

The warfront that Robinson finds in the Western District of the Port Phillip colony is already casual, domesticated.

The tracks of livestock are already visible trundling from Lake Bolac towards Portland.

In 1841 he describes the spot, later called Hexham, where my great-great-grandfather Herman Anders will farm some sixty years later.

There, Robinson watches a dog trying to catch an emu delighted to see the bird streak away not shot for sport. But in a shepherd's hut one evening he is shown a double-barreled rifle inlaid with a brass plaque 'from the settlers of Geelong' to a son who had 'beaten off the natives'.

Tunnaminwait has gone ahead of Robinson.

Robinson crosses the Hopkins River where Nan will later play; meets what he claims are the worst set of men in the colony working on one of the big estates.

When I read the names of these estates in his journal, I recognise the ones that proudly feature in the district's historical association and pioneer memorials. I re-read them – listen to the stories behind the names – and I see anti-monuments that spell out unlettered attacks, retaliations, graves. Spell undated wars 1830 to 1859.

Robinson describes the 'pulpy quality' of the marshes around the

volcanic stones – they allowed groups of Gunditjmara to run into the stones and escape pursuit during the Eumeralla Wars. He also notices a couple of shepherds guarding flocks, each with a double-barreled rifle. And he notes how a settler stockkeeper, stumbling into Robinson's accommodation, is bleeding from a gash on the back of the neck – by now a familiar injury that represents a reprisal for a settler attack.

When he and Tunnerminnerwait get to Portland on the southern coast, Robinson meets with Henty, the manager of the whaling station where the Convincing Ground massacre had allegedly taken place around 1834. Henty says the name comes from the spot where the whalers fought one another to settle their scores. But Henty has already shared with Robinson information about a massacre, showing a crack in his own denial. He offers to allow Robinson to hear the whalers' oaths. Robinson declines, saying he doesn't trust the whalers to speak the truth.

Speak the truth to whom? I wonder.

Robinson's journals are ignored by the state. They are bureaucratic busywork, proof of a job done.

And yet his journals contain scores of fragments, traces of truth to lob at the White walls of forgetting.

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Over a hundred and fifty years after Robinson's western travels, at Lake Corangamite Bruce Pascoe locates Colijon, Girrae Wurrung or Djargurd Wurrung fish traps and hut foundations inside an impoverished farmer's boundaries. While there, he also sees how the dry basalt walls of the Western District hark to traditional

huts, with 'the stones from destroyed houses...picked up and used to build' new ones by settlers.

The district's lakes are shallow pools set into clean black rings, the water sunk slightly under heavy grass banks. Birds are stuck all over their still surfaces like gravel. Ducks, cygnets, the sky is bulging with early morning cloud after an electrical storm from the coast. Beyond the lakes to the north, I'm looking at the jagged tips of Grampians/Gariwerd, hooked onto the horizon. As the sun climbs and light flushes through the lakelands, what could not be seen a few minutes ago is rising up from the edges and into view.

I buy thick-skinned lemons, borage, eggs and a stem of pigface from a cart beside someone's garden wall. The sky lifts and the pastures appear to stretch. This is where most of the state's butter, cream and cheese is homogenised, pasteurised, loaded onto Sungold and Western Star trucks.

Hayley Millar Baker's pictures of the Western District don't show the invasion of her Gunditjmarra ancestors; they show its textures. She is representing her Country as it was and is, at once.

A storm is moving high up, manifest in the swamps as a grey-orange tint, and on the horizon as a swinging, vertical blur of falling rain. Rolling up the coast, the stony rises ripple outward from the old volcanic cones, Tapoc, Mount Napier and Collorerr, Mount Rouse.

The broken base of Rouse is distractingly grand. Grass coverage slips away into some rich depths in the scoria. The peaks were renamed by Major Thomas Mitchell, when he surveyed the central and western grasslands for the first massive pastoral estates in the 1830s.

Millar Baker's work isn't landscape photography. The truth as settlers see it in the present, with the glancing eye, isn't true enough. With digital photomontage she enriches photographic evidence, adding details that have been erased.

Farmhouses are awkwardly built into the uneven hollows, and laval blisters pop through the soil. Everywhere the tumbling, pocked stones and tuff.

By disrupting a photograph's objectivity, Millar Baker can rebuild more accurate narratives. And it was an heirloom – a set of photo negatives from her grandmother – that started her interest in the medium. Her camera may be the coloniser's tool as well as being a matrilineal inheritance; she makes it see what it does because it's both. It's like what Michel Foucault says about the purpose of writing history: 'knowledge is not made for understanding; it's made for cutting'.