

CREATIVE RESPONSE

It was the great ordeal that was inevitable when a motor of a machine stopped working or the flintlock in a musket was jammed; it was taken out, thrown away and replaced. This principle was universal and was no different for lieutenants who were serving in His Majesty's service. Marines who failed to devote themselves entirely towards the service had no place to remain a part of the grand imperial machine and led to the stigma of being left a marked man.

For Gardiner, the usually hearty and self-assured fellow, this journey had come to an end. It was not difficult for the Governor to notice the slightest hints of insubordination. The Governor relied on young starving convict prisoners to do his dirty work, wondering around the settlement picking up on conversations that sparked any signs of rebellion. The convicts were rewarded with potatoes and peas for bringing the governor with information and were lured in by his sophistry to participate in his evil plans, just as Gardiner had once done.

Gardiner overlooked the sea that stretched on beyond infinity; it amounted to a paradise for a sailor who longed to hear the sound of the waves, which sounded like eternal whisperings around desolate shores. On board *Sirius*, heading to Norfolk Island with Captain Barton and a load of frail prisoners, the silhouette of the land was clear as they were nearing their destination. Having been on the ship for days, the sight was horrid, the mess filled with scraps and vomit of people unable to cope with the monstrous and relentless fury of the sea. The way the sea underwent rapid changes in mood at times capable of gentle temper had fascinated the experienced sailor to this day.

“How are you keeping old fellow?”, Barton asked in a voice attempting to hide his fatigue.

Captain Barton seemed unsettled himself; there was no doubt the demands of His Majesty's service were reaching extreme lengths unable to recognize that the human capacity to serve had almost filtered out. His weary eyes resembled the scarlet of his coat decorated with regimental brass ornaments, signifying the great devotion of the man. He waited for a reply from his right hand man, yet Gardiner was oblivious and sidetracked in watching the waves racket against the makeshift base of the ship.

“Ah, Al-Alright sir” Gardiner blurted in a hurry, but the truth was so far off from these sacrosanct words. This response would make it difficult to decipher the undue misery Gardiner was suffering, the pain choking his insides as though someone was forcibly strangling them.

The longing felt by Gardiner was an ache that wouldn't be extinguished as long as one foot was still attending the duty of His Majesty's service and the other leading him where his heart desired.

Gardiner remembered his hands shaking; it was hard to kill.

Not that those were the mere orders given, but expected from Governor Gilbert. To fulfill his duty, it was a pivotal part to demonstrate a sense of authority to the natives. It was the pervading idea of a 'greater good' with its artifice of legitimacy that made this brutal treatment towards the natives justifiable, causing a man who ought to be as morally oriented as Gardiner, to surrender himself to a dispassionate machine.

As he shot the musket in the air, the screams of the natives had died down and what remained was a horrid look on the innocent faces, as though they were about to be doomed. In spite of being accustomed to the orders of His Majesty's Service unlike Rooke, to hunt, kill and slay people was not Gardiner's imperative. Growing up without a father during childhood, and now seeing himself as the cause of another man's suffering shook him to the core. Gardiner was not immersed in the notions of the natives being less civilised than the British, they were human and they deserved better than to be treated like animals. He was against invading the natives through barbaric and inhumane means.

The wind gusts hissed and roared causing Gardiner's frame like body to stumble, but Gardiner continued to resist with all his strength, fighting to stand straight against the power that was undoubtedly on side with the natives. The fellow marines with him were also hacking at the innocent natives, struggling to capture the sculpted arms scattered with scars, laughing and demeaning at their sight.

Gardiner was simply performing a duty as he was accustomed in doing in the past, there was no time to think, but the governor's face pervaded his thoughts, the stream of words flushing out in anger from his mouth, spit deposited as foam on the crevices of the man's lips, his teeth decaying as they spoke.

How a man could be equipped with emotions of tyranny and hatred was undistinguishable. Gardiner had grown to resent a man so sour and secretive as Governor Gilbert, a man whose influence and power forced others to unduly implement his dirty work.

His life had arrived at a point of suspension, like a fleck of dirt in a glass of water, hanging in a cold bleak space. He pondered on the times he had crept out of his bed in the odd hours of dawn to see the waves clash up, high tides wrestling with each other, racing to make it to shore. The moon glistening and the wind brushing his rough curls away from his face. Overlooking the serenity before him underneath the antipodean sea, Gardiner let out a sigh of relief. The allegiance to the crown was not his mere imperative. To be swept away from its eccentricities and the peculiar asks of the service comforted the man to great degrees.

A few meters away, Barton was ushering his hand forward signaling Gardiner to help him out with the readings of the day, marking out the position of the ship and how far they were from approaching Norfolk Island. It thrilled him to be able to explore and root a way through the blanket of blue, navigating through just as Henry Hudson had once done, discovering a new route to China while voyaging via the arctic circle. He wondered how this island they had just inhabited, with its luscious flora and fauna had been discovered by the natives. On what vessels had they arrived here. What stars had guided them. They would have some other story all together. But whatever you called the navigation the patterns were the same. The experience of voyage, exploration and discovery resonates with him, it was an innate connection he possessed and demonstrated from within. Determined to leave his own legacy, he had regarded this assignment as a unique opportunity to discover the undiscovered and explore the unexplored, to create a path of his own workings.

Now he was perplexed as he steered through the troubled waters muddled by conflicting views of humanity and sovereignty. Over every man black or white, every object great or small, and every relationship of whatever sort that might take place in his kingdom.

It disheartened him to see Governor Gilbert tackle the natives in such an alarming way. To view the Governor along with his entourage failing to engage with the natives in a courteous manner, but rather tackling them with barbarity and inhumanity overwhelmed him. Gardiner pitied the man unable to carry out his task as Governor with diligence, reacting instinctively making hasty decisions. Failing to reason the reactions of the natives worsened the situation. Having endeavored to voice his dismay, Gardiner failed to dominate the Governors regime to help facilitate a better plan of action. The circumstances were undoubtedly causing good men to lose their humanity to the dispassionate service.

Dear Rooke, Gardiner wrote, I am unaware of what I should be feeling. Having been sent away from the establishment I have had days to ponder on the past and rethink the actions. You need not fear for my circumstances. I am rather content with myself, here. Yes, I may have shown regret for executing orders but being here is far better than having to follow the Governor's every day demands. I have accepted this penalty, secure in the knowledge that I voiced my dissent. A man can never be certain of how another man will receive his counsel.

I feel as though a burden has been lifted from upon my shoulders, shackles removed from my body and replaced, no longer enslaved by the power of the repressive service. I am writing to warn you, do not be swayed by that man, Gilbert, he is bitter and has the capacity to go to great lengths of flummery in order to achieve sovereignty. Here, the pine trees and the jagged cliffs remind me of Sydney cove, the palm forests towering over the beach, the view is stupendous, and the celestial patterns like no other. All these days I have had the governor to blame, even Lennox and Willstead for being so entrapped in occupying the land, but I realize now that I too had used the same sophistry, persuading myself to be accustomed to duty reflecting on the greater good.

Your work is to be commended young man, continue as you mean to go. Interacting with the natives through seclusion from the colony may bear with consequences but do continue with your progression, it gladdens me that someone is equipped to dealing with them with amity and kindness.

The water was glistening, the feeling of writing back to an old friend placed Gardiner in a euphoric state of being, no longer was he bound by the constraints imposed by the governor. The birds chirped wildly as the moon shined luminously from above. The waves pitched and rolled like a child thrashing about in the waters of the choppy and wallowing sea. The large body of water pulsated with life and seemed to smile back.

So far the sailor had allowed himself to be propelled by circumstance.

Perhaps it was the brandy, but in the eerie wash of the moon light he sat content, almost to the point of bliss.