

*a collection of writing & images supplementing the work of
scott howie exhibited under the title 'claimant' in the wagga
wagga art gallery between august thirty-first & november
third, two thousand and nineteen.*

*we're all born naked
& the rest is drag*

rupaul charles

PERSONS ADVERTISED FOR.

A HANDSOME REWARD will be given to any person who can furnish such information as will discover the fate of ROGER CHARLES TICHBORNE. He sailed from the port of Rio Janeiro on the 20th of April, 1854, in the ship La Bella, and has never been heard of since, but a report reached England to the effect that a portion of the crew and passengers of a vessel of that name was picked up by a vessel bound to Australia—Melbourne it is believed—it is not known whether the said ROGER CHARLES TICHBORNE was amongst the drowned or saved. He would at the present time be about thirty-two years of age; is of a delicate constitution, rather tall, with very light brown hair and blue eyes. Mr. Tichborne is the son of Sir James Tichborne, Bart., now deceased, and is heir to all his estates. The advertiser is instructed to state that a MOST LIBERAL REWARD will be given for any information that may definitely point out his fate. Gentlemen in a position to refer to shipping reports may be able to find some record of the saving of the shipwrecked persons from La Bella, and a very careful search, if with a successful result, will amply repay any one who will take the trouble to investigate the matter. All replies to be addressed to Mr. ARTHUR CUBITT, Missing Friends Office, Bridge-street, Sydney, New South Wales.



portrait of t. castro wagga by james farley

the stories that wagga chooses to celebrate itself with such as the mischievous tease (outright lie) of the five o'clock wave, the tenuous link to the invention of the chiko roll (and subsequent friendly intercity rivalry), or the 'something in the water' that makes us a 'city of good sports' may help narrowly define our identity as good-humoured, team-oriented and unpretentious. or perhaps conversely a tribal, junk-food eating, pack of liars who value muscle over intellect. you might think that, i couldn't possibly comment.



so what to make of the wagga butcher/slaughterman thomas castro who appears to be the first person to draw international attention to our little country town. a fine collection of tichbornalia graces our museum, as does a massive oil painting depicting a scene from his trial. his is a story that gets told. but why the endless fascination?



are we honouring a liar, a grimy chancer, a rebel sticking it to the british aristocracy? do we empathise with his chance to escape the place & the foulness of his work and live a life of luxury? who among us, hasn't dreamt of winning the lottery? part of me likes to consider him wagga's first performance artist - committing to a durational performance the likes the world had never seen. and then the romantic in me likes to think that just maybe, despite all the evidence, that just maybe he was roger.



like any person who suffers from imposter syndrome, castro must have been unable to believe the number of people he convinced that he was tichborne. each lie led to another lie to another lie to another lie. how strange it must have felt to experience the acceptance and love of the dowager tichborne. to be all of a sudden thrust into a whole new family drama, to be a pawn in a family rift. and then, when the dowager died, to have lost your most strident advocate.



at what point do we start to believe the lies we tell ourselves? at what point do we start to believe the impressions that others have of ourselves? how can we ever be sure of who we actually are? like castro we choose to create an external identity, a persona that we wear each day. sometimes we believe it is the real us, sometimes we know that this is the mask we put on each day, to protect the real us. but what happens when we no longer recognise ourselves?



and i guess this is what lies under the performances.



the weight of constantly claiming identity



once castro left for london and paris he was soon lost to us all here in wagga. 'castro' disappears to be come the claimant, tichborne, orton. castro never returned.



they all leave us eventually.



we all leave eventually.



only our stories remain

Orton's life for his own. For example, in a document which details his days since leaving England as the young Tichborne, The Claimant blurs into one events from the lives of the heir and Orton. Why? It would appear, at first glance, that this is evidence enough that The Claimant was really Arthur Orton, and that his true identity was floating to the surface of his assumed identity. But another reason was given by The Claimant's counsel. It was argued that this blurring of lives was the effect of two men living closely together; if you like, one's memory might have swept into the other's. So The Claimant's counsel moved on to ask: 'Why would a clever impostor make the type of foolish mistakes The Claimant has made, in regard to proving his identity? Surely his behaviour is more in keeping with one who *knows* he is Roger Charles Tichborne, and does not for a moment entertain the idea that others will have any difficulty in believing him. Accordingly, he is not concerned with giving an absolutely accurate and undeniable version of himself. He just speaks . . . Imagine, gentlemen, if one of yourselves were forced to prove your own identity. How would you go about it? I believe, if you will allow me the liberty to put forward the suggestion, all of you would offer flawed versions of your lives.'

This argument holds some weight. Proving your own identity in a legal arena, in such a context, would be a daunting task. But perhaps stronger, and simpler, is the idea that The Claimant really was Arthur Orton, a butcher from Wapping, who killed nobody, and who unwittingly embarked upon a strange crime. The entire affair might have











still extracted from castro / tichborne



portrait of t castro wagga by william gibbes



the dowager tichborne

the three performances were filmed nearly twenty years to the day of the death of my mother. the memories of her and the complexities of our relationship forced their way into my work as they are oft to do.

the dowager never believed her son roger was dead, refused to believe. when she finally met castro, she quashed any element of doubt that he was truly her son returned, ignoring all the damning evidence of falsehoods told. castro milked her for as much money as he could. she gave to him as freely as she could.

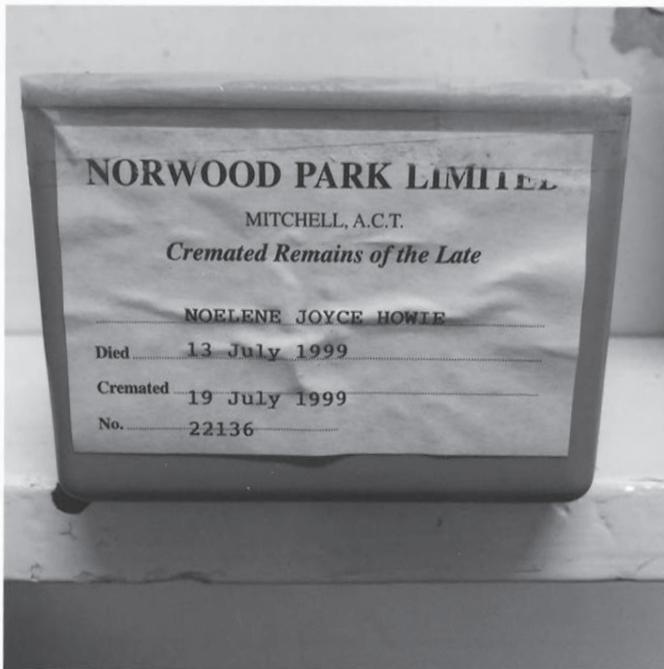
but maybe that's what mothers do. well maybe that's what my mother did, wanting to believe the best in me, to adhere to her vision of me as a 'good son', a role i performed very badly over the years. i told lies to my mother and withheld information from her in fear of [or perhaps to protect her from] shattering her image of me. i suspect it was a game we both played. i took lots from her and gave little back in return. as i believed i was entitled to.

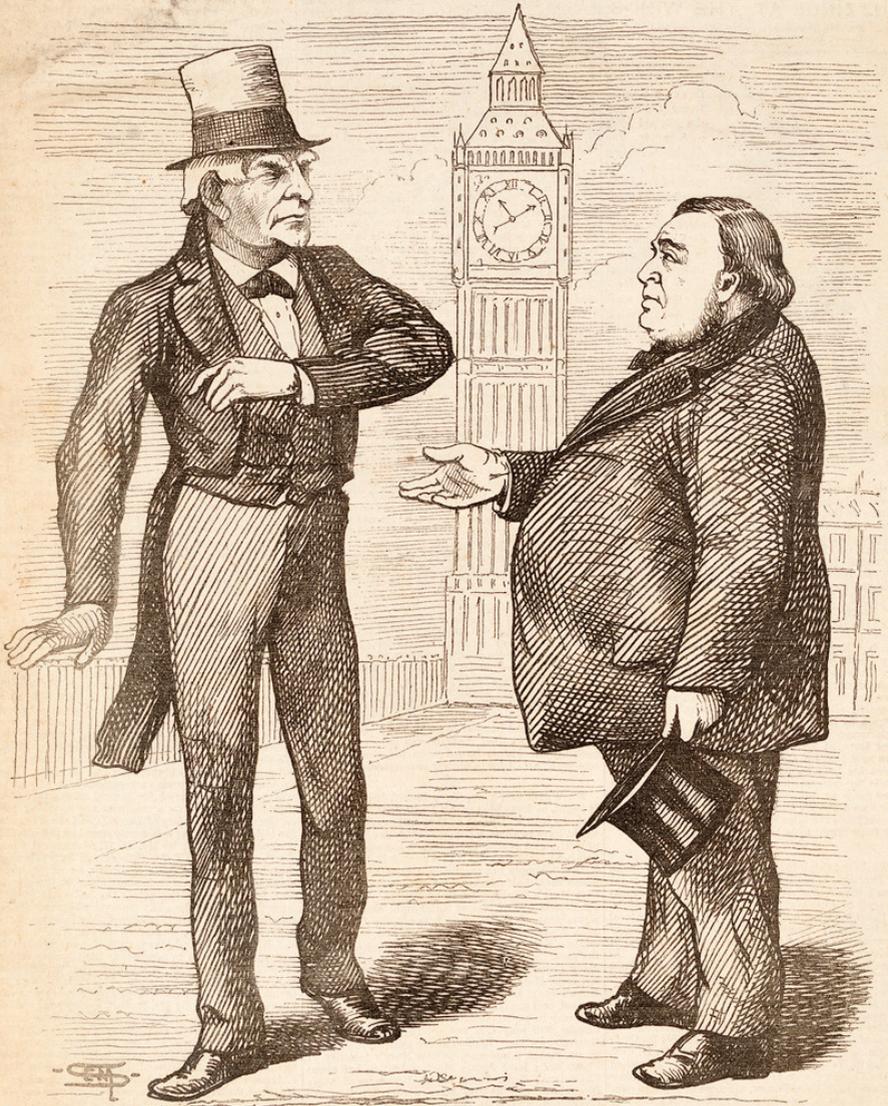
my mother died before i could reset our relationship, where the mild traumas of my childhood no longer constrained my ability to relate to her as an adult [but i don't know maybe you are always your mother's son].

at the crematorium i asked if i could retain a small portion of my mother's ashes. i planned to commission some form of ornament to hold some for myself and my siblings. i have held onto the ashes in a plastic grey box inside a non-descript white cardboard box for twenty years, out of sight but always knowing exactly where they were.

once the box sat on a bench near where i was doing a durational performance shortly after my mother's death. then it was a long ritual of trying and failing to clean up a mess i had made. now i have used them again in the dowager performance wearing a small portion of her remains on my face. there was something transformative in touching them, acknowledging them, respecting them but not letting their aura overpower me. a memento mori. later i wiped the remains from my face and sprinkled them over a lavender bush. my mother would not have approved or understood these actions but she would have told everybody about this exhibition.

opposite: what it says on the box & self-portrait





THE CLAIMANT: WHY WOULDNT THEY BELIEVE ME. IT WAS A BALD-FACED LIE BY COOK THAT ALLOWED HIM TO CLAIM LAND AND WEALTH HE HAD NO RIGHT TO.

*each morning when you wake you look in the mirror to remind yourself who you are.
sometimes you don't recognise yourself.
sometimes you seem to have never changed.
you are aware that you have never seen your face with your own eyes,
only reflections imperfect, imprecise
but
you have seen your hands.
you trust your hands.
you touch your face, your lips, your nose your eyes, your ears.
they feel in the right place.
a drop of sweat forms on your lip, you extend your tongue to collect it.
it tastes of you. smells of you.
you know this face
you have known this face forever
yet
you cannot remember the first time you saw it.
there were so many other faces to see first.
eyes and ears and mouth and nose.*



*you touch your face
you are touching
you are being touched
both acting and acted upon
you have been taught how to act
you have rehearsed
you perform
you perform every day
you perform yourself
you perform others
you perform for yourself
you perform for others
you can no longer tell when you are performing.
you claim to be yourself
yet you are uncertain of who you are
you feel like an imposter
you are an imposter*



eyes and ears and mouth and nose

list of works

castro / tichborne (2019)
digital video

*the dowager approached a large figure laying in a bed, fully dressed, his
back to the door and a handkerchief covering his face
(oh my dear roger)* (2019)
digital video

portrait of t. castro wagga (2019) *with james farley*
photograph, digital audio

remains (2019)
mixed media



performances

*in which the artist reads the entire life and full confession of arthur orton,
(the tichborne claimant) written by himself.*
performed october 12

tom's requiem
performed october 26

more

read

mat schulz (1996) claim
robyn annear (2002) the man who lost himself
anonymous (c 1875) the entire life and full confession of arthur orton, the
tichborne claimant
jorge luis borges (1971) tom castro, the implausible imposter



listen

dirty three (2000) lullaby for christie. whatever you love you are
the dollop #211 - the tichborne situation (live w/ wil anderson)



watch

j.t. leroy (2018) dir. justin kelly
the imposter (2012) dir. bart layton
rupaul's drag race season 5 & 6
catfish (2010) dir. henry joost, ariel schulman

*i really appreciate the support, assistance and generosity of the following
people and organisations & extend a hearty huzzah to them all*

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dave burraston
miriam crane
caroline geraghty
drew halyday
tayla martin
casey ankers
jasper howie
ivy ankers*

&

*wagga wagga art gallery
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museum of the riverina
next in line films
cootamundra -gundagai regional council
old gundagai gaol
cad factory
wired lab
hampshire council trust
wagga wagga city council*

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