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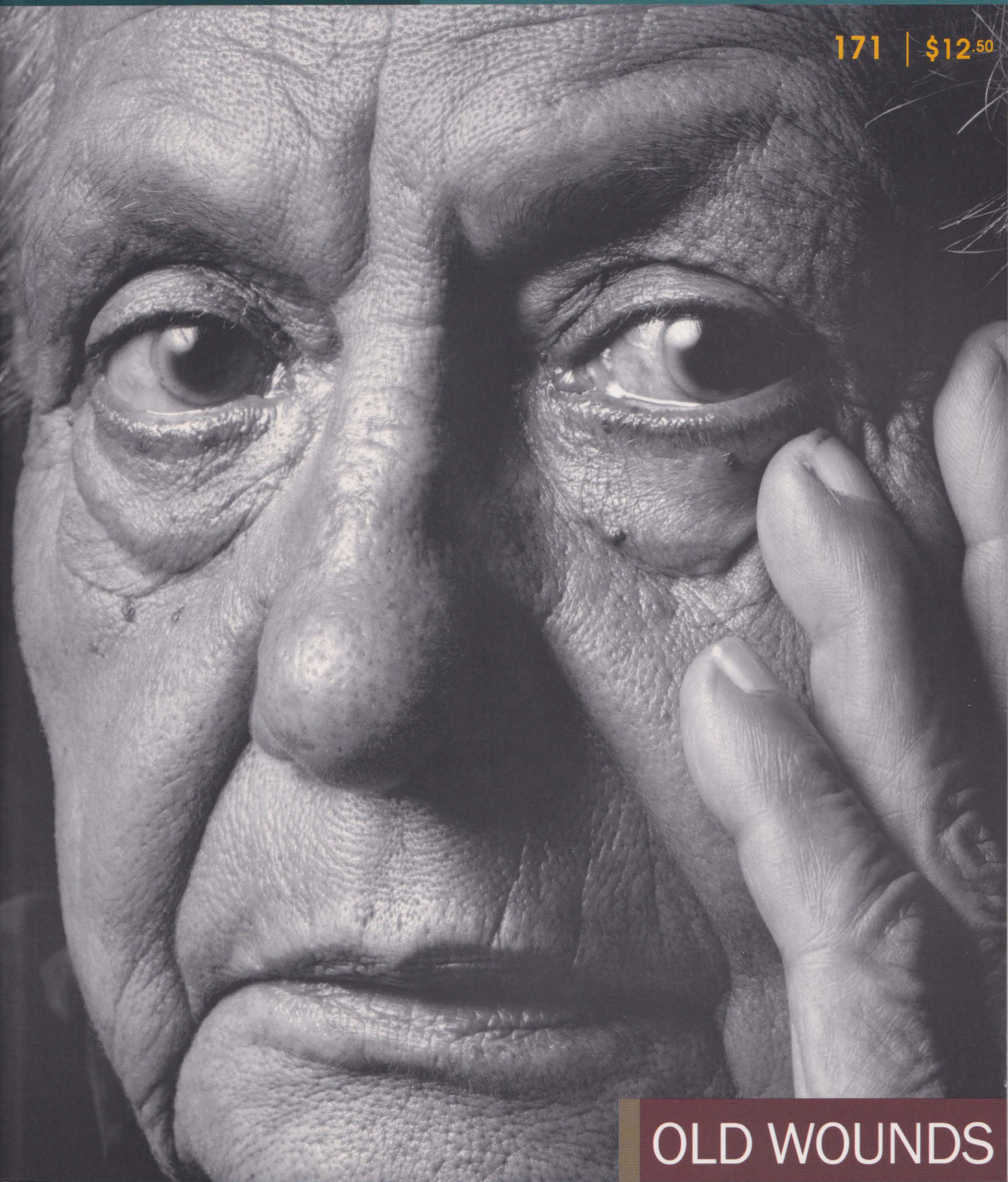

OLD WOUNDS

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ARTS VICTORIA
Victoria The Place To Be
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editorial / **NATHAN HOLLIER & KATHERINE WILSON**

OLD WOUNDS

IT WAS SUSPECT, but—at a stretch—believable. When a US tank fired at the hotel where most 'non-embedded' journalists were based, killing two and wounding several, the official line was to blame the victims. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was a regrettable accident. Death is just one of the hazards of the job.

After all, insisted the Pentagon, war kills. But this basic fact eluded many Australian newspaper columnists, even some of our most liberal-minded. In their haste to declare the war a 'success', they forgot about the catastrophic impacts: the civilian deaths and humanitarian crisis, the destroyed infrastructure, public health devastation, the ongoing human rights violations; the fact that, despite fuzzy human interest stories suggesting the contrary, neither Afghans nor Iraqis are yet liberated. That the owner of all the world's highest-selling and most influential press organisations was backing George W. (and by extension, our Johnny), might have explained this forgetfulness. But then, Murdoch papers weren't the only offenders.

When we think of government-controlled media we might think of China, North Korea, Cuba. We're appalled by the sentencing of journalists like Tewodros Kassa, serving two years in an Ethiopian prison for publishing opinions deemed anti-government. The same wouldn't happen here, not in our democracy. Instead, Howard gags the military and directs the tone and timing of news and imagery to manipulate public opinion at crucial political junctures. His ruthless methods are documented in David Marr's and Marian Wilkinson's *Dark Victory* (reviewed by Peter Mares on page 89), which discloses the ways his government 'embeds' its own journalists:

> On Howard's plane late on the night of November 6, [political editor Dennis] Atkins had his laptop open to show his press colleagues how the *Courier-Mail* would be splashing his scoop the next morning. Howard appeared in the aisle and Atkins showed him, too. "Good," said the Prime Minister. "Excellent."

With Howard handmaids like Atkins as their guide, it's understandable that some sections of the public equate asylum seekers with terrorists. They might be forgiven for believing that killing people in Iraq somehow avenges the events of 9/11, as if—as the *Village Voice* puts it—the entire Middle East is "just one giant, undifferentiated mass of turbaned bad guys". But can journalists be forgiven? A few can: there's little scope for freedom of the press when 'unembedded' reporters are detained and threatened by US soldiers, or when there's no doubt in press circles that the tank attack on non-embedded journalists was deliberate (see 'Is killing part of Pentagon Press Policy?' <www.fair.org> and see *Overland*'s website <www.overlandexpress.org> which offers a series of articles by Gore Vidal, Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein and others). But what about Australia's armchair commentators, safe in their cosy convictions?

By any standards, the legal and ethical case for war against Iraq was not established. Iraq was not a threat. The British, American and Australian public were also not clamouring for the war to take place, in spite of long-running war-mongering campaigns by the governments and corporate media of these nations. The ostensible (though hypocritical) final justification, the search for weapons of mass destruction, has been proven not only spurious but, because these have not been found, ineffective. But although the war was not necessary or popular and did not produce the evidence for its legitimacy, as the 'coalition of the willing' had claimed it would, it has been deemed a success by those who most loudly supported it. As it has done so often, the Howard government ignored the constraints of law and democratic process and relied on an acquiescent and lazy media to ensure that power and prejudice prevailed over justice and reason.

It seems incredible that this war has been fought and declared over and is slipping into history in the time between this and the previous issue of *Overland*. On the day it began in earnest many of us in Melbourne trudged down Swanston Street and St

Kilda Road to protest in front of the Victoria Barracks. You felt you had to do something. Behind us the Shrine of Remembrance, with its fiercely contested messages regarding the legacy of human conflict, spoke silently of courage and suffering and human folly. In hindsight it seems appropriate that this march began at the State Library of Victoria, for the protesters were calling, among other things, for the spirit of reasoned consideration and democratic process that had led to the building of this public institution. The war, when it began, was new and visually spectacular. The media conglomerates, being in the entertainment industry, devoted blanket news coverage to it, though with minimal real analysis. Other issues were ignored. Now that the war is officially over, it is old news, and so questions about it, such as whether it was right or wrong, are not deemed relevant.

But for many people of course wars do not cease when they are officially declared over, or when the corporate media decide that their struggle is no longer a viable source for voyeurism. In his classic novel *My Brother Jack*, George Johnston describes an Australian childhood of the inter-war years, surrounded by reminders of war: wounded and disfigured soldiers, artificial limbs, mysterious medicines, screams in the night. As Johnston well knew, the physical and emotional wounds inflicted by war are deep and profound, and not only on those who do the fighting. In the little memoir she wrote for children shortly before she died, Judith Wright recalled:

> The war was very much part of my memory from the very beginning; war has been a horror of my life, and I don't know if I've ever really recovered from that. Why should I, after all?

If Howard, Murdoch and their journalists have forgotten what war is really like, we can rest assured that the wounds and resentments inflicted on Iraqis and others by this recent conflict will not go away quickly.

Strength, wrote Joseph Conrad in a discussion of imperialism, is nothing to be proud of when you have it, since it is only an accident arising out of someone else's weakness. When power is abused those wounded in the process tend not to go away but on the contrary to keep struggling for recognition of their experience, stories and hurt, and for the setting right of old wrongs. In Australia the greatest evidence of this is the continuing Aboriginal struggle for justice, a struggle which has been pushed out of the mainstream media, if not the public consciousness, in recent months. In addition to Jeff Sparrow's account of media representations of the war in Iraq, which reveals also some of the damage inflicted on Australian democracy, and pieces by Michael Wilding and Claire Tuke revealing the effects of bullying and hypocrisy within intellectual milieus, we publish in this issue a range of articles detailing the personal and social costs of attacks on Aboriginal Australia. Regrettably, as Margaret Simons sets out in her recent study of the Hindmarsh Island affair, these attacks are ongoing. Simons will discuss more recent developments within the conservative anti-Aboriginal industry, including its response to her own work, in the second 2003 *Overland* lecture, to be published in *Overland* 172.

CORRESPONDENCE

I READ Anthony Macris's 'The New Millennium', in *Overland* 168, with some interest. Although I am unconvinced that Macris has contributed any genuinely new insights in his critique of capitalism, I would still commend him for his attempt in the *Capital* series to detail the toll it takes on our humanity, in the dishonesties and indignities it demands we participate in. Moving on to his excerpt, 'TCF (Textiles, Clothing and Footwear)', however, I was very quickly disappointed—to say the least:

> [S]he came face to face with a generation who had devoted all their spare time for the past twenty years to supplementing the family income at sewing machines, overlockers and buttonholers, and who were now desperate to find another job that would allow them to pay off their homes more quickly, build a granny flat if it had been paid off, or buy the dinner sets and mix masters their husbands sometimes refused to shell out for.

The exploitation of women workers for the purposes of minimising labour costs is perhaps one of capitalism's most lucrative practices on a global scale. And in this one sentence, Macris has diminished the power of his challenge to capitalism; he has weakened his intellectual weapon by indulging and perpetuating

one of the very lies his target has so insistently demanded we believe.

What luxury Macris describes! According to him, these women are not working out of genuine need or because working is important to their own sense of independence and personal achievement, but simply in order to be able to enjoy middle-class perks and privileges. Kitchen appliances and crockery to support the capitalist industry of 'feminine consumerism' at that.

One of the most enduring discriminatory beliefs that has 'justified' the consistent failure of employers to pay their female workers equal money for work equal to that performed by male colleagues—and their celerity with dispensing of female staff before male—is the idea that, while men are working to put bread on the table (and for some personal satisfaction), women are simply working for 'pin money'. A man's work is therefore valuable and his continued employment important because it is contributing to the betterment of a family, whereas a working woman can do without another handbag, lipstick or whatever other triviality she so desires. Macris has utterly failed to deconstruct one of capitalism's most powerful and fundamental lies.

A large proportion of women working in any kind of employment, including that described (menial, factory), are not working to 'supplement' a man's income. Rather, they themselves are the primary or sole provider in their family. Despite legislation supporting equal pay for women having been passed in many nations, there has been little commitment among employers to honouring the objective supposedly intended by this legislation.

Women, who represent half of the world's population, do two thirds of the world's (paid) work, earn 10 per cent of the world's income and own only 1 per cent of the world's property. What about taking some time to critique a system that creates (demands) such an unjust reality?

That Macris should consider he can formulate any critique of capitalism, without even acknowledging the need to deconstruct key axes of discrimination and oppression that have fed its rampant, expansionist progression into every facet of our lives, is a startling flaw.

Katle Hassani

ANTHONY MACRIS RESPONDS:

WHEN KATLE HASSANI 'commends' me for tackling the big issues of capitalism in my novel series, *Capital*, it strongly suggests she has read them. I'm really not sure how, because the second novel, *Capital*, Volume One, Part Two, from which the extract 'TCF' is taken, isn't finished and hasn't yet been published. What is clear is that she has read this one section of a chapter, and one sentence in particular. It goes without saying that sound textual analysis is based on reading the whole text, and if it's not available, then you should limit your judgements to what the textual evidence before you permits.

Hassani also makes basic methodological errors of interpretation. Since she uses the term 'deconstruct' (with all its Derridean overtones) in her approach to my work, rather than the less modish term 'analyse', I think it fair that we examine her comments from a poststructuralist perspective. Once again, we quickly find a basic error of analysis. She has taken a literary text, and given it a purely social science reading. 'TCF' is narrated in third-person subjective: an omniscient narrator takes the perspective of the protagonist, Penny, and gives her point of view. Such statements are clearly generated by a particular subject position, contain their own kind of truth and insight, and simply cannot be analysed using only criteria from the mainstream social sciences: statistical validity, etc. Also, I wonder if Hassani is familiar with contemporary critiques of social sciences discourse which have enriched the discipline by forcing it to take account of subject positions and the biases they by necessity entail. With their lack of self-reflexive awareness, her current comments indicate she hasn't.

Now, for the TCF workers themselves. Hassani is concerned that my character Penny fails in her comments to acknowledge the efforts of full-time women workers, and how they often work for themselves, not to support a man or a family. But Penny works in an agency that deals with part-time employment (it's mentioned in the other parts of the chapter), and many of her TCF clients are older and have families. It's understandable her comments would be couched in those terms. And it's understandable she might mention how such wages would "supplement" a family income. For Hassani to attack Penny's comments on the basis of perceived sins of omission strikes me as extreme. Furthermore, Hassani's overall position suggests that such part-time workers are somehow inferior to their full-time counterparts, which is unfair, to say the least.

Finally, not all TCF workers see their work as 'menial', as Hassani does. Many see themselves as highly skilled machinists who can do complicated sewing jobs with great efficiency, and are justifiably proud of their expertise. This makes their exploitation all the more degrading. I would also be curious to see some of their reactions to being told that when they buy crockery, they are supporting the "capitalist industry of 'feminine consumerism'". I'm not sure they would agree with Hassani on that one either.

Anthony Macris teaches at the University of Wollongong.

essay / **JEFF SPARROW**

WEAPONS OF MASS DISAFFECTION

The media, the Right and the 'war on terror'

ON 25 MARCH 2003, the *Age*'s foreign editor and in-house warlord Tony Parkinson announced the discovery of Iraqi chemical weapons, crowing over the "awkward questions [posed] for those who were sceptical about US motives for this war".[1] Over the next weeks, newspapers around the country—undeterred by the large foot protruding from Tony's mouth—proclaimed with varying degrees of confidence the detection of weapons of mass destruction: on 31 March, 6 April, 8 April, 12 April, 22 April and 28 April.[2]

Now, after all these finds dribbled into nothingness, one might think Mr Parkinson and his peers would answer a few awkward questions of their own, especially given, in most cases, they did not retract their 'discoveries' so much as coyly decide to speak no more of them. Yet the grotesque extent to which reports from the 'war on terror' diverged from accepted principles of journalism provides its own strange protection, just as His Majesty's strut silences those who might otherwise remark upon the Imperial genitalia, dangling naked in the breeze.

Another example: for days, the Iraqi tactic of fighting in civilian attire (a war crime, according to the Pentagon) earned the ire of editorialists around the world. Then, at an American military briefing, a journalist noted that US special forces in Iraq and Afghanistan also fought in civilian clothes—surely they were equally guilty of war crimes? Victoria Clarke, the Defense Department's flack-catcher, responded:

> I'd actually like to take that question, because I don't think you're right about that. (Pause.) We'll take the question and we'll get back to you, but I don't think you're right about that.[3]

Did Clarke 'get back' to anyone with the answer? Who knows? No-one bothered to follow up, and the issue quietly vanished.

In a recent study of American media, Eric Alterman describes how journalistic agendas cohere during US election campaigns:

> Because all the reporters are travelling on the same plane, eating the same food, covering the same events, following up the same press releases and, most of all, reading one another's copy, reporters find themselves, as if by osmosis, sticking to the same script . . . Back home, their editors and producers are all reading the coverage in the [*New York*] *Times*, the [*Washington*] *Post* and the newsweeklies. So too are network producers, who that night repeat the gist of these bigfoot narratives, but with visuals. These images further reinforce the narrative power inside the rest of the pack. The strict story line receives further fortification from the cable chatfest, as these focus relentlessly on the agreed upon narrative of the day. And the entire process repeats itself beginning with the morning news shows the following day.[4]

Though an unprecedented volume of information appeared from Iraq, those reports that resisted assimilation into the 'bigfoot narratives'—regardless of their real significance—simply didn't last in the mainstream. For instance, in response to US accusations about chemical weapons, Syria proposed an

> This is where the war on terror has brought us. To the imprisonment of old men and children. Yet our newspapers focussed on Private Jessica Lynch's 'rescue' rather than the plight of Faiz Mohammed because she was—as the *Herald Sun* pointed out—'pretty'.

agreement to rid the entire Middle East of weapons of mass destruction. An important development, one would think, given the world's recently developed sensitivity to WMDs. Yet the story broke—and as quickly fizzled out. The dominant narrative on Iraq rested upon the postulate—more powerful for being unspoken—that the US and its allies alone possessed the right to weapons of mass destruction. Without that assumption, the Iraq story made no sense. (George W. Bush—in command of some twenty thousand nuclear bombs—lecturing Saddam on disarmament?) The Syrian proposal implied the destruction of the Israeli nuclear arsenal, WMDs of which the US approved. Therefore the proposal was not credible and not worth discussing. Another picture of Saddam's statue falling, perhaps?

The narrow bounds in which news might unfold meant that the Australian media accentuated the trivial, while gliding over the most important information emerging from the 'war on terror'. Take, for instance, the extraordinary document drawn up by the Right-wing think-tank Project for the New American Century, for Dick Cheney (now vice-president), Donald Rumsfeld (defence secretary), Paul Wolfowitz (Rumsfeld's deputy), Jeb Bush and others from the neo-conservative clique now ascendant in Washington. Written in September 2000, the paper stated plainly America's need to conquer Iraq:

> The United States has for decades sought to play a more permanent role in Gulf regional security. While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein.[5]

Behold the real smoking gun of the Iraq war, far more significant than mouldering barrels in the desert. A Scottish newspaper's publication of the PNAC document established that, as the Left long argued, George Bush's ideological mentors cared neither about the liberation of Iraq, nor weapons of mass destruction, but wanted a war purely and simply for the extension of US strategic power. The terrorist attacks of September 11 provided an appropriate climate, the shenanigans with UN inspectors, a pretext.

The authenticity of the PNAC report remains unchallenged. But has it impacted upon the debate in Australia?

The culture of locking onto officially sanctioned topics naturally finds reinforcement from risk-adverse media corporations. In his extraordinary book *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, Greg Palast explains:

> Investigative reports share three things. They are risky, they upset the wisdom of the established order and they are very expensive to produce. Do profit-conscious enterprises, whether media companies or widget firms, seek extra costs, extra risk and the opportunity to be attacked? Not in any business text I've ever read.[6]

Anyone who doubts how the scales generally fall in the balance between challenging the established order and making a quick buck might ponder the decision by the American networks ABC, CBS, Fox and PBS to provide content for a Pentagon-controlled broadcast entitled 'Toward Freedom', beamed into Iraq through the same military C-130 cargo planes used for spy-warfare against Saddam's reign.[7]

The adventures of perky Private Lynch, the American soldier supposedly snatched from Saddam's troops (in a stage-managed 'rescue'[8]), touched the themes central to the approved Iraqi narrative and thus received saturation coverage. It's thus worth briefly comparing her tale with another escape story which didn't fare quite so well.

In October 2002, three Afghans and a Pakistani emerged from Camp X-ray, the US facility in Guantanamo Bay. After nearly a year of detention, the US concluded they knew nothing about terrorism and that their continued imprisonment served

Many of the three thousand people seized by the US remain imprisoned without charge, legal representation, contact with relatives or the Red Cross. It is not surprising that one has already died. As one US official explained: "Our guys kick them around a little bit".

no useful purpose. Hardly surprising, one would think. One Afghan, Faiz Mohammed, gave his age as 105 (though US reporters judged him in his late seventies). Faiz Mohammed had spent eleven months in a wire cage, completely isolated from family or the outside world, in an environment which has driven numerous inmates to attempt suicide. All this with no charge, no sentence and no legal representation.

Australian newspapers gave only the briefest mention of Faiz Mohammed's plight, and even that may have rendered his name incorrectly (Associated Press gave it as 'Mohammed Hagi Fiz'[9]). He was, after all, scarcely photogenic. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described the individual the US had interrogated in chains as a "partially deaf, shrivelled old man" who "babbled at times like a child" and was "unable to answer simple questions".[10]

This is where the war on terror has brought us. To the imprisonment of old men, we can add the recent revelations that Camp X-Ray maintains (in indefinite detention, without trial or charge) several children under the age of 16.[11] Yet our newspapers focus on Private Jessica Lynch rather than Faiz Mohammed because—as the Melbourne *Herald Sun* pointed out—she is 'pretty'.[12] The cry with which someone once despaired of an earlier Empire comes to mind: What times! What morals!

THE RAPID COLLAPSE of Baghdad saw the Right-wing punditocracy rampant. Andrew Bolt—the tough guy of the *Herald Sun*—taunted the Left:

> So where are you today, you whom Saddam reckoned among his friends? Where are you who waved anti-war banners that pouted: 'Not In Our Name'? . . . The war in Iraq has been won well. Let's move on to the next war—a war for our culture . . . Let the accountability begin.[13]

Now, in a period of widespread political cynicism, with membership and confidence in community organisations, political parties, trade unions and even churches sunk to dismal levels, high-profile figures prepared to voice even mild dissent can quickly become ersatz spokespeople for a silent populace. That is, few people today feel any confidence in their ability to actually select or control a representative to represent their views. Hence the increasing importance of what we might call 'politics by proxy', where the otherwise marginalised invest their hopes in a film star, writer or other public figure, who may have no connection with supporters other than the ability to speak in the public domain.

Newspaper columnists—unelected, unaccountable, but widely heard—provide a case in point. The few Left or liberal pundits to oppose the war on Iraq received an unprecedented response. Check any of the Australian anti-war websites and you'll find articles by Terry Lane[14] or Phillip Adams.[15] Ken Davidson's[16] columns on the economics of the war circulated the internet like cybernetic samizdat, while Richard Neville republished his anti-war *Good Weekend* articles in book form, with an appendix noting the extraordinary reaction they provoked.[17]

With the war ended, the Right-wing punditocracy —George Bush's Chairborne Division—embarked on a campaign to settle scores with local dissidents. The mission? To establish Iraq as a bad war for what Miranda Devine labelled the "tiny unelected cabal of influential Left-wingers who have infiltrated the media, universities, newspapers' letters pages";[18] and thereby to snuff out the little space that remained in the mainstream media before dissent could take permanent hold.

Yet, if it's accountability we seek, we should note that Andrew Bolt—who seems never to have met a war he didn't like—anticipated his Iraq column with an almost identical piece about the conflict in Afghanistan. The US military success there would, he said, "astonish those who believed the academics and commentators who said going to war would only make things worse".[19] The rest of the pundit-ocracy shared his enthusiasm, with Greg Sheridan in the *Australian* excited about a "liberated Kabul" with

A family flees an attack on the southern city of Basra, 28 March 2003. Photograph: Chris Helgren/REUTERS

"Muslim women shedding their burqas" and "the first legal bicycle race in Afghanistan for half a decade",[20] and his colleague Frank Devine declaring:

> The US, above all, is a society that treats each life as precious . . . Theirs is a philosophy—which, happily, we share—that is worth fighting for.[21]

That campaign took place eighteen months ago. Let us, then, return to Afghanistan to see who was right and who was wrong.

Well, wouldn't you know? Rather as the pesky academics and Left or liberal commentators predicted, the war tipped Afghanistan even further into chaos. The invasion slaughtered over three thousand Afghan civilians,[22] killed tens of thousands of Afghan soldiers (most of whom were, like their Iraqi counterparts, pressed into service) and deposited a quarter of a million cluster bombs[23] across the countryside. As Abdullah Sherzai, planning chief of the Public Health Ministry, recently explained, half of all children in Afghanistan are malnourished and one out of four dies before the age of 5. Life expectancy remains below 50 years for both men and women, while only 13 per cent of the country's estimated twenty-eight million people have access to safe drinking water.[24] Though George Bush promised US$3.3 billion over four years for reconstruction, he failed to include the money in his 2003 budget request, leaving Congress to step in with a meagre $295 million, even though the country is racked with a refugee crisis, drought and famine.[25]

The unelected President Hamid Karzai—a former oil company employee and CIA asset—exercises little control outside Kabul, and remains so unpopular within that city that he's unable to appear in public without American bodyguards. Meanwhile, US forces bolster Karzai's position by supporting warlords engaged in grotesque human rights abuses. Donald Rumsfeld recently visited the city of Herat and described the local governor Ismail Khan as "an appealing person", even though Mr Khan's

Irrespective of the 175 Murdoch newspapers that dutifully followed their master's call for war—ten million people took to streets around the world against war on Iraq. That's an extraordinary outburst of sentiment, an opposition unparalleled in any other war in human history. So why did such a mass movement fail?

appealing characteristics include "abitrary and politically motivated arrests, intimidation, extortion and torture, as well as serious violations of the rights to free expression and association".[26]

Of course, the American forces in Afghanistan could scarcely criticise Khan's arbitrary arrests. Many of the three thousand prisoners seized by the US in the 'war on terror' remain in the Bagram air base outside Kabul, without charge, legal representation, contact with relatives or the Red Cross. Those detainees who refuse to co-operate with interrogators:

> are sometimes kept standing or kneeling for hours, in black hoods or spray-painted goggles, according to intelligence specialists familiar with CIA interrogation methods . . . Captives are often "softened up" by MPs and US Army Special Forces troops who beat them up and confine them in tiny rooms.[27]

One man has already died under interrogation in Bagram[28]—a not unpredictable outcome, given that, as one US official explained: "Our guys kick them around a little bit". Another officer outlined the treatment accorded to wounded prisoners with the words: "Pain control is a very subjective thing."[29] Those detainees who still won't talk are taken to states like Egypt, Jordan, Saudia Arabia or Morocco for more intensive torture—where doubtless they share Frank Devine's musings on America's commitment to the sanctity of life.

As for the liberation of the women of Afghanistan—the carrot used to cajole liberals onto the war-wagon—Zama Coursen-Neff from Human Rights Watch says flatly: "Many people outside the country believe that Afghan women and girls have had their rights restored. It's just not true."[30] Instead, she reports police attacks on women's groups, forced chastity tests and other Taliban-style abuse. Warlords thrust into power by the US menace schools throughout the country—in some cases burning or shelling them. In many areas, police have once again imposed 'Islamic' rules on women and girls, or pressured women not to work for foreign organisations.

All this comes on top of the toll grinding poverty takes on Afghan women—with, for instance, the highest maternal mortality figures ever recorded in human history.[31] Now, Andrew Bolt—to give him his due—never really believed the bleeding heart liberation stuff. While Sheridan and Devine chattered on about morality and bicycle races, Bolt said:

> We never promised to turn Afghanistan into paradise . . . To be brutal, even if the Afghans again become too busy killing each other to help those who are killing us, this war will not have been fought in vain.[32]

Brutality and killing? Mission accomplished! But the success of the invasion in fighting terrorism remains much more dubious. After all, even on its own, narrowly military terms, the campaign failed to achieve its ends, with Osama bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Omar as elusive as ever. Indeed, with the US busy in Iraq, Taliban forces have quietly re-emerged, even claiming control of some remote areas.[33]

As for the prevention of terror; well, the tragedy of the Bali bombing, the single greatest loss of Australian life in an act of terrorism, revealed the fallacy underlying the Afghan adventure, since the destruction of bin Laden's infrastructure in Afghanistan did nothing to prevent local terrorists using readily available materials to destroy a nightclub. Terrorism is a *tactic*, not an organisation—and a tactic that requires little in the way of equipment.

Actually, the debacle in Afghanistan served to confirm in the eyes of the world the image of the United States as a bull in the global china shop. Prevent terrorism? We go to print in a week which has seen suicide bombings in Saudi Arabia and Morocco. As one American bumper sticker puts it, we are creating enemies faster than we can kill them.

29 March 2003: This 4-year-old girl, blood streaming from an eye wound, screamed for her dead mother while her father, shot in a leg, begged to be freed from the plastic wrist cuffs, slapped on him by US marines, so he could hug his other terrified daughter. The girls' mother was killed in the frontline firing.
Photograph: Damir Sagolj/REUTERS

The Right got Afghanistan utterly wrong. But when you cheer on wars from thousands of miles away, your own absolute safety insulates you from ever learning from the mistake.

After Afghanistan came Iraq—and each day provides more evidence of the tragedy developing in that tortured country. The full horror of Bush's military campaign will not be clear for years. However, we already know that the Right's war of 'liberation' killed tens of thousands of Iraqi conscripts, alongside untold numbers of civilians—hospital records reveal that the final battle for Baghdad alone left 2300 civilians dead.[34] While efficiently securing the oil ministry, the Coalition did nothing to prevent the destruction of Iraq's infrastructure. As a result this country, that once enjoyed one of the best health services in the Middle East, now faces an outbreak of cholera. The long-suffering Iraqi people face ongoing military occupation by a trigger happy army given to firing on civilian demonstrations, and the imposition of a regime that excludes the parties persecuted under Saddam, in favour of Washington's hand-picked toadies.

The rapid deterioration of the Iraqi 'success' means that the punditocracy's efforts to wield the Coalition's military might to good effect in the culture wars will most likely amount to little.

In any case, what's most interesting about the Right's postwar effusions is how quickly they skate over the truly significant aspect of the anti-war movement—its mass character. There's something truly bizarre in blaming the biggest demonstrations ever seen in Australia on Devine's "tiny unelected cabal"—an attempt rather like stamping on a kite to

prevent the breeze blowing. Though Davidson, Adams and Neville played an honourable and courageous role in the war, 350,000 people in Sydney patently did not march solely because of the efforts of a Keynesian economist, an advertising executive and an unreconstructed hippie.

Where are you today? asks Bolt of the anti-war protesters. Actually, Andrew, we're everywhere. It's all too easily forgotten that—despite a sustained media campaign for war, dating back to the immediate aftermath of September 11—an astonishing ten million people took to streets around the world against war on Iraq. That's an extraordinary outburst of sentiment, an opposition unparalleled in any other war in human history. Even at the McMurdo base in Antarctica, twenty research scientists paraded with the penguins—thus ensuring, for the first time ever, protests took place on every continent on the globe.

After 1.5 million people marched in London, comedian Mark Steel noted how the rally had removed the need for proxy politics by mobilising those who would normally have nothing to do with political activity:

> This is wonderfully encouraging, but slightly disconcerting. These people are your neighbours, your cousin, the bloke you sit next to at the football: they're not supposed to go on demonstrations. It's like being 19 and your grandma saying: "This week I'll come with you to the Ministry of Sound to get off my face. But I must make sure I don't mix up my Es with my green ones."[35]

So why did such a mass movement fail? Well, the (much smaller) Vietnam demonstrations terrified world leaders who saw mass protest in and of itself as pregnant with social upheaval.[36] Today governments know that while street marches might voice the population's moral objections to war (hence the significance of the 'not in our name' sentiment), they possess little actual power.

On Oscar night, Mike Moore warned George W. Bush: "Any time you got the Pope and the Dixie Chicks against you, your time is up." But, as history shows, the Pope possesses no battalions of his own—and neither, unfortunately, do the Dixie Chicks. So when George W. Bush answered the weapon of criticism with criticism by weapons, the certainty of US victory quickly ate away at anti-war sentiment. Incapable of stopping the slaughter, the opposition declined—not because millions felt convinced in the righteousness of war but because they saw no choice but to sullenly acquiesce to the inevitable.

That doesn't undercut the achievement of what came before. The Iraq conflict showed that—irrespective of the 175 Murdoch newspapers which dutifully followed their master's call for war[37]—it's still possible for the Left to reach the masses.

The Wobbly poet and martyr Joe Hill wrote that:

> *If the workers take a notion*
> *They can stop all speeding trains*
> *Every ship upon the ocean*
> *They can tie with mighty chains*

He's right, of course—but it takes more than just a notion. It requires organisation on a level which the movement, as presently constituted, cannot manage.

The Left has a huge task in front of it, if, rather than appealing to the conscience of men who possess none, we want to render the outbreak of the next war (Syria? Iran? North Korea?) physically impossible. That entails rebuilding, almost from scratch, the traditions and organisations of our movement.

A big job, yes, but not impossible.

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Jeff Sparrow is author, with sister Jill, of Radical Melbourne *(Vulgar Press, 2001).*

Below: The bodies of an Iraqi woman and her baby lie in a coffin in Hilla, 80 km south of Baghdad, after US troops bombed a residential quarter on 1 April 2003. Her husband (out of this photograph) wept nearby for the loss of his family. Most of the civilians killed when US bombs hit the Hilla residential district were children. *Photograph: Akram Saleh/REUTERS*

fiction / **MICHAEL WILDING**

MERE ANARCHY

Even to have imagined that the Push, the world of the Libertarians, as they called themselves, was a site of the exotic seems, from this distance, something in which the search for the appropriate word can only fail. Absurd, bizarre, comic, daft, extraordinary, an alphabet of possibilities begins to assemble, though with no decision, no certainty, just indication of, if not firm deprecation, amused equivocation. And yet within the possibilities known to me, within what was perceived as available, at the time, and entirely without reflection, neither forethought nor foreboding, it was new, sensual, exciting. If it now looks different what can I remark except to remove that 'if'. Certainly it now looks different. But at the time it provided its allures, pursued as they were in a haze of unconsciousness, unawareness, oblivion. How else could allures prove effective?

It was an imperative, an unthought thrust, a drive. There could have been better worlds. Possibly there were. Certainly there were worse. Some of those last I had experienced. This I had not. So there I was. Amongst it, amidst it, or at the least on the periphery. Regretting nothing.

The appeal of course was sexuality. The Push was a meeting ground at the end of an era when such meetings had had to be performed more circumspectly. But within the Push there was a proclaimed openness. Women could come up to men and ask for a fuck. This was not normative in those times, but it was part of the idiom of the Push. Sexual exchange was what it was about and jealousy was, though not unknown, frowned upon. Although in theory, of course, nothing was frowned upon. And in theory, of course, sexual exchange was not what it was all about, it was about other things too. Anarchism. It was about anarchism. There were discussions. There were meetings, which I did not go to. Perhaps you had to be invited: there was a strong sense of an inner elite corps about the whole operation. Perhaps I found the idea of meetings and discussion groups unappealing. I had enough meetings and discussion groups in my daily employment at the university. Discussions in the pub, preparatory to going to a party, were fine. Totally acceptable. You couldn't just stand all evening at the bar saying nothing. Well, you could. Ozzie Cambridge often did, unable to commit himself to some aesthetic preference, perhaps, Lowell or Olsen, which was it to be, or just sozzled. And there would be Dreadful Jiri, one of the theorists of anarchism, one of the leaders of this ostensibly leaderless sect, always ready to belabour anyone unwary enough to engage with him. "No, that is plainly ridiculous. No, that is quite impossible. Why? It would take far too long to explain why, there are a thousand and one reasons why, namely—" and he would begin to enumerate them. Dreadful Jiri, who the time I passed out passing a gallstone took the opportunity to make his own pass at my girlfriend. But that was the point about the Push, there were no taboos, do what you want was the whole name of the law, as long as

what you wanted was not socialism or communism or Christianity.

It would be tedious to describe the endless Push parties. Tedious, anyway, to attempt to recall them. Standing in kitchens and hallways, drinking beer or flagon wine from chipped cups, old glasses, newspaper-wrapped bottles. With some enforced colonial gentility, bottles of beer bought from bottle shops always crossed the counter wrapped in newspaper, and wine bottles in long narrow brown paper bags. It concealed the nature of your purchases from the wrath of the godly. Or perhaps the abstemious had insisted on such coverings so that women and children would not be led astray by the sight of naked bottles carried down the street. Or perhaps it was simply that newspaper absorbed the dampness from the bottles kept in the fridge, the condensation that developed as they encountered the hot summers. No doubt it was assumed that the bottles would be unwrapped before their contents were drunk. But Push parties favoured the practice of derelicts and winos in the parks, leaving the newspaper and bags in place.

Predictably I have followed the practice of Dreadful Jiri, enunciating what I have announced would not be enunciated. Perhaps now I should proclaim the pairings and copulations that the drinking prepared the ground for, so that I can leave them as read.

"Why is it," asked no less dreadful George, "that we have no novels about the Push, why has it not been written about?" He was a philosopher, his questions were not for you to answer. "I have thought about this," he would continue, "and I have concluded that we are too critical, too incisive, the intellectual tone is too sharp for writers to capture." Word had it that he had written a novel himself. Perhaps that captured that uncapturable, incised, felt life.

It was not all drinking and sex and parties. There was politics. Perhaps I missed this for a while, wallowing around in the Circean sty. But Circe had her agenda. Those the Congress for Cultural Freedom failed, or chose not, to embrace were seduced by the sexual congress so readily offered by the Push. Some, indeed, participated in both worlds. The agenda became clear to me at the election night party the night Labor finally won after twenty-three years in opposition. Opposition had been assured them when they split and the Catholic anti-communist faction formed what they called the Democratic Labor Party. It was a strategy successful in various countries in those Cold War days.

Election night parties were a tradition for the political intelligentsia. Contemptuous of politicians, the Push nonetheless held its party after the pub shut. It was not unfascinated with what it derided. We gathered in some old sea captain's mansion on the Balmain waterfront, the sea captain long consigned to the deep, the house decaying and awaiting renovation when the suburb became gentrified. Meanwhile a group of Libertarians rented it. It was never clear who owned these splendid old houses, nor how the people who rented them heard about them. It was as if they were safe houses operated by some deep cover agency. Perhaps they were.

Was it this party or the party to watch the American moon landing on television at which some girl newly come to the Push danced on a table and began to remove her clothes? Watching the American moon landing seems an unlikely site of celebration for anarchists, the assassination of an American president would surely have been more appropriate, but they did indeed watch the moon landing. There was only one television—they had not yet achieved an American profligacy of television sets in every room—so the girl soon acquired her own audience surrounding her, drinks in hand. Perhaps they were the less political or the less moon-gazing of the party goers. She danced around with naked breasts for a while then, when incited to remove the remainder of her gear, refused, and collapsed into hysteria or epilepsy. But parties were not usually like that. Such displays were frowned upon as vulgar, suburban. If you wanted sex you went off and had sex. Titillation, theatricalism, performance was, though not prohibited since nothing was prohibited, looked down upon with a chill disdain. It was in many ways a strongly puritan society.

Having announced politics I see that I have diverged into byways of sexuality and drinking. So it was. But it is the political that lodges in the memory.

Not in image: it is attached to no detail, no place, no individuals even. If Furbelow was there, and I am sure he was, I do not see him. Nor do I see the television with its prediction of Labor victory extrapolated from the early counting by computers and panels of psephologists. But it was that predicted victory that got the Push pundits going, got them calculating their strategies, how they must straightway expose the falsities and contradictions in the Labor program. They knew the authoritarian legislation that socialism would bring.

"They've not even taken office yet and you're already planning to attack them," I said to someone. Furbelow, Gwen, dreadful Jiri.

"Of course."

"How do you know they'll break their promises? How do you know they will fail?"

"They're politicians. They always do."

I was appalled, I was outraged. Which perhaps only shows how unpolitical and innocent I was, not only about the company I had been drinking with and having sex with all these years, but also about the so-called Labor Party. But at that time it all seemed like the beginning of a brave new world.

And unsocialist as it proved to be, that Labor administration nonetheless worried some forces enough to provoke its destruction. I don't think the sort of dark deeds that led to its removal were being hatched at that Libertarian party on election night. Surely not. Yet elsewhere without doubt they were. And there was a homology, a unity about the conception of those hydra-headed plans. Presumably in some basement room in Virginia, and Whitehall, as the results came in via the satellite, and bottles were opened less in celebration or even resignation than in the spirit of invoking inspiration, have a snort to get started, things were thought, plans initiated.

But the ideologues of the Push, were they inspired by any more than a spontaneous bourgeois spoilt kids' anarchism, an inherited fear of the working class, an intuition to mobilise immediately against the repressed, like their forebears in those mythic general strikes, pouring champagne from the bank windows on the heads of marching workers? Or was it the secret services organising immediately, calling their shock troops out to combat the slightest risk of social change? Or can such distinctions between class interest and internal security be drawn anyway?

And so Australia emerged from its chrysalis into the late modern world. It had safely slumbered for half a century, comfortable, prosperous, introverted, ignorant. Now it was to emerge as a vain, resplendent butterfly, ready to be crushed on the wheel. But we did not know that. We had not sufficiently read history. We responded to the blandishments of the new, the modern, the American way of life, and it would destroy us. Subsonic, supersonic tones were transmitted and we stirred inside the carapace, tugging at its structures, like Samson. For a few years we wore our hair long.

It was the era of the underground press. Sometimes it was referred to as the alternative press. But underground sounded much more exciting, combative: a world of partisans and hidden caves, presses assembled and disassembled, inflammatory manifestoes. For decades the Libertarians had issued a foolscap, duplicated publication, magnificently if misleadingly called the *Broadsheet*. Here the headier deliberations of the high-level meetings of the inner caucus were published, analyses of the arcana of anarchism. It was taken very seriously. I believe at one point Furbelow published a study paper in it, if appearance in such an organ can be called being published.

I was not alone in believing publication involved something rather more substantial than this typewritten duplicated effort. Gwen, a Libertarian who was a postgraduate student, mounted an editorial bid for a university student newspaper and succeeded in gaining control. I was not convinced that hijacking a student paper was a worthy aim or a suitable venue for publication, either. But then she and her group lost control of the paper and set up their own independent version of it, which they pitched at the entire city. Somewhere along the line Furbelow became the literary editor, possibly even a part of the editorial collective, though ideologically he opposed such things as collectives, and the Libertarians themselves claimed to despise structures in any way formalised, so that it was never clear who was in effect

running the paper. And now Furbelow began his career as a columnist, first lucubrating on the female orgasm, a hot topic for public intellectuals in those years and one to which he devoted his deepest attentions, and after the success of this piece he initiated a regular space for himself, holding forth on the issues of the day, or the month. I remember none of it. No doubt it was the collective intention to deflect attention from the serious and restore the margins to the centre. Meanwhile the official student paper resumed its opposition to Australian participation in America's Vietnam war, to conscription, and other such topics, deemed distasteful and engagé and leftist by most of the Libertarians and their columnist.

Furbelow asked me for a story.

"Are you the editor now?"

"No, no, I am just asking you for a story."

"Are you literary editor or something?"

"You worry so much about roles and designations."

"I think we both do," I said. I didn't. I thought he did. I thought I held no respect for such things. But I was worried about what might happen to my contribution. I worried it might disappear for ever, that the inner conclave of anarchists might dismiss it as unacceptable and lose it altogether. But it appeared.

"I liked your little story," said Gwen.

Maybe as a sociologist specialising in media she was uninformed on the technical terms of our trade and would have said, had she known the usual phrase, short story. Or maybe it was just the ruling class note of those Libertarian girls, smiling down on the writer, *de haut en bas*, to appropriate one of the French phrases that Furbelow had not learned at that time but was later massively to affect.

I confess I was pleased with the appearance of my piece, spread magnificently over a full page, tabloid rather than broadsheet, alas, but still splendid. Publication was not easy in those days. And what literary quarterly could give you such a display? I handed Furbelow a second offering down at the Newcastle one evening.

"What is this?" he asked, holding it by the corner of its pages, then raising it to such light as came into that gloomy front bar.

"A story."

"A story?"

"A story for your underground paper."

"I will hold onto it until it's your turn," he said.

"My turn?" I said. "Is it a matter of turns?"

"Yes," he said, unbuckling his briefcase and putting the typescript away.

"What sort of way is that to run a paper?" I asked.

"By rota," he said.

At some time it was Valda's turn. I don't know how her typescript was acquired. Not through me. I felt resentful, proprietorial. We had spent so many hours squatting on the floor of that cold cottage before the single bar of the inadequate radiator, planning strategies, targeting this magazine, that magazine for her work. It was always easier to direct someone else's career than your own. I could see opportunities for Valda when nothing was apparent for myself.

Perhaps Furbelow had acquired this piece, though I did not know that they were seeing each other. Perhaps Gwen had obtained it. Valda's work was perfect for their needs, sex and drugs and written by a woman. The absence of the political was ideal. The war raged on, the bombing escalated, and the Libertarians fought the fight to print four-letter words. They would have liked to appropriate Valda. Perhaps that was a temptation for all of us. But Valda would not be appropriated. She held them in contempt, their intellectualism, their theorised sexuality, their unstylishness, their straightness. She held pretty much all of us in contempt. Perhaps there was a component of envy, their moneyed backgrounds, their university scholarships and grants and salaries. To Valda they were people playing at bohemianism, with an escape route always on hand. For her, for the authentic existence she espoused, there could be no escape. She began to slide away from us, or we from her. Increasingly it was the world of the Cross, of hard drugs, of opiates, dependency, the twilight demi-monde that claimed her, or that she claimed. Her story appeared in its turn. But nothing further. For a start they didn't pay, the

Libertarians. This was an alternative press insofar as it did not pay contributors. Normally that would have been against Furbelow's principles, but his principles were always open to negotiation and he had longer term interests in play. Not so Valda. Vain she might have been in some ways, about her appearance, her image: she was not an unkempt, spontaneous natural. But vanity publishing had no appeals to her. "Typical," she snorted. She smiled wryly, with a certain satisfaction, at the double-page spread, folded the paper away, stashed it in her scuffed and battered cardboard suitcase beneath the bed along with other things in manuscript and print. And that was it. No more. No more from me, either, not my turn. But Furbelow continued productive.

"How come you appear every issue but I have to wait my so-called turn?" I asked him.

"Because my contributions are a column, whereas yours are an occasional literary feature."

"A column?"

"It is the nature of a column to appear regularly."

"And that is why you write a column?"

"There are things to be said in a column and things to be said in fiction."

"And the column appears in every issue."

"I sincerely hope so," he said.

When the paper finally died, and how it survived so long and who financed its printing were mysteries beyond my knowledge, the column transmigrated. It made a unique transition from anarchic opposition to reactionary establishment and appeared each week in the *Bulletin*. Such were the contradictions, or conjunctions, of our city. And Furbelow? Furbelow too drifted away from me. But whereas Valda sank down beneath the surface into the sad and seedy worlds beneath the Cross, Furbelow rose to the raised row of tables in the window of the Greeks, lunch with the *Bulletin* editors, chewing dead sheep, admiring the view of the war memorial and praising the American effort in Vietnam, no doubt. I don't know. I cannot imagine what they would have talked about, I wasn't there. Nor did I know what he wrote about in his column, since like everyone else I ever knew, I no longer read the *Bulletin*.

But before Furbelow was translated to the window tables of the Greeks, beginning his inexorable rise to honours and orders and ribbons, the vice squad moved and indicted the paper for obscenity. Here was the theatre of fame and glory, ready to house a libertarian spectacle. Dreadful Jiri rose to the occasion, convened meetings, planned rallies of solidarity with mass readings of obscenity on the university lawns, proposed we all announced our complicity and presented ourselves *en bloc* before the magistrate. It seemed an insane strategy. Perhaps I had more fear of authority than heady libertarian contempt for it. I had no wish to stand in the dock. Even then I sensed the power of the state. I chose not to attend the hearings and acknowledge my role in exhuming a nineteenth-century celebration of hashish. My contextualising note to its reprint was little more than bibliographic. I could see little glory accruing to me from admitting responsibility: nor was this a scholarly publication I might claim in the university's annual publication report. If the drug or vice squad wanted to act, let them find me. I declined Gwen's and Jiri's invitation to come to court. In the event the magistrate remarked of the hashish reprint, that it was a transparent and specious attempt to give the paper a veneer of literary respectability. Furbelow's role in all this fades on the memory. Perhaps it faded even at the time. As literary editor he might have been expected to have been charged. Perhaps he was not literary editor and only told me he was to obtain and suppress my second story, or to solicit a thing or two from Valda. Certainly it was only Gwen who was gaoled. It got her a lot of publicity and launched her on a subsequent high-profile though short-lived media career. Perhaps the notoriety of the case helped Furbelow in his, inducing the *Bulletin* editors to take over his column. No good came of it to me. In solidarity I joined a couple of other Libertarians in handing out copies of the next issue of the paper while Gwen was in gaol. On her release she thanked me graciously for having done so. "It meant a lot," she said. But what the meaning was I never did discover, nor cared to ask.

Michael Wilding is the author of Academia Nuts *(Wild & Woolley, 2002).*

memoir / **CLAIRE TUKE**

A CLOCKWORK ORMOND

FEAR. Fear and anxiety. That's what I mostly remember. I've been thinking about it a lot, because I'm back studying after all these years. I'm over forty now, so I guess I can look back with a bit of perspective. I remember how scared I felt, but now I know that I turned that fear in on myself. I could have gone back to Melbourne University last year, but it seemed too close, too close to the unpleasant experiences I had there.

When I went to live in Ormond College as a young woman I rather naively looked on it as a place to live. I know now that 'a place to live' is way down on the list of what college was then. Then, it was an establishment for educating offspring of wealthy and well-known identities in Melbourne. The college was mainly made up of children of wealth and privilege who would meet 'the right people' there. I wanted to escape from my strict Irish Catholic family, whose mores, formed in Ireland in the 1950s, were smothering me. Going to college was an acceptable compromise for a 'single young woman of virtue' in my parents' eyes. Having been in the country less than ten years, none of us knew much about them, and so when I failed to get into either Catholic College (as I was still attending Mass and not deemed 'at risk of losing faith') I tried a few other places. A last minute dropout left a place at Ormond.

I was certainly impressed with the beauty of the Gothic-style buildings and lavish gardens. In fact, it was in these very gardens that I was offered a bursary, digging perfectly straight edges all along the driveway, and drinking endless cups of tea, safe in the old potting shed with the workmen.

My enjoyment of my little room was soon sullied as I was made aware of the long list of my transgressions against the social order. I was a Catholic (despised) and Irish (even more so). I was not blonde and giggly, like most other girls there, no-one had heard of the suburban Catholic school I had attended, I didn't come from the suburbs that mattered, I supported myself with several jobs cleaning and waitressing at college events and at the Uni Caf, I did hard manual work in the garden and I wore black rather than the regulation pale pink. In an almost unbelievably short time, I was singled out for verbal and sometimes physical abuse. I was different, and I had no right to take the place of one of their own.

The college was built around a quadrangle, so the three floors were made up of long corridors, with doors on either side. As soon as I turned a corner and saw a bunch coming toward me, I began to sweat. I would make myself keep going to the toilet or to the laundry or the library. If it was boys and girls I would usually escape with only name calling, 'spook', 'nobody', 'maid' and other ruder words, but if it was males only, they thought nothing of standing over you, shouting abuse and knocking your books and clothes to the floor, jostling you, making sure you understood your failures.

Unfortunately, college was connected to uni by a long lonely path, and here I and the few other outsiders who had banded together were subjected to the same treatment. We tried to always walk together but two 'spooks' together seemed to incite more hatred, rather than give protection. One boy was gay, and attracted special attention: he had his door kicked in one night and was dragged out of

One student's door was kicked in and he was dragged out of bed and bashed. The Nazi slogan *Arbeit macht Frei* was scrawled in black paint on another's door. While bullying and wildness went on the tutors maintained a facade of the cultured life, with soirees and lectures and recitals on Sunday nights.

bed, bashed, and had his room torn apart. As well as being gay, he was on a scholarship and his family lived in Brunswick. He had to be taught a lesson. Another boy was extremely thin and tall, also gay, and the Nazi slogan *Arbeit macht Frei* was scrawled in black paint on his wall and door. No matter how many times we helped him clean it off, it returned every night until he said he could live with it, it was familiar now. The group, loosely aligned, included others: one woman who had been to a high school and dressed in black, one who came from the southern suburbs and was tall and not at all girlish, another boy who was coloured—all major transgressions or bars to being accepted. It was nothing to be startled out of sleep at 2 a.m. by heavy pounding at your door and shouted threats.

On nights when Ormond had either won or lost whatever sport was in season the teams would rampage around the college. In the Great Hall for dinner, in the wood-panelled and portrait-lined magnificence, the tutors would sweep up in a line, between the heavy oak tables, billows of Senior Common Room pre-dinner sherry wafting behind them, to High Table. The Master would say grace and engage in erudite conversation, while down below the footballers were so pissed they would urinate under the tables, vomit on their food and throw pieces of it at other tables. Only when one of these nights ended with the pipes of a shower block being pulled out and used to bash doors, break the glass on a collection of Gould originals, and slash a painting by Brack that hung in the Junior Common Room, did the Master act. This wanton destruction of property was taken seriously, this was more than 'boys just being boys', the usual take on bad behaviour. One of the perpetrators was 'sent down' (sent home) for a week, not much of a punishment when the police could have been involved. His parents made good the losses, of course, so he got off lightly. Who would want to blight a promising lawyer's career for a bit of drunken hijinks?

Certainly not the Master. There was little he could do when the head tutor in charge of students spent most of his time in a drunken stupor in his study, and the rest drinking with students. While all this bullying and wildness went on the tutors maintained a facade of the cultured life, with soirees and lectures and recitals on Sunday nights. Students were invited, and they were well attended and quite interesting, as long as you stayed out of arm's reach of some of the most notorious tutors. Many of them were single middle-aged men who had lived in college since their late teens and still attended college functions, on the prowl. Often their partners (if they had them) would be pointed out as last year's freshers, or the year's before that. You simply knew that if you could have worked up the courage, it was a waste of time complaining about anything to them. "Come up and see my etchings," was the line one tutor in his 50s actually used, and yes, one girl was naive and flattered enough to take him up on the offer and had the bruises to prove it. She nearly had a nervous breakdown, and failed most of her subjects for that year—she spent so much time crying in her room. "She should have expected that when she accepted the invitation," was the official line. "She should have known better."

Of course I should have known better myself, and should have got out, but I was now so steeped in inertia I could hardly leave my room. Except for food and the bathroom, I hardly ever went out. I believe I developed agoraphobia, because I felt so threatened. On one occasion, when I attended a tute in Dinny O'Hearn's office in the Medley building, it was surrounded by crazed students shouting for Geoffrey Blainey's blood. Not knowing that he had gone to ground, and was in hiding, they wanted to speak to him about his recently publicised views on immigration, and someone had called the police. Students stormed the building through the stairwell, and four of us scared students were escorted out of the building by the police. Dinny O'Hearn seemed unfazed by the whole thing and tried to talk to the students; he would have been the last person

to call the police. Later I met Blainey's daughter at a party. She had been stabbed in the street and I could recognise the fear on her face, even as she sat in a room with her boyfriend. It had become part of her expression.

One morning we woke up to the terrible news that one of the boys had suicided during the night. We didn't know him well, he had been one of the 'in crowd', although he had been more friendly than most. He had stolen something from the chemistry lab, and died horribly. No-one knew why, except that he had been depressed. As we talked about it, I realised that this kind of life was not right, there was something fundamentally rotten about it. If someone like this boy could become that depressed, and no-one could help him or even notice, then anyone could get that desperate. Even those who seemed alright on the outside were suffering. When you live in such a closed group, human nature dictates that you try to fit in, especially if you are young and vulnerable. You lose the momentum to try to leave and find another life, you get caught up in the pressures of the present, and for some it becomes too much.

We knew as we talked that it was time to leave. We had to get out. It could be a life or death decision for some of us, to go before it was too late.

Now I wonder about it all, as from a distance. The students meting out the punishment were the sons and daughters of doctors, lawyers and business people. Most were studying law or engineering, some medicine. They are probably the establishment now, and I wonder how they look back on their college days. I still receive the Ormond College yearbook at my parents' address, under my single name—every time they are having a fundraising drive, and they want contributions. Perhaps next time I'll send back this story.

The Consciousness Industry

Potent as the idea of crusade
or pilgrimage was the later fear that God
was behind the urban barricade

and out to punish vanity and greed.
It seemed best to parley, select a few
to explain common wants and need,

take back a soothing message,
explain, reward loyal acts, support games,
give warning of anything which might presage

unrest, placate the rich and gentle the poor.
Education and the media grew and
like the church, gently closed the door

upon anything disturbing the calm,
keeping snouts deep in the trough with their charm.

SELWYN PRITCHARD

missing

large pieces are missing between
motive and ambition, chasms open
between desire and flirtation
a busted bridge unbridges friends
and atrophies geography
so when you look into the harbour between
here and (you're already late for) work
all you see is what's missing from
whatever it was you wanted

under the sweet and shallow water
lies no salvager's bounty, no industry
of discards barnacled. only that
familiar unfelt terror of emptiness.
our lost dreams float facedown and
bloated. poisoned by fossil fuels, left
behind to struggle softly while we were
getting our shit together

JENNIFER MILLS

The Road Most Taken

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.
Robert Frost

In a dark wood,
redolent of another's meeting place,
I stood to rest awhile,
pondering, waiting for some sign
to guide my faltering feet,
to set them upon the turning track.
But in my midst
I counted not two paths,
but ever so many spread before me,
all appearing as fair and foul.
Which was the way for me
was far from clear,
but driven by some steely purpose
the way I went was that of many.
I took the road most travelled
and walked with the throng.
Whether I had chosen this way
or was unable to break from its sway,
I cannot say.
In the company of friends and strangers,
I made a journey of discovery,
all of us hauling a load together,
falling in ditches,
scaling barbed walls,
lurching from mistakes to better days.
I chose the way of all souls
and knew myself to be one of many
and the many as one.
What difference it made, if any,
I shall only wonder.

SANDY JEFFS

Traveller at Night

fine grass on the breezy bank
tall masts of a lonely night boat
stars low on an expansive plane
the moon surging in a big flowing river
how can you build your name on mere writings
but you could retire from officialdom as you're sick and old
what are you like, drifting from place to place?
a sandbar gull between the sky and the earth

DU FU (712–770)
TRANSLATED BY OUYANG YU (1955–)

Not fresh anymore

li bai and du fu have been read by so many mouths for so long
that it's not fresh any more now
rivers and mountains produce talents from generation to generation
each leading the way for a few hundred years

Translator's Note: I'd rather say a 'few years' now.

ZHAO YI (1727–1814)
TRANSLATED BY OUYANG YU (1955–)

gestalt

life lifts its brush to blacken,
undercoat of circumstance,

can full of matt finish fate
and paints on three walls of hope,

paints them out. reality,
the fourth, flecked and bruised, remains

untouched. the room, now bereft
but for a bulb on a string

sits open to happenstance,
stage and backdrop. you enter

from the right, sing, in plainchant,
no vibrato, no cadence

KEVIN GILLAM

fiction / **CATHERINE HARRIS**

LIKE BEING A WIFE

The Employment Agency was on the ninth floor and afforded good views of the highway and most of the hills backing the southern side of the city. I was looking for another job because my most recent occupation as a taste-tester for FoodTech was making me ill. Mostly it was the meats. It started with the Super-Sausage, which was supposed to taste like a combination of breakfast links and a pork roast but reminded me all too much of fried liver. Then the next day I was presented with a concoction of braised beef cubes injected with a prune extract (apparently as a nutritional supplement) that smelled so bad I couldn't bring myself to eat it. I explained to Val, my placement advisor, that my walking-out was anomalous behavior (I'd been with FoodTech for nine years and had a very good track record as far as attendance and such matters were concerned), but I could see from the tilt of her head as I spoke that she was worried I might be a serial insubordinate.

As Val filled out the vetting forms, I watched the chop and change of the traffic below as the lights switched from orange and red to green. It was hot outside. The asphalt shimmered and the cars scurried across the intersection like ants running to get out of the sun.

After a question about my typing, which I'm proud to say I can perform at the rate of eighty words per minute, Val tapped her pen a couple of times, then recrossed her legs and smiled at me. "I think I might have something," she said.

At the interview, Carla, the Department Head, asked about my experience. I wore a navy cotton shift and matching jacket, and one of the men (who I would later discover to be Mark from Due Diligence) kept looking at my legs.

I said that even though I had no background working in this kind of office, the skills I'd acquired as a taste-tester stood me in good stead for this type of employment. At FoodTech I'd had to rate many kinds of food across a range of categories, from astringency, springiness and density to tenderness, dryness and moistness. Not only did I have to be consistent but, I suggested, the organisation of the information was quite similar to filing and, as far as I could tell, was particularly compatible with the Department's cross-referencing system. This seemed to impress the panel. Then I recounted the example of Mudhavi, a taste-tester from India I'd worked with who was a vegetarian. Despite what you might imagine, the meats weren't a problem for her because we weren't expected to swallow the food. Thus, I explained, just because my curriculum vitae didn't include any Departmental work per se, it didn't mean I couldn't actually perform it.

Much later I found out this was the argument that had persuaded them, and indeed was instru-

mental in my being immediately promoted from the rank of Departmental Administrative Assistant to the more senior position of Section Complaints Officer.

I spent my first week in Orientation. Doreen from Human Resources said that typically there are more people in the familiarisation sessions (because the majority of recruiting is coordinated across Sections and is done en-masse at the beginning of the financial year), but as I was a one-off counter-cycle appointee this round there was only me. It was my first time in a boardroom. The table sat thirty. It was longer than my apartment and polished slick as a slab of melting ice. As Doreen ran through the PowerPoint presentations I took notes and imagined what it must be like to be Doreen, married with three kids, heading off to work each morning in my pastel-coloured suits and taupe high heels. Because it wasn't an official Department meeting there were no biscuits. The coffee machine was off.

On Friday I was formally introduced to the rest of the office. At morning tea Carla tapped her mug with a teaspoon until everyone was quiet and then said, "I'd like to introduce Page Higgins, our new Section Complaints Officer. Page comes to us from FoodTech, where she was a taste-tester for nine years. Please help us to make her feel welcome." Then she simulated clapping her hands (because her actual hands were still holding the mug and the teaspoon) and most people joined in with the real thing.

After the speech, I helped myself to a slice of buttered cinnamon bun and drank a cup of tea. The cinnamon bun was palatable with no metallic aftertaste, a nice balance between springiness and cohesiveness, and the icing was sweet but not too sharp, with just the right amount of salt for depth. Also, the butter was fresh and evenly distributed across the slice.

All in all I felt the new job was working out well. I had my own desk with a computer and a telephone set up opposite the main entrance. The people were polite, and the food, when it was in evidence, seemed edible. For a moment I found myself scanning for the spit bucket (an old habit I was going to have to break), but quickly caught the oversight and swallowed the bun instead. It went down easily. Overall, I'd have rated it nine out of a possible ten.

It didn't take long for me to develop a routine. I'd wake up at 6.30 a.m., shower, scan the newspaper, then walk to work. I liked the process of transformation, of being me, Page at home in my domestic space, then stepping out of the apartment and into the day and melding with the stream of other office workers en route to their respective appointments, forming in clots at various intersections around the city. It was comforting to be part of a throng. After years of commuting by car to my single-unit laboratory carrel, it was liberating to be out on the street, in the world, knowing that beneath the courtesies and half-hearted public smiles I could be anyone doing anything. In the evenings I'd walk home via the supermarket where I'd loiter in the fruit and vegetable aisles watching as people made their decisions about what to have for dinner. I was the Complaints Officer roaming freely amongst unsuspecting subscribers, and in this way they became real to me.

My first official complainant was Mr Nathan Brickman, a local resident from the outer-east who was going overseas and was upset because his offer documents wouldn't arrive before his departure. Despite his tone, I knew better than to tell him to simmer down, and this impressed Carla no end.

"You sound like you've done this before," she said, and I had to admit it did seem to come naturally: "Yes, Mr Brickman. No, Mr Brickman. Of course, Mr Brickman, whatever you say." It was like being a wife, I supposed, this going along. It fitted neatly with my ideas about public service, and what it meant to be married to the job.

At four weeks Carla called me into her office. She gestured to the round, grey laminex-topped table set up for informal meetings adjacent to the desk, and we sat side-by-side as she conducted my first review.

"How are you finding it?" she asked.

"Good," I replied. I'd drawn up charts for each of the possible Complaint Issues, then arranged them by Degree of Seriousness and Likelihood & Speed of Escalation (based on complainant characteristics) so I could quickly calculate the importance of each call, determine the simplest way to remedy the problem and assign it to the most appropriate person within the organisation. It was very similar to what I did at FoodTech, though without the food.

Carla nodded and checked something on my Evaluation sheet. "I hope you like to travel," she said. "You're coming to Melbourne with us next week."

This was unexpected. I'd grown used to being left behind. While the rest of the team attended Supplier meetings on Fridays and ate dainty tea sandwiches for lunch, I kept the office intact, forwarding necessary telephone calls and faxing forgotten memoranda. Melbourne meant strategy meetings and elevator towers and code combinations instead of keys. It also meant being away from my desk. I knew Carla must have factored this in, but it worried me to leave my files unattended.

On the plane, I recognised the lunch combination—a ham and cheese sandwich on wholemeal, an apple and a single wrapped Tim Tam—as one of four options I'd evaluated nearly a year ago now when FoodTech landed the Skylink account. I'd guessed as much, so packed my own food (also a ham and cheese sandwich, but smoked ham and Swiss cheese rather than cheddar, with Dijon mustard on rye). From experience I knew the Skylink sandwich would be too moist and would score highly on the sweetness and astringency scales, while the apple would be powdery and bland, with a spotty, bruised exterior.

As the plane taxied, I lifted the blind. Melbourne airport appeared to me like a film captured on a series of beige plastic-ringed frames, each crawling with luggage carts and mechanical personnel. The seatbelt sign was still illuminated but most of the passengers were already up out of their seats extracting their bags from the overhead storage compartments. During the Strategy meeting to plan for the Logistics meeting later that afternoon, Carla said they should position the postal service executives on smaller chairs and have them sitting facing into the sun. Ordinarily she wouldn't have been so aggressive, she explained to me in the break, but since the postal service mislaid all of the Express applications, the Minister had been breathing down her neck. Her back was up against the wall, she said. Something had to be done.

Everyone at the meeting agreed. The situation absolutely couldn't be allowed to continue. It was decided to postpone the Logistics meeting until the following week and to bring it forward an hour to take full advantage of the brightness of the midday glare.

Carla stirred her coffee. I watched the circular motion as she outlined for me the history of the postal service's uneven corporate account performance. The spoon made a gentle clinking sound against the side of the porcelain cup.

At a quarter past, the meeting reconvened. We took our seats along the far side of the table and, as everyone shuffled into place, Carla took the opportunity to introduce me to the Chair of the Committee on Committees, Paul Turner.

"Paul, have you met Page?" Carla said.

Paul shook my hand. "Page," he said. "Like in a book?"

I nodded.

"Hmm. Interesting," he said. "Page, Page, Page. What kind of name is that?"

I'd often wondered why more people didn't ask why my parents called me Page. It was a natural question, I reasoned, given all the other names I could have had. Why did they choose Page, for example, and not Annabel or Mary-Lou? I could have been a Mary-Lou, I thought, though I wouldn't tell him that.

"What's in a name?" I replied instead, dodging the issue completely.

Later that night, when I arrived at the restaurant, Paul called out, "Here's Alice."

"No, not Alice, my name is Page," I reiterated, trying not to sound too impatient.

Paul said, "Yes, but a rose is a rose is a rose."

Carla wanted to know what he was talking about so Paul explained about Gertrude Stein. From that moment on everyone at work called me Gerty.

The first time Paul and I had sex we met at The Diplomat motel, a circular building girded by black painted steel balconies directly over the road from the Department where he was staying for the night. He said the official purpose of his trip was business, but the real reason was me. I fascinated him, he said as he brushed a strand of hair from my face. His breath smelled of Johnny Walker and Altoids. When we kissed he held me by the shoulders and ran his tongue slowly across the surface of my teeth.

Even though Paul was much older than me, he was in reasonably good shape. "That's a hundred sit-ups each morning," he said, punching himself in the tummy. "Come hell or high water." And then he got down on the floor to demonstrate the strength of his abdominal muscles. Paul said his wife left him because she was selfish and a fucking bitch, but I could see he would be difficult to live with.

Paul took to calling me at the office each afternoon at three. I'd prepare a Complainant Profile in advance so when the telephone rang it looked like I was engaged in a bona fide conversation. "Section Complaints," I would say in my normal 8 a.m.--6 p.m. voice and then, as Paul would describe to me all the lurid thoughts he'd had about me during the course of the day, I would fiddle with my papers and say, "Yes, Mr Brickman. No, Mr Brickman. Of course, Mr Brickman, whatever you say."

Sometimes Carla would nod to me from her office across the hall. It was demarcated by a perspex dividing wall, set up in such a way that she could monitor the entire Section from her desk.

My probationary period concluded after exactly six months. I thought it ironic that my permanent contract came into effect on May Day. To celebrate I bought a pale lime rayon suit and a pair of six-inch taupe high heels. I wore them on Friday to morning tea and then again that weekend when Paul and I had sex on the meeting table in Carla's office. Paul hitched up my skirt and ground into me, calling me Alice and Page and Dirty Gerty, but I didn't come because I was worried about pulling a seam.

Even though I was no longer officially with the agency, Val called to congratulate me on my new unconditional Departmental standing.

"Nice going," she said. "I had my doubts but you came through."

Although I was flattered by the recognition, the superior quality of her tone rankled me. I wanted to tell her that I knew she'd had her doubts about me, that I'd seen it in the way she looked at me and heard it in the skew of her voice all those months ago on the ninth floor when she'd first interviewed me in her office, listening to her talking on about the significance of rules and procedures, as though I had no idea of the implications of the FoodTech incident, as if I couldn't figure it out for myself, the potential consequences of my actions.

But I didn't. Instead, I said, "Thank you, that's so kind," in a distinctly sugary tone, noting the fruity aspect of my delivery, but prepared to risk the rarefied sweetness because of the sharp strains inherent in the overall flavour of the message I had thought to convey.

Not that I expected her to realise that. But it pleased me to deal with the world in this way, to know that at worst the situation would be well categorised and that no matter how discordant the many elements of the scenario might be, the experiment (if properly observed) could always be repeated.

Catherine Harris is an Australian writer currently living in the United States.

fiction / **ERIN GOUGH**

PACKING A PUNCH

One night when I am eight years old my father takes me with him to Darlinghurst in the food van. We park on the footpath across the road from where the boys slouch against the Wall, the mist from their mouths coming apart in the shadows between the street lamps. I help my father open the back door and we roll out the bench for the coffee urns and the hot trays of cooked food. People start appearing from nowhere in particular. The world tastes of sugar and sausages and sweat.

There is a woman in a sequined dress with bare legs, and she is wearing strings and strings of beads around her leathery neck. Silver ones like disco balls, solid red ones, blue ones you can see through. She rolls up her sleeve and shows me an elbow swollen like a tumour. "This is where I got hit with an iron bar," she says, and nods her head, and bites into her bread and sausage. "Come with me."

On the other side of the van there is the road, and the thin boys looking over at us. The woman makes me give her my hand. Her fingers are soft and flat. She shows me how to roll mine into a fist. "Don't tuck your thumb in girl. Keep it out or it will break. And punch quick, like this. No. If you swing from the shoulder they'll see it coming. Watch."

I watch her throw punches into the dark. "In boxing tournaments you're not allowed to punch here" (she points to her chest) "or here" (blocking her crotch) "but life is no tournament, you understand?" I nod. "I once knew a prostitute who cheated me out of four hundred bucks. With one blow I sent her flying WHAM onto a car bonnet."

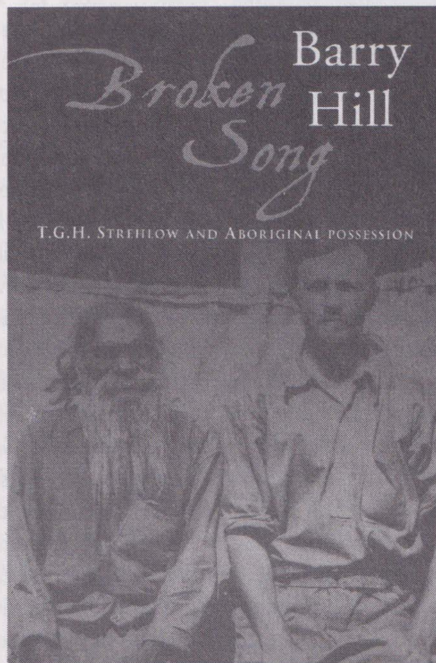
I am eight years old and have never punched, or been punched, in my whole life, ever. The woman faces me, her mouth twisted and her eyes coloured with a fierceness I have never seen in anyone before, and she orders me to drive a blow into her open palm. I feel the dull shudder of my fingers against her bone, the curious power of my fist landing on her soft, loose skin.

"Okay, now try this. But watch first." Left then right and fast she begins to fight, as if setting loose upon the whole world, her knuckles a blur just in front of my face. She has bread in her teeth and meat on her breath. My father is on the other side of the van. I stand there the whole time with my eyes open, somewhere between fear and exhilaration, and an inch away from being broken by her hands.

Erin Gough is a young Sydney writer.

review essay / **MARK McKENNA**

A SYMPHONY OF BRUCKNERIAN PROPORTIONS



Barry Hill: *Broken Song: T.G.H. Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession* (Knopf, $59.95)

T.G.H. Strehlow, born 1908 at Hermannsburg Central Australia, the son of a German Lutheran missionary, was by the time of his death in 1978 one of the most controversial figures in Australian anthropology and Aboriginal politics. Strehlow, an extraordinarily gifted, obsessive, flawed and ultimately tragic figure, is a compelling subject for the biographer. He left behind him a rich archival legacy—diaries, letters, autobiographical sketches, films, a private collection of Aboriginal sacred objects (collected over a lifetime's work from the Aranda people of the Northern Territory), and most importantly of all, *Songs of Central Australia*. This book, the documentation and translation of more than 900 songs (or couplets) containing the 'poetic lore' of the Aranda, became Strehlow's life's work.

In Barry Hill, Strehlow has found a sympathetic biographer, a writer who shares Strehlow's fascination for the written and spoken word and the poetics of language. Like Strehlow, Hill is drawn to Aranda culture—a culture where "poetry is an expression of its unifications by faith"—a culture where flesh, earth, sky and language are one, where everything is connected. Twelve years is a long time for a writer to work on any project, and by devoting this amount of time to Strehlow, Hill's biography, in all of its epic proportion and depth of literary analysis, somehow mirrors Strehlow's experience in writing *Songs of Central Australia*. As if the time available to both biographer and subject is consumed not so much by life as by language. When Hill writes of Strehlow (a polyglot who in addition to his native German mastered classical Greek and Latin, English and Aranda), that he was "heavy with language", he also describes *Broken Song*.

In almost 800 pages, a symphony of Brucknerian proportions, Hill takes the reader through Strehlow's life. We move from Strehlow's childhood at the Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg (the stoic puritanism of the Lutheran world view evoked magnificently) through his time as a brilliant undergraduate at the University of Adelaide, to his first journey into the land where his heart would always remain—collecting the sacred knowledge of the Aranda in the early 1930s—the beginning of *Songs of Central Australia*, a book that Hill describes effusively as "Australia's Book of Genesis". Hill follows the lines of Strehlow's life faithfully. We witness Strehlow's experience as a patrol officer in the Northern Territory (here Hill deepens his narrative by placing it in

the context of the broader history of race relations in the Territory), his time as a soldier during the Second World War, his subsequent return to Aranda country, his disappointing journey to England and Germany in the early 1950s, his time as research fellow at the Australian National University, and finally we witness his tragic decline in the 1970s when the changing political climate saw Strehlow cast not as an 'embalmer' of Aranda culture but as a selfish and possessive plunderer.

There is so much I could say about *Broken Song* but space dictates that I cut to the essential remarks. I was moved by this book, moved by the skill and emotional power of the writing and moved by the manner in which Hill brings the intellectual brilliance and emotional volatility of the depressive, melancholic Strehlow to life.

Hill's tone is always sincere, honest and searching. His writing is not seamless—he allows the reader to see his own doubts about constructing the narrative. So much so that sometimes he seems to be talking to himself—talking his way through the writing process. Early on in *Broken Song* Hill writes (as if to himself) "let allusions look after themselves as the book unfolds". When he reaches a point where he needs to change focus he suddenly exclaims "This is enough for now". This strategy is particularly in evidence when Hill deals with the issue of Strehlow's diaries, and the difficulties they raise for him as the interpreter of Strehlow's life.

Throughout the book, Hill's poetic sensibilities are constantly on display. Some lines take your breath away. For example, when Hill writes of Strehlow's return from his first expedition to collect the sacred songs of the Aranda, he describes Strehlow coming home with "camel bags full of eternity". He is alive to the ironies of Strehlow's mission (transcribing Aranda songs by day and translating the Bible into Aranda at night) and especially sensitive to Strehlow's lifelong struggle to understand Aranda culture.

My reservations about *Broken Song* are few. The length of the book will be daunting to many readers and the many lengthy passages of textual analysis could have in some cases been reduced. As a reader who did follow Hill's journey with Strehlow through to the last line of the book I felt the need for an epilogue. Perhaps Hill had come to a point where Strehlow's death was a relief, a natural finishing point. But I wanted to know more about the fate of Strehlow's collection and something about the way in which Strehlow has been remembered since his death in 1978. I also wanted to understand what had brought Hill to Strehlow.

Hill devotes considerable time to the interpretation of images and photographs. Some of the most intuitive, subtle and beautiful passages in the book are inspired by Hill's reading of the early photographs of Strehlow. In many instances Hill's prose is crying out for the illustrations to be more closely married to the text. In this sense I believe the book's design does not do full justice to the author. There are also some minor mistakes and typographical errors but as Hill would say, 'enough!', these do not detract from the author's achievement in *Broken Song*.

Hill manages to convey powerfully the deep sense of failure that haunted Strehlow throughout his life. A man who felt wrongly deprived of academic recognition (shunned by the English academy in the early 1950s, "this accursed island", and misunderstood in Australia "where university folk cringe and bow to English opinion"). In 1978, perhaps to compensate for his lack of recognition, Strehlow sold over 200 slides and photographs, many of them revealing secret Aranda ceremonies and sacred knowledge, to the German magazine *Stern*. Strehlow often blamed others for his failure but too often he failed himself. In other ways, Australia failed him.

Strehlow lived his life in exile: exile from his parents' homeland, Germany, and exile from the brutality and insensitivity of White Australia, a culture in which he was forced to defend the humanity and integrity of Aboriginal people and their culture. As Strehlow wrote, "I have no country left to me . . . the only people who have been loyal to me without fail are my Aboriginal friends". And so Strehlow came to identify with the Aranda to the point where in the 1970s, as the political earth shifted under his feet, he believed that he was the only rightful possessor of Aranda sacred knowledge, and that he, Strehlow, was Aranda.

As Barry Hill writes in *Broken Song*, "no life is new, the past moves with us". For the quality of its prose and the depth of its research, *Broken Song* will move with us for many years to come.

Mark McKenna is an Australian Research Council Fellow in History at the ANU. His recent book, Looking for Blackfellas' Point: an Australian History of Place, *won the 2003 Douglas Stewart Prize for Non-Fiction and Book of the Year in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.*

interview | **STEPHEN BENNETTS**
talks with **BARRY HILL**

TALKING BROKEN SONG

Above: Strehlow back in Alice Springs in 1932 after his first long treks by camel. Courtesy of Trudy Johannsen.

BARRY HILL'S *Broken Song: T.G.H. Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession* was published last year to wide critical acclaim. John Mulvaney called it "one of the great Australian books"; Robert Manne said it was "a landmark event . . . in the history of Australian high culture"; Hugh Stretton reviewed it as a "masterpiece"; and Alan Atkinson said it was a "brilliant book that brings into focus the importance of language in the relationship of black and white in Australia".

Here Barry Hill, who first essayed upon Strehlow for *Overland* (Autumn 1992) talks with Stephen Bennetts, a consultant anthropologist who worked for several years in Central Australia, including around Hermannsburg, where Strehlow was born in 1908.

How did you come to Strehlow?

Via William Buckley. I was writing my long narrative poem about that escaped convict who lived for thirty-two years in the wild, down around my way, on the Bellarine Peninsula, in Victoria, among the Wathaurung people. In the poem, which tracks his movement from one culture into another I came to the question: what song did he sing then? What forms did he enter by virtue of crossing over, or going native, as it used to be called? I discovered there are no fragments of local song, and hardly any local language on record. So I went looking for the major works on Aboriginal song elsewhere, and found, in the Deakin library, a tome called *Songs of Central Australia* by someone called Strehlow. I couldn't believe my eyes—great runs of poetry in two languages, one of them an ancient language of this country, with detailed commentary. Thrilling. And mysterious. Who was this Strehlow? Where did this book come from? How did it happen?

You say Songs of Central Australia *has the lyricism of the* Song of Songs *and the authority of the* Torah. *Is that what set you off?*

Yes, and then actually going to the Centre, which happened soon after I had read the book. *The Age* wanted me to cover the opening of Imparja, the first Aboriginal media outfit in Alice Springs: so I found myself up there with a thousand people partying in the red dust and the sun going down over the Western Macs. As the sun bounced off those ranges I found myself weeping and didn't know why. The power of the place. Its pulse. I just had to go back, and started to get myself there as often as I could. Strehlow's book exuded whatever it was I had registered, and so I started off on a reading binge about the Centre. To travel more and read more I got a commission to write *The Rock, Travelling to Uluru*. I got to know a fair bit of the region, including the beautiful country around Hermannsburg. I fully realised Strehlow was my

focus. The passion of his book, the Eros at the heart of it, was the thing. And at that time I was in love with a woman whom I eventually married in Central Australia. The poems I was writing through this period (*The Inland Sea*) are about love and translation, and getting to know the country while travelling with Strehlow.

But why Strehlow? Others have translated songs and so on. If Eros, or Desire, was the thing, what about the work of the Berndts who did that wonderful book on love songs. Is Strehlow the most interesting of the Australian anthropologists?

Many of the Australian anthropologists are interesting and would be more so if the profession could relax a bit more about its own history. And yes, the Berndts did the Eros wonderfully, and in more than one work. But they were mainly Top End. I'd fallen for the Centre and the desert. And Strehlow was unique: he was the first Western scholar to grow up in an Aboriginal language—this because he grew up on the Hermannsburg mission, under the sway of his scholarly father, Pastor Carl Strehlow. The household language was German, but his mother's housekeepers were Aboriginal women. Strehlow was cradled in Aranda.

As a young man Strehlow was the first Patrol Officer in Central Australia, and a brave friend of the Aborigine: this at a time of horrible economic and sexual exploitation, as one section of your book so graphically lays out. Back then he defended their religious rights (for their sites, their sacred possessions), and was a sharp critic of the early assimilation policy. But by the end of his life in 1978 he had disgraced himself, betrayed the trust of his most knowledgeable informants by selling those secret sacred images to Stern magazine (which syndicated them to People *in 1978). And by then Strehlow had set himself against the whole modern movement of land rights, Land Councils, the repatriation of sacred objects and so on. What happened to him? What kind of story are you telling here? You seem to have written tragedy. Is that what you set out to do?*

No. But it is. His father died when he was 14, after a terrible buggy ride to get him to a doctor. They stumbled down the Fink in the heat of October 1922, where he died under the galvanised iron roof of the pub at Horseshoe Bend. Strehlow went with his mother to Adelaide where he got his schooling at the Lutheran Immanuel College and then did his honours degree in English at the University of Adelaide—all the time still grieving for his father, and then, when his mother took off to Germany in 1931, to rejoin her other children (his four brothers and a sister Strehlow had not seen since he was a toddler) he felt even more isolated, abandoned, more needful, more resentful, more desperate for recognition. He had this melancholic core very early on, he had a sense of himself as damaged, flawed—which is why he may have wanted to do his MA on Bradley's theory of Shakespearean tragedy. But he didn't. He got a research grant to do the first formal study of an Aboriginal language, and so there he was, on the train to Alice in 1932, dreading the heat and the flies, lugging his misery back inland to start the work that nonetheless would celebrate, would sing, so much.

So where did he go so wrong?

I don't know where, exactly. But there was a point, I think, when he was younger, when he had a chance of deepening his self knowledge via psychoanalysis. He was reading *Totem and Taboo* when he was doing some of his early long camel treks, collecting the songs and sacred objects. He had Freud in his saddle bag in 1932 when he saw his first sacred ceremony, with all its 'primitive' trappings. He rather fancied himself as a dream analyst, or he did when haplessly trying to woo a young woman at the time. But when the chips were down he steered clear of any deep self-scrutiny. In his heart he remained a Lutheran and yearned for salvation by faith. He held onto the lament—*Lord, why Me?*—that runs through the Lutheran culture, or at least the culture of the fundamentalist mob that had settled the mission in 1877, hard put-upon refugees from persecution in Germany. Strehlow very easily felt persecuted. That was the tragedy, the one my narrative could not get away from.

But he went wrong, really, I suppose, because he made certain assumptions about ownership, and continuity of culture. What he had collected he felt that he owned, by virtue of the linguistic intimacy he had with his Aboriginal contacts. And what he had collected he judged the remnants of a finally doomed culture. He had arrived, he kept saying, in the 'sunset' of the culture. For a complex of reasons—psychological, cultural, historical, Strehlow

was a natural elegist. That was the tragedy. In his guts he couldn't really see a future for the Aranda knowledge, not even for what he called the 'genius' of Aranda as a language.

Early in the book, you mention that the word 'mate' was one which Strehlow could never have used. In a passage you later cite from Journey to Horseshoe Bend (the book in which he describes the death of his father), there is a curious sense of displacement about the celebration of Australian mateship which Strehlow puts into the mouth of the bushman Bob Buck. Then there is his melancholy sense of disillusionment with his adored Poms after a miserable time in London around 1950. I get a sense of some kind of alchemical process triggered by Strehlow's engagement with Aboriginal culture in central Australia which produces a shift from 'second-hand European' to use Hope's phrase, to 'Australian'. You say that Strehlow certainly saw himself as an Australian nationalist, but you seem to have reservations?

He was always the son of a missionary. A German missionary, with German sentiments. As you would expect. My remark about 'mate' was to contrast Strehlow with a few of his contemporaries on the frontier—knockabout men like Bill Harney, Ion Idriess, and Xavier Herbert, who I call 'frank democrats' because of their ease with others and their candour with regard to sexual relationships with Aboriginal women, which at the time were against the law. Strehlow as a Patrol Officer had to police that law. As a nationalist Strehlow's oeuvre absolutely nails the connection Aborigines had with country, their homeplace. He wanted white Australians to learn from that. Today, his position is commonplace: he was prophetic. But his sermonising could isolate him, especially since, as a solitary traveller, a scholar with European affiliations, he did not ally with any collective sense of Australia that had its clearest expression in the labour movement. He was a Labor man—or was until his *bete noir* Nugget Coombs popped up under Whitlam—but a Labor man without a union, so to speak. I suppose he would have said his union was the Aranda people, to whose songs he devoted his life. They made him strong, which was the feeling he projected into his claim that he was the 'last of the Aranda'.

What are the various levels at which Strehlow translates from one culture to another? At a deeper level, 'translation' becomes a key metaphor in your book for exploring the contradictions you see between 'Caliban' and 'Luther' in Strehlow's troubled personality. At several crisis points in his life, such as the Max Stuart case,[1] this contradiction seems to re-emerge and threaten to destroy him. Is it this inner contradiction which finally undermines him? How might Strehlow have been able to reconcile Caliban and Luther?

Caliban is the Strehlow that translated the songs. The white man steps into the black man's voice. But he is Luther's—not Shakespeare's—Caliban because at the same time he was translating the *New Testament* into Aranda. To some extent the tasks worked in different directions. With the songs he was, in the end, flirting with what used to be called the 'primitive': notions of wild naked carnalities etc., even though the textual work he did with the songs derived from the 'civilising' traditions of Biblical and Classical scholarship. By contrast, with his translation of the *New Testament*, he was wanting to improve Aranda spiritual life by elevating their native religious language, which he did by Hellenising it—by incorporating abstract nouns and so on. He co-opted the Arandas' own sacred language, and imposed his own scheme of things. That made some Hermannsburg men very disgruntled and he tried to deal with that by lecturing them like Luther.

So: on the one side you have the white man's yearning to enter the black man's wild side, which had a performative poetry at its centre—the white man wanting to dance, you might say, to join the sacred round of things in the home country, theirs and his. And on the other you had the son of a missionary wanting to carry on the mission work via the act of translation. Secretly, Strehlow thought of himself as a 'black missionary'. These are some of the levels I was exploring. And there is no clear divide—as in psychic split or Langian divided self—that finally undermines him, as you put it. Rather I would say that in an organism called T.G.H. Strehlow you have the cauldron of ambivalent and sometimes ambiguous tensions that drove his life's work. But sometimes, when he wanted to be too reductive about those forces within him, he could become his own worst enemy. As in the Stuart case, where he fell into over-professionalising himself as a linguist, rather than

finding ways of embracing Stuart's whole human predicament—which would have included Strehlow's own predicament as a translator.

But you do feature the split; he was a Gemini, born in a place of Twins Dreaming, which was the myth story for Hermannsburg.

Yes I do feature that, and I give an account of how he seems to have avoided any explication of his own Dreaming.

Why do you think he avoided this?

I don't know, really, but I try to suggest that he shied away from the primal nature of the crime committed by those mythic boys. The personal implications of it—if he was to sustain his identification with his dreaming place and Aranda culture—was too uncomfortable for him.

You face the very difficult and highly politicised question of discussing the activities of a man whose professional life was intimately bound up with secret-sacred Aboriginal material. This automatically implies a collision course between two radically different economies of knowledge: our own Enlightenment tradition and a tradition where it is an offence to even ask questions about certain sacred matters, let alone publish them. How did you resolve this problem? Did the Strehlow Research Centre advise you to delete any material from your original manuscript, and who made rulings about such decisions?

They did indeed. In fact, for some years they did not trust my integrity, or my depth of respect for Aboriginal culture, and kept me away from most of the archive, even when I was not necessarily wanting to read, or see, Aboriginal material. To begin with, I was allowed to read the manuscript of *Songs*, and the unpublished autobiography, *Land of Altjira*. This was exciting, and opened up many other questions, but then my access was stopped. I was barred from diaries, and correspondence. At the time the Centre was still trying to work out its research policy, and was being administered as a kind of personal fiefdom by its Research Officer. I was made to wait, from which I learnt quite a lot. That was my lesson in Aboriginal patience. In my head I was occupying a kind of tent embassy on behalf of liberal scholarship, an address to which many helpful scholars (Hugh Stretton, John Mulvaney, Ken Inglis, Peter McPhee, Tim Rowse, to name a few) wrote supportive letters. Then there was a regime change at the Strehlow Research Centre. I then had access to a lot of correspondence, and sensible access to many diaries—after they had been vetted for sensitive Aboriginal material, which was fine by me. I signed an access agreement whereby I complied with requests to remove or alter any sensitive Aboriginal material, and show the Strehlow Research Centre my whole manuscript when it was done. It sounds simple now, but at the time that was excruciating, a matter of each party agonising through their different responsibilities. I lost a lot of sleep. A book could be written about the making of my book, I can tell you, and I'm not going to write it.

The naming of specific men's ceremonies in the first chapter touched a nerve for me, and I was initially surprised the Strehlow Research Centre let this through.

Yes, but what was the alternative? My allusions are absolutely minimal, as you know. They do not penetrate any ceremony, they simply allude to a vast and revealing literature that is in the public domain, the now 'classic' studies of Aboriginal culture. In the opening sections I edited some of the classic material, and all through my book, when in doubt, I was also taking the advice of anthropologists like John Morton who know the Aranda material. There is nothing in my book, for example, that has not been made more explicit in recent academic papers. We owe it to the serious readers to speak honestly yet tactfully about the sacred, whatever the culture. My book is, in the long run, a judicious return to Strehlow's honouring work, the better to explore what were his valid best intentions: to explicate a profound religious culture without diminishing it.

How did you research the book and what was your time frame? Who did you interview, what places did you have to go to for information?

I was working in archives other than the one in Alice Springs, of course. And I was travelling in 'Strehlow country' whenever I could, camping out, and so on, getting the feel of it in the way that Ray Erickson did with his biography of Giles. But I was not trying to meet everyone who met Strehlow, as many biographers do with their subject. It's not the usual biography. For quite a while I did not care

that much about the details of Strehlow's life. I mean, I was initially inspired by the wealth of his book; my travelling was in the literature that arises from his work. For some years I just stayed with that, reading in and out of the problem of translating poetry. Step by step though I realised I had to come to these central themes via the narrative of his life, and when, well down the track, some of his crucial diaries were open to me, my project came to be grounded in that, in his voice, his own emerging, and obsessive mythologising of himself.

What sources of information were closed to you?

The most important material I did not see were his 'Myth Books', which are his nitty-gritty field notes of his sitting down with informants, whose songs and stories he recorded in Aranda as much as he did in English. To work with this material, which would be the crucial next step in Strehlow studies, you would need Aranda, and, of course, some permission by Aboriginal men with authority.

In a sense, you seem to suggest that Strehlow was both a failure as a writer and also flawed as an anthropologist in the stricter sense, a man who falls between the two schools of academic anthropology and literary endeavour; his anthropological peers seem never to have wholeheartedly recognised him for any serious contribution to 'scientific' anthropology; his work seems always to have been too problematic and idiosyncratic, too outside the mainstream of developments within scientific anthropology for that. What then, is his contribution to our understanding of Aboriginal culture?

Above: Strehlow with Pintubi men near Mt Liebig in 1932. Courtesy SA Museum/Norman Tindale.

I say he had flaws as a writer, but hardly a 'failure', given what I have just been saying. I suggest he was not very successful as an intellectual if you build self-knowledge and scholarly transparency into that concept. As to Strehlow and the profession, well, you know better than I that the profession is less embracing than most, since its occupational hazard is to isolate socially retiring individuals for many years of their lives with dependent peoples—all under the delusion that their 'field' is the 'world'. There is very little that is 'problematic' about Strehlow's 'anthropology', so called, as has been borne out by its usefulness in land claims and the recent Native Title Case for Alice Springs. Unless you are asserting that to do anthropology you need a full course of social theory, so called. The simple fact is that by virtue of being cradled in Aranda, and raised inti-

> **Australian linguists have let us down: there is no secondary literature about the status of Strehlow's translations. There are good and bad reasons for this: the good being the matters of ownership and respect raised by any public translation of a sacred song. The bad, that it's an expression of the intellectual dehydration of linguistics, once a generally humanising endeavour.**

mately with an Aboriginal community, he embodied a resolution of the problems of epistemology that anthropology as a profession had been landed with. What Strehlow gives to us is the flesh and blood of Aboriginal poetics. I happen to think that Heidegger's use of Holderlin's phrase, 'poetically, man dwells' is true. It is a life-redeeming truth. Strehlow's work, and much of the rendering of his own life, shows us that truth in a country which was invaded by men whose scientific and materialistic culture tended to diminish poetry at its roots. For better *and* worse Strehlow came to celebrate Australian roots. He was not a poet, but his oeuvre is a tableland for camping out with the possibility of a poetics that could be native to us all.

You also express major reservations about his writing. Yet despite its fustian nineteenth-century style, Journey to Horseshoe Bend *seems like a true classic of rare power and insight. How would you rate it as a literary text? Where is he strongest, and where weakest as a writer and can we take him seriously as a writer?*

Journey to Horseshoe Bend is too flowery for me, and I have only enjoyed it in parts. It often feels like derivative Wordsworth. I like his plainer writing, which is there in the best passages of *Songs*, and most powerfully present in his early papers. He was fresh then, had less to defend. You can feel the classics in his sentences.

I love your evocation of twentieth-century Adelaide, the city of churches where I grew up. I wonder what Strehlow made of the Dunstan era which shook this genteel city to its foundations. Among the many personal resonances I found in the book is your wonderful evocation of that earlier and little known substratum of multicultural Australia, the German Lutherans, which Strehlow shared with my maternal grandmother, also the child of a German Lutheran pastor. Among other things, you illuminated for the first time for me the circumstances in which their 'Altluteraner' sect emigrated to Australia following persecution by the Prussian King. Your description of the Adelaide University and Emmanuel College context illuminated my grandmother's experience too. The stifling provincialism of pre- and post-war Adelaide seems like the perfect time-warped stronghold for this nineteenth-century intellectual subculture based on Lutheranism and the Classics, impervious to the clamorous assaults of modernism going on in the outside world.

And yet he never wanted to live anywhere else but Adelaide. And I feel he did not because, despite your reservations about the place, it has a special relationship to Central Australia. Snib open the back door, even in Prospect, North Adelaide, and there is the air of the desert. But what he did rail against—which is connected with the conservatism you're conjuring—was what he called the Adelaide Establishment. He thought the Establishment had damaged him at the Stuart case.

Is it possible that Songs *will ever be republished? Can you see* Journey *or Strehlow's life history as the possible basis for an opera? What is the rightful place of* Songs *within Australian intellectual and cultural history?*

A cantata of *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* is about to have its premiere this year in Sydney. I can't imagine *Songs* being re-published in full, not at the moment, because of contemporary concerns about sacred material. But I can imagine a shorter book with, say, an edited version of the English, along with much of the commentary. That would be a gift to all. But also, the Strehlow Centre is looking at the possibility of publishing his father's work in English—for the first time. And, if they had the wherewithal, which they do not, since it is a public body, they might look at publishing some of his diaries. That would be marvellous, like John

Mulvaney's collections of letters of Gillen to Spencer.

Did you face any difficult decisions about omitting any personal material from your account of Strehlow's life?

I could have gone after his womanising, I suppose. But it was sufficient to use one crucial adulterous diary entry (where I deleted the initials of the women involved) because it helped explicate his intellectual position with regard to Eros in Aboriginal culture.

Using the diaries of Malinowski and Strehlow, you bring out well the double scientific and personal lives of the ethnographer, each feeding off the other. What attracts you as a writer to the figure of the anthropologist?

It goes back to Buckley I suppose. For old-fashioned nineteenth-century literary reasons, my imagination has gone to the frontier, and the encounter between races. Enter the anthropologist, with all his or her colonial collusions, vanities, denials, tremblings, yearnings. It's extraordinary, you know, that so few full biographies of anthropologists have been done. Philip Jones, the curator at the South Australian Museum, recently remarked that Strehlow was our Malinowski, which I thought was apt. Maybe, when more biographies come out, there might be more Malinowskis—providing the British empiricist tradition of circumscribing anthropology does not set the tone. I'd love to see something big on the profession's sharpest writer, W.H. Stanner. The feeling in his thinking is a fascinating mystery.

I feel one aspect of his literary culture which is neglected in your book are the great Northern-European myth cycles: Beowulf, *the* Eddas, *the Middle High German epics and so forth. A study of Old Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon language and literature was considered a fundamental part of the English Literature course at the time. Like his contemporary Tolkien, this 'barbaric' yet quintessentially European literary canon was an important source of inspiration for Strehlow's writing. In* Songs, *this corpus provides an important European context into which to elevate the 'primitive' Aranda literary canon he is busily constructing. Did you deliberately sidestep the older German material?*

I think I did, I'm afraid. I did not feel at home with it. And there was so much else to deal with, I had to leave some things out. That's another book that could be done now: Strehlow's conscious and unconscious use of the old German legacy.

You don't have German. You don't have Aranda. How did you manage?

With a little help from my friends. I went to Germany and was helped by the archivist at the Neuendettelsau seminary. Here scholars like Walter Viet gave me their translations of letters and reports. With the Aranda, I proceeded as poets since Pound or Lowell or Merwin all acted last century: I wrote as a poet in the long tradition of contemplating different interpretations of the original. It's a self-respecting way of operating as long as you're careful. Besides, I was not presuming to offer new translations, but rather to shadow the life work of a translator. Australian linguists have let us down so far: there is no secondary literature about the status of Strehlow's translations. There are good and bad reasons for this: the good being the matters of ownership and respect raised by any public translation of a sacred song. The bad, that it's an expression of the intellectual dehydration of linguistics, once a generally humanising endeavour. Maybe that's a raft my book might prompt: a set of papers about the nuances of some songs, at least, the better to display their power that Strehlow was so appreciative of.

The last line of *Songs of Central Australia* spoke of Australian verse one day being woven from the "Stone-Age hair spindles of Central Australia". We can now forget the 'Stone Age', of course, and we can remember that already Aboriginal poetry has profoundly affected much Australian poetry, and here I'm not thinking of the earnest and mediocre efforts of the Jindyworobaks. Les Murray was essaying passionately about Strehlow back in 1976. I mean that for the culture overall, the more specialisms dare to speak into a democratic pool of thought and feeling the more our deeper dwelling will be shared and known and, dare I say it, extended. End of sermon. But this is not why I wrote the book. I wrote it for reasons keen swimmers swim hard in the sea.

1. In 1959 Rupert Max Stuart was convicted for the rape and murder of a 9-year-old white girl. His death sentence was commuted seven times as his case went to appeal, the High Court, the Privy Council and a Royal Commission—at which Strehlow's linguistic testimony about the confession was crucial to the defence.

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essay / **MARTIN THOMAS**

VON GUÉRARD'S SERPENT

ECHO POINT on the edge of Katoomba provides the most dramatic view of that great Blue Mountains landmark, the rock formation known as the Three Sisters. When I first moved to the mountains in 1996 I became familiar with an Aboriginal busker named Goomblar Wylo (aka Paul Shillingsworth). Painted with ochre and dressed in a loin cloth, he would stand at this heavily frequented tourist site and play didgeridoo. For a few coins he would allow himself to be photographed in front of the sublime vista of the Three Sisters and Jamison Valley. One day I spoke to him about his activities. At one level, he explained, this was just a way of making a living. But Goomblar was also convinced of the political significance of what he was doing. Although he makes no personal claim to the country of the Blue Mountains (he originates from the far north-west of New South Wales), he considers his performance a political act which reminds visitors of the area's original occupation.

Goomblar Wylo's decision to assume tribal dress and place himself in the landscape scene provides a contemporary perspective on a sequence of images, the meaning of which I've been trying to unravel. They were created by the colonial artist Eugène von Guérard who visited the Blue Mountains in 1859. He did not stay at Echo Point, which was then pretty much untouched by Europeans. So he never made images of the Three Sisters. Rather, he lodged a few kilometres to the east at an inn known as 'The Weatherboard'. From there he walked one-and-a-half miles to one of the superb waterfalls that tumble into Jamison Valley. Known then as Weatherboard Falls, it was renamed in 1879 to honour the explorer and politician William Wentworth.

While visiting the falls, von Guérard made a pencil sketch which served as the preliminary study for a painting exhibited in Melbourne three years later. The 1862 painting had the unwieldy title *Weather Board Creek Falls, Jamiesons* (Jamison) *Valley, New South Wales*, and is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria. At its first exhibition, the painting was warmly applauded by Melbourne's small circle of art critics, and von Guérard was sufficiently encouraged by its success to paint a smaller but similar version titled *The Weatherboard Falls* in 1863.[1] 'The title is not romantic, but the picture is eminently poetical,' wrote the critic for the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, when describing the 1862 canvas:

> This is distance, there are rocks, there is falling water, and that is all. But the effect is grand and imposing beyond conception. It gives you the idea of eternal solitude, and perpetual exclusion from civilised life. The far extending summits of those peculiar, level, ranges, so characteristic of Australian landscape, convey the impression of vast space. The blue vapour that hangs over the valley and reaches up well nigh to the brown of the mountains, has an aerial quality about it, quite startling. You seem to breathe the pure cool air, as it comes swelling up from the deep-down gorges below, whose impenetrable gloom is almost awe inspiring.[2]

In planning his sunset painting, von Guérard stood at a tourist spot which, though now eclipsed by Echo Point, has been visited by literally millions of people. In the mid-nineteenth century, it and a few other waterfalls were the key sites of visitation for

Eugène (Eugen) von Guérard (1811–1901), *Weather Board Creek Falls, Jamiesons Valley, New South Wales* (1862), oil on canvas, 122.1 x 183.3 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by the ANZ Banking Group Ltd, Honorary Life Benefactors, 1989.

the then (relatively rare) connoisseurs of scenery. Wentworth or Weatherboard Falls was rapturously described by Charles Darwin who visited in 1836:

> By following down a little valley and its tiny rill of water, an immense gulf is unexpectedly seen through the trees, which border the pathway, at the depth of perhaps 1,500 feet. Walking on a few yards one stands on the brink of a vast precipice, and below is the grand bay or gulf (for I know not what other name to give it), thickly covered with forest. The point of view is situated as if at the head of a bay, the line of cliff diverging on each side, and showing headland behind headland, as on a bold sea-coast. These cliffs are composed of horizontal strata of whitish sandstone; and so absolutely vertical are they, that in many places, a person standing on the edge, and throwing down a stone, can see it strike the trees in the abyss below. So unbroken is the line, that it is said, in order to reach the foot of the waterfall, formed by this little stream, it is necessary to go a distance of sixteen miles round. About five miles distant in front, another line of cliffs extends, which thus appears completely to encircle the valley; and hence the name of bay is justified, as applied to this grand amphitheatrical depression.[3]

Just where von Guérard did his sketch is difficult to determine. The most significant difference between the initial drawing and the painting of 1862 occurs in the foreground. The tilted and inhospitable boulders which start near the bottom of the page, leading the eye towards the precipice, have been flattened, suggesting a stage-like appearance. The valley itself has been compressed, enabling its most dramatic elements to fit within the pictorial frame. The Aboriginal figure stands against this backdrop on one of the stage-like outcrops near the cliff edge. His back is turned upon the valley, though he does not meet the gaze of the viewer. He is preoccupied with his private drama. A boomerang is poised in his right hand and a spear is held in the left.

When the painting was first shown at the Victorian Exhibition of Fine Arts, the figure, if it attracted notice, was treated as a decorative flourish. The *Argus*, absorbed by nationalist objectives, claimed

> *Weather Board Creek Falls* was among the last of von Guérard's paintings to depict an Aboriginal figure. Eventually they disappeared from his paintings.

that: "We do not require either the description in the catalogue, or the presence of the aborigine in the landscape, to assure us that the subject is racy of the soil". The Aborigine was pure ornamentation in a scene that was already primitive—where the cataract tosses "its wealth of waters wastefully into an invisible abyss".[4] The critic for the *Illustrated Melbourne Post* was the only commentator who considered the specific detail of the figure to be worthy of notice, writing:

> There is nothing to break the solemn repose of the scene, save a dusky savage starting at the sudden appearance of a large snake, gliding from beneath its thick concealment of stones and grass.[5]

The snake and Aborigine are diminished by the imposing scenery. But this does not satisfactorily explain why their combative pose attracted so little interest among von Guérard's contemporaries or the manner in which it has been ignored by subsequent interpreters. Perhaps there has been a reluctance, in the context of realist expectations about landscape painting, to grapple with the anthropomorphic symbolism of the painting. The evocation of a sunset scene, and the proximity to the precipice of Aborigine and snake, raise the possibility that some sort of historical drama was being enacted on that rocky platform.

VON GUÉRARD was born in 1811 in Vienna, the son of the prominent miniaturist Bernhard von Guérard with whom he travelled to Italy in his mid teens. There he took art classes in the classical tradition and made contact with the group of expatriate German painters who became known as the Nazarenes. He was among the thousands of settlers attracted to Australia by the Gold Rush, arriving in Melbourne in 1852. His short time on the goldfields produced little gold and eventually he resumed his occupation as an artist, travelling widely and painting scenery in many parts of Australia and New Zealand. He returned to Europe for the last years of his life, but his tenure in Australia lasted thirty years—and it was the period in which rampant expansion of the pastoral industry caused rapid and profound damage to the social fabric of many Aboriginal societies.

Tim Bonyhady has observed how "European figures never seem at risk" when they appear in von Guérard's landscapes.[6] In this respect they are very different from the Aboriginal figures he depicted. Viewed as a narrative sequence, von Guérard's Australian landscapes reveal an intense interest in the changing circumstances of indigenous people. *Aborigines met on the road to the diggings* (1854), an early Australian work, depicts Aboriginal hunters in a highly active pose. Two men stride into the foreground while half a dozen others hold back so as not to disturb their quarry. *Barter*, painted the same year, takes up the subject of exchange between Aborigines and settlers. The whites—obvious visitors to the blacks' camp—are trading blankets for possum skins. In the distance, the covered wagons of pioneers are being hauled by bullocks. The Aborigines in these images are anything but diminutive 'natives' poised against a majestic landscape. They are dynamic beings—hunters, negotiators—who clearly influence their own destinies.

A diptych called *Bushy Park*, painted in 1861, marks a transformation from von Guérard's earlier representations of Aboriginal life. Bushy Park was a cattle station near Stratford in Victoria. Von Guérard used the expansive format of the panorama to encapsulate the sweeping vista of flat grazing land and low hill country beyond. It would be the epitome of pastoral abundance and colonial success, were it not that in one panel an Aboriginal family is positioned near a fallen tree while cattle feed in the distance. The frailty of these figures, not to mention the reality that they are camped on cleared grazing country—territory that is now someone else's—adds poignancy to the sister canvas which contains no human figures but does show two feuding bulls, white and dark, their horns interlocked. Daniel Thomas has described this painting as a "symbolic conflict" and relates it to other motifs in

Detail of Eugène (Eugen) von Guérard (1811–1901), *Weather Board Creek Falls, Jamiesons Valley, New South Wales* (1862), oil on canvas, 122.1 x 183.3 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by the ANZ Banking Group Ltd, Honorary Life Benefactors, 1989.

von Guérard's opus such as "a European fox stalking native kangaroos" or "European blackberry vines invading native pastures".[7]

Weather Board Creek Falls was among the last of von Guérard's paintings to depict an Aboriginal figure. Eventually they disappeared from his paintings. In this way, they reflect his pessimism about the future of Aboriginal society. This sentiment is clearly discernible within the sequence of images depicting Wentworth Falls. Each time he produced a new version of the landscape, the human presence underwent some form of transformation. In *The Weatherboard Falls*, the second, smaller painting of 1863, the Aboriginal figure is no longer a combatant. The snake is gone, the man's back is turned to the viewer. He is far more passive, a witness to the sunset scene. When, in 1866–67, von Guérard included a new rendition of the same view in his folio of coloured lithographs, the Aboriginal presence had vanished. In his stead are two pairs of European sightseers.[8] Those closest to the viewer are equipped with rifles. One crouches, the other stands, his gun pointing towards the waterfall. More distant are two other Europeans, very small, and perched on the edge of the precipice. The replacement of the Aborigine by sightseers anticipated with extraordinary foresight the rise of the tourist industry which landscape artists encouraged.

VON GUÉRARD'S depiction of snake and combatant is a fantasy, of course, but it has a peculiar, niggling kind of resonance. Having lived with a small reproduction of the 1862 painting on the wall of my studio, my fascination increased when I saw it in the flesh and experienced the proportions of the scene. The 1862 canvas is 122.1 x 183.3 centimetres, a sizeable work. Lovely details became apparent for the first time: the variegated effect of dappled light across the landscape, and the wily presentation of the artist's signature—inscribed as a graffito on a rock of his own painting. While immediately impressive in its totality, the painting begs closer inspection, encouraging the viewer to step forth and be immersed in the extraordinary proliferation of detail, much of it painted under a magnifying glass. Von Guérard's paintings were executed with such precision that botanists have been able to survey the flora represented in his landscapes.

The mortal players in the foreground are reduced to near-nothingness by the grandiosity of the backdrop. Perhaps it is this very insignificance that encourages the viewer to approach them and to engage. They embody, in their diminished state, a moment of encounter that emphasises both human and animal frailty positioned against the greater terror of the abyss. While symbolising the displacement that the artist witnessed as an overall condition in the colonies, it is difficult to believe that this Viennese Romantic, schooled in the symbolism of Claude and Poussin, could not have been intrigued by the metaphorical associations of the mythically loaded creature that he depicted and would have personally encountered during his excursions through the Australian bush.

The snake, of course, is a symbol of evil in the Christian bestiary. In von Guérard's painting it menaces a man who, in Romantic terms, could easily be thought of as inhabiting a 'state of nature'. This encounter occurs on a cliff edge, thereby intimating a fall with echoes of those key biblical descents: Lucifer's fall from heaven and Adam and Eve's from earthly paradise. Operating at this mythical level, there is also a historical dimension to the clifftop drama. A painting like Thomas Cole's *Scene from 'The Last of the Mohicans', Cora kneeling at the Feet of Tamenund* (1827) suggests that in the Americas, also, it was possible to envisage the demise of Indigenous communities by depicting them on a cliff edge. In von Guérard, however, there is an added connotation not discernible in Cole's depiction of the Mohicans gathered on a ledge of overhanging rock. That the menacing creature which threatens the Aborigine might stand as a metaphor for the colonisers of his country is confirmed by the

When, in 1866–67, von Guérard included a new rendition of the same view in his folio of coloured lithographs, the Aboriginal presence had vanished. In his stead are two pairs of European sightseers.

surprising array of narrative possibilities suggested in the Wentworth Falls landscapes. A man of the land stands poised with a snake. The snake vanishes. He watches the sunset. The man himself disappears. Tourists arrive. One carries a gun . . . There is the hint of a story, but its components are too open, too scattered, to plot a particular course. While the narrative might signal Aboriginal disappearance, it could also refer to the expunging of the snake.

It is this ambiguity that makes the drawing, paintings and lithograph genuinely exciting as objects of contemplation. Intriguing spectacles in their own right, they also allow one to re-approach the scene and consider its many nuances. Tempting as it is to regard the second painting, where the Aborigine gazes at the sunset, as something close to a valediction, my own wanderings around the scene have led to quite opposite imaginings. Sitting on King's Tableland, the plateau above the waterfall, I look at grooves in the rock which were caused by the sharpening of Aboriginal spears. In this plateau country, never far from a convenient expanse of sandstone bedrock, it is interesting to note how frequently such sharpening grooves are found at elevated, panoramic spots like this. Aesthetic preferences were obviously important in influencing the choice of location for the repetitious labour of sharpening spears. Viewing the sunset is a majestic moment in its own right.

Following this, one should at least attempt to consider what the view might have represented to the spear sharpeners or other Aboriginal observers. The vertiginous uncertainty that haunts *all* the figures posed along the cliff edge must be viewed in light of the reality that the seemingly unattainable valleys were the very places where the Gundungurra were most at home. The Coxs–Warragamba river system, which you peer into when you look at von Guérard's painting, was a concentration of mammal, bird and aquatic fauna. The fertile, frequently flooded river flats provided the staples for human existence. We can imagine a pattern of occupation in which a regular life in the valleys was punctuated by seasonal excursions to the high country of the plateaus. It was the very opposite to the European practice of experiencing the landscape from the clifftops.

KNOWING that von Guérard did not see an Aboriginal person when he drafted his initial sketch, it could be inferred that to some degree, *all* the figures in his paintings are out of place. Situated in dangerous proximity to the chasm, these personages invoke an empathy common in many experiences of vertigo, in which the terror of the abyss is not confined to approaching it oneself; it can also take hold simply by watching someone else approach the edge.

That the settlement of the Blue Mountains spread along the highway, and that the favoured tourist haunts would develop on the most dangerously exposed sections of the escarpment, are essential aspects of the way the region became a site of pilgrimage and visitation. The bones are there in von Guérard's images. A landscape of exquisite beauty, of unreachable depths and of persons vulnerable and endangered would intimately resonate with the experiences of those who had come to occupy this land. The overwhelming sense of danger and frailty that hangs over the characters in paintings and lithograph points not only to an endangered Aboriginal future but to the profoundly unsettled quality of the settler experience.

1. Von Guérard, *The Weatherboard Falls* (1863), oil on canvas, 45.5 x 75.8 cm. Collection of the Geelong Art Gallery, Geelong.
2. *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 3 January 1863, p.11.
3. Darwin, 'Journey Across the Blue Mountains' in G. Mackaness (ed.), *Fourteen Journeys Over the Blue Mountains*, Horwitz-Grahame, Sydney, 1965, p.232.
4. *Argus*, 29 December 1862, p.5.
5. *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 3 January 1863, p.11.
6. Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition*, OUP, Melbourne, 1991, p.78.
7. D. Thomas, Introduction to Bruce, *Eugen von Guérard*, Australian Gallery Directors Council, 1980, p.13.
8. Von Guérard, *Australian Landscapes*, Hamel & Ferguson, Melbourne, 1866–67.

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essay / **JENNIFER JONES**

WHY WEREN'T WE LISTENING?

Oodgeroo and Judith Wright

JUDITH WRIGHT AND OODGEROO shared a thirty-year friendship, which, like many other aspects of their lives, left a legacy for those of us who 'have ears to hear' the lessons of their experience. Theirs was a multi-faceted relationship. They were, each for the other, colleague, teacher, mentor, patron and supporter, advisor, fellow activist and ally, confidant and close personal friend. These roles demanded the development and exercise of an art that serves as a successful foundation for most relationships, particularly cross-cultural collaborations. Judith Wright and Oodgeroo listened to each other. Listening, Oodgeroo argued in a letter to Judith Wright in 1991 was an art that was not frequently practiced in the contact zone. At this time Judith Wright was experiencing continuing difficulties with the Wilderness Society,[1] which refused to acknowledge Aboriginal rights in wilderness areas. Judith Wright was frustrated that many environmentalists left "no room in [their] world for any new kind of vision . . . nor any other ethic than [their] own".[2] This experience, wrote Oodgeroo, was familiar to Aboriginal people:

> Aborigines suffer so much from 'emotional' well-meaning 'do gooders'. They are still making decisions for us. Why the hell can't they understand that it is time to start listening to us instead of fouling our lives with their English minds and fucked up colonialist attitudes?[3]

Perhaps, as Oodgeroo indicated, the question non-indigenous Australians need to ask is not 'why weren't we told?' but 'why weren't we listening?'.

It has been argued that Oodgeroo's first poetry collection *We Are Going* (1964) should *not* be understood as 'breaking an Aboriginal silence', rather as, "ending a period of white deafness, by bringing a powerful Aboriginal voice into earshot of large, mainstream audiences both in Australia and overseas".[4] Indeed, Penny Van Toorn has demonstrated that Aboriginal people sought to communicate their concerns textually from the earliest days of white invasion.[5] Gaining the attention and understanding of an often indifferent or hostile audience proved to be the challenge.

Judith Wright cultivated the ability to actively listen, making an enormous difference to the quality of her cross-cultural collaboration with Oodgeroo. The public ear to Aboriginal voices was/is substantially characterised by selective hearing. This is best illustrated by contrasting the collaboration between Judith Wright and Oodgeroo with other key cross-cultural collaborative relationships of the same era.

Oodgeroo was always a woman who fought her own battles. In an era when foundational Aboriginal women writers frequently accessed the resources and support of 'communities of commitment' to facilitate their writing and publication, Oodgeroo primarily worked alone. Foundational Aboriginal women writers such as Monica Clare and Margaret Tucker forged long-term coalitions with white political groups and their ideological structures: particularly CPA aligned 'united front' groups and Moral Re-Armament. From these communities of commitment they drew support that aided and shaped their autobiographical narratives *Karobran* and *If*

Everyone Cared, which were both published in the late 1970s. Clare and Tucker's writing manifests tensions between their chosen politics, everyday realities and Aboriginal cultural beliefs. Clare and Tucker reconciled these tensions through pragmatic compromise with their supporters, particularly their editors. Collaborative compromise allowed both the writer and the group that supported them to realise some important goals through the publication.[6]

Oodgeroo's political affiliation and support structures differed from those of Tucker and Clare, who found life-long ideological homes within white-dominated communities of commitment. Oodgeroo's political history was marked by unpopular, independent stances. Oodgeroo tried and abandoned a variety of white political organisations, always struggling with the limitation of ideological and organisational self-interest. Her primary allegiance was to Aboriginality, and she maintained a freedom to choose, moving between ideologies. By the time Oodgeroo came to write her autobiographical stories in the period 1969 to 1972, she had moved through both the CPA in the 1950s, the ALP in the 1960s, and had resigned from FCAATSI by 1969, then the peak organisation in Aboriginal politics. Oodgeroo had also joined and was soon to resign from the National Tribal Council; the Indigenous-led alternative to FCAATSI.[7]

Oodgeroo severed her early association with the Communist Party following disagreement with the prioritisation of the party line: "I didn't stay in the Communist Party long because they wanted to write my speeches. They wanted me to say what they wanted me to say. I said, 'No, can't do that. I'm no parrot'".[8] Similarly, her decade-long commitment to peak pan-Aboriginal political organisation, FCAATSI ended because of intractable differences with the white-dominated executive. Oodgeroo believed FCAATSI's 'equal rights' platform ignored the significance of cultural difference and the need for black political autonomy.[9] Oodgeroo repeatedly strove for, but was disappointed in attempts at political solidarity and community in activism. Instead she drew a circle of prominent and committed individuals, a dedicated but disparate band of supporters who formed a loose coalition with each other through their mutual association with her. Judith Wright was one of the most faithful and significant members of this group and together they shared an important, lasting personal correspondence.

Judith Wright met Oodgeroo (then known as Kath Walker) in 1963, in her capacity as a part-time reader of poetry manuscripts for Jacaranda Press:

> In 1963, a manuscript came to Jacaranda, its author then not known to me. But the poems rang out and commanded attention.[10]

Judith Wright had encountered Kath Walker's 'Aboriginal Charter of Rights' and immediately recognised "a new voice in the fields of Aboriginal subjection". Wright continued, "This poetry had to be published and listened to [. . .]".[11]

Oodgeroo admired and respected Judith Wright as a poet and activist. In a letter responding to Judith's new collection, 'The Other Half' in November1966 Oodgeroo expressed her desire to develop their mentoring relationship:

> I wish you were with me so I could ask the many questions that come into my mind. Perhaps one day I shall be left alone to do some research on poets and poetry, which I feel necessary if I am to develop as a poet.[12]

This mentoring relationship was reciprocal. Through Oodgeroo, Judith Wright "learn[t] about Aboriginal culture from the inside".[13] This was significant for Judith, whose interest and concern for Aboriginal people was entwined with her love for the land.[14] This sense of connection between the wellbeing of

Above: Oodgeroo and Judith Wright at Wright's home in Braidwood, NSW, 1993

Aboriginal people and the land had solidified into an understanding as early as 1942, when Judith first considered writing her family history, and further during the 1950s when she began research for *The Generations of Men*. In 1951 Judith Wright turned down a financially attractive offer to edit a collection of Aboriginal legends for Oxford University Press, realising that she could not comply with the pressure "to try to change them into European yarns to amuse kids".[15] This ethical decision will appear clear-sighted and sadly ironic when I later briefly discuss the editorial treatment of Oodgeroo's autobiographical stories and Dreamtime legends in 1972.

During the 1960s Oodgeroo and Judith Wright learnt from each other and a special bond grew. Oodgeroo would sometimes take a retreat at Calanthe, to write or to get away "from the rat race". At night they spent long sessions on the verandah or in the kitchen over a bottle of scotch. Judith described one visit in a letter to Kathleen McArthur:

> Kath . . . has been here on and off for a fortnight; the poor woman is in even more a state of despair over her people's situation than we are of the country's and is rapidly convincing herself that bloody revolution is the only answer. We have long and exhausting bottle-fests while she argues it out. I shall be as much of a new lefty as she is before long.[16]

Both Oodgeroo and Judith Wright fought major political battles in the 1960s, and during times of considerable stress their practice at Calanthe was to "avoid talking too much of politics, whether government or Aboriginal, [. . .] taking a working holiday away from [their] problems".[17] Like Judith, Oodgeroo experienced demands on time and energy that friends described as absurd.[18] They both lived a "double identity";[19] creative output vied with family and community responsibilities, the demands of public political life and a relentless itinerary.

For example, in 1969 Oodgeroo gained ALP preselection for her home electorate of Greenslopes, contesting the Queensland state election. Her platform of Aboriginal self-governance was not popular in Greenslopes, which was a blue-ribbon Liberal seat.[20] Just one month after this electoral loss Oodgeroo embarked for London where she was an Australian delegate to the World Council of Churches conference: 'Consultation on Racism'. The London conference confirmed Oodgeroo's opinion that, "Australian blacks seemed so far behind many other indigenous peoples"[21] and redoubled her frustration with lack of access to political power. Oodgeroo wrote to Judith Wright, expressing her exhaustion and anguish. Her mind was "in turmoil and I feel I must get away from the rat race for two reasons 1) I am tired 2) I feel I need to write my thoughts about the racial situation".[22] Oodgeroo explained her decision:

> I am withdrawing from the mad rat race of society for a while to write another book. [. . .] I am cancelling much of my work and by the middle of October I should be free to do some writing.[23]

Oodgeroo asked Judith Wright to join her in writing a bi-racial dialogue on "the reconstruction of the human race":

> What I had in mind is to think black and for someone to think white. There is a need for a healthy balance of criticising world affairs. Is it possible for you to be the white thinker and assist me to write the book? [. . .] I am afraid if I write it alone it will be lopsided and biased.[24]

This three-week retreat to 'Calanthe' did not result in a dialogue on racism. Oodgeroo wrote eight of the stories that would constitute her 1972 book *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, germinating the first autobiographical narrative to be published by an Aboriginal woman and marking an important turn in her politics and writing. Oodgeroo's political activism was closely aligned with her style as a writer. Her position as high-profile 'people's poet' in the early 1960s was established in tandem with a deep commitment to pan-Aboriginal political organisations. This shift to prose in the late 1960s mirrored her growing investment in the education of children and cultural conservation through relationship with the land: "I'm sick and tired of talking to mentally constipated adults; they don't listen. It's the children who are going to change this world for the better, not the adults".[25] In 1972, Oodgeroo returned to her traditional home on Stradbroke Island, establishing 'Moongalba', a cultural education centre, and writing more prose for children.

Ironically, Judith Wright, whose failing hearing

rendered her almost completely deaf during the period of their friendship, demonstrated a capacity to listen that was unparalleled in Oodgeroo's experience of non-indigenous adults. Judith Wright listened, encouraged and fostered Oodgeroo's dreams of 'Moongalba' her 'sitting down place'. Whilst Oodgeroo wrote her autobiographical and Dreamtime stories, Judith Wright wrote 'Two Dreamtimes' for Kath Walker:

> *Kathy my sister with the torn heart,*
> *I don't know how to thank you*
> *for your dreamtime stories of joy and grief*
> *written on paperbark*[26]

Oodgeroo's friendship meant an enormous amount to Wright, whom she counted as "the person I speak to . . . most easily".[27] This relationship had enabled Wright to re-evaluate her inheritance as one 'born of the conquerors':

> *If we are sisters, it's in this—*
> *our grief for a lost country,*
> *the place we dreamed in long ago,*
> *poisoned now and crumbling.*
>
> *Let us go back to that far time,*
> *I riding the cleared hills,*
> *plucking blue leaves for their eucalypt scent,*
> *hearing the call of the plover,*
>
> *in a land I thought was mine for life.*
> *I mourn it as you mourn*
> *the ripped length of the island beaches,*
> *the drained paperbark swamps.*[28]

Sharing this grief bound the women together as 'shadow sisters', as did the realisation that their destiny or doom would also be shared:

> *Raped by rum and an alien law,*
> *Progress and economics,*
> *Are you and I and a once loved land*
>
> *peopled by tribes and trees;*
> *doomed by traders and stock exchanges,*
> *bought by faceless strangers*[29]

Whilst listening to Oodgeroo, Judith Wright had learnt of 'a knife between us', contact history told from an Aboriginal perspective. That they could still meet at Calanthe 'in secret kindness' was a treasure and a small triumph over the 'cruel faces' of Judith's 'righteous kin'. This knife, made 'from your country's bones' can also be read as the weapon of language that the poets shared, which Wright symbolically offers to Oodgeroo:

> *The knife's between us. I turn it round,*
> *the handle to your side,*
> *the weapon made from your country's bones.*
> *I have no right to take it.*
>
> *But both of us die as our dreamtime dies.*
> *I don't know what to give you*
> *for your gay stories, your sad eyes,*
> *but that, and a poem, sister.*[30]

In this poem, and through her actions, Judith Wright revealed how the ethic of active listening shaped the construction of her whiteness. Wright chose to listen as:

> *Over the rum your voice sang*
> *The tales of an old people,*
> *their dreaming buried, the place forgotten*[31]

Judith Wright eschewed the conventional and convenient invisibility of whiteness, choosing instead to face her inheritance. From where Judith stood "with all my fathers, their guilt and righteous" it became plain that "We too have lost our dreaming".[32]

Oodgeroo received Judith Wright's gift of a listening ear as recompense and healing. Oodgeroo in her poem 'Sister Poet':

> *Where you sit with your "civilised" kin*
> *Shadow sister, your high ideals*
> *Compensate me for their sin.*[33]

Oodgeroo was so moved by Judith Wright's gift of 'Two Dreamtimes', that she was unable to read it aloud for several months.[34] Similarly, when Oodgeroo replied with her poem 'Sister Poet' in 1975, Judith Wright wrote to her saying:

> Look after yourself Kath and keep writing; it reaches more people than you'd think and we've only got one Kathy Walker. I am keeping the poem in my special treasures and though our shadow cries, still we are tied together in a special way and I love you.[35]

This special relationship modeled a foundation for successful cross-cultural collaborations, if not the art of friendship in general. Indeed, I count it a privilege to have read the letters Oodgeroo and Judith

Wright shared in thirty years of correspondence.

Now I turn briefly and somewhat sadly, to contrast this relationship with other collaborations of the same era, including the editorial collaboration experienced by Oodgeroo in the preparation of *Stradbroke Dreamtime*.

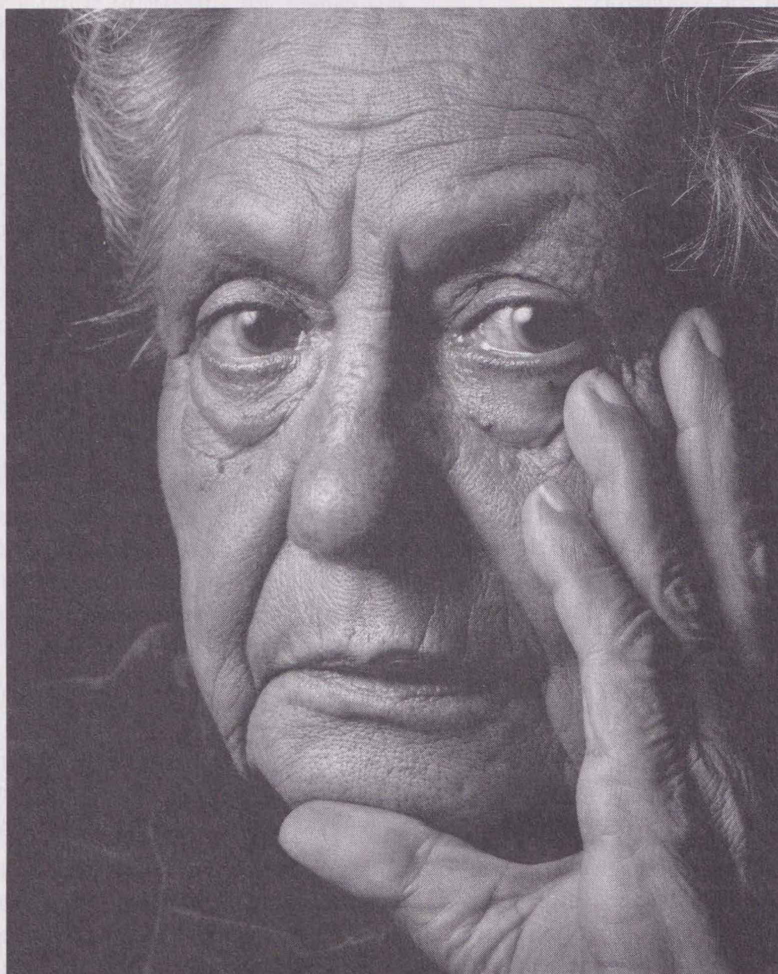
OTHER COLLABORATIONS

Most foundational Aboriginal women writers engaged in a process of cross-cultural collaboration, be that in the transcription of an oral text or in the editing of the original manuscript. The original manuscripts prepared by Margaret Tucker and Monica Clare were both edited by members of their community of commitment. Given this common allegiance, it became clear in the examination of the edited manuscripts that the editors held a philosophical investment in the style of expression and success of the Aboriginal autobiography. Although I found the texts to have been significantly altered, the published versions still substantially agree with the epistemological foundation of the manuscripts, but without the original emphasis upon Aboriginal cultural priorities. Tied as they were to a philosophic community, these texts shared the success and/or decline of the grand narratives that underpin them. Unlike *If Everyone Cared* and *Karobran*, Oodgeroo's *Stradbroke Dreamtime* was written in the aftermath of the severing of community bonds and without a pre-existing relationship or negotiated understanding between editor and author.[36]

The severing of ties with her communities of commitment, particularly the NTC, left Oodgeroo shattered, vulnerable and substantially unable to defend the textual expression of her emerging epistemology in *Stradbroke Dreamtime*. Her circle of friends, though deeply concerned and loyal, did not provide the hedging protection availed by a structured community of commitment. Oodgeroo's political journey illustrates that the pragmatic need for white support outside these institutional structures was at the risk of continuing white dominance. Opportunities which appeared to be in her interest were not always so. For example, one supporter:

> blandly told me the reason why she got me here is in the hope that she will get her professorship [. . .] She treats me like a very fragile black golliwog, and I hate it [. . .] I don't give a damn whether she gets it [the promotion] or not but I sure hate to be used this way.[37]

As Judith Wright realised so perceptively in 1951, it was "very easy for non-Aboriginal people to use Aborigines for their own ends".[38]



When Oodgeroo wrote *Stradbroke Dreamtime* modernist thinking still attempted to resurrect a mythologised 'traditional' Indigene when engaging with Aboriginal issues. Oodgeroo wrote from the position of an urban-based Indigenous woman who was attempting to re-engage with her Aboriginal heritage and spirituality. Reflecting this standpoint, the manuscript of *Stradbroke Dreamtime* crossed genre boundaries and pushed the limits of Aboriginal expression as deemed acceptable by then prevailing white cultural criteria.

Stradbroke Dreamtime is an unusual text because of the deliberate generic combination of autobiographical stories and tribal legends (Oodgeroo's preferred phrase). The manuscript of *Stradbroke Dreamtime* challenges the individualistic underpinning of autobiography and offers a contemporary understanding of Aboriginality that melds traditional spirituality with urbanised daily realities. The editorial response to the generic border-crossing performed by the original manuscript (crossing autobiography, myth and children's literature) was to reinstate genre boundaries. A fictionalised Aboriginal narrative voice was imposed upon the text in order to represent a primitive Aboriginality deemed acceptable within white discourses.[39] The published text thus remained tethered to the stereotypes of romanticised Aboriginal primitivism that Oodgeroo had sought to eschew.

Oodgeroo's political and creative liaison with Judith Wright was not an encounter between author and editor, therefore this comparison focuses upon the spirit manifest in their collaboration. Judith Wright demonstrated the willingness to construct her whiteness reflexively. Contrasting the other collaborations I outlined in this paper, Judith listened and did not impose her own conception of Aboriginality upon Oodgeroo. Judith Wright was prepared to accept Aboriginal representations of Aboriginal experience and then acknowledged the impact of this history upon her position as one 'born of the conquerors':

> *over the drinks at night*
> *we can exchange our separate griefs,*
> *but yours and mine are different.*[40]

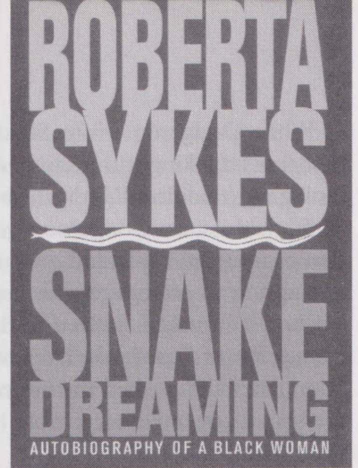
By accepting these differences Judith Wright and Oodgeroo offer us a legacy of active listening and learning, a way of living together in the contact zone.

1. Veronica Brady, *South of My Days: A Biography of Judith Wright*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1998, pp.466-73.
2. ibid., p.474.
3. Oodgeroo letter to Judith Wright, Judith Wright Collection, National Library, Box 64, Folder 420.
4. Penny van Toorn, 'Indigenous Texts and Narratives', *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, Elizabeth Webby (ed.), CUP, 2000, p.29.
5. See Penny van Toorn, 'Indigenous Australian Life writing: Tactics and Transformations', *Telling Stories: Indigenous history and memory in Australia and New Zealand*, Bain Attwood and Fiona Magowan (eds), Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2001, pp.1-20.
6. See Jennifer Jones, *Aboriginal Women's Autobiographical Narratives and the Politics of Collaboration*, PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2001.
7. ibid., pp.137-74.
8. Susan Mitchell, *The Matriarchs: Twelve Australian women talk about their lives to Susan Mitchell*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1987, p.197.
9. Jones, op. cit., p.146.
10. Kathie Cochrane, *Oodgeroo*, UQP, St Lucia, 1994, p.163.
11. ibid., p.166.
12. Oodgeroo letter to Judith Wright, op. cit.
13. Brady, op. cit., p.303.
14. ibid., p.194.
15. ibid., p.192.
16. ibid., p.304.
17. Judith Wright McKinney, Letter to Jennifer Jones, 1999.
18. Cochrane, op. cit., p.79.
19. John Collins, 'A Mate in Publishing', *Oodgeroo: A Tribute*, UQP, St Lucia, 1994, p.19.
20. Cochrane, op. cit., p.77.
21. Peter Read, 'Cheeky, Insolent and Anti-white: the split in the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—Easter 1970', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 36:1, 1990, p.76.
22. Wright, op. cit.
23. ibid.
24. ibid.
25. Terry Lane, *As the twig is Bent*, Dove Communications, Melbourne, 1979, p.33.
26. Quoted in Cochrane, op. cit., pp.206-9.
27. Brady, op. cit., p.361.
28. Quoted in Cochrane, op. cit.
29. ibid.
30. ibid.
31. ibid.
32. ibid.
33. ibid., p.97.
34. ibid., p. 96.
35. Wright, op. cit.
36. Jones, op. cit., pp.229-206.
37. Wright, op. cit.
38. Brady, op. cit., p.192.
39. Jones, op. cit.
40. Quoted in Cochrane, op. cit.

Opposite page:
Oodgeroo Noonuccal, photograph by George Fetting

Jennifer Jones gained her PhD from the University of Adelaide in 2002.

essay / **SONJA KURTZER**



IS SHE OR ISN'T SHE?

Roberta Sykes and 'authentic' Aboriginality

THE PUBLICATION OF *Snake Cradle* and *Snake Dreaming*, the first two volumes of Roberta Sykes's autobiographical trilogy, generated a great deal of debate in Australia's Indigenous community. Was Sykes claiming an Aboriginal identity in these texts, and did she have a right to claim it? Sykes has said she never claimed an association with the Birrigubba Juru-Bindal clan.[1] She also said she knows very little about her parentage and has been at a tremendous disadvantage in not having the "luxury of being able to make any claim at all in terms of clan or extra-familial relationships".[2] Referring to herself as a "Black Australian" enabled Sykes to create an ambiguous identity.

In October 1998 *The Australian* published responses to these texts by some Townsville Aboriginal women[3] who called on Sykes to apologise for what they perceived as her wrongful adoption of the snake as her totem.[4] Aboriginal academic Professor Gracelyn Smallwood disavowed Sykes's purported claim to an Aboriginal identity, stating that she has been "incorrectly portrayed in the media" as an Aborigine.[5] In a later story Pat O'Shane accused Sykes of the "sin of omission".[6] O'Shane argued that while Sykes had never made the claim to an Aboriginal identity, she failed to correct media reports describing her as such.[7] O'Shane argued that Sykes lived a life very different from "every other Aboriginal kid in Queensland" and that her story does not provide evidence of an Aboriginal life.[8] She concluded that Sykes's experience of racism is not the experience of Aboriginal Australians.[9]

These articles are indicative of some of the confusions concerning what it means to claim Aboriginal identity. They reveal the competing and sometimes contradictory ways in which Aboriginal identity is defined: through descent or particular life experiences, or knowledge of the 'ancient order' or traditional Aboriginal customs, or by associating with Aboriginal people, or being accepted by an Aboriginal community. Sykes calls on some of these understandings in an attempt to establish an identity, however ambiguous, for the subject of her autobiography. These contradictory understandings provide readers with the possibility of reading Sykes's story as both very similar to and very different from other Aboriginal stories.

IDENTITY

In Britain, according to Stuart Hall, the notion of a 'black' identity developed as a means of organising a politics of resistance against the common experience of racism and marginalisation.[10] He argues that this 'black' identity led to an impasse. Although it was designed to challenge, resist and transform the dominant forms of representation, it too was simplified and stereotyped. Hall argues that postmodernism has led to the de-centring or displacement of "old hierarchies" and "the grand narratives" based on notions of the universal self and his others.[11] This displacement has opened up opportunities for previously marginalised people to contest dominant understandings of identity, leading to the partial development of new identities which encompass a recognition of the extraordinary diversity of speaking positions, social experiences and cultures.

We need to be aware, however, of both the need for and limitations of identity; and of how it devel-

ops within the confines of an oppressive relationship. As Hall argues, identities are imaginary positions, or "imagined communities" but are none the less important.[12] For Hall, identity is not "who we are" or "where we have come from", but more about "what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves".[13] Identity construction for Indigenous Australians is even more complex because it needs to incorporate not only the desires of the subject and his or her imagined community, but also the desires of the dominant culture.

LOCATING THE 'AUTHENTIC' NATIVE

Some of the conflict over notions of Aboriginal identity can be explained in terms of the peculiar place that the native as "defiled image" occupies in the psyche of the settler society.[14] Elizabeth Povinelli claims that settler society seeks out the native as evidence of the existence of an "ancient order".[15] This "ancient order" is the "something else" or the "something more" of Aboriginal society which can only be glimpsed when "every last trace of white men's effect on Aboriginal society" is "altogether cast out of the calculation".[16] Povinelli argues that this "something else" constitutes that which the state and nation recognise as worthy and deserving of public sympathy and state resources.[17] This denies the conditions under which the category 'Indigenous' came into being—that is, in relation to the imperial state and the socialised identities within it. This does not prevent settler society, however, from continuing to demand evidence of the existence of this "ancient order".[18] Nor does it prevent Aboriginal people or those who imagine themselves in this category, from attempting to perform this "something else" in an attempt to gain the personal and material benefits that may accrue as a result.

From this perspective, Aboriginal identity can become a performance; that is, proof to a dominant culture that 'real', 'authentic' natives exist. Indigenous Australians who cannot perform 'authentic' Aboriginal identity are viewed as failures.[19] Povinelli argues that the very terms that constitute Indigenous subjects also define them as failures, in that 'real', 'authentic' natives always exist somewhere other than where actual Aboriginal people are.[20]

Aboriginal people may resist this demand for performance, thus establishing a site of conflict, because other groups in society, notably particular historians, social anthropologists and other Aboriginal communities, may insist that their ideas represent the 'truth'. While some Aboriginal people may be able to occupy this space and receive the rewards that accompany this performance, others cannot perform 'authentic' Aboriginality. The danger for these people is that they will be declared 'inauthentic' natives, 'impure hybrids' and no longer worthy of a special place in a multicultural society.[21] Performance or the unwillingness to perform can determine rewards or punishments from the settler society.

LIFE EXPERIENCE AS THE MARKER

One means of determining Aboriginal identity has been the categorisation of particular life experiences. This notion has its history in colonial discourse where certain practices and beliefs were said to be 'traditionally' Aboriginal while others were said to have been learnt from the settler society. Such views derive from the notion of Aboriginal culture being the essential 'something else' of the primitive 'Other'. This denies the impact of colonialism and the ways that Aboriginal people have 'chosen' to or been forced to adapt to the demands of colonisation. In relation to Aboriginal women who have been forced to live on both sides of the colonised frontier, Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that this view denies them the possibility of acquiring "new knowledges in order to act and function in contexts not of their choosing or under their control within the dominant culture".[22] Many Aboriginal women became involved in relationships with 'white' men, for example, which provided them with access to the new society and may also have been a means of surviving the brutalisation of their own society. Aboriginal women also worked as domestic servants in 'white' settler homes. Such work took them away from their communities and from the opportunity to learn traditional laws and customs, but again provided them with the opportunity for survival. To insist on knowledge of particular practices or beliefs as the markers of 'authentic' Aboriginal identity is to deny the way that certain identities were formed within the context of colonial relations. As Philip Morrissey states:

> Where there are records of people passing, we see that they did so at the cost of continual vigilance and that their selves were in effect created, like other Aboriginal selves, by the experience of being Indigenous in a colonial state.[23]

'DESCENT' AS THE MARKER

The state has sought to define Aboriginal identity since the moment of colonial contact. Firstly, the state was concerned to recognise and preserve, or at least record, 'authentic' or 'real' Aboriginal culture, as it existed prior to colonial contact. (That this recording has taken place during colonial contact has been denied by many historians and social anthropologists in an effort to maintain the belief in the 'something else' of the primitive 'Other'.) The second concern of the state has been with those deemed 'inauthentic' Aboriginals, either by virtue of their lost or forsaken 'traditional' practices or because they no longer 'look' Aboriginal. This is the problem of the 'half-caste', the 'quarter-caste', the 'quadroon', the 'octaroon', the 'hybrid'.[24] Here, notions of racial or biological inheritance have been conflated with cultural inheritance. It was thought that once Aboriginal people lost their distinctive physical features, through miscegenation, they would also lose their cultural traditions.[25] The ethnocentric view that 'white' society was superior to Aboriginal also meant that 'white' policymakers thought that if one could escape one's positioning as Aboriginal, one would want to do so. Thus the state intervened to remove fair-skinned Aboriginal children from their families and communities and attempted to 'assimilate' them into non-Aboriginal society. The notion that Aboriginal people become less 'authentic' as their skin colour lightens operates to deny active, interventionist state practices. To connect Aboriginal identity to physical appearance is to deny the particular histories of Aboriginal people who were removed from their families.

SNAKE CRADLE AND *SNAKE DREAMING*

The reader is introduced in the first two volumes of Sykes's autobiography to a number of signs that the author is speaking as a racial 'other'. The front covers of both books contain an illustration of a colourful snake painting by Indigenous artist Bronwyn Bancroft. Both texts are subtitled *Snake Dreaming: Autobiography of a Black Woman*. The inside front cover states that: "Dr Roberta Sykes was born in the 1940s in Townsville, North Queensland, and is one of Australia's best known activists for Black rights." An identity as 'black' rather than Aboriginal is thus highlighted. The reader is presented with an unidentified photograph of two young girls, the author and her sister, dressed in similar dresses, standing side by side. The girls have dark skin and dark curly hair. Through these various signs, the reader is primed to expect a story of racial 'otherness'. In Australia, where knowledge of 'black' Australians other than Aboriginal is limited, it is likely that the story will be read as that of an Aboriginal woman. Though the texts never confirm this reading, neither do they dispel it.

The young child of *Snake Cradle* does not initially have an awareness of her racial identity. Sykes constructs a young child who is intelligent, inquisitive, sensitive and innocent.[26] In the first chapter, a more mature narrator often speaks on behalf of the child, instilling her story with a sense of meaning, coherence and purpose much like the narrator of a traditional autobiography. The child is constructed as being just like any other, until the knowledge of racial difference and its effects disturb her innocence. During this short-lived time of innocence, the narrator draws attention to other characters' physical appearances, such as 'Uncle George' whom we are told was a "very black man" and could be a relative (1:11). Just as a child would not have the language to name racial identities, the narrator of the texts does not name her own or other people's racial identities but simply comments on physical appearances. This device enables an ambivalence around the racial identity of the protagonist.

Later stories highlight the way an increasing knowledge of her difference leads to a desire to identify with those she perceives as similar to her. During her time in an orphanage in Rockhampton, Roberta is identified by the nuns as an 'Islander' because of her tight curly hair, and she is segregated in the Islanders' dormitory (1:44). Spending time in an orphanage is a familiar experience for the many Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their families. This story creates a sense of connection with Aboriginal stories for the young Roberta. An important difference, however, is that Roberta's mother is able to resume care of her children when she is ready to do so.[27] It is at the orphanage that Roberta notices the dark colour of other children, her similarity to them and her difference from the 'white' children (1:45).

The racial identities of Roberta's mother and father are ambiguous. The narrator states that she knew very little of her mother's life, including information about her family, where she was born, where she lived or worked. Roberta only ever meets one of her mother's sisters despite her coming from

Desire on the part of the author to understand who she is and where she is from is never fulfilled but the ambiguity may signal a longing for connection.

a family of "as many as sixteen or eighteen children" (1:13). With a paucity of information relating to her mother, the narrator focuses on identifying individuals outside of the immediate family. The reader is informed of various Aboriginal relatives such as a cousin, Hiram, who we are told is the son of an Aboriginal boxer (1:74). The reader is not told whether the relationship is established through her mother, father, or through marriage, or whether 'cousin' or 'uncle' is a term of respect, indicating a social rather than a biological relationship. Other Aboriginal women living in Townsville identify Roberta's mother, Mrs Patterson as 'white' and then speculate as to who Roberta's 'real' biological mother might be (1:95). This creates the idea that Roberta could be an Aboriginal child who has been removed from her biological mother's care to be raised by a 'white' woman. The narrator does not provide evidence that this is likely to be the case. In response to trying to provide these Aboriginal women with information on her family, Roberta begins to question her mother about her identity.

Roberta's mother tells her a number of different stories relating to the identity of Roberta's father. Her mother at various times says her father was from Fiji and Papua New Guinea (1:96). She also tells a number of stories about her name and those of her sisters, which Roberta finds out are not true (1:97). Established as an unreliable source, her mother finally tells of a father who was an American soldier and "who was half Negro and half Cherokee Indian"(1:98).

The story does provide the young Roberta with a notion of family and respectability and an explanation for her racially different physical appearance, but the story remains suspect. This is particularly so given the younger sister Leonie's apparent 'Asian' appearance. That Roberta's father might be Aboriginal remains a distinct possibility within the text.

The narrator also does not rule out the possibility of the mother being Aboriginal. Stories of Roberta's mother's attitude to welfare create uncertainty concerning her racial identity (1:99–101). In the context of Aboriginal children being removed from their families and Aboriginal women passing as 'white' to escape this practice, Roberta's mother could be assumed to be a fair-skinned Aboriginal woman passing as 'white'.[28] Indeed, this is the reading of one critic.[29] The mother's insistence to authorities that she is 'white' and her negative attitude toward Aboriginal people could be read as denial of her Aboriginal identity. At the end of Sykes's second text, Roberta reinforces the impression that her mother's identity as 'white' is questionable (2:242–43):

> I also carefully noted that Mum's own racial background had not been questioned. As long as the papers described her as 'white', she wasn't obliged to clarify and neither did she object (2:242).

Sykes does not offer any clarity regarding what she believes to be her mother's 'true' identity.

DESCENT AND ABORIGINAL IDENTITY

If, according to Hall, identities are about the way in which we imagine ourselves in relation to dominant ideas concerning history and culture, then it is possible to read the protagonist of Sykes's texts as Aboriginal. The ambiguity about racial origins and the numerous references to relatives that might establish an 'Aboriginal' rather than a 'black' identity for this subject might also underscore a desire for an identity as Aboriginal. Desire on the part of the author to understand who she is and where she is from is never fulfilled but the ambiguity may signal a longing for connection.[30]

Identity construction is also about the setting up of boundaries.[31] Some Aboriginal people view descent as a legitimate boundary of Aboriginal identity.[32] The issue of descent is problematic where based on genealogical and biological notions of inheritance, and other Aboriginal people view descent differently. Philip Morrissey, for example, views descent as an "historical connection that leads back to land and which claims a particular history".[33] Ian Anderson claims that the notion of 'blood' signifies for Aboriginal people "a connection through kinship with your mob—both living and ancestral".[34] This is one aspect of Aboriginal identity which sets

it apart from other 'black' identities in Australia. Claiming an Aboriginal identity is a political as well as a social act which includes claiming the right to land and the inheritance of particular rights which come from being defined as 'Indigenous'. The concept of descent is also about refusing the positioning of Aboriginal people as members of a 'dying race'.[35] Other Aboriginal people have prioritised particular life experiences or knowledge of Aboriginal culture as a legitimate means of establishing the right to an Aboriginal identity, though they do not seek to exclude the concept of descent.[36] Rather, they view descent as well as other aspects, like life experience, to be the essential characteristics of Aboriginal identity.

LIFE EXPERIENCES

While the issue of descent remains unresolved within Sykes's text, and the protagonist never claims an Aboriginal identity outright, the telling of particular life experiences could provide the impression of an Aboriginal life. Stories of such experiences are scattered throughout both texts. There is the racism that the young Roberta experiences from school children (1:51), school teachers (1:140–141), police officers (1:187), employers (1:165) and other people she encounters in her life. Migrant children call her and her sisters names such as "natives" and "dirty black gins" (1:51–55). Relatives on Roberta's mother's side of the family 'shun' her mother because of her dark children (1:74). When she is older Roberta meets with other "coloured" children at the pictures. She gets along with them well and she visits the suburb "Garbutt" where all the coloured kids live (1:102–108). In these stories, Roberta's life is established as very similar to that of other Aboriginal children living in Townsville in the 1950s.

The problem with using perceptions of characteristic life experiences to establish Aboriginal identity is that many of these stories have been produced by the dominant culture in an effort to define Aboriginality. They do not represent ways in which many Aboriginal people have defined their own lives. Many of these stories are simplified and stereotyped. Many contain notions of authentic Aboriginality as being contained in a primordial past. When Aboriginal people tell their own stories, they both engage with and resist dominant understandings. Sally Morgan's story, for example, the Aboriginal legitimacy of which was initially contested, revealed the complex ways in which people who identified as Aboriginal lived lives that did not fit within the stereotypes of their day.[37] Morgan's story is now viewed by some, in view of the National Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families and the subsequent report which published the findings of that Inquiry, as representative of Aboriginal life experiences.[38] Emphasising particular life experiences can serve to mask the complexity of history as well as the diversity of individual choice.[39] Sykes's desire to privilege 'black' Australian over that of Indigenous or Aboriginal Australian identity, upholds physical appearance and life experiences as the markers of Aboriginality.

Many Aboriginal people have resisted an understanding of identity as being defined solely through physical characteristics *or* life experiences. Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that culture has often been perceived to be lost as particular physical features have changed.[40] Michael Dodson outlines the histories of particular definitions of Aboriginal identity that have incorporated these understandings and argues that they are inappropriate as a means of defining Indigenous peoples.[41] Dodson argues that these concepts have been used as tools to control people's lives.[42] These concepts render 'suspect' those Aboriginal people who are not identifiable as 'black', or who have had life experiences that differ from the expectations set up within mainstream discourse.[43]

SYKES'S DIFFERENCE

Certain incidents threaten the reading of Sykes's character as Aboriginal. Roberta's mother is 'white' and does not live or associate with other Aboriginal women. Roberta and her sisters attend a private school and are the only 'coloured' children there (1:45). Roberta at various times learns music (1:81–82), joins the YWCA (1:113) and takes up swimming at the local pool (1:143) where other 'Murri'[44] kids are not allowed (1:145). Her mother is never without paid employment and is later able to negotiate for Roberta to obtain employment both in Townsville (1:139) and in Charters Towers (1:190). Her mother is buying her own home (1:78) and then purchases other properties which she rents out (1:88–89). In Brisbane, Roberta puts an end to police questioning by informing police that her mother is 'white':

> It worked almost like magic. With little further ado, I was allowed to rejoin my new friend (1:218).

In many ways Roberta utilises and is protected by notions of 'white' privilege.[45] Roberta is clearly not living under the Aborigines' Protection Act, which controlled the lives of most other Aboriginal people living in Queensland at the time. Sykes does not attempt to resolve the ambiguity of her narrator's identity, but accepts the ambivalence of her positioning as constitutive of her racial identity. This ambivalence sometimes provides Roberta with a sense of power and agency to resist her positioning as an Aboriginal subject. This sense of agency also serves to align her subject closer to that of the traditional speaker of autobiography.

IS SHE OR ISN'T SHE?

One can neither determine nor deny an Aboriginal identity for the subject of Sykes's texts. The carefully structured ambivalence allows for a reading of the subject as Aboriginal and as something other than Aboriginal. The development of knowledge and discourse in Australia relating to 'black' identities other than Aboriginal is still fairly limited. This would have been even more so during the 1950s and 1960s, the time in which Sykes grew up and developed her sense of self. Sykes's subject develops a sense of her difference from 'white' Australians but has little opportunity for understanding what this difference means. She must, of necessity, find herself located within discourses of marginality that served to define Aboriginality and mark her as 'other'. In other ways, she claims 'white' race privilege through her association with her mother and in the ways that her life is different from other Aboriginal Queenslanders. Sykes draws attention to the lack of knowledge concerning 'black' identities which have their own histories in and relationships with 'white' Australia.

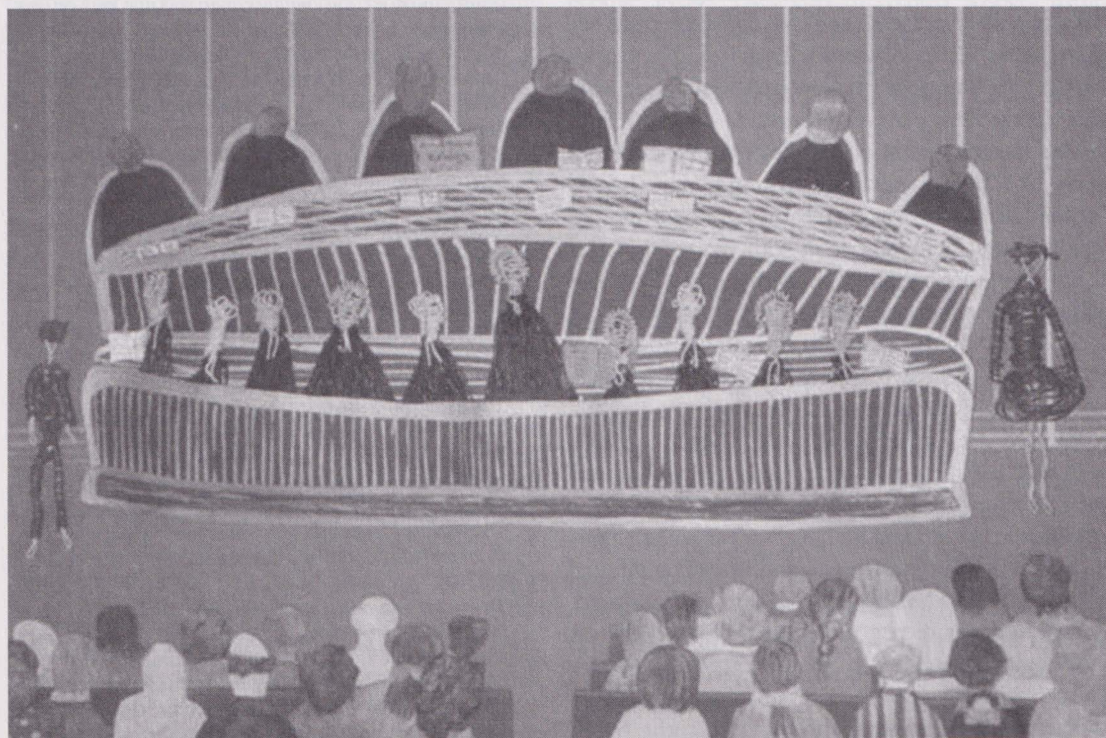
ULTIMATELY identity is partly fictional, partly based on myth and on personal understanding of one's experience. Aboriginal identity is a particularly contested issue with knowledge and understanding of what it means to be Aboriginal still being challenged, and boundaries re-negotiated to take into account Aboriginal viewpoints. In the end, it is only the resulting boundaries which enable one to decide whether a particular identity has a right to an Aboriginality or not. Many Aboriginal people insist that the issue of descent is an essential requirement in order to claim an Aboriginal identity. Such boundaries have important social and political consequences and they mark the desire for a coherent identity which is distinguishable from non-Aboriginal Australia.

1. Roberta Sykes, 'In the Public Interest', *The Weekend Australian*, 24–25 October 1998, p.27.
2. Sykes, 'In the Public Interest'.
3. Kevin Meade, 'Writer's snake claim speared', *The Australian*, 21 October 1998, p.5.
4. Meade, 'Writer's snake claim speared'.
5. Meade.
6. Pat O'Shane, 'Sin of Omission', *The Weekend Australian—Focus*, 7–8 November 1998, p.29.
7. O'Shane, 'Sin of Omission'.
8. O'Shane.
9. O'Shane.
10. Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', *Stuart Hall—Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, David Morley and Chen Kuan-Hsing (eds), Routledge, London, 1996, p.441.
11. Stuart Hall, 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', *Stuart Hall—Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, David Morley and Chen Kuan-Hsing (eds), Routledge, London, 1996, p.466.
12. Stuart Hall, 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics', *Cultural Remix: Theories of Politics and the Popular*, Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (eds), Lawrence & Wishart, London, p.66.
13. Stuart Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs "Identity"?', *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Guy (eds), Sage, London, 1996, p.4.
14. Rey Chow, 'Where Have All the Natives Gone?', *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Padmini Mongia (ed.), Arnold, London, 1996, p.124.
15. Elizabeth Povinelli, 'Settler Modernity and the Quest for an Indigenous Tradition', *Public Culture*, (11:1), 1999, p.19.
16. Reverend Lorimer Fison cited in Povinelli, p.19.
17. Povinelli, p.22.
18. Andrew Lattas, 'Aborigines and contemporary Australian nationalism: primordiality and the cultural politics of otherness', *Race Matters: indigenous Australians and 'our' society*, Gillian Cowlishaw and Barry Morris (eds), Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997, pp.223–255.
19. See Darlene Johnson, 'Aboriginality: Playing and passing versus assimilation', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin* (5:2), 1993, pp.19–23.
20. Povinelli, 'Settler Modernity', p.29.
21. Povinelli, p.37.
22. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'When the Object Speaks, A Postcolonial Encounter:anthropological representations and Aboriginal women's self-presentations, *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education* 19.3, 1998, p.277.
23. Philip Morrissey, 'Aboriginality and Corporatism', *Postcolonial Studies* (1:1), 1998, p.105.
24. Michael Dodson, 'The Wentworth Lecture. The end in the beginning: re(de)finding Aboriginality', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1, 1994, pp.2–13. Dodson details some of these terms, pp.2–3.

25. Gillian Cowlishaw cited in Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'When the Object Speaks', p.277.
26. Roberta Sykes, *Snake Cradle Vol. 1*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, pp.1-16. Subsequent references to this text will occur in parenthesis marked as (1). *Snake Dancing* will be marked as (2).
27. My own grandmother sought assistance from welfare in the early 1950s to provide temporary care for her five children while she found work and a home for her children to live in. Despite obtaining employment and accommodation and numerous attempts to have her children returned to her, they were never returned to her care.
28. Sally Morgan, *My Place*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987.
29. Anne Waldron Neumann, 'Pity, Terror and Admiration', *Meanjin* (57:2), 1998, pp.372-379, p.374.
30. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, Padmini Mongia (ed.), Arnold, London, 1996, p.120.
31. Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs "Identity"?', p.5.
32. Morrissey, 'Aboriginality and Corporatism', p.106.
33. Morrissey, p.106.
34. Ian Anderson, 'I, the "hybrid" Aborigine: film and representation', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1, 1997, pp.4-14.
35. Anderson, p.9.
36. Jackie Huggins, 'Always Was Always Will Be', *Australian Historical Studies* (25:100), 1993, pp.459-464 & pp.461-462.
37. Gareth Griffins, 'The Myth of Authenticity: Representation, Discourse and Social Practice', *De-Scribing Empire: Post Colonialism and Textuality*, Alan Lawson and Chris Tiffin (eds), Routledge, London, 1994, p.7.
38. 'Bringing them Home—A Guide to the findings and recommendations of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families', Trans. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 1997, p.4.
39. Morrissey, p.101.
40. Moreton-Robinson, 'When the Object Speaks', p.277.
41. Dodson, 'Wentworth Lecture', p.5.
42. An example of such control can be seen in Regina Ganter, 'Living an Immoral Life—"Coloured" Women and the Paternalistic State', *Hecate* (24:1), 1998, pp.13-40.
43. Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989.
44. 'Murri' is a term used by Aboriginal people to identify Aboriginal Australians living in Queensland.
45. Jenny Tannoch-Bland, 'Identifying White Race Privilege', *Bringing Australia Together: the Structure and Experience of Racism in Australia*, The Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, Brisbane, 1998, pp.33-38.

Sonja Kurtzer studied identity in Roberta Sykes's autobiographical narratives for her BA Hons thesis at the University of Adelaide. *She acknowledges the support of her supervisor, Dr Kay Schaffer.*

Below: Detail from Sandra Saunders, The Inquisition *(1996) wire collage with pencil on paper.* *See Saunders' article on p 60*

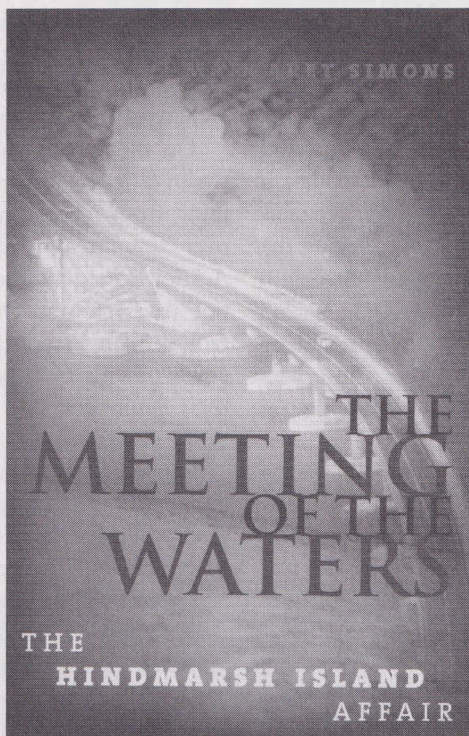


review essay / **STEPHEN GRAY**

AN ODD KIND OF CONSPIRACY

Power play and betrayal in a collision of cultures

Margaret Simons: *The Meeting of the Waters: the Hindmarsh Island Affair* (Hodder Headline, $39.95)



AN ENVELOPE CONTAINING details of 'secret women's business' finds its way onto the desks of two politicians of opposing political persuasions. One decides to open the envelope, the other not. Each, as a result of his decision, has his political career destroyed.

This stage-play scenario is not all that different from what actually happened at the height of the Hindmarsh Island affair. Then Aboriginal Affairs minister Robert Tickner was reviled for his decision to issue a twenty-five-year ban on the bridge without having read the secret envelopes. He left politics after Labor's 1996 election defeat. Ian McLachlan, whose staff read and photocopied the material after it mistakenly arrived in his office, had to resign from the front bench after it became clear that the material had been labeled confidential. He spent time in the political wilderness, his career only resurrected after the 1996 election.

The 'secret envelope' is symbolic of the explosive power of Aboriginal myth in turn-of-the-century Australian politics. For conservatives it epitomises the so-called 'guilt industry', the gullibility of Europeans willing to accept Aboriginal claims without subjecting them to 'normal' processes of public cross-examination. Roger Sandall and others have argued that the affair marks the beginning of a new period of forelock-tugging, of deference to romantic myths about Aboriginal culture which in the end harms the very people it is supposed to serve.

Should Europeans respect Aboriginal secrets, or ride roughshod over them? In the world of Realpolitik, this has partly come to depend on whether the claim to 'secret women's business' made in the Hindmarsh Island affair can be exposed as a fraud.

Margaret Simons's re-examination of the affair sheds the investigative journalist's light on these broader issues. Publicity for the book makes some large claims. Simons or her publicists have stated that the rule of law, parliamentary democracy and freedom of speech were corrupted in the affair. The Royal Commission failed to reveal evidence which was before it. The 'dissident women' who denied the existence of secret women's business were 'organised' from Ian McLachlan's office.

> The Ngarrindjeri women, perhaps, did not appreciate that for Europeans the notion of revealing secret business was a contradiction in terms. To prove that it exists, it has to be revealed; but as soon as it is revealed it can no longer exist. The Royal Commission failed to understand how Doreen Kartinyeri could say, without lying, that she knew nothing of secret women's business and later claim she was its custodian.

Yet Simons stops just short of saying that people deliberately lied. She stops short of stating explicitly that the Royal Commission was wrong, although this is clearly the direction of most of her argument. Rather, she says that "there was never any good reason to believe that the women lied, and there were many reasons to believe that they were telling the truth". Perhaps libel laws stop her from stating her case outright. She charts a difficult course in which she is, ultimately, alleging a conspiracy against the anti-bridge Ngarrindjeri, while not alleging that people involved in the conspiracy acted in bad faith. A kind of constructive conspiracy, in fact.

How, according to Margaret Simons, did the debate over whether a bridge should be constructed between the mainland and Hindmarsh Island go so badly wrong?

In part, it was personality. Much of the fascination of Simons' book lies in her insider's knowledge. A joke made by Ngarrindjeri elder Henry Rankine at a public meeting infuriated the pro-bridge lobby early on. Asked whether there were any sites of particular significance in the affected area, he replied "not that I know of but I'm sure if we look around we can find something". Later Doreen Kartinyeri blew up in journalist Colin James's face, calling him a "fucking white cunt" and losing the campaign a powerful ally. Doug Milera gave a drunken interview with journalist Chris Kenny in which he was manipulated into saying that the claim to secret women's business was a fraud. During the Royal Commission anti-bridge Ngarrindjeri women cat-called and swore, while the dissident women were quiet and respectful.

Relationships and their political undercurrents were also influential. Anthropologist Neale Draper's wife Rose received evidence from a local Ngarrindjeri woman that the Murray Mouth was a 'women's fertility site' before any alleged fabrication of secret women's business. Rose and Neale later had an acrimonious divorce, and Neale did not put this part of his ex-wife's evidence into his report. Anthropologists Deane Fergie and Philip Jones had an 'almost chemical' enmity. Each, according to a quoted source, represented 'something archetypal' to the other.

On the Aboriginal side, there was enmity between different Ngarrindjeri groups involved stemming from relationship breakdowns and tensions over committee memberships and job applications. Acknowledged traditional elder Connie Roberts did not like Kartinyeri. Other Ngarrindjeri, such as the radical Allan Campbell, denied the existence of secret women's business because they believed that their family and clan had a better claim to traditional ownership around Hindmarsh Island.

Simons's book dismantles any romantic myth about a unified Indigenous culture. It provides a graphic illustration of how *not* to go about reaching agreement with Indigenous people. Developers Tom and Wendy Chapman adopted a 'take me to your leader' approach to consultation. They failed to understand local Ngarrindjeri politics until it was too late. There were no mechanisms or procedures for how consultation was to occur. As a result the developers thought consultation had finished while the Ngarrindjeri thought it had barely begun. The true situation was not adequately explained to the Ngarrindjeri. Further consultation was merely part of conditions attached to an approval already granted. In this situation it is scarcely surprising that Aboriginal people thought they were being manipulated. Perhaps some did some manipulation of their own.

The most obvious source of conflict, however, was different attitudes towards secrets—or at least, Aboriginal secrets. Simons quotes a 'Kauma Elder' as waving a hand at the television and saying "Our culture is all about protocol . . . It isn't like this.

People talking everybody's business all the time." The Ngarrindjeri women, perhaps, did not appreciate the fact that for Europeans the notion of revealing secret business was a contradiction in terms. In order to prove that it exists, it has to be revealed; but as soon as it is revealed it can no longer exist. The Royal Commission failed to understand how Doreen Kartinyeri could say, without lying, that she knew nothing of secret women's business, and later claim she was its custodian. Generally, Europeans failed to understand the idea in Ngarrindjeri and other Indigenous cultures that secrecy and publication do not exist in absolute opposition. A thing can be published in one context, and yet maintain its quality of secrecy in another.

Does all this add up to a conspiracy? It seems that Simons thinks that there was. But it is an odd type of conspiracy—the type that happens when powerful people take a story and run with it, when debate becomes utterly disconnected from its original sources, when opinions and ideologies become more important than facts. One of the more powerful images in the book is of the 'dissident women' taken to meet John Howard at Parliament House. "How very humble and privileged," one of them later wrote, "to be actually talking with the Prime Minister in person."

I had some minor criticisms of Simons's work. Early on, she states that the "Ngarrindjeri were the most politically sophisticated people in Aboriginal Australia . . . This idea—the notion of formal representation and being able to speak for others—was foreign to most Aboriginal cultures." This kind of generalisation is almost impossible to support. I also found her occasional capitalising of 'elder' (as in 'Kaurna Elder') a bit cloying, reminding me of Marlo Morgan's 'Real People'.

Nevertheless the book is extremely thorough. It is a rebuke to ideologues, and an illustration of the ability of debate to become utterly disconnected from its original terms. In the end, Simons says little specifically about the 'culture wars' and the Keith Windschuttle-instigated debate in which oral and written history make competing claims to truth. Her examination of Hindmarsh Island makes it clear that stories written by Europeans do not become invulnerable to distortion and manipulation merely by being written down. There is no magic in the pen, and Aboriginal oral history is not necessarily wrong.

The Windschuttle debate and the so-called 'culture wars', like the debate over Hindmarsh Island, have become disconnected from their original terms. Unfortunately only spiritualists and spin-doctors, and not investigative journalists like Margaret Simons, can now claim to speak with the people involved.

Stephen Gray is a Vogel Award winning novelist and teaches law at Northern Territory University.

BOB ELLIS
GORE VIDAL
NAOMI KLEIN
EDWARD SAID
NOAM CHOMSKY
GERMAINE GREER
MEAGHAN MORRIS
JOHN RALSTON SAUL
MARGARET SIMONS
MICHAEL MOORE
SUSAN GEORGE
THOMAS FRANK
JOHN PILGER
MARK DAVIS
MIKE DAVIS

OPINION | *Sandra Saunders*

Are they going to pull it down?

THE HINDMARSH ISLAND ISSUE has more twists and turns than a pit full of snakes and a bite just as deadly. Ten years have past since the Ngarrindjeri people sought protection of Aboriginal heritage sites on and around Hindmarsh Island. It has been a sustained attack on people's spiritual and cultural beliefs, and has caused deep emotional and physical distress.

At the time I was Director of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc. (ALRM) of South Australia, and this was just another Aboriginal heritage case. How wrong was I! Today we are still dealing with the aftermath of the politics, lies, betrayal, legal wrangling and media propaganda.

The day Federal Minister Robert Tickner put a twenty-five-year protection ban over the area was a day of celebration that soon turned sour. This just decision was challenged and overturned because of a legal technicality.

During this time ALRM was involved in negotiation with the Federal Government on the Native Title legislation. Land ownership and heritage protection were major issues.

THE WEB OF DECEIT

The day Ian McLachlan, Liberal Shadow Minister, tabled the confidential women's only documents was a nightmare. Dr Doreen Kartinyeri became extremely distressed. She was crying and talking to her ancestors. She blamed herself, as she was never to tell a man. At this point I became more closely involved.

Under Doreen's instructions I rang Ian McLachlan demanding the return of all the information. He told us he had copied the information and distributed it around Australia. He lost his position on the front bench for misleading parliament regarding this information. I remember saying to Doreen we will rue this day, as he is a powerful man touted as a future Prime Minister.

McLachlan spent the next months campaigning to undermine the women's knowledge. This is confirmed by evidence given within the Royal Commission and other court cases. He had influential friends including High Court Judge Callinan who had to stand aside during the High Court challenge to the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Bill.

The media propaganda and betrayals started to emerge, and divisions within the Ngarrindjeri Community were exploited. Philip Jones stated in the media that women's business was not part of Ngarrindjeri lore. Philip Clarke propagated this view and accused Doreen of bringing the seven sisters story from the North. Both men were SA Museum colleagues of Doreen. She had taught them both a lot about Ngarrindjeri culture and history, in particular Clarke. Jones was also busy providing information to his mate, Christopher Pearson, who wrote numerous derogatory articles. Neither had the guts or ethics to approach Doreen. They betrayed her trust. What gave them the right to speak out? They are white men and Doreen a Ngarrindjeri woman and custodian of the women's knowledge that was handed down to her from her Aunties.

Christopher Anderson, then Director of the SA Museum, wrote to Doreen and ALRM stating:

> The museum acknowledges that a number of Ngarrindjeri women strongly believe in the existence of women's secret business relating to a site at Hindmarsh Island. The museum respects these beliefs and does not want to be seen to be criticising them.

How deceitful given the evidence revealing the role of Museum staff during the Federal Court case.

INQUISITION AND HARASSMENT

A Royal Commission was called by the then Premier Dean Brown. That confirmed my belief that they were out to undermine land rights in this country. To use Dr Doreen Kartinyeri's words, "it was about power, politics and money".

During the Royal Commission I was regularly receiving hate and threatening mail and phone calls including a death threat. Every day brought a new twist, I didn't know what would happen next and would find out from the television news. David Smith, Counsel Assisting the Royal Commissioner, revealed to the media that he had received a copy of a letter written by Patrick Dodson that Doreen

> Of course the letter was a fabrication, but David Smith did not go back on television retracting his outrageous allegations. Ten years on, Ngarrindjeri culture is still being destroyed; burial grounds are still being dug up. Ngarrindjeri have no access to Kumarangk except by the bridge that destroyed their herita•e.

Kartinyeri and Sandra Saunders had fabricated the women's business. A knot built up in my guts. Of course the letter was a fabrication, but David Smith did not go back on television retracting his outrageous allegations.

The Royal Commission decision of fabrication was handed down on 17 December 1994. I had faith in the legal system and was expecting a finding that women's business was not fabricated, so for me the finding was shattering. A lot of tears were shed and you could see the pain and suffering on Ngarrindjeri people's faces. The bloody Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission is the fabrication. That day will be forever with me as it tore at my heart. Even today thinking about it brings back the terrible pain and tears to my eyes.

The developers, the Chapmans, with the Royal Commission under their belt, headed for the Federal Court seeking compensation. Ngarrindjeri people gave evidence in the Federal Court Case. I was subpoenaed as to the whereabouts of a computer disk containing the women's restricted knowledge. On refusing to hand it over I was found in contempt of court and my house was searched. I felt violated and angry at yet another invasion justified by the whitefellow justice system in this country.

The Federal Court von Doussa judgement was handed down on 21 August 2001. When von Doussa read "upon the evidence before this court I am not satisfied that the restricted women's knowledge was fabricated or that it was not part of genuine Aboriginal tradition" there were tears of joy. There were many of the women in court that day, and to quote dear Aunty Maggie, who has since passed away, "Are they going to pull the bridge down?"

THE FABRICATOR

Von Doussa also stated that Clarke's diaries "show that he (Clarke) was the originator of the fabrication theory". Clarke should be charged with perjury and sacked from the Museum. The real fabricators have not been called to account for the roles they played. Where is the justice in that for Ngarrindjeri people?

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

- The two Philips (Jones and Clarke) are still working at the SA Museum, both with promotions.
- David Smith and Andrea Simpson who assisted in the Royal Commission are now both judges, appointed by the State Liberal Government.
- Christopher Anderson, previous Director of the SA Museum, now works for Newmont Mining.
- Christopher Pearson worked as Howard's speechwriter and is now on the board of the National Museum of Australia.
- Ian McLachlan was appointed Minister for Defence when the Howard government was elected in 1996. He left parliament in 1998 to pursue his wool business interests.
- Ian Callinan was appointed as High Court Judge and remains on the bench today.

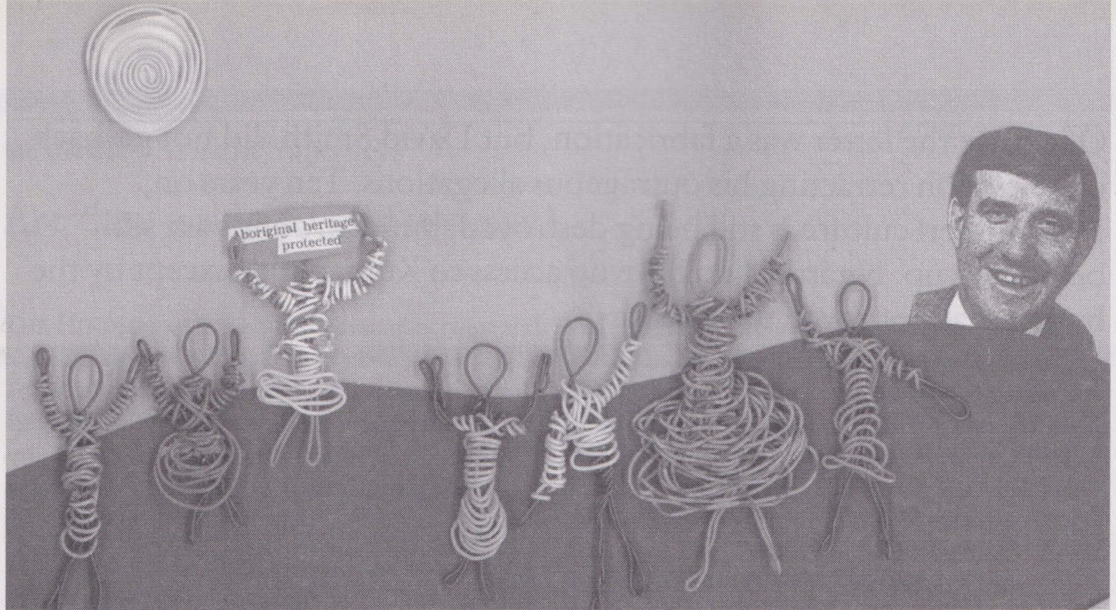
Haven't they done well!

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Dr Doreen Kartinyeri has retired and has just completed and published a book.
- Veronica Brodie has also written and published a book. Both are suffering from poor health.
- I no longer work at ALRM. I am unemployed and have completed a series of artworks about Hindmarsh Island, which will be exhibited in July.

Ten years on Ngarrindjeri culture is still being destroyed; burial grounds are still being dug up. Ngarrindjeri have no access to Kumarangk except by the bridge that destroyed their heritage. Nationally the Howard Government continues to attack and dismantle Aboriginal heritage. The fabrication tag still remains with the Government refusing to take up the issues raised in the von Doussa judgement and no apology has been made to the Ngarrindjeri.

However, my faith in the whitefellow legal system has been partly restored. It is a great judgement. GO VON DOUSSA!



Detail from Sandra Saunders, No Bridge *(1996) wire collage with pencil on paper*

OPINION / *Tom Trevorrow*

A shocking insult

PRIOR TO 1990, the South Australian Labor Government negotiated a tripartite deed with the Goolwa local council and Binalong Pty Ltd, to allow the development of a marina, later extended to the building of a bridge across the waters between Goolwa and the island. The marina construction had commenced in the 1980s. The Ngarrindjeri people were not appropriately consulted prior to construction occurring. The Ngarrindjeri people were extremely upset that this process did not occur prior to the start of construction. The Lower Murray Aboriginal Heritage Committee opposed the building of the marina and the bridge. Our Ngarrindjeri women were forced to speak at the last minute on the importance of the area to Women's Beliefs. But they would not reveal their Cultural Beliefs to 'a Blackman or a Whiteman'. So the nightmare began.

Our Ngarrindjeri people's Heritage and Women's Beliefs were put under the microscope by the media, and not by qualified experts on our culture. At first our hopes for justice seemed like a dream that might come true. The bridge was banned for twenty-five years by the Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Robert Tickner under the 1984 Commonwealth Aboriginal Heritage Act. Then, we were suddenly awakened when the Dean Brown Liberal SA Government called a Royal Commission into Ngarrindjeri Heritage, Culture and Beliefs. The terms of reference that Commissioner Iris Stevens was charged to report upon are as follows:

> whether the 'women's business' or any aspect of the 'women's business' was a fabrication and if so [a] the circumstances relating to such a fabrication; [b] the extent of the fabrication; and [c] the purpose of such a fabrication (Stevens, 1995).

The findings of this Royal Commission became headline news when the *Advertiser* proclaimed "Lies, Lies, Lies". This is a time that we Ngarrindjeri will never forget.

My challenge to the findings of the Commission on the grounds of a denial of natural justice was due to a legal point not upheld. The Supreme Court said a Royal Commission is protected by law from a claim of Denial of Natural Justice. How can we forget the impact upon our Ngarrindjeri Heritage and Cultural Beliefs? How can we forget the ignorance of asking us Ngarrindjeri men to speak of the Women's Beliefs? The shame, the embarrassment, the hurt will never be forgotten. I will also not forget the divisiveness and hurt that was inflicted on our white brothers and sisters who believed in us and stood with us. As I asked at the time: What

gives people the right to forcefully dominate another race of people, humiliating them and then attempting to destroy their way of life, their beliefs, their heritage? Is it greed? Power? Ignorance? Racism? Or politics? Whichever, it seems there are still two laws in this country, one for the Blackfella, another for the Whitefella.

The decision of the 1995 Royal Commission had a mental, physical and financial impact on our working arrangements at Camp Coorong Race Relations and Cultural Education Centre, which is where since 1986 we have been teaching and sharing our Ngarrindjeri Culture, Heritage, Beliefs, who we are, and our traditional connection to our Country. Being called Liars and Fabricators of our own Cultural Heritage and Beliefs is a shocking and embarrassing insult.

We Ngarrindjeri people were required to give evidence as witnesses in the Federal Court, before Justice John von Doussa. This was not a Royal Commission with restricted terms of reference. Justice von Doussa left no stone unturned. Justice von Doussa said that he considered each of the nine Ngarrindjeri women to be credible witnesses who genuinely held the beliefs and recollections expressed by them. He went on to find that:

> I am not satisfied that the restricted women's knowledge was fabricated or that it was not part of genuine Aboriginal Tradition.

This caused much joy and happiness. We Ngarrindjeri are vindicated. There is hope of maintaining our pride and dignity in who we are. I recall on the day of the judgement one of the Elder women, Auntie Maggie Jacobs, saying: "See, I knew I wasn't a liar, that von Doussa man, I could hug him." Unfortunately, Justice von Doussa's findings did not hit the front page of the *Advertiser*, like the finding of the Royal Commission.

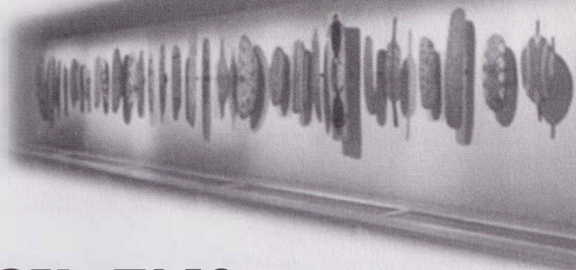
Prior to the bridge issue the SA Museum staff had been involved with the Ngarrindjeri. Then with our objection to the bridge, it came to light that Mr Philip Clarke had received his PhD. He named me in his thesis as one source of information—but without my permission. Because of Mr Clarke's involvement in the Royal Commission and the views he expressed, I was distressed that he used my name as a source and I would not have consented to him doing so had he asked my permission.

Despite Justice von Doussa's findings, there has been no expression of sorrow and apology given to the Ngarrindjeri people for the wrong we suffered. When in the history of South Australia has a belief of the Christian faith been put under a comparable microscope? As I said at the opening of the bridge:

> My Elders, My People, our friends, brothers and sisters,
>
> We are gathered here today in sadness and pain while they up there celebrate the opening of a Genocide Bridge.
>
> This bridge has been secured and built upon our land across our waters without our consent. It has been built in a place which is very spiritually and culturally important to our Heritage and Beliefs.
>
> It has been secured and built by people who can't understand or don't want to understand other people's Heritage and Beliefs, especially if other people's Heritage and Beliefs interfere with developments that could possibly make big money, or perhaps they fear that to recognise other people's Heritage and Beliefs might mean to recognise their official rights.
>
> Could you imagine the uproar if we the Ngarrindjeri went to England and decided to remove the London Bridge and replace it with a ferry? Or remove Buckingham Palace and replace it with trees? There would probably be a nuclear war.
>
> Also it seems that so-called laws, guns and prisons determine who should be right and who needs to be wrong.
>
> Many, many people in Australia, South Australia, and around the world know that this bridge is wrong, it has denied, caused divisions, caused much pain and suffering to the Ngarrindjeri People and our brothers and sisters.
>
> Also you know what? Because we the Ngarrindjeri spoke of why this place is culturally important to us, some ignorant, confused, racist people have turned it into another one of Australia's good old Blackfella jokes: Men's Business—Women's Business.
>
> We take time today to speak to the spirits of our old people, the spirits of all things upon these lands and under these waters: we are sorry, we tried and tried; we are sorry.

Tom Trevorrow is a Ngarrindjeri Elder and Chairperson of the Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee Inc.

essay | **STEVE HEMMING**



OBJECTS AND SPECIMENS

Conservative politics and the SA Museum's Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

MY RELATIONSHIP with the AACG—the South Australian Museum's Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery—is a complex one. A curator working with the Aboriginal collections for about fifteen years, I left in 1997 after several years of turmoil surrounding the Kumarangk (Hindmarsh Island) issue. I was deeply disturbed by the way that the Museum's collections and exhibitions had been used as an authenticity template against which contemporary Ngarrindjeri people's beliefs were judged (see Hemming 1996; Bell 1998; Hemming 2000). In many ways, this experience clarified my understanding of the political functions of museums and in some cases, their continuing, colonising relationship with Indigenous Australia.

Regarded as an 'encyclopedia' of Australian Aboriginal cultures, the AACG has been characterised as a 'stubbornly' brave example of a traditional, ethnographic and artefact-based approach to the display of Indigenous cultures (see Kean 2001). It is seen to celebrate the "highest standards of conservation and scientific enquiry" and is favourably compared with the "more than a touch of political correctness" found in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney galleries (Megaw 2001: 119). During the 2002 Museums Australia conference, Philip Jones, the curator responsible for the AACG's original brief, made the point that he had pursued a traditional, artefact-based approach as opposed to what he believed was a more politically influenced approach being taken in the eastern States.

Yet Jones's approach is itself anything but politically neutral. The AACG is a powerful, political act of representation. The discourses that suffuse the gallery mediate and limit public understanding of complex and important contemporary issues. The AACG and the scholarship that produced it provide more than just the influential backdrops in current public debates, particularly those that have swept through the new exhibitions of the National Museum in the guise of 'history wars' (see Attwood & Foster 2003).

In 2001, after a lengthy Federal Court case, Justice von Doussa found that the Ngarrindjeri proponents of what has been called by the media 'secret women's business' are credible witnesses:

> upon the evidence before this Court I am not satisfied that the restricted women's knowledge was fabricated or that it was not part of genuine Aboriginal tradition (Von Doussa 2001: 4).

Yet the two principal curators of the AACG, non-Indigenous conservatives Jones and Philip Clarke, played a central role in the perception of a fabricated 'secret women's business', arguing to the 1995 Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission (Stevens 1995) that the Ngarrindjeri restricted women's business was a recent invention. The AACG has been strongly influential in reinforcing the authority of non-Indigenous institutions to tell Australians what 'Aboriginal Cultures' are. It is a 'politically correct' gallery at a time when the favoured readings of Australian culture and history are determined by a conservative Federal government.

THE AACG LOCATES 'real' Aborigines in a spatially and temporally remote space. It reinforces a sense

of western culture as technologically superior, modern and further down the teleological track of progress. This is the narrative that flows through the gallery. Assimilation—rather than sovereignty—is the political message embedded in the complex array of texts. Non-Indigenous visitors meet their old friends: the boomerangs and spears that have long stood as symbols of Aboriginal culture in Australia—symbols of the 'primitive other' that underpin an understanding of whiteness. As Chris Healy has pointed out:

> As non-Aboriginal people have tried to know the other, they have imagined themselves as not 'primitive', not part of 'nature', not 'Stone Age', and so on. It is only through knowing blackness in Australia that whiteness has been felt to be real (Healy 1997: 95).

The Australian public and overseas tourists are encouraged to think of the AACG as an encyclopedia of Indigenous Australia. Sold as a 'gateway to the outback', a gateway to authentic cultural tourism, it is seen as a place where you might still experience 'classical' or 'traditional' Indigenous culture. The former Premier of South Australia, John Olsen, wrote in the AACG's exhibition catalogue:

> The new Gallery provides an ideal gateway to the outback as well as a fascinating insight into Aboriginal Australia. The South Australian Government congratulates the Museum and all involved.

I wonder if the former Liberal State Government would have supported a gallery developed by Indigenous people with themes that addressed issues of invasion, dispossession, sovereignty, survival (in a colonised land) and a history of political 'activism'?

In its avoidance of key political and historical debates, its uncritical use of western scientific traditions as a framework for authorising a representation of what is described as Australian Aboriginal cultures, the AACG is by definition 'politically correct'. Philip Clarke (Clarke 2000: 6) states in the exhibition catalogue:

> The Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery is the most comprehensive Aboriginal cultural exhibition in the world, with over three thousand objects and hundreds of photographs on display in a contemporary and ethnographic setting.

This claim of encyclopedic status rests comfortably with the Museum's historical role as a natural history institution. Constructing an authoritative, ordered view of the world, a view from the position of the dominant western 'centre' (see Pratt 1992), the gallery is obscured inside what is essentially a natural history museum containing representations of exotic cultures from the colonial space. The encyclopedia informing the AACG is the South Australian Museum's Anthropology Register, with its scientific language of museum classification developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of the exhibition labels have been taken directly from the register.

In a paper delivered at the 2001 American Association of Museums Annual Meeting, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill investigated the relationship between "museums and cultural politics" (Hooper-Greenhill 2001). Taking her understanding of culture from what she describes as "the intellectual field of cultural studies" she argued that:

> Cultural politics . . . concerns itself with issues and morality, sociological questions of exclusion and inclusion, advantage and disadvantage, and these concerns are of extreme relevance within the museum. Questions need to be asked about access to culture and cultural production. Who has the power to create, to make visible and to legitimate meanings and values? And what stories are being told? Museums have the power to affect lives by opening up or closing down subjectivities, attitudes and feelings towards the self and others (Hooper-Greenhill 2001: 4).

Created in an era of Social Darwinism, influential categories or subjectivities, such as 'traditional' go unchallenged in the AACG. They continue to shape visitors' understandings of Indigenous people and their apparently tenuous relationship with contemporary Australia. Early black and white photographs of 'traditional looking' Indigenous people from remote areas fix a particular version of Indigeneity in visitors' minds. In the most direct way, Indigenous people are reduced to objects by the Museum's 'old-fashioned' exhibition approach. What are characterised as the cultural achievements of Indigenous people have been judged by a non-Indigenous panel of experts and measured against a materialist, scientific world-view.

Indigenous voices in the AACG are trapped inside small video screens and seldom make it out

into the main exhibition. They have no influence on the shape of the exhibits that frame them. They have an inter-textual relationship with the rest of the gallery; a context through which the visitor makes sense of what they see and hear. The often quietly spoken black face talking to the visitor is not the usual face of authority for non-Indigenous Australians or many overseas visitors. It may provide a stamp of authenticity, but only within the context of the powerful, western institution of the museum.

In the main part of the exhibition, labels written in a scientific voice provide visitors with a material bedrock of 'fact' on which to judge the voices of Indigenous people on the video screens, and, importantly, other Indigenous people encountered in contemporary Australia. There may be multiple voices in the AACG, but it is the dispassionate, scientific, curatorial voice that dominates and directs the story. This voice remains unidentified, masked, naturalised and authoritative.

In a climate of ongoing struggle among Indigenous people to assert the validity of their oral traditions (for example, in the Kumarangk issue, and in native title and land rights cases), oral traditions have been cast against the empiricist, factual, written records of the non-Indigenous institution. The AACG reinforces the perceived 'superiority' of the written, the documented, the scientific and scholarly. This is not, as Kean argues, ". . . a healthy tension between the 'classical culture' that has been captured by the museum and the lived experience of contemporary people" (Kean 2001: 9).

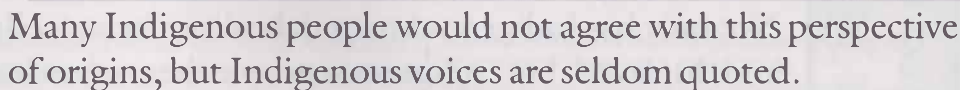
A version of the Ngarrindjeri people's Ngurunderi Dreaming is included in a strangely undisciplined textual form—the text layout does not follow the orderly lines of authoritative, printed material. Described as being "told by Albert Karloan [Ngarrindjeri elder] to Ronald and Catherine Berndt [anthropologists]", it carries the following label: 'The Ngurunderi Dreaming is a well-documented example of a South East Dreaming'. Does it need to be well documented to be authentic? Well documented by whom? Is this in opposition to something that is not well documented such as women's beliefs? Providing very little of an Indigenous women's perspective or experience, it would be hard to determine from the exhibits whether women play much of a role in religious life or indeed whether or not they have initiations.

THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM sits on north terrace, Adelaide's cultural boulevard, alongside other authorising institutions such as the University of Adelaide, the Art Gallery and the State Library. These institutions construct influential representations of Indigenous people and they form, with the Museum, a nexus of power fundamental to the dominant discourses of contemporary Australia. The Museum, with its galleries of natural history and exotic, colonised 'natives' has traditionally been the place to learn about 'Aboriginal culture'. Not only has Indigenous material culture been 'collected' and displayed by the Museum, but Indigenous people themselves have been collected as 'human remains'—part of the natural science collections that have traditionally explained the 'unfamiliar' environment of the Australian continent. Indigenous people's skeletons were on display in the Museum until the 1970s.

During the recent Adelaide Festival, 'art activists' replaced the Victoria Square signs with Tarndanyungga—the Kaurna name of the area. The power of the Victoria Square site to generate negative images of Indigenous people as 'fringe-dwellers', 'vagrants' and 'alcoholics', not 'real' Aborigines like the ones in the Museum, has been recognised and challenged by attempts to re-name and by the permanent location of an Aboriginal flag in the square (Hemming 2001). What role could the AACG have played in this crucial cultural debate? An exhibit dealing with the historical, cultural and social complexities of this issue could have made a positive contribution.

Over the last few years a number of places around the City of Adelaide have been re-named with their Kaurna language names (see Amery 2000). The South Australian Museum didn't follow this trend by finding an Indigenous name for the AACG.

AS YOU MOVE towards the entrance to the AACG there is a large photomural with Ivaritji (Ivaritji is unidentified), a female Kaurna elder, positioned alongside the explorer, Sir Douglas Mawson—they are both wearing animal-skin clothing. What the general public makes of this contemporary juxtaposition would be the subject of an interesting survey. Has Sir Douglas Mawson 'discovered' Ivaritji? Or would visitors see Ivaritji as Mawson's 'native wife'—rescued from her Indigenous culture? The powerful theme of the European discovery and res-



cue of Indigenous cultures frames the entrance to the AACG. As you enter you walk past the 'Aboriginal canoe tree' rescued by the Museum in the 1960s. The Pilbara tin masks that surround the inside of the entrance are described as having been abandoned by their Indigenous makers and subsequently discovered by the museum anthropologist, Norman Tindale. He rescued them from destruction and gave them new life as anthropological specimens in a natural history museum. The Museum labels do not include information from the Indigenous people who made and used the tin masks. The interpretation is entirely, uncritically from the standpoint of the 1950s anthropologist. The masks reinforce what is perhaps the main underlying theme or 'mythology' of the AACG—the power of western science to rescue and authorise Indigenous culture.

Once inside, the visitor is met by a display of what would be read by many as 'traditional' Aboriginal faces, the same nameless 'Aborigines' that have occupied so many displays and publications. Included are a couple of small video screens with moving pictures of contemporary people but without sound—the people are unidentified and have no voice (see Bellear 1996: 41). Where are the faces and voices of Pat and Mick Dodson, Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton or Lowitja O'Donohue? Even sporting heroes don't make the grade—there is no image of Cathy Freeman, Jason Gillespie or Andrew McLeod. Local Indigenous leaders such as Gladys Elphick, Doreen Kartinyeri or Yami Lester are also absent. Perhaps most disappointing is that there is no context within which to understand contemporary Indigenous experience. The visitor is given few clues as to why Indigenous people have been arguing for land rights for so many years, why native title has been a battleground and why so many Indigenous people are calling for an apology from the national government over the Stolen Generations.

The AACG's regional exhibits are largely based on shared environmental features and aspects of material culture. The local Indigenous people of the Adelaide Plains area, the Kaurna people, have a specific section near the gallery's ground-floor entrance and the Tiwi people have a separate area on the second floor. There is, surprisingly, no traditional Kaurna welcome to country at the entrance of the gallery.

The gallery itself is very dark and in many cases it is impossible to read labels or properly see objects, adding to the impression that Aboriginal cultures are something in the past. Most of the text in the AACG is written in the past tense. This is particularly the case when exhibits deal with regions that are popularly characterised as rural or urban. The introductory label sets the scene for the gallery—the curatorial voice tells the visitor that "Aboriginal people arrived in Australia over fifty thousand years ago". This is a political statement of origins based on archaeological research (questioned even within its own discipline). Many Indigenous people would not agree with this perspective of origins, but Indigenous voices are seldom quoted. When they are, they are without a profession or authority label such as senior elder, Rupulli (Ngarrindjeri) or law-man.

Much of the language of the object labels has been taken directly from the old museum register. The language of the era in which the specimen was 'collected' is used uncritically to make sense of its meanings and cultural value. Often the information is very sparse and limited to European, technical descriptors such as, 'container, bark' or 'spear, two rows of barbs cut from the solid'. There is little discussion throughout the gallery of the meanings that Indigenous people have for the 'objects' on display. Nor is there an examination of the history of the power of the European classification of material culture and its relationship to the ranking of what were seen as the 'races of man', with Indigenous people at the bottom of the ladder.

In the themes and technologies sections there are few photographs of people—the focus is fundamentally on material culture, and 'traditional' practices from the past. The photographs that are included are mostly black and white and from remote areas. The section called 'Webs of relatedness' appears different from the rest of the exhibition.

> Not only has Indigenous material culture been 'collected' and displayed, but Indigenous people themselves have been collected as 'human remains'—part of the natural science collections that have traditionally explained the 'unfamiliar' environment of the Australian continent.

While it deals with social themes, the language used is complex and anthropological. This feature, combined with the dense, lengthy and extremely small-fonted labels, and the very poor lighting, makes this part of the gallery almost impossible to follow. In the background are a series of archival films playing. Norman Tindale's voice-overs can be heard and his stilted, formal style seems to have flowed throughout the gallery into all levels of text.

JOHN KEAN, IN HIS REVIEW of the AACG, makes the point that the exhibition has a "dispassionate intellectual structure". The language of science or the bureaucracy is often dispassionate as part of a strategy for masking what Lowitja O'Donohue referred to as 'reality' in her keynote address at the 2002 Museums Australia conference. When the language and logic of powerfiil discourses is not recognised for what it is then it is at its most powerful and dangerous. The AACG naturalises a non-Indigenous, scientific and anthropological view of Australian history and Indigenous 'cultures'. A view that is often characterised as non-political, but is just as political in its aims as the Bunjilaka Gallery and perhaps far more powerful in its influence.

Vincent Megaw concludes his review of the AACG on a surprisingly positive note given some of the serious criticisms he raises. He clearly prefers the old-style museum exhibition to what he categorises as exhibitions in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney that are "liberally assisted by more than a touch of political correctness, not to be confused with sensitivity towards indigenous concerns, a sensitivity which clearly suffuses much of the AACG" (Megaw 2001: 119). I am not sure to which Indigenous concerns Megaw is referring.

Visitors to the AACG should be able to find well-documented evidence of the link between anthropology, government policy and the genocidal policy of child removal—particularly in the South Australian Museum where the research of anthropologists such as Norman Tindale became influential in the development of Australia-wide 'Aboriginal policy'. Australians should be made aware of the powerful discourses that operate in the AACG and continue to oppress Indigenous people. These discourses restrict and control the general public's understanding of some of the most important contemporary issues facing all Australians.

IN 2002 RICHARD WEST, the Director of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), part of the Smithsonian Institution, presented a paper in the South Australian Museum's Pacific Gallery entitled, 'American Museums in the Twenty-first Century: By Whose Authority?'. His question is equally relevant for Australian museums. In his paper West outlined the process undertaken by the NMAI in its exhibition development. Indigenous creativity was the driving force right from the conceptual beginnings of the process. He told us that:

> . . . the NMAI developed five guiding principles that were based directly upon its consultations with Native communities regarding exhibitions and were to inform their development. The five Exhibition Principles are the following: (1) community: our tribes are sovereign nations; (2) locality: this is Indian land; (3) vitality: we are here now; (4) viewpoint: we know the world differently; and (5) voice: these are our stories (West 2002: 11).

The Jumbanna Gallery in the new Melbourne Museum is an exhibition developed more along the lines of the Smithsonian example. Its main themes, 'Koori Voices', 'Belonging to Country', and 'Two Laws: Indigenous Knowledge, Law and Property' have much in common with the principles outlined by West (see Russell 2001). Importantly, Jumbanna (part of the Bunjilaka centre) incorporates insights and perspectives developed in contemporary cultural and postcolonial theory and makes them ac-

cessible to the visitor. Perhaps the South Australian Museum might have also looked for inspiration from the engagement between ethnography and postcolonial theory (see Hebdige 1994; Clifford 1997)..

I wonder how many of these principles might have been identified by Indigenous leaders for the existing AACG, arguably the world's most important collection of Australian Indigenous material culture and associated documentation, photographic records, film and other resources.

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Steve Hemming lectures in Australian Studies at Flinders University. He was working as a curator in the Anthropology Department of the SA Museum during the AACG's formative stages. From the outset he disagreed with the concept and themes developed by curator Philip Jones. Francesca Cubillo, an Indigenous curator who worked on the AACG project has confirmed the limited power of Indigenous staff and community leaders in determining the gallery's themes and approaches. She made this point publicly during question time in the session of the 2002 Museums Australia Conference in which an earlier version of this paper was presented.

OPINION / *Naomi Parry*

More on Windschuttle

THE DEBATE SURROUNDING Keith Windschuttle's *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume 1, Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847* is infuriating for historians. Firstly, it is extremely time-consuming to prepare historically robust answers to his claims. Secondly, few historians have a rigorous understanding of Tasmanian frontier relations. By setting this book in Tasmania, Windschuttle has deliberately picked a soft target. The only people alive who have done sufficient research to rebut his accusations are Lyndall Ryan and Henry Reynolds, whose reputations he has determined to destroy. Few others can speak with authority about the primary sources he says have been corrupted. Consequently, Windschuttle has been able to build quite a head of steam in the press, with-

> Windschuttle expressed no interest in my sources, and defended one erroneous source by asking, "why would a newspaper lie?"

out facing many real challengers to his ideas of 'truth'.

Much of the book is devoted to intricate (some might say laboured) arguments about source material—Windschuttle's speciality is locating erroneous footnotes. Yet he himself is guilty of shoddy research, even mistakes. For example, a key argument in *Fabrication* is that Tasmanian Aborigines failed to mount any organised resistance to colonisation. He states that violence against settlers between 1824 and 1831 was not, as most contemporary historians have argued, guerilla warfare, but isolated incidents of criminal behaviour. He attributes many of these to Musquito, a Port Jackson Aborigine who was associated with several notorious raids before his capture in 1824. Windschuttle presents Musquito as a "white man in a black skin" who lived a white lifestyle before leading groups of Tasmanian Aborigines in acts of wanton violence.

I recently wrote a biography of Musquito for a forthcoming supplement to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. By attributing Tasmanian violence to Musquito's bad influence, Windschuttle simply follows an historiographical trend which began in 1852. Windschuttle seems determined to present Musquito as someone who, in associating with whites, lost his identity, and whose actions should not be considered an Aboriginal response to colonisation. Although I cannot go into depth here, Windschuttle appears ignorant of Musquito's early career harassing settlers in NSW, 'outrages' which saw him exiled to Norfolk Island in 1805. This information, readily available in the *Sydney Gazette* and NSW State Records, indicates that Musquito's actions in Tasmania represent a resumption of his old fight. Windschuttle deliberately avoids complexity by omitting mention of sources he knows shed a different light on Musquito's life and influence. These include Hobart newspaperman Henry Melville, who wrote that Musquito's crimes were exaggerated and his execution was a mockery of justice, and Chief Constable Gilbert Robertson, who felt Musquito murdered from self-defence, and that his hanging enraged Tasmanian Aborigines to subsequent murders.

At a recent Blackheath Philosophy Forum debate between Windschuttle and Melbourne academic Stuart Macintyre, Windschuttle presented his slimmed-down biography of Musquito as a 'white man in a black skin' who led Tasmanians in acts of criminal violence. During the discussion, I was able to secure the microphone, and point out some of Windschuttle's biographical errors. I also asked him why he blamed Musquito, who was not involved in all the 'outrages', and was hanged in February 1825, for violence which continued until the Aborigines were 'conciliated' in 1831. Windschuttle expressed no interest in my sources, and dismissed my evidence. The 'dialogue', such as it was, was an exchange of 'yes he did', and 'no he didn't', during which Windschuttle defended one erroneous source by asking "why would a newspaper lie?" (A heckler yelled "read any lately?".) My question about Tasmanian Aboriginal violence remained unanswered.

His resistance to new information in this case is indicative of deeper problems. It shows that he has chased footnotes, rather than doing fresh research. Although Windschuttle alleges that his view of history is the 'truth', it is clear that he has not the command of historical sources he claims, or else wilfully ignores them. He says that he "changed his opinion" about Aboriginal history after doing his own work, and demands that historians such as Reynolds and Ryan do the same. Yet his own work is flawed, his research is narrow, and as my encounter with him shows, he lacks the grace to reflect upon it.

Given that Tasmanians conducted many raids without Musquito, and continued their fight for years after his execution, it is reasonable to conclude that their movement was bigger than this one man. In depicting Musquito as a criminal renegade, Windschuttle hides the real story of a man who fought white settlement, and obscures the motives of the Tasmanian Aborigines. The 'truth' about Tasmania's past is more complex than Windschuttle would have us believe.

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State Housing: A Sonnet Sequence

As if streets could ever be neat,
pride and resistance and peonies
blooming in beds of blue metal
and grevillea; brothers fighting
tumbled through a sheet of asbestos,
and neighbours wanted them out.
Locked in, contained, they reached
out into private suburbs: ate
the cherries of entrepreneurs
and speculators, or mentioned money
at a friend's dinner table. Keeping
up appearances, a grandparent
trimmed the edges, and grass
was as green as the reticulators'.

Without curtains and furniture, they sit
backs to the wall, below the sill.
The toilet welled up from below,
regurgitating the building's collective
conscience. Mopping up with newspaper,
print stuck to the floor, mirror
images of a shooting at the deli
down the road. The bond swallowed
back-rent, they drink on the balcony.
Take-away tempting magpies.
The flat next door is glimpsed
through an open door—heat
intense. Neat, particular, star charts
and incense. Floor plan identical.

Name on a list for a three-bedroom
brick house for years: the family
growing old in the flat. Fortnightly,
rent is paid in Armadale: a car
got trapped at the crossing last time,
a few blocks away, crushed
by an electric commuter train,
almost empty coming back
from the city, outside peak time.
The noise! The noise! The noise.
They would have seen it coming,
would have tried to get out.
Makes you happy with what you've got,
the woman behind the counter insisted.

The geo-politics of the park: storm
drain where tadpoles and frogs
are tortured, swings where skills
are tested. The toilets where
you don't go even if you're bursting.
The game where men drink and kids
knock them out of the park.
The show-off with the Cox-model
plane won't let the other kids
have a go—Rigby thumps him but can't
get it to fly. He breaks the wings off
and hits the swings, singing:
"I was walking along one dark night,
my balls jangling from left to right . . ."

On the rich side of the fence
your pool party hots up: bush telegraph:
my mum said it would be okay.
You keep them out of your bedroom,
away from your air rifle. They
search the shed and ask why
you'd want to keep snails and insects.
Doesn't make sense. Us and them.
It's class, the friend of a friend butts in.
They all pissed in it, you complain.
It was more yellow than blue.
But it turned overcast and the light
was strange, and night snuck up
real fast, the wattle-birds at roost.

Per square, tractor-fed, simultaneous
almost; bulk-buying, quota data status,
police station on hand: keep your eye
on the cheap shopping; servicing
Babylon; comparative histories
out of different ologies; contrary
Mary and property, footy and Dante;
savoir-vivre; as if the deals are done here,
look elsewhere—bigotry shaped and sized;
cigarettes and alcohol; pharmacy; hold-ups;
built-in expectations; polemics; school corpora,
loud-hailer, vote collecting; eviction notices;
warrants; death notices; gas heaters;
inspections; deedless inoculations.

JOHN KINSELLA

fiction / **MARK O'FLYNN**

A GOOD BREAK

All this was before he'd applied himself to the learning of first aid.

After the horse had bolted, so to speak.

But for the moment at hand.

A heat wave. Beachy weather. Half the townspeople sprawled in various stages of leisure and undress. Frisbees in the water; the day hot enough for the dumping margin of the surf to be jumping with swimmers.

Dean had brought the family down to the beach as a kind of littoral gesture to weekend harmony, and they'd camped outside the flags (there was no room left between). He glanced with envy at the private shade of a beach umbrella nearby. The kids, Gracey and Aaron, ran to the water's edge to begin a game with the waves. Leap, hop, squeal. Shona plonked herself on a towel and pulled a book, no it was a magazine, from her bag. Her eyes squinted at the reflected brightness of the pages. Seagulls strutted about on the sand, puffing their chests out, craning their necks. The shrieking insides of their orange beaks. Enough to make someone want to throw a bottle at them. Dean stood keeping an eye on the children.

"Do you think they need any more blockout?"

"What?" asked Shona.

"Do you think they need—"

"You decide, you're their father. I'm having a rest."

She did not lift her eyes from the page, even though she must have felt the tight grip of crows feet about her eyes. Was that fair? Stupid time to come really, Dean thought, but then he could have said no, could have insisted that the late afternoon might have been a better time. He might have been able to carry on with the work he'd brought home for the weekend. Get ahead.

He felt the sun eating through the fabric of his shirt.

Beyond the dumpy waves surfers danced their dance on the curling breakers further out. Taking advantage of the good break and the tide. Behind him there was a healthy queue at the ice-cream van in the car park. Dogs. Dean watched the kids now digging a hole in the wet sand; watched them watch it fill with water. He felt the tips of his ears burning. A jogger puffed past, all shiny with sweat. It looked as though he was limping, but that was just the gradient of the sand sloping down to the water. When the waves pulled back he could see the cliffs at the end of the beach reflected briefly on the shimmering sand. Between the legs of bathers. A sign-writer concocting the first puffy stilts of a message in the sky. Otherwise not a cloud.

"Do you want an ice-cream?" he called to Shona.

"Not yet."

"Do you think the kids—"

"I don't know. Ask them."

He turned to the kids, furiously digging their hole, and there, just beyond them, was a punch-up. A struggle in the water between three men. And then suddenly there wasn't. One of the men, a boy really, a youth, called to Dean.

"Give us a hand mate."

For a moment Dean considered foisting this plea on to someone else. But there was a particular look he could not name in the boy's eyes, and in that moment there was no-one else. Then Gracey stood up to see what was going on.

Two young fellows were holding up an older man between them in buffeting, waist-deep water. His head lolling forward. Dean stepped forward decisively.

"Go to your mother," he said, marching past the children. He admired whatever it was in his tone of voice that made them obey him so swiftly. Dean splashed through the choppy backwash to the young lads who were struggling to keep the older one's head out of the water.

"He was just floating," said one.

Dean grabbed the legs, which were limp and leaden.

"Up to the sand," he said.

They were only teenagers. Didn't really know what they were doing.

They staggered out of the water. Between the three of them the man was as heavy and slack as a sack of lemons. Dean felt mildly shocked at so suddenly having a stranger's feet in his hands. No sooner had they laid him down and rolled him on to his back than the two young lads ran off. Dean looked down at the face before him. He saw the froth and slime at the lips.

Come on mister, snap out of it, he might have thought.

"I don't know how to do this," he called, as though he were speaking to the figure lying on the sand. Suddenly a woman dropped to her knees beside him. She tipped the man's head to one side and scooped the white goop out of his mouth with a finger. Then tipping his head back and placing her lips over his she blew heavily into the open jaw.

"Find the xiphoid location," she said between breaths.

Dean looked at her stupidly.

"I thought you knew how to do this," she said.

Dean shook his head. She'd misheard him. He looked at the white slop on her fingers. Then there was another man beside them who seemed to snip some hairs from the hairless chest with his fingers before launching into a fierce barrage of chest pumping. What was that called? Repercussion, or something? The woman jerked her face aside as seawater and mucus gushed up into her mouth. She spat on the sand. Returned to breathing.

"Come on mate, you can do it," said the chest-pumping fellow.

Really, Dean thought, isn't that going a bit far? Surely after a little rest this chap is going to spring up and ask what all the fuss is about. He thought this even as he watched the man's face turn blue. Then bluer. There was sand on his eyeball. Dean picked up the fellow's hand and searched for a pulse. The hand was flaccid and cold, the fingers wrinkled from the water.

"I can't find a pulse."

The others said nothing. Perhaps he hadn't said it at all. From the periphery of his vision Dean saw several dozen legs gather and mill around them as they worked.

"Does anyone know him?" Dean called out. It was the only thing he could think to do, to try and involve everyone. To his surprise a voice answered:

"Yeah, he's my uncle."

Dean glanced up at a face amongst the crowd.

"How old is he?"

"Sixty-two."

Dean looked at the hard muscles of the stomach; the penis shrivelled within the Speedos. Sixty-two! Jeez he looks fit for sixty-two. He looked at the blue body, the blue hand in his. Even at that moment the cynic in him wanted to shout: he's your uncle, why don't you try and save him? In fact while we're on about it where's the bloody lifeguard?

"Can you do this?" asked the man pumping the chest.

"No."

Surely I'm doing enough—still searching for a pulse and finding none. Should he admit that perhaps he was no good at finding a person's pulse? They turned the man's head to the side again and drained more of the bubbly slop from his mouth. It looked like dishwashing water. This was what he was afraid of, and of not knowing what to do, for despite all the urgency he was afraid. It was like a dream where he should have known and had forgotten everything.

He couldn't believe a face could turn so blue.

After a while someone said:

"Here are the ambos."

The crowd parted and the uniformed legs of two ambulance officers soon crouched beside them. Calmly they took over. Their uniforms incongruous among the bare legs surrounding them. Thank Christ. Their calm was a deep relief to Dean. Surely now the bloke would be all right. He realised there was no more he could do; that there was probably nothing he had done at all, other than be first on the scene. Apart from the two teenagers, but where were they?

Letting go of the man's hand he stood and became one of the forest of onlookers.

"There's no carotid or radial pulse," said the woman who had done the mouth-to-mouth. She knew what she was doing.

"Thank you."

"He's sixty-two," Dean thought to add, a voice from the throng.

The ambulance officers opened their box, greased the electroshock pads—whatever they were called—it was just like television.

"Stand clear."

The body jumped on the sand and lay still. Again. And again. The waves lapping at them. One of the ambulance men told them there was nothing more to see, and the people began to move away. All except the one who had identified the man as his uncle.

Dean went back to Shona and the kids, who had thankfully kept their distance. His hands felt cold. His relief at their calm also cold.

"What happened Dad?"

"I don't know love."

"Is that man dead?"

"I think so."

"Will he be all right?"

"I don't know."

"I've never seen a dead person before."

He had no idea how much time had passed.

"I don't know what story that nephew is going to tell the aunt."

Shona put her arm around him, "Let's get these kids out of the sun."

They packed their paraphernalia: towels, snorkel, flippers. Warm apples in the bottom of the bag.

The message in the sky had blown away.

"Dad can we have an ice-cream?"

"Sure."

"Can we look in the ambulance?"

Its lights flashing in the car park. They shuffled across the sand. Moving away slowly, as did the other onlookers, from the small scene on the beach. Retrieving their number. The seagulls and the dogs also carrying their ceaseless activity into the brightness of the afternoon.

Mark O'Flynn writes poems and fiction and lives in the Blue Mountains.

Trucked Cattle

Auski Roadhouse, Hamersley Ranges WA

The cattle howl, or what would be howling in less deep-voiced creatures.

They cannot turn. Starting to die of thirst, they stamp in the shoulder-crushed space. The container's metal sides clank, an under-base to their bellows—bellows so low they are almost not sound but vibration.

The cries grow louder, a crescendo maintained. *Someone surely now must come to release us.* Each one, on a different note, proclaims its share of their shared distress. One cow is no cow. Herd-units they are, and each one reports—is vibrated by—its part in their common herd-wail.

The humans have always been kindly till now.
Yes, kindly on balance.
Apart from the ear-tags and such.

Families are shouting to the noisy campfire parties to let them sleep. The new noise is trivial, but this old one, this lowing like the sound of ocean waves breaking upon a beach, is an invisible backcloth of sound.

By moon-rise the trapped herd's bellows grow deafening; but still, like the sound of the sea, or of trains, unheard. Too low and constant to bear attention. Too deep to be heard as ear-sound, an earth-shudder rather. As if the earth itself was creaking, like an old ship's timbers. Bawling each stands, crush-propped, while blood drips from a dewlap, a hock chafed on a neighbor, a nose bashed against steel in the long corrugated hours.

And all the while humans are showering, eating, fixing coffee and tea in cups, watching the cafe's TV, arranging their beds for the night.

The metal trays clank with their shifting weights, above and below. The whole herd strives, and is beaten. They will go nowhere till morning, I guess, when the driver is rested.

Why, and how, water cattle that go to their deaths? Only makes more piss in the trays.

They will not believe the worst. One after one, some deep-voiced sufferer leads a reverberant communal, and unal, outcry, then falls back in weariness. These are no random lowings. The beasts are calling to dimly remembered mothers, aunts, siblings. It is blood that speaks. Their cries are antiphonal, rising up in the help-begging howl, falling away to exhaustion. No one, human or cattle—and humans till now have always grasped their needs—could mistake it. In the camp ground a child asks "What is that noise?"—"Just some cattle, dear. Brush your teeth properly."

But the herd go on. They are calling to kin, and to dimly remembered kindnesses, whether of mother or man. All they remember of life and love is in that long

bellow. My friend in the cafe orders a pie, watches a flirt-piece on *60 Minutes*—on an all-girl band, very spunky. Elsewhere, in rooms I will never know, torturers are changing shifts, checking their instruments; and near to them people are dancing, loving, excreting, dying, rejoicing, breaking up, being born. And the sassy girl band dances on. We are predator-stock. We dance on bones.

I walk out, furtively, round the back of their trays. The noise alters and falters. Heads would turn if they could. Trapped, they have scented the anthropoid coming to help or to kill. Their flanks strain to turn; are held. Some are knocked down on one knee, or on two in the crush. A dog barks at them then, and their huge flanks bash the sides—a dull metal booming.

And still no one sees them. They are only some cattle, a background. What do you expect in the country? Out here no one complains, almost ever. Here it doesn't pay to complain. Only the cattle self-interestedly protest. For one day more.

Their herd-minds cannot grasp indifference. They know deaths, sickness, predators—not trucking. The aunt who lies down and never gets up. The patch of torn leather and bones at the fence corner. But not death camps, and not death for the herd. Their god, the herd, must have had a plan. In that faith they followed each other up the ramp, to where they are jammed. And still it is herdwise they search for escape. They scent me as the breeze shifts again, and tonnes of flesh thrash-bash the steel welds.

They are gentle at heart, and half tame from birth. Centuries back, we cut the wild out of them. They feel present aches and cuts; since the present for them is all.

If any have guessed, it must be the steers. Lonely ones, with faint childish memories of a day when humans seemed angry and took their sex away.

The driver has paid his bill. Yet he dawdles, rewarding himself with a smoke.

Ah, I've overheard! The truck's lights have failed, a mechanic is coming to speed them on safely. No way to unload them. Dry meat for the abattoir! So the driver waits. And the cattle cry.

They are quieter now. Are talking to us, to themselves about it, in low existential moans.

The bargain was simple: all tender care in exchange for your meat at a given date. Cradle to cull security. Some would jump at that. No parasites, creditors, predators ever. Good feed and water. Great living.

Hours pass; and the cattle's veins dry. Water and feed have flowed through them. They are turning hollow.

Now a man turns the motor on and off, probes and tinkers. The cattle's hopes rise and fall, they chant and bellow—such heart and unison any parson would wish in his flock.

Near midnight, the cattle grow plangent, but the men won't move, not till all's right with their night-swimming ship.

The Southern Cross spins its slow 24-hour hand. Spins slowly over their drying mouths, their drying cries. Their cries dying down. The smell intense.

Now the mechanic has got the lights cobbled. And the driver is walking on top of the two-storey roadtrain. He clanks on the roof, and their feet panic on the steel floors. He would be crushed like an old rag if he fell in. Their rush begins in ripples, in bone-breaking shoulder-pack. A terrible shuffling. The frozen stampede goes millimetres into steel walls.

Satisfied with how they are packed, he climbs into his cabin. Time now to concentrate, and finish. The motor roars up. Yes, the cattle city is lit. The dog barks again, and the steak train throbs.

Now the prime-mover is edging, a liner away from its berth, towing its twin tall trailers, and seeking the swift night roads.

Leaving behind a crowd of heavy mosquitoes, in a puff of warm odour, the roadtrain pulls clumsily out.

And now the vast rig goes past me, at walking speed, out into the gravel driveway, stirring the cool air of night. With lights at all levels, in all shapes and colours.

Moving away slowly, up to the bitumen road. Now the assemblage swings around, takes up its flight path onto its runway. And the cattle low, relieved to be going.

Their bones that soon will be waste at the abattoir, then the warm stench of blood-and-bone on somebody's lawn, have a job still to do. To hold them up stiffly. To keep the meat's structure.

Soon a terrifying wind blows through their open-mesh prison. Standing sideways, metres up, they are flung through the night air, over the corrugations clean to Port Hedland.

And now they are sailing at top jolting speed, their tail-lights fading through country that's burning its spinifex daytime and night, burning the old to bring fresh shoots for the breeding herds.

And now only the distant fires (the same that have fragrantly burned for weeks) glow in the far sky's dust.

The campers have forgotten, but half-notice a backdrop is gone, like a cloth-blind pulled away. Later, when the generator goes off, one will stretch and say, *It's so quiet out here in the country.*

From *Pilbara Story*

MARK O'CONNOR

History (from 'Six Refugee Poems')

In 1947 when Calwell introduced
A migration policy that would transform
The suet colonials in two generations
Only 27% of voters supported him.
Talkback radio was not born
And politicians thought of the future
Beyond next year's election.
Here we are, well fed on a diet
Of new spices and a multitude of choices.
Grumpy old men and a few clannish women
Still eat their overboiled veg and stringy beef.
They must fear the younger generation
Who have been abroad and dine out
On Thai and Vietnamese and are probably
Vegetarians. Talkback radio is for them,
In their laminex kitchens.
Our Prime Minister listens. They are his own people.
Outside, in the real world, Australia has changed.
Some things, though, are still waiting to happen.

TOM SHAPCOTT

The Policy

I'm a disappointment officer.
We all are
where I work
for the government resource free
Health Department.
We're employed to implement
the policy of helping people
understand, they don't meet our criteria.

SAXBY PRIDMORE

Target Selection—January 2003

They are making lists now
carefully. Their fingers are clean
as water, their eyes are delicate
and sharp.
These lists take time and effort,
and it is very cool in the shade of their fists.

You pressed your nose against the window when I left,
rolling across the desert on hot tyres. The dust
was a dream washing
across the windscreen. I mistook
it for something real as I mistook

the palms of Basra for laughter
and your neat skin for forgiveness.

These lists are of numbers not names.
They are lines but not the lines
between your hair. They fall
across the heat and join
invisibly above,

and they do not smile.

JOEL SPENCER

essay / **PHILLIP DEERY**

SHAPING HISTORY'S VERDICT

The Alger Hiss case online

IN 1950 MOST Australian leftists, including many future supporters of *Overland*, were outraged by the conviction of Alger Hiss. The space to express this outrage was confined: the Cold War was chilly and the mainstream press was hostile. There were no demonstrations but there were articles in union journals and communist papers, letters to the editor and telegrams to politicians. Half a century later, the typewriter has been replaced by the word processor, newsreels in the cinema by the World Wide Web in the home. The private study has become a public space. The bitter, divisive Alger Hiss case is now online and attempts to clear his name are fought not in the press or through the courts but on the internet. This new public space is being used to settle old scores.

READING AN ORIGINAL LETTER, yellowing and brittle, written by Alger Hiss from Lewisburg Penitentiary, Pennsylvania, was an eerie experience. For I read this letter, dated 31 January 1953, not in a government archive or a library manuscripts collection but in the very room in which it was first read fifty years earlier. The letter was addressed to Priscilla and Tony Hiss, wife and son, and it was one of the 742 letters that Alger sent to his New York home during his four-year prison term. When I first met Tony Hiss, in February 2002, I discovered that he continues to inhabit the same third-floor, two-bedroom rented apartment, on East Eighth Street in Greenwich Village in lower Manhattan, into which his parents moved from Washington, DC in 1947. Alger left it in 1959 after he separated from his wife; she stayed on until her death in 1984. Now, the son sleeps in *their* bedroom and dedicates much of his time attempting to shape the verdict of history by defending, online, the innocence of his father.[1]

As many *Overland* readers would know, the Hiss case occupies a central space in Cold War iconography and provides a key to the American psyche at the mid-point of the twentieth century. It was a defining episode not only in the Cold War but also in modern American politics. It rallied conservatives and enabled the little-known Richard Nixon to take those first critical steps on the twisted road that led him to the White House. It split and polarised American liberalism and thereby permitted a sturdier platform for Joe McCarthy when, in February 1950, he first brandished his fraudulent list of communists in the State Department. It blurred the line between radical activism and involvement in espionage and therefore mandated a savage assault on civil liberties. And it led to the 'trial of the century', a five-year prison sentence, innumerable appeals and law suits, and the intense, divisive debate that continued to swirl through the second half of the twentieth century.

The Hiss affair has spawned a regular stream of countless newspaper and magazine articles, a documentary film and a television mini-series. It has also generated dozens of books: in the New York Public Library alone there are more than thirty monographs (including three by Alger himself) ranging from Alistair Cooke's 1950 *A Generation on Trial: USA v. Alger Hiss* to the just-published new edition of Weinstein's *Perjury: the Hiss–Chambers case*. There is also the highly partisan 'Pumpkin Club' that, an-

nually, nominates left-wing liberals for the Navasky Prize for Treason.[2] This continues the ugly tradition set by the John Birch Society, which once printed thousands of postcards that featured a photo of the United Nations building in New York under the caption 'The House that Hiss Built'.

However, *Overland* readers may not recall the complexity of the Hiss case. Nor, indeed, how a man who, in 1945, accompanied Roosevelt to the Yalta conference and was elected secretary-general of the founding conference of the United Nations should, eight years later, be composing a letter from a prison cell. What follows is a bare outline.

In 1948, the elegant and articulate Alger Hiss, president of the prestigious Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was accused of having been part of a communist underground organisation during the 1930s. The accuser was Whittaker Chambers, a *Time* magazine editor and a nervy, pudgy and unprepossessing man regarded even by his allies as obsessive and unreliable. He was a self-confessed former communist agent who had abandoned his creed to become an anti-Soviet polemicist.[3] Hiss appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee, vehemently denied the allegations, confronted Chambers in a dramatic scene famously captured by newsreel cameras, dared him to repeat the charges outside the Committee and, when Chambers did, sued him for slander.

Hiss's action was, in retrospect, ill advised for two reasons. First, it prompted Chambers to escalate his charge to one of espionage. He produced a cache of classified State Department documents that, he claimed, Hiss had given him in 1938 as well as microfilm hidden in a hollowed-out pumpkin on his Maryland farm.[4] Second, at this point an obscure but highly ambitious congressman from California emerged from the shadows. Richard Nixon gave the 'Pumpkin Papers' maximum publicity and pursued Alger Hiss relentlessly and zealously. As he later boasted (and recorded on the Watergate tapes), "I played it in the press like a master . . . I leaked out the [Pumpkin] papers . . . I had Hiss convicted before he ever got to the grand jury".[5] At this stage Hiss was supported by the 'ivy league' liberal establishment, including the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson. Even President Harry Truman denounced HUAC's investigation into Hiss as 'a red herring'. In December 1948, Hiss appeared before the New York Grand Jury which indicted him not for high treason (since the statute of limitations had expired on espionage charges) but for perjury. The first trial, from May to July 1949, ended in a hung jury; the second, from November 1949 to January 1950, in a conviction. All appeals failed, the Supreme Court refused to hear the case and, in March 1951, Hiss was imprisoned.

Upon his release, after serving forty-four months, a gaunt-looking Hiss found it impossible to rebuild his career, and by 1960 he was selling office stationery.[6] Until his death in November 1996, at the age of 92, he continued, unrelentingly, to protest his innocence. Indeed, if constant denial of guilt for nearly five decades could be regarded as proof of innocence, Hiss would have long been exonerated. It was this fact, this dogged persistence in the face of disbelievers, which helped sustain Tony's faith in his father.

Tony Hiss is an unlikely crusader. A quiet, unassuming 61-year-old former journalist for the *New Yorker*, he struggles, in conversation, to overcome an instinctive shyness. But he is resolute in his conviction that the case against Hiss is still inconclusive, that the door to history's verdict is still open. Part of this conviction emanates from the heart, not the head. The received wisdom, even in left-wing academic circles in the United States, is that the balance of evidence currently leans heavily towards a verdict of guilty as charged. Hiss still has his defenders but, like the upholders of the Rosenbergs' innocence, they are rapidly dwindling.

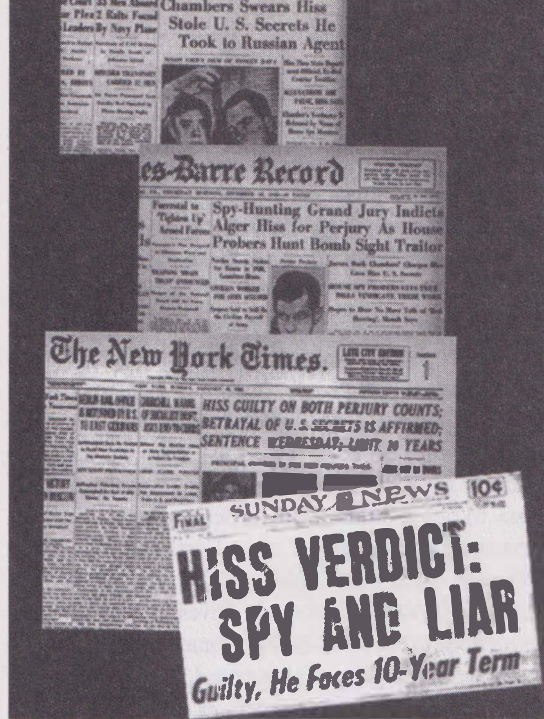
However empirical evidence, or, rather, its absence, appeared to turn the tide in Hiss's favour in 1992 when the former Soviet Union opened its doors to the Soviet secret service (NKVD and KGB) archives. General Dmitri Volkogonov—notable historian, chairman of the Supreme Council commission on KGB archives and military counsellor to Boris Yeltsin—examined "a huge amount" of documents and declared that "Alger Hiss was not ever or anywhere recruited as an agent of the intelligence services of the Soviet Union . . . Tell Mr Hiss that the heavy weight should be lifted from his heart".[7] The jubilation was short-lived. He later admitted his search through KGB files was incomplete and that GRU (Soviet military intelligence) files were not examined. Then, in November 1993, a Hungarian historian uncovered restricted files of the Interior Ministry in Budapest that, allegedly, implicated Hiss through the confessions of former friend and American spy,

Noel Field.[8] More damaging to the Hiss side was the release in 1996 by the National Security Agency of the Venona decrypted cables. One cablegram identified a senior State Department official as a Soviet agent who worked under the covername of 'Ales' whom the FBI claimed was 'probably' Hiss. 'Ales', like Hiss, attended the Yalta conference and thereafter flew to Moscow.

Tony Hiss believes final vindication will occur when the tightly shut GRU archives are prised open. To that end, he wrote directly to President Putin but received no reply. The other source of exoneration, he suggests, lies within the untranslated and unpublished manuscript of Vitali Pavlov. Pavlov, the younger Hiss argues, would most certainly have known or known of 'Ales' since Pavlov oversaw the highly successful KGB intelligence operations in the United States from the late 1930s—the very years Hiss, according to Chambers, was passing classified documents. By this time, Soviet agents had infiltrated the US embassy in Moscow and, thinks Tony Hiss, the real 'Ales' could well have been one of these agents. Pavlov's manuscript, apparently, states that neither Hiss nor Harry Hopkins was implicated in Soviet espionage.[9] Like his father, he is stoically determined "to see this thing through".

His campaign has now entered the twenty-first century and has become, appropriately, high-tech. A sophisticated, multi-layered website entitled 'The Alger Hiss Story: Search for the Truth' was launched in 2001.[10] Its stated aim—of "disseminating primary material that brings us closer to the full truth in this watershed case of the Cold War era" and presenting material so that "the reader can evaluate Hiss's goals, accomplishments and his character"—disguises its unstated purpose: to clear Alger's name. In 2002, it continued to expand. Extracts from forty thousand pages of FBI files released in the 1970s have been supplemented with extracts from four thousand pages of Grand Jury minutes unsealed in 1999. Soon, it will feature HUAC investigative files and closed executive session testimony; this compelling material is measured not in pages but in linear feet on government warehouse shelves.

The site is designed to be both accessible for the undergraduate student with the most rudimentary knowledge of the Hiss case and illuminating for the well-versed historian. The opening screen consists of a montage of front-page newspaper headlines about Hiss's trial and perjury conviction, such as



"Chambers Swears Hiss Stole US Secrets" and "Hiss Verdict: Spy and Liar". Visitors can 'enter the courtroom' where entire testimonies of witnesses can be read, watch actual newsreel footage or excerpts from documentaries, listen to Hiss and Chambers 'in their own words', and read intensely 'human' documents such as private correspondence from Lewisburg prison, with the dateline "sunset March 10, 1953", to an 11-year-old and which begins: "Dearest Tony, About time for a letter all of your own . . ." This handwritten letter, along with FBI reports and numerous other documents, have been scanned and put in PDF format so that something close to the original can be downloaded and printed. At a more sophisticated academic level, the site reproduces assessments by historians first published in journals not readily available, at least in Australia. One article reproduced from the British journal *Intelligence and National Security* (2000), for example, that must be taken seriously by Hiss's detractors, is the cogent and forensic-like analysis, 'Venona and Alger Hiss', by Lowenthal.[11]

Indeed, the more one undertakes the 'search for the truth' on this richly textured website the more one is persuaded Hiss was innocent. The accretion of favourable evidence—whether warm comments by Hiss's friends or cold testimony from court records—steadily wears away scepticism. But, then, this is a partisan presentation. As the 'Hiss Case in History' page states, the site presents "a compre-

hensive look at the case for the defense". Extracts from recent scholarly books and articles that implicate Hiss with Soviet espionage cannot be found.[12] Conversely, pro-Hiss reviews critical of these books or rebuttals of these articles can be found.

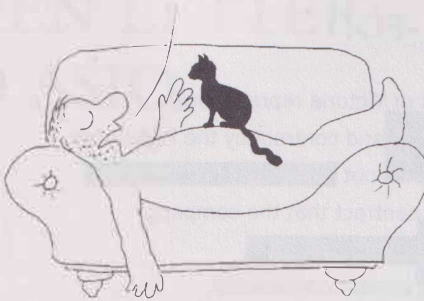
This imbalance prompted the online magazine *Slate* to question the apparent imprimatur given by New York University to the site through its URL identification.[13] Consequently, and controversially, NYU requested Tony Hiss and the site's Web master (oral historian Jeff Kisseloff), to alter the Web address from its original <http://www.nyu.edu/hiss> to one that more clearly designated the site as a personal, not academic one. Further controversy followed when the Tamiment Institute Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, housed on the tenth floor of the NYU Bobst Library, hosted a launch party for the website. This rankled with the Board of the Tamiment Institute which, at the time of Hiss's trials, comprised left-wing anti-Stalinists, published the fiercely anti-communist *New Leader* and believed uncompromisingly in Alger Hiss's guilt. In this limited sense, then, the Cold War was still being fought.

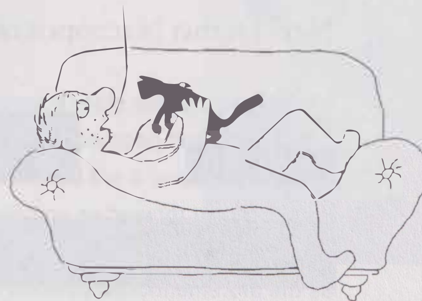
Nevertheless, the 'Alger Hiss Story' website, which has recorded nearly sixty thousand visits, constitutes a significant repository of archival resources for students of the Red Scare. It is also a testament to loyalty, a remarkable and unusual form of filial devotion. This is not the first time Tony Hiss has defended his father: in 1999 his poignant hagiography *The View From Alger's Window: A Son's Memoir* appeared. In it he wrote of the disjunction between 'Chambers' Alger and my Alger'. Chambers' Alger—"strange, misshapen, mean-spirited"—is unrecognisable in the "translucent father I got to know" during and after Lewisburg.[14] Throughout the memoir, he quotes liberally from Alger's prison letters; these are warm, open, heartfelt and, often, very moving. They counter the stiff, aloof, patrician persona that Alger presented to the public. Nor will the website be his final defence. Negotiations are currently underway to publish an annotated selection of Alger Hiss's correspondence—including letters to an acquaintance in Australia, Barry Jones, then Labor Shadow Minister for Science and Technology—that will further 'humanise' Hiss. One of them will probably be the letter, from January 1953, that I read. Such a book will not cleanse the smear of guilt nor, by itself, restore his reputation. But it may permit the reader to step into the inner world of a man which has remained hidden from those who have sought, equally, to both lionise and demonise this mid-twentieth-century American icon.

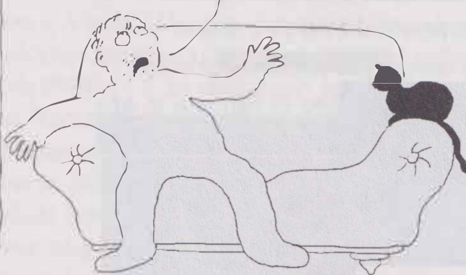
1. Tony Hiss is currently a visiting scholar specialising in urban policy at the Robert F. Wagner School at New York University.
2. The editor of *The Nation* magazine, Victor Navasky, became a *bête noir* of the Right after he savaged Allen Weinstein's *Perjury* preventing it, allegedly, from winning the Pulitzer Prize. See Navasky's 'Weinstein, Hiss, and the Transformation of Historical Ambiguity into Cold War Verity' in Athan G. Theoharis (ed.), *Beyond the Hiss Case: The FBI, Congress, and the Cold War*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1982, pp. 215–45.
3. See Whittaker Chambers, *Witness*, Random House, New York, 1952; Sam Tanenhaus, *Whitaker Chambers: A biography*, Random House, New York, 1997.
4. Controversially, this farm was designated a National Historic Landmark. Chambers predeceased Hiss by thirty-five years and, posthumously, was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan in 1983.
5. Hiss became an unexpected beneficiary of Nixon's involvement in the Watergate affair. Hiss became a regular 'lecture circuit' speaker and the audiences became very interested in and sympathetic to his case.
6. The prison mug shots, taken on his first and last days at Lewisburg, testify to the physical change in Hiss's appearance.
7. See Dmitri A. Volkogonov, 'Report, 14 October 1992', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no.2 (Fall, 1992), p.33.
8. Maria Schmidt, 'The Hiss Dossier', *The New Republic*, 8 November 1993, pp. 17–20. These findings were challenged by Ethan Klingsberg, 'The Noel Field Dossier. Case Closed on Alger Hiss?', *The Nation*, 257(15), 8 November 1993, pp.528–32.
9. This manuscript has been sighted by Bruce Craig, author of the forthcoming *Treasonable Doubt*, which will challenge the received wisdom that Harry Dexter White, Treasury official in Roosevelt's administration, was in fact a member of the 'Silvermaster group' of American agents working for the Soviet Union.
10. See <http://homepages.nyu.edu/~th15>.
11. John Lowenthal, 'Venona and Alger Hiss', *Intelligence and National Security*, 15(3), 2000, pp.98–130. The density of its detail is exemplified by its 11 pages of endnotes.
12. Such as James Srodes, 'The Spy of the Century', *The Spectator*, 277(8784), 23 November 1996, pp.9–13; Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—the Stalin Era*, Random House, New York, 1999; John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona. Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999).
13. See <http://slate.msn.com/?id=1007346>.
14. Tony Hiss, *The View From Alger's Window: A Son's Memoir*, Alfred Knopf; New York, 1999, pp.50–1. A second edition, with a new afterword that, *inter alia*, responded to the Venona documents, was published by Viking in 2000.

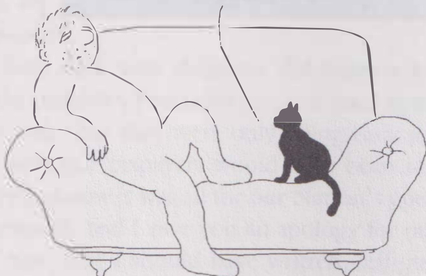
Phillip Deery teaches history at Victoria University. In 2002, when he met with Tony Hiss, he was a 'Center Fellow' researching the Cold War at New York University's International Center for Advanced Studies.

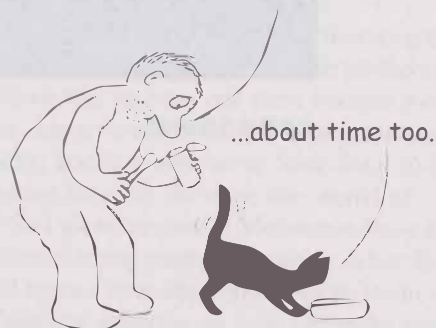
Inspiratoria #18 by Lofo











When it comes to priorities, nobody can beat a cat.
And who would want to beat a cat?

Neo Demo Nacropocracy—FOI

It is agreed that the state government of Victoria representing
her majesty and peoples and contract by the legislature
and it will not
It shall be put forward as commercial contract that the company
as the aforementioned position to the remain confidential,
will not be subject to any form of breach to the agreement
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ned or furthers in any
this is a significant increase compared to the figures for the period

ALISTAIR STEWART

essay / **MONA BRAND**

OPEN LETTER TO ASIO

Paramount Studios, 1960

SINCE THE LAUNCHING last November of Michelle Arrow's very readable book *Upstaged* I've been studying ASIO's 379-page file on me. I'd often been asked by friends if I'd tried to see my file, and my reply was always "Too busy" or "No, it's too dear." But now I've seen it I'm quite impressed about how busy all your informers have been since that first entry in 1950! . . . an important year, of course because Robert Menzies had just returned from the USA telling us to expect war in three years. I was in London at the time, as were a number of other Australians (some of them really well known now) so it was only natural that you should ask somebody there to make a list of all of us and to let you know when we were returning home. And, no doubt, where to find us if Menzies's referendum to ban communists and fellow travellers had been successful, allowing him to incarcerate us in the camps prepared for us in remote areas of our freedom-loving country.

As I have said, your diligence did impress me, despite the number of mistakes some of your agents came up with. But they were only doing their job, and I'm sure our taxpayers would have been only too happy to know it was all for our Nation's good. But I personally feel I owe you an apology for only realising now that I should have written, self-published and launched my autobiography, *Enough Blue Sky: The Autobiography of an Unknown Well-known Playwright*, well before I did (to mark my eightieth birthday in 1995). I only published three hundred copies and it is out of print, but available in the main libraries. You see, everything you took such pains to gather is in that book. Plus a good deal more. Things like when and why I joined the Australian Communist Party, why and when I left; when, why and how I returned to Australia after spending five and a half years abroad.

I don't know who your ASIO informers and agents are because of course all names are blacked out. Except one when the blackout failed to lob on the name of the NSW Regional Director. But don't worry. I won't tell (not here, anyway)—I'm not an informer. Yes, it's all my fault. You didn't have to send those people to follow me when the *Strathaird* reached Fremantle. I'd have been proud to tell them I'd been invited to give a talk on ABC Radio about my travels. And I'm sorry you missed me in Adelaide. It was wrong of me not to tell everybody on board that I was going to visit a girlfriend who'd just had her first baby.

And I apologise now for the exhausting time you must have had searching for me in Melbourne. You see, we had an extra day there because the Queen was due to enter Sydney Harbour on her Royal Yacht, and it would never have done to have us arriving there on the same day, would it?

So I spent my time in Melbourne living it up at a welcome-home party, and visiting other friends.

I can see now why you had to go to the expense of putting someone on board to make sure I was bound for Sydney and still occupying cabin no. 763 on H Deck and to have him or her lurking outside that door when we berthed at Pyrmont and my brother came on board. I'm sorry my cabin "door was closed". You see, it was an emotional scene between us, involving a family near-tragedy. It's all explained in my book. Anyway, at least the agent

discovered (through the door) that my brother was working at no. 137 Broadway. But how did that agent obtain my brother's Dee Why address? By exercising some thwarted skills as a writer of cheap novels? and hinting that there was a romance between me and an English migrant (name supplied) with whom I'd had some casual conversations, and who had surprised me the day before we landed by asking me to lend him ten pounds, and promising to pay me back as soon as possible if I gave him my Sydney address. I did this somewhat reluctantly, and I'm still waiting to hear from him nearly fifty years later.

Of course you knew already that I'd spent six weeks in the USSR as a guest of the Soviet Writers' Union because they'd been to one of my plays in London and wanted to see it performed in their country. The play I'm talking about is the one you say more than once the Lord Chamberlain had banned. Yes, he had. But only after it was reviewed warmly by several leading London critics.

On the way to and from the USSR I had spent several days in Budapest, a guest of the Hungarian theatre people to whom I had given permission to perform my first full-length play *Here Under Heaven*. It seems that it was the publicity I had received about this, including some now long-forgotten interviews on Budapest radio that inspired a Hungarian migrant to write from Darwin to the Immigration Department in Perth on 28 September 1954. After mentioning that he or she was in receipt of Hungarian newspapers, his or her letter includes:

> "It is realy [sic] miracle that I heard every day from the radio that speaking from the Royal Spionage [sic] and to Miss Brand as a good Australian citizen have a contract the biggest enemy contra this country. I liked [sic] to help you, respective our Australia because I must be do this contra this people where completely [sic] proced my swith country, in second I make the same work in the last war for the Royal Intelligent Service too. I attached [sic] here this document too and please forwarded [sic] in the right place.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> BLACKOUT

Which apparently the Immigration Department did, judging by the grimy, scarcely readable—even by Hungarians—printed copy of what I might or might not have said on Hungarian radio. I can only comment now that it was jolly decent of BLACKOUT to offer those valuable services, and only hope that his or her English has realy [sic] improved since 1954.

Oh, ASIO! To think you had to spend so much of your time and that of your female agents sitting through all those talks I was asked to give to the Union of Australian Women, not to mention those Smith Family View Club lunches where, as you mention, I was presented with three teaspoons (actually it was six)—so much more deserving of the "Top Secret" page heading.

And I feel quite apologetic now about not informing you in advance about my meeting and subsequent marriage with Len Fox. I could have invited you to the reception given to us, at Helen Palmer's flat, by the Realist Writers' Group that I see now you were so interested in. The guests had included Frank Hardy and Katharine Prichard. Now, wouldn't that have been a scoop! And it would have saved you the trouble of shadowing us on our honeymoon, and having to check with the Registry Office later to make sure we were in fact married.

Yes, I should certainly have written my autobiography earlier. It explains all you wanted to know about our sojourn in Hanoi in 1956 and 1957, and might have helped you to understand why we took part in so many anti-Vietnam War meetings, demonstrations and marches. Now, that can't have been a cheap exercise (costwise I mean, of course)—taking all those photos.

And speaking of Vietnam, when we returned to Sydney by ship in 1958 you wrote that "there was nothing unusual in their luggage". You must have exhausted yourselves trying to find something unusual, judging by the latch on our tin trunk that is still broken.

All that phone tapping must have had its boring moments, especially during the several visits to Sydney by small groups of Soviet writers: having to know when they were arriving and leaving and who was going to the airport to welcome them and to say goodbye—like the time you heard one of my friends saying he was sorry that I couldn't be at the airport on one occasion, but that one of the Russian visitors had left me a gift of a little doll on a sponge rubber base that he would forward to me. I never received it, and soon forgot about it. Now that you have reminded me I'm wondering if you

had expected to find some secret message in the little doll's foam rubber base. But perhaps the most intriguing entry in my files involves an Intercept report on 13 April 1964 that you say is "worthy of consideration". Trying to make sense of it all, I gather that your Informer said that a call made to our telephone number by a TASS correspondent was answered by a Mrs Wren. But one of your agents argues that it is unlikely that the name Fox could be confused with the name Wren in an intercepted trunk-line phone conversation. On the other hand, he or she goes on, "It is not inconceivable that the name Brand would be confused with the name Wren if spoken with a foreign accent." Well, I'm no linguist, but I'm a bit of a 'dab hand' when it comes to accents, and try as I can in French, Vietnamese, Hungarian and Russian (all being countries I have visited) I just can't make Brand sound like Wren. The story doesn't end there. A few pages later my files record that a report by Mr BLACKOUT "tends to show that Mrs Wren is probably identical with Mona Alexis Brand." So, quite naturally, you checked "current electoral role particulars revealing no such thing".

If I were a mystery writer I might be tempted to make use of this deep, dark secret by having a female agent using the name of Wren entering our home and answering a call on our phone from an accomplice with a foreign accent calling himself a TASS correspondent. Then, on her way out 'Mrs Wren' would help herself to a passport. A bit of harmless fiction, of course. But for some years now I have been unable to find my passport. And I notice that ASIO claims to possess two copies of my passport photo. Since my marriage in 1955 I have continued to use the name Mona Brand for writing and Mona Fox for other purposes, although I have sometimes thought that a nom-de-plume might have been useful for my somewhat hampered writing career. But Wren?—No!—Never! Not after having heard Frank Hardy mention that name so often while working on his fictional novel *Power Without Glory*.

Meetings were obviously popular with your agents—especially New Theatre Annual General Meetings and the monthly ones held by the Aboriginal–Australian Fellowship—neither of them ever big gatherings. For example, your records remind me that at the 1965 New Theatre AGM thirty-eight people were present, of whom you list the names of thirty-two of us. Who were the other six? Who knows which of the six (or of the thirty-two?) deserved your heavy black mark? For some years there was a big conference in Canberra at Easter attended by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal delegates. From several hundred you at least on one occasion selected sixteen of us for special mention. That was generous of you, considering few of us had played an important part in the Conference proceedings.

And it was really diligent of you to somehow make sure you received the monthly roneoed bulletins issued by the Aboriginal–Australian Fellowship and Sydney New Theatre—viz. *Fellowship* and *Spotlight* respectively. Both of them pretty dull at times. Yes, I can see now how tedious I must have made life for some of your long-suffering agents. It was thoughtless of me not to let you know when and where I'd be "seen entering" and "seen leaving" events like the Australian–New Zealand Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament and the Congress For Cultural Freedom with Mr J.B. Priestley as guest of honour. You could have followed me in. Much more comfortable than trying to hide behind lampposts or in the gutter.

My book doesn't mention in detail everything I attended. And now I have a big confession to make: due to age and ill-health I haven't been going to any of those things lately—not even to the enormous recent anti-war demonstration where people tell me it was hard to move even a few steps, which would have made people like me hard to single out and short-list. But I was there in spirit, if that's any use to you. And finally I must thank you for reminding me how busy I was once, and I keep wondering how I had time to do so much writing. My autobiography does recount some of that, but omits, I'm afraid, to describe myself. But you have done it for me several times—not always to my liking. "In early thirties. Short, dumpy build. Scraggy looking." That's the one I mind least because in 1954 when that was recorded I was not in my early thirties. I was close to turning forty. So, ASIO you made a mistake. A laughable one. Not the first, and not the worst. At least you didn't send balaclava-clad agents to come and smash down our doors.

Yours truly,

Not 'Mrs Wren'

This is an expanded version of Mona Brand's contribution to the Sydney Morning Herald's 750-word HECKLER column on 17 December 2002, entitled 'The sometimes true story of ASIO, the Cold War and Me'.

Howard, *Tampa* and the politics of race

PETER MARES

David Marr and Marian Wilkinson: *Dark Victory* (Allen & Unwin, $29.95)

The outline of *Dark Victory* will be known to even the casual observer of current events. It is the story of the Norwegian freighter, the *Tampa*, which rescued 433 asylum seekers from a sinking vessel in the Indian Ocean, and was then prevented from putting them ashore at the Australian territory of Christmas Island. It is the story of the misnamed 'Pacific solution', with which Australia used its economic and diplomatic clout to deflect unwanted asylum seekers to some of the small, mendicant nations that circle within Canberra's orbit. It is the story of children NOT thrown overboard, of boats forced back out to sea by the Royal Australian navy, of the tragedy of the SIEV X—suspected illegal entry vessel X—which went down, en route to Australia, claiming the lives of 65 men, 142 women and 146 children.

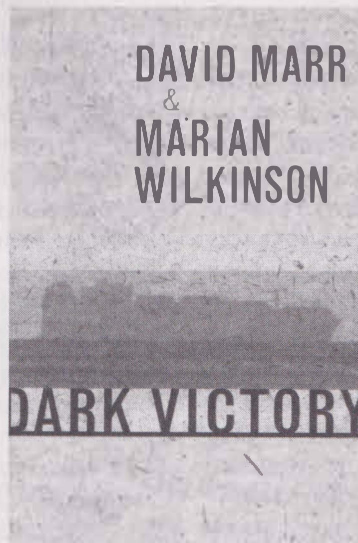
Above all, *Dark Victory* tells how John Howard's government won a third term in office in November 2001 by masterfully exploiting the contentious issue of 'boat people' for electoral gain. Not that Marr and Wilkinson suggest that John Howard's election victory was solely the result of the *Tampa* affair. They give due weight to other factors, such as the benefit of Howard's incumbency at a time of war and uncertainty: the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington occurred while the Federal Court was still deliberating on the ultimate fate of the *Tampa* asylum seekers. The authors also note (as the Labor Party apparently failed to do) that Howard had already begun to turn around negative opinion polls. By the time the *Tampa* arrived in late August, Howard had already "spent a fortune on the old, on voters in marginal seats and on advertising his government's achievements".

Nevertheless, the government's response to the *Tampa* was the centrepiece of Howard's victory. There can be no doubt that the Coalition saw "border protection as its most potent vote winner . . . [and a] fortune was spent hammering the message home". As wavering voters went to cast their ballots, they entered polling stations decorated with posters of a resolute John Howard, "fists clenched, flanked by flags" delivering the key slogan of the campaign: "We decide who comes into this country and the circumstances in which they come." In the last days of the election campaign, in the most closely contested seats, the Liberal Party "pulled advertising on every subject but this one".

Intricate detail is the great strength of *Dark Victory*. Marr and Wilkinson have interviewed key players in the saga, including for example asylum seekers rescued by the *Tampa* and since resettled in New Zealand, and members of the *Tampa*'s crew, who give first hand accounts of the appalling conditions on the deck of the ship:

> On a hot day in the tropics, the patch of deck between the containers became an oven. People were unconscious, in pain and in distress. The children were hard hit by diarrhoea. As the buckets in the

latrines filled they were carried out of the containers and emptied over the side of the ship. The hotter the day grew, the more agitated the survivors became.



Marr and Wilkinson also interviewed senior Norwegian government officials who expressed astonishment at the heavy handed tactics of Alexander Downer. Downer twice telephoned Foreign Minister Thorbjoern Jagland to demand that he order the *Tampa* to sail the 433 rescued asylum seekers to Indonesia. As Jagland tried to explain to the "undiplomatically aggressive" Downer, such a request was "legally and politically impossible"—the Norwegian Foreign Minister had no authority to issue orders to the captain of a commercial vessel. In fact, once the *Tampa* had entered Australia's territorial waters, Captain Arne Rinnan had a legal duty not to sail out again:

> A ship licensed to carry only forty people could not leave port with over ten times that number on board ... For the *Tampa* to sail unseaworthy from Christmas Island would break both Australian and Norwegian laws [and] breach the shipping line's contracts with its insurers . . . Canberra was not only demanding its own laws be flouted, but was telling the Wilhelmsen Line to put at risk a ship with a replacement value of about $150 million, cargo worth about $20 million and over 450 lives.

The authors also tracked down individuals who were tangential to the action but who should not have been. Duty officers from the Royal Flying Doctor Service should have been brought into the loop over the *Tampa* because the Flying Doctors act as the medical arm of Australia's sea rescue authority. They would almost certainly have recommended that some of the asylum seekers be evacuated from the *Tampa* for treatment on Christmas Island since such procedures are routine in maritime search and rescue if there is even the slightest risk to a person's health. But this was no routine rescue. Officers at the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) were surprised to find themselves receiving orders NOT to follow normal procedures in regard to the *Tampa*. The orders came direct from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and were obeyed even though AMSA is an independent statutory authority.

In addition to interviews, Marr and Wilkinson have extracted a wealth of information from the proceedings of the Senate Inquiry into a Certain Maritime Incident (the 'kids overboard' inquiry) and augmented this with well targeted use of the Freedom of Information Act. They reveal the government's extraordinary efforts to ensure that asylum seekers aboard the *Tampa* would not be able to lodge claims for refugee status. SAS soldiers sent to board the *Tampa* went "armed with exquisitely careful legal advice". Powers under the Migration Act—such as receiving applications for a refugee visa—can only be exercised at sea by military parties using Commonwealth vessels and by law a Commonwealth vessel must fly the Commonwealth ensign. So when SAS soldiers sped out to the *Tampa* in a zodiac, their inflatable craft was not flying any flag.

Dark Victory is also the story of a dark defeat. Marr and Wilkinson describe how the Labor Party was completely outflanked in a deft campaign of wedge politics, orchestrated by John Howard, Liberal campaign director Lynton Crosby, party pollster Mark Textor and federal party president Shane Stone. When Labor might have had a chance to lay a glove on Howard, it failed to do so. After the sinking of the SIEV X for example, newspapers ran front-page photographs of a grieving Sundous Ibramam who had lost her three daughters, Emaan, Zahra and Fatima. Sundous's husband Ahmaed Al-Zalimi was already living in Sydney as a refugee but under the terms of his temporary protection visa he could not go to Jakarta to comfort his wife without giving up any right to return to Australia. Opposition leader Kim Beazley was urged to call on Howard to make an exception and to allow Ahmaed Al-Zalimi to fly to Indonesia and his wife—something which almost certainly would have struck a chord

with broad sections of the Australian public as the decent and compassionate thing to do in the circumstances. Beazley refused. "He wanted the issue to die. He did not want another front page lost to those drowned children." Beazley told colleagues that he had "another idea up his sleeve: a visa for Sundous to come to Australia". But he never acted on this idea and it was five months before Sundous and her husband were eventually reunited.

Dark Victory is a fine example of investigative journalism and provides an invaluable record of a key moment in Australian history. Yet it carries its wealth of detail lightly. Marr and Wilkinson are great storytellers and *Dark Victory* makes gripping reading. It is also a salutary lesson in media manipulation by John Howard, who is described as "a master of political speech" and "a master of the political art of deceiving without lying". Take the impression Howard gave of the troopship *Manoora*, which transported the *Tampa* asylum seekers to Nauru. The Prime Minister praised the facilities on board. "Australian troops often spend weeks on that vessel," he told *60 Minutes*. "Nobody can suggest that if these people are on it for a number of days that they're being treated in an inhumane, uncivilised fashion." He told UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that "conditions on the *Manoora* are as comfortable as they can be, given that it is a large troopship". Similar assurances were given to the Federal Court, to convince Judge Tony North to allow the asylum seekers to be transferred from the *Tampa* to the *Manoora* before the court reached a verdict on their future. What the Prime Minister did not say, was that the asylum seekers would be "locked into the *Manoora*'s garage, the 'tank deck' which usually held tanks and trucks", rather than the troops' quarters. No daylight reached the tank deck and unlike other parts of the ship, it was not soundproofed against "the incessant noise" of the *Manoora*'s engines. The asylum seekers begged to be allowed out on deck, but it was at least eight days before they were granted permission to go out into the open air "for a couple of hours, twice a week".

Despite its questionable morality and dubious legality—since tidied up by retrospective legislation—the government's stand on the *Tampa* won overwhelming support from the Australian people. Critics who attacked Howard on the basis of race misfired, because to condemn him as racist was to accuse his supporters—millions of Australian voters—of being racist too. In comparison to his predecessors, John Howard has often been mocked for his lack of Prime Ministerial vision, but in wanting to make this country "relaxed and comfortable . . . he was making a potent pledge to Australians: to leave their consciences alone".

Peter Mares is a journalist with Radio National and author of Borderline: Australia's response to asylum seekers in the wake of the Tampa *(UNSW Press). This review was broadcast on Radio National's* Book Talk.

Creating OzLit

ANDREW McCANN

Richard Nile: *The Making of the Australian Literary Imagination* (UQP, $28)

With an iconic Australian image by Jeffrey Smart on its cover and an imposingly ambitious title, *The Making of the Australian Literary Imagination* promises the kind of grand narrative that the field of Australian literary studies, I suspect, still secretly craves. The cover and title, however, are parts of the unsettling conceit with which Richard Nile introduces his book: "The book you are now reading is written in the manner of a conversation with Australian literature across the course of the twentieth century. Its title was chosen by my publisher, I believe, in the same spirit of self deprecating irony as *The True History of the Kelly Gang*." A few pages earlier Nile has told us that he sees Carey's latest Booker prize winner as the "best Australian novel of the late twentieth century". There is something telling in this, not least because the sense of irony that the title of his book shares with Carey's undercuts the sense of epic history that often accompanies the discourse of Australian cultural nationalism. Nile's book is not the grand history its cover promises, and it is probably a good thing too. In fact the book suggests a constant problematisation of its own terms. The 'making' of the Australian literary imagination turns out to be just as much about 'unmaking', as the pressure of market forces erodes the sense of literary democracy that might have once prospered, while the term 'Australian' is itself rendered suspect by virtue of the strange predicament of local literary production in the grip of both colo-

nial and then global publishing practices. The book's style also reflects this sense of irony. Nile's writing is much more anecdotal, episodic and hybridised than the title suggests, employing "mixed modes of narrative history and creative non-fiction".

There is however a strong thesis being presented here despite the book's non-linear style. Nile charts the fraught relationship between a developing national literary consciousness and the cultural and commercial institutions with which it was constantly bound and by which it was often thwarted. In very broad terms he suggests the manner in which the project of literary nationalism slowly succumbs to the pressures of the global market for book publishing, in which market-driven individualism finally gives rise to the advent of the 'celebrity author' who is a function of the marketplace rather than of any intrinsic social consciousness or cultural-political project. "The novel was written for the mass market but its development in an Australian context was closely related to a nation-building project that conceptualised the writer not only as a creator of fiction but as a public intellectual," Nile writes. But nationalism gave way to growing diversity by the end of the 1970s and "diversity, in turn, encouraged greater individualisation of the novelist and helped facilitate the rise of the celebrity author of the late twentieth century". Nile's argument develops work by critics like Graeme Turner, who have established the reality of celebrity as one of the pervasive cultural logics of literary production in Australia, where the likes of Carey, Malouf and Keneally are just as likely to show up in lifestyle-oriented journalism as in the review pages of a serious literary journal. *The Making of the Australian Literary Imagination* is very even-handed in its account of these developments. There is no real finger-pointing and only a mild sense of cultural crisis surrounding the demise of the public intellectual. Nevertheless the argument is still very much readable as the history of a decline: the decline of socially conscious, publicly accountable literary production, the fall of what Nile calls "Australia's literary democracy".

Hence the question that the book's back cover poses: "Is Australian literature dead?" There is a touch of sensationalism in this. As Nile demonstrates, however, the pressures on Australian writers resulting from factors like the local indifference of Australian publishers, and the financial rewards of circulating writing through larger British and American publishing houses and reading publics, raise compelling questions about what can remain uniquely and specifically Australian about Australian literary production given the meagre size and marginal global significance of the Australian reading public. As Nile shows, this dilemma is not new either. The heroes of his study, figures like Miles Franklin, Henry Lawson and Katharine Prichard, were all in various ways committed to the development of a flourishing Australian literary sensibility, but saw their efforts repeatedly thwarted by the realities of local publishing, forcing them into obscurity, exile or, in the case of Prichard, to seek patronage and readers elsewhere. Angus & Roberston comes in for some serious scrutiny here, and really one of the most compelling sections of the book is its examination of the tensions and antagonism between Australia's literary democracy and a publishing industry driven by a very different set of imperatives. On the other hand, Nile is also eager to point out the efforts of local publishers to fight against these trends in or-

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der to foster local writing, despite the pressures of the larger houses and the ever present "political economy of British publishing". Throughout all of this we get the distinct sense that Australian literary nationalism was itself a 'minority culture' (in the sense intended by F.R. Leavis's use of the phrase) battling against a mainstream and struggling with the legacy of colonialism and the realities of globalisation. The book is at its most convincing (and eye-opening) when it documents the dire struggles of Australian writers against public neglect and commercial failure. Anyone who thinks that Australian cultural nationalism became a cultural dominant at the moment of Federation need only be reminded of some of the salient facts Nile presents, such as Nettie Palmer's *Talking it Over* selling a total of eighteen copies and receiving £1 in royalties. Later in the book this sense of a minority culture losing out to the marketplace is supplemented by discussions of the official surveillance of writers associated with what were deemed to be subversive movements, and of Australia's conservative censorship regime. At other moments, however, Nile is critical of the ways in which nationalists like the Palmers formed cultural elites that were dismissive of more popular, commercially oriented writing. His discussion of Arthur Upfield's *An Author Bites the Dust* quite ingeniously introduces an argument about the politics of cultural capital in the milieu of the Palmers, and his attitude to Vance in particular is often one of bemusement bordering on cynicism, despite the key role he played in the fostering of a national sensibility.

The strength of the book is its focus on and grasp of the relationship between writing and other cultural institutions: commercial publishing, small presses, film, government administration and the myriad organisations, political and cultural, mediated different kinds of reading publics. It is, however, not a book that 'reads' literary texts. Textual analysis is quite deliberately avoided in favour of broader institutional histories and focal points. There are moments when the book struggles to maintain its conceptual clarity beneath the weight of the factual and statistical detail it assembles, moments when facts seem to emerge as ends in themselves, such that the broader thesis dissolves into a sometimes confusing collection of empirical observations. By the same token, the argument sometimes gives way to generalities in a manner that is often typical of Australian cultural histories—the new literature of the 1970s, the diversity of the 1980s etc. This is probably an inevitable result of a study that has given itself an entire century to explore. And in fairness, for every myth or generality perpetuated, another one is debunked or opened up to critical scrutiny in a new way. This is an ambitious book, despite the irony of its title, and though its sometimes anecdotal method will be frustrating to a certain kind of reader, its detail and its posing of key questions will also be important stimulants to work on twentieth-century Australian literature and its institutions.

Andrew McCann teaches in the Department of English at the University of Melbourne.

Lives and letters

BARBARA GARLICK

Amie Livingstone Stirling: *Amie: Memories of an Australian Childhood* (Black Inc., $29.95)

Alison Alexander with Prue Torney-Parlicki: *A Wealth of Women* (Duffy & Snellgrove, $25)

Jacqueline Kent: *A Certain Style: Beatrice Davis, A Literary Life* (Viking, $45)

Marilla North (ed.): *Yarn Spinners: A Story in Letters, Dymphna Cusack, Florence James, Miles Franklin* (UQP, $34.95)

Gregory Kratzmann (ed.): *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943–1995* (UQP, $40)

Whatever we call it—lifewriting, faction, autobiography or biography, memoir, a life in letters or just plain history—most of us are comfortable now with the elusiveness of any attempt to capture a life, to the problematic aspects of such an attempt and the inevitable conclusion that the result is only ever one oblique version. Driven by this acknowledgement of a necessarily partial view, both writers and readers are quite accepting of a variety of hybrid forms which come under the general heading in the bookstores of biography. We've seen the intrusive author like Brian Matthews in his life of Louisa Lawson or in Peter Ackroyd's Dickens, Don Watson's political insider's view of Paul Keating, or Meg Tasker's use of a different typeface to offer her own conjectures about aspects of Francis Adams's life which she was unable to support irrefutably. Then there is

the romantic biographer like Richard Holmes who steeps himself in his subject's culture and milieu and intuits direction and approach. Or the dedicated historian-cum-biographer who assiduously collects every available fact in order to justify the magisterial assumption that this is all there is to say. But there is always something lurking somewhere to skew the picture, to reinforce the knowledge that lives are multi-faceted and cannot ultimately be pinned down—a new letter or even a cache of letters: witness the revelations about the seventeenth-century diarist John Evelyn and Mrs Godolphin, or about Toscanini's obsession with blood, either writing to his mistress in his own blood or demanding she send him some of her own menstrual blood on a handkerchief to wear in his breastpocket (no wonder his orchestra conducting was so passionate; eat your heart out Angelina Jolie); a reassessment (or novelisation) of the life of a previously under-appreciated companion such as Marele Day's recent book on Mrs Cook (who's Mrs Cook? you ask); a new approach to a much worked-over figure; or a Hollywood-style between-the-sheets exposé. The clutch of books under review here illustrate many of the forms biographical writing can take and the problems it throws up.

Let's take autobiography first. Amie Livingstone Stirling's 'memoir' was first published in 1980, over thirty years after her death. Her son had asked her to set down her memories of her Australian childhood, and the manuscript was passed around among the family until her granddaughter finally prepared it for publication. This second edition has a foreword by Margaret Whitlam, some new material from Amie's later diary and letters, and her statement that she is now writing "the story that will make me famous and justify my right to life." A large call for what are essentially individual and personal memories. There's not much meditation on experience here; it's all set down unambiguously, and the memoir displays all the signs of having been well rehearsed over the years in frequent retellings. Visually the book is reminiscent of the domestic genre of Victorian Country Diary, all brown typeface and sepia illustrations, many of which are drawings of local flora by the author's mother. The word 'charming' is omnipresent—on the jacket, in the preface and in the introduction—and indeed there is a cosy delight in reading the well-written narrative of an isolated childhood in the Victorian Alps, of a city teenagehood blighted by an unpleasant stepmother, and finally of the escape to Europe and life in Paris. The narrative itself though transcends the 'charm' of its packaging; it compares well with late nineteenth-century novels of the freedom-loving, physically active colonial girl with spirit and independence of thought (think Rosa Praed), the type that Angela Woollacott sees as an icon of modernity. In a sense Amie Stirling's story feeds into Woollacott's academic study in the way it illustrates how an Australian bush childhood in that period could produce a free-thinking maverick who was not easily categorised in terms of class or education. In other words it's a much tougher piece of biographical writing than the assertions of charm and the appearance of the book would suggest.

Alison Alexander's *A Wealth of Women* is subtitled *The Extraordinary Experiences of Ordinary Australian Women from 1788 to Today*. It was commissioned by the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women and funded by a Federation centenary grant, and was based on the four hundred responses to a nationwide history search, backed up by already available archival material. A worthy project, it would seem, marrying history with intimate biographical anecdote of the small and the unsung. It's a strange hybrid though: in one way it's a straightforward and chronological history of women's work and position over more than two centuries, backed up by copious anecdotal evidence which has been cleverly organised into a coherent narrative. Apart from two fine chapters by Prue Torney-Parlicki though, which deal specifically with the history of Aboriginal women, the anecdotes, particularly the nineteenth-century ones, are either white and middle class in origin, because they were written by the women who were literate, the ones who wrote diaries and letters, or they are gilded over with the gloss of frequent retelling through generations. Individually they are sometimes amusing, usually pertinent and interesting, and they certainly flesh out the standard histories. However, the fact of basing a history on anecdote leads to a certain tedium of the everyday which palls at times: here's another story to back me up, here's another, and another, and another. From a reading point of view also, the practice of putting select anecdotes (and I fail to see any particularity in the highlighted choices), recipes, and other items in shaded boxes intermittently throughout the text is annoying and disrup-

tive. It's like the old argument about footnotes: if it won't fit coherently into the text, leave it out. Much more successful are the five historical snapshots between groups of chapters, which give succinct timelines of food, health, fashion, education, and inventions. In many ways this book in its overall conception reinforces the domestic emphasis of all women's history which has been the bane of modern feminists, and which the 1994 *Creating a Nation* (Grimshaw *et al.*) did so much to counter. To give them their due though, Alexander and Torney-Parlicki do emphasise a robust history of female work in which all participated and which characterises both the pioneer and the modern Australian woman.

The most standard biography under review is that by Jacqueline Kent of Beatrice Davis, the powerful Angus and Robertson editor, whose name is closely associated with some of the most important writers in Australia from the 1930s to the mid 1960s. It's a good title, *A Certain Style*, because Davis was distinctive not only in her editorial relationship with writers and her importance in developing a certain style of Australian writing (she is the only editor to have received a Fellowship from the Commonwealth Literary Fund), but also in her private life, not being afraid to express her strong sex drive openly in a period when such openness was frowned upon. She was worldly and elegant, intellectually astute, and ran her stable of mainly female editors like a genteel women's club, as Richard Walsh, the *Wunderkind* who radically reorganised A&R and eventually sacked her, rather bitterly pointed out. Kent has done her research well, and for the most part this is an absorbing read, particularly as she has chosen to devote separate chapters to many of Davis's main authors, rather than spread her dealings with them throughout a purely chronological narrative. This results in a nice understanding of these important relationships, but also highlights Davis's great capacity for loyalty and friendship, even when the loyalty was not always reciprocated as was the case with the gossipy Hal Porter, or when a writer such as Eve Langley (*The Pea Pickers*), with her fragile emotional balance and her endless unpublishable manuscripts, tested Davis's patience to the extreme.

And so to letters, the lifeblood of many a biography. Time was when a Life and Letters was in fact the standard approach, and certainly a well-edited and annotated collection of letters such as Carole Ferrier's *As Good as a Yarn with You* is both an invaluable resource for a biographer and a pleasure to dip into for the general reader. In fact Ferrier's 1992 collection of letters between Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and Eleanor Dark may stand as a companion volume to Marilla North's 'Story in Letters' *Yarn Spinners*, which presents the exchange of letters between Dymphna Cusack, Florence James and Miles Franklin during the same period of the late 1920s to the mid 1950s. North says in her 'Editor's Note' that she has "tried to create an experience that resembles the reading of a novel. The letters are edited and woven together so that the story they tell flows from one to the other." Perhaps I am the wrong person to respond to such a method. I like my letters whole. I like to relish the gossipiness and unexpected detail without having my reading so directed. It's all a bit bossy. Ironically enough North's story bears almost no relation to what we might think of as an epistolary novel in its original eighteenth-century form, where the very obliqueness of the way the reader acquires information is an essential part of the implicit contract between writer and reader. This is not to say that the story is not absorbing. It covers a turbulent time in both the history of Australian literature and of the world in general; years of Depression, war and the Cold War. All three writers were sufficiently politically involved to make their comments on domestic and world history fascinating. North has included relevant items like reviews and telegrams, and letters from other people which help to explain events, together with interspersed paragraphs and explanatory footnotes, all of which

maintain the flow of the narrative. As a resource therefore this is a valuable book, but as a 'novel', no thanks.

To turn from this to Greg Kratzmann's impeccably yet unobtrusively edited collection of over fifty years of Gwen Harwood's letters is to move into a world of endless delight and intriguing connections. I read with relief in the 'Editor's Note' that "The letters tell their own story, and I have kept editorial intervention to a minimum." At over five hundred pages the volume represents only a tenth of the letters transcribed by Kratzmann, so there are possibly more delights to come, although her editor recognises that the *Complete Letters* would reach Tolstoyan proportions. Harwood's reputation as one of Australia's greatest poets is secure. With this edition she will now be equally firmly established as one of the twentieth century's great letter writers, not only in quantity but also in wit, profundity, incisiveness, and just general enjoyment—and how delicious is the contrast between those prim white collars and neat hairstyle and the wonderful occasional bitchiness and sharp observation of the letters. Almost half of the letters are to her longtime friend Tony Riddell with whom she maintained a close and nurturing friendship for all of her adult life and who was the recipient of her most vituperative comments about James McAuley and other editors in the early days when she was sending her poems for publication to the little magazines. She shared her life in Hobart, her puns and some of her famous anagrams with him and sent him many of her comic 'Sappho' cards (these cards predated Glen Baxter's by many years). No small detail is too mundane to include—the silly typos on galley proofs, buying chips for the children so that she would have time to write another letter, cat scratches, driving lessons, the depredations of ABC announcers—all reported with a clever, wicked humour. The letters also give evidence of her musicianship and of her status as Australia's most imaginative librettist, and Kratzmann has wisely included some of the Larry Sitzky correspondence. I cannot praise this collection highly enough. Given how much of our correspondence is now conducted by email, I grieve that younger writers may not be celebrated by such an archive in the future.

Barbara Garlick has just edited a book on nineteenth-century women's poetry.

Homage

DENIS GALLAGHER

Ken Bolton (ed.): *homage to john forbes* (Brandl & Schlesinger $29.95)

John Forbes (1950–1998) met his future memorialist, the poet Ken Bolton, in 1975. Together with John Tranter and a few other poets, from Sydney mainly, they took their cue from the witty, expressionistic style of the so-called New York School, best exemplified by Frank O'Hara. This tendency was unpopular with the Australian poetry establishment of the time, resulting in an alternative culture of small-press publishing, readings and ultimately the publication of the ground-breaking *The New Australian Poetry* (edited by John Tranter) in 1979. All three have since consolidated significant reputations in contemporary Australian poetry. Now that the Poetry Wars begun in the seventies are abating, heroes are being celebrated and histories commenced.

This is the first homage to a modernist Australian poet. Although not as expansive as its erstwhile model, *Homage to Frank O'Hara* (published in US in 1980), neither is it as hagiographic—rather, its tone is fulsomely considerate. The seventeen contributors, all Australian, address Forbes the person and the poet via reminiscences, critiques and poetry. Most have appeared before, mainly in magazines, some augmented especially for this collection. The contributions by Peter Porter, Ivor Indyk, Gig Ryan, Alan Wearne, Ken Bolton, John Kinsella and Laurie Duggan are particularly insightful of his poetry and poetic milieu.

John Forbes was a brilliant poet who had an equivocal life. As Ivor Indyk laments in his zealous critique, 'The Awkward Grace of John Forbes':

> at the time of his death [...] he must have felt more deeply than many do, because he felt it so much more personally, as poverty and loneliness and lack of recognition, the hard times on which poetry has fallen in this country.

London-based Peter Porter, a renowned poet and litterateur, is the only contributor who could not be counted a natural ally poetically. He offers a complementary view of Forbes the modernist from a European perspective, explicating certain characteristics such as the 'look at me' feeling in his work, for Porter typical of ambitious Australians in Eu-

rope. His recollections of Forbes the person, often "a disturbing presence", are intimate and gracious.

Others are less forbearing. Much of the book's liveliness results from an unremarkable abandonment of politeness for something better: a summation of the poet as a compelling person, with warts. Here we have Forbes the dissembler, the inchoate feminist, the indiscreet masculinist, the sybarite, the calumnist, the panhandler, the klutz, the fantasist, the egotist, and the self-doubter. Given the 'personalism' of his poetry and its era it is all of a piece, his own claim on these traits a matter for conjecture. There is also tribute to his wit, breadth of knowledge, and generosity to younger poets.

Most lively are the contributions by the poet himself. His droll, picaresque account of his employment history from youth onwards concludes sardonically with, "you'll now see that there is no necessary connection between a poet's work and his life". His letters to Laurie Duggan are full of apothegms, inversions and glee, often at the expense of the English, for example: "In England the working class exist to keep the middle class employed serving them". And elsewhere, "Italian bread was designed for French toast." Greeks and Canberrans are similarly disparaged.

Cath Kenneally's interview, recorded in 1991, is a highlight due to what is divulged about his process of writing. He also talks about his lack of confidence, the influence of Catholicism, his competitiveness, and his impinging misery, but nothing about his drug-taking and its connection (or otherwise) with his writing.

Ken Bolton's own tribute is a heartfelt recollection of his association with someone he obviously has always respected as a poet and liked as a friend. It is valuable in its location of Forbes within the cultural climate of Sydney's inner-city suburbs in the 1970s, as is Pam Brown's 'Petersham Days'.

For whatever reason, there are two notable absences. Forbes's relationships with women, real and imagined, are mentioned often, yet there is no first-hand account from any of them. Also missing is a memoir from his friend and sometime collaborator, the evasive Sydneyite, "the real" Mark O'Connor. Even so, this book's comprehensive contextualising of a major poet by his peers makes it an important document of Australian literary culture.

Denis Gallagher writes from the Blue Mountains.

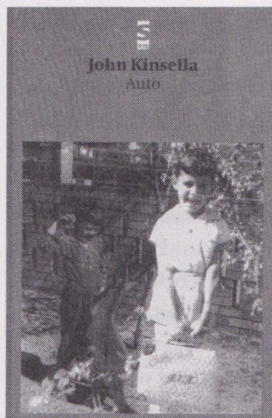
Smashed

RICHARD KING

| John Kinsella: *Auto* (Salt Publishing, $19.95)

John Kinsella is primarily a poet, though what kind of poet is an open question. While his poetry retains traditional elements (the negotiation of shaping forms such as Pastoral, for example), it is also clearly influenced by the principles of Language Poetry. An assault on so-called 'official verse culture'—especially its (assumed) assumption that language simply 'presents' the world—Language Poetry concerns itself, not with attempting to find a way of representing the world with words, but with illustrating the impossibility of doing any such thing. The notion of a speaking subject whose meaning can be understood is thus revealed as illusory: ultimately, there's just the text and the reader imposes his meanings upon it. "I am nothing to the reader", writes Kinsella in *Auto*: "The text is not me nor does it belong to me." As far as Language Poetry goes we can take such statements as read. But *Auto isn't* poetry. It is (a kind of) autobiography. So the 'death of the author' begins to look like an odd hypothesis from which to proceed.

This oddness is intentional. Kinsella has not written the story of his life so much as the 'story' of the story of his life. His title eschews 'biography'—the concept of a life in words—but retains, in 'auto', the concept of self, and the various ways in which that self attempts to *create* a life in words is the book's essential subtext. By mixing up his personal pronouns, Kinsella attempts to communicate the problems inherent in self-description: 'I' becomes 'You' and occasionally 'He', but the one who is speaking, addressed or referred to is, with conspicuously few exceptions, John Kinsella himself. That the book contains about seventy text notes, and that most of those notes refer to Kinsella's *own* collections of poetry, further suggests the separation between the author and his textual wraith. In his Prologue, Kinsella recovers an image that will stand for this species of autobiography. The location is Cambridge, England, and ice is on the ground. Ice preserves, but it also distorts. Kinsella quotes from one of his poems: "Further down the path, shattered/ sheets of ice disperse reflection:/ your face, a branch, the stark/ blue winter sky . . . Small tundras refusing reverence,/ exteriors you



might slide across/ or fall through endlessly."

What do these small tundras reveal? At the risk of appearing a Narrative Nazi, I will say they reveal the familiar story of a man whose demons get turned into art, or else get drowned in booze and drugs. It is very much to Kinsella's credit that he doesn't try to link the two: the Romantic coupling of art and intemperance is, to adapt the coroner's verdict on the death of Dylan Thomas, 'an insult to the brain'. But the fact that Kinsella was often smashed does at least add a certain verisimilitude to the 'smashed up' quality of his breathless prose. "I was pretty far gone", he says at one point. "I said something about fucking Tracy and Andrew was disgusted. When I did, or maybe I already had, I burnt the curried vegetables and shaved the hair from around her cunt." It isn't all about narrative 'unreliability': clearly Kinsella was a bit befuddled even at the time.

Kinsella's readership is, I suspect, an essentially student readership. *Auto* won't change this state of affairs: studies of how the book relates to its author's 'Counter-Pastoral' project or the deaf poetics of the Language 'School' are easy to foresee, as are the many class discussions as to how and why Kinsella incorporates poetry into the text. This last is in fact an interesting subject, since the author's penchant for quoting himself is ostensibly at odds with his firm belief that his poems have unmanageable lives of their own. If, as he says on a number of occasions, those poems do not 'belong' to him, then why are they quoted in such a way as to suggest that they have a particular bearing on the author's 'life experiences'? I suspect—I fear—that I've answered that question with my own, uneasy quotation marks, but no amount of generic *wink wink*-ing will alter the fact that for many readers the book will appear, in one respect, to negate its own hypothesis. More generally, by crying "*Don't look at me!*" Kinsella ensures his omnipresence. As is the case with Language Poetry, we are left with the faintly ridiculous sense of an author attempting to convince his readers of his *inability* to convince his readers of anything at all. The self-defeating nature of *Auto*—or the *auto*-defeating nature of *Auto*—should thus be clear to all who read it. Is it an *intentional* irony? By the end of the book, I'd ceased to care.

Richard King is a Fremantle writer. He often reviews for ABR.

Speeding into oblivion

GRAHAM SEWELL

Bernard Cohen, John Kinsella, McKenzie Wark, and Terri-ann White: *speedfactory* (FACP, $19.95)

One the of the most satisfying things that accompanied the Dot.Com slump—rather unkindly labelled Dot.Gone in some circles—was the way it punctured the hubristic bubble of futurology surrounding the claims about the transformation of society. One such claim was that the Internet had changed the world forever. This drove the belief that the way we communicate would transform traditional artistic and literary endeavours beyond all recognition.

All the while this was going on many people didn't seem to notice that the sales of printed books—a technology about 550 years old if you believe in a Eurocentric view of history—have never been higher. This apparent anachronism holds out a tantalising prospect. Let's see what happens if we combine the diachronic, linear narrative of printed text with the synchronic, diffused cognition of hypertext. This is the premise of *speedfactory*—a collection of wide-ranging dialogues between Bernard Cohen, John Kinsella, McKenzie Wark, and Terri-ann White. These dialogues take in enduring topics such as love, disease, death, and money as well as a few recent ones like 'How will email change my life'? The one theme, however, that is supposed to link all these narratives is speed. Speed and the destabilising effect it has on literature as electronic representation careens into the agonisingly slow behemoth of manual inscription we inherited from Sumerian cuneiform. You would expect there to be collateral damage from such a collision. Surely some of our comfortable literary conventions will be destroyed

in the process. Surely the energy generated at the point of impact will create new modes of style and content as the mass-free particle crashes into the solidity of the nucleus, creating an uncontrollable chain reaction. Nice idea but is *speedfactory* any good?

Part I: An intriguing premise. One person emails 300 words. The other returns 300 words and if they don't get anything back in the next 48 hours they send another 300 words too.

Game #1: John Kinsella and McKenzie Wark. Starts. Is it John or is it McKenzie? How could we know? Let the games begin. Let's make this interactive. It might help sustain our interest. Four pages in. Paul Virilio? (Note to self: it must be McKenzie, ever the intellectual fashion victim.) Six pages in. White. Patrick White. White blood cells. White wash. Washed-out desert. (Note to self: someone's been reading Derrida's *White Mythology*.) Nine pages in. Transition? Is it John? Talk of AIDS. Gulf War. Sussex landscapes. (Note to self: Yes, that really was Sussex he just mentioned.) Berthold Brecht. Hannah Arendt. Carl Dryer. Chatting with Thomas Pynchon. (Note to self: name drop/must be McKenzie again/he's just found out that *Gravity's Rainbow* is the postmodern book/irony: how can there be a postmodern canon?) John Anderson. Ends. Abruptly!

Well, that certainly was fast and furious. You do get a sense of speed. You certainly get the impression of a litany of names and images flashing past you. Sometimes these names are (loosely) attached to concepts. If you are lucky then on even rarer occasions these concepts are remotely related to the names themselves. On this evidence *speedfactory* is more like the kind of poetry that attempts to capture a mood or a quality using the shapes or sounds of the words rather than any meaning—all sign and no signified. In this way game #1 is a qualified success. It does convey the feeling of losing control. Unfortunately, I lose control. Game #1 is incomprehensible.

Now I've composed myself enough to start reading again. Game #2. Wark and Cohen. More of the same. A list of names, places, objects, dispositions. No discernible form. No rationale. Just a stream of consciousness. Make that two consciousnesses.

Game #3. Wark and White. Crossing borders. This it does to great effect. Game #3 shuttles across the border between the banal and the risible with metronomic regularity. It does, however, perform the possibly unique achievement of linking Al Green with Heraclitus of Ephesus. No mean feat and something of a leap of the imagination for which these contributors should be congratulated.

And so on to game #4. Kinsella and White. Again this piece reminds us that the authors have just laid their hands on the reading list from Postmodernism 101. Gilles Deleuze on Henri Bergson.

Game #5. Cohen and White. Nostalgia. Blondie. Billy Bragg. A visit to the dentist. It's 1979. It's 1999. I like game #5. I don't know why.

Part II: Why is Part II here at all? No dialogues, just monologues. Is it poetry? The Big Question: Is McKenzie Wark able to write about anything else other than himself? McKenzie Wark, solipsism redux. Revisited themes. So that's who wrote that bit. I was right. So that's who wrote that bit. I was wrong. This has become interactive again.

speedfactory is a short book. At a pinch you could read it in less than an hour. Now that's fast. Speed? It depends. I took considerably longer than this because I wanted to make a careful assessment. The disjointedness of this review reflects the disjointedness of the book. If I were being really generous I would say that *speedfactory* should be seen as a series of aphorisms—a collage of first-person existential soundbites. Unfortunately, however, *speedfactory* is just a twenty-first century version of that old parlour game where you write a few lines of a story and pass it on to the person next to you for them to start again where you left off. Of course, it can be a mildly diverting exercise for the participants but it's certainly not a spectator sport. I suppose that's why parlour games should be restricted to the parlour.

So, *speedfactory* should be seen as a failed experiment, an experiment that probably would have failed regardless of the participants. This is because it is still a linear narrative; still enslaved to Time's Arrow, that anxiety-inducing Christian invention that we find so hard to break from. Although the contributors probably found their parlour game fun the hapless reader sees none of the joys of their liaisons in hyperspace. The interesting mutations that were no doubt anticipated by the commissioning editors with this form of dialogical composition have failed to materialise. Mediating that dialogue through a new(ish) technology adds little; I suspect the book

would have been the same even if the authors had to stuff the envelopes, lick the stamps, and walk down to the corner every couple of weeks to post their next missive. And multiple authors? Let's face it; few books are ever the work of one person, from the intervention of the humble editor to the armies of 'researchers' employed by blockbuster novelists. *speedfactory*? snoozefactory!

Graham Sewell teaches in the Department of Management at the University of Melbourne.

Murder, memory, denial

DI BROWN

Unity Dow: *The Screaming of the Innocent* (Spinifex Press, $24.95)

Terri-ann White: *Finding Theodore and Brina* (FACP, $19.95)

As Botswana's first, and only, female High Court judge with a long record as a prominent human-rights lawyer and activist, Unity Dow is well placed to make a difference in the fight against corruption and the ensuing struggle for justice and retribution in her homeland. The author has also written about the link between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and children's legal status in Botswana. She was the plaintiff in a ground-breaking legal case in which Botswana's nationality law was overturned. This led to the passage of legislation through which women were enabled to pass on their nationality to their children.

Unity Dow's first novel *Far and Beyon'*, was written for young adults and presents the conflicts between traditional village life and community. Social and cultural change in a modern Botswana builds tension, as more and more young people adopt white ways and challenge the heavily divided structure of contemporary African society.

The Screaming of the Innocent focuses on matters of community concern that are close to the author's heart and tells a very different story of child removal. In 1994 a 12-year-old girl, Neo Kakang, disappears from her village. The village community know that their children—especially young girls—are being ritually murdered for body parts that are harvested for *dipheko* (Setswana for medicine). Amantle Bokaa knows the story about the big, black men from the north enroute to South Africa's goldmines: "They carry suitcases surrounded by swarms of flies. They grab young girls out walking alone, rape them and cut them in two, across the waist. They stuff the bottom half of the corpse into their suitcase and carry the suitcase for days, so they can re-use the half-corpse until either they've found another young girl or the half-corpse has broken up from rotting." How much of this story is myth and how much is truth?

The villagers tell and re-tell the story of how Neo's bloodstained clothes were found and handed over to the police, but the police say they cannot produce the clothes because they cannot be found. Without such incriminating evidence the authorities fabricate a reason for Neo's death—that the child was killed by a lion or other wild animals—and the case is closed. Five years later the clothes labelled "Neo Kakang; CRB 45/94" are discovered by government employee, Amantle Bokaa. She approaches one of "the new breed of human-rights lawyers" in Botswana, Boitumelo Kukama, and pressure is subsequently applied on the government to re-open the case and to instigate new police investigations.

Through fear for his own daughter's safety and the intimidation inflicted on him by power-hungry men, Rra Naso becomes implicated in the murder of Neo Kakang by naming her. Neo's innocent screams haunt the grief- and guilt-stricken old man dying of tuberculosis, who witnesses Neo's murder. The novel reaches its climax with Rra-Naso's horrific disclosure of how Neo is violated and his identification of the perpetrators. The story, however, takes a bitter twist and the forces of evil once again close in.

Neo's story is based on not one but many murder cases in African countries for ritual or *mutu* (medicine) harvesting purposes. While corrupt men in powerful positions of authority remain the ring-leaders of such heinous crimes, justice will not be done. Those in the community who could speak out are too afraid to come forward. A powerful way of bringing such matters into world focus is to write about them. Unity Dow visited Australia in 2001 for *The Age* Melbourne Writer's Festival to discuss the issues raised in her novel and to draw wider public attention to

contemporary struggles in her homeland. Unity Dow continues to live, write and speak the courage of her convictions and fight for change while choosing to live with her family in Botswana. Spinifex Press will publish the author's next book in 2003.

Terri-ann White, who previously owned and managed the Arcane bookshop in Perth, has taken a courageous step in exploring the risky business of self-discovery through uncovering the shards of her past. In doing so, she searches for and finds herself, and also faces the demons of an Australian family five generations old:

> I uncover the picture of family and, while it is better to know the details, they won't save me from anything.

As a bookseller who collected the secrets and desires of her customers through their reading habits, the author now turns to darker and deeper familial secrets. She presents an alternative view to traditional representations of the social, political and cultural history of early settlement in Western Australia. As such, she makes an important contribution to a growing body of literature that rewrites Australian history, from the mid nineteenth century to the present:

> Born of a pure union in the Swan River Colony in the middle of its first white century, they will be the last generation of Jews in the family.

The nine Krakouer children were born in Fremantle, Western Australia between 1853 and 1869. Their parents, Theodore and Brina (nee Israel), were born in distant European homelands—Krakow and London. Theodore arrived as a convict on the *Mermaid.* Brina Israel, an unmarried emigrant woman, arrived as a free settler to the colony with her sister Esther on board the bride ship, the *Travancore.* Both left the Old World to make their way in the New. The Krakouer boys eventually marry gentiles and none of their children identify as Jewish. Some also have sexual relations with Nyoongar women but these relations are not recorded in official state documents.

In the first chapter of the book the author imagines a "meeting of family" (Jewish and Nyoongar) around a monument erected outside of the town of Broomehill, Western Australia, to commemorate the pioneers who built the road from Broomehill to Coolgardie, known as 'Hollands Track'. The author poses hard questions: will the Nyoongar members of the family, if they arrive at the designated meeting place, be accepted or even acknowledged as family? Perhaps they will "be rounded up and transported to a mission like Mogumber at Moore River as part of the containment policies formulated to counter the 'coloured problem'". Or, they may be simply "shooed away by the 'real' family":

> One part of the family is Jewish; it starts off that way at least. Another part is Aboriginal. An Australian experience; a colonial experience. The quintessential Australian family. How do we get back together?

As the principal researcher facing opposition from those who do not agree with her interpretation of family history/histrionics, fact and fiction, the author knows this meeting of family will never take place. There have been too many differences and exclusions—the past being the past—that is all pervasive and robs the present of possibilities for reconciliation. The author recognises that within families over time "once avoidance is installed, amnesia is the usual outcome". As "the family archivist" and "keeper of secrets" Terri-ann White holds her own silences, "hiding behind a signature and a barrage of words".

A photograph of the Krakouer family taken at the end of the nineteenth century appears on the book jacket. The feature on the front cover is a close-up of Fanny's right hemline, ankle and shoe, taken from the same photograph. Fanny is one of four children belonging to the author's great-grandparents, David and Jessie Krakouer. These are linkages the author makes "with strangers, through blood". As a descendant of the people posing on the verandah in the photograph, the author meets three of them during their long lives.

Finding Theodore and Brina is a story of what is spoken and unspoken, what is found and what is not found in family records, hidden truths and the silence of the past imprinted within the present. It is also a granddaughter's "desire to remake a family with words and an attention to select lines of history". This will involve gaps, selective memory and selective choices in the re-telling. The author focuses on three women in the family—sisters who

were born between 1937 and 1949—Ena, Nancy and May Krakouer.

Ena's secret was her first baby, born out of wedlock in the year that Wall Street crashed in 1929:

> While some are adopted out, some are taken away because under the policies of the government of the day they are half-caste. Nobody talks about any of this.

After only nine months with her birth mother, Beryl Merle is adopted out. This event remains a family secret for over half a century until Merle arrives on her sister's doorstep the year after Ena, "mother of five, grandmother of thirteen", and dies during a game of bingo aged 69. Ena Krakouer had married Paul Raoul Le Comte, born in Malta of a French father and a Welsh mother, who stowed away to Fremantle when he was 16 years old and became an "entirely assimilated Australian". Ena's younger sister Nancy Krakouer, a "failed political activist" was imprisoned in internment camps with twenty other racist and fascist members of The Australia First Party, the subject of one of Australia's biggest national security scandals. Nancy is the only individual in the Krakouer family with some notoriety. Significantly it is Nancy— the outsider and 'bone fide outlaw'— who links Ena's adopted daughter, Merle, to her blood sister after her mother's death. May, the author's great-aunt, is one of two left from her generation who resides in a nursing home, suffering from Altzheimer's disease, who remembers and forgets.

The remains of the author's great-great grandmother, Brina Israel Krakouer Mardon, who died in 1902 after forty-nine years in the colony, lie in an unmarked grave in the Jewish Orthodox section of the Karrakatta cemetery in Western Australia. There are no photographs of Brina in the State library— only copies of her letters to officials held on microfiche. Theodore Krakouer was committed in 1874 to the asylum in Fremantle that was built with convict labour in 1861. This is now the Fremantle Arts Centre, "the big limestone building that treasures the making of art and craft: a transmutation from loony bin to arts centre". This was the place where Theodore died in 1877.

The author inherits the past and all of its apparitions. Her childhood and adulthood have lacked important information and knowledge that wasn't passed on by family members: "Any conflict in this family has been patched over and nobody can remember any detail of the reasons for sisters refusing to speak to each other for the rest of their lives, for half a century. Left for dead, or for conjecturing, isolated, curious members of new generations. Like me." Terri-ann White is compelled to write.

The writing is self-reflective and honest, moving from the author's voice to other narratives that tell stories of heartbreak, violation, dislocation and madness. These stories uncover the underbelly of racism that is alive and well in a nation still largely in denial.

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Jewish cobbers

PHILIP MENDES

John Levi & George Bergman: *Australian Genesis: Jewish Convicts & Settlers 1788–1860* (MUP, New Edition, $89.95)

Chanan Reich: *Australia and Israel: An Ambiguous Relationship* (MUP, $39.95)

Suzanne Rutland: *Edge of the Diaspora* (Brandl & Schlesinger, 2nd Edition, $39.95)

For Jews, Australia has truly been a land of milk and honey. From the very beginning of white settlement, Jews have formed an accepted part of Australian society and culture. Three new books illustrate this Jewish success story by documenting different periods and aspects of Australian Jewish life.

Australian Genesis—written by well-known reform Rabbi John Levi—traces the early years of Australian Jewry from the First Fleet to the gold rushes of the 1850s.

Levi notes that Jews comprised a disproportionate percentage of early convicts. This high involvement in criminal activities reflected the marginal and poverty-stricken existence of many Eastern European Jewish immigrants in Britain. Consequently, apart from the indigenous Aborigines, Jews would constitute the only substantial non-Christian community in Australia until the arrival of the Chinese during the gold rushes.

Levi relates the fascinating stories of many of the early Jewish convicts and settlers. For example, there was Esther Abrahams, who became the mistress

and later wife of the Lieutenant Governor of the colony, and hence Australia's unofficial 'first lady'. Other characters included John Harris who became Australia's first policeman, Israel Chapman who acted as Australia's first detective, Barnett Levey the founder of Australian professional theatre, Joseph Samuel known as the man they couldn't hang because the rope broke three times, the pirate James Woolfe, and Edward Davis the Jewish bushranger executed for robbery and murder.

Perhaps most notable was Ikey Solomon, the famous underworld character fictionalised as Fagin in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. Strangely, Levi makes no reference to Bryce Courtenay's recent fictional account of Solomon's life in the *Potato Factory*.

Over time, Jews became prominent in such trades and professions as auctioneering, jewellery, clothing, general stores, and innkeeping, and became a noticeable part of the emerging middle class. They contributed a number of Yiddish and Hebrew words to Australian slang such as cobber, shikker/shikkered, and shemozzle.

In general, there was a refreshing absence of intolerance and bigotry within the colony. Jewish religious and civil equality preceded Jewish political emancipation in Britain by fourteen years. As early as 1844, for example, Jews were appointed to important political posts, and some Jews would also play a prominent role in the Eureka Stockade rebellion. In addition, State assistance was provided for the building of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues. There were instances of anti-Semitism and some popular stereotyping of Jews as associated with money-lending and wealth, but overt social and political discrimination was rare.

IN CONTRAST, Chanan Reich—an Israeli political scientist who has spent much of the past twenty years in Australia—explores the historical relationship between Australia, Australian Jews, and the State of Israel from 1915 to 1967. Reich is a labour Zionist, and his text reflects this perspective to the extent that it features a preface by the former Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres.

His study is based primarily on the official archival records of both countries, and this reliance on declassified archives emerges as a major strength, and at times weakness. I wondered throughout what contrasting interpretation an Arab or Palestinian author might draw from the same documents.

The relationship between Australia and Israel is described by Reich as complex, involving a mixture of both cooperation and conflict. Contrary to the popular myth that Australia has always been pro-Zionist and pro-Israel, a number of Australian governments were strongly opposed to the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

For example, conservative governments led by Joseph Lyons and Robert Menzies from 1932 to 1941 were overtly hostile to Jewish national aspirations reflecting their allegiance to British imperial agendas. Later, the Australian Labor Government of Chifley and Evatt campaigned heavily for the internationalisation of Jerusalem as a result of Catholic (and often anti-Semitic) political pressure.

On the other hand, Australian support for Zionism and Israel has been significant. Reich argues that the Chifley Labor government was fundamentally pro-Zionist. Despite anti-Zionist propaganda from the conservative opposition and sections of the Australian media, Dr Evatt consistently used his key role in the United Nations Committee on Palestine to support partition. The ALP's sympathy for Zionism reflected its more critical and independent attitude to British policies, and the labour movement's sympathy for Jews following the Holocaust.

Later, the ALP government granted full recognition to the State of Israel, established diplomatic relations, opposed attempts by UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte to hand over significant territory to the Arabs, and supported Israel's admission to the UN despite opposition from Britain. On the other hand, Australia refused to recognise Jewish control over West Jerusalem, and assented temporarily to British pressure to delay recognition of Israel.

Following Israel's independence, Robert Menzies and the conservatives began to revise their previously harsh and antagonistic views. Reflecting their identification with British interests, they gradually moved from ambivalent neutrality to strong support for Israel's actions during the 1956 Suez crisis. The government also offered strong support for the Israeli position during the 1967 war, and the ALP opposition led by the sympathetic Gough Whitlam was equally, if not more, pro-Israel.

Overall, Reich succeeds in deconstructing popular myths about an innately close and supportive relationship between Australia and Israel, and provides an accessible historical overview of the major events in state-to-state relations from 1948 to 1967. How-

ever, a deficit of the text its heavy reliance on archival records, leaving the author without an analytical narrative when it comes to the internal dynamics of the Australian Jewish community.

Thus, Reich misses a number of opportunities to elaborate on political divisions within Australian Jewry, to analyse their relationship with broader ideological debates around Zionism and Israel. For example, he notes but does not comment on the irony that the Left provided the strongest support for Israel in the 1948 war while the Right was overtly hostile, and yet these positions were largely reversed after 1967.

HISTORIAN SUZANNE RUTLAND provides an impressive overview of the history of Australian Jewry, and fills in many of the gaps left by Levi and Reich. Her basic argument is that Australian Jewry prior to 1945 struggled to survive as a distinctive religious and ethnic community. This struggle reflected a number of factors including numerical smallness and geographical isolation, the pressures of assimilation in Australia's free and open society, and the insular and static approach of the Anglo-Australian community leadership.

However, Rutland argues that the Jewish refugee immigration of the 1930s and forties transformed Australian Jewry into an expanding and thriving community. Today, Australian Jewry is renowned for its relatively low intermarriage rates, dynamic day-school movement, and strong commitment to Zionism and Israel.

Rutland notes that early Australian Jews aimed to minimise differences with the majority Christian population, creating what she calls an ideology of non-distinctiveness. This ideology emphasised that Jews were merely Australians of the Jewish religion, rather than a separate ethnic or cultural community. Consequently, there was little sympathy for Zionism, and often little sympathy for foreign Jews fleeing persecution who were strongly encouraged to assimilate into Australian society.

As with Levi, Rutland notes that Jews felt welcome in Australia. There was little institutional prejudice or discrimination. Anti-Semitism existed, but Rutland is careful to emphasise that, with some exceptions, it primarily emanated from the political margins. The public acceptance of Jews was reflected in their disproportionate involvement in the early colonial legislatures and the Federation Movement. Later, Sir Isaac Isaacs and Sir John Monash would gain national notoriety.

Rutland provides a balanced account of the more controversial events in Australian Jewish political history. For example, she impartially analyses the rise and fall of the left-wing Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism within the context of McCarthyism and the Cold War. She offers a careful discussion of the opposition by Sir Isaac Isaacs and other Anglo-Australian Jews to Zionism in the 1940s, and the connection between Jewish support for the ALP and the role played by Dr Evatt in the creation of Israel. She gives a measured critique of the discriminatory quotas imposed on postwar Jewish migrants by Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell.

The only disappointing aspect of this book is that its brief penultimate chapter fails to seriously expand beyond the 1988 publication date of the first edition. Rutland makes virtually no reference to the major Australian Jewish books, theses, and historical articles published in the past fifteen years. Consequently, we hear nothing whatsoever about the contemporary Australian Jewish Left, and the myriad battles of the controversial Australian Jewish Democratic Society with the Zionist establishment. We also hear nothing about the infamous Demidenko Affair, or of the increasing Jewish involvement in diverse social movements ranging from gay rights to Aboriginal reconciliation to support for refugees.

Dr Philip Mendes lectures in Social Policy & Community Development at Monash University, and is author of The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War, 1965–72, *Lazare Press, Melbourne, 1993.*

The big peanut revisited

BILL HARLEY

Rae Wear: *Johannes Bjelke-Petersen: the Lord's Premier* (UQP, $35)

Joh Bjelke-Petersen was undoubtedly a significant Australian politician. At a national level, his appointment of Albert Field to a casual Senate vacancy was central to the dismissal of the Whitlam government and he was certainly a thorn in the side of a succession of federal governments, particularly where issues of environmental protection were concerned. Within the state of Queensland his impact was profound. For those of us who grew up and were po-

liticised in Queensland during the 1970s and eighties he stood for corruption, oppression and a total disregard for democratic process.

Bjelke-Petersen was also of considerable significance in terms of the politics of identity—he came to be a symbol of the otherness of Queensland, or at least the stylised view of Queensland as 'the deep north', with a population which was almost without exception composed of conservative, racist bigots. In a country with a shameful history of racism, bigotry and social conservatism, it was no doubt comforting for those outside Queensland to be able to compare themselves favourably to this caricature.

In spite of his significance, however, I wonder whether we really need another book on Bjelke-Petersen and, if we do, whether this is really the book we need. In *Johannes Bjelke-Petersen: the Lord's Premier*, Rae Wear attempts to chronicle Bjelke-Petersen's life and to provide an explanation of his approach to politics. Those of us who find Bjelke-Petersen and his period of premiership interesting will probably find enough new material here to repay the reading. There are some delightful details which reminded me of just how bizarre Queensland under Joh could be. A nice example is the quote from an Education Department bureaucrat concerning the "subversive, anti-establishment, anarchistic, revolutionary, permissive, amoral or immoral, irreligious or over-religious" beliefs of some young Queensland schoolteachers. Some of the reminiscences of those who knew Bjelke-Petersen are also quite diverting. But overall it's a rather unsatisfying book.

As a piece of academic research—I believe that it was originally a PhD thesis—the book lacks explanatory power. It's never clear precisely what Wear is trying to explain, beyond perhaps the factors shaping Bjelke-Petersen's personality (with a particular emphasis on religion and family) and the impact of this personality on his politics. I'm sure that personality matters, but I'm less convinced that it's the *primary* factor in explaining political outcomes. In making personality central, Wear often slips into rather trite and shallow explanations of events which veer rather too close to pop psychology. For example, in attempting to explain aspects of Bjelke-Petersen's relationship with other political actors, she falls back on the suggestion that: "It is not inconceivable that attempts to make him submit to another's will evoked memories of his father's power, as something to be resented and/or as something to be imitated". Ultimately issues of socialisation and personality don't provide sufficient explanatory power and I would have liked to see a lot more emphasis placed on the role of economic and political context, as well as an explicitly stated theoretical framework.

This is also an oddly dispassionate book considering the subject matter. Wear makes clear in her introduction that she has tried to integrate a wide range of views, both positive and negative, about her subject. But I fear that in trying to be balanced she has ended up with with a rather grey account of a rather colourful subject. Although as I've noted above there are some lovely bits of detail, for me the book fails to evoke the distinctive ambience of Queensland during the Bjelke-Petersen years—the claustrophobic heat, the repressive political atmosphere, the brazenness of police, politicians and businesspeople, and the apparent comfortable apathy of so many citizens.

If you want to try to understand Bjelke-Petersen's Queensland I think you'd be much better off going to Andrew McGahan's *Last Drinks*. Of course, *Last Drinks* is fiction and Joh Bjelke-Petersen is never mentioned, but for my money McGahan's novel provides a more compelling account of Queensland politics than Wear's book, and it's a great thriller to boot.

Bill Harley lives in Brunswick but he used to live in Brisbane.

Waltzing materialism

DAVE NADEL

Richard Neville: *Amerika Psycho: Behind Uncle Sam's Mask of Sanity* (Ocean Press, $18.95)

That Richard Neville has titled his thin collection of essays and emails *Amerika Psycho* tells you a great deal about both Neville and his book. The term 'Amerika' for the USA came from the Yippie and countercultural wing of the 1960s protest movement. Apart from Neville I cannot think of anyone who has used the term in the last thirty years.

Although Neville's original claim to fame was as one of the editors of *Oz* when it was a Sydney-based groundbreaking satirical magazine, he is best

known as one of the editors of London *Oz*. The British version was far more counter-cultural and much more closely connected to the late 1960s youth culture. Neville's book published around this time (*Playpower*, 1970) hails the counterculture as the way of the future. Thirty years on Richard Neville is an occasional television personality and a self-described "professional futurist". But as the title suggests he still looks back to the sixties counterculture.

The book is built around two essays Neville wrote for the Fairfax *Good Weekend.* The first, six months before 11 September 2001, written in response to George Bush's rejection of the Kyoto treaty, accuses American society of being selfish, superficial, materialist and workaholic. He points out that America uses 30 per cent of the world's resources and produces a quarter of the world's greenhouse gases.

The second Fairfax essay, written almost a year later looks at 9/11 and America's response. Its main argument is that the US is as guilty of terrorism as al-Qaeda. Neville suggests that in the six months following the attack on the World Trade Centre the US killed more Afghan civilians than al-Qaeda had killed Americans on 9/11. He lists some of the many American interventions around the world from Nicaragua to Sudan, often in support of dictators and always with high civilian casualties. He also argues that Afghanistan was a target because of the Taliban's unwillingness to host an oil pipeline from Turkmenistan.

The rest of the book comprises reprints of (mostly hostile) emails Neville received after the two articles were published and a series of shorter essays of varying quality. The best essay is entitled 'To Love, Honour and Throw Away' and links the decline in human relationships with consumer society, workaholism and the loss of leisure time. Neville refers to his countercultural dreams of *Playpower* and complains: "Instead of a counterculture, we have created a hyperculture."

The worst essay also relates to the counterculture. Under the heading 'Who killed the counterculture?' Neville argues that a 1968 youth rebellion was defeated by generational marketing. Even for Neville this is a stunningly superficial conclusion. What sort of counterculture is so vulnerable that it can be defeated by a marketing strategy?

Generational marketing had been invented more than a decade earlier. What was happening in 1968 was both more and less than a youth rebellion. May 1968 in France and the Prague Spring involved the whole society. Furthermore, rock'n'roll, drugs and a more open attitude to sex may be a cultural change, but it is neither a youth rebellion nor a countercultural rebellion. It was however the prevailing sixties experience of most young people. Those of us who were actively involved in protest politics, whether as revolutionary socialists, labourites or hippies were always a minority of our generation.

Neville's writing is always colourful and entertaining. Describing the influence of American values on Australia, he writes:

> The Man from Snowy River, having turned himself into a brand, is hunched at midnight over an intrusive 'business activity statement', pitting the depreciation of his assets, including his 'small and weedy beast' against earnings for product endorsements. Perhaps he now regrets his capture of the colt from old Regret. Most people I know are working their guts out, even the ones who should be singing soft-rock ballads around the piano in pink dressing-gowns at Shady Acres. "Have you been on the Harbour Bridge at 7.30pm?" gasps a friend, "It's still peak hour." In 1800, the governor of New South Wales set the working hours for convicts at fifty hours a week, much less than today's relentless grind.

It's good writing and many of his criticisms of American society and foreign policy are absolutely correct (even if he is reluctant to use the term capitalism to describe what is wrong with American society). But the arguments are always superficial and impressionistic. At their best they are supported by references to Chomsky or Pilger, both of whom provide more context and detail to their arguments than Neville.

The image of American society as psychologically disturbed is not helpful. Apart from the fact that it lays Neville open to the charge of knee-jerk anti-Americanism—which was the accusation of his email critics—it depoliticises the argument and it does not really lead anywhere. So when Neville concludes by advising his readers that "This is not the time to give up," the only alternative he can offer is to expand our horizons. That (via sex and drugs and rock'n'roll) was his advice in 1970 and it did not work then either.

Dave Nadel teaches Sports History at Victoria University. He was prominent in the student movement of the 1960s.

COMMENT / *Debra Smith*

How we are failing released prisoners

THE VICTORIAN MINISTER FOR JUSTICE visited the prison where I work. He asked me how successful the drug program was. I replied that it was difficult to measure success, as we operate in isolation, and though his Government had recently funded some new support services in the community there was still not enough support for prisoners on release.

I recently worked with 'David', a prisoner who is thirty. David lived in foster homes since he was seven, and has been in prison nine times for drug-related offences. He is being released soon and believes he has the best chance ever of not returning because this time he has more support than before.

This doesn't mean the Government policies are working. Support for David comes from volunteers and an unfunded community agency willing to help due to a sense of social justice. David has no family or social support. He is being helped by the Bridge Foundation, a community organisation based in East Gippsland which supports released prisoners wishing to settle in the Sale/Bairnsdale area. The organisation operates with volunteers and community donations, and has developed volunteer networks out of a growing sense of frustration that the Government is not listening or willing to help. Through these networks we have arranged to have a person meet David on his release, and take him to emergency accommodation (a motel room for two nights) in the town nearest the prison. This is because there are no housing places for him, despite assurances by the housing service that there would be. We have also managed to find him part-time employment and short-term accommodation. The Bridge Foundation worker will also take him to Centrelink, his housing appointment and his employment appointment the following day. We will try to provide some kind of integration into the community over the next two months.

This is the support David has. It's not much, but it's more than he's ever had before. I don't know what his chances of making it are, but his case illustrates some critical issues.

The first is economic. The Government is prepared to spend about $65,000 a year to keep this man in prison, and only $200 to look after him on release (SBS: 2001). This doesn't make sense. David needs more than an unfunded, volunteer organisation is able to provide to help him develop skills and become a useful member of the community. He might make it, but the odds are against him. The current recidivism rate in Victoria is about 65 per cent (ABS:2001)

The cost of re-offending involves community safety and economic factors. It is likely that an unsupported released prisoner will re-offend, thus putting the community at risk. If he returns to prison it will also cost the community more to maintain him.

Another issue is the poor results of Government-funded services, particularly the transitional housing program. Since the program's introduction, fewer prisoners have received help on leaving prison than before. Bridging the Gap is a Government-funded pilot program which was established to provide a range of transitional support services, but spends 98 per cent of its resources and time on accommodation issues because there simply is not enough accommodation available. (Office Correctional Services Commissioner Reports: 2001).

Possibly the most important issue is that every time a young man spends time in prison he is more brutalised, more prone to alienation to community values and a sense of belonging. Because he develops a sense of worthlessness instead he is less likely to be able to manage on the outside.

David is typical of young men who leave prison. Unless we begin seriously to take action to provide support and resources for people the revolving door of prison, the negative impacts of prison—drug use, violence, alienation, the spread of infectious diseases—will continue.

It is not enough that concerned volunteers are doing their best, and that the Government recognises the problems involved in the transition from prison to the community. Government services need to match Government policy, and this must start with adequate housing. About 2300 prisoners are released in any given year in Victoria, and many of them cannot return to their families, or afford pri-

vate rental. Public housing must be available, as must support services. The inequity between $65,000 to keep a man in prison, and a few hundred to keep him out, needs to be addressed.

Another prisoner, 'Jamie', is also due for release soon, and in a recent group session I challenged him about his release plans, which had included a great deal of bravado, drug taking, and aggression. Then he burst into tears. "You just don't understand," he yelled, "I've got nothing. No family, no friends, nowhere to live, no-one wants me, I haven't even got any clothes except a black T-shirt and a pair of shorts, of course I'll be back." Jamie is not an isolated case, and we will get him some clothes, and find him some temporary accommodation, and we will probably work with him again within the prison. There is a lot more to Jamie's story. And there are a lot more stories that emphasise the way we are failing, and we have to start listening.

Debra Smith is an East Gippsland psychologist completing her PhD on public health practices in prison; and Chairperson of the Bridge Foundation, a community organisation supporting prisoners on release.

COMMENT / *Dan Leach*

Our stars and stripes

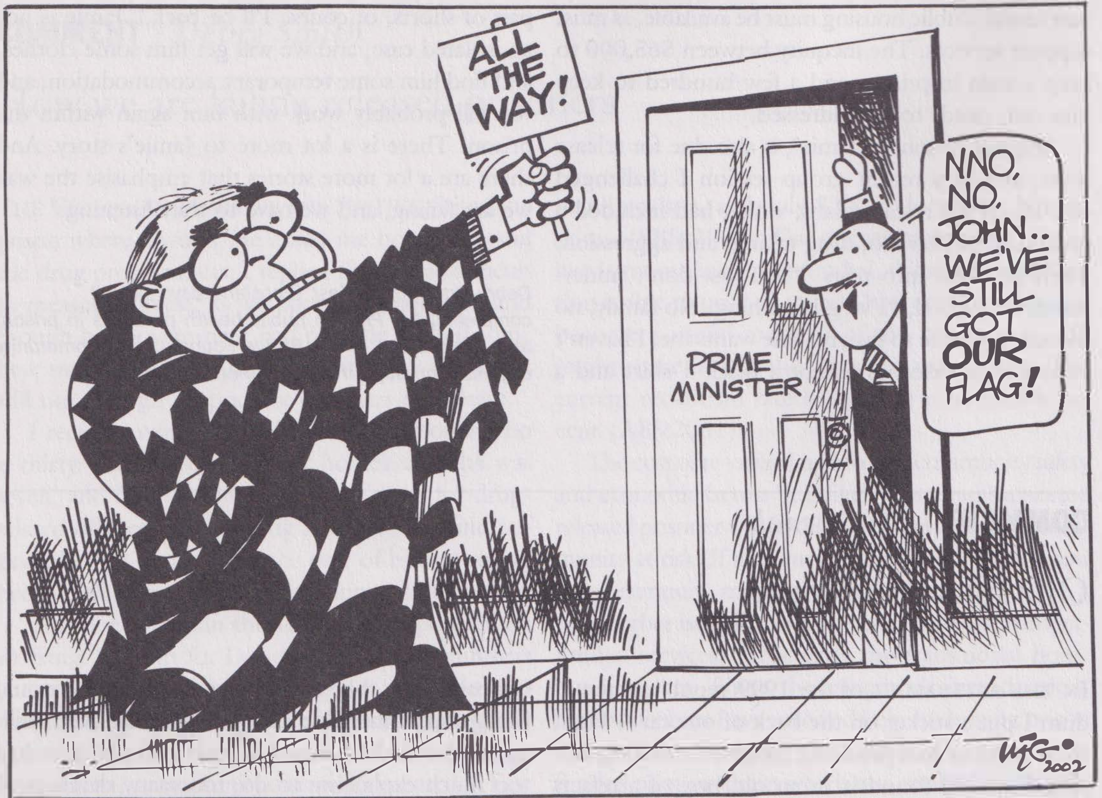
IN THE AFTERMATH of the 1999 republic referendum I put a sticker on the back of our car—'Fight for Australian Independence' beneath a striking Eureka Flag. I'd found it in an old box of artefacts from the Whitlam era that had belonged to my father, and felt strongly enough about the failed referendum to try and wilfully ignore the doubts that instantly beset me. I stuck it on, nodded, and immediately began searching for a Murri flag to put beside it. It just couldn't stand on its own. It had to be qualified.

The following May Day, still a little unsure of its impact, I decided to be unabashed and march with my father's wonderful homemade Southern Cross. "That's the BLF flag," I heard someone say. Later, I asked a friend if we could fly it boldly from his car as we headed to a traditional Brisbane post-May Day piss-up. He looked troubled. "What if people think we're Nazis?"

I can recall far too many incidents like this. In Scotland I heard the Eureka referred to as "that Aussie White Power flag". I wasn't too young to remember a time when Brisbane skinheads flew the Union Jack, and would attack any 'lefty poofter' sporting a Southern Cross on his schoolbag. There's a great theft underway, that's clear: the theft of a progressive, republican symbol of great power and history, and it's taking place even in the perceptions of much of the Left itself. Despite my passionate opposition to this, there was still no way I would bring that homemade Eureka flag to the Reconciliation March the following June. I would have had too much explaining to do, too many defences to mount. It dismayed me to realise it, but it would probably even have caused offence.

So where, now, does a progressive, republican, non-indigenous Australian look for a defining symbol? It seems each time I display the Eureka Flag, a new misinterpretation is revealed. "Are you a Maoist?" "Are you a fascist?" Or perhaps worst of all, "Do you support South Melbourne?"

Let's face it, if you don't want to appropriate yet more of Murri culture by pinching their flag, and if you're left unimpressed by the various insipid corporate-style logos proposed by slick marketing agencies with their stylised kangaroos and potaroos and Ulurus, and if you seek history and meaning and substance in your symbols, then there's simply no alternative to the Eureka. No other existing Australian symbol embodies social justice, anti-colonialism, republicanism, multiculturalism (Germans, Italians, Americans and Irish were all at the Stockade), and resistance to oppressive authority like the Southern Cross. And to those who baulk at a flag 'born in violence' (and who then often go on to defend the British ensign 'because the ANZACs fought under it'), I ask you to ponder the origins of the Stars and Stripes, the French, Irish and Italian



tricolours, the Chinese flag, the flag of East Timor, and all the many other globally respected national symbols born of revolution or resistance.

But it seems today too many on the Left are postmodernly nervous about being in any way identified with the bogey of nationalism, and are content to be rendered *sans symbole*. We'll stand beside the Murris and support their flag (and so we should), but we couldn't possibly fly one of our own. We'll read with interest as the descendants of Lalor et al. fight the 'theft' of the original banner by the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, but it seems we won't intervene to stop the real theft—that of a popular and potent symbol belonging to all progressive Australians.

Dan Leach is a historian and scriptwriter.

COMMENT / *Gerry Harant*

Technology and the Left: love or hate?

IN RECENT YEARS the federal government decided that what Australian television viewers really need is DTV or digital Television. With the ALP's connivance, they pushed legislation through parliament which—unless common-sense prevails—will obsolete current analogue transmissions by 2008. After lengthy hassling with commercial operators, they finally settled on one of the many possible uses of the rehashed medium, High Definition Television (HDTV).

What will HDTV do for you? You can see it in the shops now. It comes with a big image, and an even bigger price. Its format is similar to the old cinemascope, hardly what graphic artists would choose routinely, even for landscapes. Also, years ago, research showed that the impression of size of

an object had little to do with the angle subtended by the image at the viewers' eye. You cannot turn a picture of a pussycat into a picture of a lion just by looking at it from close up or through a magnifier, no matter what the sales people tell you. Your brain uses some six parameters to interpret the size of an object.

You can buy a set-top adapter which allows you to receive the digital picture, albeit somewhat inferior to what you are receiving now, through your existing set. That'll set you back around $500. And, don't you worry, you'll be seeing the same old reruns.

Chances are that, like most people, you will have little idea why you are supposed to need DTV. In particular you may have scratched your head as to why the cash-strapped ABC should need to spend $180 million on it. Mind you, it's small beer compared to the ultimate national total conversion cost of $30 billion projected by 2007, most of it spent overseas. And if you were to have believed successive ABC fat cats, the public would have rushed to buy HDTVs just like they embraced colour in the 1970s. No kidding. Predictably, it didn't happen. Today, one person in two thousand watches DTV.

There is nothing new about technology giving you less for more. Society is shot through with lousy and unreliable services all due to the 'improvements' brought about by new technology. At least most of these fulfil their promise—to put money into the pockets of corporations. Banks are the best example. But HDTV is the ultimate in waste—not even the moguls of media and technology can, at this stage, find any major way of using it to exploit discernible groups of gullible idiots. Even if we ultimately get more channels, advertising revenue won't increase; it will just be spread more thinly.

I don't need to warn *Overland* readers against wasting money on this non-solution for a non-problem even if they had the necessary. Like most sensible Australians, they are not likely to touch it with the proverbial barge pole. Alas, they are unlikely, however, to abstain for any reason other than money savings, going by my experiences. When the digital imposition was first mooted, I approached the Friends of the ABC (FABC) committee (some of whom I had known for decades) in writing, pointing out that the $180 million to be spent on digitisation would have to come from the ABC budget and that this amounted to three times the budget cut against which their membership was at the same time vigorously protesting Australia-wide. The committee treated this as a side-issue; indeed, for their next AGM they invited Murray Green, Victorian Regional ABC manager, to give us the good oil on the beauties of digitisation, without allowing any Q&A or discussion afterwards. For another year after that I vainly attempted to get access to their newsletter even only in the form of a letter to the editor. It wasn't until Brian Johns's last days that they ultimately decided on an anti-digitisation policy without adequately explaining the reasons to their membership.

Why am I grizzling about this, when there are so many important issues to tackle? Simply because technology is, in western capitalism, perhaps the most important ideological issue at the moment. The Left is shot through with various degrees of technological determinism, and the FABC attitude is typical of an important section of left liberals.

TECHNOLOGY AND LEFT IDEOLOGY

By and large, capitalism is based on technology. In particular, labour-saving technology (i.e. that connected with more intensive exploitation) is closely linked to capitalist organisation. Prior to the industrial revolution few people thought of intensifying labour other than by making people work harder. Enlightened thinkers recognised the dichotomy inherent in 'labour-saving machinery'. When Blake talked about Britain's "dark satanic mills" he referred to fettered thought as much as fettered labour. Right from their beginnings, socialist and communist parties spoke of the 'dignity of labour' in the same breath as looking on labour as drudgery to be eliminated wherever possible. Some regarded machinery as a means of eliminating this drudgery, others were horrified at the miseries inflicted on the workers in industrial societies.

This contradiction goes on today where even some leading unionists see automation as the ultimate liberating force. Textile workers in 1812 had no such illusions when they smashed the wide knitting frames which produced shoddy goods as well as putting workers' jobs in jeopardy. For this they were heavily punished, transported and hanged, and the term 'Luddite' remains an insult to this day.

ASPECTS OF WORK

The Dignity of Labour does not depend on whether

you are sitting in front of a terminal or shovelling shit. It depends on the conditions under which you do your work, and on its purpose. Having spent years as a process worker, I can assure you that alienated repetitive manual work, something performed for a boss, can for a moderate period be relaxing and even therapeutic. Work-songs from all over the world bear witness to this. During the past decade or so, paid work in most 'advanced' countries has become more and more onerous and stressful. This has almost nothing to do with the technology used but everything to do with the attitudes of management. Conditions of work are rarely governed by economic considerations. This was already clear to industrial reformer Robert Owen in the early part of the nineteenth century. Addressing his fellow mill-owners, he produced figures showing that without exploiting child labour, by working relatively reasonable hours and providing decent housing for his workers, he was actually producing better profits. As it was materials rather than wages which were his main costs, avoidance of waste and of costly mistakes, as well as increased productivity when workers don't fall asleep with fatigue at their machines, is far more important than employing cheap children and driving workers to exhaustion. His peers chose not to believe him. Nor would a similar group of employers believe him today.

Economic rationality is only a small part of the boss–worker relationship. The most important aspect is class. Take events like WTO meetings. The corporate moguls don't need meetings to brew up further impositions – yet they hold them. Capitalist states hosting these meetings do so in the full knowledge that it is going to cost them millions and that the result will be the radicalisation of new sections of the population. There is no economic explanation for the decision to hold these meetings; it is a matter of showing who is the boss. With the standard left economic model so obviously in tatters, can one blame people for being confused about technology?

HANDS UP THOSE WHO KNOW WHAT THEY MEAN BY TECHNOLOGY

When the first human picked up a rock to crack a nut, he or she was only doing what great apes had been doing for millions of years. It is nowadays fashionable to assume that labour-saving machinery didn't really take off until the widespread introduction of digital computers in the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, automatic machine tools and textile machines were introduced well before the turn of the twentieth century. The punch-card-controlled Jacquard loom produced intricate lace from the year 1802; Whitworth's automatic lathe dates from 1850. The machines which are now defining, changing and threatening our environment are, as a moment's thought will confirm, not the computer but the bulldozer, the chainsaw, the internal combustion engine and the 1001 chemicals which are the offshoots of earlier chemical revolutions. The hype about the 'second industrial revolution' is just that.

WHAT'S CHANGED?

Even the original industrial revolution was more about industrial reorganisation than technology. The division of labour was not an automatic result of the factory system; rather did the factory system allow the imposition of the division of labour on workers. The factory system was not intended to produce cheaper goods to consumers; it was a means of increasing the rate of exploitation. If subsequently competition resulted in cheaper goods, it was an unwanted (by the entrepreneur) side-effect. As Robert Owen proved, the impositions of the factory system were nothing more than a class-dictated means of punishing workers. Of course, if asked, the entrepreneur would argue that production had increased tremendously and indeed that may have been his perception. As Owen showed, it is a perception employers were never prepared to put to the test.

FLOATING FUND

Once again we would like to thank our friends and supporters for generously giving to keep *Overland* afloat. Thanks this quarter are due to: $1000 E.K., B.W.; $500 V.D.; $400 J.McL.; $200 A.M.H.; $150 V.I.; $30 G.K-S.; $28 J.S.; $24 N.J.; $20 R.E., B.A., L.L.; $18 J.M.; $14 O.H.; $10 J.A; $9 R.D.M.; $8 J.A.S., R.L., J.P., S.A.G., A.H.K., A.B., V.O'D., E.W., M.S.; $5 M.D.; $4 G.B., H.S.B., P.W.G.; $2 R.&B.S.; Totalling: $3534.00.

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THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE LIBERATED WORKER

Of course improvements in production technology have raised worker productivity tremendously. At the same time, well-meaning though ignorant 'liberal' writers kept on hailing the way machinery was supposed to ease the burden of labour when in fact the reverse was intended and achieved. Concentration on such areas as the Internet and mobile phones leads the system away from providing the essentials of life and indulging, in 'advanced' countries, in providing toys for the affluent which are of transient economic value. The most vital areas, particularly those of alternative energy and resource savings, are as yet hardly touched.

On the other hand, playing with these toys has given non-technical people a quite unwarranted idea that they are, courtesy of Bill Gates, participants in the 'computer revolution'. This in turn has given rise to some of the world's worst software writing to supply the lucrative market for unnecessary 'upgrades'. Meanwhile a gas plant blows up, bridges collapse, a tunnel springs leaks, trains derail, even a satellite fails because it gets metric measurements confused with imperial.

IDEOLOGY LEFT BEHIND

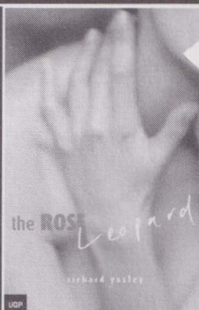
Nowadays few of the left have personal experience of the industrial situation. And Karl Marx was always ambiguous about technology. While tearing strips off the murderous practices of employers, he saw workers' oppression by technology as an economic rather than ideological process. Marx and Engels, who clearly saw the domination of ideology by the ruling class, didn't, apparently, see the direction of technology as part of this domination but as having a life of its own. As a result, Marx could cheerfully predict, in the chapter on Primitive Accumulation in *Capital*, that the means of production would outgrow the mode of production, leading to the system's collapse from within. If only!

The growing gulf between rich and poor individuals and countries is not due to 'mistakes' by the system, but displays its essence and purpose. State brutality at peaceful demonstrations is no aberration but the true face of a repressive society based on repressive technologies.

Gerry Harant, under the pseudonym 'Ned Ludd', runs a monthly segment on 3CR critically analysing aspects of technology.

UQP University of Queensland Press

NEW FICTION



The Rose Leopard
Richard Yaxley

"Passion, love, loss, grief – and passionate healing. Richard Yaxley manages the whole range in this massively assured debut."—
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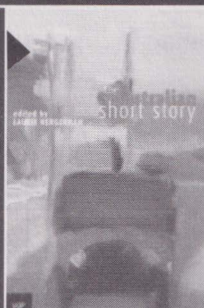


BIOGRAPHY/MEMOIR

Mama Kuma: One Woman, Two Cultures
Deborah Carlyon

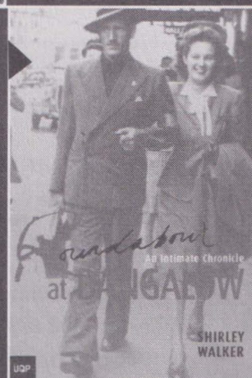
Winner of the 2002 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards—Best Manuscript by an Emerging Author

"A significant contribution to post-colonial literature"—Judges' report, Queensland Premier's Literary Awards

Roundabout at Bangalow: An Intimate Chronicle
Shirley Walker

Shortlisted for the 2002 Adelaide Festival Award for Non-Fiction

"One of the best memoirs I've read lately..."—Debra Adelaide, Sydney Morning Herald



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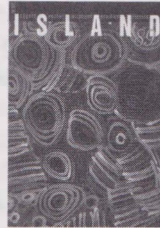

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As a tribute to outgoing poetry editor Pam Brown, *Overland* has produced an e-book with her final selection of poets and poems. The publication is accompanied by an introduction, by John Jenkins, discussing Brown's contribution as poetry editor between and 1998 and 2002.

The book can be accessed via <www.overlandexpress.org>

www.overlandexpress.org

MEDIA

Where are you today? asks Bolt of the anti-war protesters. Actually, Andrew, we're everywhere. Irrespective of the 175 Murdoch newspapers that dutifully followed their master's call for war, an astonishing ten million people took to streets around the world against war on Iraq. That's an opposition unparalleled in any other war in human history. There's something truly bizarre in blaming the biggest demonstrations ever seen in Australia on Miranda Devine's "tiny unelected cabal".

—Jeff Sparrow, p.10

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Jones was busy providing information to his mate, Christopher Pearson, who wrote numerous derogatory articles. During the Royal Commission I regularly received threatening mail and phone calls including a death threat. The real fabricators have not been called to account for the roles they played.

—Sandra Saunders, p.60

Developers Tom and Wendy Chapman adopted a 'take me to your leader' approach to consultation. As a result the developers thought consultation had finished while the Ngarrindjeri thought it had barely begun. It is scarcely surprising that Aboriginal people felt they were being manipulated.

—Stephen Gray, p.58

FICTION

It was the era of the underground press. Sometimes it was referred to as the alternative press. But underground sounded much more exciting, combative: a world of partisans and hidden caves, presses assembled and disassembled, inflammatory manifestoes.

—Michael Wilding, p.18

OPINION

I was able to secure the microphone, and point out some of Windschuttle's errors. I asked him why he blamed Musquito, hanged 1825, for violence which continued until 1831. Windschuttle expressed no interest in my sources, dismissed my evidence, and defended his erroneous source by asking, "why would a newspaper lie?"

—Naomi Parry, p.70

REVIEW

Dark Victory is also a salutary lesson in media manipulation by John Howard, described as "a master of political speech" and "a master of the political art of deceiving without lying".

—Peter Mares, p.90

MEMOIR

On nights when Ormond had either won or lost whatever sport was in season the teams would rampage around the college. The Master would say grace and engage in erudite conversation, while down below the footballers were so pissed they would urinate under the tables, vomit on their food and throw pieces of it at other tables.

—Claire Tuke, p.19

Oh, ASIO! To think your female agents had to spend so much time sitting through all those talks where, as you mention, I was presented with three teaspoons (actually it was six)—so much more deserving of the "Top Secret" page heading.

—Mona Brand, p.87

CULTURE

What Strehlow gives to us is the flesh and blood of Aboriginal poetics. I happen to think that Heidegger's use of Holderlin's phrase, 'poetically, man dwells' is true.

—Barry Hill, p.36

"The most exciting in its field"
| Ross Fitzgerald, *The Australian*

"Uncomfortable food for thought"
| Debra Adelaide, *Sydney Morning Herald*

"A blunt challenge to the Australian media"
| Fiona Capp, *The Age*

"A journal of variety, ideas, opinion and heart"
| Christopher Bantick, *Canberra Times*

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Oodgeroo Noonuccal by George Fetting

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