The Secret River

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KATE GRENVILLE

The Secret River is actually inspired by Kate Grenville's own convict ancestor, Solomon Wiseman. He was brought to Australia from England as punishment for theft and, like William Thornhill, never returned to England. Kate Grenville's father was a judge and a barrister in Sydney, while her mother was a pharmacist. After completing her BA at the University of Sydney, Grenville edited documentaries for Film Australia. In the late 1970s she lived in London and Paris. During this time, she did some film editing to support her writing career. After attending the University of Colorado at Boulder for a MA in Creative Writing, she returned to Sydney. Her first book, the short story collection *Bearded Ladies*, was published in 1984 and was received well by critics. She published her first novel, *Lilian's Story*, in 1985. *Lilian's Story* was adapted into a film ten years later, and the film version achieved similar critical success. Grenville teaches creative writing and was very involved in writing several of the reference texts commonly used in creative writing classes and workshops. She lives in Sydney with her husband.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Europeans first observed Australia and met with Aboriginal people in 1606. In 1770, the English Lieutenant James Cook charted the eastern coast of Australia and claimed it for King George III. This land became New South Wales and over the next 30 years, ships from England brought free settlers as well as convicts to settle it. Officially, New South Wales was a penal colony from 1778-1823, which meant that it was populated primarily by men like William Thornhill who were convicted of crimes in England and sent to Australia for the duration of their sentences. Initially, relations with the Aboriginal people were relatively positive and based on trade, though interactions soon soured as the new arrivals violently took over land and pushed the native people away from white settlements. Though Thornhill and his fictional companions in Australia suggest the mindset that the Aboriginal people don't actually have any claim to the land, that idea wasn't put into law until 1835. At that point, the governor of New South Wales issued a proclamation stating that prior to British colonization, the land belonged to nobody, which effectively denied Aboriginal people any legal claim to the land. This idea persisted in various laws until 1992 when Australia's High Court decided *Mabo v. Queensland*, which finally recognized "native title" (the notion that the native people have legal rights to the land). The character of William Thornhill is based loosely on the historical Solomon Wiseman, who settled Wiseman's Ferry on the Hawkesbury River in the early 19th century. Grenville has said that many of the events of the novel are based on actual accounts of events from the era, and the Governor's proclamation allowing settlers to use violence against the Aborigines is transcribed word for word from the original 1816 proclamation by Governor Macquarie.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Secret River is the first in a trilogy known as The Colonial Trilogy. The second book, *The Lieutenant* begins in 1788 and follows an English lieutenant who learns the Gadigal language from a young Aboriginal girl. Grenville has described the novel as a mirror image of *The Secret River*, as it shows that it is possible to bridge the language gap and form a respectful relationship between white settlers and natives. The third book, *Sarah Thornhill*, continues the story told in *The Secret River*: the titular character Sarah Thornhill is William Thornhill's youngest daughter, and the novel follows her as she learns about her family's dark past. Grenville also wrote a companion to *The Secret River* titled *Searching for the Secret River*, which details her research for the novel. *The Secret River* is often compared stylistically and thematically to Thomas Kelly's 1972 *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Based on true events of the early twentieth century, it follows an Aboriginal man who commits murder and goes into hiding. The nonfiction book *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding* by Robert Hughes is one of the best accounts of the colonization of Australia.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Secret River
- **When Written:** 2000-2005
- **Where Written:** New South Wales, Australia
- **When Published:** 2005
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** London, England and the penal colony of New South Wales, Australia; 1777 to the mid 1820s
- **Climax:** When Thornhill participates in the massacre of Aborigines at Thomas Blackwood's homestead
- **Antagonist:** Though the antagonist is primarily poverty and the English justice system, Thornhill himself, as well as his fellow settlers on the river, are an arguably larger threat to both the Aboriginal people and to their own sense of humanity.
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Drafts. *The Secret River* took five years and twenty drafts to write. The first handwritten draft of the novel was included in a 2010 exhibition at the Mitchell Library in New South Wales titled 100 Objects, which was part of the Mitchell Library's centenary celebration.

A River of Blood. The title for *The Secret River* is borrowed from the anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner. He wrote about a "secret river of blood flowing through Australia's history," which refers to the violent treatment of Aboriginal people by white colonizers.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins on a man named Thornhill's first night in New South Wales. He wakes up and steps outside his hut, where an Aborigine man confronts him. They yell at each other, and Thornhill goes back to bed scared. The novel then jumps back in time to Thornhill's birth in 1777 to a very poor family. In his childhood, Thornhill spends time with a girl named Sal and her family. Thornhill's parents die when he is 13, and the following year Mr. Middleton takes him on as an apprentice waterman. For the first time, Thornhill is warm and well-fed, but he loathes working for the gentry because they don't treat him like a person. Thornhill marries Sal the day he gets his freedom from his apprenticeship, and they have their first son, Willie, a year later. Two years after that, the Thames freezes and Mrs. Middleton falls on the ice, and both she and her husband die within a week of each other.

Thornhill's life begins to go downhill. He loses his boat and all his money, so he begins stealing. He takes a job working for Mr. Lucas and learns that Mr. Lucas will be transporting valuable Brazil wood. He makes a plan to steal the wood with the help of his brother, Rob. As Thornhill is stealing the wood, Mr. Lucas catches him. Thornhill is jailed, and Sal thinks up a brilliant story to prove his innocence, but at his trial, he forgets his story and the judge sentences him to hang. Sal insists that Thornhill pay someone to write a letter. The letter is successful: a Lord Hawkesbury pardons Thornhill and instead sends him to the penal colony of New South Wales for the remainder of his natural life. Sal and Willie go with him.

Sal has her second child, Dick, in Cape Town on the way to New South Wales. When they arrive, officials assign Thornhill to her to work as a convict servant (in this system, convicts were assigned either to private masters or to the chain gangs to work for the duration of their sentences). Thornhill thinks the land is strange and uninviting, but soon finds work in Sydney Cove. He works primarily for a man named Mr. King, who has Thornhill smuggle liquor around the customs office. Sal is slow to adjust to their new home, but opens a very successful rum bar. She occasionally feeds an Aborigine man called Scabby Bill who hangs about the settlement. Thornhill runs into several people he knows working in the cove, including Thomas Blackwood. Blackwood is doing well for himself: he received a full pardon and works up and down the Hawkesbury River 50 miles outside of Sydney, where he owns 100 acres of land. After a year, Thornhill applies for his ticket of leave, which makes him a truly free man.

Sal has a third baby, Bub, who's sickly. Thornhill begins working with Thomas Blackwood. On his first trip up the Hawkesbury River, Thornhill is scared of the rough water and the harsh landscape, and Blackwood explains that the natives are everywhere, watching them. They meet a dog breeder named Smasher Sullivan, who rows out to them and shows them a pair of black hands that have been cut off an Aborigine man. Thornhill looks through Blackwood's telescope to see the flayed man strung up in a tree. Blackwood is angry and tells Thornhill that out here, it's “give a little, take a little” with the natives. Several months later, Thornhill tells Sal that he wants to live on the river. Sal refuses, but Thornhill doesn't stop thinking about it.

Blackwood retires the following year but gets Thornhill his pardon before he does. Sal and Thornhill borrow money from Mr. King to buy Blackwood's boat. Thornhill renames the boat the *Hope* and takes over trading along the Hawkesbury. Willie begins accompanying him, and Sal has her fourth baby, Johnny. Thornhill finally convinces Sal to move to the Hawkesbury River after she has her fifth baby, Mary.

The Thornhills leave Sydney for the Hawkesbury River in 1813. Thornhill brings a **gun** with him. He hopes it'll keep him safe, but he has his doubts. They sleep in a rough tent the first night. The next morning, Thornhill, Willie, and Dick find a flat area to plant corn. Willie and Dick insist that someone has already planted something there, but Thornhill dismisses this. They clear a patch, and while the boys run to fetch the corn for planting, two Aborigine men appear in front of Thornhill. Thornhill is scared but speaks to the men like he remembers being spoken to by gentry. The men try to talk to Thornhill, but Thornhill feels dumb not being able to understand them. When Willie and Dick return, the older of the two men tries to steal a spade. Thornhill hits the old man and shouts at him. The man finally drops the spade and they disappear into the forest.

Sal keeps a tally of the weeks on a tree, and Thornhill knows that she is scared and feels like a prisoner. After a few weeks, Thornhill climbs the ridge on the edge of his property. On one rock he finds carvings of a fish and of his ship, and he realizes the natives are everywhere and are always watching. He doesn't tell Sal. Smasher comes to visit with housewarming gifts, and when the children leave he begins to tell tales about the vicious savages and how he deals with them. Later, Sal makes Thornhill promise to not be as violent as Smasher. Thornhill makes friends on the river who come to drink at the

Thornhills' hut. Sagitty is violent like Smasher, while Mrs. Herring insists that it's not worth fighting the natives. Blackwood tells Thornhill that the daisies he pulled up when he planted his corn patch won't grow back, and the natives will go hungry.

After about a month, Thornhill receives word that he's being granted convict servants. When he goes to pick them up, he chooses a man named Ned and another who turns out to be a childhood friend, Dan Oldfield. Thornhill and Sal insist that their servants call them Mr. and Mrs. Thornhill. The next day, as Dan and Ned work, Dan pleads for a break. Thornhill refuses and wanders in the shade with a flywhisk. As summer starts, Sal develops mastitis and nearly dies. When she finally recovers, she makes sure that Thornhill continued to keep her tally of days while she was ill.

Thornhill returns home one day to find Willie yelling that the natives have arrived. Thornhill decides to go to the natives' camp and talk to them. An older woman tries to talk to him, but Thornhill can barely look at her due to his embarrassment at her nakedness. When the men appear and try to speak, Thornhill cuts them off and insists that the land is his now, and they can have the rest of the country. One of the men tries to explain that Thornhill destroyed their crop of daisies, but Thornhill won't listen. Several weeks later, Thornhill and Sal begin giving the natives names: the old man is Whisker Harry, while two of the younger men are Long Bob and Black Dick. Sal trades with the native women for bowls and digging sticks, and Thornhill begins to see the natives as peaceful. The Aboriginal camp doesn't disperse and eventually Sal asks Thornhill to speak to Blackwood about it. When he arrives at Blackwood's camp, Blackwood reminds Thornhill of his idea of "take a little, give a little." Suddenly, Thornhill sees a black woman emerge from the trees with a blond child. Blackwood speaks to the woman in her own language and swears Thornhill to secrecy.

Dick begins disappearing in the afternoons. Thornhill knows that Dick is playing with the native children and doesn't tell Sal, but Bub tattles on his brother. When Thornhill goes to the camp to fetch Dick, Long Bob is showing the children how to make fire. Thornhill watches with the children as Long Bob successfully starts a fire without flint. The two men introduce themselves, but Thornhill can't understand Long Bob's name, and renames him Long Jack. When Sal later tries to tell Dick he can't play with the natives, Dick sulks and Thornhill beats him. Thornhill catches Dick trying to make fire the next day and helps him. When they're unsuccessful, Thornhill gives Dick permission to ask Long Jack to show him again.

As the weeks go on, more natives arrive. One night, the Thornhills hear the natives singing, and Thornhill goes to look at the camp. As he watches Whisker Harry dance, he realizes that Harry is an important figure among the natives. When he returns to the hut, Sal, Dan, and Ned are still afraid that the natives are going to kill them, so Thornhill shoots the gun into the sky to "send a message." Thornhill decides to buy dogs from Smasher. When he goes to pick them out, Smasher shows him a black woman he's keeping as a sex slave. Thornhill thinks about having sex with her and feels evil for thinking it. He refuses to go through with buying the dogs. One night, Thornhill comes home to find his hut filled with people. Smasher tells Thornhill that a man named Spider moved to the town of Windsor after the natives stole everything. When the natives continue to steal from others, Captain McCallum arrives with a plan to deal with the natives. McCallum's plan to trap the natives at Darkey Creek and kill them fails miserably, and the Governor gives the settlers on the river permission to shoot the natives. Sagitty suggests poisoning them one night, and when Smasher pulls out a pair of ears he cut off an Aborigine man, Blackwood attacks Smasher. After this, Sal wants to return to London.

A week later, Thornhill passes Darkey Creek. There, he finds a camp of Aborigines dead from poison. The next morning, natives steal Thornhill's corn. He fights them and shoots into the forest after them. He wakes up the next day to find his corn patch has been burnt to the ground. Sal walks over the ridge to the native's camp for the first time and tells Thornhill that she's leaving. They hear that Sagitty's place is on fire, and Thornhill goes to help. He finds Sagitty has been impaled by a spear. After taking him to the hospital in Windsor, the Hawkesbury group drinks at Spider's new bar. Smasher riles the group up and they decide to ambush the natives at Blackwood's place. Thornhill agrees, since he knows Sal will stay if the natives are gone. At dawn, Thornhill and the group crawl onto land and begin shooting women and children in their huts. Thornhill doesn't shoot. He watches Whisker Harry spear Smasher, and shoots Harry in the belly. Smasher dies.

Over the next ten years, Thornhill flourishes: he buys Sagitty's place and another 100 acres and builds a stone villa which Sal calls **Cobham Hall** where the Thornhills live in luxury. Sal tries to plant an English garden, but nothing will grow in the Australian soil. Dick goes to live with Blackwood and won't speak to his father. Long Jack lives on the property but won't accept food or clothing from the Thornhills. Mr. Thornhill tries to touch Jack one day, and Jack says in English that the land is his. Thornhill spends his evenings sitting on the veranda, watching the cliffs and the river. He thinks the cliffs look like a stage, and that watching them for signs of the natives is his punishment for what he did.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

William Thornhill – Thornhill is born in 1777 into a large, impoverished family. As a boy he steals in order to eat, but Mr. Middleton saves him by taking him on as an apprentice to become a waterman on the Thames. Thornhill loves the river,

though he hates working for the gentry. He loves Mr. Middleton's daughter, Sal, because he doesn't have to be tough around her. They marry the day Thornhill gets his freedom, and they have six children over the course of their marriage. When the Thames freezes one winter, Thornhill's life takes a turn for the worse: he and Sal lose all their money, their boat, and the home they rent. Thornhill begins stealing in earnest and is caught when he tries to steal valuable Brazil wood from Mr. Lucas, a very powerful man. Thornhill is convicted, but Lord Hawkesbury arranges for him to be sent to New South Wales with Sal and Willie instead of being hanged. Although Thornhill initially finds New South Wales foreign and unwelcoming, he comes to appreciate it and find it beautiful. He falls in love with land on the Hawkesbury River when he begins working on the river with Thomas Blackwood. After five years in New South Wales, Thornhill receives a full pardon and convinces Sal to move the family to the Hawkesbury to settle. There, Thornhill comes into contact with the Aborigines. Although he fears them and thinks that they're uncivilized, he comes to realize that they live fulfilling, idyllic lives that strangely resemble the lives of the gentry in England. Thornhill trades successfully with them, which earns him the scorn of his more violently inclined neighbors like Smasher, who view the natives as a threat. Thornhill purchases a **gun**, thinking it will keep him safe, but the gun never makes him feel safe, and he's a poor shot. Thornhill is roped into participating in the massacre at Blackwood's place after Sal threatens to leave: he loves his land too much and knows the only way to keep Sal and his land is to get rid of the natives. He's fundamentally changed after the massacre. The book ends with Thornhill on the balcony of his massive stone villa, searching for Aborigines in the landscape with his telescope, haunted by his inability to understand or make peace with them.

Sal Thornhill – Sal is Thornhill's wife. They meet as children through Thornhill's sister Lizzie. Sal's parents spoil her because she's an only child, though she's haunted by her brothers and sisters that died not long after their birth. She marries Thornhill the day he becomes a freeman, and the two have six children together over the course of their marriage. When Thornhill's luck begins to take a turn for the worse, Sal sets out to make the best of it: she begins stealing and finds her family cheaper and cheaper places to live. She constructs Thornhill's story of innocence for his trial, and accompanies him when he's sent to New South Wales as part of his sentence. Sal desperately wants to go home to London and keeps a roof tile from London to remind her of home. She sings songs and tells stories to her children about London, and Thornhill realizes that she does so to prepare them for their return to London. In New South Wales, Sal and Thornhill begin keeping secrets from each other. Thornhill doesn't want to tell Sal that they'll never go home and doesn't tell her the truth about the Aborigines that live over the hill on the Hawkesbury River. On the Hawkesbury, Sal develops good relationships with the native women and trades with them for bowls and digging sticks. She doesn't like how Smasher talks about teaching the natives "lessons" using **guns** and whips. She makes Thornhill promise to not behave violently. When she finally finds out about the natives' camp over the ridge, she insists that the family leave the Hawkesbury at once. Hoping to convince Sal to stay, Thornhill attempts to get rid of the natives by participating in a brutal attack on them, though he never tells Sal what happened. She names their stone villa **Cobham Hall** after a place her mother worked, and tries to make it as English as possible in appearance. Although she never stops talking about London as home, she does come to realize that for her children's sake, home is in New South Wales.

Smasher – Smasher is one of the first men that Thornhill meets on the Hawkesbury River. He's a small, mean man who burns oysters to make lime and breeds dogs that he trains to attack only Aborigines. He views the natives as little more than animals to be exterminated, and hunts them for sport. He often takes body parts from the native people he kills and carries them around as trophies. Smasher despises Thornhill and Blackwood for attempting to coexist peacefully with the natives. He keeps a black woman chained up as a sex slave, and offers to let other men on the river use her as well. He loves telling stories of the trouble natives cause for white settlers, though he embellishes the stories to make them even more gruesome. Smasher is responsible for rallying the men to go to Blackwood's place and massacre a group of natives. In that battle, Whisker Harry spears Smasher, and Smasher dies as a result.

Thomas Blackwood – When Thornhill first meets Thomas Blackwood in London, he owns a lighter called the *River Queen*, which has a false bottom for stealing cargo. Thornhill runs into him later in New South Wales, where Blackwood is not only making his fortune honestly, he has also received a full pardon and owns land on the Hawkesbury River where he makes rum. Blackwood is a quiet and private man who speaks in riddles when he speaks at all. He tells Thornhill that when dealing with the Aborigines, he has to remember that nothing is free: if a person takes something, they must be willing to give a little in return. Thornhill learns the extent of this when he goes to speak to Blackwood about the natives living on his own property and discovers that Blackwood lives on the very edge of his lagoon and doesn't venture into the forest because the natives told him to stay by the river. Thornhill also learns that Blackwood has an Aboriginal lover and the two have a child, and that Blackwood has learned the native language to communicate with them. Blackwood despises men like Smasher and Sagitty, who deal violently and cruelly with the natives. He avoids them whenever possible and eventually attacks Smasher for speaking violently about the natives. After the massacre, Thornhill's second oldest son, Dick, goes to live with Blackwood and ferry rum up the river for him. Thornhill visits him

occasionally after the massacre, but never sees the woman or Blackwood's child again.

Willie – Willie is Thornhill and Sal's first baby. He's born in London about a year after they marry. After being relocated with his parents to New South Wales, Willie adjusts to his new life quickly, although he is the only Thornhill child to remember London. He begins working with Thornhill on the *Hope* when he's 11 and is a natural waterman. After the Thornhills move to the Hawkesbury, Willie begins to show that he listens to Smasher when Smasher calls: he often tells Thornhill to "show the natives the **gun**," and seems more prone to violence than peaceful coexistence.

Dick – Dick is Thornhill and Sal's second child, born at Cape Town during their voyage to New South Wales. As a boy he's dreamy and solemn, and Thornhill doesn't recognize himself at all in Dick. After the family moves to Thornhill Point, Dick regularly disappears to spend time playing with the native children. He learns to throw a spear and make fire, though Thornhill and Sal try to forbid him from wandering off after Bub tattles on him. After Thornhill participates in the massacre and begins constructing **Cobham Hall**, Dick stops speaking to his father and moves down the river to live with Thomas Blackwood. Thornhill realizes he's lost his son when he hears people speak about Dick as though he's Blackwood's son.

Sagitty – Sagitty is one of Thornhill's neighbors on the Hawkesbury River. He's great friends with Smasher and is similarly cruel to the Aborigines that live along the river, which he justifies because the natives steal from him regularly. Smasher tells Thornhill that Sagitty joined him in raping the Aborigine woman that Smasher keeps chained in a hut. Sagitty is also responsible for poisoning the natives with rat poison at Darkey Creek. On the day that Sal gives Thornhill an ultimatum about staying on the river, the natives burn Sagitty's hut and spear him in the stomach. Although Thornhill is able to get him to the hospital at Windsor, Sagitty dies.

Whisker Harry – Whisker Harry is the name Sal and Thornhill give to the old Aboriginal man who lives on and around Thornhill Point. When they first meet, Thornhill slaps Harry on the chest and tells him "no," like a child. Later, when Thornhill watches Harry dancing in the native camp one night, he realizes that Harry is an important figure in his community, worthy of respect, and that slapping him like he did was foolish and disrespectful. At the massacre at Blackwood's place, Thornhill shoots Whisker Harry, killing him.

Long Bob (or Long Jack) – Long Bob is one of the younger Aboriginal men living around Thornhill Point. When Thornhill comes upon him teaching children, including Dick, how to make fire, the men introduce themselves to each other. Thornhill can't understand more than the first sound of the man's name and begins calling him Long Jack, having originally called him Long Bob. At the end of the novel, Long Jack is the only Aborigine known to be living on the Hawkesbury River. He suffered major injuries during the massacre at Blackwood's, and limps to this day as a result. He refuses Mr. Thornhill's offers of clothing, food, and shelter. When Mr. Thornhill becomes frustrated at this, Long Jack tells Thornhill in English that the land belongs to him, not Thornhill.

Spider – Spider is another of Thornhill's neighbors on the Hawkesbury River. He's an unlucky man—seemingly always the first on the river to be stolen from or have a crop washed away. He calls his piece of land "Never Fail," which Thornhill finds ironic. After the natives steal his corn crop and all his belongings, he moves to the town of Windsor on the mouth of the Hawkesbury River and opens a rum bar. He's an instrumental figure in organizing the massacre at Blackwood's.

Mrs. Herring – Mrs. Herring lives alone on the Hawkesbury River with only a few chickens. She smokes a pipe and is the closest thing to a doctor on the river. Though the natives steal from her, she turns a blind eye. She insists that she has enough and doesn't need to make a show of asserting her dominance.

Dan Oldfield – As a child in London, Dan plays with Thornhill and is a famous chestnut thief. As an adult he's sent to New South Wales several years after Thornhill, and Thornhill ends up taking him on as a convict servant. At that point, Thornhill insists that Dan call him Mr. Thornhill instead of William to assert his dominance. On the Hawkesbury, Dan shows that he's cruel and fearful of the natives. He pushes Thornhill to participate in the massacre and encourages Thornhill to torture the natives like Sagitty and Smasher do.

Rob – Rob is one of Thornhill's older brothers. He developed a fever as a child, and after that loses some of his hearing. Although he's described as "simple," he's exceptionally kind and hardworking. Thornhill loves his brother and employs him when he's an adult. When Thornhill is caught stealing the Brazil wood with Rob, Rob falls overboard and drowns in the Thames.

Loveday Loveday is one of Thornhill's neighbors on the Hawkesbury. Like Smasher, Spider, and Sagitty, Loveday despises the natives. Claiming he was once speared in the hip by a native, Loveday spreads exaggerated stories of the natives' violence and engages in cruel acts of retaliation against them. When Smasher brings a native's head to Thornhill's one night, Loveday suggests they pickle it.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Ned – Ned is one of Thornhill's convict servants. He offers no last name and reminds Thornhill of Rob. Though he's not particularly skilled or useful in working Thornhill's land, he's surprisingly adept with **guns**. He's fearful of the Aborigines and suggests using violence against them.

Scabby Bill – Scabby Bill is an Aborigine who hangs around the settlement at Sydney. The Thornhills give him bread and rum when he sleeps outside their hut, and occasionally, he dances

for patrons at Sal's rum bar in exchange for rum.

Mr. King – Mr. King employs Thornhill in Sydney, and later lends him money to purchase the *Hope*.

James (Bub) – John is Thornhill and Sal's third baby, and their first to be born in Australia. He's a sickly child and Thornhill believes he'll die, but he survives nonetheless.

Johnny – Johnny is Thornhill and Sal's fourth child. He's a sturdy, happy boy and loves to tinker with things.

Baby Mary – Mary is Thornhill and Sal's fifth child.

Dolly – Dolly is Thornhill and Sal's last child.

Black Dick – Black Dick is what Sal and Thornhill call one of the younger Aboriginal men who lives near them.

Polly – Sal dubs one of the native women she sees often "Polly."

Captain McCallum – Captain McCallum is sent by the Governor in Sydney to deal with the natives on the Hawkesbury River. He's a pompous man and believes the British army can surely deal with the natives, though his plan backfires and he leaves with his military in poor shape.

Lord Hawkesbury – Lord Hawkesbury is the man with the power to save condemned men from hanging in London. He instead sends them to New South Wales for the term of their natural life. In New South Wales, the Hawkesbury River is named after him.

Devine – Devine is an Irishman who builds Mr. Thornhill's villa on the Hawkesbury River.

Lovegood – Lovegood is one of Thornhill's neighbors on the Hawkesbury. He was a higher-class man in London, so he knows how to read and uses more sophisticated English.

Collarbone – Collarbone is one of Thornhill's childhood friends. Half his face is bright red and he loves Thornhill's sister, Lizzie. He's hanged after being caught with stolen Spanish brandy, leaving a strong impression on young Thornhill.

Mr. Lucas –Mr. Lucas is a fat ship owner who is rumored to want to be Lord Mayor of London. He employs Yates as a foreman to hire lightermen and doesn't tolerate thievery from his employees.

Yates – Yates is Mr. Lucas's foreman. He's a fair man and tries to allow Thornhill to escape when he's caught stealing from Mr. Lucas.

Mr. Knapp – Mr. Knapp is the lawyer assigned to Thornhill during his trial for stealing Brazil wood.

Captain Watson – Captain Watson is one of Thornhill's regular customers on the Thames. He writes a letter to help Thornhill after he receives his death sentence.

Mr. Middleton – Mr. Middleton is Sal's father. He's a successful waterman who takes Thornhill on as an apprentice. He's kind and generous to Sal, though also sad and stern after many of his babies die within their first month of life. He dies of a fever, leaving his business to Thornhill.

Mrs. Middleton –Mrs. Middleton is Sal's mother. She dies after breaking her hip and seems to refuse to heal.

Mary Thornhill – Mary is Thornhill's oldest sister. She's sharp and torments her younger siblings.

Lizzie – Lizzie is Thornhill's older sister. She's not old enough to work and is put in charge of caring for Ma's babies instead. She's kind and Thornhill considers her more motherly than Ma.

Ma – Ma is Thornhill's mother. She sews shrouds with Mary to support her family and dies when Thornhill is very young.

Pa William's father. He dies when William is a young teenager, leaving him an orphan and the family without a head.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SOCIAL ORDER, HIERARCHY, AND CLASS

When Thornhill is born in London in 1777, he's born into dire poverty with seemingly no hope or fighting chance of getting ahead. At the end of the novel, however, Thornhill is a member of Australia's early land-owning class: he lives in a large stone villa, can buy Sal whatever she fancies, and even makes sure his children learn to ride horses in the style of the gentry. Thornhill's upward journey situates the relationship between a person's economic standing and their quality of life front and center, and explores the ways in which a person can rise through society's ranks, as well as the ways they can't.

Throughout the novel, Thornhill is concerned with the hierarchy he perceives among people of different class backgrounds, and frequently questions his own place in that social hierarchy. Thornhill defines success in terms of ownership. As a child he believes Sal's father, Mr. Middleton, is the pinnacle of success. Mr. Middleton is a successful waterman who has two boats, takes on apprentices, and can afford to not just feed but spoil his daughter, Sal. In Thornhill's mind, the crown jewel of Mr. Middleton's success is his home—a cozy, charming house on Swan Lane that Thornhill believes Mr. Middleton owns. While in Mr. Middleton's service as an apprentice, Thornhill is warm and well fed for the first time in his life. Mr. Middleton shows him that it's possible for a boy like Thornhill, born into poverty, to become relatively successful if he's an honest and hard worker. When disaster strikes and Thornhill watches the Middletons die and lose everything, being plunged back into poverty isn't the worst part

for him. For Thornhill, the most painful part of it all is learning the truth that Mr. Middleton wasn't as prosperous as he seemed—he didn't even own his home on Swan Lane. This realization, coupled with the loss of the boat that Mr. Middleton gave him as a wedding gift, shows that he places a great deal of emphasis on ownership. For him, owning a home or a boat is the ultimate symbol of status, power, and success. When he owns nothing and must resort to theft to survive, Thornhill is at his lowest point.

Thornhill arrives in New South Wales as the lowest of the low in the social hierarchy: he's a convict, sentenced to work as a servant for the term of his natural life. However, New South Wales offers Thornhill unique opportunities to improve his standing in the class system because it is a new English colony and is therefore still developing its own social structure. Thornhill only spends four years and five months as a convict and a man who isn't truly free, after which point he's able to join the Australian middle class and take land for himself. He then begins to assert his dominance over others, as he remembers the English gentry doing with him. He does this first with his own convict servants, Ned and Dan. When he picks them up in Sydney, he takes pleasure in bullying them and making Dan, a childhood friend, call him Mr. Thornhill. Within days, he learns that it's extremely easy to dehumanize people of a lower social standing than himself. These lessons carry over into the ways that Thornhill interacts with the Aborigines that live near Thornhill's Point. The Aborigines provide Thornhill a way to examine the English class system by allowing him a glimpse into a social structure very different from his own. After watching them for a few weeks, Thornhill comes to understand that the Aborigines don't have a class system like the English do. Instead, he notes that they all live like gentry. Their society doesn't require an oppressed lower class to function. However, these realizations aren't enough to keep Thornhill from bullying and dehumanizing the Aborigines just as he dehumanizes Ned and Dan: although he recognizes that their culture might even do some things better than his own, he thinks of them mostly as uncivilized and child-like people who will be eaten up and destroyed by the spread of English settlers on their native lands. Thornhill's mindset that the Aborigines are truly inferior allows him to rationalize his participation in the massacre that kills most of the natives living on Blackwood's property. The draw of moving up in the world is intoxicating enough for Thornhill to make even horrific violence against "lesser" people seem justified.

The novel offers Thomas Blackwood and Thornhill's son Dick as characters who see an alternative to the narrative Thornhill chooses. Thomas Blackwood lives where the natives told him to live—on the banks of the river, not in the forest—and even learns their language. He coexists peacefully with them and even has an Aborigine lover and a child with her. Thornhill's one meeting with this woman shows that Blackwood treats her truly as an equal and, in doing so, puts himself at risk of violence and ridicule from other settlers if they find out the truth of his situation. By living the way he does, Blackwood rejects the transposed English class system that puts Aborigines at the very bottom in favor of considering them to be people like anyone else. When Dick runs away to live with Blackwood, he similarly rejects the violent English class system, and more specifically the deadly violence that the system calls for. By refusing to engage with his father after that, he also rejects those individuals who carried out the violence in order to preserve the class system and their place in it.

This all suggests that although Thornhill recognizes both the beauty of the Aboriginal social structure and the violence of his own, he feels unable to escape the violence of the English class system by choosing to live more like Blackwood. Although Thornhill recognizes that Blackwood's relationship with the Aborigines is peaceful and respectful, choosing to have that kind of a relationship with the natives means outright rejecting the English definition of success. Of even more importance for Thornhill, doing so would mean compromising his desire to own land—which would amount to a rejection of the English class system as well as his own beliefs about what success means to him. Importantly, however, the novel ends with Thornhill fundamentally regretting his participation in the massacre, even though it allowed him to remain on Thornhill's Point and amass a large fortune. This shows that the system that promised Thornhill freedom and success ultimately does not lead him to happiness because it depends on the systematic and violent oppression of other people, and thus by participating in that system Thornhill deprives himself of his own sense of humanity.

COLONIALISM AND VIOLENCE

The Secret River takes place during the British settlement of Australia. From 1778-1823, New South Wales was a penal colony of England, which meant that England primarily sent convicts like William Thornhill to settle its new colony. In the new colony, white settlers came into contact with the Aborigines, the native people of Australia. For Thornhill and his companions on the Hawkesbury River especially, the Aborigines present a number of problems to their efforts to settle the region. Although characters like Thornhill and Thomas Blackwood suspect that the Aborigines are peaceful people and just want to be left alone, others like Smasher Sullivan believe that the natives should be exterminated. This conflict leads Thornhill to consider the consequences of British colonialism, and whether it's even possible to reconcile his own dreams of land ownership with the reality that the Aborigines are the original stewards of the land he now occupies.

Initially, the Aborigines strike fear in the hearts of the white settlers. Newspapers like the *Sydney Gazette* run stories

regularly detailing the "outrages and depredations" carried out by the natives against the settlers, and the spears used by the Aborigines are known to be lethal. This begins to suggest that though the Aborigines are capable of carrying out violence against the white settlers, fixating on this fact creates an environment of fear and paranoia. By circulating these stories, both in print and by word of mouth, the settlers craft a simplistic story of a violent, unpredictable people out to do nothing but harm. Alongside this culture of fear exists the belief (shared by many characters, including Thornhill) that the natives are childlike or primitive. Thornhill sees them as lazy and incapable of thinking ahead, as they don't plant gardens or raise animals for food. However, Thornhill eventually comes to understand that there's a degree of freedom in the way the natives conduct their lives that may even exceed the sense of freedom that he and his own family enjoy. Because a group of Aborigines has a camp just over Thornhill's ridge, he has the opportunity to observe them for a period of time at relatively close range. He comes to realize that although they live very differently than he does, in many ways they live like English gentry live: they spend some time each day on necessary tasks, but have much of their day to spend as they please. This realization represents a turning point for Thornhill, as it suggests that everything Thornhill has spent his life fighting for may not lead to happiness, after all—and may even be inferior to the natives' way of life.

Thornhill notices that there are two opposing schools of thought regarding what should be done with the natives. For individuals like Smasher, the natives exist to be hunted and killed like animals. For others, like Thomas Blackwood, the natives are to be treated with respect and kindness. For much of the novel, Thornhill finds himself sitting somewhere in the middle between Smasher and Blackwood in how he himself deals with the natives. Although he finds Smasher's penchant for violence against the Aborigines sickening, he also doesn't quite know how to have the kind of respectful relationship with them that Blackwood does. Further, Thornhill's fear for his family's wellbeing eventually draws him into Smasher's violence against the Aborigines, which suggests that the widespread fear of the natives is stronger than Thornhill's distaste for violence. The reasons for the massacre (i.e., the desire to attack the natives before the natives attack the settlers en masse) show that the violence towards the natives stems from a desire to maintain a sense of safety and control. This is, notably, something that's impossible to achieve with the constant stories of "outrages and depredations" and the settlers' generalized unwillingness to try to understand their native neighbors.

HOME AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

After Sal and Thornhill arrive in New South Wales, they talk often about going home to London. For them, even though they spend many years living in New South Wales, London is the place that's truly home for them. As the novel progresses, Thornhill finds that his conception of home changes, while Sal struggles to adjust to life in New South Wales and see it as home. This leads Thornhill to question what home actually means and what makes a place home, particularly as he goes on to observe how the Aborigines interact with the land that they call home.

It's important to note that for Thornhill, his conception of home is tied directly to ownership: as a young man, he feels like the house on Swan Lane is a true home until he realizes it's rented, and later, in New South Wales, he doesn't begin to feel fully at home until he claims Thornhill's Point. This shows that Thornhill believes home is defined by whether one owns the place they call home. For him, owning Thornhill's Point is as easy as planting a patch of corn and naming it after himself to claim the land as his own. Owning the place he calls home makes Thornhill feel like a king. Ownership then becomes a way for Thornhill to escape his past as a felon and live like a truly free man.

For Sal, however, the notion of home is far more complicated than simply living on land that her husband owns. Although the exact timeline is somewhat unclear, the final chapter of the novel suggests that Sal didn't begin considering New South Wales her home until she'd been there for nearly ten years. Up until that point, she refers to London as home and insists that the entire Thornhill family will return there someday. Sal fixates on the possibility of returning to London because it's the only place she truly knows. Unlike Thornhill, Sal had a relatively happy childhood with parents who loved her and could spoil her. At that time, London held everything she ever needed or wanted: food, love, and family. This shows that Sal doesn't define home as much by ownership, but thinks of it as the place where she and her family live and thrive. This is supported by the narrator's assertion that when Sal finally does begin to think of New South Wales as home, she does so for her children. All of her children grow up in Australia and for them, Australia is the only home they've ever known.

Although Sal finally accepts that New South Wales is home, she does everything in her power to create the sense that she's living in England: at **Cobham Hall**, she plants an English garden and Thornhill purchases poplars to line the road up to the villa. However, the fact that none of the plants imported from England thrive or even survive is testament to the fact that Australia is *not* England—and that England is no longer the Thornhills' home. Although it's an English colony, New South Wales cannot support a lifestyle that's an exact replica of life in England. The death of the plants also represents Sal's sense of rootlessness. Like the plants, she also struggles to put down roots and thrive in her new home, and indeed, never truly does.

While Thornhill sees home as something that a person owns, he

understands that the natives feel a deeper and perhaps more emotional sense attachment to the land that makes New South Wales home for them. Upon his arrival in the colony, Thornhill believes that the natives don't own the land, noting that the natives don't have houses, fences, or flocks that would indicate to any Englishman that they have a claim to the land. Thornhill doesn't seem to truly grasp the nature of the Aborigines' claim to the land until Long Jack speaks to him at the end of the novel. Jack's insistence that the land belongs to him, and his obvious affection for the very ground he sits on, makes Thornhill realize that it is Jack's emotional connection to the land, not the hut that Jack lives in, that makes the place home for him. Long Jack shows Thornhill that although Thornhill may have come to consider New South Wales home, he will never experience the sense of rootedness that Long Jack experiences. Thornhill's thoughts on his life at the end of the novel reinforce this idea. Although Cobham Hall was supposed to be the home of Thornhill's dreams, it's not quite right in many ways. Further, even though Thornhill is a member of Australia's gentry class by the end of the novel, he still feels like an outsider and as though he doesn't belong, both in the sense that he doesn't feel like a gentleman and in the sense that he feels a lingering sense of anxiety about living on land that was once inhabited by the Aborigines. This suggests that home isn't something that can be purchased, owned, or even built—rather, home is a sense of true belonging.

LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND STORYTELLING

Even though Thornhill is mostly illiterate, he's entranced at various points in his life by the power of stories and words. Since he himself can't read, the fact that much of the western world depends on written language to function is almost a fantastical thought for him. As Thornhill moves up in the social hierarchy in New South Wales, language becomes a way for him to signify his ascent: through his word choice, he can signal to others, like Ned and Dan, that his status must be respected. On the other hand, Thornhill also struggles to bridge the language gap between himself and the Darug-speaking Aborigines who live nearby, and secrets and lies begin to create an absence of language between Thornhill and Sal. Taken together, the novel sets out to explore the power of language: how stories can change reality, how language can signify status, and how a lack of understanding through language can have disastrous consequences.

The power and importance of language first hits Thornhill when he's on trial in London. He realizes that the entirety of court proceedings is nothing but words: his words, the words of the witnesses, and finally, the words of the judge. As Thornhill and Sal construct a story that they hope will prove Thornhill's innocence, Thornhill is forced to reckon with the power of storytelling. He knows that telling the right story has the power to save him, while the words of men more powerful than him have the power to sentence him to death. This introduces the idea to Thornhill that stories have the power to change a person's life. He sees this play out again and again throughout the novel, most notably in the lead-up to the massacre at Blackwood's place. Although Smasher didn't witness firsthand the horrific carnage that Thornhill did at Sagitty's place, Smasher takes it upon himself to turn Sagitty's death at the hands of the Aborigines into something infinitely crueler, more gruesome, and far more horrific. By changing the story to fit his own views on what should be done with the Aborigines, Smasher is able to pull others into his violence. As he listens to Smasher alter the story, Thornhill realizes that Smasher's new story will, without question, alter the lives of everyone around him, as well as the lives of the natives. Smasher's story condemns Thornhill to a life of guilt for participating in the massacre, just as his own words in the courtroom in London condemned him to live out the rest of his life in New South Wales.

Thornhill's experiences with literacy and language show that, by speaking a certain way or adopting a certain dialect, a man can move up in the world or, at the very least, act as though he belongs to a higher class. Both Thornhill and Sal adopt language they remember English gentry using to speak to them when Ned and Dan Oldfield arrive on the Hawkesbury. By speaking as though they're of a much higher social class than Ned and Dan, Thornhill and Sal can make it clear to their convict servants that even though all four of them come from similar backgrounds, the Thornhills are now more powerful. And yet, even as Thornhill's dialect begins to change with his success, language maintains its power to make him feel powerless and stupid. When Aborigine men like Whisker Harry try to speak to Thornhill he occasionally catches their meaning, but because he cannot make sense of any of the sounds he hears, he often feels dumb. The fact that Thornhill feels dumb and angry when he can't understand the Aborigines shows that he does recognize the importance of being able to communicate with his neighbors. However, despite this realization, Thornhill never considers trying to learn Darug, and is shocked when he discovers that Blackwood speaks it. Further, when Thornhill does speak to the Aborigines, he adopts an even more upper class and condescending style of speech. This does nothing to help him communicate, but does make him feel powerful and helps him to maintain his belief in his own superiority. This is indicative of Thornhill's belief in the colonial system that discredits and devalues individuals who don't speak English. This in turn leads to other forms of communication that cross language barriers, such as the more benign use of gestures and hand signals—though it also includes **guns** and violence, which need no vocal explanation to communicate meaning.

In addition to the novel's careful consideration of what happens when words are spoken, it also explores what happens in

silence. As the Thornhills move to New South Wales and begin experiencing life very differently from each other, Thornhill notices a silence growing between himself and Sal. Although Thornhill and Sal never stop loving each other, the silence between them—made up of lies, omissions, and unspoken dreams—robs them of the openness they experienced at the beginning of their marriage. The consequences of the silence between Thornhill and Sal, as well as the lack of understanding between Thornhill and his Aborigine neighbors, suggests that both silence and speech can be dangerous when they don't lead to truth and understanding.

JUSTICE AND CONSEQUENCES

The action of *The Secret River* hinges on the relationship between crime and punishment. As a child and a young man, Thornhill steals to try to escape his dire poverty, and is punished for doing so by being forcibly resettled in the penal colony of New South Wales. In New South Wales, Thornhill finds himself outside the English justice system and, along with his companions on the Hawkesbury River, is forced to decide for himself how justice should function outside of a structured system like the English court system. In this way, the novel considers the relative fairness of different systems of justice—both organized and personal—and their consequences, foreseen and unforeseen.

For the first half of the novel, Thornhill is at the mercy of the English justice system. He's whipped as a boy for stealing sugar, and learns how to steal small amounts of rum or sugar as a young man working on the Thames. Notably, Thornhill does this despite the very public consequences for stealing: death by hanging. Thornhill witnesses several hangings, most notably that of his childhood friend Collarbone. However, despite knowing exactly what the consequences are for theft, Thornhill continues to steal, until one day he is caught and experiences the consequences firsthand. This shows that until the consequences affect him directly, Thornhill functions as though he's outside of the law. This attitude leads Thornhill to steal the Brazil wood, which in turn is what brings about his resettlement in New South Wales.

When Thornhill arrives in New South Wales, he recognizes it for the prison it is. Although it doesn't have walls or official guards to keep the convicts in, it has thousands of miles of water to keep them in an inhospitable land for the term of their natural lives. This is an early suggestion that a prison doesn't have to be a prison in the conventional sense to make people feel like prisoners, something that Thornhill watches Sal realize after they relocate to the Hawkesbury River. There, Sal feels like a prisoner, even though she's there of her own free will. With this, the novel begins to suggest that people's personal conceptions of justice can differ greatly. While Thornhill sees Thornhill's Point as a reward for his hard work, Sal sees it as an extension of the punishment they all suffer for Thornhill's thievery in London.

On the Hawkesbury River, Thornhill, Smasher, Sagitty, and their other white neighbors find themselves outside the realm of organized justice. Indeed, for men like Thornhill, settling on the river in the first place isn't technically legal without the proper paperwork, though in the case of settling the frontier, "transgressions" like this are given a free pass. This creates the sense that the individuals who live on the Hawkesbury are truly in charge of creating their own system of justice, particularly regarding how they decide to relate to their Aborigine neighbors. Individuals like Sagitty and Smasher are insistent that the Aborigines be subjected to the same systems of justice as white men, though with much harsher consequences. When Smasher catches Aborigine men stealing from him, he doesn't put them in prison, but rather subjects them to gruesome and torturous deaths. Smasher came from very humble origins, just like Thornhill, but in the relatively lawless land of New South Wales he can get away with committing such atrocities. He justifies it as the natural consequence of theft—which is extremely ironic given that nearly every former convict on the Hawkesbury was sent to New South Wales in the first place as punishment for theft. The irony is, of course, lost on Smasher even when Blackwood points it out to him, which only betrays Smasher's racist belief in his inherent superiority.

Blackwood and Mrs. Herring operate on a different system of justice when it comes to how they deal with the Aborigines. Blackwood operates using the system of "take a little, give a little," which first and foremost recognizes the importance of treating others fairly. Similarly, Mrs. Herring insists simply that she has no need to create a system of justice to punish Aborigines for theft: for one, she knows she has little power to actually enforce such a system, though she also seems to share Blackwood's opinion that violent retaliation is cruel and dangerous. This idea is supported when the Aborigines "burn out" Sagitty: his own violence towards them leads to his death, suggesting that violent systems do nothing but create an environment ripe for more violence.

After Thornhill participates in the massacre at Blackwood's place and kills Whisker Harry, he comes to a new understanding of the true consequences of taking justice into his own hands. He spends the next ten years building his empire and his villa, **Cobham Hall**. To an outsider, it would appear that Thornhill has long since risen above the unfair consequences of his theft in London, but Thornhill's emotional state suggests that he's still suffering the unforeseen consequences of his participation in the massacre. Although Thornhill enjoys his life of luxury, he spends every evening searching the forests and the cliffs for signs of Aborigines. This is Thornhill's true punishment: he spends the remainder of his life steeped in regret and guilt for taking the law into his own hands and serving "justice" to the Aborigines along with his white compatriots during the massacre. His regular gifts of

food and supplies to Blackwood and Dick are symbols of his desire to atone for his actions. Despite his gifts and his attempts, however, the novel suggests that Thornhill's feelings of guilt and remorse never end, proving that there is no crime without consequences, even if the punishment doesn't come from a court.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

GUNS

When Thornhill initially decides to purchase a gun, he sees it as an insurance policy that will guarantee his and his family's safety in the wild of New South Wales. When he learns how to fire a gun, however, he learns that although guns do have the potential to do damage and offer protection, they're little more than a symbol of power: in the early 19th century, guns took nearly two minutes to reload, making them ineffective against the Aborigines unless used en masse. This plays out particularly as Thornhill speaks to Sal about "showing the blacks the gun" to send a message: he knows full well that the spears of the Aborigines are far deadlier than his gun, but he plays to Sal's blind trust that the gun will do its job and strike fear in the natives.

COBHAM HALL

Cobham Hall is the villa that Mr. Thornhill builds on the hill on Thornhill's Point. It's modeled after Cobham Hall in London, where Mrs. Middleton worked before she married and had Sal, and parts of it are modeled after London churches. Although it's a grand building, it's not quite right in Thornhill's eyes: the steps are awkward and too small, and the lion statues that Thornhill orders for the gateposts are tame-looking instead of ferocious. The building becomes representative Thornhill's strange success in New South Wales. Although Thornhill achieved wealth and status in New South Wales, his success doesn't quite sit well with him. Like Thornhill's success, the villa is built on unspeakable violence against the Aborigines who originally inhabited the Hawkesbury River: the house rests on top of an Aboriginal drawing of a fish and Thornhill's boat. In this way, the villa also represents the erasure of the river's original inhabitants.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Canongate edition of *The Secret River* published in 2007.

Part 1: London Quotes

He had a sudden dizzying understanding of the way men were ranged on top of each other, all the way from the Thornhills at the bottom up to the King, or God, at the top, each man higher than one, lower than another.

Related Characters: Mr. Middleton, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Thornhill is at Watermen's Hall, being bound as an apprentice to Mr. Middleton. Standing in the grand room in front of rich men, Thornhill has the sudden understanding of the class system and the way it truly works. This begins Thornhill's lifelong study of the class system and where he stands in it. In London, Thornhill recognizes that he and his family of birth are of extremely low class. After he and Sal are relocated to New South Wales, Thornhill finds that the class system isn't as clear-cut as it is in London. There, though God and the King are still very much at the top of the social order, men like him can still move up in the world in a way that wasn't possible for him in London. However, the whole system remains "dizzying": the particulars of the system, where he is in it, and how exactly he got there remain pressing questions for Thornhill throughout the novel.

Winter wore away, and there it was at last, his whole name: William Thornhill, slow and steady. As long as no one was watching, no one would know how long it took, and how many times the tongue had to be drawn back in.
William Thornhill.
He was still only sixteen, and no one in his family had ever gone so far.

Related Characters: Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

The first winter that Thornhill is in Mr. Middleton's service as an apprentice, Sal teaches him how to write his name. Thornhill's pride at being able to write his name makes it very clear how great of an achievement this is for him. It's

one of the ways that Thornhill begins to move up in the class system, as literacy is one of the ways that he differentiates between upper-class gentry and lower-class, poor individuals like himself. This holds true even though Thornhill never achieves full literacy: simply being able to sign his name allows him to apply for loans and land in New South Wales, which in turn help him move up in the social hierarchy. Literacy, then, along with being able to write one's name, becomes a way to escape poverty by allowing him to access the tools and systems to later get out of poverty.

He was struck by the power of words. There was nothing going on in the court but words, and the exact words, little puffs of air out of the mouth of a witness, would be the thing that saw him hanged or not.

Related Characters: Yates, Mr. Lucas, Mr. Knapp, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Thornhill is in court in London for stealing Mr. Lucas's Brazil wood. He realizes that his fate will be decided by something as ephemeral and unsubstantial as words, not by something tactile. Although Thornhill's previous decision to allow Sal to teach him to write his name showed that he does understand on some level that there is power in words, language, and being able to use them, this realization takes this a step further. In the court, those with the best words win, and whether they're actually innocent or guilty is entirely beside the point. Realizing this makes Thornhill feel desperate and hopeless, which again makes his social standing very clear. As a poor man, Thornhill doesn't have command over language the way the other men in the courtroom do.

Part 2: Sydney Quotes

There were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them. They had no fences that said "this is mine." No house that said, "this is our home." There were no fields or flocks that said, "we have put the labor of our hands into this place."

Related Characters: Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Thornhill has just begun his new life in Sydney and the narrator describes how white Englishmen like Thornhill view the native Aborigines. First, the tone suggests that the class system Thornhill experienced in England extends into New South Wales, but in an altered form: here, even though Thornhill is one of the lowly convicts, the superior tone suggests that the natives are a step below even white men like Thornhill. This superiority creates the sense that the white settlers don't understand (and further, have no interest in trying to understand) the original inhabitants of the land. Though Thornhill's thoughts will later evolve on this issue, at this point, the fact that the Aborigines don't live their lives in the same way and with the same guiding principles as the settlers makes them lesser beings. This, in turn, creates an environment in which horrific violence can happen without consequences for the perpetrators.

King George owned this whole place of New South Wales, the extent of which nobody yet knew, but what was the point of King George owning it, if it was still wild, trodden only by black men? The more civilized folk set themselves up on their pieces of land, the more those other ones could be squeezed out.

Related Characters: Thomas Blackwood, Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

After being in Sydney for five years, Thornhill decides that it's time for him to claim Thornhill's Point. He knows that the Governor will allow him to settle without the proper paperwork, as it's more important in the government's eyes to settle the land than to insist on people following the law. Thornhill's reasoning shows a typical mindset of colonizers: a belief that the native populations aren't people who should be considered the rightful, legal occupants of the land. It denies those native populations claim to what is truly their home in favor of making the land home for the colonizers. It also heightens the sense of the "us versus them" mindset so prevalent throughout *The Secret River*. Though Thornhill begins to break down that thought

process, he still very much conceptualizes the Aborigines as the enemy to be beaten back, not as people just like himself and his family.

Part 3: A Clearing in the Forest Quotes

Thornhill could not believe he would be able to send a ball of red-hot metal into another body. But being allowed a gun was one of the privileges of a pardon. It was something he had earned, whether he wanted it or not.

Related Characters: William Thornhill

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Thornhill remembers purchasing his gun, learning how to shoot it, and his thoughts on owning one. He demonstrates a belief that guns are a privilege afforded only to free, upper-class men. This suggests one more way in which the upper-class has power over the lower class. It's not just the money, it's the dangerous objects and tools at their disposal. By owning a gun, then, Thornhill has a symbol of his rising social standing. His fear that he couldn't actually use it is evidence of the fact that he came from a lower-class background: it's not something that he grew up knowing how to use, or even knowing that he *could* use. It's something he's grown into as an adult, which shows that the lingering consequences of poverty exist even in adulthood, even when a person is able to move up in the world and achieve financial success.

Thornhill saw that although this voyage, from Sydney to Thornhill's Point, had taken only a day, and the other voyage, from London to Sydney, had taken the best part of the year, this was the greater distance. From the perspective of this unpeopled riverbank...Sydney seemed a metropolis, different only in degree from London.

Related Characters: Willie, Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

As the Thornhill family travels from Sydney to Thornhill's Point, Thornhill realizes that this is a major journey for Sal. Though Sal certainly struggled to adjust in Sydney, her feelings about Thornhill's Point truly begin to articulate her experience as an immigrant in this new land. For Sal, Sydney was much like London: she could work, exist within a community, and safely walk through the township. Thornhill's Point offers no such comforts, and their Aboriginal neighbors are like nothing Sal has ever had to live with before. The wilderness of the Point is entirely foreign to Sal, who's never lived outside of a city of some sort. Sal's willingness to go with Thornhill illustrates her devotion to her husband, though her feelings on the matter continue to show that she actively refuses to adjust. She holds so tightly to the hope that she'll return to London in the near future, she doesn't allow herself to adjust or integrate into her community in a way that would make the experience more pleasant.

He had thought that having a gun would make him feel safe. Why did it not?

Related Characters: Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

Thornhill and his family sit around the fire at Thornhill's Point on the first night. Thornhill feels exposed and vulnerable, even with the gun. This points back to Thornhill's assessment of guns in general: they're something the gentry grows up knowing how to use, while it's something he, as an originally low-class man, has to learn how to use. The gun itself is foreign to him, just as the landscape is foreign. However, Thornhill's feeling of vulnerability also shows that even if it's somewhat terrifying, he has a healthy respect for the Aborigines and their spears, a respect that not all on the river share. This situates Thornhill as a sympathetic character in relation to his native neighbors, and it's one of the reasons he tries to trade and coexist with the natives when he comes into contact with them. Even though he does indeed take the colonialist view that the natives have no right to the land, he

does attempt to see them as competent individuals before that point.

> Dick would be right, he thought, except that everyone knew the blacks did not plant things. They wandered about, taking food as it came under their hand...But, like children, they did not plant today so that they could eat tomorrow.
> It was why they were called savages.

Related Characters: Dick, Willie, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

When Thornhill, Willie, and Dick try to plant corn, they find the land has already been dug up. Dick suggests that the natives planted something, and Thornhill offers this rationalization as to why Dick is wrong. Thornhill's assessment is characteristic of the colonial mindset that situates natives as being childlike, primitive, and unintelligent. It shows a lack of understanding for a culture that's different from western culture, and the degradation of that culture that often follows. Essentially, Thornhill's mindset comes from believing that his western, English culture is the only culture worth being a part of. It keeps him from trying too hard to understand the Aborigines and also allows him to conceptualize himself as the good guy and them as either children or bad guys, which in turn creates the situation in which the massacre can happen at the end of the novel.

> The unspoken between them was that she was a prisoner here, marking off the days in her little round of beaten earth, and it was unspoken because she did not want him to feel a jailer.

Related Characters: Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

After the narrator describes the layout of the Thornhills' settlement on Thornhill's Point, Thornhill mentions that Sal begins keeping a tally on a tree of the 260 weeks she's promised to be on Thornhill's Point. This shows the differences between how Thornhill and Sal are adjusting to their lives in New South Wales. For Thornhill, New South Wales is becoming a place of opportunity. Soon after this moment, he receives convict servants, and he has land named after himself. He has the opportunity to move up in the world, unencumbered by the restrictions and rules he fought against (and that drove him to thievery) in London. Though New South Wales began as a prison for Thornhill, it's become a place where he can be truly free.

It's worth noting that, although Sal had little choice in the matter when she and Thornhill were relocated to New South Wales, she came as a free person and was immediately granted her own husband as her convict servant. She entered the social structure of Sydney higher up than Thornhill because of this, and for her, New South Wales wasn't necessarily her prison. Now that Thornhill is once again moving up in the world and actually has an emotional attachment to the land, Sal is seeing New South Wales as a prison. The plan to move home to London keeps getting pushed out further and further, though Sal still refuses to truly integrate and make herself at home in New South Wales to help herself have an easier time of it. Though all of Sal's time in New South Wales has been because of Thornhill, his newfound attachment to the land further alienates her.

The silence begins as Sal worries about hurting Thornhill's feelings and making him feel bad for keeping her here. This shows that although the silence is portrayed as a negative thing, it comes from a place of love, care, and concern for the other's wellbeing.

> It was an old pain returning to find that William Thornhill, felon, was waiting under the skin of William Thornhill, landowner.

Related Characters: Ned, Dan Oldfield, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

When the captain who brought Thornhill to New South Wales is at the port where Thornhill has come to pick up his convict servants, Thornhill realizes that he cannot truly discard his past even if he has become very successful since

he was a felon. This shows that though Thornhill has technically worked his way out of the system that sent Thornhill to New South Wales in the first place, he'll continue to suffer the consequences of his crimes. Further, the class system is still alive and well in New South Wales, even if it's a somewhat different system than in England. Though Thornhill is of a higher class than he's ever been, he'll still never reach the top because he was once a felon.

> And between the words, unspoken, Thornhill heard the real reason: Sal was only the wife of an emancipist.

Related Characters: Mrs. Herring, Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

After Sal becomes ill with mastitis, Mrs. Herring tries to treat her but Thornhill asks a surgeon to come to Thornhill's Point to see Sal. The surgeon refuses. Thornhill understands that the surgeon doesn't see the point in caring for the wife of a former felon, which shows that the English class system is still alive and well in New South Wales. Moments like these remind Thornhill that even though he's come very far and achieved great success since arriving in New South Wales, the consequences of being relocated include never being allowed to forget that he was once a felon. He'll never be able to forget that he's an initially unwilling immigrant to a penal colony, no matter how much he manages to distance himself from his unlawful past.

Part 4: A Hundred Acres Quotes

> How did it apply to a moment like the one down by the blacks' fire, when a white man and a black one had tried to make sense of each other with nothing but words that were no use to them?

Related Characters: Whisker Harry, Long Bob (or Long Jack), Thomas Blackwood, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

When Thornhill approaches Thomas Blackwood for advice on how to deal with the Aborigines camping on his property, Blackwood offers his characteristic "give a little, take a little" catchphrase. Thornhill isn't sure what to make of it, as it seems entirely inapplicable to the problems he's having with the natives. He sees that there's a gulf of understanding that's unbridgable for both him and the Aborigines due to their lack of a common language. During the exchange that Thornhill references, he was able to identify the basic outline of a conversation, but neither participant came away with any meaning or understanding beyond the fact that words were exchanged. This begins to show that although language is undeniably a way to communicate with others, it certainly has its limits. Particularly as Thornhill learns that Blackwood has an Aborigine lover and can speak her language, it becomes apparent that Thornhill could create understanding with the natives if he too tried to learn how to better communicate with them. Language and understanding are choices, and not ones that Thornhill chooses to make.

> He could hear the great machinery of London, the wheel of justice chewing up felons and spitting them out here, boatload after boatload, spreading out from the Government Wharf in Sydney, acre by acre, slowed but not stopped by rivers, mountains, swamps.

Related Characters: Dick, Long Bob (or Long Jack), William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

When Thornhill goes to the Aborigines' camp to fetch Dick, he and Long Jack introduce themselves to each other and Thornhill finds himself thinking and saying that the natives will soon be pushed out by British felons colonizing the now-wild land. He understands that the Aborigines will be the ones to suffer the truly horrific consequences of British colonialism. Though Thornhill recognizes that he himself is a victim of British society and its class system, he also recognizes that the continuation of this system isn't an altogether bad thing for him. Perpetuating it means that he gets to exist on a higher social level than the Aborigines, who will be crushed and beaten down as English colonization continues.

In the world of these naked savages, it seemed everyone was gentry.

Related Characters: Black Dick, Long Bob (or Long Jack), Whisker Harry, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

After existing in relatively close proximity to the Aborigines for several weeks, Thornhill begins to understand that their culture doesn't operate with the rigid class system that his own English culture does. In their culture, they don't need an oppressed lower class to make everything work. Rather, everyone can live like the English upper class does. When Thornhill realizes this, he begins to understand that his English culture might not be the only way or the best way of organizing society. It offers him a window into a culture that seems to function perfectly well without the oppressive system that landed Thornhill in New South Wales as a convict in the first place, and it also allows Thornhill to begin to see the Aborigines he meets and interacts with as humans with an advanced social order of their own.

Part 5: Drawing a Line Quotes

This old fellow is a book, Thornhill thought, and they are reading him. He remembered the Governor's library, the stern portraits, and the rows of gleaming books with their gold lettering. They could reveal their secrets, but only to a person who knew how to read them.

Related Characters: Whisker Harry, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

As Thornhill watches the Aborigines dance and sing at a large gathering one night, he begins to understand more clearly how their society functions and how, in many ways, it's little different than his own. Here, as Thornhill watches Whisker Harry dance, he realizes that people can perform the same function as books. Harry is telling a story, and his audience knows how to read the story through Harry's movements. This shows another way that Thornhill is illiterate. He's culturally illiterate when it comes to Aboriginal culture, as well as illiterate in English. Further, by thinking of Harry as being akin to the Governor's books, Thornhill begins to understand that the Aborigines do indeed have a sophisticated social structure that is worthy of respect.

He knew, as perhaps they did not, how pointless a thing it was. He could go through the rigmarole of loading it up and squinting along its barrel and firing. But after that, what?

Related Characters: Dan Oldfield, Ned, Dick, Willie, Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

After watching the Aborigines dance, Thornhill agrees to shoot off his gun to "send a message," even though he recognizes that his gun will never protect him. This shows that Thornhill understands that his own culture isn't truly superior to the Aborigines' culture, and in cases like this, it simply doesn't have the tools or the methods to successfully conduct battle in New South Wales. This gives language and reasoning to Thornhill's fear of the natives; because he simply doesn't have the tools or the will to defend himself against them successfully, they become infinitely more terrifying. This turns the gun into little more than an empty symbol of power. The symbol itself can be scary to someone faced with it, but in practice, the kinds of guns available to Thornhill at this time take nearly two minutes to load, making them ineffective.

Thinking the thought, saying the words, would make him the same as Smasher, as if Smasher's mind had got into his when he saw the woman in the hut and felt that instant of temptation. He had done nothing to help her. Now the evil of it was part of him.

Related Characters: Smasher, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

Thornhill decides not to tell Sal about the Aborigine woman that Smasher is keeping as a sex slave. He believes that giving voice to the fact that he was tempted to accept Smasher's offer to have sex with this woman makes him evil like Smasher. While Thornhill has predominantly used silence and secrets to protect Sal from unpleasant information, here he tries to protect himself the same way. His belief that the evil is now a part of him suggests that this method of protection isn't a successful one, while admitting guilt that he did nothing to help the woman shows that Thornhill believes that he had a moral obligation to help another person in need. As Thornhill becomes more aware of his complicity in the violence towards the Aborigines, it begins to suggest that horrific feelings of guilt and regret like this will be the true consequence if Thornhill doesn't do something to stop the violence.

❝ They were too cunning to have anything as vulnerable as an army, for they knew what the Governor and Captain McCallum did not: that an army clumping along was as exposed and vulnerable as a beetle trundling over a tabletop.

Related Characters: Captain McCallum, Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

Thornhill knows that Captain McCallum, the leader of the army sent to deal with the "native problem," will be unsuccessful in dealing with the natives because his plan of attack treats the natives as dumb and gullible—something Thornhill knows they're not. This shows how well Thornhill has adjusted to his new life and learned about his neighbors. For all that he has yet to understand about them, he's well aware of the fact that they're not dumb, and in fact, are more than capable of doing major damage to an army like Captain McCallum's. However, when Thornhill doesn't do anything to truly stop Captain McCallum's attempts, he becomes complicit in the violence against the Aborigines. Even if he doesn't actively condone it, like Smasher and Sagitty might, his silence means that he's not making a difference.

Part 6: The Secret River Quotes

❝ He was no longer the person who thought that a little house in Swan Lane and a wherry of his own was all a man might desire. It seemed that he had become another man altogether. Eating the food of this country...had remade him, particle by particle...This was where he was: not just in body, but in soul as well.
A man's heart was a deep pocket he might turn out and be surprised at what he found there.

Related Characters: Sal Thornhill, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

As Sal and Thornhill fight in the Aborigine camp over the ridge, Thornhill thinks briefly about what leaving New South Wales would look like for him. When he realizes that New South Wales, and Thornhill's Point on the Hawkesbury River in particular, is his home, it shows his completed transformation from the distraught man who arrived on the shore years before. This makes it very clear to him that his sentence in New South Wales has had the unintended consequence of not just removing him from London as punishment, but making it altogether undesirable to leave Australia. Although for Sal this is a negative thing, for Thornhill, this transformation means that he has opportunities to advance like he never could have had in London. He's become so successful exactly because he allowed himself to integrate and make this new land his home.

❝ "They got no rights to any of this place. No more than a sparrow." He heard the echo of Smasher's phrases in his own words. They sat there smiling and plausible.

Related Characters: Sal Thornhill, Smasher, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 290

Explanation and Analysis

As Sal insists that the Thornhill family leave Thornhill's point to escape the Aborigines, Thornhill insists that the natives don't have any claim to the land. The fact that Thornhill

attributes his words to Smasher suggests that he doesn't truly believe what he's saying. This shows that he recognizes the absurdity of insisting that he's the first person to "own" this land, when he understands that the Aborigines have been living here and calling it home for generations. However, Thornhill also recognizes that Smasher's words have a knack for stirring up emotional reactions, which is why he's using them on Sal now. They're comforting words in times like this because they insist that the settlers are doing no wrong by claiming this land, and Thornhill understands that thinking the thoughts and saying the words can make it easier to act as though they're true. The novel shows that the narratives people build about reality continually bear influence on the way history plays out.

He was reminded of what he had not thought of for years, the yard at Newgate, the men rehearsing their stories so often that they took on the substance of fact.

Related Characters: Sagitty, Smasher, William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 296

Explanation and Analysis

In the bar after taking Sagitty to the hospital, Thornhill listens to Smasher commandeer the story of Sagitty's stabbing and make it even more horrific than the truth. When Thornhill makes this connection, he's reminded of the fact that the way in which people talk about things has the power to actually change how people experience things. For Smasher, the act of making the story more gruesome is a way for him to experience Sagitty's rescue for himself—and his knack for storytelling means that others will take it as fact. Thornhill's thoughts, which seem very detached from the emotionally charged banter going on around him, suggest that he sees Smasher's story for what it is: decidedly not the truth, but exceptionally powerful because it makes it easier to justify the coming violence.

Part 6: Mr. Thornhill's Villa Quotes

He would not have thought that William Thornhill could ever have any relationship with a house like this except of the trespasser. But if a man had enough by way of money, he could make the world whatever way he wanted.

Related Characters: William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 316

Explanation and Analysis

Thornhill wonders at the fact that he owns Cobham Hall, his great stone villa on Thornhill's Point. This shows Thornhill's final destination on the social hierarchy as a rich landowner with immense power to shape the world around him. Thornhill's awareness of his power recalls his earlier awareness of the power of words. With words, a person must be able to craft a story that's appropriately persuasive. With money, however, Thornhill doesn't need to use words—his money can speak for him. Further, recognizing his power calls into question how Thornhill feels about the Aborigines, now that he truly has the power to shape their future in New South Wales. The fact that Thornhill never uses this power to help the people he once wronged so horribly shows how trapped he is by this social structure, even when it's the thing that gave him the power in the first place.

Under the house, covered by the weight of Mr. Thornhill's villa, the fish still swam in the rock. It was dark under the floorboards: the fish would never feel the sun again. It would not fade, as the others out in the forest were fading, with no black hands to re-draw them. It would remain as bright as the day the boards had been nailed down, but no longer alive, cut off from the trees and light that it had swum in.

Related Characters: William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 316

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes Cobham Hall, Mr. Thornhill's vast stone villa, and the exact location where it's built. By choosing to build Cobham Hall on the Aboriginal rock drawing of the fish, Thornhill symbolically—and with finality—erases the Aborigines from the place they once called home. However, he recognizes that it's a different

kind of erasure than what is happening to the other drawings. While the other ones are erased passively by the weather and simply won't be redrawn, this one is actively covered by Thornhill's decision to build Cobham Hall right on top of it. This shows Thornhill acting violently towards the Aborigines, as he ensures that they have no claim to the land once there are no drawings to ever act as evidence that they were here.

❝ But there was an emptiness as he watched Jack's hand caressing the dirt. This was something he did not have: a place that was part of his flesh and spirit. There was no part of the world he would keep coming back to, the way Jack did, just to feel it under him.

Related Characters: Long Bob (or Long Jack), William Thornhill

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 329

Explanation and Analysis

When Thornhill tries to go down to speak to Long Jack and offer him food, Long Jack tells Thornhill in English that the land is his (Long Jack's). Thornhill realizes that he'll forever feel like an immigrant and an outsider in New South Wales, even though he has made his fortune and calls the place home. This draws upon Thornhill's many realizations throughout the novel regarding London's diminishing role in his life, and about New South Wales's growing importance. This shows that although Thornhill defines home as a place he owns, maintains, and shapes, the true meaning of home is tied up in emotional and spiritual connections to the land. Although Thornhill's children will experience this feeling in New South Wales, both Thornhill and Sal will live out their lives knowing that they do not truly belong in this place, even if it is the only place they can call home.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

STRANGERS

The *Alexander*, the ship that brought William Thornhill, his wife, Sal, and his two children to New South Wales, had been at sea for nearly a year. Now, Thornhill, Sal, and the children lie in a hut made of bark, sticks, and mud. Sal and the children are asleep, but Thornhill can't bring himself to sleep. He gets up and is aware that, although there are no guards, he's in a prison surrounded by thousands of miles of water. He feels small in this vast land and doesn't recognize any of the stars.

The novel begins by making it clear that Thornhill feels unmoored and displaced. Thornhill sees New South Wales as a prison rather than a land of opportunity, and certainly not as a home for him and his family. The description of the hut shows that Thornhill and Sal aren't of a particularly high class, and so shows that they're living here in relative poverty.

During the months Thornhill spent on the *Alexander*, he tried to listen for Sal's voice from the women's quarters and spent his time mentally paddling along the Thames River. Now that he's in New South Wales, he knows he'll never see that river again. Thornhill knows that he'll die here and feels as though he died in London. He thinks that being here is worse than death.

Thornhill's mental paddling along the Thames shows that London is his true home, though Sal is also an important element of how he thinks about home. This shows that Thornhill's sense of home depends, at least in part, on the people he loves.

Thornhill sees darkness moving in front of him and realizes that a black man has appeared before him. The man is naked and scarred, and his spear seems to be a part of his body. Thornhill feels naked and vulnerable and fears for his children's lives. He shouts angrily at the man to leave and steps forward. As he raises his hand, he notices that the stone at the tip of the spear is jagged. The black man begins to speak, but Thornhill can't understand what he says. Suddenly, Thornhill understands the man is saying, "be off!"

The encounter with this man makes it abundantly clear that this place is not, and perhaps never will be, Thornhill's home: it's this man's home, and he's learned enough English to tell the invaders as much. Here, Thornhill retaliates only because he's scared, not because he thinks he has any claim to the land. This shows that fear is often one of the primary motivators for the violence involved in the conflict between the English and the Aborigines.

Thornhill finds himself speechless. He thinks that he already died once and can die again, but looks back towards Sal and the children. When he turns back to face the black man, the man is gone. Thornhill looks at the forest and thinks that it could hide a hundred black men and their spears. He stumbles back into the hut, even though he knows it offers no safety. He lies down next to Sal and anticipates the stabbing pain of one of the spears in his belly.

Now that Thornhill has met the natives, the landscape is even less inviting. Thornhill senses even now that the Aborigines and the land are intrinsically parts of each other: the landscape is threatening because of the humans that hide within it, and the humans are scary because of their close relationship to the mysterious land.

PART 1: LONDON

The Thornhill family lives near the river in London in cramped quarters. The streets are only wide enough for one person in places, and everything is dirty. The church steeples are the tallest things, and there's one around every corner. William remembers his life beginning at Christ Church by the river. The building was huge enough to scare him, with snarling stone lions at the gates. Inside, William feels as though his being expands with no boundaries. He doesn't understand God and is even more frightened.

The descriptions of where the Thornhills live shows that they live in extreme poverty, establishing class as one of the novel's main themes. The abundance of churches, and William's fear of them, suggests that religion is a language that's all around, but that it isn't a language that William understands. It doesn't offer him comfort because he cannot use it.

Once William Thornhill learns his name, he realizes that there are many William Thornhills in the world. Most notable is his brother, the first William Thornhill, who died when he was a week old. When William Thornhill was born a year and a half later in 1777, he took on the same name. He always felt his brother's ghost, however, and resented his cousins who were also named William Thornhill.

William's common name works here to remind him that, in the eyes of others, he's not unique, special, or even worthy of individual treatment. He's one of many, which reinforces his position as a poor boy who's seen as just another one of many poor boys by upper class Londoners.

Ma and Mary sew shrouds while Lizzie cares for the babies. She's sweet and motherly, and makes William feel warm and loved. The family is always hungry. Pa works wherever and whenever he can and has a constant rattling cough. When William turns five, he begins accompanying Pa to collect dog feces for a factory. William never learned what they used the feces for, but thinks that being hungry is worse than the smell. Ma prefers to steal than collect dog feces. She and William's siblings steal books from booksellers.

The need for William to work at such a young age underscores how impoverished the Thornhill family is. That Thornhill never learns what the factories use the feces for shows that it's far more important at this point to make money than it is to understand where it comes from or to do something more dignified than picking up after other people's dogs.

By the time William is ten, he's a fighter and enjoys feeling his rage. He runs around the city with his brothers, James and Rob, and his friends, William Warner and Dan Oldfield. Dan is an expert at stealing roasted chestnuts and is kind enough to share them. A boy named Collarbone joins them too. They all steal in order to eat.

Dan's kindness here is very important to keep in mind for later. At this point, Dan and William are on equal footing: both are poor and thieves, though Dan is a generous thief with his friends. This shows that poverty doesn't always breed selfishness.

When Ma has more babies, William begins spending time with Lizzie's friend Sal since Lizzie's attention is elsewhere. Sal is an only child: though her parents had more babies after her, they all died within a month of their births. Mr. Middleton is a waterman and he keeps a warm, narrow house that always has food. When son after son dies, however, Mr. Middleton becomes sterner and quieter, and the house is always sad. The Middletons dote on Sal, and although she's not particularly beautiful she flourishes with the care. William finds Sal and her life intriguing: Sal can't bear to see a chicken killed, and he dreams of living in a home like hers on Swan Lane.

In comparison to William, Sal is spoiled. She has everything she could ever want in her parents' home: food, love, and a strong sense of belonging. She's privileged enough that she doesn't even see where her food comes from (as in the case of the chicken), which is fascinating for William because of his extreme poverty. At this point in his life, Mr. Middleton is the pinnacle of success in his warm home that's full of food. This begins to shape William's goals for his own future.

William and Sal find common ground through their siblings: he has too many, she has too few. They often slip away to a sheltered spot near the fields and watch the rain on the river. He loves Sal's face and listening to her speak. With her, William doesn't have to fight. One day he shows her how far he can spit, but lets her think that she can spit further. She calls him Will, which he likes.

In London, Sal comes to represent home for William: with her, he feels safe and secure, and as though he belongs. At this point, the idea of home has less to do with an exact location and more to do with a specific person, which is also a consequence of William's poverty and home situation.

When William is thirteen, Ma gets very sick. Ma hallucinates that she's a child trying to pet the lions on the gateposts at Christ Church. When she dies, she's buried in a common grave. The next day, William goes to the church and throws a glob of muck at the lions. Not long after, Pa dies, leaving the family without a head. William's brother Matty had already left to be a sailor and James had disappeared, so the job of supporting the family falls to William. He tries to work at a factory but quits after he sees a child crushed by an engine. When he can, he works as a "lumper" on the wharves. He loves the docks.

The lions send a message that the church is something scary and far above poor individuals like William and his mother. By throwing the muck at them, William is lashing out at the system that keeps him at the bottom of the social order—which in turn, is one of the reasons his mother is buried in a mass grave and not in a grave by herself. William's decision to quit his factory job shows that he has a heart and cares for people less fortunate than himself.

One day, William finds a group of men in a warehouse opening up a crate of brown sugar. The sight of all the sugar makes William's mouth water. While the other men fill bags that hang in their coats and then leave, William stays and shoves sugar into his mouth. He hears footsteps approaching and tries to fill his hat and leave, but his boss catches him. The boss strikes the hat to the ground and accuses William of stealing, but William insists that the crate was already open. The boss doesn't listen and whips William. William learns he should never get caught.

The bags in the men's pockets are William's first hint that stealing along the docks is a common activity, and one that can be made marginally less risky with the proper supplies. William gets caught here in part because he's not prepared, but also because, in his extreme poverty, he has never seen sugar like this before—so stealing it is a choice for survival for him, while being sneaky about it is secondary.

When William is 14 and the snow comes, the river freezes over. While those more fortunate enjoy a fair on the ice, work on the ships is stalled. Mary continues sewing shrouds and William's brothers steal potatoes, but there's little work to be done. After another baby son dies, Mr. Middleton realizes he'll never have a son to take over his business and agrees to take William on as an apprentice. He also finds sewing work for Mary and Lizzie.

The apprentice system offers William an official channel through which he'll have the opportunity to move up in the world. It gives William hope to succeed in the system that has, until now, kept him and his family down, and encourages him to believe that not all people of a higher class than him are bad, as evidenced by Mr. Middleton's kindnesses.

In January, Mr. Middleton takes William to Watermen's Hall to be bound as an apprentice. William is breathless as he thinks of the possibilities of his future: after the seven year apprenticeship, he can be a freeman on the river, carrying people and goods across the river as long as he stays healthy. He thinks he'll be able to marry Sal and inherit Mr. Middleton's business. Mr. Middleton pulls William into a grand room. Robed men sit on the other side of a mahogany table and address Mr. Middleton by his first name. William realizes that these men are of a much higher status than Mr. Middleton.

It's worth noting that for a boy such as William, his dreams here are lofty ones given his family's limited means and modest background. William's observations about the class system at play in the grand room begin his journey of truly situating himself within the greater class system. By figuring out where others stand in the hierarchy, he can place himself in that same hierarchy and, eventually, find a way to move up in the world.

Mr. Middleton introduces William and the robed men ask if William has his "river hands." Mr. Middleton explains that William already has blisters from rowing, and William offers his hands to the robed men. They laugh and grant him his apprentice's license.

Though working as a waterman promises to give William a way to move up in the world, the calluses he'll form are a physical marker of his occupation and of his class that will be with him for years to come.

For the first time, William is well-fed and warm. His blisters never heal and the blood from them stains his oar brown. Mr. Middleton teaches William how to read the tide, and he learns how to interact with the gentry and not get cheated. William develops a charming way of interacting with the gentry, but thinks of them as a different species. One day, standing in the water and steadying his boat as a couple climbs in, he hears the man telling his companion to not show her leg to "the boatman." William looks up at the gentleman, whose look tells William that, while the gentleman "owns" the woman, William owns nothing. William thinks that the gentleman doesn't look like he knows what to do with his beautiful companion, even if she is his property.

William struggles to think of the gentry he meets on the river as people. Their lives seem so vastly different from his own, he finds it hard to see the similarities. This will come up again when Thornhill is in New South Wales, but these experiences here suggest that it's part of William's nature to immediately think of different types of people as inhuman. The gentleman's cruel and condescending attitude towards William only heightens William's sense that the gentry must be an entirely different species.

William looks to the woman's leg, covered in silk stockings with green silk slippers on her feet. Although the woman thanks her husband, William thinks that she's purposefully showing him her leg, possibly to provoke her husband. The husband climbs in and pulls his wife's skirt down over her leg. When William climbs into the boat, the woman stretches her leg out, pulls her skirt to her knee, and laments that her slipper is ruined. She gives William a quick look, and William realizes that the gentry are indeed people, with human desires.

For William, the thought of sex brings this gentlewoman onto his level of understanding: she desires sex and to play with the men around her, just like other women William (presumably) knows. However, the couple's way of interacting with each other suggests that, for the husband, his wife is truly his property, something to be guarded. She's less than a full human being in his eyes.

William spends his Sundays with Sal since he doesn't have to work. The first winter she decides to teach him to read and write, though he's not particularly interested. He can keep lists and do math in his head and sees no reason to write anything down, but humors Sal. The quill feels foreign in his hand and when he finally tries to write, ink splatters all over the paper. William thinks that he can do anything but this. Sal laughs, but soon stops. She draws a T for Thornhill on the paper in dots, and William carefully traces it. He insists on being done for the day. By the end of winter, he becomes the first in his family able to write his name.

Although Thornhill certainly wants to move up in the world, he's less interested in learning to read and write, which are markers of being of a higher class. This suggests that at this point, truly climbing the social ladder is an abstract idea for William and he doesn't exactly know how to do it. For now, he sees his ability to move through life without needing to write as being a marker of success, even as he comes in contact with rich people on a daily basis who demonstrate their status through writing.

As the years go by, William realizes that he's in love with Sal. He thinks about her while he's on the river and the thought warms him. They begin spending time together in the graveyard at Christ Church, where they read the writing on headstones. One day, he tells her that as soon as he's done with his apprenticeship, he'll marry her. She promises to wait for him.

William is building his life and his home in London: he'll marry Sal, and he has Mr. Middleton's example to look to for how to create a home. The headstones are, notably, those of richer individuals. William and Sal are learning about the lives of the upper-class as they read them.

William and Sal marry on the day William is freed from his apprenticeship. Mr. Middleton gifts William a boat as a wedding gift, and the couple takes a room near Mr. Middleton's house. At night, they tell each other stories. Sal tells William about **Cobham Hall**, a luxurious place where her mother worked before marrying. They talk about their future as well: the children they'll have and how successful William will be on the river. William (who now begins to go by Thornhill) can barely believe his good luck. He works primarily rowing coal and timber to shore and can employ Rob to help him.

The boat from Mr. Middleton is one of the first things that Thornhill truly owns. As such, it is proof that he's advancing up the social ladder and is realizing his dreams of owning things. Thornhill also shows that he's kind, generous, and wants to support his entire family by employing Rob. This allows him to share his wealth and good fortune with others and suggests that he might be more generous with his wealth than the gentry he ferries across the river.

Sal gives birth to a boy a year later. Though they christen him William, they call him Willie. Thornhill loves Willie, and loves watching Sal care for him. When Willie is two, winter arrives with a vengeance. In January, the Thames freezes and the Thornhills huddle together and hope the money they have saved is enough to get them through. Things begin to go downhill quickly: Lizzie comes down with the quinsy (a form of tonsillitis), and then Mrs. Middleton falls on the ice and struggles to recover. The surgeon is expensive, as are the delicacies that Mr. Middleton fetches for her with the hope of getting her to eat something.

The speed with which the Thornhills begin to slide back down the social ladder shows how fickle the entire system is. Wealth and fortune aren't things that can be counted on, even when Thornhill seemed so sure of his success only months ago. The fact that all this comes about because of an act of nature begins to suggest that nature itself will prove to be one of Thornhill's primary adversaries.

Sal and Thornhill visit often. One day they meet Mr. Middleton on his way to an apothecary across town. He refuses to be talked out of going. He returns to his wife hours later. Mrs. Middleton takes one sip of the mixture before refusing more, and Mr. Middleton finally allows Sal to help him out of his coat and boots. Mr. Middleton is very cold and wakes with a fever the next day. He dies a week later. When Sal tells her mother, Mrs. Middleton turns away, refuses to eat, and finally dies.

The intensity with which Mr. Middleton cares for Mrs. Middleton shows how devoted Mr. Middleton is to his wife and his family more generally. It also helps explain how, later in the novel, Sal will learn to define home for herself: not just in terms of where her literal home is, but in terms of the people she loves.

After the Middletons' deaths, Thornhill realizes that their prosperity had been precarious. Mr. Middleton had spent all his savings on the delicacies for his wife and the prescriptions from the doctor. When the rent collector calls, Thornhill finally understands that Mr. Middleton's house was leased, not owned, and he begins to think of it as cheerless and unsafe. He and Sal sell the furniture to pay rent, but the bailiffs seize Mr. Middleton's boats, including the one he'd given Thornhill as a wedding gift. Thornhill must now make a living as a journeyman, rowing boats for other men.

At this point, Thornhill understands that his idolization of Mr. Middleton's way of life was in some ways misguided. Thornhill places so much emphasis on owning that the revelation that Mr. Middleton's home was rented is enough to make a place that, by all other metrics, was a warm, cheerful home seem suddenly very unsafe. Although Thornhill thinks that it's the home that's unsafe, he's slowly learning that prosperity in general isn't something he can rely on.

Sal fights this turn of fate. When Mrs. Middleton dies, Sal purchases red velvet for her coffin. She doesn't cry until they bury Mr. Middleton, but after she cries, she seems more prepared to move forward. She takes it upon herself to find her family cheaper and cheaper rooms. Thornhill admires her tenacity, even as she begins to steal food. Because Sal has never experienced hunger before, stealing is fun for her. She acts as though it's a fun game, but Thornhill feels as though his life is going backwards.

Sal conceives of her poverty as something that she'll experience for a while and eventually leave behind. This illustrates her privilege, as she can't bring herself to believe that this will be her permanent state going forward. Thornhill, having experienced poverty before, knows that it likely will be: society makes it very difficult for the poor to get ahead without a great deal of help.

One day, Sal develops a plan to steal a chicken from their landlord. Thornhill successfully abducts the chicken and gets it up to their room, but before they can wring its neck, they hear footsteps on the stairs. Sal throws the chicken out the window, where it stalks across the roof of the outhouse, clucking. When their landlord bursts into the room, he accuses the Thornhills of stealing, but they swear they did nothing and the landlord leaves them alone.

The fact that Sal develops this plan illustrates just how dire of a situation the Thornhills are in. The girl who couldn't bear to see a chicken killed is now orchestrating thievery and butchering schemes in her own home. This shows that Sal is able to adjust and adapt to new circumstances.

The narrator explains that watermen in general were not honest people. They were all thieves, though some were certainly better than others. The narrator mentions Thomas Blackwood, a successful thief who owns a lighter (a type of boat) with a false bottom for storing stolen goods. Collarbone isn't so lucky: he's caught with Spanish brandy and sentenced to hang. Thornhill visits him the day before his hanging and imagines hanging himself. Collarbone asks Thornhill to bribe the executioner to buy him a quick death, and Thornhill agrees. The executioner, however, takes no notice of the bribe and Collarbone chokes and tosses on his rope the next morning. Rob vomits, and later Thornhill tells Sal that it was a clean, quick hanging. She sighs and turns back to her darning.

The system in which Thornhill and his peers find themselves is not set up to allow them to get ahead at all: they must steal to survive, but if they are caught, they are punished without mercy. The only comfort is the hope of a quick exit from this life, which Collarbone's horrific death shows isn't even something that can be bought. When Thornhill lies to Sal, he does so to protect her from these horrors. This begins to erode the trust and openness between the two in ways that Thornhill couldn't have predicted.

Thornhill is hired by Mr. Lucas, a successful man who's rumored to want to be Lord Mayor of London. He employs a man named Yates as a foreman and doesn't tolerate thieving on his boats: he made sure one man caught stealing from him hung to set an example for others. Thornhill is cautious at first and learns to bribe the marine police with French brandy. One night, after three years of working for Mr. Lucas, one of Thornhill's friends lets him know that a ship has just arrived carrying valuable Brazil wood.

Mr. Lucas's goals and ambitions show that men of the gentry class can move up the social hierarchy, and can do so by exploiting men of a lower class. This shows that there is the possibility of upward mobility for some people, but it's certainly not available to all.

Yates instructs Thornhill to transport the Brazil wood, along with other timber, to a wharf upriver. Thornhill is ready and thinks of Sal as he sleeps in his boat. She's pregnant again, and doesn't ask too many questions about where Thornhill's money comes from. All the same, he senses that she's beginning to turn away from him.

The silence between Thornhill and Sal, which began when he lied about Collarbone's hanging, is truly beginning to create distance between the two. Although Sal doesn't ask questions, the outcome here suggests that they'd be better off if they were honest with each other.

At daybreak, Rob doesn't show up to help Thornhill load the wood. Thornhill hires another man to help and grows angry with Rob. When most of the timber is loaded, Mr. Lucas arrives. Thornhill asks if there's more wood, and Mr. Lucas finally tells Thornhill where the Brazil wood is. Mr. Lucas marks the pieces of wood with his mark, and Thornhill wonders if he shouldn't follow through with the theft. He wonders if Mr. Lucas knows what he's planning.

Brazil wood is used to make bows for stringed instruments and can also be used as a textile dye: as a material, it's symbolic of the gentry class who would be able to enjoy such luxuries. For Thornhill, it represents the possibility of achieving some degree of success, though he'll likely never think of Brazil wood the way that the gentry do.

At 11 that night, the tide turns and Thornhill guides his boat upstream. He finds the appropriate wharf where he knows his personal boat is waiting, but the tide is too low to unload. He calls softly for Rob, who finally appears and helps Thornhill pull the boat to shore. After they tie up the boat, Thornhill hears a splash and wonders if something isn't right. He and Rob begin to unload the Brazil wood into Thornhill's boat when suddenly Thornhill hears boots running and Mr. Lucas yelling. As Mr. Lucas gets closer, he trips on the oars and Thornhill and Rob manage to push off into the river. Rob is upset that he lost his coat in the scuffle, which Thornhill finds a silly fixation given the circumstances.

The fact that Mr. Lucas himself is involved in catching Thornhill in the act shows just how valuable the Brazil wood is to him. It's valuable enough to warrant Mr. Lucas being out on the cold river at night to supervise, even though Mr. Lucas is of a class that normally wouldn't do such a thing. In Rob's defense, his health and livelihood depend on staying warm enough and not getting sick, something that will be far more difficult without his coat. Even if they make it through this theft, losing his coat puts Rob at a steep disadvantage.

Thornhill thinks they've successfully escaped when he hears Mr. Lucas yelling for Yates to get them. Thornhill notices another small boat quickly approaching, and he rows away as fast as he can. Yates is a big man, however, and quickly catches up. Suddenly, the boat lurches as Yates jumps into Thornhill's boat. Rob yells and falls into the river. Thornhill pleads with Yates before jumping into the river himself and climbing into Yates's boat. Yates doesn't pursue Thornhill, but Mr. Lucas offers a ten-pound reward for Thornhill's capture, and Thornhill is found the next day.

Yates's decision to not pursue Thornhill suggests that he understands why Thornhill is doing what he's doing: he likely worked his way up to where he is now from a place similar to Thornhill's, and knows how difficult it is for a man like Thornhill to achieve financial security. This epitomizes Thornhill's assessment of how things work on the river: everyone steals, and everyone knows everyone steals.

Sal, Lizzie, and Mary visit Thornhill in the Newgate prison. Sal brings Willie, who's four, but Thornhill asks her to not bring him again. They also bring food, but he can barely eat. Thornhill feels hopeless, but Sal has a plan. She knows that Thornhill needs a story that he believes wholeheartedly and will be able to recite as though it's the truth. Sal suggests that Thornhill say that he left the timber at the wharf to make his boat lighter, but while he was away, someone took the wood. The story makes Thornhill hopeful, and he becomes even more hopeful when he hears the next day that a man accused of stealing ducks was just acquitted because he insisted he was "as innocent as the child unborn."

Once again, Thornhill and Sal tie stories to hope. In this case, telling stories is a way to create hope for the future. This suggests that the way in which people tell stories can create meaningful change in their lives. The stories can also change how a person experiences the past by turning something fictional into something "true." The stakes are much higher here than they were in the privacy of the Thornhills' home, however, as it's no longer a matter of poverty or comfort, but of life and death.

The courtroom is a bear pit: barristers and ushers are near the ground, the jury sit along the wall on the next level up, and the witness and judge are on the same level opposite each other. Behind the witness sits the scribe, who records every word, and near the ceiling are the public galleries. As he stands in the courtroom, Thornhill tries to pick out Sal in the gallery. He can't quite find her, but knows she's there. His hands are tied behind his back, forcing him to hunch over. Thornhill is struck by how powerful words are in court: words will either save him or condemn him.

Thornhill isn't fully sold on the usefulness of the written word. Here, however, his spoken words will be recorded by the scribe and preserved for all eternity in the court record. Because Thornhill is still illiterate, this creates the sense that his words are beyond his control, because they'll take a form that he cannot access once they leave his mouth.

A lawyer named Mr. Knapp is assigned to represent Thornhill. Mr. Lucas takes the stand first, and Mr. Knapp sets a clever trap: he insists the night was so dark, Mr. Lucas could only identify Thornhill by his voice, which isn't enough to prosecute. Mr. Lucas seems annoyed and repeats that he knew Thornhill's voice. When Yates takes the stand, he looks very unhappy and cannot escape Mr. Knapp's trap regarding Thornhill's voice. Thornhill can feel Mr. Lucas staring at him.

Mr. Knapp's trap uses the idea that spoken language is less valuable than written language to help Thornhill, arguing that a man's voice isn't enough to warrant hanging. This divorces language from actions, as it matters not what Thornhill actually did. What Thornhill said on the night of the theft, and what people say in the courtroom today, will be the deciding factor in Thornhill's fate.

When Thornhill is allowed to speak, Sal's story disappears from his mind. He insists he's innocent, but the judge seems to not be listening. Finally, the judge sentences Thornhill to hang. When Thornhill is pushed back into his cell at Newgate, he feels naked without his story and his hope.

When Thornhill loses his words, he loses all hope for his future. This again connects the proper use of language to hope for the future—Thornhill's poor use of language here denies him a future.

Sal visits him later and tells him that the way out of his death sentence is to send letters "up the line." She tells him who to speak to, and Thornhill later buys a letter by trading in his wool greatcoat. The letter is to Captain Watson, one of Thornhill's regulars, imploring him to speak on his behalf. Thornhill stares at the illegible scribbles on the page and feels hopeless that they're the thing that can save him.

Even if language failed Thornhill in court, it's not useless: he now uses written language to try to change his fate. His own illiteracy makes this seem hopeless, as his inability to read means that the written word is truly useless to him, since he can't understand it or manipulate it himself.

Captain Watson sends a letter on Thornhill's behalf to Lord Hawkesbury, who alone has the power to pardon Thornhill. Watson also sends a copy of his letter to Sal. She has to pay the man who wrote the initial letter to read Watson's letter aloud, and she and Thornhill fear it won't do any good. He and Sal smile at each other, but they know that this is the end and that Sal will have to "go on the streets" to make a living now.

Sal's own literacy only goes so far: she can't read cursive. This shows that the written word is a way to discern class even among literate individuals, as cursive is only taught to upper class people. Captain Watson's letter shows again that not all upper class people are cruel or as bad as Thornhill sometimes believes.

One morning, a man comes to the cell door and yells Thornhill's name. The man reads quickly that Thornhill's death sentence will no longer stand, but that he will be transported to New South Wales for the term of his natural life. The clerk accompanying the reader asks for Thornhill's wife's name, and says that she and Willie have also been granted passage to New South Wales.

Thornhill's punishment is now to be removed from the place he calls home. This robs him of his roots and of the dreams he has for a life in London. That an option even exists for Thornhill to be sent to the British colony of New South Wales is a matter of luck, since England in the 18th century had an interest in sending convicts to help settle this new territory.

PART 2: SYDNEY

Thornhill arrives in Sydney, Australia, a sad and jumbled town, in September of 1806, after a nine-month journey at sea. The light hurts his eyes after so long below deck, and he vomits standing on still ground. He hears Sal cry out for him, but a guard pushes her back. Minutes later, Thornhill hears his name called and the guard "assigns" him to Sal. Willie doesn't seem to recognize his father. Now, Thornhill gets to look at the new baby, who was born at Cape Town several months before. They named him Richard after Sal's father.

Although Sal and Thornhill are still lower-class citizens, assigning Thornhill to Sal as a convict servant suggests that she's a step up in the world. As the novel will show later, having convict servants is a privilege one earns when they're free, and not before. This makes it clear that there's a very different organizational system for society here in New South Wales.

The government issues Sal a week's worth of food, some blankets, and a hut. Thornhill is, essentially, a slave, bound to work for Sal doing whatever she wants. They're on their own as soon as they collect their items and inspect their hut. As the sun sets, an older drunk couple brings them a kettle with a wooden bottom. Thornhill thinks it's a joke, but the woman tells them how to use it. The man warns them against the "savages" before they leave the Thornhills.

The kettle is representative of Thornhill's initial experience of culture shock: it's so foreign to him, he thinks these people are making him the butt of a joke. In reality, the culture in New South Wales entails different ways of cooking that Thornhill simply hasn't seen before. These early weeks, then, will be consumed by figuring out how the culture works.

Thornhill studies the land. The town is mostly hovels, and a wooly forest goes on for miles behind it. It's entirely foreign to Thornhill, who's only ever seen London. He thinks of his journey to this strange place and how he thought of Sal for all those months at sea. The family finally goes into the hut, and Willie insists on sleeping next to Sal. When he finally drifts off, Sal and Thornhill embrace and cry.

The relationship in Thornhill's mind between Sal and this new environment shows that, to a degree, he does believe that home is where Sal is: she's the only thing he knows in this strange land. Without any other way to feel like he belongs in this new land, Sal is all he has.

In the morning, Thornhill wonders if the black man who confronted him in the night was a dream. He doesn't dwell on it and instead turns to finding employment rowing boats in Sydney Cove. He works mostly for Mr. King, smuggling casks of liquor around the customs office at night.

New South Wales is no less lawless than London was, which shows that the thousands of miles have done little to alter that part of the culture. Thornhill is still able to do what he knows and make money doing so.

In New South Wales, the government has instituted a ticket system in which convicts can apply for a “ticket of leave” after a year. This allows them to work and support themselves, but not to leave New South Wales. Sal and Thornhill joke for the first year that she's the mistress. They soon move into a larger hut and Sal opens a rum bar in one of the rooms. At night, they talk to each other about their future. They see from those around them that it's wholly possible to move up in the world here, and eventually they'll be able to return to London after making their fortune.

From a contemporary perspective, the existence of the ticket system shows that England was more interested in colonizing Australia than it was in truly punishing people: it allowed the people a way out, but only after they left their mark on New South Wales. The system is different enough from London that Thornhill stands to make something of himself.

Sal is consistently astonished at the lightning and thunder, as well as the crawling creatures. She finds the trees, which are silvery gray and formless, insulting. She holds tightly to a piece of roof tile she found on her last day in London, and tells Thornhill that when they return to London, she'll take it back to where she found it. Thornhill encourages Sal to take walks outside the town limits, but she prefers to sit on the wharf at Sydney Cove.

Sal in particular refuses to adjust and integrate fully into this new culture, and instead fixates on her return to her home, London. Thornhill's insistence that she step outside the township suggests that he's learned that there are things worth experiencing outside of the town. Sal's unwillingness is evidence that she's actively trying to not adjust.

An Aborigine called Scabby Bill lives in the settlement. He sleeps outside the hut and Thornhill and Sal give him bread sometimes. He has scars on his chest and can sometimes be convinced to dance for a sip of rum. There are several natives like Scabby Bill who live in the settlement, and many others in the forest who are invisible. They're all naked, and Thornhill thinks that there's no indication that they feel like they own the land: there are no signs, fields, or homes to signal ownership. However, white men in the settlement are sometimes speared by natives. This troubles Sal, and Thornhill is glad to be on the water all day where the spears can't get him.

Thornhill and the other white men in the settlement have a very western conception of what signals ownership of a place (signs, fields, etc). This, of course, ignores the ways in which the Aborigines interact with the land and think of it as home. The spearing incidents show that the Aborigines feel threatened by these white invaders and do wish to protect themselves against them, and Thornhill's fear suggests that they pose a very real threat.

In Sydney Cove, Thornhill runs into many acquaintances from the Thames. He meets Thomas Blackwood again, who insists, when Thornhill explains the circumstances that brought him to New South Wales, that someone accepted a bribe and ratted Thornhill out to Mr. Lucas. Blackwood appears to be doing well in Sydney without a false-bottomed boat, as carrying goods between Sydney and a fertile stretch of land 50 miles away is good business. The route follows the sea and then the Hawkesbury River. The river is named after Lord Hawkesbury, who sent both Blackwood and Thornhill to New South Wales.

The naming of the Hawkesbury is significant on several levels. The novel will show that it's a place where a man can become rich, like Lord Hawkesbury. In the same vein, the river will be the livelihood for several men, Blackwood and Thornhill included, echoing the way Lord Hawkesbury saved their lives by sending them to New South Wales in the first place. The river and the man it's named after are in many ways one and the same.

The Hawkesbury River is the place where a boatman has a good chance of getting rich, either by farming or transporting farmers' crops. It's very remote, however, and populated by warlike natives. Blackwood says nothing when Thornhill asks about the "outrages and depredations" reported by the *Sydney Gazette*.

Thornhill begins to see that the Hawkesbury River can be a key to advancing his own place in the social hierarchy. Blackwood is proof of this. Blackwood's silence about the "outrages and depredations" suggests that his opinions might not be popular.

After a year, Thornhill applies for and is granted his ticket of leave. When the baby, Dick, is able to feed himself, Sal becomes pregnant again. James is born in March of 1808 and is a sickly baby. Sal barely sleeps as she comforts him every night, and Thornhill resists bonding with him. They nickname him Bub.

Bub is the first Thornhill who will truly call New South Wales home. This culture is the one he'll grow up knowing and thinking of as normal, which creates a sense of distance between him and his family, who still think of London as home.

Three years after the Thornhills arrived in New South Wales, Thornhill can afford to purchase meat three times per week. Bub survives infancy, and Thornhill decides to find new employment after Mr. King takes on a new clerk who keeps detailed lists and begins to notice things missing. Blackwood's convict servant fell overboard a few weeks before Christmas, and Thornhill doesn't hesitate to take his place. On his first journey to the Hawkesbury, the wind is icy even though it's the middle of summer. The water swells, and Thornhill realizes he's scared. After half a day, Blackwood points to an arc of forest and says that it's where the Hawkesbury comes out. The mouth of the river is well hidden in a bay beyond some rocks.

Thornhill's ability to purchase meat is a marker of how well he's doing in New South Wales. The journey to the Hawkesbury River feels to Thornhill like leaving the country all over again: he becomes, in a sense, an immigrant in this new landscape. This illustrates the fact that, at this point, New South Wales is an entirely unknown place to Westerners. 50 miles might not be a great distance today, but in 1811, it meant the difference between civilization and complete wilderness.

Blackwood skillfully navigates the boat into the small bay, and Thornhill searches for the mouth of the Hawkesbury. Blackwood seems to point the boat towards solid land, but the river finally appears. Thornhill thinks the land looks like something out of a dream. Blackwood points to oyster shells and explains that the natives fish regularly. When Thornhill asks where the natives are, Blackwood replies that they're everywhere. He gestures to smoke columns running up the river, and explains that they're signaling each other that the boat is coming up the river. Blackwood sternly says that they'll only see the natives when the natives want to be seen.

The way that Blackwood speaks about the Aborigines suggests that they are very much a part of the land: the forest surrounding the river hides them, and they live off the land as evidenced by their fishing habits. They're also in control of how and whether they interact with the white settlers. It's worth noting that Blackwood's language is respectful of this power that he describes in the Aborigines. He recognizes that they're in control, and he's a mere bystander.

Blackwood and Thornhill continue up the winding river until they reach a bay. Blackwood calls out for a man called Smasher Sullivan, and explains to Thornhill that Smasher burns oyster shells for lime. Thornhill squints at Smasher's hut and notices something that looks flayed hanging in the yard. Smasher rows out to Blackwood's boat. Blackwood is quiet, and Smasher proudly shows off a pair of black human hands, cut off at the wrists, saying that the man they belonged to won't steal from him again. Blackwood is angry and instructs Thornhill to help him row away. He hands Thornhill his telescope, and it takes Thornhill a minute to realize that the flayed body is the body of one of the natives.

Smasher, unlike Blackwood, is introduced to the reader as a person who does not accept that the natives have any power: butchering this black man is a clear message that he believes he *has the power here. At this point, Thornhill is stuck following along with Blackwood's way of thinking about the Aborigines. This sets a precedent for Thornhill, instilling in him a belief that the Aborigines are people worth respecting.*

When Blackwood speaks, he angrily says that men have to pay a fair price to take things. After a silence, Blackwood points to where his property is. He explains that he bought his pardon two years ago and picked out a hundred acres. Thornhill thinks that he doesn't know anyone who owns land, and is astonished that a convicted man can own land. Blackwood explains that one only has to choose a place and stay there to claim it as one's own.

Blackwood defines ownership in a way that's very appealing to Thornhill, as it doesn't necessarily require money. It also shows him that he is capable of owning land—and is therefore fully capable of attaining the status that comes along with being a landowner.

The boat passes a bend in the river that looks like a man's thumb, and for the first time, Thornhill feels as though he's fallen in love with this piece of land. He imagines standing there and calling it Thornhill's Point, but acts as though he doesn't care. Blackwood sees through this façade and tells Thornhill that the land is no good, and tells him again that out here it's "give a little, take a little," or you're dead. Thornhill insists he agrees, but Blackwood doesn't seem to believe him. Thornhill continues to think of the thumb-shaped piece of land.

Again, Blackwood's theory of "give a little, take a little" suggests that the native people should be treated like stewards of the land with as much of a claim to ownership over it as any white man. Blackwood seems to believe that, whatever Thornhill thinks on the matter, the land is owned—just not in a way that makes sense to Thornhill, with his western way of thinking about land ownership.

When he returns to Sydney, Thornhill tells Sal about the river and the people that live there. He doesn't mention his dream of owning land there. Months later, in July of 1809, Thornhill finally tells Sal about the land. Sal laughs at the thought of farming, but realizes that Thornhill is serious. She insists that if they stay in Sydney, they'll have enough money to return to England in a few years. At the sound of their parents' raised voices, Willie and Dick wake up and watch the two argue. Thornhill is proud that each of his three boys have their own blanket at night. He realizes that Sal's dreams are small and cautious, and although he drops the subject, he doesn't forget the land. Every trip up the river, Thornhill watches with dread to see if someone else has claimed it.

At this point, it's becoming more evident that Sal and Thornhill feel very differently about their lives in New South Wales. While Thornhill sees opportunities for advancement and is ready to think of New South Wales as a final stopping point because of those opportunities, Sal still sees the whole thing as a stopover on their way back to London, where she truly feels at home. Thornhill sees evidence, like his boys' individual blankets, as proof that his family is thriving here in a way they wouldn't have been able to in London.

A year later, Blackwood decides to retire to his place on the river, but he takes Thornhill to get him his pardon before he does. Thornhill purchases a petition from a man who charges rum, and Thornhill proudly signs his name at the bottom. He and twelve other men take their petitions to the Governor's estate and stand in a large drawing room. Thornhill can't understand the Governor's Scottish accent, so he wonders what it would be like to live this grandly. When the Governor calls Thornhill, he pardons him absolutely. The term of Thornhill's natural life had been four years, five months. At home, Thornhill and Sal toast to his good fortune.

Getting the pardon is a measureable step in Thornhill's ascent in the social hierarchy. This scene mirrors Thornhill's binding as an apprentice: just as he did then, Thornhill imagines his bright future and how high he might rise as he receives the tools to possibly get there. Like the binding, it also throws Thornhill's status into sharp relief by placing him next to a man as important as the Governor. Though this will provide him opportunities, Thornhill cannot forget that he's of a much lower class than the Governor.

Thornhill decides he needs a boat of his own, as that will allow him to do well enough to not have to steal. He and Sal get out their cash box and count out 35 pounds, enough to buy one of the well-made skiffs from a man in the cove. Sal says that she read in the *Gazette* that Blackwood is selling his boat for 160 pounds but will take less, and tells Thornhill to borrow the rest of the money from Mr. King. She insists that they'll be able to pay it off and move back to London in a few years. Thornhill agrees, but he still dreams of moving to the land on the Hawkesbury.

Sal and Thornhill's dreams continue to diverge, and Thornhill continues to keep quiet about his dreams. Again, this difference in dreams brings out the differences between Sal and Thornhill's London childhoods. Sal was happy and well fed in London, but Thornhill understands that providing a good life in London will be exceptionally difficult given the hardships he has experienced.

Thornhill borrows 115 pounds from Mr. King, who shakes hands with Thornhill as though they're equals. When Sal comes to admire the boat, pregnant again, she suggests they rename the boat after her father's boat, the *Hope*. Thornhill renames the boat and Sal comes to see it with the new baby. The *Hope* is perfect, and Willie begins working with Thornhill now that he's eleven. The two spend much of their time trading along the Hawkesbury and develop a loyal clientele. Thornhill works nonstop, driven by the fear of the loan and hope for a future that's better than the past, particularly since he's noticing his body beginning to age and ache.

Mr. King's handshake is proof that the pardon actually meant something. This shows that the legal and social structure in Australia is directly responsible for Thornhill's good fortune, as no system exists in England that would allow him to take out a loan like this. Further, the loan allows Thornhill to truly own something, which certainly contributes to Thornhill's sense of success.

Thornhill's family thrives: Bub is now three and looks as though he'll survive; Dick is introspective and solemn; and the new baby, Johnny, loves to tinker with things. Sal is exceptionally happy. By early 1812, Thornhill has paid back a quarter of his loan to Mr. King and knows that he needs to take the land on the Hawkesbury before it's too late. He knows that although technically he needs a paper signed by the Governor, in reality, England needs people to settle the land and will look the other way.

Sal's happiness suggests that she might actually be adjusting to life in New South Wales, whether or not she's willing to admit it. Again, the legal structure of the colony (as well as England's goal of simply populating its new colony) makes it possible for people to advance without much capital or anything else. For men like Thornhill, it's a land of great opportunity.

Sal becomes pregnant again, and on New Year's Eve 1813, Thornhill tells her again about the land. She laughs, admitting that she had thought he was seeing another woman with how dreamy he's been looking. He asks Sal to give it five years and says that then they can go back to England. He reminds her of their dreams of buying a house in London, and she finally agrees to go once the baby's born. She agrees to five years and no more.

New South Wales is becoming home for Thornhill, particularly now that Sal agrees to go along with his dream of owning land. When Thornhill mentions their dream of owning a home in London, it suggests that owning a home is also important to Sal, though the location is more important to her than ownership itself.

PART 3: A CLEARING IN THE FOREST

In September of 1813, the Thornhills board the *Hope* and begin their journey to the Hawkesbury River. Sal sits with the new baby, Mary, held tightly to her chest. She looks back towards Sydney until it's out of sight and then down at her feet. Thornhill knows she's trying hard to not be sick, and loves her for being willing to come with him. When they reach the Hawkesbury River, Thornhill watches Sal and the children look at the surrounding hills with fear and wonder. He realizes how much he's changed since he first saw the river: it now represents hope to him. He tries to comfort Sal.

It's important to keep in mind that Sal is only doing this because Thornhill promised that they will return to London after five years. Thornhill is well aware that she's viewing these five years as a means of earning her reward of getting to return to London. In this way, Sal shows that she hopes to use the lenient hierarchy system of New South Wales to reintegrate herself back into London culture, not simply to be successful here.

Dick asks if the savages will try to eat them, and Thornhill assures him that he won't let them. He glances at the **gun** wrapped in canvas. He'd bought it from a man in Sydney and when the man showed him how to use it, the kickback was enough to make him stagger. Thornhill thought he'd never be able to shoot a man, but thought that he'd earned the right to own a gun with his pardon.

The way that Thornhill conceptualizes the gun is directly influenced by the way he came to own it. It's a marker of his success and status, not necessarily a useful tool. With this, Thornhill experiences what's known now as "imposter syndrome:" he's pretending to belong by acquiring the symbols, but doesn't feel as though he truly belongs.

Finally, Thornhill points to where they're going to settle. The tide turns, however, and Thornhill decides to fight the tide to get to land now rather than sleep in the *Hope* for the night. He snaps at Willie to help, and the boy obeys. When they reach the shore, Thornhill jumps out of the boat into the squelching mud and makes his way onto dry land. He steps lightly and is in awe of the fact that the land is his. Thornhill walks into a clearing and marks out the perimeter of a hut while a black bird watches and crows at him.

The fact that Thornhill is the only one who experiences this as an awe-inspiring, almost religious experience illustrates just how important to him it is to own this land. To the rest of his family, it's a disruption of a life they knew, and it means they'll have to do the hard work of creating a home here all over again.

Thornhill, Willie, and Dick struggle to erect a canvas tent and manage to do so just before nightfall. When Thornhill goes back to the *Hope* to fetch Sal, he realizes that, although the journey from London to Sydney was certainly a longer one, this journey from Sydney to the river feels even further away. Willie coaxes his mother to stand by telling her they have tea and bread ready, and she finally allows them to help her, Bub, and Johnny out of the boat and onto dry land.

Thornhill begins to understand that moving to the Hawkesbury has made Sal feel like an immigrant all over again. Thornhill's Point may be owned by her husband, but as far as she's concerned, it is not *her home. This suggests that Sal had begun to think of Sydney as her home.*

When they all reach the tent, Thornhill realizes how flimsy it must look to Sal, and realizes that she'll be on her own for a week at a time while he works up and down the river. The children look wary and skeptical of their new home. Thornhill knows that people can survive out here, but understands that Sal hasn't been far from real civilization before. Thornhill doubts that his family can actually be successful out here and looks at the sky. He thinks that the moon is the same one they saw in London, and tells Sal that this river is little different than the Thames. He begins to point to where different landmark buildings of London would be, but Sal says sadly that those buildings are still in London.

That Thornhill is realizing that Sal will be alone for periods of time only now shows just how much owning land means to him, and by extension, how he's not taken the time to consider the actual impact or practical aspects of moving to the Hawkesbury. This begins to show that although Thornhill has dreamed about and idealized this move, there are possibly very real consequences for moving here: Sal, because she's female and will be alone, will almost certainly be in danger.

The family huddles close around the fire as night falls. Before sunset, Thornhill loads the **gun**. He wonders why it doesn't make him feel safe to have it. Thornhill studies the stars and Willie suddenly suggests that the natives might be watching them, though Thornhill quickly shushes him. When they go to bed, Sal snuggles close to Thornhill and he holds her until she falls asleep. As he lies awake, he thinks that he's finally lying on his own land.

Thornhill sees the gun as little more than a symbol *of power and status rather than something that will actually make him powerful. Thornhill's fears about moving his family to the Point are overshadowed by the joy he feels at owning this land, which again makes it very clear where his priorities lie.*

At sunrise, Thornhill, Willie, and Dick walk down to a flat, clear strip of land by the river with only weedy daisies growing on it. Thornhill knows that what will make the land truly his is to plant corn there. When they get to the strip, Willie points out that someone's already been digging in the soil. Thornhill nearly cries, but steadies himself and inspects the patch. He realizes that it's not been dug in a neat square like someone with a pick or a hoe would dig, and the daisies are still lying on top of the soil.

Thornhill understands ownership in terms of cultivation, so he reasons that the land will be his if he plants something on it. Thornhill's inspection of the patch doesn't necessarily suggest that the daisies aren't cultivated purposefully, but it does suggest that if they are cultivated here on purpose, it wasn't by an Englishman. Thornhill seems not to even consider the possibility that the natives may feel that they already own this land.

Calmly, Thornhill tells his sons that moles or hogs must have dug up the dirt. Willie hears his father, but Dick says that savages planted the daisies while Willie tries to shush him. Thornhill thinks that Dick would be right, but it's common knowledge that the natives don't plant things, and that's one of the reasons they're called "savages." He tells Dick that the natives don't plant things and they go to work on the soil.

Thornhill's assessment is the first of several incidents in which he attributes things done by Aborigines to the natural world. This represents the colonial mindset that the natives are entirely incapable of doing things like cultivating the daisies on purpose.

Hoeing is difficult. Thornhill sweats in the full sun, Willie hoes madly, and Dick dreamily scratches at one spot of dirt for minutes at a time. By afternoon, they've cleared a small square to plant corn. Thornhill sends the boys back to the tent for the seeds and sits down to admire his handiwork. Suddenly, he realizes that two black men are watching him. When he stands up, the two men step towards him with their spears. They regard each other for a minute until finally Thornhill approaches them and warily tells them to not spear him.

Thornhill's first meeting with the Aborigines is, importantly, a non-violent one. This suggests that the Aborigines aren't violent, an idea that stands in direct opposition to the reported "outrages and depredations" in the Sydney Gazette. To be sure, the settlers don't have a good picture of what the Aborigines are actually like—there's a gulf in understanding between the two cultures.

The older of the two black men begins to speak in his own language, gesturing at the land all the while. Thornhill listens for a minute, but soon feels angry and dumb. He loudly interrupts the man and calls him "old boy," speaking to him as he remembered rich people used to speak on the Thames. Thornhill laughs and tells the men he can't understand them. The men don't laugh with him, and when Thornhill gestures to the land around them and says that it's his now and the natives have "all the rest," the native men don't look or laugh. Thornhill thinks that his hundred acres are surely insignificant in the grand scheme of New South Wales.

For Thornhill, not understanding the man speaking to him recalls times in his past when he couldn't understand members of the gentry class. All of those experiences made him feel stupid and inferior, and this one is little different. By adopting the speech patterns of the gentry, Thornhill ridiculously attempts to show his superiority and make the Aborigines feel inferior. Further, this shows Thornhill adopting not just the speech patterns of the gentry, but their hierarchical ways of thinking about people, as well.

Suddenly, Willie and Dick run down the hill with the corn seeds. They stop when they see the natives. Sal comes out of the tent and stops Bub and Johnny from following their brothers. She looks scared. Thornhill thinks that the natives look like they're waiting for something and wishes he'd bought beads to offer them before they left Sydney. Sal shouts to Thornhill to give them some of their pork, and yells to Willie to come and fetch it from her. Thornhill thinks that that's how she dealt with Scabby Bill, but these natives seem very different from him.

Even as Thornhill plays at being superior and powerful, he recognizes that he'll have to meet these men on some level and give them something in order to come to an agreement. This shows Blackwood's "take a little, give a little" principle in action. Further, Thornhill's desire to give them something shows that he doesn't actually want to fight the natives.

The natives accept the pork and some bread but still don't move. Thornhill mimes eating, but they don't eat the food either. The younger man puts the pork down and Thornhill wonders if he should give them some of the coins in his pocket. As he reaches into his pocket, he hears Willie yell at the older man to give the spade back. Willie rushes the man and wrestles with him for the tool, but the man pushes Willie off. The two face off and yell at each other in different, angry languages. Thornhill thinks that there are too many people and not enough language, and feels like he's lost control of the situation.

Thornhill recognizes that the language barrier will be the primary obstacle to forming a peaceful relationship with the Aborigines, as without language, they won't be able to solve any of their conflicts. Willie's willingness to yell at this older man shows that he believes he's more powerful and worthy of respect than this man. This shows that Willie is entirely a product of the English culture that tells him he's superior to the Aborigines.

Thornhill yells "No!" and runs over to Willie. He slaps the old man's shoulder and continues to shout "No! No! No!" as he does. The old man's face closes as he reaches for his club, and the younger man lifts his spear. Thornhill hears others in the woods lifting their own spears. Sal cries out and then everyone falls silent. The old man grunts, drops the spade, and disappears into the forest. The younger man approaches Thornhill. Thornhill can see the stone and glass chips that make up the point of the spear. The man slaps Thornhill's shoulder, mirroring what Thornhill did to the old man, and then he gestures and speaks. Thornhill understands that he's telling them to go away. Then the man melts into the forest.

Specific language isn't always necessary to clearly communicate, as Thornhill learns when the younger man tells them to leave. Now, Thornhill will have to decide whether to listen. Not listening means denying the Aborigines any claim to the land. Importantly, the actions of both Thornhill and the younger man speak volumes, an idea that Thornhill will return to later. Their success communicating this way suggests that movement is also a language, distinct from spoken and written language.

Bub asks why the natives didn't spear them, and Sal insists that the natives left once they gave them food. Thornhill thinks that Sal likely doesn't believe that, but he agrees with her anyway. The next morning, Thornhill crawls out of the tent to find it surrounded by spears stuck into the ground. He quickly gathers them up, but Willie sees. Thornhill assures Willie that if the natives wanted to kill them, they would've, but he feels hollow inside. He tells Willie that they shouldn't frighten Sal. Later, when they plant the seeds, Willie remarks that the shriveled seeds won't grow. Thornhill insists he doesn't care as long as he can lay claim to the land.

The spears send a clear message that Thornhill and his family aren't welcome, which again works to expand the definition of what counts as language. When Thornhill willfully ignores this message, he sends a message in return that he believes in the righteousness of his own claim to the land as an English settler more than he believes what the Aborigines tell him.

Sal soon creates a yard of sorts for the family where she cooks and mends clothes, and she doesn't leave it unless absolutely necessary. She begins keeping count of the days on a tree near the tent. Thornhill hears her telling Willie that they'll be here for 260 weeks. He hopes that she'll stop counting, but she never does. Thornhill understands that she feels like a prisoner, though neither of them will admit the truth of it. He doesn't want to say out loud that his dream is Sal's idea of a prison.

Sal creates a sense of home and of belonging by fencing herself in, though the fence also contributes to the sense that Thornhill's Point is a prison for her. With this, the novel continues to expand its definition of what prison and punishment can be. This also shows Thornhill suddenly becoming the jailer, at least symbolically.

Within two weeks, the corn sprouts. Willie and Dick water the plants while Sal tethers Bub and Johnny in the yard to keep them from danger. Though she agrees to come down to the corn patch to admire it, Sal doesn't seem impressed. When Thornhill tries to offer her edible plants he finds, she refuses to try them and insists on waiting for the corn. Thornhill understands that she's going to wait her five years before they can return to London. In the mornings, she tells Thornhill her dreams of wandering around London. All the Thornhills feel watched, though they don't actually see any of the natives.

Again, Sal does everything in her power to resist learning about her new home in an attempt to keep herself from adjusting. In addition, by turning her mind so fully to London and her future there, she reinforces for herself and for Thornhill that London is her home. By playing to Thornhill's guilt and not allowing him to forget his promise, she tries to ensure that he'll act fairly and follow through in the end.

For the first few weeks, Thornhill and his sons perform hard labor to get the corn growing and begin to construct a hut. After two weeks, Thornhill decides to climb the ridge on one edge of his property. He looks forward to seeing all of his land laid out before him. However, he soon realizes that the ridge isn't an easy or straightforward climb. After struggling for a while, he settles for a flat rock at the base of the ridge. From there, he can see Sal washing clothes and Willie standing still instead of hoeing. Thornhill yells to Willie, but the vastness of the land swallows his voice and it doesn't carry.

Though the landscape entrances Thornhill now that it's not so terrifying, it's still not exactly welcoming. This complicates how Thornhill thinks of this place as being home, as the land itself seems to directly oppose Thornhill's attempts to master it. Thornhill can't even control his own family, as the landscape swallows his voice. In short, the land isn't doing Thornhill any favors.

Thornhill looks down at an ant and notices a freshly scratched line in the rock. He follows it and thinks that it must be the work of water and wind, though when he realizes that the lines make up a detailed drawing of a fish, he admits to himself that it's a drawing made by humans. The drawing is five yards long, and the fish looks very alive. As Thornhill walks around the fish, he notices another drawing overlapping the fish. Upon closer inspection, he realizes it's a drawing of the *Hope*. Thornhill makes an indignant noise, which the land also swallows up.

Thornhill's thought process mirrors the thoughts he had when he began his corn patch: he struggles to believe that the Aborigines are capable of creating something, which shows just how superior Thornhill believes his culture is. When the land "swallows" Thornhill's reaction, it suggests that the land is on the side of the Aborigines and that Thornhill's language has no place here.

Thornhill looks around and sees no one watching him, but he realizes that even though the land may seem empty, the drawings are proof that this place is populated. He turns to watch Sal again and thinks that he'll tell her about the fish someday, but not yet. He begins to realize that once you start keeping secrets from someone, it's easier to keep doing it than to stop.

Now, Thornhill finally understands that what he calls "home" is land that others also think of as their home. He decides not to tell Sal about the fish to allow her to think she's safe. Again, his intentions are good, but it means that neither of them will be able to truly understand the other's experience.

On their fourth week on the Hawkesbury, Smasher Sullivan arrives with a housewarming gift of rat poison, a keg of lime, and oranges from his tree. His dog follows him up to the half-finished hut. Sal greets Smasher as though they're old friends and offers him all the hospitality she can, while Thornhill only sits down to be pleasant. Smasher tells them how he was convicted and sent to New South Wales. Sal tells Smasher her story and shows him her marks on the tree. Thornhill realizes how lonely Sal is, but thinks that he hadn't thought to ask her about it.

Arriving with gifts stands in stark contrast to what Thornhill saw on his first trip up the river: this is chilling evidence that Smasher is racist and cares only for the white *inhabitants of the river. When Thornhill finally learns that Sal is lonely, he confronts the consequences of his own silence. She's turning to others instead of him, and in some ways, putting him in his own prison of solitary confinement.*

When Dick gets tired of holding Mary, Sal takes her and sends Dick to play. With the children gone, Smasher begins talking about the natives and regales them with tales of their viciousness. Sal becomes quiet and holds Mary tightly, while Thornhill tries to give Smasher a hint to stop talking. Smasher continues to talk about his guns and his dogs, which he trains to attack only natives. Finally, Thornhill puts the cork in the rum bottle and Smasher finally shouts goodbye and leaves. Both Thornhill and Sal can't seem to shake the violent stories.

Smasher seems to get real pleasure and satisfaction from talking like this. This kind of language allows him to feel superior and successful, though it also shows that his success is built on a foundation of violence and cruelty. The fact that Thornhill and Sal can't escape the stories after Smasher's departure recalls Thornhill's observations from prison: the stories seem more true the more often they're told.

Later that night, when the lamp goes out, Sal forces herself to laugh and asks Thornhill if Smasher is just exaggerating. Thornhill insists that he surely is, but thinks about the hands and the flayed man he saw his first time up the river. Sal is quiet for a minute and then says she didn't like how Smasher spoke about having guns and whips around to teach the natives lessons. She makes Thornhill swear he'd never do that. Thornhill thinks of watching Collarbone hang and how he lied to Sal that the death was clean. He assures her he'd never be so violent and Sal falls asleep immediately.

By continuing to lie, Thornhill creates a false sense of safety for Sal, one that downplays the very existence of the Aborigines, as well as invalidates and tones down the very real violence of Smasher's words. It suggests that Smasher isn't one to be taken seriously when, in fact, he embodies the beliefs of many settlers: that the natives aren't welcome on this land, and violence is a perfectly acceptable way to deal with them.

The hut proves a difficult structure to erect. As Thornhill fights the difficult earth to build it, he discovers that he's actually capable of building things. He finishes the hut in the fifth week on the Hawkesbury and has cleared a larger corn patch by then, too. The hut makes the place seem more human, though it's so crude it barely keeps the wilderness out: one morning, a black snake crawls out of Willie and Dick's mattress. They all watch it go silently, and then Sal tells Willie and Dick to patch the gaps in the walls after breakfast. Sal insists that they don't have to do an impeccable job since they'll be leaving soon, but Thornhill wonders if five years is going to be enough.

Thornhill is able to deepen his emotional connection to Thornhill's Point by building the physical home on his land. Though Sal certainly benefits from the new hut, she still works hard to keep her distance from the building that she could call home. For her, the building has little symbolic value—it's not much more than a place to stay for a while. Thornhill's wondering suggests that his emotional connection is strengthening so much that he's considering breaking his promise to Sal.

Thornhill encourages Smasher to tell others on the river that his family enjoys company, so one Sunday, several neighbors arrive. Smasher arrives first, followed by a man named Sagitty. Sagitty had once had a wife and children here in New South Wales, but they all died. He farms wheat and raises hogs, though he insists that the natives steal from him constantly. Though Thornhill bristles when Sagitty says he "learned them a lesson," he understands that theft on the scale he describes isn't a small matter.

Thornhill finds Sagitty a more sympathetic character than Smasher because he lays out a logical system of actions and consequences when it comes to the natives (they steal, he punishes them). Smasher, on the other hand, doesn't seem to require provocation to behave violently towards his black neighbors. This shows that Thornhill very much relies on these systems of justice to justify his beliefs and actions.

Sagitty and Smasher exchange knowing looks as they talk about the natives. Thornhill tries to change the subject, but Smasher dreamily says that killing the natives is like killing flies. Sal stops in her tracks. Smasher notices and insists he doesn't actually kill the natives, but Thornhill knows he's lying.

Smasher shows here that he thinks of the Aborigines as completely sub-human, and therefore worthy only of being hunted for sport—a horrifying way to think of and treat any group of people.

A man nicknamed Spider arrives with Loveday. Thornhill hopes the conversation will turn away from killing the natives, but it only becomes more intense. Spider insists that the natives are vermin, and tells the group that they kill white people and eat them. Loveday regales them with a tale of being speared in the hip and even shows them the scar. Thornhill laughs with the others, but hopes that Sal will think that these are stories and not factual. The widow Mrs. Herring arrives. She tells Sal that because she lives alone, she gives the natives what they want and turns a blind eye when they steal. She insists that she has enough supplies to not need to make trouble.

Mrs. Herring's view on how to deal with the Aborigines is more closely aligned with Blackwood's than any of the other attendees. However, hers also seems to come from a place of fear and recognition that she's vulnerable as a single, older woman. This suggests that she might not think this way if she had more power or didn't live alone, while Blackwood's philosophy seems to come more from an active choice to cooperate than from a place of fear.

Smasher notices Blackwood coming up the river. Smasher and Sagitty exchange a hard glance as Blackwood walks up with a keg of his homemade rum. When he arrives, everyone becomes quiet and sober. Thornhill thinks he barely knows Blackwood. Even though he worked with him for a year, Blackwood had discouraged Thornhill from visiting him on the river.

Blackwood truly seems worlds apart from any of his companions here: he's silent and unknowable, with beliefs that don't line up with anyone else's. This suggests that he's operating under an entirely different social system than everyone else, and makes his participation in this system somewhat fraught.

Smasher says loudly that the natives stole from him the night before. As though he didn't hear, Blackwood motions to Thornhill's cornfield and notes that he dug up the daisies. Blackwood explains that the roots are edible, like yams, and the natives gave him some when he first arrived. Mrs. Herring agrees that the daisies are sweet, and Blackwood tells Thornhill that once you dig up the daisies, they won't grow back and the natives will go hungry. Sagitty angrily insists that the natives don't farm, but Blackwood speaks over him and says that there was a meeting a while ago between the Governor and one of the natives who spoke some English, and they shook hands that no more white settlers can claim land past a certain point of the river.

Blackwood's information about the daisies is an encouragement for Thornhill to see his own farming methods as destructive, not just a way to lay claim to the land. This in turn challenges Thornhill's sense of ownership of his land, as his corn is his way of staking a claim. It's worth noting that the meeting Blackwood mentions was one of many that took place during this time that did grant the Aborigines some rights to their land, but these agreements were all overturned about 20 years later so that Englishmen could settle even more area without consequences.

Smasher yells that the natives are dishonest thieves, and Blackwood insults Smasher's own honesty. Blackwood turns to Thornhill and tells him again that he needs to remember that when he takes a little, he has to give a little back. He gets up and leaves, and the rest soon follow. Thornhill wonders if Blackwood's advice is a warning or a threat, but he knows it's better than any advice from Smasher.

For now, Thornhill recognizes that Blackwood's peaceful relationship with the Aborigines is preferable to the violent ways of Smasher and Sagitty, but Thornhill doesn't have seem to have the tools or temperament to build a relationship like Blackwood's with the natives. Thornhill is too caught up in claiming the place as his own to "give a little."

Before the Thornhills left Sydney, Thornhill had applied for convict servants. Five weeks after moving to the river, he receives word that he's been assigned two. Thornhill worries about leaving his family alone for a week, but he and Sal know he has to go. As he leaves, he waves to Sal and thinks of how vulnerable Thornhill's Point is.

The convict servants are another status symbol for Thornhill, as they mean that he actually has power over other Englishmen and not just theoretical power over the Aborigines.

On the wharf, Thornhill remembers what it was like to emerge from the dark ship years ago. Thornhill is unpleasantly surprised to find that the captain who brought him to New South Wales on the *Alexander* is there, assigning convicts to free men. When the two men look at each other, the captain recognizes Thornhill and insults him. Thornhill tries to look stony, but realizes that he'll always be known as a felon even if he's free now.

Being back on the wharf where he himself arrived in New South Wales, Thornhill realizes that his past life as a poor man and as a convict will follow him forever. However, Thornhill doesn't feel this way on Thornhill's Point, which suggests that owning that land is allowing Thornhill to escape his past.

Thornhill gets one of the last picks of the convicts. He chooses a man called Ned because Ned reminds him of Rob, and after he has chosen another man, the man excitedly introduces himself as Dan Oldfield, Thornhill's childhood friend. Dan happily cries that London sends its regards, but Thornhill mildly tells Dan to call him Mr. Thornhill. Dan's face falls.

Thornhill's fear and shame at remembering his past leads him to be cruel to a man who was once a very kind friend. This shows the power of the new class system in Australia, and it shows Thornhill embracing it.

Thornhill realizes that, to men like the captain, he and Dan are one and the same, and he begins to understand that there's no future for the Thornhills back in London. He remembers how he himself avoided men who'd been to New South Wales as though they were diseased, and realizes that nobody would trust him to be honest. Further, his children would carry the same curse. He understands that the Hawkesbury River is the one place where everyone is equal and can forget their pasts.

This difficult realization shows Thornhill that the idea in his head of London as home is an idealized and unrealistic one. London won't allow the Thornhills to live in luxury, but will instead condemn them to continue suffering the consequences for Thornhill's theft. Again, it seems land ownership on the Hawkesbury is what will allow Thornhill to leave his crimes and his shame behind him.

When Thornhill returns to the river with Dan and Ned, Sal insists that Dan call her Mrs. Thornhill. She uses fancy language she heard rich people use to tell him so. Thornhill wonders at the pleasure he experiences bullying Dan. He thinks that he didn't know he could be a tyrant, and gives Sal the gifts he brought from Sydney: an engraving of London Bridge and some chickens. Sal nearly cries at the engraving.

Sal's use of high English words mimics the way Thornhill spoke to the Aborigines in the field. Even if the language is foreign to Sal and not quite correct, Sal's newfound power as a mistress allows her to experiment with it without being laughed at.

At breakfast the next morning, Thornhill watches Dan eye the cliffs and surrounding forest. He waits until Dan looks at him to say that the savages are out there, and he won't make it the 50 miles back to Sydney if he runs away. Thornhill then tells Dan and Ned to start building a lean-to at the back of the hut so they can sleep separately from the Thornhills. Ned soon shows that he's useless, and Dan struggles to chop wood and fight the flies in the hot sun. Finally, Dan pleads for a break, but Thornhill refuses. Dan looks for a moment like he's going to refuse to work, but finally turns back to his task. Thornhill strolls around in the shade with a flywhisk.

Thornhill learns that it's exceptionally easy to dehumanize people of a lower class. In doing so, he perpetuates the system of class violence that he was once, and continues to be, victimized by. Further, even though Thornhill certainly doesn't care what Dan was convicted for in England, he now becomes the person responsible for making sure that the English justice system does its job in the new colony. The tables have turned.

That night, Dan and Ned crawl into the lean-to, and Thornhill notices that Sal is smiling. He tells her that they'll fix up the hut and she won't want to leave, and Sal laughs at the joke. They have sex, and Thornhill thinks that New South Wales is taking over and taking them in a new direction. Sal doesn't pinch the candle to save the wick for another day.

Sal's decision to not pinch the candle wick is again an indicator that the Thornhills are doing better than they ever have, since conserving supplies isn't a concern for them right now.

When the hot weather starts, Sal's breasts become painful and baby Mary frets. Sal wakes one morning with hard breasts and a fever, so Thornhill fetches Mrs. Herring. Mrs. Herring insists that Sal must keep nursing and use poultices on her breasts. Thornhill worries Sal will die as she lies ill for days. He finally goes upriver to fetch a real surgeon, but the surgeon refuses to help. Thornhill knows it's because Sal is the wife of a felon. Finally, Sal asks Thornhill to bury her facing north towards London.

Despite the Thornhills' newfound power on the Hawkesbury, when Thornhill deals with other powerful individuals (like the surgeon), he's reminded that his life truly doesn't matter to anyone but himself and his family. To them, Thornhill is still a convict and undeserving of help. This again shows the cruelty of the upper classes.

Their neighbors on the river bring gifts of food and alcohol, but Sal doesn't begin to look better until Blackwood arrives with jellied eels. The day after, Sal is sitting up when Thornhill wakes. She looks much better and asks Thornhill if they've been making the marks on the tree. Though Thornhill assures her they've been making them, he's disappointed that the marks were her first thought.

Sal still thinks of herself as a prisoner, even if she's an exceptionally well-cared for one. Thornhill's disappointment shows just how much of a shift he's undergone in how he thinks about New South Wales: the fact that Sal wants to leave this place that's offering him so much is heartbreaking for him.

PART 4: A HUNDRED ACRES

With Dan and Ned on Thornhill's Point, Thornhill feels better leaving to work on the river. The children grow quickly and well, and even Bub thrives. Business is good now that the Governor decided to settle towns near the mouth of the river, so Thornhill doesn't have to go as far to trade. He buys Sal gifts when he's in Sydney and buys himself his first pair of boots. They make him walk like a rich man. Thornhill says nothing to Sal, but whenever he's in the towns he hears about the atrocities committed by the natives.

That Thornhill's children are thriving suggests that Thornhill's Point isn't at all a bad place to live and call home. Whether Sal likes it or not, it's where her children are growing and developing—and it's the place they'll call home. Thornhill's boots function much like the gun does. They're a symbol of wealth and help him act the part, even if he doesn't feel like a gentleman.

In December of 1913, as Thornhill approaches his property on the river, Willie runs down wildly and says that the natives have arrived, though nobody's dead yet. He points to smoke further down the river. Thornhill listens to the faraway sounds of a dog and a child crying, and Willie tells his father to get the **gun**. They go to the hut where Sal gives Thornhill a bag of food and tobacco. She tells him to take it to the natives, but Thornhill refuses and insists that if they always give them things, the natives will never stop. Sal agrees. Thornhill realizes he must draw a line with the natives and decides to go down to talk to them.

That Thornhill's actions are guided by fear (and not spurred by an actual, obvious overture by the Aborigines) speaks to the power of the stories told in the newspaper, by Smasher, and in the townships. Thornhill cannot conceptualize that the natives might not mean him harm. Willie's insistence on getting the gun shows that he's been listening to Smasher and others like him. He believes in the power of brute force and violence.

When Thornhill reaches the camp, it takes him a minute to notice a few older women and children sitting around the fire. He steps towards them and tells them to leave. One of the women stands, and Thornhill can barely look at her. He's never seen a woman naked, even Sal, and he's embarrassed. One of the women begins to speak without fear, and Thornhill replies by saying he could shoot her head off if he wanted to. One of the women gestures for him to leave. When Thornhill turns around, a group of six tall men is standing behind him.

Thornhill's observation that the woman speaks without fear is an interesting one, as it throws his own fear into sharp relief. His fear, and her lack of fear, points to Thornhill's insecurity in this situation. Because of this, he turns to violent language, even though she can't understand him. It makes him feel better and more in control, even though it doesn't actually accomplish anything.

Thornhill decides to act like he's hosting these men and greets them loudly, though he wishes he had his **gun**. The men approach him, and the old man Thornhill once slapped comes right up, touches his arm, and begins to speak. Thornhill cuts him off, gestures around, and tells him that all the land is his now, but they can have the rest of the country. The old man picks up one of the daisy roots from the fire. He eats some, explaining something to Thornhill, and even offers Thornhill a piece. Thornhill deems the roots "monkey food" and refuses. The man looks as though he's waiting for an answer, but Thornhill doesn't know what to say.

All the Aborigines here seem intent simply on communicating with Thornhill, which again makes his own fear and threats seem exceptionally out of place. When Thornhill refuses the roots, he tells the Aborigines (and himself) that their way of life isn't worth trying to understand. It also again allows Thornhill to feel superior and in control. Admitting he has something to learn from these people would mean admitting that his power has limits and can be questioned.

When Thornhill returns to the hut, he tells Sal that the natives will leave soon, but as Christmas passes, they don't leave. Eventually, Thornhill and Sal start to give the natives names. They call the old man Whisker Harry, and another is Long Bob. One of the younger men they call Black Dick. Sometimes the men watch Thornhill, Ned, and Dan work, but the women approach Sal often. One day, he watches as a large group of women, including one Sal named Polly, show Sal their wooden dishes and touch her skirt. One woman takes Sal's bonnet, and the entire group laughs.

Giving the Aborigines English names gives Thornhill and Sal a way to connect with their neighbors, though it should be acknowledged that doing so is a form of erasure of the native people's own culture. It seeks to turn the Aborigines into individuals who are more acceptable and palatable to the white settlers by diminishing the importance of their culture and customs as much as possible.

Dan, Ned, and Thornhill watch all of this, entranced by the bare breasts of the younger girls. They watch as Sal barters with the older women for one of their wooden dishes and trades sugar and her bonnet for it. Sal is proud of having struck a deal and tells Thornhill that there's no need for **guns** or whips to deal with the natives.

Sal's success in trading is a prime example of Blackwood's "take a little, give a little" principle. It shows that it is possible to come to agreements with the Aborigines and coexist peacefully and fairly.

Thornhill realizes that he has no idea how to find food in the forest like the natives do. He wonders if the native women laugh at him for this reason. They spend their time strolling around and finding food, while the Thornhills spend all day working. Ned and Dan scorn the natives and think of them as animals, and Sal halfheartedly suggests they put them to work in the field.

When Thornhill recognizes that the Aborigines don't necessarily need to work in the way that he does, it shows that he's beginning to develop a more lenient and positive view of his neighbors. Ned and Dan, on the other hand, embody the colonial mindset that the Aborigines are inferior, even if the leisurely aspects of their lifestyle might be appealing.

One day, Sal tells Thornhill that the natives have been around for three weeks. She says that she spoke to Mrs. Herring, who said that the natives come more than they go. Finally, she looks Thornhill in the eye and says that she won't stand for them coming and not going. She asks him to go ask Blackwood about it.

Though Sal seemed to be learning that she doesn't need to fear the Aborigines, her request shows that the fear persists. However, asking Thornhill to go to Blackwood instead of Smasher shows that she hopes for a nonviolent resolution.

Thornhill struggles to find a place to land his boat at Blackwood's encampment. He notices that Blackwood hasn't cleared his land at all; the hut and corn sit half in the forest. Blackwood is waiting for Thornhill and doesn't greet him warmly. Thornhill hesitantly begins to explain that the natives won't leave, and finally Blackwood invites him to have tea. They sit for a while and Blackwood begins to tell Thornhill that once, a group of natives was waiting for him when he returned from Sydney. He says that they told him to leave. He tried to give them food and finally gave them his hat. They made it clear that Blackwood was to stay on the beach, and later, they sang up on the hill.

When Blackwood agreed to live where the Aborigines told him to, he showed them that he views them as stewards of the land and accepted his own inferiority on their land. His reaction to this kind of an encounter differs greatly from what Thornhill did: Blackwood chose to listen to what he did understand, while Thornhill actively ignored the natives' request for him to leave. This shows where Thornhill and Blackwood differ: Thornhill feels entitled to the land as a white, English settler, while Blackwood is willing to compromise.

Thornhill doesn't understand how this applies to his own problems with the natives. He thinks "give a little, take a little" is still very vague. Blackwood stands up and seems done, but Thornhill hears a woman's voice coming from the clearing. Blackwood answers her, though Thornhill can't understand his words. He sees that the woman is a black woman who looks angry, with a dark-skinned, blond child next to her. Thornhill realizes that Blackwood is speaking the woman's language. When Thornhill meets Blackwood's eyes, he says that he told the woman that Thornhill won't say anything. He insists that the natives are peaceful. When Thornhill tells Sal what he saw at Blackwood's, she declares that they'll have to figure out what to do with the natives on their own.

Again, Thornhill sees Thornhill's Point as his right as a white settler, not something he needs to negotiate with the natives for. The revelation that Blackwood speaks the language and has a black lover makes it abundantly clear that he has been successful in creating understanding between himself and the natives. By learning the language, he's shown this woman that he values her and her way of life. Her nakedness reinforces this: Blackwood isn't trying to make her give up her way of life to be more like him.

Now that he's eight, Dick performs his chores in the morning and then disappears in the afternoons. Thornhill sometimes sees Dick playing with native children in the river, naked like his companions. Thornhill says nothing to Sal, but Bub tattles on his brother one day. Sal tells Thornhill to go fetch Dick back. When Thornhill approaches the camp, Long Bob is teaching children, including Dick, how to make fire.

Thornhill's leniency suggests that he's taking Blackwood's example to heart, even if it still doesn't make sense. The fact that Dick is choosing to play with the native children reinforces Thornhill's assessment that Dick is a child between worlds: though he occupies Thornhill's world comfortably, he can also feel comfortable and at home with those very different from him.

Thornhill approaches to watch, thinking that making fire without flint is not really possible. Dick is transfixed watching Long Bob. As Thornhill tries to pull Dick away, smoke begins to come from the sticks. Long Bob stands up, wraps the sticks, swings them around, and the packet bursts into flames. The two men regard each other for a moment as the children gather around the fire. Thornhill puts a hand on his own chest and says "me, Thornhill." Long Bob smiles and repeats Thornhill's words. Long Bob puts a hand on his chest and speaks quickly, but Thornhill can't make out anymore than the first sound. He calls the man Long Jack. Long Jack looks secretive.

Thornhill treats this encounter as a referendum on whose culture is better, which shows that Thornhill still feels threatened by the presence of the Aborigines and the effect their proximity is having on his son. Even though he and Long Jack have an exchange that makes some degree of sense, Thornhill still chooses to not try to understand the man's name. Though Thornhill starts out trying to understand, when he finds it too difficult he settles for the comfort of his own language and culture.

Looking around, Thornhill realizes that the black people around him aren't black, per se; they're just skin-colored. He tells Long Jack that he's a fine fellow, but that the white men will get all the black men in the end. Long Jack says something in reply that makes the children laugh, and Thornhill makes himself join in. Dick looks uncertain.

Thornhill again capitalizes on the fact that the Aborigines don't speak English and uses violent language to make himself feel superior. Dick's uncertainty shows that he very much follows Blackwood's school of thought, which sets this up as a recurring conflict between Dick and his father.

That night, Sal tries to explain to Dick that he needs to act like a civilized person. Thornhill insists that Dick is old enough to work and stop playing, but Dick sulks, saying that the natives don't need flint and don't work all day. Thornhill is overcome with rage and beats Dick with his belt. Sal won't meet Thornhill's eye as she puts the children to bed. She says that their children are just doing what they themselves did as children, sneaking off to be alone. Thornhill understands that his children have no conception of anything other than New South Wales and will never know London. He says that, nevertheless, Dick will come with him on the *Hope* from now on.

Thornhill's anger is a direct result of his fear that his own culture might not actually be the superior one. In this situation, violence towards either Dick or the Aborigines is the only way to make sure that he never has to actually consider the implications of what accepting the drawbacks of his own culture are (namely, giving up his claim to Thornhill's Point). Thornhill also realizes that Dick is a product of this new land, not of England: his value system will be different, which is another challenge to Thornhill's sense of right and wrong.

The next day, Thornhill finds Dick trying to make fire like Long Jack showed him. Thornhill is angry for a moment, but knows that beating Dick again won't do any good. He squats down with Dick and they try to replicate the trick. After a while they finally see a puff of smoke. Thornhill tries to do as Long Jack did and tip it into a leaf with tinder and whirl it around, but the package flies apart. He laughs and tells Dick to have Long Jack show him again, but not to tell Sal.

Thornhill desperately wants Dick to see him and their western way of life as good and correct. By allowing Dick to continue to see his native friends, Thornhill shows that he values keeping his son more than he values carrying out Sal's wishes. This secret continues Thornhill's habit of creating silence between himself and Sal.

Willie is the only child who knows anything of London. To the others, London is just a word. Sal sings songs about London to the children at night and Thornhill listens, but he realizes by the tone of Sal's voice that she's preparing the children to return to London, not just singing for them. When Sal begins to tell them the layout of a street, Thornhill corrects her geography. Dan corrects Thornhill, and he realizes that London is truly just a story now.

Sal doesn't *think of London as a story: it's still real for her, and she desperately wants it to be real for her children too. Thornhill begins to understand that home is defined in part by where a person is planted. This allows Thornhill more justification for accepting the finality of New South Wales and insisting that they stay.*

One morning in January, the Thornhills wake to see smoke coming from the native's camp. Thornhill and his family watch as the natives seem to conduct a controlled burn on the hill. Sal calls out to Polly, who kills a lizard. Polly ignores her. Sal says uncertainly that Polly doesn't know her name yet. Ned remarks with disgust that they'll eat the lizard. Dick pipes up that lizard is good, but stops when Sal catches his eye. Dan remarks on the stupidity of burning land for a single lizard.

Though Sal is certainly willing to meet the Aborigines halfway, her insistence that Polly simply hasn't learned her name shows that she's only willing to make a nominal effort to understand them. She'd rather try to convert them to her way of doing things than learn about their culture, a mindset enabled by a colonialist system that tells individuals like Sal that they're superior.

Several days later, it drizzles for a day before the heat returns. The burnt patch becomes green, which attracts kangaroos. Thornhill watches Black Dick hunt a kangaroo one day, and decides to try to shoot one himself. Thornhill has his eyes set on a buck, but when he tries to pull the trigger, the buck flees. Sal is disappointed, as is Thornhill. At dinner that night, the Thornhills can smell kangaroo meat cooking at the native camp.

As Thornhill realizes that the natives did something quite sensible (and importantly, something that entails thinking ahead), he's forced to acknowledge the fact that they aren't stupid. The location of the controlled burn suggests that the Aborigines may have been extending an olive branch of sorts to allow Thornhill to try to hunt.

A few days later, Thornhill fills a bag with flour and goes to barter for some kangaroo meat. Whisker Harry accepts the bag, and Long Jack cuts off the kangaroo's foot and part of its leg for Thornhill. Thornhill thinks that he'd haggle if he had the language, but the natives turn their attention back to cooking their kangaroo before disappearing into the forest. Thornhill thinks their method of burying the kangaroo body in coals is indicative of their ineptitude.

Once again, Thornhill feels dumb and inferior for not knowing the natives' language. Importantly, however, recognizing that knowing their language would be helpful shows that he's seeing the wisdom of Blackwood's ways and knows that learning about the Aborigines' practices would make his own life easier.

Willie tries to skin the kangaroo leg, but his knife can't cut through the skin. Thornhill ends up chopping the leg with the axe and putting the pieces, fur and all, into the stew pot. They strain out the hair and drink the broth.

Once again, Thornhill must consider that the Aborigines have a better way of doing things, and that not learning some of these methods has a direct negative effect on his own family's wellbeing.

That night, Thornhill thinks about the natives. He thinks that they're little more than savages running around naked, but they also don't seem to have to work to make ends meet. They have time to make their babies laugh, unlike the Thornhills. He realizes that they don't need garden fences, because they create spaces that lure wild game in. He thinks they're like the rich people in London who get to spend their days as they please, though their culture has no need for poor men—like he had been—to serve them. In the Aborigine culture, everyone is rich.

Finally, Thornhill makes the connection that the Aborigines aren't unintelligent savages at the mercy of the land. Unlike Thornhill, who actively fights the land to survive, they know how to use the land to feed themselves with very little effort. When Thornhill understands that not all cultures require an oppressive class system to function, he understands that a culture like this would mean that he wouldn't have to work so hard to be successful, or fight the unfairness of a system that punishes poor people.

Now that he's successfully traded with the natives, Thornhill is less anxious leaving Sal and the children. He trades regularly with Smasher, as his lime is in high demand in Sydney. Thornhill hates going to Smasher's and tries to leave as quickly as possible. One day when Thornhill arrives, Smasher is by the water, lighting a pile of uneaten oysters on fire. Smasher greets Thornhill and says that all the oysters are gone now, which means the natives are also gone. When Thornhill and Smasher are almost done rolling the kegs of lime onto the *Hope*, Smasher's dogs start barking. They look out to the water and see a native man standing on the shore.

That Thornhill continues to trade with Smasher, even when he doesn't like him, is evidence that Thornhill feels trapped by the systems at play in the colony, both economic and social. Burning the oysters uneaten is a demonstration of Smasher's sense of superiority, showing that he doesn't need the oysters for food. The lime will be used to build in Sydney and advance the goals of the colonists instead of supporting the Aborigines' way of life.

The man is holding an oyster and when he has Thornhill and Smasher's attention, he opens the shell with one hand and eats the oyster. He speaks slowly and mimes eating the oysters. Smasher yells at the man, who approaches and gestures at the burning pile and then at the water. The man begins shouting, but Smasher comes at him with a whip. Smasher whips the man once across the chest and then the man catches the end of the whip. They stare at each other for a moment before the man goes back to his canoe and leaves.

The man's attitude of wanting to teach Thornhill and Smasher reinforces Blackwood's assertion that the Aborigines are peaceful. The man only wants Smasher and Thornhill to understand that the oysters a resource that they can all enjoy and to treat the oysters as such. Smasher's reaction shows that he prioritizes his profits from lime over preserving these resources.

Smasher begins yelling at Thornhill. He yells that he knows that he's been friendly with the natives, along with Blackwood. Thornhill yells that Smasher knows nothing, but feels panicky. Smasher tells Thornhill that the natives will kill him one day, but Thornhill insists they finish loading the lime. As he casts off into the water, Smasher yells that Thornhill shouldn't come to him when he gets speared.

Smasher sees Thornhill and Blackwood as threats to the project of settling Australia. For him, violence is the only way forward as it's the only way that will allow him to continue to think of his own culture as superior without question.

PART 5: DRAWING A LINE

When Thornhill returns from Sydney a week later, things begin to change. The natives arrive en masse and don't seem to leave. Sal keeps the children close and Thornhill puts off taking the *Hope* down the river to trade. One afternoon, he slips away to the natives' camp. He's shocked to see at least 40 of them milling around campfires. When he returns to the hut, he airily tells Sal that the natives are just having a get-together.

It's worth noting that Thornhill's decision to not trade is reflective of his privilege: he no longer has *to leave Sal in danger to get the money he needs and can choose to stay home if he needs to. Thornhill's fear is that the influx of natives will mean violence. This shows that Thornhill hopes to avoid bloodshed if possible.*

Sal tells Thornhill to stay at the house that afternoon rather than going back to the corn patch. Bub asks if the savages are coming for them, but Sal tells him he's silly and cleans his face. Thornhill goes into the hut and checks the **gun**. Sal catches him, but he insists there was only a nest of spiders in the barrel. When Sal sings to the children that night, Thornhill can hear fear in her voice. She and Thornhill sit by the fire and listen to the children, Ned, and Dan sleep, when they begin hearing clapping and chanting coming from the natives' camp. Thornhill tries to convince Sal that they're singing like Scabby Bill did, even though this singing is very different.

Sal and Thornhill's fear is a direct result of the fact that they cannot (and don't really care to) actually communicate with the Aborigines to figure out what this is all about. In the absence of communication, fear thrives, as evidenced by Thornhill checking his gun. Even though he knows it's useless against the spears of so many natives, it's the one thing he can hold onto that might bring him some sense of comfort and safety.

Ned and Dan come to the fire and insist that the natives are coming to kill them. The children begin to cry with fear, even though Thornhill insists that the natives won't hurt them. Willie tells his father to show them the **gun**, but Dick gets up and says that the natives truly are just having a get-together. Thornhill shushes the boys, and Dan says that he has a knife if the natives come close. Thornhill is scared, but he decides to go have a look at the camp.

Even though Thornhill is scared, he still advocates nonviolence. Again, Willie shows that he's been listening to Smasher's violent tirades, while Dick's contribution suggests that he might know more than he's willing to admit, given that he's still spending time with the Aboriginal children.

Thornhill picks his way through the rocks and brush until he's above the natives' camp. Nobody cares that he's there if they notice. Men are dancing around a fire, and everyone is painted with stripes of white paint. Women and children clap sticks to create the rhythm. Thornhill realizes that they're doing a war dance, though he's calm at this thought. Thornhill watches one dance end and another begin, this one featuring Whisker Harry dancing and singing alone. As he watches, Thornhill realizes that Whisker Harry is a person entirely different from the name he'd given him.

Thornhill finally realizes how the names he and Sal give the Aborigines erase the Aborigines' true identities. He recognizes that the English names are a security blanket and nothing else. When he jumps to the conclusion that the Aborigines are doing a war dance, it betrays just how afraid Thornhill is of the natives being violent towards him. Again, this shows how insidious the circulating stories of the natives' "outrages and depredations" are.

Thornhill understands that the natives are watching Whisker Harry dance a story they all know, and he thinks that Harry is a book of sorts. Thornhill remembers slapping Harry's chest, and realizes that doing so was a mistake. He realizes that, within the natives' own culture, Harry is equivalent to the Governor, and nobody would slap the Governor.

When Thornhill expands his definition of what constitutes a book or a story, he allows that Aboriginal culture is not actually inferior—it's just different. Further, when Thornhill realizes he can't "read" Harry, he pokes holes in his own assessment of the dance as a war dance. He can't know that for sure, because he doesn't know the language or culture.

When Thornhill returns to the hut, Sal has the children dressed. Thornhill tells Sal, Dan, and Ned that there are only a dozen natives, though nobody seems to believe him. Sal has their belongings set out on the table and insists that if they give things to the natives, they'll leave them alone. Dan and Ned squeal that the natives will burn them, and Thornhill finally snaps. He takes the **gun** down and loads it, though he wonders if he's the only one who knows how pointless it is: the natives could turn them into pincushions in the time it would take him to reload. Thornhill shoots into the sky out the window and pretends to be satisfied. The clapping and dancing don't stop.

Though Thornhill doesn't hurt anyone at this point, the lead-up to shooting off the gun shows how powerful fear is. It also shows how fear can be channeled into violence by voicing these fearful thoughts that think of the Aborigines as only dangerous. Although Thornhill follows along, he knows that what he's doing is useless. He recognizes both the power of the Aborigines and the uselessness of his one gun to match them.

Every night for a week, the natives dance and sing. They never approach the Thornhill hut, but even after they disappear Sal and Thornhill are fearful. Sal stops engaging with the women, and Thornhill buys three more **guns** and teaches Ned, Dan, and Willie how to shoot. Ned is a natural with the gun, while Dan prefers to use a club. Willie is thrown back when he fires. Thornhill hopes that even if the guns themselves are fairly useless, the natives' fear of the image of a man with a gun will keep them away.

Thornhill is allowing these fearful narratives to guide his actions, even when he knows that the actions mean little and won't help. Again, he's relying on the symbol of the gun to soothe Sal and scare the Aborigines, but this thought process shows that he's engaging with the guns as a symbol only.

Thornhill decides to clear the space around the hut. He cuts down a stalk from a grass-tree to make a spear and makes a joke of being a savage. He tries to throw the spear but it only skids on the ground. Dick picks up the spear and throws it easily 50 yards. Thornhill realizes that this isn't the first time Dick has thrown a spear, but decides it's more important to clear the land than it is to punish him. He fences the clearing, which he finds satisfying, but realizes he can only push the forest back, not get rid of it entirely.

The forest is a metaphor for the Aborigines, which shows that Thornhill questions his ability to actually do anything to affect change, since he struggles to master the landscape. The fact that Dick is presumably still playing with the Aborigines shows that Thornhill's growing paranoia and violent demonstrations aren't having much of an effect, as the Aborigines are still willing to accept his son in their games.

In March, Thornhill decides to buy dogs from Smasher. When Thornhill approaches Smasher, Smasher tries to draw out the transaction and gloat, but finally agrees to Thornhill's price. As they head to the kennel so Thornhill can choose his dogs, Smasher says that he has something to show Thornhill. Smasher motions for Thornhill to enter the dark hut and inside, Thornhill makes out a black woman on a mattress, chained to the wall.

The dogs are a symbol for Smasher and men like him. They're trained to attack Aborigines and don't have the capacity to think that what they're doing is wrong, just as Smasher doesn't see any of his violent actions as wrong. Further, as animals and separate beings, they're further outside of human control than guns are.

Smasher whips the woman and forces her outside. Her skin is ashy and has red sores under the chains. Smasher licks his lips and says that both he and Sagitty have had sex with this woman, and Thornhill imagines having sex with her too. Smasher asks Thornhill if he's interested, but Thornhill can't speak. He shakes his head and turns away as Smasher asks if Thornhill is too good for free sex. He says that even Thomas Blackwood sleeps with a black woman, and Thornhill feels breathless. He yells to Smasher that he doesn't want the dogs and gets in his boat to leave. He decides not to tell Sal what he saw, and feels ashamed and evil that he'd been momentarily tempted to accept Smasher's offer.

Thornhill understands that Smasher truly sees the Aborigines as subhuman, and useful only to fulfill his own desire for power and control. Smasher's anger shows Thornhill that not adhering to Smasher's view of the world by adopting a more Blackwood-style relationship with the natives is dangerous if he wants to remain a part of white, colonial society. Smasher's mention of Blackwood is a warning that Smasher has the power to destroy both Thornhill and Blackwood's reputations.

Over the next several weeks, Thornhill trades up and down the river, though he stops trading with Smasher. When Sal talks about going back to London he agrees with her, but he privately thinks that the Hawkesbury River is pleasant and beautiful. He ties up the *Hope* one night and makes his way to the lit hut, where he finds Sal entertaining Smasher, Mrs. Herring, Sagitty, Loveday, Blackwood, and another neighbor. When Thornhill enters, Sagitty and Smasher tell him about Spider: while Spider was gone one day, his wife had been tricked into trading with a native woman while other natives stole their entire corn crop.

Sal is cultivating her community on the river to give herself a sense of home, even if the conversation this invites rouses her fear more than it comforts her. This shows how desperate Sal is for attention and community: it's no secret she dislikes Smasher, but she's willing to put up with his violent stories in order to not be alone. The way that Smasher frames the story about Spider casts the natives as malicious, which allows him to justify making sure there are consequences for the theft.

Smasher is livid. Mrs. Herring says that the natives can be quite charming and recounts pulling the same kind of trick on shop owners as a child, but Sagitty isn't amused. He says that the natives stole four bags of wheat from him. Smasher finishes telling the story of what happened to Spider: when he returned, the natives were still stealing. He'd tried to **shoot** them, but at spear-point, the natives stole all their food and all their other belongings while Spider's oldest son cried. As the natives left, one mocked Spider's family by shaking his buttocks at them. After that, Spider decided to move to a township and let others deal with the natives on the river.

Mrs. Herring is, notably, described throughout the novel as being self-sufficient: she grows what she needs on her land rather than trading or selling a crop. By living this way, she's removed herself from the economic structure that Sagitty, Spider, and the other men present are still a part of—the same structure that's threatened when the Aborigines steal valuable crops.

Loveday angrily shouts that the natives are destitute, and Smasher continues the tirade. Smasher mimes shooting a **gun** and shouts that the natives understand that. Mrs. Herring silences Smasher, and Thornhill wonders if all the men present had been invited to have sex with Smasher's chained woman. Mrs. Herring warns Smasher and Sagitty that they're going to pay for what they're doing. Smasher recounts shooting two natives the week before, and Blackwood snaps. He yells that one native is worth ten of Smasher and storms out. Thornhill thinks of Blackwood going home and wonders if the woman and his child will sit with him by the fire.

Blackwood's reaction suggests that he's only participating in these gatherings to give the appearance that he hasn't entirely rejected western culture, since he loudly and boldly rejects Smasher's interpretation of it. Thornhill realizes that when Blackwood straddles cultures, he gets to have the best of both worlds: land granted by the governor, a woman who loves him, and an alternative to the colonial violence that Smasher perpetuates.

The attack on Spider's family becomes one of many attacks: nearly every farmer has an encounter with the natives. Thornhill stays home to keep an eye on his own corn since there's nothing to trade on the river. Though the king and the Governor don't particularly care about the emancipated men on the Hawkesbury, they issue a warrant to take action against the natives. Because Thornhill's land is a convenient starting point, Captain McCallum stages his army there, though he's openly rude to Thornhill. As Thornhill and Sal watch McCallum spread out his map, he thinks that McCallum won't be able to do anything.

The reasoning behind the Governor's decision to send troops shows that England prioritizes the spread of English culture and men over the lives of the specific men doing the dirty work. In the eyes of the Governor, the natives' attacks on white settlers represent attacks on England as a whole. McCallum embodies this mindset by acting superior and looking down on Thornhill, one of the men he's supposed to protect.

McCallum's plan involves creating a human chain with his men and trapping the natives along a place called Darkey Creek, which is a narrow spot on the river where the natives are rumored to be taking refuge. As McCallum explains the plan, he lifts canvas bags high and says that he's been ordered by the Governor to bring back six heads. As Thornhill looks at the map, he thinks it's technically correct but leaves out all the gullies, rocks, and mosquitos. He thinks that McCallum thinks he's fighting an actual army, when the natives are too clever to have something as obvious as an army. They can throw spears from hiding places and then disappear.

Thornhill shows that he's come around to believing that the Aborigines are smart and knowledgeable, but in a different way than he is. This understanding makes McCallum look dumb, a reflection of the way Thornhill has thought of the Aborigines for much of the novel. However, now that Thornhill has reached this point, he does little to protect the Aborigines, and his silence amounts to complicity in McCallum's campaign.

Thornhill speaks up and says that the going is rough on McCallum's plotted path, but McCallum only thanks him briskly and explains that his soldiers are well trained. When McCallum and the army returns a week later, he looks bedraggled. His soldiers tell Thornhill that they'd made the human chain and fought the landscape but when they arrived at Darkey Creek, the natives trapped them, not the other way around. The army lost several men and took no heads.

When Thornhill finally does speak, the underlying message is that McCallum won't be successful, not that they shouldn't try in the first place. Because McCallum makes sure to behave like he's far above Thornhill on the social hierarchy, Thornhill feels powerless to try to change the what's happening.

The Governor issues a proclamation in the *Sydney Gazette*, which Loveday reads to a group of settlers at Thornhill's one night. Smasher, Sagitty, and Blackwood are there, and Dan and Ned look on. Loveday reads that if the natives trespass on farms, the owners of those farms are allowed to "drive them away by force of arms." Mrs. Herring and Sal grab the paper and pore over it in case Loveday made a mistake in his reading. He didn't make a mistake.

The Governor is giving the Hawkesbury residents permission to take justice into their own hands, which implicitly entails allowing them to decide what justice even means. This suggests that that question will be a pressing one, as the person who decides what story to tell about the natives will be the one shaping the definition of justice.

Sagitty suggests poisoning the natives, and Smasher pulls something from his pocket and says he doesn't need the Governor's permission to use force. Sal reaches for what he pulled out and then recoils when she realizes it's a pair of black human ears. She yells for Smasher to get them out so the children don't see. Thornhill tries to look stony as Smasher explains that he's going to boil the head and sell it. The room is silent until Loveday suggests pickling the head. Smasher pulls out the ears again, and Thornhill almost feels bad for Smasher. It's obvious how much Smasher wants to be admired.

When Smasher doesn't even offer a reason as to why he killed the Aboriginal man, he's telling people that he doesn't need *a reason to kill them—their blackness is enough to justify it. Further, selling the head is a symbolic distillation of how the colonial powers profited by exploiting the natives' skills and bodies and denying the colonized peoples any reward.*

Blackwood rushes at Smasher and shoves Smasher's head into the table. He punches Smasher several times before the others, including Thornhill, restrain him. Blackwood leaves and Smasher assures the group that Blackwood and the natives will be sorry for this.

Blackwood's rejection of the developing English system is to blame for Smasher's threats: choosing to exist outside the system implies questioning the legitimacy of the system, something that Smasher doesn't want to think about since the system benefits him.

After the group leaves, Sal suggests that the Thornhills go home to London. Thornhill insists they don't have enough money and haven't been here long enough. He asks her to remember the poverty they experienced in London, and she suggests they move to one of the townships at the mouth of the Hawkesbury and reopen their rum bar. Thornhill is startled to realize she's been thinking about this for a while. He assures Sal that the natives won't hurt them, and Sal says she doesn't want Smasher around anymore. Thornhill realizes Sal is giving in, but he knows that trouble is coming if they stay. He thinks he can't give up Thornhill's Point.

Sal sees that simply escaping this violent clash of cultures is an easy way to not have to deal with the implications of being involved in this conflict. This shows that she hasn't yet realized that if they do return to London, they'll never be able to escape poverty. Essentially, the choice becomes either involvement in colonial violence or crushing, inescapable poverty. This reinforces the idea that colonial violence is the primary reason for Thornhill's success.

PART 6: THE SECRET RIVER

A week later, Thornhill sails the *Hope* past Darkey Creek. He notices that there's no smoke coming from the gully and he sails in. When he steps ashore, he sees a dead campfire and a scattered camp, but it looks abandoned. He looks in one of the dwellings and sees a native man and a woman, but realizes they're dead. Thornhill backs out of the dwelling and sees more dead bodies. He hears something groaning and follows the sound to a small boy Dick's age.

The decision to check on the Aborigines shows that Thornhill definitely cares for their wellbeing, even if he doesn't necessarily want them around. This reinforces Thornhill's in-between status: though he supports the project of colonialism because it will benefit him, he also vehemently rejects the kind of violence that colonialism is based on.

The boy is curled up, vomiting and lying in a puddle of diarrhea. Thornhill looks up and wants to leave. He tells the boy that he can't do anything, but he goes to get the boy water. When the boy sees Thornhill approaching with water, he reaches towards it. The boy drinks but vomits the water back up again with green slime. Thornhill is terrified. He feels like if he moves, he'll feel the poison burning him as well. Finally, Thornhill walks back to the *Hope* and pushes it away. He decides not to tell anyone, including Sal, and knows that this was Sagitty's doing.

The green slime suggests that this is the same rat poison that Smasher brought Sal as a housewarming gift. The fact that Thornhill only tries to remedy the situation when he's the only white man present underscores just how much Thornhill buys into the social hierarchy at play in the colony. He can only be kind to the Aborigines when nobody's watching.

The next morning, Dick runs to Thornhill and says that the natives are filling bags with their corn. Thornhill feels rage fill him and grabs the **gun**. He walks to the corn patch. The natives silently and deliberately continue picking corn. He grabs a woman by the hair, but another woman clubs him on the head. He fights back, kicking, punching, and elbowing the women. When he makes one woman bleed, he thinks that the blood is the same color as his own blood.

In the midst of his own violent lashing-out, Thornhill must reckon with the fact that the subjects of his violence are human beings. For Thornhill, violence humanizes these people instead of dehumanizing them, the opposite of what it seems to do for Sagitty and Smasher. This sets Thornhill up to experience more of an emotional impact when all is said and done.

Thornhill lets go of the woman he'd held and points the **gun** at Long Jack. He yells that the corn belongs to him, and the natives, except for Jack, run into the forest. He stands at the edge and stares at Thornhill. After a minute, Thornhill closes his eyes and shoots at Jack. When he opens his eyes, Jack is gone. Thornhill hears Dan yelling and sees that Dan has ahold of a native boy. Dan and Ned suggest they tie the boy up like Smasher does to lure other natives, but Thornhill thinks that this boy could be the brother of the one at Darkey Creek. He crouches down to the boy's level and tells him to leave, and then tells Dan to let the boy go. Dan continues to hold the boy.

Thornhill wants the gun to do damage without actually having to do anything, which shows that Thornhill truly doesn't want to be an active participant in this conflict. It's easier for Thornhill to feel as though he's being generous with the natives when he's not actively trying to harm them and is instead quietly complicit in others' violence. Dan and Ned, on the other hand, turn their fear into the potential for active and intentional violence.

Sal yells for Thornhill to let the boy go and steps forward to let him free herself. Dan looks at Thornhill with a dead look and doesn't let the boy go until Thornhill threatens a flogging. After he lets the boy go, Dan spits in the dirt near Thornhill's boots. The boy can barely stand. Dick tells the boy to go and the boy finally stumbles through the corn and into the forest. Bub asks if the natives are gone, and Thornhill assures him that they are. Dick asks if they can give the natives bread, but Thornhill says again that the natives are gone.

This is one of the few times that Thornhill uses his status to stop violence against the Aborigines, which shows that he's capable of using his power for good. This stands in contrast to the times that Thornhill doesn't do this, as it makes it very clear that Thornhill is aware that he has a choice to stand up against violence and simply chooses not to.

The entire family works to harvest corn that afternoon. Thornhill tries to work next to Sal, but Sal works hard to avoid him. He says twice that the natives would've taken all the corn, and Sal says that she heard the first time and goes on ignoring Thornhill. At dusk, Sal pushes the children into the hut. When Johnny tries to come back out, she cuffs him on the ear and makes him cry. Thornhill knows that Sal's fear has transformed into anger.

Rather than reaching for a gun (like Thornhill), Sal turns to hitting her children to give her fear an outlet. This shows that the relationship between fear and violence isn't unique to the conflict between the Aborigines and English settlers. It affects every aspect of life and makes the one place that should be safe (i.e., home) feel unsafe.

When Thornhill wakes, he smells smoke. From the hut he looks at the burnt corn patch, thinking that life had just been waiting for him to feel secure before pulling a trick on him. Sal comes out of the hut and stands for a moment before walking silently along the path the native women wore to their camp. Thornhill follows her, calling to let the natives be, but she yells back that the natives aren't there and she's going to go onto their property like they came onto the Thornhills'.

Sal's language shows that she's still holding onto a western conception of land ownership: she sees the Aborigines' paths through her yard as trespassing, not as the Aborigines walking on land that's also theirs. Thornhill realizes that the social system that places him above Aborigines in the hierarchy isn't something that can protect him in the long run.

The camp looks like it usually does, but deserted. Thornhill tries to tell Sal to come back, but she inspects the entire camp. She picks up a broom and drops it. Ned and the children follow down to the camp. Sal turns to Thornhill and says that the natives lived here like she and Thornhill lived in London, and accuses Thornhill of not telling her this. Thornhill insists that there's enough land for everyone, but Sal is fixated on the fact that they live at this camp.

Finally, Sal is forced to acknowledge that the Aborigines call this place home: they have the people, the structures, and the objects to make it a home and not just a temporary dwelling. Her insistence that coexisting with the natives isn't possible speaks again to her fear, as she's entirely engrossed in an "us versus them" mentality.

Thornhill asks where the natives are if they live here, and Sal insists that they're watching them now and will never leave. Thornhill says he has a plan for if they come back, and Sal insists that the natives will certainly return and that the family needs to leave now. Thornhill thinks of how he'd feel leaving. He thinks of the life he and Sal talk about having in London, but realizes he has no interest in working the Thames anymore. He realizes that he's become a new man since coming to Australia, and that his soul lives in this spot of land.

For Thornhill, the realization that this piece of land is "home" to him gives him the strength to fight Sal on this issue. Sal's insistence on getting the family off of Thornhill's Point shows that she's prioritizing the safety of the individuals in her family over the family's physical location. She has learned that she can make a home anywhere, as long as she feels relatively safe.

Sal says they can be packed in an hour. Thornhill feels angry and says that the natives have no right to this place, though he thinks the words sound like Smasher's. Sal insists that it'd be better to live in poverty than fear for their lives here. He grabs for Sal and shouts that they're not leaving and the natives won't hurt them. She yells back as Thornhill towers over her. He raises his hand to hit her, and Sal looks shocked. Sal yells that he can hit her, but she'll still leave.

Sal's assessment that poverty is better than fear again betrays her privilege and brings the gap between her and Thornhill to the forefront. Thornhill did live in fear on the Thames because he was forced to steal in order to make ends meet. Because he never told Sal explicitly, she was able to function as though life wasn't precarious.

Thornhill drops his hand and feels his rage disappear. He wishes he could go back in time but knows there's no escaping this life. He begins to try to talk to Sal, but Dan, breathless, interrupts them and says that the natives are burning Sagitty's place. Sal ignores Thornhill and shouts instructions to the children. She turns and tells Thornhill to help Sagitty and when he comes back, they're leaving with or without him.

Sal insists that home doesn't have to be comprised of both land ownership and specific people, which stands in direct opposition to the way that Thornhill thinks about his land. This place allows him to feel powerful, while the fear inherent in living here does the exact opposite to Sal.

Thornhill, Dan, and Ned float down towards Saggity's place. They see smoke and a smashed boat, but no signs of life. Slowly, Thornhill leads the way onto land. They find Sagitty behind the water barrel, alive and with a spear in his stomach. Thornhill wishes he could be anywhere else. Dan and Ned ask if Sagitty will die, while Thornhill wishes for Sagitty to die. Thornhill feels unprepared, but tells Dan and Ned to get Sagitty on the boat to take him to the hospital downriver. They manage to get Sagitty onto the *Hope*, and Thornhill covers Sagitty's face with a handkerchief to keep the flies off and so he doesn't have to look at Sagitty's staring eyes.

Sagitty's fate recalls Mrs. Herring's assertion that he and Smasher will pay for their cruelty. This begins to suggest that their "payment" may come in a form that's unexpected or far outside any organized system of justice, and also shows that the white settlers aren't the only ones who get to decide what justice means in the free-for-all on the Hawkesbury.

As they travel down the river, Thornhill thinks he'll have to tell Sal. He knows that Sagitty's fate will make it very clear to Sal that they do need to leave. He knows she'll leave without looking back, and that their homestead will melt into the forest quickly. Thornhill thinks he'll mourn Thornhill's Point forever, because he's only a king when he's there.

By conceptualizing having to leave Thornhill's Point as an unfair consequence of being a victim of violence, Thornhill shows that he absolutely functions under his own conception of justice that favors him over anyone else—but he can only do so on Thornhill's Point.

At the town of Windsor, Thornhill, Ned, and Dan get Sagitty to the hospital and then go to Spider's bar. They hear Sagitty's scream when someone pulls the spear out and they know he's dead. Over the course of the afternoon, men arrive to hear the story. When Smasher arrives, he commandeers the story and embellishes it. Thornhill silently drinks and remembers Newgate Prison, where men rehearsed their stories so many times that they became fact.

Losing such a close friend provides Smasher the emotional investment to make the story especially rousing. It's a way for him to honor Sagitty, as it ensures that he'll be remembered and his death will be thought of as noble. Thornhill recognizes that this is dangerous, as the stories people tell can easily become fact.

Spider solemnly says that they have to go get the natives before the natives get them. Thornhill imagines being speared as Smasher says that the natives are camping at Blackwood's place. He continues that if they leave now, they can "settle" the natives by morning. The other men are tuned in to Smasher, and Thornhill thinks that Smasher's voice is commanding. Smasher says they have to exterminate the natives and looks at Thornhill for a moment before saying they need the *Hope* to get there.

Thornhill is reminded of the fact that stories, not necessarily facts, create change. Notice that Smasher doesn't ask specifically for Thornhill to pick up a gun: he asks only for his complicity and his help in supporting others in using guns. This shows that Smasher understands how to manipulate Thornhill to get him to agree.

Thornhill looks at the men in the room and thinks that they're all becoming wicked. Loveday says that they need to either fight or return to their old lives. Dan approaches Thornhill and says that if they get rid of the natives, Sal will agree to stay. Thornhill already knew this, but hates Dan for saying it. He knows he has to agree to Smasher's plan in order to keep Sal and Thornhill's Point. Smasher insists that nobody will know what they're going to do, and Thornhill says he'll cut the tongue of any man who tells.

It's important to note that Thornhill knows that this is unambiguously wrong and cruel. However, the draw of land and the power he derives from owning land is enough for Thornhill to justify participating in the unspeakable violence to come. He shows that he's aware that their actions might not be as palatable to others when he demands secrecy.

Smasher crafts a well thought-out plan. The *Hope* picks up men along the way and about a dozen in all ride with him to the river near his own place to wait for the tide to turn to take them to Blackwood's place. Thornhill looks at them all and thinks that he never thought they were bad men, and realizes that now they're all going to do horrible things. He thinks that Sal will be putting the children to bed now, and he knows that Sal is surely aware of what Thornhill found at Sagitty's. Thornhill wonders how his life has come to this moment where he has so little choice. He recognizes that he does have a choice now, and thinks that he didn't have a choice when he was waiting for the executioner at Newgate.

Again, Thornhill only feels as though he has little to no choice in the matter because he refuses to step outside the social hierarchy that gives him power in New South Wales. Like Blackwood, Thornhill could choose to learn how to understand the Aborigines and live on his land while respecting the Aborigines' claim to it. This drives home Thornhill's belief that social status is something that must be performed. *Because Thornhill wasn't born into power and privilege, he now feels the need to act the part.*

Thornhill realizes that he would've died at Newgate, and what happens in the morning will fundamentally change him and his life. He thinks that this situation with the natives is like a hard knot in rope, and the only thing to do is to cut it out. As the tide turns, Thornhill lets the *Hope* glide up the river towards Blackwood's place. Thornhill thinks of the black woman at Blackwood's, but tries to think of Sagitty instead. The group stops outside Blackwood's lagoon to sleep for a few hours before dawn.

Thornhill realizes that an inevitable consequence of the coming violence will be losing a part of his humanity, the part of him that recognized that the Aborigines bleed the same blood that he does. In order to follow through with the violence, Thornhill must tell himself stories that dehumanize the Aborigines until he believes them, just as he formulated his story at Newgate.

At dawn, Smasher whispers to everyone to shoot the men first, then the women. The men wade to shore with their **guns**, though Thornhill thinks it's likely the natives heard them a long time ago. The group approaches the camp as Thornhill wonders when the spear will hit him. A gun fires and Thornhill thinks he sees a black man, but realizes it's a tree after he shoots at it. Suddenly, all the guns are going off. Smasher fires into the natives' dwellings. The men shoot at the natives as they try to flee.

This kind of ambush is a clear case of foul play, as the Aborigines have no hope of fighting back. This shows that Smasher's final decision as to what justice means entails denying the Aborigines a fair fight or trial, just as all the white men present were denied fair trials for their crimes in England.

Thornhill watches the massacre around him. He watches Dan club Black Dick over the head, and Ned shoots a woman carrying a child. Thornhill points his **gun** at people, but doesn't shoot. He hears a shout and sees Blackwood coming out of his hut with his own gun aimed at Smasher. Smasher flicks his whip at Blackwood and Blackwood reels backwards holding his eyes. Thornhill feels a blow on his hand and drops his gun. As he turns, something hits his head and things go dark. Something hits him again and he falls to the ground.

By not shooting, Thornhill seeks to remove himself from the situation and absolve himself of any responsibility without actually physically removing himself. It's an attempt to follow in Blackwood's footsteps and be there without truly participating—though Thornhill still suffers the pain of being there, just like Blackwood does.

Thornhill gets up with his **gun** and realizes that there are natives in the forest throwing rocks and spears. He realizes his party is trapped between the lagoon and the forest. Spears hit several men and they scream. Whisker Harry steps out and seems to throw his spear in slow motion. Thornhill feels like he's trying to pull the trigger, but his finger won't move. He watches the spear pierce Smasher's chest. Smasher walks to Thornhill holding the spear and tries to speak. Whisker Harry makes no move to throw another spear.

Smasher receives his justice, just as Sagitty did. The fact that Whisker Harry kills Smasher reinforces Thornhill's earlier assessment that Harry is a powerful and revered individual: here, he's the one that gets to exact justice. Thornhill's body seems to refuse to participate in the violence as he struggles to pull the trigger, a subconscious attempt to escape the situation.

Thornhill's **gun** finally goes off. Whisker Harry stands stern for a moment and then folds forward and lies down on his back. Thornhill watches Harry and lays down his gun, feeling as though the forest is watching. He looks at the dead bodies all around. Thornhill hears a baby cry, and Dan clubs it until it's quiet. Blackwood is still alive, but is motionless. Smasher refuses help until he dies, leaning on the spear. Everything is silent.

The watching forest reinforces the idea that the white settlers don't belong here, and that this was a gross overstep. The feeling of being watched also creates a sense that "justice" hasn't been served yet: there were witnesses to this atrocity, and this conflict can be continued and revisited.

PART 6: MR. THORNHILL'S VILLA

In the following ten years, the river itself doesn't change. New men move to Smasher and Spider's places, and Thornhill buys Sagitty's place and 100 acres that includes Darkey Creek. It's called Thornhill's Creek now. The natives no longer bother the settlers, so the settlers flourish on the river. Thornhill has paid off the *Hope* and had a larger boat built. Thornhill's Point is now 300 acres with hogs, cattle, and grain. The Thornhill estate feeds the chain gangs, and Thornhill is treated like a king. He watches the river with his telescope, and Sal is famous for her Christmas parties.

Ten years in the future, the power dynamic has shifted enough that the natives don't pose a threat any longer. Even though the massacre was grossly unfair and cruel, it served its purpose of making sure the white settlers were able to lay claim to the land. Now, Thornhill is truly like a king: others see him now as he always wished to be seen. He doesn't have to perform his status the same way anymore, because people accept it as fact.

An Irishman named Devine built a stone villa for Mr. Thornhill. Thornhill and Sal call it **Cobham Hall** after the place where Sal's mother worked before she married. It's built on top of the fish carving in the rock cliff. The stone walls are 18 inches thick, and there's a staircase that can be drawn up like a drawbridge in case of attack.

Cobham Hall provides Sal and Thornhill an outlet to create their own version of London, just as they ended up doing in their stories they told each other about returning to London. The fact that it is built like a fortress, however, places it firmly in the "unsafe" wild of New South Wales.

The villa isn't exactly what Mr. Thornhill had in mind, and parts of it aren't quite right. The stone steps leading to the veranda are awkward and not imposing, and the stone lions that he ordered to go on the gateposts look domestic instead of grotesque. Thornhill called them perfect, but Sal caught his eye and knew he was disappointed. Thornhill had the lions put higher than originally planned so people can't see them well, but they send the same message that this is Thornhill's home.

Cobham Hall's imperfections mirror the imperfect nature of Thornhill's success: his success came about as a result of the massacre, a tragic and violent event. Further, the imperfections also reflect Thornhill's feeling that he is an imposter. It looks like a gentleman's residence but isn't quite right, just as Thornhill now looks like a gentleman (and goes by Mr. Thornhill) but doesn't truly feel like one.

Cobham Hall is a grand residence. Sometimes Mr. Thornhill wonders if he's a gentleman now, and thinks that it feels like a dream. Sometimes, he thinks of the fish carving swimming in the rock under the house. He knows that it won't fade, since it's covered. Other drawings in the forest are fading with no natives around to redraw the lines.

Again, building Cobham Hall on top of the fish drawing is a way of erasing the fact that the Aborigines were ever here. It's also an active and intentional form of erasure, unlike the other drawings fading in the forest because of the weather. However, it also reminds Thornhill of the natives who were here before him.

Sal's tally marks are eventually covered by new tree bark. She keeps the roof tile from London and sometimes talks about going home, but London as home is just an idea. Both Sal and Mr. Thornhill understand that they'll never go home to London, not least because their children all believe that New South Wales is home. Sal will never leave her children, so Mr. Thornhill got her everything she needed to make a home on the Hawkesbury. They have plush furniture and Sal has a paisley shawl from India. The shawl would've cost a year's worth of earnings in London. Thornhill also gives Sal a pair of green silk slippers.

Sal has finally accepted that she has the power to make this place home now that Thornhill has the money to do so. This suggests that with enough money, home can be created anywhere—as long as the right people are there to fill it. The silk slippers signify to Thornhill that he's made something of himself, as they refer back to the gentlewoman he ferried as an apprentice.

Thornhill agrees to build Sal a stone wall around the garden, with only one gate. The wall pleases Sal, and she plants an English garden inside. Mr. Thornhill imports turf from Ireland, and Sal plants daffodils and roses. She longs for trees, so Mr. Thornhill buys poplars to line the road up to the villa. Sal tends to the trees and the garden carefully, but nothing thrives except for a geranium from Mrs. Herring. Most of the trees die, and Sal walks down to the living ones in the evenings. Now, ten years later, Sal has had one more baby, Dolly, and has grown stout in her older age. Mr. Thornhill notices that the calluses he once had on his hands are now no more than thick skin.

The death of Sal's plants and trees shows that as much as Sal tries to create the sense that she's in England, she isn't: this is Australia, and her husband's money can't make plants grow. They also symbolize her own sense of rootlessness. Though she does think of New South Wales as her home now, she doesn't have the deep sense of attachment to this place that she did to London. London is still home in her heart, even if Cobham Hall is home in practice.

Mr. Thornhill had two portraits of himself painted. One hangs in the parlor, one is hidden under the stairs. The one under the stairs was a bad experience. The artist asked Mr. Thornhill his story as he painted, and Mr. Thornhill's story was that he was born in Kent and accused of stealing French brandy. The story came from Loveday, who had moved on to a story involving a young girl and a false accusation. The man in the painting looked more like the artist than Mr. Thornhill. The artist had mocked Mr. Thornhill's desire to hold a book and had painted it upside down.

The way that the narrator talks about the men's stories shows that the Hawkesbury truly allows these men to escape their pasts and their real stories: it's a different system where this borrowed story is entirely plausible. Thornhill's desire to hold a book is indicative of his desire to look like educated gentry. The artist's jab reminds Thornhill of the times when he didn't understand language—either in written form in London, or spoken on the Hawkesbury.

The portrait that hangs in the parlor was done by an "old colonialist," and shows Mr. Thornhill holding a telescope. The expression on Mr. Thornhill's face looks as though he's surprised at where his life has taken him.

The telescope in this painting recalls the watching woods Thornhill felt at the massacre. It reminds him that, although he's successful now, his situation is precarious.

After the massacre, the *Sydney Gazette* had run a story that wasn't false, but wasn't exactly true either. It didn't mention the dying natives that Mr. Thornhill remembers. When he'd returned home to Sal, she'd been waiting. He told her that they'd spoken to the natives and shown them the **guns**, and the natives left. He assured her that they were gone for good, and she looked away for a while before saying that she hoped Thornhill hadn't done something. Thornhill brushed her off and washed his hands at her prodding.

Sal certainly knows that Thornhill is lying to her that he merely showed the natives the guns, but Thornhill's unwillingness to tell the truth shows that he knows he has to bear the weight of his memory alone. The guilt is his burden to carry, even though Sal's hope that Thornhill didn't do anything suggests that she has a burden of guilt to carry as well.

Thornhill wished that Sal would say something, but she never did. She unpacked their things and continued with her life. She stopped making marks on the tree after Dolly got sick. Thornhill noticed this but said nothing. He thinks that his silence is part of the silence between them that began when he returned from Blackwood's. Thornhill thinks sometimes that he didn't realize that unsaid words could create so much distance between two people.

The consequence of not sharing his life, his dreams, and his thoughts with Sal is a sense that the relationship is closed and somewhat businesslike, rather than open and affectionate. This in turn robs both Thornhill and Sal of the intimacy that helped make home feel like home and cements Thornhill's place as a perpetual immigrant.

Now, Blackwood still lives in his hut. Mr. Thornhill occasionally takes Blackwood food and tobacco, and glances at the spot where he'd burned all the bodies. Nothing grows there. Blackwood refuses to speak to Mr. Thornhill, and although Mr. Thornhill listens for Blackwood's woman and child, he never hears them.

Now, Blackwood's silence speaks volumes. Mr. Thornhill's continued offerings serve as an apology for the massacre, while Blackwood's silence says that Thornhill will never be forgiven.

Dick moves into Blackwood's hut with him. Some on the river suggest that Mr. Thornhill sent Dick to take care of Blackwood, and Mr. Thornhill doesn't correct them. Dick had run away not long after the massacre, and when Thornhill had found him at Blackwood's, Dick had refused to look his father in the eye. Now eighteen, Dick takes Blackwood's rum up and down the river and sometimes stops at Thornhill's Point to see Sal, but he avoids his father. Thornhill thinks that Dick became an okay waterman after all. Newcomers to the river sometimes think that Dick is Blackwood's son, and it cuts Mr. Thornhill and makes him ache.

When Thornhill doesn't insist on correcting others on the river, he accepts that Dick's story of what happened at the massacre is different and much less flattering than Thornhill would like to admit. Allowing the false stories to act as truth allows Thornhill to avoid admitting the nature of his participation to anyone, and he continues to pay the price when he hears that people think Dick is Blackwood's son.

The general sentiment among the gentlemen settlers is that the natives will die out and will be gone in a few generations. The narrator says that if any of the gentlemen had gone to the reservation set aside for the natives, they'd see how wrong they were. Long Jack is the only black man still living near the Thornhills on the river. He'd been shot at Blackwood's but didn't die. One of his legs drags and he shows no emotion or pain. He lives where he once did when Thornhill first came to the river, and Sal takes him clothes and insists on building him a hut.

The assertion that these gentlemen settlers are wrong suggests that colonialism isn't over just because they've taken over the Hawkesbury River and moved the Aborigines to a reservation. The fact that these men are wrong means that they and others are going to have to continue to grapple with the aftermath of colonial violence for years to come—indeed, into the 21st century and beyond.

Long Jack refuses Sal's offerings. He never wears the clothes and doesn't eat her bread. He occasionally begs food from the Thornhills, but sometimes disappears for periods. One cold morning, Mr. Thornhill takes Jack a blanket and some sacks to sleep on. Jack looks dull and skinny. He offers Jack the blankets and tells him to come to the house to get some food. He almost yells, but Jack won't look at him. Thornhill is frustrated and reaches to touch Jack.

Long Jack becomes a project of sorts—an opportunity for Thornhill and Sal to try to atone for their misdeeds. By being kind to him, they can tell themselves that they're not bad people and are actually doing some good for the Aborigines. Jack's listlessness suggests that this is a wholly unsuccessful way of going about things. The Thornhills cannot give him the help he needs.

Jack says "no." He slaps the ground and says "this me, my place," and strokes the ground. Mr. Thornhill thinks that he has money, food, and boots—everything he ever wanted—but feels empty watching Jack touch the ground. He thinks that he'll never have a place that's truly a part of him. Mr. Thornhill snaps and yells at Jack before storming back to the house. He never goes down to Jack's hut again.

Jack makes it clear to Thornhill that the true meaning of home is the spiritual connection that he feels to the land, something that Thornhill never will experience. This shows Thornhill that the things he can buy with his money aren't the things that make his home, and suggests that his conception of home is based on an ugly reality: the violence of colonialism.

Mr. Thornhill spends his evenings sitting on the veranda with his spyglass. He has his servant bring him a drink and a cigar and watches his family and his land. He can smell the horses and thinks that his children are learning to ride like gentry. The estate looks like it could be in England, and Mr. Thornhill feels successful until he looks beyond his estate to the cliffs and the woods. It looks untouched. Sal comes to join Thornhill and asks if he's still watching. She tells him that she thought he was wonderful when they were young because he could spit so far. They laugh, and Thornhill says that in Australia, a man needs his spit. Sal goes inside after a while.

Thornhill's pride that the estate looks like England shows that even if he regrets his violent acts, he doesn't regret at all the colonial system that brought those acts about in the first place. The wildness of the land beyond Cobham Hall drives home again that this is an oasis in an inhospitable, faraway land that Thornhill can only hope to ever tame. It's not truly home, despite Thornhill's best efforts to make it so.

Mr. Thornhill thinks watching the cliffs is like watching the sea: they're always changing, and it's hard to tell how big they are without a person for scale. He studies the fallen rocks and the scrub trees and wonders what it looks like when the rocks break away from the cliffs. Mr. Thornhill watches the shadow of the hill move across the villa until it reaches the river. It seems to pause there before engulfing it. At that point of the evening, the top of the cliffs looks like a stage. Thornhill scans it looking for people. He knows they could be there and that if they wanted to be seen, he would see them. He thinks of how patient they are and how they're a part of the forest.

Thornhill is reminded once again of his own insignificance in this land. It's still unconquerable, and he'll never be able to truly assert himself over it. When Thornhill watches the cliffs for the Aborigines, it shows that he regrets his violence and hopes to see that it didn't actually do any lasting damage, though of course it did. By telling himself that the Aborigines could be there and not be seen, he's telling himself a story to feel better. It doesn't matter if they're there or not—the possibility is enough to keep him going.

The bench that Mr. Thornhill sits on while he watches isn't particularly comfortable and he thinks of it as part of his punishment. It reminds him of the bench he sat on while he waited to be made an apprentice, and he knows that this bench should be his reward for his hard work. When the sun begins to finally set, Mr. Thornhill puts his telescope down. He doesn't know why he keeps watching, but he knows that watching brings him peace. He watches the cliffs even after true darkness falls.

Even though Thornhill is so powerful, he still thinks of New South Wales as a prison. It's still the place where he's living out his life sentence, though now it's for a crime the government knows nothing about: the massacre. This shows that guilt and remorse are some of the most powerful consequences of Thornhill's participation in colonial violence, and ones that he'll have to deal with until the end of his life.

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