

JOSEPH FURPHY



***RIGBY'S
ROMANCE***

Joseph Furphy

Rigby's Romance

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Wren Farnsworth

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Introduction

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Between the plain facts of work and land and the unruly urgencies of the heart, Rigby's Romance probes how a life can be steered by talk, chance, and desire. As its title promises, the book is about courtship, but the path toward intimacy runs through camps, crossings, and the shifting loyalties of mateship. Joseph Furphy's narrative treats affection not as a private feeling but as something publicly negotiated in speech, rumor, and travel. Readers meet a world where a person's reputation can turn on a phrase and the next road can reset hope.

Rigby's Romance is an Australian novel by Joseph Furphy, who also published under the pen name Tom Collins, and it belongs to the bush realism that came to prominence in the early twentieth century. Set largely in rural districts and small townships, the book evokes riverlands, paddocks, and roadways rather than urban vistas. Its milieu is colonial-era Australia, with itinerant workers, smallholders, and storekeepers shaping the social texture. Without relying on melodrama, Furphy builds narrative momentum from movement and conversation. The publication sits in the period when Australian nationhood and literary identity were consolidating, and its pages record that process in idiom, attitude, and setting.

At its center stands a man named Rigby, a practical worker with a stubborn streak of idealism, who finds his plans repeatedly entangled with the possibility of love. A

journey brings him into and out of districts where past acquaintances and new prospects intersect. Meetings in hotels, along roads, and at stations lead to misunderstandings, clarifications, and fresh intentions. The plot advances less by secrets than by the friction of everyday talk and the abrupt turns of travel. What emerges is a courtship traced across wide spaces, where timing, pride, and circumstance continually test the sincerity and resilience of feeling.

Furphy's manner is distinctive: colloquial without being careless, argumentative yet playful, and given to digressions that illuminate character and place. Dialogues spool out in long exchanges where jokes and propositions sit side by side with etymological curiosity and philosophical aside. The narrative voice relishes the rhythms of spoken English as used in the bush, while also maintaining a wry, skeptical distance from its own storytellers. Readers will find a texture of irony that favors observation over sentiment and laughter over lament, yet tenderness is never entirely withheld. The tone is humane, unsentimental, and companionable, inviting attentive reading rather than hurried consumption.

Several themes organize the book's movement. It examines how speech constructs reputation, mapping the swift social life of rumor across sheds, inns, and crossings. It weighs the obligations of mateship against the commitments that romance demands, noting how loyalty can both protect and obstruct. Economic precarity and mobility shape nearly every decision, as characters weigh wages, seasons, and distances. Questions of class and

gender expectation arise in small quarrels and grand pronouncements, rarely resolved but sharply observed. Finally, the landscape itself operates as a moral pressure, at once generous and pitiless, reminding readers that emotion in this world must be carried, not secluded.

For contemporary readers, the book's preoccupations feel strikingly current. Its network of talk, with news ricocheting through camps and bars, anticipates today's rumor economies and the way stories govern opportunity. The itinerant work that frames the action speaks to precarious labor and how intimacy must be negotiated alongside movement. Its satire of swaggering masculinity and its attention to courtship etiquette, pride, and patience invite renewed scrutiny. The novel also emerges from a colonial context, and its emphases and silences reward critical reading about whose experiences are centered. In all these ways, Rigby's *Romance* remains a lively interlocutor in ongoing conversations about community, love, and voice.

Approached on its own terms, Rigby's *Romance* offers the pleasures of a road narrative, a social comedy, and a thoughtful study of feeling under pressure. Its language asks readers to listen closely; its structure rewards patience with a mosaic of episodes that accumulate into a portrait of character and place. The book matters because it refuses easy oppositions between cynicism and sentiment, celebrates the resourcefulness of ordinary people, and treats language as the arena where futures are negotiated. As an artifact of Australian literature and as a still-vital story of desire, it invites readers to test their bearings in company with Rigby.

Synopsis

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Rigby's Romance, an Australian novel by Joseph Furphy from the early twentieth century, is a companion to his landmark *Such Is Life*. It reshapes bush materials into a more sustained courtship narrative while preserving Furphy's irony, philosophical digressions, and ear for vernacular talk. A narrator known as Tom Collins frames the action from the vantage of roads, camps, and townships, drawing together scattered episodes into a continuous thread. Against the harsh, work-driven rhythms of pastoral life, a romance takes form, its progress continually tested by distance, reputation, and the tricky mediation of hearsay—conditions that define the social world the book anatomizes.

The story begins with a capable bush worker whose prospects hinge on more than strength and skill. Rigby, steady yet proud, seeks to unite his livelihood with his hopes for a future partner. Collins encounters him on the track and gradually pieces together the situation through conversations with mates, employers, and bystanders. The prospective match depends on good standing, reliable income, and character—commodities as fragile as they are prized. Early scenes sketch a web of acquaintances stretching across stations and public houses, where a word spoken lightly can echo for months and where formal introductions carry tangible consequence.

Much of the narrative proceeds through movement: teams on the road, shearers changing sheds, and small

parties shifting between outstations and town. Collins reports the campfire debates that punctuate these journeys—on politics, property, and the practical ethics of work—while keeping sight of the romantic thread. Rigby's plans are pragmatic, aimed at securing position and demonstrating constancy. Yet small mishaps accumulate: missed meetings, messages delayed or mistranscribed, and obligations to employers that conflict with personal intentions. The book's humor arises from these frictions, balancing affectionate portraits of bush competence with the comic ungainliness of events outside anyone's control.

Complications gather around the fragile asset of reputation. An old incident, remembered differently by different witnesses, threatens to color Rigby's name at a critical moment. Collins records overlapping stories in which each teller's confidence conceals uncertainty. Rather than adjudicate, the narrative dwells on how truth in a scattered community is constructed by rumor, inference, and the convenience of tidy explanation. Formal mechanisms—letters, references, and testimonies—offer clarity but also risk hardening mistakes into official record. The conflict thus pivots on whether character can be recognized through lived conduct or must be proved through paperwork and secondhand judgment.

As paths converge in busy seasonal intervals, chance meetings present both danger and opportunity. Old acquaintances resurface with partial knowledge, and new allies emerge in unlikely venues, from store verandahs to roadside encampments. The romantic question pushes toward resolution, but misunderstandings persist, fed by

bush reticence and the etiquette of not speaking out of turn. Collins remains a hesitant intermediary, aware that intervention can do harm as easily as good. Several set pieces—social gatherings, workplace negotiations, and near-formal confrontations—reveal how pride, courtesy, and misread signals can either seal estrangement or open a path toward mutual understanding without declaring the final outcome.

Form and voice reinforce the novel's concerns. Furphy's digressive structure mirrors the detours of travel and the indirections of courtship, while the mingling of registers—learned riff, practical advice, and idiomatic banter—enacts the cultural variety of the inland. Landscapes are not mere backdrop; weather, distance, and cycles of work shape choices as surely as sentiment. Themes familiar from *Such Is Life*—mateship, social mobility, skeptical empiricism—are reframed by the demands of a romance plot, giving fresh urgency to questions about evidence, fairness, and how people come to know one another within the limits of place and time.

By turning the bush yarn toward a love story without surrendering intellectual bite, Rigby's *Romance* enlarges Furphy's portrait of Australian life. It treats affection and fidelity as tests of practical philosophy, measuring ideals against circumstance. The book's enduring appeal lies in its blend of humor, moral scrutiny, and sympathy for working lives, and in its wary account of how narratives—official and informal—shape fortune. Without revealing the final turn, the novel closes on the possibility that patience, integrity,

and clear speech may counter the distortions of rumor,
leaving a resonant reflection on character and community.

Historical Context

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Rigby's Romance is by Joseph Furphy (1843–1912), who wrote as Tom Collins. The novel draws on his years as a bullock driver in the Riverina and northern Victoria during the 1880s–1890s, when wool from vast pastoral stations moved by dray, riverboat, and expanding rail. Furphy lived and worked around towns such as Hay and Echuca before resettling in Shepparton to labor in his brother's foundry. He wrote fiction grounded in bush workplaces—stock routes, shearing sheds, and camp yards—observed first-hand. That setting supplies the novel's idiom, itinerant cast, and attention to the practical institutions of colonial rural life.

He was promoted by The Bulletin, Sydney's influential nationalist weekly, whose literary editor A. G. Stephens encouraged a distinctive Australian vernacular. Furphy's massive manuscript was reshaped under Stephens's guidance: *Such Is Life* appeared in 1903, while other sections and parallel episodes later became *Rigby's Romance*. After Furphy's death in 1912, his friend and advocate Kate Baker preserved his papers and pressed for further publication; *Rigby's Romance* reached readers in the early 1920s. This path through the colonial press and posthumous editing frames the book as part of the Bulletin school, with its blend of satire, realism, and democratic argument.

The late colonial economy of the Riverina was dominated by wool, run on leasehold estates managed by overseers,

shearers, cooks, and teamsters. The Murray-Darling river trade connected station stores to markets, while new rail lines redirected freight and settlement patterns. Seasonal droughts and the 1890s depression—culminating in bank suspensions in 1893—pressed workers to move constantly for contracts and cartage. These conditions produced an egalitarian yet precarious social world in camps and public houses, with practical skills and reputation as currency. Furphy's narrative situations and debates are anchored in this working landscape and its logistics, rather than in metropolitan institutions.

Industrial organization transformed pastoral labor in the period the novel reflects. The Amalgamated Shearers' Union formed in 1886, and the shearers' strikes of the early 1890s became national news, shaping public talk across shearing sheds and carriers' camps. The Bulletin championed unionist voices and a sardonic, anti-authoritarian bush ethos. Furphy's characters share that argumentative culture: they spar about contracts, fairness, and competence, while valuing mateship amid rough conditions. Though the novel is not a strike chronicle, its conversations assume readers know the new power of unions, the tensions with pastoralists, and the expectation that working men should reason publicly.

Constitutional change also framed the era. Throughout the 1890s, conventions debated uniting the colonies; the Commonwealth of Australia began in 1901. Borderland districts like the Riverina had long traded south through Victoria, and periodic Riverina separation talk reflected economic frustrations with Sydney. Federation promised

standardized tariffs, rail gauges, and national policy. At the same time, the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 inaugurated the White Australia policy, matching The Bulletin's own exclusionary nationalism. The novel's preoccupations—national character, speech, and civic respect—arise from that ferment, presenting bush people as articulate citizens whose wit and conduct embody, and test, emergent Australian ideals.

Social customs in rural New South Wales and Victoria shaped the novel's romantic and comedic situations. Courtship and reputation mattered in small communities linked by coaching lines such as Cobb & Co., postal routes, and occasional race meetings. Respectability, thrift, and self-reliance were prized, yet mobility and isolation complicated intimacy and trust. Women's political rights were expanding—South Australian women gained the vote and the right to stand for Parliament in 1894; the Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902 enfranchised most white women nationally—while domestic expectations remained strong. Against this backdrop, Furphy examines how speech, rumor, and moral judgment govern personal choice.

The landscape itself is a historical actor. Pastoral expansion along the Murray-Darling had entailed the displacement of Aboriginal peoples, and in New South Wales an Aborigines Protection Board, established in 1883, exerted growing control over Indigenous lives. Public discourse often marginalized Aboriginal perspectives, a silence that marks much settler writing of the period. Furphy's fiction centers settler workplaces and roads, attentive to weather, water, and distance, and to the improvisations that hardship

demands. That focus reflects prevailing priorities in rural settler society while implying the wider consequences of occupation, even as the narrative keeps to the practical sphere known to its narrator.

When Rigby's *Romance* finally circulated, readers encountered a companion to *Such Is Life* that extended the same world of camps, carriers, and station gates. Its humor, dialect, and argumentative set pieces preserve the idiom of the 1880s–1890s bush, while its irony tests shibboleths about class, gender, and national virtue. The book neither romanticizes nor condemns wholesale; instead it records how ordinary colonial institutions—unions, railways, the press, the courts, the pub—shape choice and chance. In doing so, it offers a critical snapshot of Federation-era Australia, using narrative play to examine the promises and limits of its democratic self-image.

RIGBY'S ROMANCE

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THE END

I am a humble actor, doom'd to play
A part obscure, and then to glide away;
Incurious how the great or happy shine.
Or who have parts obscure and sad as mine.

--Rev. George Crabbe.

WHILST conveying my own unobtrusive individuality into Echuca[1] on a pleasant evening in the April of '84, I had little thought of the delicate web of heart history which would be unfolded for my edification on the morrow. My mind was running rather upon the desirableness of a whole bag of chaff for my two horses; a satisfying feed for my kangaroo dog[3] (which is implying more than most people wot of); and a good sleep for myself. I would have been prepared to aver that I was merely bound for Yarrawonga[2], via Echuca, on business of my own; whereas the smoothly--running Order of Things had already told me off as eye-witness and chronicler of a touching interlude--a love passage such as can befall only once in that one life which is each person's scanty dividend at the hand of Time.

Making straight for my customary place of sojourn--namely, Mrs. Ferguson's Coffee Palace[4]--I helped the landlady's husband to unsaddle and feed my horses; after which, I caused that unassuming bondman to bring about twenty lbs. of scraps for Pup, whilst I chained him (Pup, of course) in an empty stall. Then, with six or eight words of explanation and apology to Mrs. Ferguson, I sought my usual bedroom, and, shedding all my garments but one, threw myself into collision with that article of furniture which

has proved fatal to some better men, and to a great many worse.

Here an opportune intermission of about ten hours in the march of events affords convenience for explaining the purpose of my journey to Yarrawonga. The fact is that I object to being regarded as a mere romancist, even as a dead-head speculator, or dilettante reporter, of the drama of life. You must take me as a hard-working and ordinary actor on this great stage of fools; but one who, nevertheless, finds a wholesome recreation in observing the parts played by his fellow-hypocrites. (The Greek "hupokrisis," I find, signifies, indifferently, "actor" and "hypocrite[2q].")

I was booked for one of those soft things that sometimes light on us as gratefully and as unaccountably as the wholesale rain from heaven upon the mallee beneath. John C. Spooner, Rory O'Halloran and I had just bought the Goolumbulla[5] brand. Or rather, the manager, Mr. Spanker, had given us the clearing of the run under certain conditions, one of which was the payment of £100.

Goolumbulla--centrally-situated in that wilderness between the Willandra[6] and the Darling[7]--had been settled for about five years. Six hundred head of cattle had originally been placed on the run, to the disgust and exasperation of Mr. Spanker, whose bigoted faith in the evil-smelling merino[8] admitted no toleration for any other kind of stock. His antipathy was reasonable enough in this instance, for these were warrigals[9], even as scrub-bred cattle go. You know the class--long-bodied, clean-flanked, hard-muscled, ardent-eyed, and always in the same

advanced-store condition. They had been wild enough when first brought from the ranges of the Upper Lachlan[10], and Goolumbulla was just the sort of country to accelerate their reversion to the pre-domesticated type. At the time I speak of, they could barely endure the sight of a man on horseback. As for a man on foot, they would face anything else on earth to get away from him; and if they couldn't get away, that man might either betake himself to his faith, or stand on guard. Which latter alternative sounds so dishonestly vague and non-committal that literary self-respect demands a slight digression[1q].

To deal with fear-maddened cattle in confined spaces--as in drafting or trucking--the infantry man requires an alert eye, a cool head, and a suitable stem of scrub, terminating in a nasty spray of leafless twigs; also his flank and rear must be covered, in order to confine the enemy to a frontal assault. These conditions being fulfilled, the operator can reserve his mortal preparation for some future emergency, though it would, perhaps, be as well to abstain from anything in the nature of language until the draft is put through. A handy piece of brush, judiciously presented, will check the charge of any steer[3q]. The animal will try to get round the obstruction, but he won't attempt to break through.

Here, by the way, I may seize an opportunity of further disturbing the congested ignorance of the bookish public by noticing Sir Walter Scott[11]'s misapprehension of the bovine temperament, as displayed in "The Lady of the Lake[12]." You remember how the milk-white bull--"choicest of the prey we had, when swept our merry men Gallangad"--

is depicted as fiery-eyed, fierce, tameless and fleet, to begin with.

"But steep and flinty was the road.
And sharp the hurrying pikemen's goad;
And when we came to Dennan's Row.
A child might scatheless stroke his brow."

Stockman will conclude either that the child would be an accomplished matador in disguise, or that Scotch cattle have some peculiar way of reasoning out a new situation.

Nor did the Goolumbulla brand entertain any Scotch idea respecting the advantageousness of southward emigration[4q]. A draft, started for Victoria, was like a legion of evil spirits evicted from their haunt. As they went through dry places, seeking rest and finding none, the frenzy of nostalgia, or home-sickness, aggravated by chronic insomnia, made them harder to hold than quicksilver. Their camp was liable to spontaneous eruption at any hour of the night; and then it would be as easy to steady a cyclone as to ring the scattered torrent which swept through the scrub, like a charge of duck-shot through a wire fence.

Drovers of superhuman ability and profane address had at different times taken away three drafts; but none of these professors had ever besieged the station for a second contract. Indeed, the last drover, though as vigilant, as energetic, and as prayerful as any on the track, had found himself with about forty head left out of two hundred by the time he had crossed the first fifty miles. His horses being completely played out in limiting the leakage even to this proportion, he had sacked his three or four men, and had sullenly escorted the remnant of his draft back to their

beloved wilderness. The absconders found their way home in batches, franked by the boundary men of intervening paddocks, who willingly made apertures in their fences to speed the parting guests.

But now Goolumbulla had changed owners; and the new firm had authorised Mr. Spanker to get rid of the cattle at any price and stock up with sheep.

One of the Goolumbulla boundary riders was an old friend of mine. This Rory O'Halloran--better known as Dan O'Connell--was a married man. By nature dreamy, sensitive and affectionate, the poor fellow had a few months previously sustained a blow which left him in a trance of misery. His only child--a fine little girl five or six years old--had got lost in the scrub, and had been found too late. Rory had settled down patiently and submissively to his routine work again, but the memories and associations of his home, though precious while the sense of bereavement was fresh, had in time become intolerable. For such afflictions as his, there is no nepenthe, and the only palliative is strenuous action[5q].

Hence Rory's nature, recoiling in unconscious self-defence from the congealing desolations of Memory, craved such hardship and distraction as would be limited only by physical endurance. And instinctively perceiving that the Goolumbulla cattle were quite competent to meet his requirements, he had talked the matter over with Mr. Spanker, and provisionally engaged to buy the brand for £100. He proposed me as an associate. Spanker, in seconding the motion, suggested John C. Spooner, professional drover, as a third co-operator. Seconded, in

turn, by Rory, and carried on the voices. The station stockkeeper had then been approached on the subject, but he washed his hands of the whole business. He darkly predicted calamity to the enterprise and insolvency to the station, as a consequence of such "blanky, flamin', jump-up greed for a bit of wool."

Then followed hasty and copious correspondence between Rory, Spooner, and myself. Everything went without a hitch[7q]. The preliminaries were soon arranged. For my own part, not being blessed by Nature with the saving grace of thrift ("saving grace" is good), I had no cash reserve. Spooner was in a similar state of sin, for, in spite of his almost insulting efficiency, he was constitutionally unfortunate. But Rory had about £300 in the bank at Hay, and he was prepared to finance the undertaking.

The arrangement was this: Spooner was to enclose with a strong wire fence each tank from which the cattle were accustomed to drink, leaving the lower wire high enough to admit sheep. An open gateway would be left in each fence until everything was ready. Then the gaps would be closed, and the cattle, shut out from water, would hang round the tanks, tailed and humored by our party, till the whole brand was collected. Meanwhile, the three of us would jointly sign a bond for the £100--which, by the way, was merely a nominal price for the draft, and immediately make a start. The poor dumb beasts would certainly be thirsty to begin with, but this was nothing when you consider how much worse they would be by the time they reached the next available water.

No one had any clear notion of how many head might be collected, but we counted on something over four hundred--possibly up to five hundred and fifty, including calves and cleanskins. We intended to take them across the Murray[13], and dispose of them in handy lots at the agricultural fairs in northern Victoria, thus passing the trouble on a little farther.

But this was prospective. For the present, it had been arranged that Rory should meet Spooner and myself at Hay, on the next Sunday but one. Another week would take the three of us to Goolumbulla, with three or four hired men, and ten or twelve decent horses. Then, if we could not command success, we could do more, Sempronius[15], we would deserve it[6q].

Again, we might fairly count upon favourable conditions. The route was familiar to Spooner and myself; there would be no disturbing moonlight for the first week or so; and we might expect reasonably cool weather. The trip to the Victorian border would be only about three hundred and fifty miles. So everything was propitious.

My own immediate business was to be at Yarrawonga on a certain day, there to take delivery of three horses, already purchased by Spooner with Rory's money; then I had to turn up at Hay on the Sunday above referred to. Meanwhile, Spooner, with a few more horses, would be converging from his native town of Wagga.

Of course, these details are nothing to do with my record; they are presented merely as a spontaneous evidence and guarantee of that fidelity to fact which I acquired early in

life, per medium of an old stirrup leather, kept for the purpose.

Chapter I.

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I wol you tell a litel thing in prose.
That oughte liken you, as I suppose.
Or elles certes ye be to dangerous.
It is a moral tale vertuuous.
Al be it told sometimes in sondry wise.
Of sondry folk, as I shall you devise.

--Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales."

JUST as a bale of wool is dumped, by hydraulic pressure, to less than half its normal size, I scientifically compressed something like twenty-four hours' sleep into the interval between 9 p.m. and 7 a.m. Then a touch of what you call dyspepsia and I call laziness, kept me debating with myself for another swift-running hour. So it was getting on for nine o'clock when I sat down to breakfast with Mrs. Ferguson, the two servant girls, and the husband already glanced at. All the boarders had by this time dispersed for the forenoon[8q].

However, scene and association presently recalled former companionship; and I varied the usual breakfast-table gossip by asking:

"Have you seen the Colonel lately, Mrs. Ferguson[9q]?"

"Not since a fortnight after the last time you were here; it's nine weeks to-day, and the other'll be seven weeks come Friday. There were two ladies here inquiring for him yesterday afternoon. One of them had a dark maroon, and a sailor hat trimmed with the same color; and the other had the new shade of brown, and a new tuscan with three black feathers. They wanted to know his address."

Notes

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1 Echuca is a riverside town in northern Victoria, Australia, on the Murray River; in the 19th century it was a busy riverport and service centre for surrounding pastoral districts.

2 Yarrawonga is a town in northeastern Victoria on the Murray River, historically an agricultural and crossing point for stock and travellers.

3 A 'kangaroo dog' in Australian 19th-century usage refers to a working dog (often a sight or scent dog) used in bush and pastoral districts for hunting or controlling kangaroos and assisting drovers.

4 A 'Coffee Palace' was a temperance hotel popular in late 19th-century Australia that provided lodging and dining without alcoholic drinks; Mrs. Ferguson's Coffee Palace is the local boardinghouse/pub in the story.

5 Goolumbulla is presented as a pastoral 'run' or station (cattle property) in western New South Wales/ Riverina country, typical of large rural leases of the period.

6 Willandra refers to the Willandra region/Willandra Plains in western New South Wales; it is used here as a geographical marker in the Riverina/western NSW districts.

7 The Darling is the Darling River, a major river in New South Wales forming part of the Murray–Darling basin and a key watercourse in inland Australian pastoralism.

8 Merino is a breed of sheep prized for its fine wool; merino sheep were central to Australia's 19th-century wool

industry and often contrasted with other stock.

9 In this context 'warrigals' refers to scrub-bred or wild cattle (often spelled warrigal/warragal), implying animals reverted toward feral or untamed behaviour.

10 The Upper Lachlan denotes the headwaters/upper reaches of the Lachlan River region in New South Wales, an inland pastoral area from which stock might be brought.

11 Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) was a Scottish novelist and poet whose historical romances and narrative poems, such as *The Lady of the Lake*, were widely read in the 19th century.

12 *The Lady of the Lake* is a narrative poem by Sir Walter Scott (published 1810) set in the Scottish Highlands and widely quoted and alluded to by Victorian readers.

13 The Murray (River) is Australia's longest river, forming much of the border between New South Wales and Victoria and serving as a major route for moving stock and goods in the 19th century.

14 The Murrumbidgee is a major river in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, part of the Murray–Darling basin and important in inland pastoral and irrigation contexts.

15 'Sempronius' is a classical/Latin name used here as a rhetorical allusion; such classical names were often invoked by English-educated speakers in 19th-century writing.

16 Dunolly is a town in central Victoria associated with the 19th-century gold rush era; its mention situates characters in the region and period's social mobility.

17 Epictetus (c.50–135 AD) was a Stoic Greek philosopher; the reference suggests a formative influence of

Stoic self-control on a character's outlook.

18 Marathon is the name of a town in New York State (and an ancient Greek place), here used to indicate a backwoods American birthplace—Marathon, N.Y., exists as a rural New York town in the 19th century.

19 Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (Pompey the Great) was a leading Roman general and statesman of the 1st century BCE, often invoked historically as an example of political prominence and its loss.

20 A reference combining British currency ('pounds') with the biblical 'pounds' or 'talents' (units of money used in parables), here meaning sums entrusted to servants as allegory for stewardship and investment.

21 Rehoboam is a biblical king of Judah, son of Solomon; in the Bible his harsh policies are said to have led to a division of the Israelite kingdom.

22 An older-English form of Sophocles' play usually called Oedipus Tyrannus or Oedipus the King, a classical Greek tragedy about fate and self-discovery.

23 A parable of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke about a son who squanders his inheritance and later returns repentant; the story includes the detail of the disgraced son feeding pigs in some versions.

24 Sheol is a Hebrew term from the Hebrew Bible usually denoting the grave or underworld; here it appears used colloquially as an oath or expletive.

25 Thalers were silver coins and monetary units used in various German states from the 16th century; the reference ('15,000 thalers') denotes a historical German currency sum.

26 Pfennigs (here spelled 'pfennings') were small-denomination coins in German-speaking countries (similar to pennies); '1,000 pfennings' would denote a modest amount of money.

27 In Greek mythology, the Elysian Fields (Elysium) are the blessed afterlife realm for heroes and the righteous; used here metaphorically for a happy afterlife.

28 Literally from Greek meaning 'dog's tail' and poetically used to mean a focal point or guiding star; the narrator discusses its classical use referring to the Pole or North Star.

29 A northern constellation known as the Little Bear; it contains Polaris, the North (polar) Star, which is sometimes poetically called the 'cynosure.'

30 Reference to the Koh-i-Noor, a famous and historically contested Indian diamond (here pluralised with other valuables), used as an emblem of great wealth during 19th-century discourse.

31 Allusion to the Golden Fleece of Greek myth (the object of Jason's quest), used here as a metaphor for valuable assets or speculative riches.

32 The Pactolus is a river in ancient Lydia famed in classical myth for yielding gold to King Croesus; in English usage it often symbolizes sudden or legendary wealth.

33 A Hebrew word mentioned in the text as the term for usury; the narrator notes it is translated or understood to carry a sense like 'to devour.'

34 A formal style referring to the British monarch; in the passage 'guest of Her Britannic Majesty' is a euphemism meaning imprisonment in a British jail.