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Spinning Gold: Nuggets, Narratives, and Raw Materials in the Victorian Gold Rush

ADELENE BUCKLAND

King's College London

ABSTRACT

In this essay I take up Jane Bennett's invitation to "think slow" the idea of matter as "passive," "inert" and "raw" by focusing on a specific - and overlooked - material category: the "raw material". Taking as a case study the gold mined in Victoria, Australia in the 1850s and beyond, I argue that the "raw material" is not an inevitable "fact" of nature, simply awaiting its inevitable transformation into capital. Instead it is a narrative construction deliberately designed to suppress or erase (often violently) the sheer range of alternative meanings the same matter might hold. Gold is an especially useful material for exploring this idea, since it is a key example of Marx's "primitive accumulation," a resource extracted explicitly in order to construct a new settler colony. It is also a material with a long history of fabulation and fantasy. Reading Charles Reade's settler colonial novel *It is Never Too Late to Mend* (1856) alongside the indigenous writer Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* (1999), I argue that the novel is a particularly adept form for registering the multiple, rich, alternative stories we might tell (or that have long been told) about "raw materials" and their dissonant, recalcitrant meanings.

The "material turn" in the humanities and social sciences has produced a rich, interdisciplinary body of scholarship taking in a diverse array of material forms. This ranges from things supposedly "independent of any human action or intervention (e.g. a stone, a mountain, an animal or a tree)"¹ to bodies, manufactured goods, art, and infrastructures. And yet, despite its significance in the histories of capitalism, industrialism, and empire, only recently have critics begun to consider the "raw material" as a specific category of analysis. As Anna Tsing has put it, "most analysts of capitalism ... have ignored the formation of 'raw' materials, taking them for granted as capitalist resources", despite the fact that these kinds of objects "have their own genealogies of production outside the capitalist purview" - the geological processes by which they have been created, for instance, or photosynthesis.² In a different vein, Kathryn Yusoff has recently reminded us that the extraction and production of supposedly "raw" materials has often

had a violent - and racist - history, as she argues for the need to find new ways to remember “the cut hands that bled the rubber, the slave children sold by weight of flesh, the sharp blades of sugar”, and “the lingering dislocation from geography, dusting through diasporic generations” that brought so much “raw” matter into existence in the first place.³ As Jane Bennett puts it more generally, we need to “think slowly an idea that runs fast through modern heads: the idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert”.⁴

In this essay I take up Bennett’s invitation to “think slowly” the idea of matter as “passive” and “inert”. But I am less interested in the idea that *all* matter can sometimes be imagined in this way (as unagential, passive, and awaiting human imagination and industry to be realized in its fullest capacities) or, as Bennett also is, in the idea that particular collocations of matter might be “vibrant”, taking unexpected trajectories that have not been designed by the systems of which they are a part. Instead, I am more interested in the specific historic construction of the “raw material” as an *ideology*, a narrative of materiality that deliberately occludes, oppresses, and denies the agencies and meanings of matter that clearly existed for it at the outset. The nineteenth century saw an exponential increase in the cultivation and extraction of these materials, of course, including: the dramatic acceleration of mining and fossil-fuel burning; slavery and widespread atrocities carried out in the name of rubber, cotton, indigo and sugar cultivation; the invention of the abattoir and of the shipping of refrigerated meat on newly-decked out ocean liners; fur, whale and ivory hunting on scale so unprecedented as to threaten the extinction of multiple species; the disarticulation of animals into an ever-wider range of commodities (from buggy whips to celluloid, industrial lubricants to bicycle tyres); and the oil, gold and diamond rushes (to name but a few). But Following Yusoff’s focus on geological extraction, here I consider the particular case study of gold - the nuggets mined in Victoria,

Australia in the gold rush of the 1850s and the decades that followed. Nuggets of gold are particularly useful materials for thinking through the ideology of the “raw” because they are a paradigmatic example of what Marx would theorize as “primitive accumulation”: “raw” not only in the sense of their large, amorphous, irregularly-shaped form (not yet melted down for jewelry or for bullion), but also, as symbols of massive and instantaneous wealth, in what was assumed to be their potential to forge a new “civilized” nation from the large, amorphous, irregular space represented by Australia on the colonial map. Viewed through the lens of the “raw material” both the gold itself, and the very corner of the earth in which it had been found, seemed to *require* hammering down and reshaping to commercial ends. Nuggets and ore constituted the material base on which a capitalist settler-colonial society was supposed to be created, and in their very naturalness they seemed to suggest the inevitability of that process. And yet if any matter was to accrue other resonances and significations, it was glittering, elusive, phantasmal gold. Paying attention to gold in its supposedly “raw” states, then, we can ask: are raw materials simply to be understood as “taken-for-granted ... capitalist resources”? Or do they have other significations to which we, as literary scholars, might attend? What kinds of histories have brought “raw materials” into existence, and what kinds of ideologies produce or are produced by these particular forms of matter? And what role has the idea of the “raw material” played in the histories of colonialism and capitalism? It is my contention here that literary scholarship is in a particularly strong position to answer these questions. Paying attention to the language and form of the novel, literary scholars can demonstrate the seemingly “factual” status of the “raw material” as a narrative construction, and attend to the range of alternative significations of matter (subconscious, contradictory, literal and metaphoric) that the novel so often reveals.

VICTORIAN NUGGETS

It does not take much digging to unearth the dazzling multiplicity of the cultural meanings attributed to gold. Indeed, in the wake of the Californian and Australian gold rushes, British writers perhaps most often imagined gold as an agent of economic and social violence and a producer of mental disorder. As Anthony Trollope characterized it, for instance, “gold upheaves everything”:

and its disruptions are those of an earthquake. The workman rushes away from his old allotted task, not to higher wages, not to 3s. a day instead of 2s., or to 6s. instead of 5s. but to untold wealth and unlimited splendour, - to an unknown, fabulous, but not the less credited realm of riches. ... His imagination is on fire, and he is unable any longer to listen to reason ... The presence of gold is a fact. All the corollaries of the fact might be plain to him also, if he would open his ears to them, - but, in regard to himself, he is deaf as an adder to them. That all the world around him is rushing to the diggings, he can see; - and he knows that there are not princely fortunes for them all. In some rough way he knows that, were there fortunes for them all, the fortunes would cease to be princely. But “something tells him,” - as he explains to the friend of his bosom.⁵

In a literal sense, gold enacts social upheaval by tempting workmen away from steady if low-paid employment to the high-stakes lottery of winning big at the diggings. And in another, deeply literal, sense, “gold is a fact”. As a naturally-occurring metal of geological antiquity, it is as real as the earth itself. The workman has every chance of finding it and making his fortune. But of course, as Trollope is keen to point out, gold has also long been defined by its phantasmagoric and hallucinatory qualities. The workman’s “imagination” is “on fire”, and it causes him to ignore truths about the scarcity of gold which he can nonetheless see and hear. The evidence of his senses loses out to his desire. And while this could be interpreted as a consequence of the workman’s greed, or his presumed lack of education, instead it is presented as a function of the gold itself. As Trollope reminds his readers, only if there is plenty of gold in the ground is it worth abandoning secure wages to go and find it - and there is plenty of gold. But at the same time, only if there is a

scarcity of gold can it hold enough value to be worth finding in the first place. In order to exist as an object of desire, the gold must be both real and unreal - both there and not-there. Gold must be both an object of reality and imagination at once.

This builds, of course, on longstanding anxieties about the “chiefly ... fictitious value” of money, especially as this was intensified by the paper money crises of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the subsequent institution of the gold bullion standard in Britain in 1821.⁶ Moreover, after two decades of stock bubbles and investment collapses, Victorian hearts might have yearned to rest easy in the assumption that gold bullion was the concrete stuff from which otherwise merely symbolic exchanges of currency would derive their material reality. But the material reality of gold was itself sometimes troubling: as Timothy Alborn has recently demonstrated, in Britain in the early nineteenth century there was a Protestant distaste for gold as mere ornament or decoration (where it acquired a gaudy, *nouveau riche* reputation), while in its symbolic form as currency it could be understood as the “modernizing motor” of civilization.⁷ Robert Hogarth Patterson’s *The Economy of Capital* (1855), for instance, opened by imagining a “planetary Sage” trying to understand why “men in myriads” are rushing to the “waste places in the uttermost parts of the earth” merely to seek a “yellow substance” which is of no immediate value (which cannot be used for sustenance or medicine, for clothing or as an instrument of war). While “the savage would tell him that it served to make rings for wearing in the nose and ears, or on other parts of the body, by way of ornament, but otherwise was of no account”, it would only be by following “the track of the gold-ships ... to Europe and the abodes of civilisation” that the Sage would see “our banks, our marketplaces, our counting-houses” and understand it as a “symbol of property”.⁸ Ornamentation was not only for the *nouveau riche*; it was also one of the “toys and gewgaws” of the savage - and in both cases a sign of barbarism. As Alborn puts it, “in transporting

gold from cathedrals into banks and coin purses, iconoclasm indirectly fueled the demise of traditional society and the rise of a new capitalist spirit” (even as royal processions often (paradoxically) attempted to “out-glimmer” those of imperial princes or national competitors).⁹ Whatever the unease around the illusory nature of gold as a guarantee of capital, it was only once it was reimagined in its symbolic functions in commerce, and according to abstract and predictable scientific law, could it be pressed into the service of the “civilized”. Nonetheless, multiple significations sat uneasily side by side.

Perhaps more importantly, the Californian and Australian gold rushes dramatically increased the world’s gold stock in the decade from 1848 and, for the economy at large as much as for Trollope’s workman, this was threatening: too much gold awash in the markets would radically destabilize its value overall.¹⁰ At the same time, as Trollope’s text also hints, the precise mode by which this new wealth was accumulated provoked uneasy thoughts about the reality and stability - or otherwise - of the society that might be built upon it. The very activity of “rushing to the diggings” potentially destabilized not only the value of gold, but the symbolic association of land with civilization and value. Classical, stadialist economics valorized the steady “allotted task[s]” of the agricultural laborer (Trollope’s “workman”, perhaps), and the symbolic functions of money and stockpiled resources, as the tokens of advanced society. But the gold diggings were a paradigmatic example of what Marx would theorize as “primitive accumulation,” and were derived not from steady labor but from “rushing” and wandering to wherever the gold might be found - an itinerant economic activity much more associated with so-called “primitive” people than commercial Britons.¹¹ As Philip Steer has put it, “if [individual and national] character came from developing the land with labor, as Locke had taught economists to assume, what happened to a society whose wealth arrived at random from holes in the ground?”¹² Perhaps money was illusory

and fictitious, and its value about to go into sharp decline; perhaps equally illusory was the seemingly concrete relationship between human systems of value (and systems of valuing humans) and the land. In economic terms, gold was an essential raw material of the settler colony; in symbolic terms, it troubled the cultural foundations on which settler colonialism could be justified and explained.

The anxieties that circulated around the discovery of so much gold can be seen in sharp relief the lectures of imperial geologist, geographer and self-styled “Goldfinder” Roderick Murchison, delivered at such institutions as the Royal Institution, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Geological Society and the Royal Geographical Society, as well as in counsel to the Prime Minister Robert Peel, and across several editions of his book, *Siluria*. In all these texts, Murchison worked tirelessly to argue that scientific law would render the earth and its pockets of extractible wealth comfortingly predictable. Though he had never set foot in Australia, he claimed to have successfully predicted the discovery of its gold in 1844, some six years before it was found (and he embarked on a jealous campaign to undermine the ‘discoveries’ of colonial men of science in the process).¹³ He had done so, he said, based on an analogy with the Ural Mountains in Russia, both of which he claimed to have been thrown up in the Permian period and later injected with gold by the intrusion of quartz veins.¹⁴ Since these assumptions had apparently been correct, Murchison was able to argue that nature operated via a series of golden “constants”: imperturbable laws which bestowed upon men of science almost magical powers of prediction and resolved the seeming chaos and unpredictability of the planet into law and order. These “constants” meant he could predict that gold would always be found in the “dorsal spines” of meridional (or north-south) mountain chains.

Murchison carried this argument even further, going on to argue that gold also had an inbuilt stop mechanism, designed by nature, which would keep the currency stable (he called this the “General Gold Restriction Bill of Nature”).¹⁵ Only surface deposits of gold could be profitably mined - and since Murchison believed that these came from a limited store of Silurian rocks broken down by erosion and redistributed by cataclysmic floods - there would never be too much of this gold to threaten its value (unlike silver, which had been devalued by its relative abundance). Deeper deposits would always, he argued, be too costly and difficult to mine. As such, it was necessary to “check extravagant fears and apprehensions respecting an excessive production of the ore; for we can trace the boundaries, rude as they may be, of a metal ever destined to remain precious on account of those limits in position, breadth, and depth by which it is circumscribed in Nature’s bank”.¹⁶ Nature and commerce were intertwined: gold was regular, law-like, always-already symbolic - and in being so, a natural guarantee of the self-same civilizing properties it was also required to fund.

In fact, so well-organized were the earth’s “stores” of gold that only the exact amount required to finance new colonies would ever appear, Murchison claimed, at which point the mining of gold would become unprofitable.¹⁷ This had been seen in all previous gold rushes, he said: “just in proportion to the time a country has been civilized, the extraction of the precious metal has diminished”.¹⁸ Murchison wasn’t the only one to make these claims about the Providential nature of gold: several commentators pointed out that the gold had been discovered just at the point that the Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, had begun to despair of the colonies as “a millstone around our necks”.¹⁹ But Murchison made himself the standard-bearer of this view. Gold, he wrote, “has served the purposes of Providence in providing for a great augmenting population, and in converting wild tracts into flourishing hives of industry”.²⁰ There could be no fears about the

itinerant nature of gold-finding: gold was predictable, rational, and not randomly distributed at all - so it could be worked as reliably and carefully as any product of the land. Nature was bountiful, but it was also prudent, and it justified imperial power as the bestower of prosperity across the entire earth.

In the later 1850s, the racial dimensions of these histories and economies of gold became even more explicit in Murchison's work, as he was forced to admit that gold supplies were not diminishing in Victoria as he had predicted, and that new technologies were making ever-deeper mining more possible. In the broader culture, Alborn has argued that this development meant that the "conspicuous consumption" of gold as jewelry and ornament became considered less vulgar, and more as "a safety valve" for the gold standard, actively preventing too much of it from transforming into money. And for Murchison, the narrative of scientific clairvoyance and trustworthiness, and of the idea that gold served a reliable imperial destiny, was too embedded to abandon. So he made the "constants" rely not so much on the material properties of gold, as on the characteristics of race. "Numerous hands," he said, "used with Anglo-Saxon energy, in California and Australia, may, in a quarter of a century, accomplish results which could be attained only in many centuries by a scanty and lazy indigenous population; and thus the present large flow of gold into Europe from such tracts must, in my opinion, diminish, as soon as the richer detritus of certain tracts has been sifted."²¹ If the rocks were not running out of gold in time to secure the power of the "Anglo-Saxon" colonizer and the wealth he had extracted, then that very same colonizer's superior "energy" and industry would make it happen anyway. Either way, gold had been designed as an agent of white British power, and its reliability and predictability - as both guarantees and emblems of that power - were assured.

This was the ideology of the raw material. To use Nicole Shukin's words when describing animals-about-to-be-turned-commodities, these objects have the "raw facticity of a specimen".²² And as I have explored elsewhere, sugar, cotton, indigo, blubber, meat, timber, oil, coal, gold, diamonds, ivory or opium are all supposedly unprocessed, naturally-occurring and passive - useless until man's invention and technology transforms them into manufactured commodities, and thus into capital.²³ But as the case of gold attests, the smooth and magical transformation of "raw material" into marketable goods was often a fiction. Murchison's theories on north-south mountain chains were erroneous. It remained a project of immense difficulty to predict the precise locations of gold deposits, so that have-a-go prospectors still hit upon lodes in unexpected places throughout the nineteenth century. And we can only presume that Trollope's workman was more likely to have met with destitution or death at the diggings than to find his fortune.

New materialists have already begun to discuss these ideas about raw materiality in ways that bring out its political dimensions. For Bennett, the alternative to the "raw" is "vibrant matter": the manner in which trash and electrical grids and streams of chemicals come together in "human-nonhuman assemblages" (particularly inside a capitalist system that has already constructed matter in certain ways) - to act in recalcitrant or otherwise unexpected modes that can't be entirely controlled by human agency. Vibrant matter is "*not*", she adds, "the raw material for the creative activity of humans or God".²⁴ Moreover, she argues that this conception of matter as "raw" produces the kinds of power relations that enslave and colonize. If matter is raw, it can be harnessed without agency to the purposes of power. Though this dimension of "rawness" is not explicit in Murchison's account (and we must note here that Murchison's maternal family had slave holdings in the Caribbean), it is certainly at least implicit in his

deterministic account of the inevitable “flow of gold” which “must” move in certain ways now it has been released from “a scanty and lazy indigenous population” and into the energetic, industrious hands of the Anglo-Saxon. Since the “lazy indigene” has failed in the task of primitive accumulation - has failed to extract the gold on which a more prosperous “population” might be built - he is not so much raw material as waste product; nonetheless, the labor of the gold digger is itself a raw material of empire. The idea of certain kinds of matter as unagential so very quickly lends itself to the related idea of human labor as nothing more than the "raw material" of commerce: as so many pounds of flesh, sweat, blood, tears, and skin required to release the value of the object. Black Studies scholars have been most attentive to this dimension of the language of the raw: Tiffany Lethabo King has noted that “slavery produced Black bodies as the raw material for infinite forms of use”, for example, from slaves reduced from bodies to flesh - forced to procreate but denied parental rights; Hortense Spillers describes this as an “open exchange of female bodies in the raw”.²⁵ There are two things on which these critics all agree. First, that the idea of matter as passive stuff has dangerous consequences for the treatment of human beings, who can so easily be figured as “raw materials” in the production of value for those in positions of greater power than themselves. And second, that there is no such thing as passive, “raw” materiality that does not have the power to elude the significations attached to it, or to exert its own recalcitrant agencies.

By attending to a range of texts written in the nineteenth century, we can see the very idea of the “raw material” still in process - the ideologies still forming around it, the other significations of that self-same matter that had not yet been fully excised from it. The narrative of the raw material - an object always-already predisposed to its own transformation into a commodity - was not yet firmly established. In the remainder of this essay, then, I focus on two

important narratives on Australian gold. The first is Charles Reade's 1856 novel *It is Never Too Late to Mend* - perhaps the most emblematic novel of the Australian gold rush written in that decade - and I use it to explore the ways in which other figurations of gold than as "raw material" creep into the narrative unbidden, and can only be excised by recourse to a narrative of colonial theft from indigenous people. Reade's is a novel about nuggets - the great, monstrous, amorphous alluvial forms of gold still waiting to be found near to the surface of the earth in Victoria; it is also a novel that both exposes and attempts to disguise the racial violence that was built into the nugget as a material form.

And alongside Reade's novel, I discuss the much more recent *Benang: From the Heart* (1999), written by Kim Scott, an indigenous novelist of mixed descent and Nyoongar ancestry. The novel both explores and performs the project of reinstating Aboriginal Australian voices and perspectives within the imperial past of which Reade's novel is such a characteristic representation. *Benang* centers on Harley, bred as "the first white man in the family line" by his eugenicist grandfather Ern under the racial absorptionist policies of A.O. Neville, and charts his efforts to recapture connections with four generations of his Nyoongar family.²⁶ Though it is set largely in the early twentieth century, it explores the project of historical recovery from "The Great Silence" of white Australian literature and history from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Within this broader narrative, for key characters in the novel gold emerges as both a foundational object on which that erasure began, and holds the glittering, always out-of-reach promise of material existence - as if owning gold as a material object, with its concomitant effects of wealth and status, can re-summon a lost history into material existence, or give material reality to Harley's ancestry on the point of its erasure.²⁷ But in this novel, set a little later than Reade's work, the "nuggets" have mostly already vanished, to be replaced with the

much more difficult and industrialized processing of ore from hard rock (though large nuggets were occasionally found right up until the 1990s). The romantic history of radical gold finds for individuals - and the wealth that brought - has always already escaped the protagonists.

Gold, then, becomes the material substance symbolizing the detritus of the Victorian ideology of the “raw material” and its ongoing legacies of violence and suppression. In other words, if the nineteenth-century novel reveals the ways in which the very idea of the “raw material” is predicated on a volatile, unpredictable and often violent ideology which makes capitalist economics, extractivism, and imperialism *appear* as natural - as ordained by the earth itself, then Scott’s work explores the flipside of this idea: for Scott, “gold” is so volatile and unstable as a locus of meaning and value that it can hardly be considered anything more than a violent fiction. For Scott, exposing the violent cultural logics that go into the creation of the idea of a “raw material” - and the ways in which that idea of the “raw material” has to be sustained in order to support those ongoing cultural logics - gold is only as real as the racial politics that define and enable its existence and its possession.

STOLEN GOODS

We must begin with the most charismatic raw form of gold in Victoria in the 1850s: the “monster nugget”.²⁸ The word “nugget” has an unclear etymological derivation, but it almost certainly emerged from Victoria, where more life-changingly large lumps of gold were found than in any other parts of the world. 60 nuggets weighing more than 20lbs were found and recorded on the Australian goldfields in the first two decades of the Australian gold rushes, and the Victorian Mines Department register recorded 649 significant nugget discoveries by 1868.²⁹ Since many nuggets were smuggled away, this is probably less than half the real number. And “nugget” had a

distinctively "raw" and simultaneously colonial ring to it: the writers of periodical articles felt the need to translate the word for "non-colonial readers" into at least the 1880s.³⁰ (Scientific writers often preferred *pepitas* - Spanish for pumpkin seed, if the nuggets were small - or the less evocative "lump of gold").³¹ Some monster nuggets even resisted the raw material's usual transformation into manufactured goods by acquiring names, celebrity, and status as artifacts on their own account - the Loch Lomond, the Welcome Stranger, or the 1743 oz. Blanche Barkley nugget which was exhibited at the Crystal Palace, for example. Indeed, *The Times* considered that allowing the Blanche Barkley to "be melted down as bullion would be as much a piece of national Vandalism as if we macadamized our roads with the Elgin marbles".³² Nonetheless, these celebrated nuggets were exceptions to the rule. The fact that they had avoided their fates and resisted being melted down only gave a dramatic flourish to the sheer volume of gold undergoing that transformation, the inevitability of that destiny for most of it, and to the sense of the Australian colony as rugged, raw, and ripe for excavation.

One especially famous nugget exemplified this ideology: the 340oz Victoria nugget, purchased by the Government of Victoria in Australia on 20th September 1852 and presented to Queen Victoria the following February (it can still be seen in the Western Australian Museum in Perth). The presentation was made because the nugget was said to resemble the Queen's face in profile. *Punch* could not resist the joke. A second "piece of gold" has been found, it sniggered, and it "bears a striking resemblance to the figure of *Punch*, and has been molded by nature to add the conclusive evidence of the voice of Nature to the fact that *Punch* is worth his weight in gold".³³ That fictional nugget would be called "The Great Punch Nugget". Nonetheless, beneath the joke was a serious point, embedded in that verbose recourse to the "evidence of the voice of Nature to the fact" - to the discrepancy between the "facticity" of the nugget and the seemingly outlandish

meanings it contained. *Punch* was making fun of the very idea of giving the nugget as a gift to the Queen as an at least semi-serious attempt to make the uncertain relationship between colony and crown appear natural and self-evident. As it knew, the gift of the nugget attempted to turn the Queen's face - discovered in the colonial soils in the very form in which it would appear once melted down for coin - into a metaphor for the apparent naturalness of her sovereignty and the presumed rightfulness of British possession of Australian gold and land.

Still, *Punch* stopped short of pointing out just how unnatural this relationship was, or how dependent upon extreme forms of racially-motivated violence. Nonetheless, as is now widely accepted and understood, this was a feature of gold mining the world over. As Benjamin Madley has meticulously documented, in less than three decades after the 'discovery' of Californian gold, the Native American population plunged from 150,000 to 30,000 - supported by at least \$1.7 million of investment in the murder of Native American people by the state and federal governments.³⁴ The Klondike Rush saw the forced removal and extermination of the Hän people of the Yukon for their own "protection" (many died in large numbers on "reserves"), while many other First Nations people died of starvation or disease.³⁵ The Tierra del Fuego Gold Rush of 1883-1906 all-but destroyed the Selk'Nam people (who were raped, mutilated, deported and deliberately exterminated by ranchers and farmers).³⁶ And in South Africa the quest for gold led to the Second Boer War and the establishment of concentration camps by British authorities.³⁷ In Australia, too, gold could only exist as a raw material only to the extent that Aboriginal Australians were first disinherited of their land and then dispossessed of the profits of their labours on the goldfields. While the nugget could be made to emblematised both the "rawness" of the colonies and the naturalness of the logics of both empire and commerce, it is important to note that this narrative also depended upon a specifically racist violence.

Indeed, a narrative of indigenous ignorance shaped apocryphal accounts of nuggets long into the century - when a romantic time of nugget-hunting was often remembered wistfully (nuggets were perceived to have dried up - pick-and-shovel placer mining undertaken by individuals replaced by deep-quartz mining requiring heavy investments of capital). The “first” large nugget “discovered” in Australia was Kerr’s nugget - and, in a story regularly retold and repeated in the press right to the end of the century, was said to have been discovered by an Aboriginal Australian boy in the employ of a Dr. Kerr, who stumbled across the gold, and “knocked a piece off with his tomahawk”.³⁸ The boy informed his master and immediately made him “a present of whatever might be found”.³⁹ In other accounts, the boy was rewarded “with a couple of flocks of sheep, rations &c ... and a team of bullocks”, though “this wealth so suddenly acquired by Black Tommy and his brother, did not make them happy”.⁴⁰ Such narratives reinforce the sense of the rightful ownership of the gold by its white appropriators, suggesting that Aboriginal people were neither culturally or biologically advanced enough to appreciate the value of gold (despite knowing enough of it to have hidden it for Kerr, in some accounts), nor to be able to handle the wealth acquired through commerce, to which they were supposedly unsuited.

Of course, to note that Aboriginal people did not accord gold any special worth is emphatically *not* the same thing as saying that such people were unable to appreciate its value on the market. Rather, the cultural relativity with which gold was regarded is central to its meaning: gold is useful for storing currency or creating ornaments but has little intrinsic value of its own. Indeed, Aboriginal people often quarried for greenstone, sandstone, obsidian, kaolin, white pipe-clay, ochres, or basalt, both before and after colonization.⁴¹ But in several cases auriferous rocks were found in quarries of great cultural, ceremonial and economic significance to indigenous peoples or on ancestral estates.⁴² Gold was often of less use or benefit to Aboriginal peoples than

these other materials and other uses of the land. Furthermore, Aboriginal people were valuable guides and fossickers in gold-rich regions.⁴³ Those who chose not to participate in gold mining did so not out of ignorance, but out of a desire to avoid the violence and environmental destruction to which they and their homes had been subjected by mining, leaving the goldfields for safer territories elsewhere.⁴⁴ Perhaps even more importantly, both pastoralism and gold (and later opal) mining destroyed landforms, landmarks, territories, and made it impossible to continue with sophisticated Aboriginal land management practices, rendering entire tracts of land infertile. Gold erased resources, knowledge, power and capital as much as it supplied them.

Charles Reade's 1856 novel *It is Never Too Late to Mend* borrows parts of its story directly from accounts of Kerr's nugget (and the Prince Albert and Queen Victoria nuggets Kerr also claimed), and its protagonists debate the different scientific theories about the origins of gold in ways that make it seem more elusive and magical than Murchison would have wanted - even frustratingly so. The men of the novel end up rejecting their earlier idea that gold was created "in masses" rather than as "dust", so that "the dust is only a trifle that has been washed off the bulk" and nugget-hunters "ought to track the gold-dust coarser and coarser ... to its home in the great rocks".⁴⁵ Then, they consider a "wiser" theory shaped by a deeper sense of geological time: "no doubt the gold was all in block when the world started, but how many millions years ago was that? at the beginning of the world the gold was all solid, at the end it is all to be dust" (III: 45). And, since "we are fifty times nearer the end" of the world "than the beginning," it "follows there is fifty times as much gold-dust in nature as solid gold" (III: 45). Later, the hero George Fielding becomes obsessed with the idea of a river of quartz in which large nuggets might be found: "poor George and his nuggets!" the narrator proclaims with a perceptible roll of the eye (III: 75). The novel never explicitly comes down on the side of one particular theory or another.

At the same time, George is assisted as a sheep farmer and then nugget hunter by a character named Jacky or Kalingalunga, a Koori man insistently described in stereotypical terms as “shallow”, “lazy” and almost amnesiac in his lack of a historical conception of time. Nonetheless, gold agitates the minds of all who come into contact with it except for Jacky/Kalingalunga, who “rather mortified George by deserting him upon the first discovery of gold”: “‘Dis a good deal stupid,’ was that worthy’s remark on the second day. ‘When I hunt tings run, and I run behind and catch dem. You hunt - it not run - yet you not catch it always. Dat a good deal stupid. Before we hunt gold you do many tings, now do one; dat a good deal stupid’” (III: 103).

A paternalistic irony constructs Jacky/Kalingalunga here as the one who is “a good deal stupid” for not crediting the significance of the gold. But through Jacky/Kalingalunga the novel also expresses an ironic mode of relation to the instability of gold as a locus of value. Arjun Appadurai’s notion of the situational value acquired by objects is helpful here: “the ways in which desire and demand, reciprocal sacrifice and power interact to create economic value in specific social situations”.⁴⁶ Repeatedly, Jacky/Kalingalunga’s supposed “ignorance” rather suggests the troubling possibility that the value of gold was “culturally” rather than “naturally” determined, that it had only a spectral set of significations, and that all wealth built upon it was illusory. Certainly to the extent that the nugget is an emblem of rapacious acquisitiveness, the novel agrees with Jacky/Kalingalunga: “envy’s satanic fire” regularly takes hold, and nuggets automatically prompt violence and criminality throughout (III: 47). If Jacky/Kalingalunga’s inability to perceive gold as an object of value - to recognize its status as a raw material - is sometimes taken as an index of his inferior mental powers, it is just as often made to reveal the “primitive” tendencies of those who are nugget-hunting for nothing but wealth. So far, so typical.

But what is interesting is that, under these conditions, the protagonist George can't want the gold for its own sake. He would "rather not find gold than part with honesty", we are told, and gold has to be constantly imagined *only* as a conduit to domestic stability. First George "gloated over the little nuggets, for he saw [his intended wife] Susan's eyes in them" (III: 51); later, finding a large nugget, he falls to his knees and kisses it, "not because you are gold, but because you take me to Susan" (III: 199). Seeing her "eyes" in the gold a third time, he is described as "in rapture" (III: 199), shaking hands vigorously with Tom, so that the gold takes on a religious quality: "They fell down on their knees by the side of it like men in a dream. Such a thing had never been seen or heard of - a hundred-weight of quartz and gold, and beautiful as it was great" (III: 198). In order to be righteously owned, the nugget cannot be owned as merely itself, and the novel participates in a wider production of white femininity as the moral stabilizer of gold acquisition.⁴⁷ As such, it is only raw in the sense that what it will ultimately create is a home - is a happy ending and more white children to populate and expand the empire. "Such a thing had never been seen or heard of," but it means nothing new - it simply means the emerging world order can be ensured and reproduced.

This narrative, moreover, depends entirely on a logic of colonial theft. For, as has widely been discussed, in *It is Never Too Late to Mend* it is Jacky/Kalingalunga who discovers the nugget that concludes the narrative. In the first instance, this is presented as a moral problem, for, after their initial "rapture" at the find, "a horrible thought occurred": "'Why, it's Jacky's,' said George faintly, 'he found it.'" Tom "uneasily" calls this "nonsense!", but goes on to admit he is "afraid one third of it is - pals share, white or black" (III: 199). The novel has already established the legitimacy of "finders keepers" as the only enforceable law of the diggings, so that "pals share, white or black" is rather a slightly threatening appropriation of two-thirds of

Jacky/Kalingalunga's rightful wealth than the act of generosity and cross-racial allyship Tom pretends it to be. Tom and George didn't find it at all. They don't own any of it. But even worse than that, in the end, the white men don't share it with Jacky/Kalingalunga at all, but keep all the money for themselves and give Jacky/Kalingalunga a sheep farm as compensation, in line with the story of Kerr. This is a terrible gift by the novel's own standards, for Jacky/Kalingalunga has repeatedly been described as constitutionally unsuitable for the work of farming, and the narrative regularly decries the unprofitability of sheep farming even for a well-resourced white settler. Indeed, George has turned to mining only because he could not make farming pay. Though it is offered as an act of generosity, by the logics of the novel itself, this is patently not a fair exchange. It is an explicit act of thieving justified only by a racism about which even the protagonists feel uneasy.

And, even taking into account its reliance on the discovery made by Kerr's employee, it makes no sense. Firstly - beyond nominal fidelity to the source material and an excuse to create a sentimental account of a race considered to be on the verge of extinction - there is no need to have Jacky/Kalingalunga be the one to discover the gold. The white men might have found it themselves, even with Jacky/Kalingalunga as their guide. Why does the novel introduce this ambiguity? Secondly, there is no need to depict their appropriation of the nugget's wealth in morally ambiguous terms. The nugget is "such a thing as had never been seen or heard of". It contains enough wealth for them all, and sharing it will not substantially affect the chances of any member of the party. If he was the one to find it, why could Jacky/Kalingalunga not be presented as sharing it of his own free will? Thirdly and finally, the racial uneasiness surrounding the discovery is intensified by Jacky's total "composure" as he "lay yawning on the grass" alongside the much-more agitated white men. When Jacky/Kalingalunga labels the white men's response to

gold as “a good deal dam ridiculous”, Robinson replies “hastily” that he is right to avoid the “yellow stone”: “it would make you as great a fool as we are” (III: 200). The men see themselves as virtuous colonial heroes. They see gold as a symbol of - and route towards - domestic and colonial harmony. And yet they also acknowledge it as an instrument of madness (or at least foolishness), even if only to attempt to take more than their fair share of it.

The only way to deal with this is to find a culturally-acceptable mechanism by which to take the gold for themselves - which is that Jacky/Kalingalunga is given a useless gift, and the men take the wealth without guilt. While on one level this simply operates to suggest that gold is a reward for racial and mental superiority - Jacky seems happy with the exchange because he is seemingly unable to comprehend value in the first place - on another it reveals what is actually at stake in this seemingly odd narrative turn. In fact, stealing the gold helps shore up its value of gold as an object of inherent or intrinsic value. After all, one can only steal something that is of genuine value to all parties - even if one of the parties has less appreciation of that value. Theft implies that, even if Jacky/Kalingalunga is unable to understand it, gold actually does possess the same meanings for all parties. Its value is intrinsic - is stable - and the problem is only one of perception. Jacky/Kalingalunga’s indifference to gold raises the troubling prospect that gold might be an illusory, even immoral object - a familiar problem for British Protestants supposedly inured against greed. And by extension, the possibility that gold is actually worthless - or its value is purely fictional - raises the conjoint possibility that colonial resource extraction might be built on an effect of an atavistic imagination. By contrast, a narrative of theft reinstates gold as an object of fixed, stable value - a raw material whose value is objective and independent of human systems of value. The narrative demands that gold *is* worth something independently of the men who value it and hunt for it. So whatever Jacky/Kalingalunga does or doesn’t know, in

order to invalidate his perspective that gold is not really worth all that much, it *must* be stolen from him. The very act of that theft is righteous because it shores up the intrinsic value of the gold and of a system that justifies white superiority. And that is why it is more moral and necessary to steal the gold than simply to share it. If the men didn't do that, they would be acknowledging the violence and fictionality that makes gold gold.

HEAVY LODES

Kim Scott's 1999 novel *Benang: From the Heart* offers a powerful exploration of these tensions in the nineteenth-century gold rushes and beyond. Centring on Harley's search to recapture his ancestry, it interweaves real-life documents, such as those of A.O. Neville, Aboriginal Protector from 1905-1940, with those of fictionalized colonists like the policeman Sergeant Hall, who considers himself "progressive" (73) for hoping to "raise" indigenous people from being considered at the "level of troublesome indigenous fauna, of vermin control, of eradication and slaughter ... to the level of animal husbandry" (74). This is the stadialist logic of the raw material in action: as hunter gatherers (presumed low down in the scale of both history and civilization), the Nyungar are treated *themselves* as "indigenous fauna"; "raised" to a supposedly later stage of human history (agriculture), they will be forced to farm on behalf of, and care for, the white population, earning only the right to be treated as farm animals themselves - "herded about like sheep and cattle, though less well fed" (479). Only the industrialists have reached the point in history that makes them capable of extracting and cultivating the earth as it ought to be extracted and cultivated. Women are explicitly conceived of as raw materials, too: Ern's attempts to create "the first white man" creates, as Lisa Slater has put it, "the Nyoongar women's only capacity ... as body machines, to serve as incubators and storehouses of the foetus", occasionally acting as

“perfunctory ‘carers’ who watch over the children in the absence of the white fathers into whose world they are being educated”, disposed of the moment they bear Ern a male child.⁴⁸ This is a familiar logic: reproduction as raw material, of “flesh as a prime commodity of exchange” - an “open exchange of female bodies in the raw”.⁴⁹ Throughout Scott’s novel, again, the language of “assimilation” is exposed as a byword for annihilation: the logic of raw materiality is also a logic of disposability (see also Slater 2005b). If it can’t be commodified, it can always be destroyed. *Once* it is commodified, it can always be destroyed: Aboriginal inhabitants of the town of Gebalup, around which much of Scott’s story circles, are confined to a camp between the tip and the night soil pits.

Gold occupies a simultaneously central (because practical and direct) and marginal (because metonymic and unacknowledged) position in the production of this economy. In the dead centre of the novel, Sandy One, great-great-grandfather of the narrator, a white sailor who married the Aboriginal woman “Fanny” (later revealed as the “Benang” of the title), finds a mine along with his grandson Jack Chatalong (the narrator’s uncle). The chapter is called “a rich lode, or -”, and the “or” (as a homonym for “ore”) instantly suggests a discomfitingly ambiguous redefinition of the “lode” as a stable site of meaning. It is also the site of a massacre:

Chatalong stood on a piece of granite which stuck out from the slope in the way bone, broken from its skeleton, emerges from split flesh. ... Floodwaters had torn at the last tree, an old one bent by winter gales, and toppled it. Small gullies had been cut into the soil, and now there were collections of bones, mixed with sticks and small boulders where they had been caught and dumped by the rushing water. Brittle lines of white, of yellow, stabbed from the flat spaces of clay and sucked at white light there was on this day.

“There’s more,” called Chatalong, faltering. It was a skull he held in his hands.
(268)

The gold site, - “perhaps a reef of it” - is also a mass grave, in which the land (granite sticking out like a bone “broken from its skeleton”) and the broken bones of the human beings, merge into

one. This gold is not raw material: it is a tomb. The next chapter is entitled “mine mind awaking”: gold is also a state of mind. Sandy One “kept thinking, strike it rich, be a boss man in this way”, show his wife and daughters “that this is the way” (270): he “wanted that gold to prove he was someone ... if only it was not at this place” (271) - a place which speaks to the impossibility of assimilation when the very wealth on which the community is built is forged from genocide. Gold functions as raw material only for those whose whiteness is assured.

As in so many Victorian narratives, the gold itself offers a false promise - except of a different kind. First, the land itself lies. “They had thought it was reef gold, and they could just pick it off the surface. Trouble was, it shifted about”: “they ... couldn’t hit the gold spot” (270). As such, they hoped it was the kind of alluvial, surface gold found in quartz veins in which men like George Fielding made their fortunes. If it was, they’d have a chance of a nugget. But it isn’t, and Sandy One has to ask his white sons-in-law to help him, and it consolidates their links with a powerful white family, but they deny his son employment in the mine. His old “livelihood, necessary to his independence and self-respect” is replaced by dependence on the town’s white families for cash (271). And still the gold does not come. “There was always just enough to encourage them’, to keep going, ‘to cart ore to the railway ... then back to the port”, but never enough to make any money (271). Never enough to “assimilate”. In the end, the mine turns out to yield little more than dirt. There is no gold. (There is certainly no nugget.)

And that’s not even the point. Because even if Sandy One struck a nugget - or another valuable deposit of gold - it would not operate as a nugget in his hands. Having forfeited his racial rights having married an Aboriginal woman, his wife is considered white while he remains alive. She reverts to black on his death. Gold is an object with the power to define things - to define racial hierarchy, to create registers of value. An object possessing and creating imaginary and violent

agencies. This is a power not under Sandy One's control. In *Benang*, the prospect of gold merely stirs up white fear of the Black people the gold might bring. Sandy One loses his employment, the family are inspected and found wanting: they are deemed liable to attract other unwanted "natives", and forced to leave.

The racial balance sheet of loss and gain is made clear in the hauntings of the goldfield in *Benang*: "Sometimes, coming up from the darkness into the sun, he felt a cold and numbing fear. He felt them there like a whisper, like the memory of a whisper; so how must Fanny feel, she being so much stronger than he? Such loss. He crossed land which, neglected, was opened to the sun; was grazed, razed, shaved, plucked. Now the crevices and dimples which still held moisture and where a few trees remained were lavished with visits, had paths worn to and away from them (272). To those who - like Fanny - have created lives and worlds on the land from their knowledge of its waterholes, its creeks, its animals, and their sophisticated management of the earth to augment its fertility, the mine is not only the literal site of a human massacre but also a mechanism for environmental and cultural destruction. The mines leave the land "open to the sun", where it is "grazed, razed" by sheep and the "pioneering rabbits" whose coming with the first fleet and rapid multiplication created widespread extinctions of indigenous animals. Later, Fanny sits in the goldfields lamenting world "gone" or at least "changed": "the telegraph line, railway line, wheel tracks everywhere. Rubbish and bad smells. Trees gone, grass grazed to the ground, the earth cut, shifting, not healed and not yet sealed; vegetation left too long without flames and regeneration" (480-481). Earlier, Jack Chatalong "listened to batteries hammering in the close distance, crushing the ore, pounding. He, the raw earth; together they trembled and shivered" (276). The raw earth. The repeated equation of Aboriginal people with the land turns the colonial logic of the raw material on its head: "gold" is not a raw material for Sandy, Fanny or Jack, because it debars them

from participation in industrial, colonial and commercial structures of wealth acquisition, rendering them "raw" and trembling as the earth itself. Gold is the stuff by which some humans are made into "raw materials" and others enact their civility as finished, polished products.

Though it does not signify equally to all parties, then, gold is the mechanism through which acts of signification are made possible. It signals a dream of assimilation, a dream of independent existence, and yet its reality is as a logic of extermination, of the giving over of oneself to a market controlled entirely by others. Indeed, *Benang* exposes the narrative of theft in texts like *It is Never too Late to Mend* as part and parcel of the logic of the raw material, for the idea that this thing has been stolen - rather than that there were other things that mattered more - obfuscates the stories of all the other things the land, people, animals, the earth, might have been.

SETTLER STORIES

Jordana Rosenberg has recently suggested that "the urge towards objects" displayed by new materialists (and others) "comports itself in a very particular fashion, one that will be familiar to scholars of colonialism and settler-colonialism ... The ontological turn, that is to say, reshapes an old paradigm, a primitivist fantasy that hinges on the violent erasure of the social: the conjuring of a realm - an "ancestral realm" - that exists in the present, but in parallax to historical time. A *terra nullius* of the theoretical landscape.⁵⁰ Rosenberg is talking about the "ontological turn", whose "exemplary form is the molecular", an "ur-form" underpinning all others. Such a search for the tiny units of matter that might offer living networks and interconnections between seemingly discrete objects can masquerade, Rosenberg points out, as a form for re-making worlds along newly imaginative and empathetic lines, but is in fact a search for an origin story, for essentialism, all over again. Here I am concerned with the turn to another, parallel "authenticating gesture" that

might reproduce a “settler rationality” - the treatment of the "raw material" as a demediated essence either ripe for conversion into capital (a simple recapitulation of an old Victorian story) or as a conception of matter that is unthought and unthinking - that does not mediate and is not mediated - and that needs to be replaced by a more enlightened sense of matter’s vibrancy and agency (a la Bennett). I would argue here, in fact, that the “raw material” has always been a conscious fiction. For nineteenth-century settler colonialists in Australia, there was no conception of matter as raw, brute or passive that was not always already deliberate and designed. The idea of the "raw material" was compelling not because nobody had thought it through, or because it was “unthinking”, but precisely for its power to wilfully and often violently subdue and destroy alternative imaginings of the earth and alternative modes of inhabiting it, in the service of a logic that made empire and industry appear natural, homogenous and inescapable. This was always deliberate, and it had to be emphasized and re-emphasized in the generations that followed. Raw matter had to be subjugated into its rawness. It was always in the process - over and over again - of being made raw in ways that explicitly relied upon violence.

The logic of this can be traced through Rosenberg’s interest in the idea of the molecular as “a new frontier of raw material extraction/exploitation so significant as to shape the world system” (in the form of gene therapies, for instance). But the raw material is not a self-evident object, and it does not make sense or even exist outside a whole range of mechanisms of “production, extraction, circulation, and consumption” (to borrow Rosenberg’s words). To call upon it in such terms “runs the risk of blurring the many mediations of labor, spatial unevenness, and geopolitical contingencies that define” its “production” in the first place. To put it another way: the idea of the "raw material" does not presuppose an unthinking response to matter which we might overturn with more cerebral responses. The invention of the idea of the raw material required scientific,

imaginative, and economic technologies on a vast scale. Nor was "raw materiality" an inevitable configuration of materiality - it could only be produced via repression, suppression, and violence, and through a range of aesthetics and optics: spectacle, excitement, power, narrative potential. And as such, there are other stories about the stuff of the earth that we might tell. These other stories were being told before and were constructed in protest as the ideology of raw materiality took hold so strongly as to make extractivism, environmental destruction, and social and racial injustice appear as unavoidable collateral in the production of both prosperity and modernity. As many critics are already arguing, learning to leave fossil fuels in the ground, to respect animal sentience, and to find new ways of valuing the earth and its species requires acknowledging more loudly those already-existing narratives that do not presume that all matter has meaning only for its potential to be transformed into capital. It requires listening again to alternative stories of matter - to indigenous knowledge practices and alternative material traditions, to ecological interconnections and emotional or symbolic attachments to matter - which the market did *not* absorb into its structures or which it repressed, deliberately obfuscated, or attempted to destroy. It means paying attention to the representations of matter that escape Tsing's "salvage accumulation" (even if the matter itself does not). I do not make any claim to having dismantled those old narratives here in any way. Nonetheless, I hope that this case study on the stories that were told and have been told about nuggets and ores of gold demonstrates that, by unraveling these narratives as they took shape in the nineteenth century, we might better be able to re-envision their capabilities in new, less violent ways, in the twenty-first.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Christopher Tilley, "Introduction," in *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage, 2006), p. 4. The recently-published *Victorian Material Culture* series (ed. by Victoria Mills and Tatiana

Kontou (London: Routledge, 2022)), of which my volume on *Raw Materials* is a part, has five other volumes on “science and medicine”, “inventions and technology”, “manufactured things”, “fashionable things” and “Victorian arts”, to take just one recent configuration.

² Anna Tsing, “Salvage Accumulation,” *Fieldsights* (2015), Salvage Accumulation, or the Structural Effects of Capitalist Generativity | Society for Cultural Anthropology <<date accessed 11 September 2022>>.

³ Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 32.

⁴ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), vii.

⁵ Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand*, 3rd ed. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876), 2: 24-25.

⁶ David Hume, “Of Interest,” in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (London: Caddell, 1793), 1: 294. For a useful and succinct introduction to these issues see Nicholas Shrimpton, ““Even these Metallic Problems have their Melodramatic Side”” in *Victorian Literature and Finance*, ed. Frances O’Gorman (Oxford University Press, 2007), 17-38. See also Christopher Herbert, “Filthy Lucre,” *Victorian Studies* 44 no. 2 (2002): 185-213.

⁷ Timothy Alborn, *All that Glittered: Britain’s Most Precious Metal from Adam Smith to the Gold Rush* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 4.

⁸ Robert Hogarth Patterson, *The Economy of Capital: Or, Gold and Trade* (Blackwood: Edinburgh, 1855), 4, 22.

⁹ Alborn, *All That Glittered*, 4.

¹⁰ Ralph J. Roske, “The World Impact of the California Gold Rush 1849-1857,” *Arizona and the West* 5. no. 3 (1963): 196.

- ¹¹ See Philip Steer, “Gold and Greater Britain: Jevons, Trollope, and Settler Colonialism”, *Victorian Studies* 58, no. 3 (2016): 436-63.
- ¹² Steer, “Gold and Greater Britain,” 438.
- ¹³ See Robert A. Stafford, *Scientist of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 36-38.
- ¹⁴ Stafford, *Scientist of Empire*: 35.
- ¹⁵ Stafford, *Scientist of Empire*, 38.
- ¹⁶ Roderick Murchison, *Siluria: A History of the Oldest Fossiliferous Rocks and Their Foundations; with a Brief Sketch of the Distribution of Gold over the Earth* (London: Murray, 1859), 498.
- ¹⁷ See Stafford, *Scientist of Empire*, 35-40.
- ¹⁸ As cited in Stafford, 38-39.
- ¹⁹ As cited in W.F. Monypenny and G.E. Buckle, *Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, 6 vols (London: Murray, 1914), 3: 385.
- ²⁰ Murchison et al, “Address to the Royal Geographical Society of London,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 23 (1853), lxii-cxxxviii: cxxvii.
- ²¹ Murchison, *Siluria*, 499.
- ²² Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 3.
- ²³ Adelene Buckland, “Raw Materials,” in *Victorian Material Culture* ed. by Adelene Buckland (London: Routledge, 2022), 4. In many ways this article ought to be read alongside the deeper theorisation of the “raw material” found in that work.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, xiii.

- ²⁵ Tiffany Lethabo King, "The Labor of (re)reading Plantation Landscapes Fungible(ly)," *Antipode* 48 no. 4 (2016): 1028; Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," *Diacritics* 17 no. 2 (1987): 75.
- ²⁶ Kim Scott, *Benang* (Fremantle Press, 1999), 149. All further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- ²⁷ For a useful reading of this see Colette Selles, "Benang by Kim Scott: From Divergence to Convergence," *French Journal of English Studies* 21 (2007): 147-57.
- ²⁸ Anon., "Some Monster Nuggets," *Chambers's Journal* 5 no. 252 (1888): 524-526; Anon., "A Monster Nugget," *The London Journal* 30 no. 768 (1859): 253.
- ²⁹ See William Byrkmire's catalog in Robert Brough Smyth, *The Gold Fields and Mineral Districts of Victoria* (Melbourne: Ferres; London: Trübner, 1869), 361-71.
- ³⁰ "Some Monster Nuggets," 524.
- ³¹ Roderick Murchison, *Siluria* (London: Murray, 1854), 443, 444. Robert Hunt, *Descriptive Guide to the Museum of Practical Geology* (London, 1857), 88.
- ³² [Anon.], "Crystal Palace," *The Times*, 3 May 1858, 9.
- ³³ [Anon.], "Presentation of Nuggets to the Queen and *Punch*," *Punch*, 12 February 1853, 70.
- ³⁴ Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide* (Yale University Press, 2016).
- ³⁵ See Kenneth S. Coates, *Best Left as Indians* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Kathryn T. Morse, *Nature of Gold* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 154-65.
- ³⁶ See Anne Chapman, *European Encounters with the Yamana People of Cape Horn* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³⁷ For a brilliant series of essays on these subjects see *A Global History of Gold Rushes*, ed. by Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell (University of California Press, 2018).

³⁸ Herbert Preskin, “Lumps of Luck”, *Chambers’s Journal* 2 no. 60 (1899), 126. There is obvious confusion of Native American and Aboriginal Australian tools and weapons here.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ G.C.J., “The True Story of the Finding of the Kerr Nugget,” *The Molong Argus*, 7 December 1906: 2.

⁴¹ Fred Cahir, *Black Gold* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2012), 5-7.

⁴² *ibid.*, 5-6.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 21-28.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵ Charles Reade, *It Is Never too Late to Mend* (London: Bentley, 1856), 3: 45. All further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁶ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction,” in *Social Life of Things* ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4.

⁴⁷ For a paradigmatic articulation of this see Ellen Clacy, *A Lady’s Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1853). On wife-desertion in the goldfields see Christina Twomey, “Without Natural Protectors: Responses to Wife Desertion in Gold-Rush Victoria,” *Australian Historical Studies* 27 no. 108 (1997): 22-46.

⁴⁸ Lisa Slater, “Kim Scott’s *Benang*: Monstrous (Textual) Bodies,” *Southerly: A Review of Australian Literature* 65 no. 1 (2005): 64.

⁴⁹ Spillers, 75.

⁵⁰ Jordana Rosenberg, “The Molecularization of Sexuality: On Some Primitivisms of the Present,” *Theory & Event* 17 no. 2 (2014).