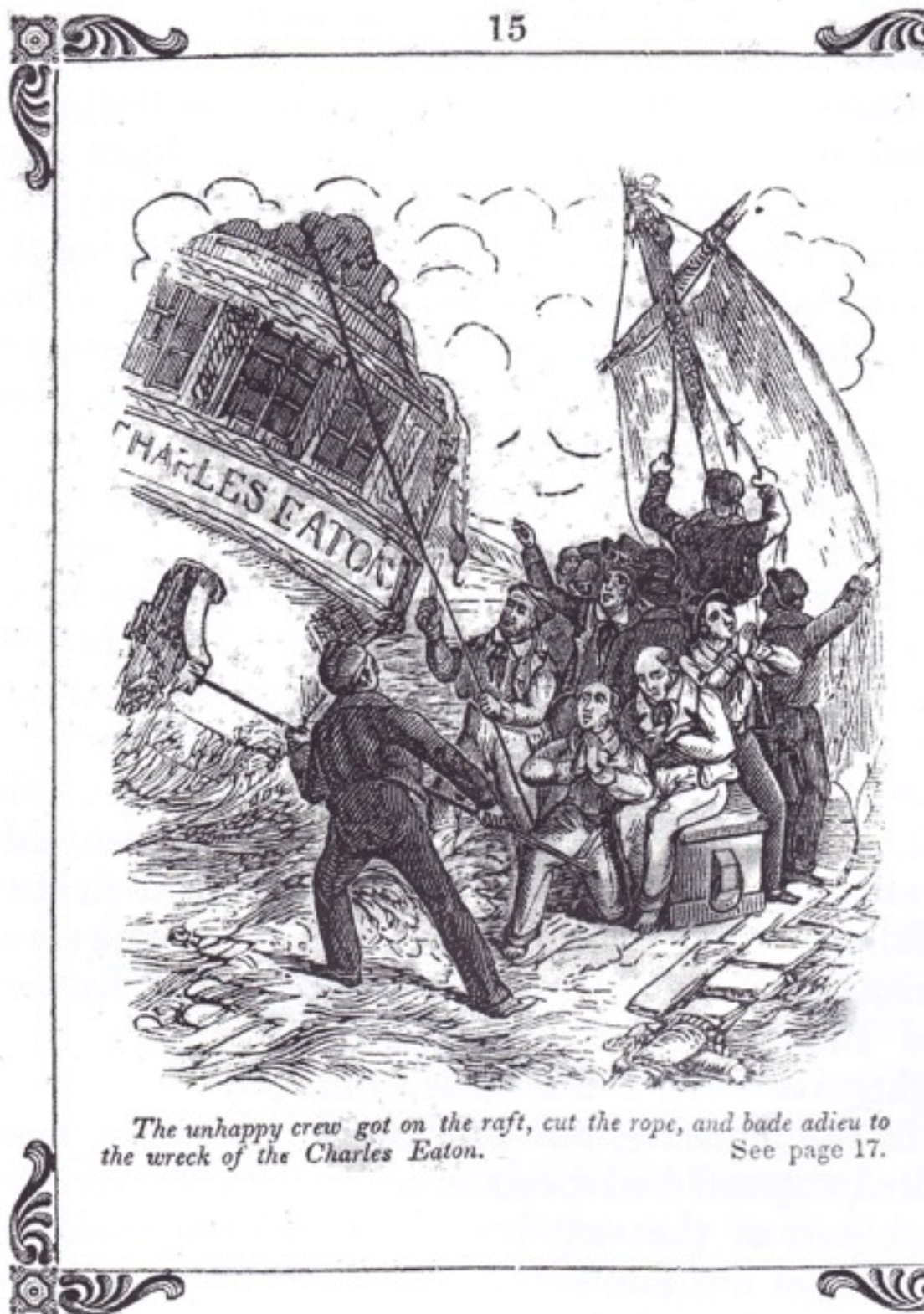


FIGURE 6: Image of the second *Charles Eaton* raft reproduced in Jack Ireland's *The Shipwrecked Orphans* (1845)

- (3) Compare and contrast Figure 1 and Figure 6. Which do you consider to be the more accurate depiction of the hellish conditions aboard the raft? Give detailed reasons for your answer.