



# CIVILISATION MYTH

LITERATURE | POLITICS | CULTURE | MEMOIR | FICTION | HISTORY | REVIEWS



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## WINTER 2005

TEMPER DEMOCRATIC, BIAS AUSTRALIAN

## THE CIVILISATION MYTH

In this issue of *Overland* Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Neilson quote George W. Bush, or whoever writes the material he attempts to recite, stating the “great divide in our time” is “not between religions or cultures, but between civilisation and barbarism”. This might be read as a statement of the liberal principle of tolerance: ‘religious and cultural difference is fine; only barbarism cannot be tolerated’. But given the willingness of Bush and his allies (as discussed in this issue by Geoff Boucher) to i) make pre-emptive attacks on and subsequently occupy sovereign nations (which coincidentally tend to have economically valuable resources), and ii) to trample on civil and human rights within their own nations, it seems clear that Bush’s statement actually represents an attempt to build legitimacy for autocracy and imperialism: ‘we are civilised; anyone who opposes us is a barbarian and must be destroyed’. Of course, the West has a long and noble tradition of justifying its brutal, sadistic oppression of the ‘dark’, ‘inscrutable’, ‘barbarous’ Other, on the grounds that white people and white society are inherently civilised. But in the context of a reinvigorated Anglo-American imperialism, made possible by the al-Qaeda attacks of 11 September 2001, conservative politicians and intellectuals have wheeled out the civilisation myth with renewed enthusiasm.

Put baldly, the civilisation myth states that ‘we’—white, Western, wealthy—have achieved our position of relative global dominance through the ‘fact’ that we are civilised; that is, ‘our’ wealth derives from our intellectual, artistic and humane sensibility, our very reluctance to shout people down or to attack, oppress and exploit the non-white, non-Western and non-wealthy. The logical extension of this view is that ‘we’ owe nothing to, and have nothing to learn from, ‘them’. Ironically, then, the civilisation myth serves to sustain Western ignorance and insularity and to legitimate the continuing ill-treatment of the non-Western. Devotees of the civilisation myth point to

the poverty and political instability of large sections of the ‘third world’ as evidence of these people’s inherent lack of civilisation, their inability to attain or become worthy of wealth.

It is much more accurate to suggest that ‘our’ wealth derives in large part from the ongoing Western or European exploitation of non-European resources. Australian society is just one obvious example. (The stories in this issue by Anne-marie Taplin, Maggie Joel, John Bingham and Robert Hodder remind us, in different ways, that Australians are not more ‘cultured’ beings than anyone else.) The logical extension of this alternative view is that ‘we’ owe a great debt to the non-Western world (including its members within Australia), and that ‘we’ have much to learn from ‘them’ before ‘we’ can consider ourselves truly civilised.

It is no coincidence then that the rhetorical recourse to a supposed ‘clash of civilisations’ becomes louder as the behaviour of the ‘Axis of Anglos’ becomes more barbaric. And from this central irony, or hypocrisy, others ensue. As Stan Winford and Peter Noble write in this issue, the need to protect what Prime Minister Howard refers to as ‘our way of life’ is used to justify attacks on hard-won legal rights that are an important part of that way of life: “The fact that people have been interrogated” under new ‘anti-terrorist’ legislation, for example, “is only publicly known because Attorney-General Philip Ruddock happened to mention it as an aside in response to a journalist’s question on the ABC’s *7:30 Report*”. Kenneth Davidson details how the supposed need to protect Western civilisation is used to justify Australia’s involvement in a war that puts us at increased risk of attack. As ‘we’ are thought to be innately civilised, there is then no need for a public education system. Damien Cahill outlines how the institution of public education is being progressively undermined by its New Right political opponents. Mitropoulos and Neilson write that the university, the great symbol of

Western intellectual inquiry, has in recent years come under pressure to affirm the inherent rightness of the West, and its national and international social order. At the time of writing, two senior academics from the Deakin University Law School are publicly advocating the legalisation of torture. Brigid Magner finds that Australian authors who have gained international literary stardom through writing about their experiences in culturally diverse, overseas settings, are reclaimed as 'dinki di' Aussies by insecure journalists. Those who criticise such conservative notions as the civilisation myth, who have some kind of concern for social justice, can be written off by its wealthy and powerful advocates as 'elites'. Graham Willet examines this process here.

One of the fearless 'elite' bashers, P.P. McGuinness, recently in the *Australian* accused *Overland* of having once been funded by the KGB. Needless to say, if there was a shred of evidence to this claim McGuinness, Peter Coleman, Peter Ryan and any number of other geriatric Cold War warriors would have been bleating this news from the nearest Murdoch media fog horn. Needless to say also, the *Australian* declined my kind invitation to correct this untruth in their letters pages.

In a new section introducing the contribution of important intellectuals from around the world—in this case Ashis Nandy from India—Robert Darby regrets that the recent Australian interest in India extends only to economic matters:

There was a time when Australia's concern with India was not so narrowly directed—at least within universities and in more progressive sections of government and the community. For perhaps two decades after India's independence the sub-continent was taken seriously. Jawaharlal Nehru commanded respect. The Indian model of political and economic change was held up as an alternative to that of China. The Colombo Plan was seen as a significant initiative.

Ken Gelder notes that "something has happened to Australian fiction". He thinks recent novels are "more inward-looking, more introspective, and more claustrophobic than Australian fiction has ever been". Perhaps this narrowness and insularity is not surprising, given the overall political and cultural climate. Mabel Lee, on the other hand, whose translation of Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* was instrumental in that book's winning of the 2000 Nobel Prize for Literature, remains optimistic about her work to promote understanding of Asian cultures in the Western world. She is interviewed in this issue by Vin D'Cruz.

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### ON VERONICA BRADY'S LECTURE

I was impressed and enlightened by Veronica Brady's account, in her *Overland* Lecture (178), of the misadventures of religion in Australia and the limitations of fundamentalism. She writes as a doughty fighter for many of the causes that most of us readers of *Overland* believe in. I wonder, however, whether her desire for "a sense of 'the grandeur too overwhelming to express', the mysterious presence we call God", is the only solution to the problems she identifies.

It might equally be argued that what we need is more scepticism, more agnosticism. The innate decencies are there in most people (psychopaths excluded perhaps). For all their talk of 'sin' and 'impurity', the major religions take this for granted. We don't need a set of doctrines about the numinous to get most of our morality right most of the time. Perhaps what we need rather more is a sense of doubt: a wariness of the simplicities thrust upon us by Hillsong fundamentalists, by jihadists, by conservative (or Marxist) ideologues et al.

Are the doctrines of Fortress Australia, with its 'border security' strategies supported by both major parties, really the most productive for us in the longer term? Maybe. Maybe not. Are balanced budgets (with minimal government-created infrastructure) as vital to economic progress as we're told? Is our support for George Bush in Iraq as likely to guarantee US support for us down here as we like to think? Is the attack on trade unions as 'relics of the past' likely to create an industrial future we can all benefit from? And these are just a few issues, taken at random.

The potential for a decent society, in which committed, liberal Catholics such as Veronica Brady and terminal agnostics such as myself would be equally happy (or less unhappy), is already present in our secular, pluralist arrangements. For all of Patrick White's metaphysics, I doubt whether "a sense of the grandeur too overwhelming to express" is the sort of "canopy" we need. Better to take the aspirations of the Sermon on the Mount as a basis for discussion

and policy direction rather than as an expression of the metaphysics it's supposed to have been handed down from. Veronica Brady's quest for a set of doctrines (or even a general sense of the numinous, however vaguely defined) is, I think, no more likely to create the kind of society we both want than a healthy scepticism, rooted in an (admittedly materialist) pragmatism.

GEOFF PAGE

### IS A BORDERLESS WORLD REALLY WHAT WE WANT?

In 2001 the Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, attacked critics of Australia's mandatory detention regime saying they were naïve and that "they essentially believe that we could have no borders".

Ruddock was, not for the first time, misrepresenting many of us who believe that Australia's response to asylum seekers is unjust and draconian. He not only portrayed us as out of touch with reality, he was also able to obscure the very real alternatives to government policy that accepted the state's right to control its borders.

But it is true that there are those within the refugee movement who aspire to a borderless world. Jess Whyte (*Overland* 177) is one such person. It is not often that I have to concede this, but on the need for borders I must agree with Ruddock.

Whyte's review of the *Quarterly Essay* 'Sending Them Home', written by Robert Manne and myself, is generally a kind one. The essay was written as a literary-political intervention. It was a response to the plight of a relatively small group of people who were unfortunate enough to come seeking protection in Australia during the few years preceding late 2001. While Whyte seems to acknowledge the merit of this sort of intervention, she has concerns with the absence of an analysis of the "failures of the West and of globalising neo-liberal capitalism". A better

world, she suggests, would be one where border controls like those Australia has set in place are no longer necessary.

Open-borders advocates of the Left base their claims on a notion of justice. (Those of the Right argue for open borders for a more efficient flow of capital and labour.) If people are of equal moral worth, they should have the right to move across borders both as an important liberty in itself and as a prerequisite for other freedoms. State boundaries are arbitrary and morally irrelevant. According to the pre-eminent mainstream 'open borders' theorist, Joseph Carens, citizenship in wealthy countries, while jealously guarded, is as illegitimate as was feudal privilege. There is also a distributive justice component to the open borders position. Immigration is a means of distributing wealth more evenly across the globe, thereby enhancing individual equality and autonomy.

Leftist calls for an end to state borders are problematic for a number of important reasons. Such people misplace or underestimate the role of states. It is true that states violate human rights. But it is also the case that the state is the entity that gives meaning to rights. As Michael Ignatieff has written, "human rights might best be fortified in today's world not by a weakening of already overburdened states but by their being strengthened wherever possible". Indeed, one of the arguments for states like Australia to accept refugees is that to do so would restore the human rights of people whose rights have been violated by the states of which they are—or ought to be—members.

But states are more than rights-conferring entities. They are also meaning-giving. Bounded communities give their members a sense of place through a shared history and culture. They assist individuals to form their identities. To acknowledge this is not to advocate a 'thick' or ethnically-based version of the nation. Rather, it is recognition that the purely 'civic' construction of the nation—one based on a commitment to certain institutions—falls short of what many people desire or even need. The rise of Hansonism taught us that many Australians remain emotionally attached to, and indeed mourn the loss of, what they imagine the Australian nation once to have been. Those of us

who seek to challenge the exclusive nationalism of the Howard era must base our efforts on a solid understanding of this reality.

Then there is the idealised world of no-borders advocates. While theoretically consistent with its 'first principles'—i.e. equality and the right of individual self-determination—the open- or no-borders position, if pursued to its logical end of a borderless world, is likely to lead to the opposite of these principles, as order disintegrates into anarchy and violence. In this sense, Michael Walzer is right; the real danger of a borderless world is the construction of a "thousand petty fortresses" ruled by warlords and criminal thugs with no regard for human rights or local or global justice. If this seems an overly pessimistic view of the possibilities, it is one that is backed by some evidence. The list of despotic and brutal rulers filling the vacuum left by failed states seems to be getting longer.

TO ACCEPT THAT borders are a necessary, even desirable, aspect of the contemporary world does not mean we have to accept global injustice. It does mean that there are difficult and complex policy decisions to be made, decisions that seem so much easier if we simply assert that it is borders that are the problem.

Consider the refugee/non-refugee distinction. Whyte criticises Robert Manne and myself for not being able "to explain how the distinction they wish to uphold between the economic migrant and the 'genuine refugee' can be policed without recourse to such brutal exclusionary measures" such as those Australia has in place. Her response is to simplistically—might I say, ideologically—suggest that no borders would resolve this dilemma.

I accept that the refugee/non-refugee distinction is problematic. The root causes of refugee movements are multidimensional and interconnected (and it is for this reason that Whyte's assertion that recent arrivals "highlight the failures of the West and of globalising neo-liberal capitalism" is also overly simplistic and ideological). People leave their homes for a complex range of reasons. It can be difficult to disentangle refugee seeking from other migratory movements. But while acknowledging this, asylum is, to quote the US refugee law specialist,

David Martin, a 'scarce resource'. It is scarce because of the number of people who are in need of it and because of the fragility of support for it in countries such as Australia. For these reasons it needs to be managed wisely and guarded vigorously. It must be preserved for those whose need is for protection. People with other sorts of needs, heart-rending as they may be, should not be granted asylum. Asylum is not designed as a mechanism for the eradication of global injustice. Careful decisions, based on subtle and difficult distinctions, need to be made.

This is not to suggest, as Whyte says Manne and I do, that other forms of people movement are illegitimate. I have argued elsewhere that Australia should develop a complementary protection mechanism to ensure that people who need protection for a range of non-Convention-related reasons can find it in Australia. Such people are entitled to asylum. I also happen to think that rather than seeing the 'abuse' of the asylum determination system by 'economic migrants' as a reflection of their dubious morality, as has been suggested in Australian political discourse, the use by non-refugees of the asylum system reflects the need for more creative and responsive policies. Such policies would be part of ensuring the ongoing viability of the institution of asylum.

For those of us who would seek to nurture the institution of asylum, it appears that states, with their claim to exclusive control over their territorial boundaries, are a key part of the problem. The spontaneous arrival of asylum seekers at their borders is more often than not seen as a threat to state sovereignty. But Australia's response to asylum seekers over recent years is not a problem of state. It is a problem of nation. It is difficult to conceive of a solution to the asylum dilemma in the absence of rights-giving states. It is also difficult to conceive of a more humane response to asylum seekers in Australia without an awakening of a new, inclusive form of national imagining. It is this, and not the end of borders, that we should be working towards.

**DAVID CORLETT** is a research associate at La Trobe University. His book, *Following Them Home: The Fate of the Returned Asylum Seekers*, will be published by Black Inc. in 2005.

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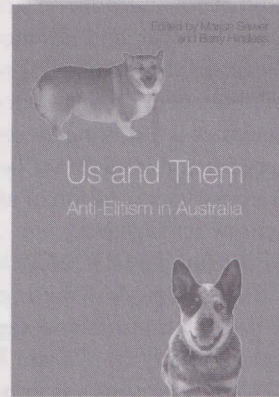
## US AND THEM

Marian Sawer & Barry Hindess (eds): *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia* (API Network, \$27.95)

EDITED COLLECTIONS are always risky. Edited collections on important issues even more so. The need for clarity of purpose and argument is too often overlooked in favour of filling enough pages and giving all the key players their entitlement. Where such volumes can work is in times like these—when new forces are on the march, and new issues and new challenges are presenting themselves and need, desperately, to be understood.

Seven or eight years ago a flurry of publications addressing the rise of Hansonism helped us grasp what Pauline Hanson represented and what we could do about it. Today the issue is John Howard's relentless advance. And what an extraordinary story this has been. From the tragi-comic figure of the mid-1980s (kind of the Mark Latham of his time), through the early awkward years in government, when the spectre of the 'one-term' label haunted him, to now, with four election victories under his belt and his status as one of the two or three really important prime ministers in Australian history (right up there with Deakin and Hawke) seemingly assured.

Australia today bears little resemblance to the one that Malcolm Fraser presided over, and while the ALP can claim much of the credit (if that is the word) for the transformation, there is little doubt that Howard in power has built upon and consolidated their work. He has seen off almost all alternative social and political visions of what Australia could be; the republic, reconciliation, multiculturalism, pluralism are all off the agenda, their proponents either silenced or, more remarkably still, noisily embracing Howard's way.



*Us and Them* examines one aspect of this success—the way in which Howard and his allies have succeeded in trashing the various alternatives by a quite remarkable process of rhetorical inversion. On his watch, advocates of 'social justice' have been recast as an elite hostile to the interests of ordinary working Australians. That is, Howardism has embraced the Left's version of the world (that there is Us and there is Them) and turned it against the Left! Successfully! People who want a better world for everybody (well, almost everybody) are accused of political correctness, of creating a guilt industry and of serving special interests or perhaps only themselves. It is all very *Alice in Wonderland* and working out how he did this is one of the most important tasks we face.

*Us and Them* helps—a lot. Its eleven chapters cover a range of material with a range of methodologies and while the results are, as always, uneven, the value of the volume as a whole is beyond doubt. There is good solid empirical work here. Sean Scalmer repeats his *Dissent Events tour de force*, in this case working with Murray Goot to examine some four hundred articles to identify precisely how the Murdoch press has used its phalanx of editorialists and commentators to summon into being thoroughly demonic 'elites'. Steve Mickler does something similar with talkback radio while Shaun Wilson and Trevor Breusch pick apart opinion surveys to compare the public and MPs' views of the world that has been made for us. There are good surveys of the history of Us and Them rhetoric, and of the international dimensions of the challenge.

The key chapter though, for my money, is Damien Cahill's, which returns to Gramsci to help us understand the way in which Howard's victory has been the result of political work—a struggle waged for over a decade to forge and advance a political program to shore up the neo-liberal reshaping of the economy. Without denying their victory, he points out that such a victory is a contingent one—it might have gone otherwise, and it might yet be superseded by some other constellation of forces and values, if only we can get our act together.

Certainly we are up against it. None of the chapters explicitly discuss this, but there can be little doubt that the rise of a transnational capitalist class, as discussed most recently by William I. Robinson (*A Theory of Global Capitalism*), is important here. So too are the think-tanks, the media, the entertainment and consumption industries—a whole swarming mass of agents of influence for a new and alien way of life. The *Australian* may get nuttier by the day, but key people read and presumably believe it. And hundreds of thousands read the *Telegraph* and the *Herald Sun*.

On our side we have the capitulation of the ALP; the weakness of the trade unions; a Left that is smaller, more fragmented and less capable of looking reality in the face than at any time in its history—all these have contributed to neo-liberalism's hegemony.

The Us and Them rhetoric has been important and has, indeed, successfully wedged many of Us from the rest of Us. But we have a deep reservoir of values in this country that can provide a basis for resistance and fightback. The *Herald Sun* reported recently (without comment) an opinion poll in which 85 per cent of Australians identified the biggest challenge facing the country as being the gap between rich and poor. And 89 per cent thought the country should become fairer. Notions of mateship, the fair go and egalitarianism, can serve our side more effectively than theirs. And the rise and rise of the Greens offers a vehicle through which much of this can be brought into public life.

We are in for interesting times—if we want to be.

*Graham Willett is currently teaching Australian Studies at the Free University in Berlin.*

---

## lies

old sage green  
mallee toughness  
  
my father beside  
me & a road  
  
into the new light  
pin prick red dunes  
  
this old familiar  
landscape, father  
  
son & the horizon  
album histories  
  
spoken, respoken  
& lied to  
  
& lied about

R.N. HARRIS

# THE RIGHT VALUES IN EDUCATION

Neo-liberal think-tanks and the assault upon public schooling

TO ANYONE WITH recent experience of public schooling in Australia, the idea that it is a hotbed of left-wing radicalism is likely to sound farcical. Nonetheless, throughout 2004, John Howard and his government were strident in their attacks upon what they claim is a teachers' union capture of public education. Public-school curricula, argues the Coalition, embody a 'values neutral' approach and are devoid of serious intellectual content—reflecting instead the latest guilt-ridden 'politically correct' fashions of the Left. In the May 2004 federal budget such claims were given a hard edge. To address the perceived crisis of values, new strings were attached to federal funding of public schools: the requirement that every public school fly the Australian flag and undertake a program of 'values education'.

That such actions and rhetoric constitute an ideological assault upon the legitimacy, independence and diversity of public education is probably clear to most readers of *Overland*. What may not be clear is that such actions are but the latest in a long campaign by the New Right in Australia, targeting public education at all levels. There are two aspects to this campaign. First, New Right think-tanks have mobilised to influence educational curricula, often using the institutions of public education to promote their own neo-liberal values. Second, the New Right has actively set out to undermine public education in Australia. The educational agenda of the Howard Government is the culmination of this campaign.

One of the keys to this campaign has been the disingenuous manner in which it has been conducted.

What is essentially a fundamentalist economic creed—neo-liberalism—is presented as neutral and scientific analysis. This claim to legitimacy is further enhanced by the benign choice of names for neo-liberal think-tanks and 'resource centres'—the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), the Economics Education Resource Centre (EERC). At the same time—and despite the prominent position of many neo-liberal activists within universities, the infiltration by New Right think-tanks of public high-school curricula, and a series of neo-liberal reforms of secondary education at federal and state levels—the New Right have cried victim and underdog in debates about education. Finally, the rhetoric of 'choice' is employed by the New Right to mask a policy agenda aimed at denying universal educational opportunity.

## A PRIVATE EDUCATION FOR ALL

The New Right—or radical neo-liberal movement, as I have described it elsewhere<sup>1</sup>—emerged as a political force in Australia from the mid-1970s onwards. What was 'new' about the New Right, and what made it unique for its time, was its neo-liberal economic ideology. Drawing upon the works of economists such as Milton Friedman, Friederich von Hayek, James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, the New Right argued that the market, when freed from state interference, was not only the most efficient, but also the most moral way of providing goods and services in society. They were thus vehemently opposed to social democracy, the welfare state and Keynesian-in-

spired economic management, all of which entailed a strong role for the state. Although the New Right's 'free market' ideology had a long heritage within Australia, it was very much a fringe position in the 1970s and broke with the ruling consensus around managed capitalism and the necessary, positive role for the state, in the provision of services and the redistribution of income. Cohering through a series of think-tanks, and with its funding base provided by leading factions of Australian capital, the New Right aimed to dismantle this consensus and shape society according to its particular ideological vision.

The issue of education has always held a central place in neo-liberal ideology. Neo-liberals advocate the application of market mechanisms to schools and universities. The most common mechanism proposed by neo-liberals is that of 'vouchers', first outlined by Milton Friedman in 1955.<sup>2</sup> Under a voucher scheme, rather than funding schools and universities, the state would provide vouchers—or 'learning accounts'—directly to students or their parents, which could be cashed in for educational services at an educational institution of their choice. Students would then become customers, with schools and universities turning into service providers. As with all neo-liberal markets, the service providers would be free to set their own fee levels. According to the neo-liberals, this would create a market for education in which schools and universities become responsive to 'consumer demand'. With both public and private schools competing for government funding, the distinction between public and private education becomes redundant. Indeed the goal of the New Right is the destruction of the very institution of public education—as the title of the CIS publication, *A Private Education For All*,<sup>3</sup> makes abundantly clear. Of course, the effect of a voucher scheme would be to further entrench the privileges of the already privileged and the disadvantages of the already disadvantaged.

But what explains the New Right's almost paranoid concern with education? The mere belief in the advantages of market-based over state-run systems does not account for the vigour with which the neo-liberals have pursued their political campaign against public education. Neo-liberalism is about much more than removing restrictions on the free movement of capital. It also entails the attempt to reshape common sense. The shock troops for neo-liberalism—think-tanks—have played a prominent role in this. As one of the key sites for the transmission of politi-

cal values, education has been an important target of their activism. They have helped to wage the battle of ideas not only over the direction of education policy, but within the education system itself.

## THE NEW RIGHT'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST PUBLIC EDUCATION

Alex Carey detailed the process whereby corporations, employer associations and business-funded think-tanks during the 1970s and 1980s undertook an elaborate campaign of 'economic education' in Australian schools. Through the production and dissemination of economics textbooks, teaching materials and films, and the coordination of programs such as 'Young Achievement Australia', such groups helped to inculcate teachers and students with the values of the 'free enterprise system' and inoculate them against socialism.<sup>4</sup> Beginning at the same time, more radical neo-liberal organisations and think-tanks engaged in a similar process, but with the aim of demonising not merely socialism, but social democracy and social justice as well.

In 1976 the Brisbane-based Foundation for Economics Education (Australia) was founded,<sup>5</sup> one of its aims being to promote the radical neo-liberal ideology within schools.<sup>6</sup> Based upon the American Foundation for Economic Education,<sup>7</sup> one of its founders, Viv Forbes, received the 'Adam Smith Award' from the Australian Adam Smith Club in 1986 for 'outstanding service to the free society'.<sup>8</sup>

Building upon such activities, the IPA and the CIS co-ordinated well-organised attempts to intervene at the grassroots level in public education. In 1989 the CIS established the Economics Education Resource Centre (EERC), the aim of which was to target a radical neo-liberal agenda at high school economics teachers. As the EERC explained:

An interventionist position is often adopted in textbooks and by teachers in their exposition of controversial issues associated with many school topics . . . The main aim of the EERC is to update teachers' knowledge of economic theory and policy and to promote an understanding of the role of markets in creating wealth through an efficient allocation of resources in the Australian economy.<sup>9</sup>

The EERC produced the *Economics Education Review* (a bimonthly newsletter), organised the annual National Economics Teachers' Conference, and held 'Professional Development Activities' for econom-



ics teachers, which consisted of a series of lectures on major economic topics. The *Economics Education Review* published articles interpreting economic issues from a neo-liberal framework, including reprints from leading neo-liberal activists.<sup>10</sup> Advertisements for upcoming CIS events and CIS publications, including its flagship journal, *Policy*, were also common in the pages of the *Review*. In 1991 “more than three hundred schools” had subscribed to *Policy*,<sup>11</sup> and in 1993 the CIS boasted that EERC professional development days had attracted six hundred teachers, while more than eight hundred schools, colleges and libraries had subscribed to the *Educational Economics Review*.<sup>12</sup> As its name suggests, the EERC also provided a ‘resource centre’, and by 1993 this was reportedly “utilised regularly by individual students, teachers and student teachers alike. Class

visits are becoming a regular occurrence”.<sup>13</sup> The radical neo-liberals were not only talking to teachers, but to students as well. The CIS also attempted to bring university students into the fold through its ‘Liberty and Society’ program. Beginning in 1996, the program brought ‘over ninety outstanding students’ together over two separate weekend seminars to discuss radical neo-liberal themes.<sup>14</sup>

The IPA also has a long history of promoting its agenda through the school system—both to teachers and their students—through the dissemination of IPA publications to schools. Between 1980 and 1989 the IPA’s Queensland branch (IPAQ) had involved “about seven thousand teachers and businessmen” in its ‘Business-Teacher Workshops’ which brought together teachers and business leaders in after-school forums. In 1988 the IPAQ organised

these workshops with the assistance of the Queensland Department of Education.<sup>15</sup>

Neo-liberalism in Australia has always had a socially conservative hue, and it is therefore not surprising that concern over 'values' has been part of the neo-liberal critique of education. The mental gymnastics required to sustain the marriage of these two contradictory ideologies is achieved by identifying a common enemy. The conservative sensibility blames the 'decline of values' in public education on 'trade union capture' and the 'politically correct new class' who inhabit the education bureaucracies. The neo-liberal sensibility sees trade union capture and bureaucratic control of schools as the reason that public education is unable to adequately reflect consumer demand. Such concerns inform the neo-liberal think-tanks' campaign against public school curricula dealing with such topics as sex education, the history of Aboriginal dispossession, as well as the promotion of gender equity in schools. It was during the 1980s that the neo-liberal think-tanks began to rail against what they described as 'values neutral' teaching. For the conservative neo-liberals, a 'values neutral' approach was a euphemistic cover for the implementation of left-wing and 'politically correct' views on multiculturalism, the family, sexuality and religion. The following excerpt from the IPA's critique of a Victorian Government safe-sex guide illustrates this position:

Marriage, fidelity, sexual restraint, and a declared belief in the desirability of heterosexual over homosexual activity are 'out' as far as the new breed of sex educators are concerned . . . [yet] it is traditional values which offer the best hope of protecting students against AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of 'charter schools', enthusiastically promoted by the CIS in particular, is another example of the marriage of neo-liberalism and conservatism. With charter schools, responsibility for what is taught, how it is taught and who teaches it are devolved to a management committee comprised of "parents, teachers or any qualified group". Funding for charter schools would still be provided by the public (either directly or through the neo-liberals' preferred method of vouchers). The schools themselves:

are freed from many government and union regulations and requirements, including those governing curriculum, teaching methods, and the hiring of staff.<sup>17</sup>

For conservatives this offers the possibility of emulating the US experience and of having their own values imposed through school curricula.

One vehicle for such conservative neo-liberal challenges to public curricula was the IPA's Education Policy Unit, established in 1988 under the leadership of Dame Leonie Kramer (and "funded by over seventy companies and 150 individuals").<sup>18</sup> The Unit's brief was to bring an economically radical and socially conservative critique to bear on the nation's public education system, and to attempt to influence both the curriculum and the policy agenda. In addition to regular publications, seminars and media statements, the Education Policy Unit produced *Education Monitor*, a thrice-yearly magazine. *Education Monitor* took over from *Aces Review*, the journal of the Australian Council for Educational Standards edited by Alan Barcan.<sup>19</sup> It provided a forum for debating education policy among educators and education policy makers, but its editorial line was consistently morally conservative and economically neo-liberal. *Education Monitor* folded in 1996, citing "relatively high production and distribution costs".<sup>20</sup> However, during its lifetime it had a circulation of 3800.<sup>21</sup>

In 1990 Dame Leonie Kramer was appointed by the NSW Greiner Liberal government to the executive of the NSW Board of Studies—the body responsible for setting school curricula.<sup>22</sup> Premier Greiner opened the new IPA office in Sydney in 1989. In attendance was Sir John Carrick, Chairman of the NSW Committee of Review into Education.<sup>23</sup> From these brief examples it is clear that the Australian Right had been successful at intervening directly in what was taught and what was read by students and teachers in Australia's public education system.

This should put into context the common cries by neo-liberal think-tanks about left-wing hegemony within the public school system—it is a disingenuous claim that belies the infiltration of conservative neo-liberal ideas into high-school teaching and policy making. In academe too, neo-liberal intellectuals have long complained of persecution by a supposed 'politically correct' cabal which dominates Australia's universities. Yet the research advisory boards and publication lists of neo-liberal think-tanks are filled with Professors and Associate Professors who enjoy highly successful academic careers in Australia's university system. Radical neo-liberal think-tanks have made other inroads into tertiary education. Over the

*With both public and private schools competing for government funding, the distinction between public and private education becomes redundant. Indeed the goal of the New Right is the destruction of the very institution of public education.*

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years they have achieved formal relationships with several public universities. For example, 'The Full Employment Project' was a 'joint venture' between the IPA and Melbourne University's Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research,<sup>24</sup> and in 1995 the IPA jointly organised the 'Risk, Regulation and Responsibility Conference' with the ANU's Centre for Applied Economics.<sup>25</sup> The most far reaching of these relationships however was the formal affiliation in 1995 of the Tasman Institute (a Melbourne-based, radical neo-liberal think-tank) with Melbourne University.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, several leading think-tank activists have gone on to run a number of public universities—the IPA's Dame Leonie Kramer was Chancellor of Sydney University; Ric Charlton of the CIS became Chancellor of Newcastle University in 1994; Lauchlan Chipman, an early supporter of the CIS, became the Vice-Chancellor of Central Queensland University in 1996; another early CIS supporter and former CIS Board Member, Maurice Newman, is currently Chancellor of Macquarie University; while current CIS Board Members John Phillips and Robert Champion de Crespigny, have recently held the Chancellorships at the Universities of Western Sydney and Adelaide respectively.

It was recently reported in the *Australian* that, while he was Chancellor, de Crespigny helped to negotiate the foundation of a private university, run by the American institution Carnegie Mellon, in the same city as his own University of Adelaide.<sup>27</sup> This is but the latest example of neo-liberal activists mobilising to undermine the public university system by establishing private competitors to it. Neo-liberal think-tanks have joined with capitalists in several attempts to form private fee-paying universities, as a direct challenge to the public system. In the mid 1980s, neo-liberals joined with Lady Fairfax in an attempt to establish the Australian Simon University, using the brand name of the University of Rochester's William E. Simon Graduate School of Business Administration. It was to be a fee-paying

educational institution based in Sydney. CIS activists were well represented on the management council, including capitalists Maurice Newman, James Beatty and Andrew Kaldor, and intellectuals Peter Dodd and Greg Lindsay.<sup>28</sup> A similar venture was the Tasman University project, driven by then Director of the Centre of Policy Studies, Michael Porter, and backed financially by capitalists John Elliott, Hugh Morgan and Will Bailey.<sup>29</sup> Both institutions planned to offer business degrees and both failed to establish themselves as viable operations.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, both were attempts to challenge the hegemony of welfare capitalism by putting radical neo-liberal philosophies into practice; to establish educational institutions based, both pedagogically and organisationally, around such philosophies; and in doing so, to challenge the legitimacy of public education in Australia.

Leading conservative figures were behind the recent establishment of Campion College, a private Catholic university dedicated to:

a fightback against secularisation of Christianity; against the influence of modernism and postmodernism in schools and universities; and against the influence of liberal Catholics who ignore the pope's teachings against abortion and contraception and focus more on social justice than the mass and sacraments.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, this 'university' offers a retreat from reason as the antidote for troubled times. Again we can see the marriage of neo-liberalism and conservatism: the neo-liberal mantra of choice provides an economic rationale for the promotion of conservative ideology.

## THE HOWARD AGENDA

The Right's position on education is much like its position regarding the ABC. Despite stacking the ABC board with a stream of right-wing ideologues (Michael Kroger, Ron Brunton, Maurice Newman, Janet Albrechtsen) and despite the emergence of programs such as *Insiders*—a showcase of conservative neo-liberal diatribe—the Coalition government

and its supporters in the think-tanks and the major newspapers continue to whine about the ABC's 'left-wing bias'. So too with public education. Despite such interventions as detailed above and despite the steady erosion of government funding of public education, which makes it difficult for teachers to teach anything, let alone undertake a radical pedagogy, the Right's fantasies about left-wing indoctrination in public schools and universities continue.

Calls for the further dismantling of public education are likely to find a sympathetic audience in Canberra during the coming years. The Howard government embodies the conservative neo-liberal approach to public education. With control of the Senate now in Coalition hands, the apogee of the New Right campaign may well be nigh.

The further we move down the neo-liberal path, the more the reality of the neo-liberal program—as opposed to the rhetoric of its ideological cheerleaders—becomes apparent. The Coalition's real agenda for public education (like its agenda for the ABC) is not 'balance', or 'choice', but the complete dismantling of the publicly owned and controlled system itself and its replacement with a fully commercial, privatised system. Behind the rhetoric of 'choice' and 'values' lies an apology for privilege and prejudice. When Howard speaks of choice in education, what he really means is the denial of opportunity for those unable to purchase a choice. When he speaks of values, he means the 'right' values—the stultifying retreat from reason that passes for conservative thought. This is Howard's educational agenda. And in this agenda the government has willing accomplices.

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2. See Simon Marginson, *Educating Australia: Government, Economy and Citizen Since 1960*, CUP, Melbourne, 1997, pp.122–28.
3. Mark Harrison, *A Private Education for All*, CIS, St Leonards, 1996.
4. Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk out of Democracy*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1995.
5. Marian Sawyer, 'Political Manifestations of Australian Libertarianism' in Marian Sawyer (ed.), *Australia and the New Right*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1982, p.7 and Viv Forbes, 'The Tide Turning?', *The Optimist*, November/December 1986, p.6.

6. Marian Sawyer, 'Political Manifestations of Australian Libertarianism', p.7.
7. *Ibid.*, p.7
8. Viv Forbes, 'The Tide Turning?', pp.5–8. Peter Samuel was also a key activist (Marian Sawyer, 'Political Manifestations of Australian Libertarianism', p.7).
9. CIS, *CIS Annual Review* 1991, p.13.
10. Such as Ian Harper, 'The Operation of Monetary Policy in a Deregulated Financial System', *Economics Education Review* 4:4, July/August 1993, which was reprinted from the IPA publication *Can Monetary Policy be Made to Work?*, IPA, Melbourne, 1992.
11. CIS, *CIS Annual Review* 1991, p.14.
12. CIS, *CIS Annual Review* 1993, p.15.
13. *Ibid.*, p.14.
14. CIS, *CIS Annual Review* 1996, p.10.
15. 'Business-Teacher Workshops', *IPA Review* 42:3, December–February 1988/89, p.64.
16. Rod Kemp and Susan Moore, 'When Sex is a Health Hazard', *IPA Review*, February–April 1988, p.47.
17. Ken Gannicott, 'Charter Schools: A New Paradigm for Public Education', *Policy*, Winter 1997, p.3.
18. 'Education Seminars', *IPA Review*, May–July 1988, p.64.
19. Editorial, 'The Challenge Ahead', *Education Monitor*, Winter 1989, pp.2, 3.
20. Anon, 'Notice to Readers', *Education Monitor* 6:2, 1996, p.2.
21. *IPA Report* 1991, IPA, September 1991, p.2.
22. Anon, 'Education Survey Exposes Deficiencies', *IPA Review* 44:1, Spring 1990, p.64. Kramer remained on the executive until at least 1994, see Editorial, 'Why single out Mr Lambert?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 March 1994, p.12.
23. Anon, 'NSW Premier Opens IPA Sydney Offices', *IPA Review* 43:2, October–December 1989, p.64.
24. Helen Hughes, *Achieving Full Employment*, Full Employment Project, Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research, University of Melbourne, Parkville, 1994, back cover; and Anon, 'Full Employment Project Launched', *IPA Review* 46:4, 1994, p.63.
25. Anon, 'Prosperity Reduces Risk', *IPA Review* 48:2, 1995, p.64.
26. Melbourne University Statute 9.46, Melbourne University Website: <[www.unimelb.edu.au/Members/tasman.htm](http://www.unimelb.edu.au/Members/tasman.htm)> and Anon, 'Melbourne University Affiliation Agreement', *Tasman Report*, July 1996, p.4.
27. Brendan O'Keefe, 'Chancellor negotiated for a rival outfit', *Australian*, 3 November 2004, p.25.
28. Steve Lewis, 'Private Universities on Parade', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 November 1989, pp.41–42, Valerie Lawson, 'University of Broken Dreams', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1990, p.46.
29. Mark Davis, 'Private Sector Supports Trans-Tasman Uni Project', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 November 1987, p.5; Glenn Milne and Anne Susskind, 'Foster's: the Beer behind the Uni', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 November 1987, p.3.
30. Out of the ashes of the failed Tasman University project was born the Tasman Institute in 1990.
31. Jane Fraser and Emma-Kate Symons, 'Putting their faith in education', *Weekend Australian*, 8–9 May 2004, p.21.

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## ACADEMIA INC. AND THE (CULTURE) WAR

IN DISCUSSIONS OF the so-called ‘culture wars’, it is often the case that ‘war’ here implies the intrusion of polemic into the otherwise routinely civil exchanges of the universities or ‘the public sphere’, as distinct from war—*polemos*—as such. This notion of a public sphere, in which there are no real conflicts because consensus on the fundamentals has already been reached, brings to mind the idyllic space of the gentleman’s club. But as with such clubs, so too with the public sphere: the illusion of a truly open and inclusive site of conversation is maintained by the systematic exclusion or suppression of those who do not accept the dominant—essentially liberal—terms of debate. In contemporary society, there is an increasing sense that *the* public sphere is simply not worth taking part in. Nevertheless, the use of force, *polemos*, as a means of controlling the actions of those who produce ‘public culture’, is on the increase. In a sense, the culture wars now bear the imprint of the West’s actual wars: the distance between *polemic* and *polemos* has been closed. In response to this post-September 11 situation, many intellectuals have sought to reassert the value of an idealised, liberal public sphere. Some have done this in order to reimpose a liberal hegemony, to exclude alternative voices, while others have done so due to a perception that civic engagement in this ‘public sphere’ brings with it minimal protections against the violence of *polemos*.

Yet it has long been recognised that any given ‘public sphere’ is formed by that which is regularly dispatched to the ‘private realm’, either by censorship or commercial decisions about, say, what to publish. A complicated interplay of gender and class relations—among other things—also moulds notions

of what can and can’t be said publicly. Today people’s experiences of connection with or disconnection from the public sphere are shaped within a highly developed media environment, characterised by more communicative channels within an expanding range of significant media, including forms of alternative media, such as online journals. The role of the ‘mainstream’ media is becoming unclear. Certainly in Australia—where there exists a degree of homogeneity in press, radio and television comparable only to those countries often denounced as ‘totalitarian’—these media continue to play a significant role in configuring both ‘publics’ as well as any ‘public sphere’.

But the relation between the public and the private is also impacted upon by other institutions. Within the universities, what is deemed public and able to be said and what remains private and necessarily left unsaid is increasingly shaped by commercial imperatives. Degrees are more aggressively marketed and external income is maximised through industry-sponsored research. As a result, the scope for making *public* what happens inside universities is curtailed. Those who work in the universities must sign contracts to ensure they cannot bring their employer ‘into disrepute’. They must also agree not to speak *publicly* about matters that fall outside their supposed area of expertise. These stipulations, written into the labour contract, undoubtedly serve to establish as well as police new borders between public and private. In practice, they are adjusted to suit the purposes of public relations, niche marketing, increasing productivity and so on. Indeed, the devices of exclusion are intimately wedded to processes of incorporation.

In this sector of the public sphere, the ‘fundamentals’ around which any consensus exists are agreements—usually tacit but, increasingly, explicit—to produce more, circulate harder, innovate and customise: to approach communicative interactions as one might enter any other marketplace. In other words and for the reasons alluded to above, there is no *ideal* or singular public sphere, even if it is possible to talk about a hegemonic, liberal form of communication whose assertion as *the* public sphere is a crucial moment in the imposition and assumption of that hegemony. Take the legislation currently making its way through at least ten states in the USA, which decrees the kind of ‘academic freedom’ that remains free for as long as it trains “creative individuals and productive citizens”.<sup>1</sup> Opponents of the legislation have described it as the New McCarthyism, which in many ways it is. Such laws do not explicitly censor left-wing views; rather, they impose a form of communication, training and ethos that mitigates against the expression of real dissent.

“There is a devil of difference”, wrote Marx, “between barbarians who are fit by nature to be used for anything, and civilised people who apply themselves to everything.”<sup>2</sup> And so it is not surprising that the pressure for the university worker to apply him or herself to an ever-changing, manifold range of tasks, coincides with a renewed rhetorical emphasis on the university’s civilising mission. Here, the ‘creative individual and productive citizen’ implies a person who can be entrusted with the responsibility of managing his or her own exploitation, entering into the labour contract *freely*, as it were. The ‘barbarian’, on the other hand, is represented as naturally predisposed—deemed ‘fit by nature’—to systems of slavery and the use of force, suppression, and violence.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, Nick Dyer-Witheford’s analysis of ‘Academia Inc.’—indicative of more recent accounts of the university—is accurate, to a point.<sup>4</sup> According to him, “the universities of advanced capitalism have been metamorphosed, the shell of the ivory tower broken, and higher education firmly entrained to market-driven economic growth [and] the development of high-technology industries”. He goes on to argue, however, that the era of mass education—or mass intellectuality—provides both the decisive *and inevitable* conduit of opposition to these same processes. While it is necessary to reflect on these significant changes, to do with the ‘opening up’ of the

university, it is nevertheless crucial to acknowledge that these processes do not function within a North American, European and Australian vacuum, shorn of its colonial aspects and global position.

According to George W. Bush, the “great divide in our time” is “not between religions or cultures, but between civilisation and barbarism”.<sup>5</sup> Defenders of ‘civilisation’ within the ‘culture wars’ see their role in similar terms, as a recommencement of the moral crusade of civilisation against barbarism. Today, that crusade is not principally waged against those classically impugned as barbarians beyond the gates, but rather against what are perceived to be simultaneously internal *and* global threats. Under these circumstances, the university becomes implicated in the organisation and rationalisation of coercion, force and war. Dyer-Witheford implicitly relegates this violence to an earlier phase of capitalism. Yet, on the contrary, the culture war is today precisely a war, part of the unfolding logic of conflict extending across the globe.

This can be seen more clearly if we examine the most recent episode in the culture wars. Until recently, the University of Sydney was to host a conference called ‘Physiognomy of Origin’. This was the second conference in Sydney to explicitly delve into the political and theoretical crosscurrents between Australia and Italy.<sup>6</sup> Keynote speakers at this conference were Adrianna Cavarero and Antonio Negri, who were to open a discussion on the resurgent questions of embodiment, biology and potentiality. Such topics are, as it turns out, quite central to what transpired. But while these questions might appear, at first glance, to be posed in an obscure philosophical idiom, in hindsight it may be worth asking whether this obscurity is perhaps a kind of self-managed encryption of politics during wartime—a hesitancy occasioned by what is at stake and by what might be put at stake in making this explicit. This aspect should not be overstated as a factor in the planning of the conference, but fear has certainly become a tangible feature of work in the universities, and indeed work (and unemployment) more generally. Along with the many instances of funding decisions, contract negotiations, intensified competition and job losses (threatened and real) that give shape to this fear on a daily basis, the *social* dispersion of this fear requires more visible displays of public power, which is to say: *examples*.

And so, in the Sydney *Sun-Herald* in January,

*The pressure for the university worker to apply him or herself to an ever-changing, manifold range of tasks, coincides with a renewed rhetorical emphasis on the university's civilising mission.*

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Miranda Devine denounced the University of Sydney for inviting the “suspected terrorist mastermind Antonio Negri” rather than offering students “intellectual enlightenment”.<sup>7</sup> Keith Windschuttle elaborated on that viewpoint in the *Australian* newspaper, arguing that “education in the humanities was once supposed to be a civilising experience” and repeating the accusation of “terrorist” against Negri. He concluded his case against free speech by insisting that universities should not “accommodate people with so little concern for civilised values”.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) spies in 1971 similarly maligned the then leftist Windschuttle, whom they reported as giving “the impression of being a violent revolutionary”.<sup>9</sup>

As it happened, before Windschuttle's article had even appeared, Negri had withdrawn due to ill health. And the conference, whose financial viability was premised on the calculation of celebrity and audience, was deferred until Negri might attend. The University of Sydney nevertheless responded by withdrawing funding for any future version of the event. Negri answered the accusations made in Windschuttle's article in detail, describing it as “a scandalous and vulgar act of historical revisionism”. Accused by Devine and Windschuttle of heading the Red Brigades, Negri pointed out that he “never had anything to do with the Red Brigades, neither as leader, member, nor sympathiser”. Conference organisers challenged what they regarded as “the politics of fear and imputation”. Other responses included an article by Jonathon Roffe defending Negri's standing as a philosopher and challenging Windschuttle's purported adherence to “traditional intellectual virtues”, given his reporting of the facts relating to Negri's imprisonment.<sup>10</sup>

It is no surprise though that Windschuttle begins his homily to the university as a civilising institution with a tribute to Charles Badham. Badham was a prominent lecturer at Sydney University in the late 1880s. For him, the emerging universities at the time were to “assume the role of the Church in colonial

society”.<sup>11</sup> Universities, he argued, should be assigned the task of provisioning the colonial adventure with a metaphysical prerogative and missionary enthusiasm, converting the savage continent into a civilisation. It is ironic—in at least two senses we can think of—that Windschuttle's academic hero repudiated the waging of disputes with “poisoned missiles”. But like Windschuttle, Badham was preoccupied above all with the figure of the ‘savage’, who serves rhetorically to legitimate any discourteous (or violent) ostracism exercised by those who insist on their own civility.<sup>12</sup>

It is simple to demonstrate that the accusations made against Negri cannot be verified; just as it was simple to show that there was no evidence of children being thrown overboard, or of WMD in Iraq; and just as it can be pointed out that those interned in Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib or Baxter have never been charged with or found guilty of any crime. Such accusations as those against Negri are defamatory fragments whose purpose is to legitimate a war, and policies in which every form of violence—from torture, to extrajudicial and indefinite internment, to vilification and censorship—against those designated as ‘enemy combatants’, ‘terrorists’ or ‘illegal non-citizens’ is made habitual. The accusation is sufficient: it is widely believed because barbarism has already been ascribed. This is the physiognomy of civilisation, a doctrine of pre-emptive war justified through the simultaneously bio-political and missionary motif of the ‘barbarian’.

This rationalisation is the foundation of Australian—indeed all colonial—politics, and the increasingly routine alibi for official acts of violence and suppression. Windschuttle is possibly quite accurate in describing Australia as a “branch of Roman civilisation”.<sup>13</sup> For it is Roman Law that bequeathed to the British Empire, and its colonial outposts, the juridical figure of *homo sacer*, the legal inscription of a life which can be taken with impunity, “the paradoxical simultaneity of the sacred and sacrificial”.<sup>14</sup> Consider here the lives of those interned at Abu

Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and Baxter, to name but a few of the growing number of internment camps around the world. Consider also those who died while in police custody or during police pursuits, and whose deaths sparked recent riots at Palm Island, Redfern and Macquarie Fields.

In all these instances, lives exist outside legal protection, deprived of any moral value—if not also legal status—and thereby laid bare to a normalised violence. The Right has shed its liberal mantra against ‘political correctness’ and adopted a moralising ethos comparable to, but perhaps more punitive and rigid than the protestant work ethic described by Max Weber exactly one hundred years ago.<sup>15</sup> There will be no accountability for the lives extinguished here, because such lives have already been relegated to a realm of ‘non-value’ according to the only measure of worth contemporary capitalism reckons with, in which the poor lack grace and those who disavow the ‘vocation’ of profit-making are sinners. The ‘creative individual and productive citizen’ is made sacred alongside the sacrifice of the ‘uncivilised’.

In reality, all workers are apt to be both compliant and resistant, depending on the strategies and freedoms available to them. Nevertheless, the figure of the ‘barbarian’ functions here as the persistent example to all of the loss of livelihood, if not always of life—this is what the dependence on precarious work entails. Indeed, despite Windschuttle’s lament, universities have returned to the days of Badham, for whom it was “one of the highest interests of the State, and of the solemn duties of its servants [i.e. lecturers], to see that our future citizens shall be trained to the great intellectual warfare necessary for the progress of all States, in a fashion worthy of the race from which we sprang”.<sup>16</sup> Badham’s easy recourse to the language of a civilising war—to the rationalisation of violence—is not simply metaphoric.

The latest episode in the culture wars should make clear that defending the apparently objective space of a university ivory tower is self-defeating. Overtures to an aristocratic detachment are strategically weak and politically isolationist, given that there are thousands outside the universities who are subjected to such attacks on their workplace freedoms every day. Moreover, if the opening of the universities in the post-Second World War period entailed a degree of mobility, that for many included an escape from the regimented rhythms of the factory, the Dawkins/Nelson era of tertiary education is marked by the

re-assertion of discipline, via the instruments of debt, declining student incomes, casualised work and the speeded-up assembly-line of publication, innovation and measurable performance.

Recoiling into the presumed comforts of a purportedly disinterested Academy will not furnish any kind of refuge from external attacks.

The metaphysical aura of the ivory tower also functions to support exploitation within the university, and so undermines the radical political potential of work within those institutions. Unpaid and underpaid work, particularly by casualised researchers and tutors, is justified by the promise of future advancement, the assumption of an essential benevolence, and the illusion of a distance between the world of the university and that of work, exploitation, violence and war. The personalised management style in the universities is more akin to feudal patronage. This can make for an amiable working environment, but it also constructs a situation in which it is almost impossible for casual workers to challenge the terms of their employment. And, as contracted or tenured academic staff are increasingly transformed into the managers of a pool of casualised workers, and often unpaid student labour, this means among other things that academic unions have come to reflect “an old-style craft unionism, a labour aristocracy that preserves workplace hierarchy”.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding the feudal benevolence of university management styles, from the viewpoint of many of its workers the Academy is a palpable mill of discontent. More often than not, however, such professional dissatisfaction lacks any form of collective expression or application, tending merely to generate noise that is drowned out by the rhythm of work itself. As such, it frequently produces a longing for bygone times in which the university was supposedly not *in ruins*.

As Stefano Harney and Fred Moten point out, academic professionalism is now constituted by a non-choice between a critique of the Enlightenment ideals upon which the university is supposedly built, and a critique of the very professionalisation and compartmentalisation that appears to rob the university of this same Enlightenment mission.<sup>18</sup> Both choices have their dangers: the first allows specific elements in the state to further waylay the university to the immediate purposes of social reproduction (for example, the establishment of ‘teaching-only’ institutions, vocationalism); the second reaffirms grand notions of the state-as-enlightenment that do not

*Such accusations as those against Negri are defamatory fragments whose purpose is to legitimate a war, and policies in which every form of violence—from torture, to extrajudicial and indefinite internment, to vilification and censorship—against those designated as ‘enemy combatants’, ‘terrorists’ or ‘illegal non-citizens’ is made habitual.*

necessarily guard against the violence of its civilising missions. Harney and Moten argue for refusing this non-choice through an un-professional recognition that the university is neither a site of enlightenment nor a place of refuge. This obliges an escape from the university (a being *in* it but not *of* it) that many, at least in the European context, have attempted to realise through the establishment of autonomous or do-it-yourself universities.<sup>19</sup> The question of how to carry out such an exodus from the university remains a key issue for any intellectual taking a stance against the current war.

In the culture wars at a time of war, solidarity with Negri—and thousands of lesser-known individuals—cannot proceed on the basis of insisting that they are civilised, truly a philosopher, one of ‘us’. Such defenses allow the *polemos* to continue its work, leaving intact the rationalisation that there may indeed be barbarians against whom censorship, not to mention actually poisoned missiles carrying depleted uranium, cluster bombs and internment camps, are necessary. What must, at the very least, occur, is a reflection on the really existing unfreedoms that inhabit the contemporary university and ‘the public sphere’ and their relation to a war that is fought as much in the press, classrooms and research laboratories as it is on the fields of Muthana province.

1. Florida House Bill n.837, *Student and Faculty Academic Freedom in Postsecondary Education*.
2. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, London, 1993, p.105.
3. It is also not surprising that the previous incarnation of the culture wars—the ‘history wars’—turned on the question of ‘developmental genocide’. (See Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe, ‘The Massacre of Aboriginal History’, *Overland* 163, 2001, pp.21–39.)
4. Nick Dyer-Witheford, ‘Cognitive Capitalism and the Contested Campus’. Available at <[www.ejhae.elia-artschools.org/Issue2/downloads2/01b-dyer.doc](http://www.ejhae.elia-artschools.org/Issue2/downloads2/01b-dyer.doc)>.
5. Speech of 7 December 2001. Available at <[www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011207.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011207.html)>.

6. The first conference was the ‘Italian Effect: Radical Politics, Biopolitics, Cultural Subversion’ held at Sydney University in September 2004. Specific political connections between Australia and Italy appeared in the late 1980s student movement (particularly within Left Alliance), re-emerging more recently around the anti-summit protests since 2000 and the various no border protests, such as Woomera 2002.
7. *Sun-Herald*, 30 January 2005.
8. *Weekend Australian*, 16 March 2005.
9. Ian Syson, ‘ASIO’s Snooping on McGuiness, Ryan and Windschuttle’, *Overland* 172, 2003, pp.109–10, 2003.
10. For Negri’s and other responses, see <[www.rhss.usyd.edu.au/negri.html](http://www.rhss.usyd.edu.au/negri.html)>. Roffe particularly relies on notions of a singular public sphere, arguing that “renouncing the public sphere, or attacking it [. . .] is a greater part of the activity of terrorism”. See <[www.msccp.org.au](http://www.msccp.org.au)>. See also Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, Pluto, London, 2002.
11. Gregory Melleuish, *Cultural Liberalism in Australia: A Study in Intellectual and Cultural History*, CUP, Melbourne, 1995, p.62.
12. Charles Badham, *Speeches and Lectures Delivered in Australia*, Dymock, Sydney, 1890, p.60.
13. Keith Windschuttle, ‘The Break-up of Australia’, *Quadrant* 369, September 2000.
14. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, California, 1998.
15. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Unwin, London, 1985.
16. Badham, *Speeches and Lectures*.
17. Marc Bousquet and Tiziana Terranova, ‘Recomposing the University’, *Mute* 28, 2004, p.76.
18. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, ‘The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses’, *Social Text* 22:2, 2004, pp.101–115.
19. Various authors, ‘Teach Yourself Institutions’, *Mute* 28, 2004, pp.82–87.

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# HEGEMONY

Consensus, coercion and culture



ANTONIO GRAMSCI

SINCE THE PUBLICATION of the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in English in the 1970s, hegemony is a concept which has been employed by many scholars, notably in Australia by Bob Connell, Terry Irving and Mike Donaldson. Recently, hegemony has become a popular word, used mainly to describe the state of international relations in the world today. In this context it is usually synonymous with descriptions of the alleged US supremacy. It is also a term that appears frequently in Cultural Studies, but usually devoid of any political, specifically class, context.

As a response to these trends in thinking, the Hegemony Research Group was established in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Wollongong in early 2004 and attracted scholars (staff and postgraduates) from across disciplines including history, sociology, philosophy, politics and international relations. The binding concept of hegemony was chosen as a way to articulate what seemed a common interest among many scholars—how class relations in Australia and around the world came to be established and maintained, how and where they are resisted, and what their future is. The group meets every three weeks to discuss set readings from a variety of disciplines, starting with Antonio Gramsci himself and moving on to applications of his work in other areas. Readings for the past year have included work by David Bollier, Immanuel Wallerstein, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, Robert Cox and Ranagit Guha as well as substantial sections of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, including sections on 'war of position', Americanism and Fordism, and the Southern Question.

Late last year, the group decided to hold a workshop with invited speakers at which members would

circulate their work and have it commented upon by guest discussants and other members of the group. Papers were written and circulated via a website up to a month before the workshop, and the workshop itself was divided into panels with a guest discussant. The panels looked at issues such as Class and Consensus, Gender/Masculinity, Ideologies/Discourse, Culture and Hegemony, and Neo-liberalism as Hegemony at both the national and international level. Paper givers were asked to engage with the concept of hegemony and its relevance for individual scholars' work. We were very fortunate to have with us some of the world's most pre-eminent Gramsci scholars, such as Professor Joseph Buttigieg, Professor Alastair Davidson, Professor Derek Boothman, and Koichi Ohara, as well as some excellent Australian-based scholars, such as Scott Poynting, Boris Frankel and Peter Beilharz, who acted as discussants of the papers written by University of Wollongong academics and postgrads. All the guests were exceedingly generous with their time and intellects, and their feedback along with the lively discussions at each panel, helped to clarify the usefulness of the concept of hegemony. It also revealed the complexity of the concept as Gramsci developed it, and this was the most significant issue to emerge from the workshop.

While current uses of the concept of hegemony do not necessarily reflect the meaning of the concept as Gramsci explored it, it is not possible to say precisely what Gramsci *did* mean by hegemony. Most work on Gramsci refers to his famous *Prison Notebooks*, which have only been available in English since the 1970s, and then in edited 'Selections'. Gramsci himself was bound by the material circumstances of

writing in prison and while very ill, so the *Notebooks* are not a clearly articulated manifesto, but contain many complex thoughts and explorations of a huge variety of issues that concerned him in the face of Italy's succumbing to fascism. Since 1992 Joseph Buttigieg has been re-translating the *Notebooks* and they are being published by Columbia University Press. In these editions Professor Buttigieg is trying to retain the integrity of the notebooks as Gramsci wrote them. So while they seem more disorganised than a 'Selection' necessarily is, they provide greater insights into the breadth and depth of Gramsci's thinking.

It is in these *Notebooks* that we start to get a sense of the notion of hegemony as Gramsci saw it, and it is in the complexity and inter-connectedness of his thinking that we see the usefulness of this concept for an understanding of the current world and its future trajectory. At one level, hegemony is about the play of coercion and consent—that is, the State is "hegemony protected by the armour of coercion". In this view, Gramsci's theories of the state detail the way in which a state is formed with popular consent. Hegemony at the state level is the way in which leadership is exercised through the ethico-political institutions of civil society, which is then translated into governance, which is in turn maintained by continued consent as well as coercion. In states where this coercion takes the clear form of the control of the armed forces, this is not really hegemony. For a government to be truly hegemonic it must rule in the ethico-political arena before it even comes to power. For Gramsci then, the role of civil society is paramount. Without this, there is no hegemony. The question as to what extent consent is really coercion is one which remains highly pertinent.

If hegemony is not then rule by force, it is a continual process or a situation of "unstable equilibria". It is not something which is achieved and then resisted by 'counter-hegemonic' forces, but is something that remains in a state of flux at all times. This point cannot be over-emphasised, and it is of extreme significance for us in the world today. If hegemony is a process, then the ruling class, or state, must always react and respond to the movements of those whom it attempts to rule. Gramsci did not use the term 'counter-hegemonic', although today it is used to describe anti-system resistance. Rather, he encompassed resistance in his analysis of 'war of position' and 'war of movement'. These concepts have

much resonance for the contemporary situation, and for any future projects. A war of position, for Gramsci, is when there is an organic (through the people), intellectual-mass nexus against those who would rule. This combination of 'positions' is capable of articulating and enforcing a clear hegemony of its own. For Gramsci, analysing this notion was part of his attempt to understand how the Italian Communists might move to power themselves. In his attempts to understand why they were unsuccessful, he articulated the concept of 'war of movement' which relates to what most of us would call 'counter-hegemony'. This is a misnomer, however, because they are movements incapable of transcending their own 'corporate' interests and they never really challenge in any organic way the truly 'hegemonic principles' of capitalism, which are, ultimately, property relations and capital, or profit, accumulation. Unless resistance movements are capable of articulating a clear, anti-system project, they can never and will never be hegemonic in their own right.

There are many possible ways we can utilise the complexity of Gramsci's thinking, and much contemporary critical social and political thought can be seen as an attempt to develop a 'war of movement' into a 'war of position'. In the face of a seemingly unstoppable neo-liberal hegemony, Gramsci's work on the subaltern, which is yet to be fully explored, may be a way to develop a clear political program for the future. There is, still, much to be done, and The Hegemony Research Group is continuing its activities this year, with more interesting workshops planned, and we are keen to develop links with other scholars and activists around the country. Part of this process will be the establishment of an Australian branch of the International Gramsci Society. To find out more please visit our website at <[www.uow.edu.au/arts/research/hegemony/](http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/research/hegemony/)>. Alternatively, contact Kylie Smith ([kms12@uow.edu.au](mailto:kms12@uow.edu.au)) or Richard Howson ([rhowson@uow.edu.au](mailto:rhowson@uow.edu.au)) if you are interested in being part of the Gramsci Society. Groups and workshops like these are a vital tool for the exploration and development of critical thinking that is connected to political action. This is the most significant aspect of Gramsci's work for us today—the concept of praxis. We would do well to remember it.

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# ACTIVISM, THE LAW & SOCIAL CHANGE

## New Activist Rights Resources

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY has been shaped by protests, demonstrations and activism. Dissent, protest and social change are seen as essential to a healthy, robust, democratic society. And yet agitators, dissenters and social movements challenging the status quo are inevitably met with the repressive forces of society: police, courts, sometimes even gaols. Law is a central and powerful discourse through which many of these conflicts are played out.

Recognising this, what might be called 'practice handbooks' for activists have sought to inform and resource the activist community by providing guides to the law, and basic legal skills and tactics for protest campaigns and social action. Important examples include *Our Rights*, first published by the NSW Activists Defence Network in 1993, the *Activist Rights Handbook: Our Rights*, published by the Fitzroy Legal Service in 1996 and *I Protest! Fighting for your Rights: A practical guide*, published by Pluto Press in 1997.<sup>1</sup>

Practical guides have differed in their messages and approaches. Some have held an optimistic outlook about the possibilities of social action directed at the powerful, restoring power to the people within the framework of the law.<sup>2</sup> These texts are usually 'how to' or 'DIY' guides, explaining the legal and political process and covering essential ingredients of a successful campaign, such as lobbying and media strategy.

These works have sometimes been criticised for their overly 'practical' approach to social action, "disconnecting action and theory by ignoring the latter", naively ignoring broader contextual considerations such as globalisation, economic policies and the complex nature of power.<sup>3</sup> Others have started

from the pedagogical premise that educating participants about their legal rights will make their protest work easier and more effective ("less time in court, in jail or in debt (through fines) to the state").<sup>4</sup> These texts seek to provide activists with the ability to make informed choices about what sanctions they might expect to face in pursuing their agendas, and accordingly, about how far they might be willing to go and what they might be willing to risk in pursuing their aims.

Guides of this kind sometimes note that in Australia "rights in this system are in reality nothing more than those freedoms that are not prohibited".<sup>5</sup> Australian law is based on the British common law system, which has no bill of rights or citizens' guarantees. Activists are engaged in a process which "does not require the permission of any state, police force or court system".<sup>6</sup> The law "starkly conflicts with rights".<sup>7</sup>

While many of the debates continue, and much of the information in these 'activist' guides remains relevant, the legal and political context for activism has changed rapidly in the relatively short time since such guides were published. This changing climate has once more made the production and dissemination of information around the law of protest a pressing concern. The law never operates in a vacuum, and protest law is particularly susceptible to changes in the political environment.

A growing fear of terrorism has created a general state of moral panic. This is an environment ripe for rapid legislative erosion of and encroachment on hard-won and long-held civil rights, formerly thought to be fundamental pillars of democratic society, such as freedom of political expression and association. There





is a poignant and bitter irony here, for these new anti-terrorism laws are founded on a rhetoric which speaks of the need to *protect* civil society.

NGOs, formed to advocate for the neglected, now suffer explicit contractual restrictions or more subtle economic restraints (for example, the fear of biting the hand that feeds). Michael Raper has identified the phenomenon of ‘mission drift’: adjusting core values to go where the money is. Dissent occupies a rapidly diminishing public and political space in our society.<sup>8</sup>

The past decade has seen the rapid growth of the internet as a new space for social action. Activism, far from being dissipated and fragmented by this new information technology, has flourished in cyberspace.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of such changes in our socio-legal environment it is timely to examine three new resources that consider the law of protest, demonstration and activism. The first two are very much products of the information-technology age and internet-based publishing: *Terrorism Laws: ASIO, The Police and You* (Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network, 2004) and [www.activistrights.org.au](http://www.activistrights.org.au) (Fitzroy Legal Service: 2004). The third, a book by Roger Douglas: *Dealing with Demonstrations: The Law of Public Protest and its Enforcement* (The Federation Press: 2004), is principally an academic treatment of the subject.

*Terrorism Laws: ASIO, the Police and You*  
([www.amcran.org](http://www.amcran.org))

Australia’s raft of new anti-terrorist legislation has been introduced through eighteen separate Acts of Parliament since 2002, ostensibly as part of the Com-

monwealth Government’s responsibility to guarantee Australia’s security and to comply with the nation’s international obligations. Activists may well be concerned by these new laws. A ‘terrorist act’ requires “an intention to coerce or influence the public or any government by intimidation”. There must also be “an intention to advance a political, religious or ideological cause”.

While the law provides that a terrorist act may not be a terrorist act “if the action is advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action”, historical experience would give some pause for thought. Governments of all persuasions have long redeployed broad terms such as ‘terrorism’ to suit their own agendas and exercise control by marginalising or even criminalising those they oppose. It is not hard to imagine an East Timorese, West Papuan, or ANC ‘freedom fighter’ being branded ‘terrorist’ by these definitions.

A rather subjective process of proscription of terrorist organisations, exercised by the executive government, coupled with very broad “association” offences (targeting those who associate with proscribed organisations, regardless of their own views or intentions) adds to the risk of misuse. In Australia, unionists have expressed legitimate concerns with the broad definition of terrorism to include action in pursuit of political objectives. In the industrial relations arena, for example, Courts could soon be required to consider whether certain forms of industrial action might constitute terrorist action or association offences.<sup>10</sup>

Not only does the anti-terrorist legislation have implications for activists, it is of particular concern to the Australian Muslim community.<sup>11</sup> Almost all of the people interrogated under the legislation have been Muslim. Frighteningly, this is something that the general public have no right to know, and very little likelihood of actually finding out in the future, because the laws include extreme secrecy provisions and restrictions on the disclosure of such information. Lawyers and journalists who might find out and reveal such information would face criminal sanctions. Indeed the fact that people have been interrogated is only publicly known because Attorney-General Philip Ruddock happened to mention it as an aside in response to a journalist’s question on the ABC’s *7:30 Report*. Some statistics about the use of detention warrants are also published in ASIO’s annual report. All of the seventeen proscribed terrorist or-

ganisations are linked to Muslim organisations. In the United States, fewer than 60 per cent of the proscribed organisations are linked to Islamic groups.<sup>12</sup>

The Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network (AMCRAN) has published *Terrorism Laws: ASIO, the Police and You*, available in hardcopy and online at [www.amcran.org](http://www.amcran.org), in pdf and html formats, in response to these legislative changes. Although presently only available in English, it is AMCRAN's intention to have the resource available in different languages in the near future.

AMCRAN's publication seeks to answer people's general questions about the new terrorist offences in Australian law and about the expanded powers and functions of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and the Australian Federal Police. It also emphasises that the actions of Australia's security and intelligence agencies are not beyond scrutiny, and outlines avenues of redress for people affected by the exercise of these powers.

The irony of enacting draconian legislation to protect 'civil society' from the threats posed by terrorism was brought into stark relief only days after the publication was launched. With questions raised about the legitimacy of publishing information which dared to assert the rights of 'terrorist suspects', the authors were forced to counteract claims that it was "counterproductive", and "designed to stop people cooperating with anti-terrorism authorities". In an AAP report of 26 July 2004, AMCRAN convenor Waled Kadous is quoted on ABC radio responding to the claims: "I think that knowledge of the law is the foundation of a healthy democracy. I can't see that letting people know both their rights and responsibilities is actually counterproductive. In fact, it might actually have the opposite effect on people when they see how severe the punishments are and the consequences of their actions, (they) might choose not to indulge."

While the AMCRAN publication is an example of a very important, timely and targeted educational response to a specific area of the law, the Fitzroy Legal Service has also recognised the rapidly diminishing space for dissent and sought to address this through a more comprehensive online activist rights resource. This project aims not only to provide accurate legal information to those engaged in dissent, but to examine the social context of activism and build resilience and activism within the community.

*Activist Rights: Legal Information and Resources*  
([www.activistrights.org.au](http://www.activistrights.org.au))

The Fitzroy Legal Service has a long history of providing legal information for activists. In 1996 Fitzroy Legal Service published the *Activist Rights Handbook: Our Rights*. This handy slimline book usefully summarised many of the legal issues. It also synthesised the experiences of various contemporary and historical protests, including the Save Albert Park campaign, the Richmond Secondary College protests, the Save Fairlea Women's Prison Campaign, the Coalition Against Freeway Extension, the banning of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, and the banning of East Timor Protests in January 1992. Since that publication, however, and given the intervening socio-legal changes, there was a clear need for current legal information.

This latest Fitzroy Legal Service publication, funded by the Reichstein Foundation and the Victorian Law Foundation, was developed over nine months, with contributions from over fifty activists, academics, lawyers and others. Contributions were drawn from around Australia and the world.

The website contains hundreds of pages of 'Activist Legal Information' and hyperlinks for information on police powers, arrest and imprisonment, common charges used against activists, how to make a complaint about police misconduct, responding to legal threats, and the new anti-terrorism legislation.

Specific information is available for particular activist demographics including: student activists, trade unionists, forest blockaders, cyber activists and international solidarity activists. There is easy-to-find information for a range of common actions from setting up a stall and putting up posters, to initiating a boycott and whistleblowing.

There is information on activist group function, control, money, charitable status, income tax, deductible gift recipient status, GST, fundraising regulations, protection against civil liability, public liability insurance and speaking out as an organisation.

Another section is devoted to 'Activist Legal Support' and contains downloadable activist guides and info-sheets on facing the police, arrest, imprisonment and strategies for court. A section on 'How to set up a Legal Support Team' has ready-to-use 'Arrest Watch' forms, 'Instruction Sheets' and 'Legal Support Person' guides. These aim to help campaigners, organisers and legal workers around Australia provide support to those charged, arrested,

injured, imprisoned or facing court. Other sections discuss the broader legal context faced by activists in Australia, the criminalising of dissent, the role of civil disobedience, and the policing of political protest.

When the Fitzroy Legal Service commenced its online activist rights project, it did so against the backdrop of a very important activist rights initiative of the National Association of Community Legal Centres, *The Complete Activist* website ([www.nalc.org.au/activist](http://www.nalc.org.au/activist)). *The Complete Activist* website is styled as a 'starter kit' for people who are considering running local, regional or national campaigns on social justice issues, to help workers identify the best strategy for a campaign, and to provide links to people and resources that can help to get campaigns started.<sup>13</sup>

Within this 'starter kit' is a map of Australia which provides a portal to a range of activist legal resources around Australia. The [activistrights.org.au](http://activistrights.org.au) site is linked through this portal. It is hoped that this link will be one of many to come so that a comprehensive single point of access can be developed to serve people interested in activist rights information across the nation.

Roger Douglas: *Dealing with Demonstrations: The Law of Public Protest and its Enforcement* (The Federation Press, 2004)

According to Roger Douglas, *Dealing with Demonstrations* is intended for two audiences: "those with a direct interest in the law relating to demonstrations" and "those whose interests are more theoretical".

Douglas is more interested in the second audience, because:

Demonstration law tells us something about the way in which governments respond to political and social dissent. In a sense, it is a measure of the relative interests of authoritarians and libertarians. It also tells us something about 'law', and what it tells us is that 'law' is not a stately monolith, but a messy set of rules and practices. Rules which are presumably intended to promote order are characterised by ad hoc-ery and by a degree of disorder. Authoritarian rules survive as a result of liberal practices. At times, pinning down what 'law' says and does can be like trying to pin down mercury.

After admitting his own "pessimism about demonstrations", Douglas comments that "the niceties of demonstration law are about as salient to the typical demonstrator as the law of contract is to the typi-



PHOTOGRAPH: KATHERINE WILSON

cal shopper".<sup>14</sup> If this is so, then a substantial amount of work producing the AMCRAN and Fitzroy Legal Service publications may well have been in vain. The absence of anti-terrorism laws mark an unusually large blind spot in this otherwise broad and in-depth survey of the field.

An important point is made throughout the book: while Australian governments on the whole have acted as if they accepted a prima facie right to demonstrate, there is no such right recognised by the law, only a series of limited 'immunities'—freedoms that are not prohibited. The State of Queensland circa 1977–79 is an example of the dangers of this situation, although since the High Court discovered an implied freedom of political communication while reading between the lines of the Australian constitution in the early 1990s, and after the case of *Levy v Victoria*,<sup>15</sup> there is at least a constitutionally protected (albeit considerably circumscribed) right to protest. Unless, that is, following the test applied by the High Court in that case, a law limiting the right to protest is "reasonably appropriate and adapted to serve a legitimate end, the fulfilment of which is compatible with the maintenance of the constitutionally prescribed system of representative government".

As Douglas repeatedly demonstrates, the limited

protection provided to political dissent in the application of demonstration law is overly inclined to subordinate political freedoms to the demands of public order, and to achieve public order by allowing the interests of peaceful demonstrators to be subordinated to the whims of their violent opponents. Douglas is most concerned with the problem of violence, and the threat it poses to the legitimacy of protest, and concludes that it may be that public order laws are part of the price which civil liberties law must pay for its legitimacy: “a legal regime in which people were free to offend and insult others, and in which those others were forbidden to retaliate (except by counter-offensiveness and insults) would be likely to arouse considerable resentment”.

Activism remains a difficult undertaking in Australia. Activists are subjected to a multitude of disparate laws, many of which are deployed against them to destabilise their resilience as much as to threaten their ability to protest.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, it seems that despite the rule of law and the rhetoric of freedom of political expression, those who seek to bring about social change will always be under threat from changing political expediencies. Activists are far more likely to experience the repressive side of the law than its protection or encouragement. Creative activists have begun to look beyond local law to systems such as international human rights, in which freedom is derived not so much from the state but from our inherent rights as human beings. Of course, activists have realised that they must develop their own resources and strengthen their own communities in order to survive. The development of resources which educate participants in this process about their rights and which assist in organising activists to develop strategies to deal with serious civil rights issues, are to be welcomed. If activists are under threat, none of us should be under the illusion that the rule of law will protect us. A vibrant democracy requires the right to self-expression as much as protection from perceived outside threats.

1. Phil Thornton, Liam Phelan and Bill McKeown, *I Protest! Fighting for your Rights: A practical guide*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1997.
2. Thornton, Phelan and McKeown, *I Protest!*
3. Martin Mowbray, ‘Beyond “A Thousand Tiny Empowerments”’: Advocacy and Social Action in Australia’, *Just Policy: A Journal of Australian Social Policy* 19/20 September 2000, p.24.
4. Lou Schetzer, ed., *Activist Rights Handbook: Our Rights*, Melbourne, Fitzroy Legal Service, 1996, p.1.
5. Schetzer, *Activist Rights Handbook*.

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. In the NGO context, Michael Raper has coined the terms “advocacy chill”, “mission drift” and “share scare” to describe the silencing of dissent, in a paper delivered to the National Association of Legal Centres Conference, in Adelaide: ‘Justice Hijacked’, 30 August 2004.
9. See for example Judith Bessant, ‘Social Action and the Internet: New Forms of Political Space’, *Just Policy: A Journal of Australian Social Policy* 19/20 September 2000, pp.114–117.
10. The anti-terrorism legislation enacted in Australia rests on a broad statutory definition of a ‘terrorist act’, a term which, at its margins, could embrace certain acts of industrial action, like picketing by nurses. While the definition of a ‘terrorist act’ excludes ‘industrial action’ (*Criminal Code Act 1995* [Cth], section 100.1), this may not afford any protection to picketing which has been found not to be ‘industrial action’ under the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (Cth):  *Davids Distribution Pty Ltd v National Union of Workers* (1999) 165 ALR, 550, 575 per Wilcox and Cooper JJ (with whom Burchett J agreed at p.586). For commentary on this case, see John Howe, ‘Picketing and the Statutory Definition of “Industrial Action”’, *Australian Journal of Labour Law* 13, 2000, pp.84–91. The ruling in *Davids* has subsequently been applied in *Auspine Ltd v CFMEU* (2000) 97 IR 444; (2000) 48 AILR; 4–282 and *Cadbury Schweppes Pty Ltd v ALHMWU* (2001) 49 AILR; 4–382.
11. Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network (AMCRAN), *Terrorism Laws: ASIO, the Police and You*, 2004. As Scott Poynting, Greg Noble, Paul Tabar and Jock Collins have suggested in *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other* (Federation Press, Sydney, 2004), Arabs have been framed as ‘folk devils’ in a pathological paradigm currently operating on three fronts: international terrorism, national refugees and local gangs. The authors debunk the pathological paradigm for understanding criminal behaviour and remind us of “the dynamics of economic inequality, globalisation, social change or international politics”, p.201.
12. AMCRAN, *Terrorism Laws: ASIO, the Police and You*.
13. National Association of Community Legal Centres, *The Complete Activist*, <[www.naclc.org.au/activist/index.html](http://www.naclc.org.au/activist/index.html)> accessed 23 September 2004.
14. Roger Douglas, *Dealing with Demonstrations: The Law of Public Protest and its Enforcement*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2004, p.v.
15. *Levy v Victoria* (1977) 189 CLR 579, 36–40, 144. The freedom of political communication cases are *Nationwide News Pty Ltd v Wills* (1992) 177 CLR 1; *Australian Capital Television Pty Ltd v Commonwealth* (1992) 177 CLR 106; *Theophanous v Herald & Weekly Times Ltd* (1994) 182 CLR 104; *Stephens v West Australian Newspapers Ltd* (1994) 182 CLR 211; and *Lange v Australian Broadcasting Tribunal* (1997) 189 CLR 520.
16. For an extended discussion of this point see Chris Vedelago, ‘Protest and Propaganda: Anti-WTO protests and the crackdown on dissent’, *Overland* 172, 2003, pp.48–52.

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## BAD BOYS MADE GOOD

The literary redemption of Gregory David Roberts and D.B.C. Pierre

Lies are like birds. From the beige ones that flit around the home in the service of laziness and quiet, to the lurid flightless behemoths deployed in the public interest, a human life on earth is a life cooled by the wing beats of lies.<sup>1</sup>

NOVELISTS Gregory David Roberts and D.B.C. Pierre have earned renown for their authorship as well as their former criminality since the publication of their semi-autobiographical fictions *Shantaram* and *Vernon God Little*. According to press reports, the process of writing these books has allowed the authors to make amends for their sins, rendering them eligible to return to polite society. Given their colourful pasts, local media responses have tended not to dwell on the texts themselves, but have instead emphasised the authors' essentially 'Australian' identities, despite the cross-cultural aspects of their writing.

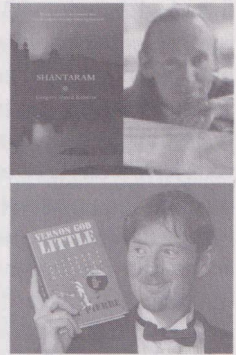
In 2003, 'Dirty But Clean' Pierre aka Peter Finlay won the Man Booker Prize with his novel *Vernon God Little*, about a boy accused of Columbine-style shootings at a US high school. A satirical novel that exposes the cruelty and narcissism of American society, *Vernon God Little* is the story of a young man's struggle to prove his innocence in the face of mounting evidence. Meanwhile Gregory David Roberts published *Shantaram*, the first volume in a proposed series about his adventures in Bombay after escaping from prison in Australia. *Shantaram* has been described as "a story of good and evil, right and wrong, of choices made and chances grasped or lost".<sup>2</sup> Both works examine the roles of alienated (criminal) individuals in relation to their host cul-

tures. Vernon spends much of his time wrestling with ignorance to prove his innocence while Roberts' hero Lin is tortured by his guilty past and tries to redeem himself through good deeds.

As a result of the biographical and social commentary, the reading public tends to make a link between the writers' personal lives and the works which bear their signatures. Due to this connection between their writerly selves and their work, their writing is supposed to act morally in the world in straightforward ways. However, *Vernon God Little* and *Shantaram* are neither simply fiction nor autobiography; instead they are hybrid forms which reveal the myriad overlaps between the genres.

As Hanif Kureishi has commented, often writing isn't a reflection of experience so much as a substitute for it, an 'instead of' rather than a 'reliving'. Nonetheless, we still tend to reconstruct authors from the references to 'self' in their texts, whatever fictional universes they have created.<sup>3</sup> While *Shantaram* and *Vernon God Little* have been highly praised, their authors' besmirched reputations tend to outshine their narratives in the public imagination, since more people are likely to read a newspaper report than a literary novel. Evidently, the authors' former criminality provides a handy hook on which to hang journalistic reportage of their literary successes. Indeed, our knowledge of these authors' lives is so thoroughly interconnected with the workings of the media that the texts themselves are in danger of being overlooked.

Not only have both books been the subject of voluminous amounts of press commentary, they also mimic common forms of media representation. Finlay



has described his book as a “satire on the way America tells its story through the media”.<sup>4</sup> *Vernon God Little* is deliberately populated with stereotypes from bad American TV. The main character, Vernon, recognises the phoniness of the interactions around him, noting that when adults want to display their seriousness they start talking like “bad actors”.<sup>5</sup> Everything is deliberately shallow in Vernon’s world, yet Pierre’s carefully balanced tone teases the reader through the novel’s seeming implausibility.<sup>6</sup>

*Shantaram* also contains its share of cultural clichés and racial types, however unintentionally. Critics have questioned the veracity of some aspects of Roberts’ writing, but have generally acknowledged the entertainment value of the book. “*Shantaram* is as close as fiction gets to reality TV,” writes Avijit Ghosh in Calcutta’s *Telegraph*, “sifting facts from fiction isn’t easy, especially in a book where reality and creative imagination are like Siamese twins.”<sup>7</sup> This deliberate blending of fact and fiction is a way of seamlessly reliving the experience for Roberts, argues Cameron Woodhead, a quality which also hypnotises readers.<sup>8</sup> For Tony Baker, the complete suspension of disbelief is necessary in order to read Roberts’ book: “for those familiar with Bollywood epics, much of *Shantaram* has that quality of juxtaposing one unexpected with another”.<sup>9</sup> Hollywood executives have also recognised the filmic potential of the book, with plans afoot to turn *Shantaram* into a movie starring Johnny Depp.

*Vernon God Little* is a more obviously fictional text which plays with postmodern techniques, yet there are unmistakable echoes of the author’s experiences within the narrative. For instance, the untrustworthy television reporter, Eulalio or ‘Lally’, exhibits traits of the conman Finlay once was. Memorably, Lally tells Vernon that he must choose the form his narrative will take, otherwise someone else will do it for him. The central story is essentially about Vernon’s attempt to regain control of his life, which has become chaotic after the school massacre. In the process he attains a kind of self-consciousness and sense of spirituality which had evaded him earlier. Lin’s journey also involves a kind of spiritual awakening. He must come to terms with his past actions and create a new identity for himself in a foreign culture.

The review pages have discussed at length the many intersections between the lives and the writing. But the writing cannot be considered uninflected ‘truth’. As Kevin Hart has argued, “any knowledge

one can glean of the writer’s life and intentions will not provide one with a privileged point of access to the text; it will involve one in yet another network . . . there is no knowledge, of which we can speak, which is unmediated”.<sup>10</sup> Even so, their experiences have granted them enough knowledge to write in a fairly believable manner; a quality which helps to keep them on bestseller lists. In their former lives, the authors must have witnessed some of the situations they recount, or learned to understand the predicament of the condemned man, at the very least.

Roberts claims that *Shantaram* is an artful amalgamation of facts rather than unexpurgated truth. As he said in a BBC radio interview: “I took substantive events of my life . . . and shoved them around into a story which I hope reads like fiction and feels like facts”.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the relationship between Roberts’ real life and the novel is always unclear. Cameron Woodhead suggests that for Roberts, “fiction is much truer to his sense of that time than autobiography could ever be. Life on the run is a life of lies; and lying, as the only way to get at the truth, is what fiction is on about”.<sup>12</sup>

Salman Rushdie has observed that it doesn’t matter if a book is presented as fact or fiction, autobiography or novel, as long as the writing is good. Yet the writing of *Shantaram* does not fully sustain the necessary illusion of truth. Sunil Badami argues that *Shantaram*, for all its high ambitions and good intentions, is the badly written novel of an incredible life-story: “Burdened by self-indulgent prose, unrealistic characters and insufficient editing, the fictional potential of the author’s own story is mostly never realised”.<sup>13</sup> Here the reviewer claims that the novel does not live up to the life-story; that Roberts’ real life is more extraordinary than his depiction of it.

In *Artful Histories*, David McCooley claims that the formal similarity between autobiography and the novel leads many to see autobiography as pretending to be something it is not: “the concern with literature has, ironically, led to a suspicion of the genre because of its literary status”.<sup>14</sup> In other words, autobiography is often distrusted due to its use of artificial techniques. While classified as novels, *Vernon God Little* and *Shantaram* have identifiably autobiographical elements which provide insight into the ways in which the authors figure their lives and represent their respective (im)moral codes.

In a *Bulletin* review Peter Pierce suggests that although there are “flowery and preachy passages”

in *Shantaram* there is no attempt at “self-exculpation”.<sup>15</sup> Badami would disagree with this, arguing that Roberts’ alter-ego Lin is unbelievably likeable:

He remains a gangster, taking part in violence, running guns, committing crimes, but Roberts is at pains to stress that Lin never kills or hurts others except in self-defence; he only stays with the mafia out of loyalty . . . It’s a double-handed absolution, morally expedient.<sup>16</sup>

Peter Finlay has redeployed the facts of his life in a much less recognisable manner. He claims that his own story is written into *Vernon God Little* but not in the part of the main character. Instead elements of his own life are ‘coded in’. Similarly, Roberts has enough material from his illustrious career in the Bombay mafia to fill four huge books.

Criminal exploits and the consequent production of literature are perhaps intimately interrelated. The writing may be driven by the authors’ need to make sense of their experiences or to absolve them from long-harboured guilt. Both Roberts and Finlay have independently acknowledged the role of regret as a motivating factor in their writing. According to the *Guardian*, Finlay wrote *Vernon God Little* with redemption in mind. His pseudonym ‘Dirty But Clean’ Pierre was meant as a symbolic statement that this was a “new start” after years spent in a “pit of deceit and failure”, as an unsuccessful film-maker, gambler, graphic artist and sometime smuggler: “I let some very fine people who believed in me down,” Finlay said. “I thought that if the book worked I could start to quietly pay some of them back”.<sup>17</sup> Evidently, Finlay sees his writing as a way of dealing with his bad conscience: “if there’s a single pressure that has brought me to writing, it is regret . . . that’s like rocket fuel for this kind of art . . . My theory is that when I finally purge myself of all kinds of emotions then I will probably be pretty useless as a writer”.<sup>18</sup> According to Finlay, his literary production is purely driven by his desire to compensate for his evil deeds. Once amends have been made, his creativity will simply disappear.

In a page of acknowledgements at the end of the novel, he writes: “To all those whose shores remain littered with my sins—this could be the handle of a mop”. One of the main functions of his novel is to earn back lost trust and generate money to pay debts. While Finlay’s Man Booker prizemoney is going to directly pay back some of what he owes, he concedes that some of his past mistakes cannot be rec-

tified. “No matter what money you pay back, there’s no way to reconstruct the trust,” he says.<sup>19</sup>

For his part, Roberts eventually plans to donate some of his earnings to the needy of Bombay, as his hero does in *Shantaram*. He describes this as “squaring his debt with fate”. With the book royalties, he says, he is going back to India to set up a mobile medical clinic to help the poor people who helped him. “If I don’t do it, flay me,” he says.<sup>20</sup> When questioned about the ethics of making money from recounting his sordid past, Roberts is typically defensive:

It’s not a book glorifying crime. It’s a book that has a very clear and, I would hope, profound moral dimension . . . No-one has given me money because I committed crimes. They’ve given me money because they loved the writing . . . so it’s inaccurate for anyone to think for a moment people have bought this book because of crime or I have benefited from crime.<sup>21</sup>

Yet it’s difficult to believe that the novel would have been so popular if it had not been marketed in terms of Roberts’ criminal reputation.

When these fictions entered the public sphere, they had unforeseen effects for the authors concerned. Finlay has commented that he had to put his past behind him to be able to write, but his success has now forced him to confront past demons: “It’s been strongly suggested to me by circumstances since the Booker that I had to reattach myself to my past,” he has said. “Because of the publicity a lot of people from my past were getting back in touch and reconnecting. It was like a stroke in reverse.”<sup>22</sup> His success has also reconnected Finlay with the country of his birth. He has been reconstructed in Australian media as a local author, even though he has lived elsewhere for most of his life. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* Malcolm Knox hailed Finlay’s return to Australia as a triumph, after a fourteen-year absence: “D.B.C. Pierre’s return to Sydney belongs to a novel—not the type of novel he writes, but a sentimental saga of redemption and happy endings and, as he puts it, ‘ghost slaying’”. Knox quotes Finlay as saying: “If my tail isn’t still between my legs, my legs are still chafed. I’m just grateful to have an opportunity to come back here at all”.<sup>23</sup>

Our tendency to claim rogue figures like Finlay as our own has already been much remarked upon. Larger-than-life characters make good copy, especially if they can be categorised as Aussie larrikins.<sup>24</sup> The recurrent emphasis on the ‘Australian-ness’ of

Finlay and Roberts tends to preclude close examination of the cross-cultural dimensions of their narratives, which are based on the authors' experiences in India, the USA and Mexico. For the fictional protagonists, Vernon and Lin, foreign terrain acts as a counterpoint to their 'home' cultures and provides refuge from the pursuit of the authorities.

As many commentators have noted, Australia's history of convictism has generated vast amounts of literature which examines the relationship between disaffected individuals and society, exploring their sense of alienation and entrapment.<sup>25</sup> This helps to explain the tradition of the outsider in Australian literature: a figure of dubious honour who threatens to unsettle the status quo. In the *Sunday Age*, columnist Jane Sullivan has commented on the Australian fondness for crooked writers, claiming that these rascals have to write to expiate their demons, creating "great art out of extremes". Their appeal comes from their "Ned Kelly-like identity as the outsider, rising up against the dead weight of authority and tradition".<sup>26</sup>

Inevitably, given his notorious reputation as a prison escapee, Roberts' novel has been compared to the 'true crime' works written by Mark 'Chopper' Read. Roberts himself sees no similarities between *Shantaram* and Chopper's series of flippant crime recollection books. Instead Roberts regards his project as being a more highbrow "tale of exile, alienation and, ultimately, redemption".<sup>27</sup>

Besides a propensity for lying, another legacy of Australia's convict past is the widespread adoption of pseudonyms. Possibly the early pen-names assumed by convicts, who were legally barred from being published, established an abiding tradition of authorial misrepresentation. Naming has certainly played an important part in the production and reception of *Vernon God Little* and *Shantaram*, since the authors have experimented with various pen-names. Indeed, Finlay's pseudonym also connects him with the land of his childhood. As Peter Fray remarked in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "perhaps Australia's greatest mark on the Booker's new superstar is his pen name". The Pierre moniker was first applied to Finlay in his South Australian schooldays by a friend he knew as Hedgehog: Apparently 'D.B.C.' comes from a childhood cartoon series, featuring a character called 'Dirty Pierre'. The 'But Clean' part is a later addition, reflecting Finlay's new leaf.<sup>28</sup>

Roberts' protagonist assumes and discards a number of names in order to sustain his anonymity

on the run. He adopts the name 'Lindsay', which is subsequently shortened to 'Lin', a name with connotations of male virility in the local language, or the more familiar 'Linbaba'. The title of *Shantaram* comes from the name purportedly given to Roberts by Indian village women, meaning 'man of peace'. Peter Pierce remarks on the incongruity of this name given the hero's "continued recourse to violence".<sup>29</sup> Even the author's current incarnation is not the same as the one he was born with, as he now prefers to use his mother's surname for his writing.

While their pen-names offer a degree of protection, the authors are by no means immune from criticism. After the awarding of the Man Booker Prize, Finlay's book came in for some stiff rebukes for his scathing representation of small-town America. The *New York Times* was distinctly dismissive towards the book: "Given the novel's clumsy contrivance and its dogged reliance on insulting American stereotypes, that assessment probably says more about British attitudes towards the United States than about literary tastes".<sup>30</sup> Obviously, the *New York Times* understood his book to be the work of an Englishman, when he is Australian by birth and 'Tex-Mex' by inclination, since he spent his formative years in Mexico. Consequently his depiction of Mexico is a sympathetic one in contrast with the novel's damning treatment of the USA. Local reviewers have also raised concerns about Finlay's vitriolic depiction of America. Delia Falconer argues that the novel displays a kind of generalised misanthropy:

Fast-food scoffing middle America is a soft target. To approach it more sympathetically would be a stretch of imagination more deserving of the Booker Prize. In *South Park* the joke is on America's moral guardians, but you feel that in *Vernon God Little's* Martirio, Bar-B-Chew Barn capital of the Texas, the joke is on those on the downside of advantage in Hicksville, USA.<sup>31</sup>

In *Shantaram*, India is explored more sensitively than the USA in *Vernon God Little*. Roberts learned three of the local languages while in India and calls himself *Gora chierra, kala maan* ("white on the outside, but full Hindustani on the inside").<sup>32</sup> This hybrid Indian identity seems to provide him with an entrée to this seductive and alien culture.

During an interview with the *Adelaide Advertiser*, Roberts expressed his worry about how *Shantaram* will be received in India. As interviewer Tony Baker observes, "Roberts is frequently generous to the



Indian national character but he acknowledges that his work might be seen as a kind of intellectual recolonisation".<sup>33</sup> Though his representation of India is familiar in some ways, *Shantaram* is unprecedented in terms of the history of Australian literature. Peter Pierce observes that "this is one of the most unusual of recent Australian fictional debuts . . . What is distinctive and arresting is an Australian desperate's attempt to make a decent Asian life".<sup>34</sup>

The desperate protagonists in *Vernon God Little* and *Shantaram* travel to escape the police and become 'better' men along the way, echoing the authors' own journeys. However, the role played by illicit drugs in the well-documented downfall of both writers is curiously absent from their texts. Roberts describes his former self as being "a desperate man, doing stupid, cowardly things to feed a stupid, cowardly heroin habit",<sup>35</sup> while Finlay's career as a conman began with a cocaine addiction acquired during his wild youth. Claire Sutherland describes *Shantaram* as a farewell to Roberts' former self: "his epic *Shantaram* is a virtual obituary to the man he once was and testament to man's [sic] ability to change".<sup>36</sup> This assumes that the man he was has gone forever.

These novels might actually be products of the same energy which gave rise to the authors' criminality, rather than mere compensations for it. Both authors have experienced serious drug addictions which drove them to commit acts of duplicity, although the difference in degree is substantial. As one reviewer put it, Gregory David Roberts' criminal record makes Peter Finlay "look like the sugarplum fairy".<sup>37</sup> Arguably their writing has been produced in the void left by addiction, and continues to draw on the energy of this lost time, despite attempts to distance themselves from their infamous pasts. For Roberts and Finlay, fame is perhaps yet another guise to add to their many incarnations. As Peter Fray observes, "Finlay wears his brand-spanking-new literary fame like a rented tuxedo. He's pleased to have it on, but he's not sure if it really fits. Not yet, perhaps, not ever".<sup>38</sup>

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2. Andrew Rule, 'Back From the Badlands', *Age Good Weekend*, 9 August 2003, pp.24–25, 27–28.
3. Hanif Kureishi, <books.guardian.co.uk/extracts/story/0,6761,1286462,00.html>, accessed 22 August 2004.
4. Peter Finlay cited by Shaunagh O'Connor in 'Blood, sweat and

- beers', *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 5 June 2004, p.95.
5. James Ley, 'Bad Actors', *Australian Book Review* 257, December 2003/January 2004.
6. Andrew Laing, review of *Vernon God Little*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 March 2003, p.13.
7. Avijit Ghosh, *Telegraph*, Calcutta, 23 May 2004.
8. Cameron Woodhead, 'A Compelling Life On the Run', *Age Review*, 16 August 2003, p.5.
9. Tony Baker, 'Not bad to the bone', *Advertiser Magazine*, 16 August 2003, p.3.
10. Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*, CUP, Cambridge, 1989, p.26.
11. Roberts in an interview with the BBC cited by Avijit Ghosh, *Telegraph*.
12. Cameron Woodhead, 'A Compelling Life On the Run'.
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14. David McCooey, *Artful Histories: Modern Australian Autobiography*, CUP, Melbourne, 1996, pp.8–9.
15. Peter Pierce, *Bulletin* 121:34, <host.techneventures.com/bulletin/EdDesk.nsf/Al/753D494F74A66FA5CA256D7200066226>, accessed 20 August 2004.
16. Sunil Badami, 'Last Mango in Pondicherry', p.205.
17. Peter Finlay quoted in 'Novelist Dirty Pierre comes clean: I was a conman', *Guardian*, 11 October 2003.
18. D.B.C. Pierre cited by Peter Fray, 'Writing For Columbine', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 October 2003, p.12.
19. Peter Finlay quoted in 'Dirty but debt-free: the prize-winning author who pledged to set right his past', <independent.co.uk>, accessed 23 June 2004.
20. Andrew Rule, 'Back From the Badlands'.
21. Claire Sutherland, 'The running man', *Herald Sun*, 13 September 2003, pp.11–12.
22. D.B.C. Pierre cited in 'Dirty but debtfree: the prize-winning author who pledged to set right his past', <independent.co.uk>, 23 June 2004.
23. Malcolm Knox, 'On Reflection, Pierre's return is a happy ending', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 May 2004, p.5.
24. Jane Sullivan, 'The prose and cons of rebel writers', *Age*, 26 October 2003, p.10.
25. See Graeme Turner, 'Film, Television and Literature: Competing for the Nation', in *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss (eds), OUP, Melbourne, 1998, p.359.
26. Jane Sullivan, 'The prose and cons of rebel writers'.
27. Claire Sutherland, 'The running man'.
28. Peter Fray, 'Writing For Columbine'.
29. Peter Pierce, *Bulletin* 121:34, (online).
30. *New York Times* article cited by 'The Editor's view' at <writersservices.com>, accessed 20 August 2004.
31. Delia Falconer, 'Two Sides of the Story', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October, 2003, p.16.
32. Sunil Badami, 'Last Mango in Pondicherry', p.202.
33. Tony Baker, 'Not bad to the bone'.
34. Peter Pierce, *Bulletin* 121:34.
35. Andrew Rule, 'Back From the Badlands'.
36. Claire Sutherland, 'The running man'.
37. Jane Sullivan, 'The prose and cons of rebel writers'.
38. Peter Fray, 'Writing For Columbine'.

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## 'PLAGUED BY HIDEOUS IMAGININGS'

The Despondent Worlds of Contemporary Australian Fiction

Sonya Hartnett: *Surrender* (Viking, \$29.95)

Peter Mews: *Bright Planet* (Picador, \$22)

Gail Jones: *Sixty Lights* (Harvill, \$29.95)

Charlotte Wood: *The Submerged Cathedral* (Vintage, \$22.95)

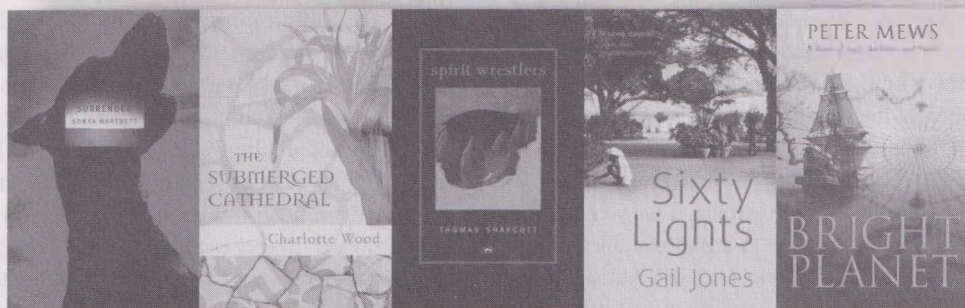
Thomas Shapcott: *Spirit Wrestlers* (Wakefield Press, \$39.95)

IN AN ESSAY in her collection, *Timepieces* (2002), Drusilla Modjeska gives a strikingly bleak account of the state of contemporary Australian fiction. She suggests that, partly because of a disenchantment with Australia's current conservative political climate, Australian fiction has "turned its face elsewhere, detaching itself more and more from local realities". It doesn't "have much to do with or much to say to the Australia we live in". It isn't, she argues, about the ordinary any more; it isn't parochial enough; nor does it engage with present-day situations, tending instead to retreat into history.<sup>1</sup> She has a point, if the novels I'm reviewing are anything to go by. Gail Jones and Peter Mews set their novels back in the mid-nineteenth century. Charlotte Wood and Thomas Shapcott begin their novels in the 1960s; Wood ends, inexplicably, in the Orwellian year of 1984. Sonya Hartnett's *Surrender* seems to be set in the recent past, but it's difficult to tell. Her earlier novel, *of a Boy*, unfolds in the 1970s.

Modjeska thinks that history provides contemporary Australian fiction with a protective 'soft glow', allowing it to wallow in folksiness, losing its 'urgency'. Her lament also rests on a sense that Australian fiction once was great, assured about its realism and its relevance, authentic and authoritative: the ghost of

Patrick White haunts her account. Now, she says, "it's hard to know where contemporary fiction can find its authority, let alone its hope"—and she turns, instead, to non-fiction which has usurped the literary terrain, doing history better and doing the 'present' better, too. Yet the imaginative possibilities remain with fiction, if only it could give them realisation: "Fiction is not tethered . . . There is no limit to the times it can assume, the distance it can travel, the rein it can give to memory, the depths it can reach or the experience it can transform".<sup>2</sup>

We can say that Modjeska's essay delivers us the bad news about contemporary Australian fiction—which then makes her conclusion about its imaginative possibilities read rather like a forlorn flight of fancy, a vain hope. Literary fiction *is* 'tethered', of course, and there are indeed 'limits' to what it can do. This is the real bad news, and the novels under review here bring it home with a vengeance. Modjeska is partly right: something has happened to Australian fiction. But the novels here do not always bathe in the 'soft glow' of history, nor do they turn away from the parochial. They may very well retreat from present-day situations, but they are also more inward-looking, more introspective, and more claustrophobic than Australian fiction has ever been: which has to say something about what it is like to write literary fiction right now. When they do give us imaginative possibilities, they do so in the knowledge that they have suddenly become fantastic, that such things are condemned to remain unrealised. For the rest of the time, these novels play out their isolation as both a social phenomenon and an expression of



their literary predicament. Their characters are usually traumatised, severed from the social just as literary fiction nowadays imagines it is severed from all the non-fictional forms as well as from any sense of a 'general public'. Even when they travel elsewhere, their characters remain tethered to their parochial histories. More often, they are visited by strangers to whom they react pathologically as the local comes to imagine itself under siege. Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* (1998) had given this a benign, paternal expression when the political climate in Australia was more receptively 'multicultural': strange visitors to isolated and protected places can sooner or later find themselves, it whimsically suggested, absorbed into the family. But Sonya Hartnett's *Surrender* now gives this a darker spin when it says of one of its characters: "She doesn't understand that doors, walls, fences, ceilings—they're helpless to keep out what determinedly desires to get in".<sup>3</sup> Far from suggesting that contemporary Australian fiction has turned its gaze elsewhere, this expression of local paranoia may say more about Australia's present-day situation than we give it credit for.

Sonya Hartnett has become a rising star of Australian literary fiction, with her first novel, *Of a Boy* (2002), short-listed for the Miles Franklin Prize. But it is perhaps the most depressing novel I have ever read: one that systematically and sadistically goes about its business of humiliating its 9-year-old boy protagonist, Adrian. Set in the late 1970s, it imagines a nodule of suburban life sealed off from the outside world, a cruel and anxious place haunted by the disappearance of three children. Parents warn their offspring not to talk to strangers. But the unloved and impressionable boy Adrian is led to his death just the same, meekly following a deluded young girl. What sense can we make of this pecu-

liarily morbid novel, in which almost every character has "died inside"? It tells us that insularity is a disease; that, far from comforting its folk, it deranges them: as if the local and the pathological go hand in hand. *Of a Boy* is in one sense slight and rather pointless; but from another point of view it is a radical novel that marks the post-Whitlam years in Australia as the beginning of the end, the unleashing of a 'symptom' which refuses to allow the local to find its resting place: which refuses to allow its people to feel at home.

The opening line of Hartnett's latest novel, *Surrender*, is therefore wholly expected: "I am dying". The protagonist here is another boy, Anwell, equally impressionable and humiliated, in a rural town which is once more sealed off from the world, "safe as a cradle". (But why does Hartnett continually punish young boys?) The publicity sheet for this novel calls it a thriller, which it is not. *Surrender* is instead a *doppelgänger* novel, in the tradition of James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* or Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Anwell is confined to his home by domineering parents; later on, he is confined to his sickbed. But he is visited by Finnigan, a wild boy who roams the township causing mischief like a kind of village sprite, never seen but always there. Finnigan becomes Anwell's protector and tormentor, a Gothic alter ego through whom Anwell vicariously lives out a sense of freedom: of imaginative possibilities. The feral dog Surrender performs the same function, wandering across the outskirts of the town and then bringing home to Anwell "cavalier tales of wit and piracy which widened the world for me".<sup>4</sup> As the terroristic Finnigan goes on a burning spree, the town becomes increasingly hysterical, fearful of anything strange, "plagued by hideous imaginings". Its paranoias are most intensely realised in Anwell's mother and father, a remote and repressive couple who re-

spond by retreating back into their home. Soon, Anwell's mother's world "had contracted like a dying spider"; such Gothic metaphors abound in this novel. But when Anwell finally slaughters them, it only contracts his world still further. He finds himself in an asylum, a "small white tomb" utterly removed from the bustle of the outside world; like an image, perhaps, of 1950s Australia, if we were to take this strange work of fiction as a national allegory.

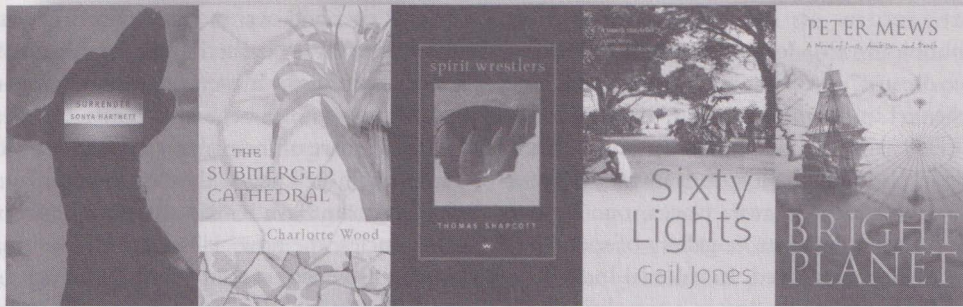
Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* laid the national allegory to rest in Australia, as if no novel afterwards could ever be so earnestly and self-consciously representative. *Eucalyptus* is national-allegory-as-folly. It reactivated the bush settlement novel, an otherwise dead literary form in this country. But it did so both to distinguish itself from it, and to do it all over again. *Eucalyptus* played out a fantasy of re-settlement after the fact, wiping the traumas of colonialism away in order to plant the landscape afresh and stake an even stronger claim on it in the process. There are no Aborigines in *Eucalyptus*: they would only upset its vision of total ownership, of full settler immersion into the landscape: of living in Australia. Every immigrant story in this novel is welcomed, processed and duly absorbed, remaining absolutely secondary to the central romance that establishes a pastoral Australian dynasty: a father, his daughter and a future son-in-law. The idea that a child might come to slaughter its parents is unthinkable here; we might even see Sonya Hartnett's fiction as a cold-blooded attack on precisely the kind of novel Bail had produced, with its occult sense that to tell the story of belonging is sufficient in itself to secure it as a fact (or a fantasy). Bail's novel was enchanted with itself. For the contemporary Australian novels under review here, however, enchantment and disenchantment jostle for space and in Hartnett's fiction disenchantment always wins. A national allegory which sings the praises of settlement is essentially a matter of faith, which none of these novels now shares. Some of them, on the other hand, mourn its passing.

*The Submerged Cathedral* is Charlotte Wood's second novel, and it seems to find itself caught somewhere in between the enchanted world of *Eucalyptus* and the bleaker provinces of Hartnett's recent fiction. This is another country-town novel, a romance that traces the lives of Jocelyn and her lover Martin from 1963 into the 1980s. Jocelyn is one of those defiant-yet-vulnerable heroines, who chooses to live with Martin but forever feels the disapproval

of what novelists sometimes rather lazily think of as 'society'. In the meantime, she is proofreading *The Complete Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Australia*, a task which seems to take ages (where on earth is the publisher?) but which also allows the book to flirt with the logics of the national allegory as Jocelyn muses over its various catalogued entries: missing children in the bush, for example, or 'Ayers Rock'. These postcard images of Australia stay with Jocelyn as she accompanies her troubled sister Ellen to London. But the local landscape is imprinted upon her body ("all fern-frond hair and smooth eucalyptical limbs") and Jocelyn returns to her Australian country town, longing for home and homeliness.

This is a novel about belonging, but it expresses this in a rather feminine way. Belonging in *Eucalyptus* meant planting trees across a huge rural property; masculine and expansionist. In Wood's novel, it simply means planting a garden. (Why are literary women in Australia currently so preoccupied with gardens?) Like Bail's eucalyptus forest, the garden in this novel is a carefully cultivated, aesthetic space; a literary space. Wood in this sense dutifully follows Bail, "imprinting" her character "on the land" by laying out "her catalogue of plants", imagining that an encyclopaedic knowledge of the countryside combined with literary composition is enough to secure an authentic sort of settler occupation. (There are, once more, no Aborigines in this novel, except for a passing reference to them in the *Illustrated Encyclopaedia* as "primitive".)<sup>5</sup> Jocelyn isn't quite as docile as Bail's passive heroine, of course; she waits *and* plants, simultaneously. But the effect is the same, producing a fantasy of settlement that dwells entirely inside its own literary logic, bathing not in the 'soft glow' of history, but in the soft glow of literary romance.

On the other hand, Jocelyn and Martin find themselves traumatically separated later on. Martin, a doctor, finds some sort of solace for his own grief in a monastery where, in a scene I can only describe as naive, he is cured through an act of homosexual love with the monastery's gardener. Gardens and gardeners are indeed inspirational in this novel; but Martin's gay interlude is soon forgotten as the monastery closes down and he returns at last to Jocelyn, cured. The novel's darker side occasionally rears up to disturb this pastoral fantasy: Ellen may or may not have been beaten by her husband; a child dies; a boy who slaps his mother in public is made exem-



plary as a typical instance of the “hatred of women”.<sup>6</sup> Wood is another woman novelist who has no time for boys, but the comparison to Sonya Hartnett is more fully registered through the melancholy presentation of her characters as social isolates. Although Jocelyn senses society’s disapproval of her, there is no ‘society’ in this novel. Wherever it might be, Wood’s characters are utterly removed from it. The result is that the little world they create is both charming and empty. This is a sad novel which remains melancholic even when its romance is realised, as if, just at the point of actually belonging and settling down, it doesn’t quite know where it is or what it has lost along the way.

Thomas Shapcott’s new novel, *Spirit Wrestlers*, begins around the same time as Wood’s, in 1964, and it shares some structural features. But it plays out Sonya Hartnett’s key theme, the corruption of impressionable young children (boys, once more) by unwelcome visitors. I have to say that this is a bizarre and rather unpleasant novel. It builds itself around a rural Australian boy, Johann, an excellent swimmer from country Queensland. Some immigrants arrive from Canada, a persecuted religious community of Russian emigres called Doukhobors. They settle in the valley and Johann befriends a brother and sister, Ivan and Olga. So it is a novel about being visited by strangers, and as we have seen with Hartnett this always turns out to have traumatic consequences. In *Surrender*, the protagonist was split in two, visiting himself, as it were, in order to unleash a series of perversions: arson, theft, murder. In Shapcott’s novel, however, all the perversions are dumped onto the immigrant boy, Ivan. He turns out to be an arsonist and a murderer, who goes on to kill his repressive father just as Hartnett’s Anwell had slaughtered his parents. He is also a transvestite and a fundamentalist, both of which seem to be disap-

proved of in equal measure. When Olga puts on a headscarf, the novel tells us that this is “common to a dozen eccentric fundamentalist denominations”: no point in drawing any finer distinctions here!<sup>7</sup> But the novel seems oblivious to its own racism as it earnestly preserves Johann (Australian, muscular, normal) from Ivan’s (foreign, pathological) infecting influence. What Shapcott has against the Doukhobors is a mystery to me, but these otherwise peaceful religious dissenters are certainly given short shrift in a novel that is high on melodrama and low on irony and self-reflection. In the meantime, Johann’s sense of belonging only increases—after Vietnam, of all things—and soon we are back to the old ‘immersion-in-the-landscape’ theme as he settles back down in the country he loves. Local Aussie paranoia is given its fullest expression here, in a novel that I can only hope doesn’t find its way to Alberta.

*Spirit Wrestlers* is described on the back cover as a “haunting, poetic novel”, which again suggests that publicists could be more familiar with their products. The blurb at the back of Charlotte Wood’s novel tells us it is written in “spare, haunting prose”. It is now surely time to abandon the word ‘haunting’ when composing publicity for new Australian fiction. Gail Jones’s most recent novel, *Sixty Lights*, is described on the back cover as: “Hypnotically poetic”. It might also be worth avoiding the term ‘poetic’ when talking about prose fiction. But certainly, Jones’s novel is beautifully written and wonderfully evocative. It is also melodramatic, but it knows this and happily admits to it as its nineteenth-century protagonist, Lucy Strange, finds herself orphaned after her mother dies in childbirth and her father commits suicide, all of which happens by about page ten. This novel, I am relieved to say, is free of paranoia. Its gaze turns outward rather than inward; it visits rather than receives visitors, and it relishes the experience

of travel. Whereas the novels by Hartnett, Wood and Shapcott return us to the local (often claustrophobically so), Jones's novel gives itself up to "exotic dreams" involving other places, or at least, two of them: London and Bombay. It loves spectacle and detail, and as Lucy grows up and becomes interested in photography it spends its time "capturing" visual images in faraway places, one by one. Victorian London becomes "a gallery of spectacles" to be described and enjoyed. In colonial India, Lucy has the sense that she sees "more intensely", that is, more intensely than she had in Australia which (much as it was in Jones's first novel, *Black Mirror*) is rather bland by comparison.<sup>8</sup>

Does *Sixty Lights* bathe in the 'soft glow' of history? I suppose it does, although it would be more accurate to say that it bathes in the soft glow of literary history. This is a self-consciously literary novel which turns not to Australian precedents for inspiration but to the English canon. *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* are its Urtexts. In her earlier years Lucy's mother Honoria had identified with *Jane Eyre* outright. As Honoria's marriage to Arthur becomes "literal and prosaic", she also plays out the role of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, except that she reads literary fiction, not popular romances. Lucy and her brother discover *Great Expectations* early on and also identify with its characters. When Lucy gets to London, it is Dickens's novel that makes the city "seem altogether more actual", as if reality needs literature to give it life.<sup>9</sup> The parents of Lucy's sister-in-law are just "like a family out of Dickens". Lucy even dreams about Dickens. The death of her uncle is later overshadowed by Dickens's death. And when she herself dies at the end of the novel, her brother's tears only begin to flow when he goes back to *Great Expectations* to read about the death of Magwitch. It is as if *Sixty Lights* wants to channel itself through Dickens's novel, although it isn't entirely clear why. It doesn't make enough of Magwitch to warrant any interest in him as an Australian immigrant, for example, nor does it want to rewrite or reconfigure either this novel or *Jane Eyre* as other modern and contemporary novelists (Peter Carey, Jean Rhys) have since done. It does draw on one lesser known revision of *Jane Eyre*, however—the 1943 Jacques Tourneur film, *I Walked with a Zombie*—when Lucy finds herself mesmerised by the nocturnal glow of the ocean and an obliging captain explains the phenomenon: "bioluminescence". Film buffs may re-

member the moment in the film; but the word is repeated over and over in Jones's novel like an incantation, as a way of registering the brightness of life, its optimism, its glow. It even gets used during sex.

Yet Jones's novel begins and ends with death and has its fair share of them along the way as well. Death is imprinted on Lucy at the beginning of the novel: why does she have to die so young? Mothers, fathers, uncles: the novel kills them all. So its glowing 'bioluminescence' is tempered by trauma, grief and loss and a series of departures, which makes *Sixty Lights* a melancholy novel rather like Wood's *The Submerged Cathedral*. At one point, Lucy imagines that "everything that is seen . . . will one day somewhere be registered".<sup>10</sup> This is the literary novel's claim on life in all its myriad detail, a project inherited from Henry James that does indeed seek to realise fiction's imaginative possibilities. But it also underwrites the current literary interest in encyclopaedic knowledge, the kind we see in Bail's *Eucalyptus* which uses the strategies of non-fiction (providing intricate details about tree species) as a way of recovering the kind of cultural authority literary fiction has now lost. However, Jones's heroine dies too early for any of this—encyclopaedic knowledge, literary possibility—to achieve expression. Lucy is a bohemian, addicted to spectacle and tourism. Her photography is understood aesthetically: she is an artist. But she merely registers a few of life's fragments, nothing much more, before she dies; and the novel's self-conscious literariness ensures that there is little that is 'real' about them anyway. The images of India, in fact, are often conventionally orientalist. London underground workers, as they emerge into daylight, look like "Creatures of the sub-London dark"—a metaphor that consigns them to genre fiction and which is also about as close as we get in this novel to the working class.<sup>11</sup> Literary and visual aesthetics prevail here, overwhelming any realist imperatives. When Lucy records an Indian holy man, impoverished and destitute, he "appeared to her beautiful . . . worthy of his image".<sup>12</sup> There is not a critical bone in Jones's novel, which lends its aesthetic consent to pretty much everything it comes across. It is the opposite of Sonya Hartnett: instead of the querying intensities of local paranoia, we get a benign and gentle Anglo-Australian cosmopolitanism.

The soft glow of history is nowhere to be seen in Peter Mews's second novel, *Bright Planet*. Covering a few months from 1841 to 1842, it chronicles a

British expedition to Australia and up along the Yarra (or Yarrow) River in search of an inland sea. But the ship's name and the novel's title, *Bright Planet*, could not be more out of place here. As Captain Elijah Blood guides his ship upriver, with his botanist Quiet Giles and the ship's aptly-named surgeon, Dr Moribund, crew members die one after the other and the journey slowly undoes itself in festering detail. There is no 'immersion-in-the-landscape' here, quite the opposite, in fact, as the British crew find themselves under siege and increasingly preoccupied with loved ones at home. *Bright Planet* is an anti-triumphalist explorer novel, far too despondent to be Rabelaisian even though it is obsessed with bodily functions. It wants to present us with an Australian *Heart of Darkness*, and some sequences do specifically recall Conrad's novel. Its task is to grind down colonial ideals, to humiliate the imperial machine, and it does this in a wonderfully effective, bleakly comic way. *Bright Planet* returns us to the logic of Sonya Hartnett's novels; it looks inward rather than outward, with the ship itself becoming an increasingly claustrophobic, confined space from which the crew project their paranoias and desires. They are indeed 'plagued by hideous imaginings', with one exception: the boy Edwin Robins, another feral, terroristic character rather like Hartnett's Finnigan who leaves the ship to run amok through the bush and nearby settlements.

Mews's novel made me think of Roland Barthes's famous and insightful essay in *Mythologies*, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat'. This short commentary is about the explorer fiction of the nineteenth-century French writer Jules Verne, but it might also tell us something about the current preoccupations of Australian fiction. For Verne, exploration is not about imaginative possibilities at all; far from wanting to enlarge the world, it seeks instead "to shrink it . . . to reduce it to a known and enclosed space". The ship symbolises this as "an emblem of closure", rather like a cave or a house or someone's property; indeed, the "bliss of closure" offered by a ship paradoxically increases with "the vastness of circumnavigation".<sup>13</sup> We can think again of Murray Bail's novel *Eucalyptus* here, which—even as the father brings in tree species from around the world and the lover tells stories of foreigners and migration—preserves this rather Australian sense that one is at the same time always on the inside looking out. For the daugh-

ter, closure is *meant* to bring bliss, confirming the fact of settlement right in the very midst of other people's movement. Verne had written his own fantasies of travel-as-settlement, like *The Mysterious Island* in which the journeying hero "re-invents the world, fills it, closes it, shuts himself up in it" and then becomes 'encyclopaedic', giving himself over to "catalogues [and] inventories".<sup>14</sup> Barthes might equally have been describing Bail's novel as well as a recognisably Australian predicament. But since then, the feeling seems to have changed. The fantasy of settlement and homeliness played out in *Eucalyptus* is now tainted with grief and melancholy in these more recent novels, as I hope I have shown. It once carried with it a sense of promise; but now, there is never enough faith in the project to see it through. For Hartnett and Mews especially, homeliness and insecurity (trauma, paranoia, etc.) are two sides of the same coin. Drusilla Modjeska had complained that contemporary Australian novels don't "have much to do with or much to say to the Australia we live in", and it is true that they can often be preoccupied by their own literariness (which can bring its own 'bliss of closure'). But although they may be despondent about it, at least they don't take the fact of living in this country for granted.

1. Drusilla Modjeska, 'The Present in Fiction', *Timepieces*, Picador, Sydney, 2002, pp.208–214.
2. *Ibid.*, p.219.
3. Sonya Hartnett, *Surrender*, Viking, Sydney, 2005, p.234.
4. *Ibid.*, p.168.
5. Charlotte Wood, *The Submerged Cathedral*, Vintage, Sydney, 2004, pp.142, 225, 226.
6. *Ibid.*, p.235.
7. Thomas Shapcott, *Spirit Wrestlers*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2004, p.161.
8. Gail Jones, *Sixty Lights*, The Harvill Press, London, 2004, pp.121, 217.
9. *Ibid.*, p.84.
10. *Ibid.*, p.212.
11. *Ibid.*, p.189.
12. *Ibid.*, p.224.
13. Roland Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat', *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, Paladin, London, 1973, p.66.
14. *Ibid.*, p.65.

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## EXCEPT FOR VIEWERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ON SATURDAY NIGHT we watched the second part of *Joan of Arc* on Channel Seven. It was a two-part mini-series and everyone had missed the first part last Saturday because the Eagles were playing Essendon but tonight the footy wasn't on till late so we watched *Joan of Arc*.

It was about a French girl who defied the English invaders so they accused her of being a witch but really it was an American program so all the actors were American except the girl who played Joan who was English. At the end Joan was burned at the stake. We watched as the English soldiers set fire to the stake with burning torches and the flames licked at Joan's feet and on the lounge, Nanna dabbed a handkerchief to her eyes. As the smoke billowed upwards and the flames began to burn her, Joan turned her eyes towards heaven in one final, hopeless look of despair and then that week's lotto numbers scrolled across the bottom of the TV screen.

"Quick gedda pen!" screamed Mum, leaping up and fumbling for the TV guide so's she could scribble down the numbers on it. Julie, my sister, scrambled around beneath the video where a store of pens and pencils is always kept so that you could write on the video label what you had taped (too many Tuesday night *Bill* episodes had been taped over with Thursday night's *ER*). She came up triumphantly with a pen that had *Quit For Life* written on its side and Mum grabbed it and scribbled down the numbers, half across Sophie Lee's face which was on the front cover of the guide.

"But you didn't buy a lotto ticket this week," said Dad, not taking his eyes off the burning Joan. (And she was well aflame by now, the lotto numbers notwithstanding.)

Nanna sniffed discreetly.

"Jus' cause I didn't buy a ticket doesn't mean I don't still need to get the numbers down," explained Mum. "How'm I going to guess the numbers next week if I don't know which ones come up this week?"

Dad didn't answer.

"Such a shame," said Nanna. "She was just a girl, really. Too young to die."

"Nan, it's just a TV show," said Dad, not looking at her.

"That's not what I meant," said Nanna, dismissing the still smouldering Saint Joan. "I was thinking of that poor girl in the paper, the one that got chosen to do the lotto numbers."

"Oh," said Dad.

Nanna meant the girl from Beaconsfield who'd been picked from a field of hundreds to be the new TV lotto girl and then she'd been knocked down by a ute at the lights on Warwick Road the very next day. It was in the *West Australian* that week. She'd only been 19 and her mum had said, all she ever wanted was to be the lotto girl on telly. So the girl who had come second got the job instead. Her name was Trina.

"Well, I wouldn't have won," said Mum, studying the numbers she'd written down. "87 not 86, and 72 not 73. I always picks youse kids' birthdays."



"I wasn't born in '86, I was born in '85," said Julie disgustedly.

"And who the hell was born in 1973?" said Dad, looking at Mum like she'd gone mad.

"Not 1973. Number 73. Our house."

"We live at 37," said Julie.

"And 37 backwards is 73," I said and everyone looked at me. I turned back to the telly where a retired footballer was advertising health insurance.

"Right, wind the tape back. Let's watch *Sex and the City*," said Mum, putting away the lotto numbers, and Dad groaned because he hates *Sex and the City*. He hates all those programs where they have a narrator telling you what's happening in a voice-over. He says it's pretentious crap and American shows all do it nowadays because it's trendy, and Julie said, well they do it in *Secret Life of Us* and that's not American, and Dad said, well there you go, then.

I reckon those shows have a voice-over narrator because they don't know how to tell you what someone's thinking. Mum says Dad doesn't like *Sex and the City* because it's about women who have brains and careers and are independent. Dad says Mum only likes it because it's about girls who shop and have sex.

The *Sex and the City* tape was from the TO BE RE-USED pile which was right beside the video and was not to be confused with the DO NOT ERASE! pile. Mum started the DO NOT ERASE! pile after Julie taped over the episode of *ER* when George Clooney left the show with an episode of *Buffy*. The DO NOT ERASE! pile has Princess Diana's funeral, the '94 Grand Final, the final episode of *Seinfeld*, Cathy Freeman winning her gold medal and the Queen Mother's funeral too. They didn't show Princess Margaret's funeral on TV, which is sad, Nanna said, because it doesn't happen often, a Royal Funeral, and it's a shame if they don't even show it on the telly.

After the credits the ads came on—a policeman's head and shoulders and Dad pressed fast-forward but you knew what he was saying: "*If you're caught going 16 kilometres over the speed limit you'll lose 16*

*points. That's half your license in one go. SPEED KILLS.*" Then there was an ad for a new-model sports car showing a sleek, tinted-windows silver car skimming down the centre of a winding Alpine road on two wheels. You couldn't see the driver, just two black-gloved hands gripping the steering wheel. *Don't get left behind!* said the caption.

Before we'd even got ten minutes into *Sex and the City*, Dad said it's time for the footy, even though the Eagles had probably lost already. He gets annoyed when we have to watch the footy on a delayed broadcast two hours after the eastern states. He says it's discrimination against people who live in WA.

Mum said if you want to whinge why don't you ring up the TV station and whinge to them? but Dad said, what's the point? The TV people all live in the eastern states, they probably think Busselton's something an Edwardian lady wore under her skirts. So we watched the footy 'live' from the MCG.

When it was quarter time and the Eagles were already three goals behind to St Kilda, Dad surfed through all the channels. There was an ad for next week's *A Current Affair*. "*Are we a nation of fatties?*" asked Mike Munro, then there was an ad for McDonald's and Dad said let's open that packet of corn chips in the cupboard. Then there was a news update and the newsreader said "*Police warn of handgun epidemic!*" and there was a shot of three youths in a street being searched by the cops then a shot of a policeman holding out a hand gun to show the camera as if he were saying, See, told you so! Then there was a preview for *Lethal Weapon III* and Mel Gibson blasted his way out of a flaming building with a small machine gun.

"They've got all three *Lethal Weapon* movies on DVD at Blockbuster Video," said Julie. "We oughta get a DVD player, Dad."

Dad flicked back to the football. Before long the Eagles were five goals behind and Mum went to the kitchen to get the corn chips.

"Me and Craig had free tickets to last week's game," said Julie, nodding towards the TV. "Craig's Dad's company sponsors the umpire's shoes."

Craig was Julie's sometime boyfriend.

"Why didn't you go then, instead of watching it on the telly?" said Dad.

Last week we had all sat and watched the Eagles lose by fifty points to Essendon.

"Course she didn't go, they lost!" said Nanna, who had recovered by now from the shock of the lotto girl's untimely death.

Dad stared at Nanna, mystified.

"But she wasn't to know they'd lose before the game started, was she?"

"It would have started two hours earlier in the eastern states," said Nanna.

Dad shook his head.

"Cheese or nachos?" called Mum from the kitchen.

Everyone sat and watched the footy except Mum who was pouring the corn chips into a bowl in the kitchen. The Eagles scored a behind.

"What sort of company sponsors the umpire's shoes?" said Dad to no-one in particular.

"Carol—me and your Auntie Chris were thinking of going over to Rotto this weekend," said Nanna, aiming this remark at Mum who was still in the kitchen. "We haven't been for years and it's such a lovely ferry ride."

"That's nice, Mum," said Mum, pulling a bottle of Coke out of the fridge. She unscrewed the lid and it gave a feeble hiss and all the bubbles dissolved.

"Only we saw the travel show was going to do Rotto this week so we thought we'd watch it on the telly instead. That Ernie Dingo always knows the best places to go."

"A shoe manufacturer would," said Julie. "Sponsor the umpire's shoes."

"Oh, is that what Craig's Dad's company does?" said Nanna, who was partial to shoes and had once spent a whole day in the new Shoez Warehouse in Joondalup.

"No, he manages a Toyota dealership in Bassendean."

"Did someone leave the lid off the Coke?" called Mum from the kitchen. "It's gone flat."

At half time, Dad flicked through Nine, Seven, the ABC and SBS then back to the ABC, Seven then Nine. We saw a car chase, a girl washing her hair in the shower, a kidney being sliced open, Real Madrid hitting the goalpost, a kidney being sewn up, a girl drying her hair and a car crashing.

"Did you leave the lid off the Coke?" said Mum coming in and standing over me, accusingly.

I don't even drink Coke.

"Stop! Stop on that one!" cried Nanna to Dad, waving her handkerchief at the TV where a young couple now stood, arm-in-arm, in the hallway of their house. "It's that show where they move into someone's house and renovate it and then they sell the house for thousands of dollars more than they were expecting," said Nan. "It's so exciting when you watch their faces during the auction and the price keeps going up and up!"

"Wish someone'd renovate our house," called Mum who was back in the kitchen and Dad sank lower in his chair because he had started replastering the ceiling before the first game of the season and now the Eagles had failed to make the play-offs and it still wasn't finished.

On the telly, the young couple (Steve and Belinda from Bondi) stood nervously in their kitchen as the auction went on outside in the street.

"*Steve and Belinda wait nervously in their kitchen whilst the auction continues outside,*" explained the presenter. Then there was a commercial break and an ad came on for the Salvos' campaign to help the homeless and there was a black-and-white shot of a small girl with stringy hair and a bald teddy bear staring at us, homelessly. Then it was back to the auction. The price went up to \$760,000.

"\$760,000!" exclaimed Nanna. It was now between just two buyers and Steve and Belinda held their breath.

"*Last time of asking,*" said the auctioneer for the third time. "*All gone. All said . . . Sold!*" and in the kitchen Steve and Belinda hugged and Belinda burst into tears and Steve called someone on his mobile.

"How much did it go for in the end?" said Nanna

but no-one could remember.

The Eagles came back strongly in the third quarter but then they lost by four goals and Dad said, wish they'd burned St Kilda at the stake rather than St Joan and Nanna said, that was because St Joan was French whereas St Kilda was in Melbourne.

After the footy there was an ad on the ABC for a new show called *Feedback* where you could ring up and complain about what you don't like on TV.

"There you go," said Mum, nodding at the TV. "Now's your chance. Go on, ring 'em up."

The ad said, "*Join our live internet discussion. Except for viewers in Western Australia,*" and Dad said, "Ha!" and turned off the telly in disgust.

"Well, you should have rung up two hours ago," said Nanna, primly.

"And how'm I supposed to know they're going to be showing this ad in two hours' time?" said Dad.

"It's always a two-hour delay," explained Nanna, and Julie said, "Not in summertime. In summertime it's three hours." I said, "Why don't we ring up someone in the eastern states and ask them to watch the lotto results on the telly then we've got two hours to go out and buy a ticket and pick the winning numbers."

"We don't know anyone back east," said Nanna, and Mum said, let's watch the rest of *Sex and the City* so we did.

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## The Idea of a Great Gallery

"We'll have a café, of course,  
outsourced for maximum art-efficiency,  
a mail-out ArtNewz system  
(e-mail and snail-mail),"

*Uh huh.*

"five rooms of interactive e-art  
by code-writers and hackers,"

*Sure.*

"revolving Koons Rococo grenades  
a do-it-yourself e-bookshop,  
and—"

*Mumblemumble(ahem)mumble.*

"Who the fuck is Kenneth Clarke?"

DAMON YOUNG

## AN EVERYDAY MIRACLE

IT'S SEPTEMBER and I'm thirty-eight weeks pregnant, 36 years old and soon to be a first-time mother. I stopped working full-time two weeks ago and although I've been instructed to rest, I feel compelled to clean the house from top to bottom. The swelling in my hands and feet has increased; I have carpal tunnel syndrome and my fingers tingle and burn. My belly is tight and broad. I have purple and silver stretch marks, visible rites of passage.

At the weekly check-up my obstetrics GP is alarmed at my elevated blood pressure. When she hears of my feelings of nausea and exhaustion, she makes her decision quickly.

"You're going to hospital," she says. "Tonight."

Peter and I leave in a daze and drive home to gather the already packed bag. It is slowly sinking in that my child's birth may not happen as planned. That night I toss and try to turn my huge bulk in the narrow, creaky hospital bed. I am monitored four-hourly and take pills to lower my blood pressure. I feel cocooned and safe.

At six, the morning shift starts and the nurse talks of the horror events unfolding in New York. Buildings imploding. Planes crashing. Thousands of people dying or dead. Mobile phone calls cut short. Waves of fear and sadness engulf me as the tears wash my face. I sneak a look at the television and am transfixed for several graphic minutes. In the next room, a woman screams for hours while giving birth. I hold my breath for long seconds at a time.

That day, I develop a blinding headache caused by high blood pressure and exacerbated by the medi-

cation. They tell me I will have to be transferred to the main birthing hospital in Adelaide. I have developed pre-eclampsia and my baby's head is not engaged. The local country hospital can't cope with these complications. I cry with Peter, frightened by the idea of a big public hospital and being treated like a number. I hear them on the phone attempting to find me a bed.

"It's urgent—PE," my obstetrics GP says. They agree to accept me the next day.

We drive the fifty minutes down through the Adelaide Hills to town. I am nauseous and anxious and my head throbs. We are armed with a letter from our hospital and have been told there will be no wait.

In the emergency reception, the television is blaring with images of New York. Tearful testimonials. Devastation. The word terrorism is mentioned. The duty nurse knows nothing about me and reads the letter in silence. We wait on plastic seats clutching our bags. I can't stop the TV noise but I try to look away. My head is splitting. Eventually, they ask me to lie on a bed in a brightly lit room with people wandering in and out. I tell my story for the second or third time. I am booked into the labour ward for 8.00 p.m. I sleep until it's time to move again. They decide to speed up the process by using cervical gels. At 11.00 p.m. I try to sleep but though the bed is soft, the pain in my head and fear in my heart keep me awake. I chat to the night nurse at 2.00 a.m. then suddenly it's 5.00 and they are ready to check for any changes. My cervix has only opened one centimetre—not wide enough for them to puncture

my waters. I get more gels and go back to sleep.

Peter arrives at 9.00 that morning and by then, I'm feeling hot and uncomfortable. I have mild cramp-like contractions and have been advised to walk about. At midday, we're disappointed that my cervix has not opened further. I half-lie on the bed and they strap me up to a device to measure my baby's heartbeat. I still have the headache. We watch the flashing lights and jiggling lines on the graph. Technology has taken over. In another room, doctors gather, muttering, around the machines. Sunlight fills every shadow of my room.

"Things aren't looking good," a doctor says. "Every time you have a contraction, the baby's heart-rate drops. It's showing signs of distress. We don't think you can give birth naturally."

I agree to a caesarean. I'm even a little relieved that I won't have to go through labour. Like most women, I dreaded the pain and found it hard to forget the horror stories. In that split second, I imagine I'll have time to gather my belongings, perhaps have a shower and prepare myself psychologically for the most interventionist of birth experiences.

I am wrong. Suddenly nurses are stripping my clothes and earrings. Many hands dress me in a blue-and-white hospital gown. Peter is whisked away to be prepared for the operating theatre. I am wheeled on a bed out of the room and down the corridor. The nurse's face hovers above me; she is talking to me calmly but I don't hear anything.

THE OPERATING THEATRE is large and brightly lit. There are many tables, pieces of medical equipment and milling people in green gowns. I sit on the edge of the narrow table, my belly enormous over my knees, while the anaesthetist inserts the spinal block. It takes effect immediately and a paralysing warmth spreads through my body. They test my skin with a pin and I'm surprised that I can't feel anything below my breasts. My arms also are tingling; they strap them onto fold-out supports. I feel like Christ on the cross. A curtain is quickly erected above my stomach and an oxygen mask slipped over my face.

Only fifteen minutes have passed since I consented to this operation. There is pressure on my belly and I realise that I can see the surgery reflected in the chrome light fitting above me. I glimpse scarlet. Fear and nausea build and I twist my head to one side, breathing in fast gasps. I know I'm panicking but I can't stop. It is primal. I am pinned like a butterfly while they cut me open. I can feel the pressure of the knife and the tugging, pulling, pushing.

I AM FEELING so sick that I'm frightened of vomiting. I've never felt such nausea or ragged fear. I'm panting and my fingernails are digging into Peter's hand. The nurses try to calm me. At the precise moment when I've had enough, there is a heaving behind the curtain and my body flops back from the force.

My child is born.

He is a blue and silent boy. I see him through a myopic fog, partially obscured by green curtain and milling hospital staff. For one long second, minute, hour . . . I fear he is dead.

The room is far away and I am crying now, overtaken by shock and sickness. I don't breathe until I see him move, after his mouth and nose are suctioned. His first breath is an angry, frightened yell. I register the nurses' excitement and placating words. Peter cuts the umbilical cord; it looks thick, purple and meaty. I am trying to reach out to my baby but I can't move. He has been inside me, part of my blood flow and now he is across the room surrounded by strangers.

And then he is lying, wrapped and wriggling, across my breasts. He stops howling the second his body touches mine and our eyes meet. His are navy blue with purple hues, enormous and with almost no white. His lashes are like palm fronds against his cheeks. On the outside, I am crying and laughing and trying not to vomit. I can feel the surgeons stitching me up. On the inside, my brain is ticking over: 'What a funny little face. And look at the hair! It's thick and black! Does he have my mouth? Are those Peter's eyes?'

All too soon, my baby leaves with his father for his first bath and feed. I am elated as they wheel me

out through a blur of hallways and lifts to the recovery ward. Within minutes, I am vomiting. The nausea overtakes me in waves of revulsion, racking my body until it is emptied—all over the front of my gown. I am paralysed from the neck down and have never felt so miserable. Nurses work in teams to change me. Curtains are drawn and for a while, I am left alone. The nausea is all-consuming. I lapse in and out of consciousness.

Six hours later, I am wheeled into the postnatal ward. Despite two lots of anti-nausea medication, I am still vomiting. Peter leaves after I am given a powerful sleeping draught. We haven't spoken since the birth.

I wake at 2.00 a.m. from a drug haze, relieved to feel almost normal. I'm so excited to see my baby that I can hardly go back to sleep, but eventually I do. Meanwhile, he sleeps soundly in the babies' ward.

THE NEXT MORNING I press the call button and wait thirty minutes for a nurse to help me up and into the bathroom. I am nearly crying with helplessness and fearful of wetting the bed. I learn from the visiting doctor that I had an extreme reaction to either the morphine or the anaesthetic. My blood pressure has finally lowered.

I ask to see my child and in his plastic crib, he is wheeled down the corridor to me, his mother. I can't think of myself in those terms yet. His name—chosen nine months before—is written in black text on blue card. I gaze at him sleeping and when he wakes, a midwife helps me learn to breastfeed. There is no milk, only raw, jolting pain. He draws blood and sucks for a few seconds before we realise. After an hour, I beg to try a bottle so he can feed. Peter arrives, hung over, and later my parents visit. Excitement fills the air and the latent morphine suppresses the ache from my wound and makes me light-headed, sweaty and vague. I creep about the room and later collapse on the bed.

"YOU'VE OVERDONE it yesterday," says the midwife. I woke shaking, crying and hyperventilating from the stabbing pain in my stomach, the sheet soaked

from night sweats. My blood pressure and temperature have risen. I imagine my bowel twisted or disconnected. A succession of doctors examines me, searching for an explanation. "A possible infection inside of you," I'm told. I begin a course of three types of super-antibiotics, both orally and via a drip inserted into my right hand. I'm hooked up to the IV machine every four hours.

My son is quiet and stares at me with wide eyes. Peter bathes him for the first time. I take photos and hover, clutching my stomach, which I fear will split open with the slightest provocation. We hold our baby lovingly. His smell is intoxicating. The nurses compliment his spiky tufts of hair.

NEXT MORNING, after less than four hours' sleep again, I wake in agony. I am slippery and hot, then shivering cold. My teeth chatter wildly. I cry and shake for some time before calling the nurses. A midwife sits with me, murmuring gentle words of reassurance, until I am calm. My temperature peaks at 40.5 degrees.

My son sleeps most of the time. We're still feeding him from a bottle because I have no milk and my nipples are so sore. I am more swollen now than before his birth; my hands and ankles ache. I feel like elephant woman. A midwife hooks me up to a milking machine, which leaves me feeling bruised and useless. I ask a nurse about my blood pressure reading. "Why do you want to know?" she snaps.

MY SON IS three days old and already the most beautiful creature I've ever seen. I've never felt skin so soft, so new. His fingernails are no bigger than pinheads. I change his nappy for the first time, gritting my teeth against the pain and hunched over the crib. My inexperienced fingers are clumsy and he howls, only quietening when nestled against my shoulder. I realise now that I would do anything for him.

My blood pressure and temperature stabilise but I still have the IV hook-up every four hours. Later that day, my milk comes in and we have our first successful feed (albeit through my clenched teeth). My son gets wind from the transition between for-

mula and breast milk and cries for hours. After trying every comfort trick in my small repertoire of baby knowledge, I call the midwife for assistance.

FEELING BETTER and taking small steps, I wheel my son down the corridor. Already, I know he has a happy temperament and calm disposition. The only problem we have is feeding; even with guidance from a midwife, it is still piercingly painful. The day passes slowly and when Peter arrives, I doze. At 11.45 p.m. my distress climaxes when I try again to breastfeed. They are still tender and throbbing from the forty-five-minutes-per-side hammering they received at 6.00. I break down and push my howling baby away, unable to stand his clamping mouth near me. The midwife takes him and leaves me to sob alone. I realise that I am a failure unless I can feed him unaided. I decide to stay another day in the hospital. At 1.00 a.m. the midwife forces me to express milk for two hours.

“You don’t know how lucky you are to have a

healthy baby,” she says. “There are a dozen women here who’d change places with you any day.”

WE DRESS OUR son in pastel-blue stretch pants and matching top, with hand-knitted mauve and yellow booties. Carefully, we drive home. The day is bright and sunny but everything jars. I sense danger everywhere and touch him protectively. I see our home with fresh eyes. Inside, I bustle about, cleaning and unpacking in a burst of energy. I’ve been told that I won’t be able to drive for six weeks. Peter holds our son and we close the door on the world outside. Now there are three of us. I cry when I notice the flowers he’s bought me.

POSTSCRIPT: I am thirty-seven weeks pregnant, 39 years old and about to go through it all again. Still searching for answers in the hope of preventing a similar anaesthetic reaction, I am uncertain about what experiences my second surgical birth will hold. I only pray for the healthy, safe arrival of my child.

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# LAST NIGHT I HEARD HIM CRYING

I LIVE IN A PUB. Why and how isn't important, other than to say I wouldn't be living here if I had a choice. But like a lot of people, I don't have a choice. The pub's called the *Abbots Inch Hotel* and it's in North Carlton, Melbourne. It's very popular with the local professional types and the students from the University. It serves good pub-grub, there's a pool table and a jukebox. I suppose it's a nice place for an after-work drink with your office colleagues. If you've got work that is. Aye it's a nice place. Downstairs. Upstairs it's a rat hole. That's where the 'guest' rooms are. There are seven of us living here at the moment. All males ranging in ages from 19 to . . . whatever age wee Gus McNab is. He's old; must be touching 80. He's lived here for nearly twelve years; I've been here for four. Gus, like me is a Scot. During the Second World War he served in the army. Like a lot of veterans he doesn't like to talk about war, but every now and again, when some of the younger blokes get a wee bit lippy he'll tell them, "Listen son, I was in Baghdad before you were in your dad's bag. I'm ane o' the men who helped turn back Rommel's panzers. Now bugger off!"

And when you see him with his chin jutting forward like a terrier and his tattooed Popeye forearms with the attached clenched fists, you kinda feel sorry for Rommel's panzers.

One of the tattoos is a typical macho affair, a faded Lion Rampant with *Scotland Forever* above it, and *Highland 51<sup>st</sup> Division* below it. On the other arm is an equally faded heart with the name *Mary* in

the middle. I asked Gus who Mary was. He looked at his forearm and for an instant he seemed to be hypnotised by it, before he replied, "Just a lassie I knew when I was young." He never elaborated; he quickly changed the subject to the condition of the communal facilities.

"It's a bloody disgrace. A hundred dollars a week I gie them oot o' my pension for a room, and they cannay even clean the bloody bathroom and toilets ance a week! And what about that kitchen? An oven wi' only ane ring working; how do they expect seven grown men to cook for themselves on that eh? It's enough to gie ye the skunner!"

AND SO IT DID, I was skunnered as well. The condition of the near-broken-down oven resulted in a queue forming for hours, to cook even the most modest of meals. That is, if you would call heating a tin of beans or soup, cooking a meal. As for the state of the bathroom and toilets, God knows the last time they had been cleaned or seen some disinfectant. The stink, particularly in the summer, is at times unbearable. Something had to be done. I took it upon myself to talk to the manageress of the pub, a young woman with an economics degree, with as much compassion in her heart for us, as Count Dracula on meeting a haemophilic maiden after midnight. When I knocked on the open door of her office, she was sitting at her desk, her head hanging over a calculator, engrossed by its large illuminated numbers.



“Ehm . . . excuse me, ehm . . . Lara can I have a wee word?” I said.

“What is it?” She didn’t look up. She obviously knew it was me, because of the accent. This indifference was normal. But I’ve often wondered if I had a job and somewhere to stay, would she still treat me this way, or was she just a bitch with everybody? If she is, it’s a pity because she’s not a bad looking woman. When I asked could she possibly see to getting the oven fixed, she lifted her eyes and peered at me over the rims of her glasses, with a look like I had just stolen money from her purse.

“Why can’t youse buy meals from the bar?” she said.

As an economist, she has as much savvy about the finances of the underclass as Marie Antoinette. I reminded her we were all on social security payments. I then added to her negative ledger, the problems with the bathroom and toilets.

“What do you mean ‘no toilet paper’? The caretaker said he only renewed the holders the other day. I mean can’t youse be more economical?”

I wasn’t too sure what she meant by ‘economical’. Did she want us to regulate our bowels more efficiently? Perhaps we could organise a roster: Hey Jimmy is it your turn for a shite the day or mine? Surely not.

“There are seven of us, Lara.”

She wrinkled her nose and sniffed slightly; a look of disgust on her face, like I had just farted. “Well I suppose I’ll just have to look into it then.”

I took this as the signal that my audience with her highness was over. “Aye . . . well thanks very much then Lara.”

And of course nothing happened.

A week later I knocked on her door again.

“Aye . . . ehm . . . excuse me Lara.”

“Yes?”

“I was just wondering Lara, what was happening with the repairs to the oven and the cleanin’ of the bathroom and toilet.”

She put her pen down and yawned. “Well I’ve looked into it. The oven isn’t worth fixing, so it will have to be a new one I’m afraid.”

“So when are we getting a new ane then?”

“If you want a new one, the rents will have to be increased by ten dollars a week to cover it.”

“Hold on, that’s not . . .”

“As for the bathroom,” she interrupted, “that’s really the duty of the residents to clean up after them, and according to the caretaker, he says youse have been stealing the toilet paper.”

“Stealing toilet paper?” I said, “Why would we steal toilet paper? Do you think there’s a black market going on, in stolen toilet paper? I mean who in their right mind? Jesus Christ!” When I raised my voice, she looked annoyed. It was a case of the mouse that roared. How dare I, in her presence?

Her annoyed look changed to one of curiosity, like I was a newly discovered form of dung beetle. “Well if you don’t like it,” she said, “you can always go somewhere else.”

“Whit!” I fumed. “Go somewhere else? D’ye mean there’s another pig sty like this near by?” My raised tone and change to a heavy Scots tongue seemed to scare her. But I didn’t give a ferret’s scrotum; something had to be done. “Ye think ye can dae anthin’ ye like don’t ye?” I said as I left her office. “Well ye cannay; we’ve got rights ye know and ye’ve no’ heard the last o’ this!”

The toilet paper issue in particular was becoming urgent; I mean there’s only so much your arse can take of the *Herald Sun*. But to get things done you need power, and if you’ve not got power, you need solidarity. People like us have the greatest reasons to stick together; instead we’re the easiest to divide. We’re like cannibals; we turn on each other. And it’s understandable. Because we’re just a microcosmic version of the bigger world, with its dog-eat-dog, every man and woman for themselves terror. Only difference is, we’re the most frightened, ’cause we’re just one step away from being on the street. The blokes and solidarity was a definite non-starter. The only person that showed support was auld Gus McNab.

“I didna fight a war to be treated like this. It’s bloody no’ right,” he said.

In desperation I phoned the Tenants Union of Victoria. A lassie answered and told me that under the law the manageress couldn’t put the rent up just because we asked for repairs and she would

have to give us ninety days' notice to do this anyway. If the repairs weren't done we could take her to the Tribunal.

It all seemed straightforward enough, and the lassie sent me a Notice to the Owner. She said the more of the residents who signed it the better, because it would make our case stronger. I told her because the blokes were understandably scared, in all likelihood it would be just myself and wee Gus that would be signing it. She warned, the manageress would probably play silly buggers, and hand myself and Gus a Notice to Vacate, but again this would have to be with ninety days' notice. By which time we would be at the tribunal, where we'd win and she'd lose.

I explained all this to auld Gus.

"What if she hands us a notice to vacate? Where am I gaunny go at my age?"

I assured him not to worry. We were gaunny win this one. Both of us then signed the Notice for Repair and I then headed off in the direction of the manageress's office.

MY WAY OF LIVING, if you can call it living, has very few, if any good times. Most of it is spent in the negative. It seems all you know, and have known, is defeat and despair. What you would call your better moments, are usually when you're oblivious to everything, when you're pished, or when you're sleeping. A life of loneliness, scarcity, craving, unemployment, violence and contempt goes past, never ceasing in its hopelessness. Years vanish, like dregs disappearing down a drain. Occasionally you'll hear words like 'equality' or 'the fair go', which only serve to mock you further, like a court jester of old. There's no woman in your life, nobody to put your arm round in the middle of the night, no human touch. In sleep you escape into a dream world, only to waken again to this perpetual nightmare. My kind are the lepers of this society, we exist in life's slagheap. We stink of its lack of compassion and are nauseous with its indifference.

So when you do have a positive moment, you savour it. Putting the Notice of Repair on the manageress's desk was such a moment. A photographer, or better still a great renaissance artist should have

been in attendance to record the moment for posterity. If only to capture the look on her face. It was like that of a hound that walks round a corner and bumps into a pack of wee foxes. Shocked, pissed off and definitely annoyed. And just to get right up her nose I asked her out on a date.

"But listen darlin', we'll have to go back to your place, 'cause I'm not allowed any overnight guests."

She never said a word; she just sat there glowering at me. I thought she was gaunny explode. I held on, savouring the moment, a smartarse smirk on my face, then gave her a wink and left. One nil to the wee people.

Two days later she equalised.

It came in the shape of the expected Notice to Vacate. It was stuck under Gus's door and mine.

"Are you sure she cannae evict us?" he said.

"Aye. It's a ninety-day notice, we'll be at the tribunal long before that, and when it's known she's doing it in retaliation for exercising our rights, she'll get thrown out the court. Don't worry about it."

But he did. Everyday he would ask me the same bloody questions, till he started to sound like the proverbial scratched record. I contacted the lassie at the Tenants Union. She said the Notice was invalid and filed a challenge with the court. I told wee Gus this but he still wasnay reassured.

"But are you sure son? It isnay fair, her evicting me after all these years. I never ance missed my rent you know, no' like some o' them. What would I do if I were evicted? Where would I go?"

His lip trembled when he said that. That was the first time I saw the auld man frightened. I tried to cheer him up.

"Och yer haverin' man! Where would you go? Many's a spinster would be glad to take in an auld sodger like you. Ye'll be able to teach them all about yer auld clandestine night operations. Ye dirty auld bugger!"

Auld Gus let out a chuckle, the boisterous mischief in his eyes ignoring his years.

"Aye I've known some beauties son," he said, then paused before adding, "but there was only one that's special."

"Mary?"

“Aye,” he said, but revealed nothing more, her name as usual seemed to induce a state of instant melancholy over him. Which remained. It was my fault. The stress of becoming homeless had eroded his impenetrable fighting spirit. Now he was just old, scared and meek. I shouldn’t have got him involved. I should have shut my mouth.

Gus’s room is next door to mine. Last night I heard him crying in his sleep. I was lynn’ in the darkness and I heard this muffled sound. I wasn’t too sure what it was at first, but then I started to make out words. A name, Jamie over and over again, and then, gies yer hand Jamie. Jamie! Jamie! There was a panic in his voice, desperation. Then I heard the sobbing. It was a deserted abandoned sound. I thought about getting out my bed and knocking on his door to see if he was all right, but what can you do about bad dreams? How do you change bad memories? I just lay there listening until finally the sobbing stopped. But the silence was just as unsettling; the still void brought my own nightmares.

Auld Gus is an early riser and I thought it was unusual I never saw him around this morning. Hours passed and there was still no sign of him. I knocked on his door but to no answer. By the time I got the caretaker to open the door to his room, I instinctively knew it was too late. His body lay in the bed, still and spiritless, the eyes open but seeing nothing. Somebody phoned for an ambulance. Ten minutes later two ambulancemen put Gus’s body on a stretcher and covered his face with a blanket. They carried him out the room, leaving me standing staring after them. How long I stood there—minutes, hours—I do not know. Finally two old framed pictures on the tallboy stirred me into movement. One was of a young Gus in a kilted uniform with his arm around another young soldier. I knew it was Gus; the boisterous eyes hadn’t changed. The other young man bore an uncanny resemblance to him. His brother? Jamie? Maybe, I don’t know. The other picture was of a young dark-haired girl. I guessed this was Mary. She was a real beauty; she had a face that belonged in a love song. Where was she now? Had she been his wife? For an instant I glimpsed an alternative life; Gus the grand patriarch of a large

clan, family gatherings to celebrate golden wedding anniversaries, cake being cut and auld songs being sung and grandweans sitting on his knee listening to tall tales. But the sparseness of the room quickly obliterated this vision; it’s smallness and poverty of comfort, urinated on any notions I had of a caring world. The room was identical to mine. I’m not too big a man to say that I started to cry.

Eventually my grief was replaced by ravenous need for justice. I left Gus’s room and headed for the manageress’s office. I walked straight in. She was standing leafing through the top drawer of a filing cabinet. She started to say something when she saw me, but never got time to finish the sentence. I hit her and she fell to the floor.

Blood on white teeth. Soft skin. Shame. Constant replay. A nightmare.

I’m sitting in my room waiting for the police to come. What I did is inexcusable; I deserve no pity and ask for none. But what about auld Gus? Surely he deserved more than this life gave him. He said once that the war was about fighting for a better world. It was a fight for decency. Decency? Is that what millions died for, what Gus’s brother Jamie gave his life for? Is this world decent? Is it decent for my kind to live the way we live? Is it right that some live in squalor so others can live in mansions? Who gets to distinguish? Who writes the rules? I don’t know, but I do know they’re cruel and they don’t care. Decency? Forget it. Sure they’ll give you words like, ‘mateship’, ‘egalitarianism’ and ‘the fair go’. Forget them. Just words the system feeds to students like sightless chicks. What they’re really teaching is how to maintain the status quo, how to be cruel. And on ANZAC day they’ll expect you to be patriotic. Decency? Forget it. Forget Gus McNab. Forget me and my kind as well. Because everybody else does, especially the comedians that rule this land. They just make excuses for my kind; they’re good at that.

I’ll be on the street tonight. When I lay my head down, I wonder if any of them think about my kind as they lie in their bed. Do they pray to God? Then does a voice whisper in their ear, ‘Aye and there’s a Devil as well, and hell is to be homeless forever?’ Sweet dreams.

## LAKE NAMELESS

By late spring good dun hatches are likely to occur whenever the water is moderately calm, and in mid-summer the rises are comparable to those at Little Pine Lagoon, Lake Kay and Silver Lake. Polaroids are essential, both to follow the fish between rises and to locate cruising fish when surface activity subsides.<sup>1</sup>

THE LAKE LAY CLEAR and calm between low, barren hills and its rocky shoreline gave way to shallow beaches of quartz crystal at one end. Weed extended over the lake bed. The weed was home to countless numbers of primitive shrimp and the larvae of stick caddis cocooned in short straws of reed; an ‘all-you-can-eat’ diner for brown trout.

“But what nong couldn’t name a lake?” asked Julie.

They threaded lines through their rods and pulled on waders on one of the beaches, dazzling even though the sun was shrouded by high cloud. Rhubarb Roberts, ex-Parks & Wildlife Ranger and now the hottest fishing guide on the Central Highlands, had parried such probing before.

“It’s not that the lake has no name. It’s that the lake’s name is Nameless,” he said with affected authority.

This delighted Julie. Through her sunglasses, she looked the guide over and noted he was tall and lean in his neoprene wading suit and chunky boots, and decided he had the proportions of an exclamation mark. Which, she mused, could be a positive attribute.



Frank had not brought his girlfriend on a long hike just for idle chat about a no-name lake in an unnamed corner of the Tasmanian wilderness during a nameless day at the height of the trout season. He had brought her here to fly fish in the classic style so she might glean some of his passion for the sport and stop moaning about “life as a fishing widow”. But the day had threatened to careen to disaster when they had discovered Frank forgot to pick up the food pack from the back of the four-wheel drive—like they had agreed while still on the road. In the pack was also half the guide’s tackle and their matches, though the guide had his cigarette lighter. When they had perceived their error while eating their only snacks for lunch after walking the track for hours, the guide, a little cocky, had told them not to worry because he would provide all the food they would need for the overnight stay in the form of fresh trout steaks char-grilled to a turn on embers of button grass. Julie had remained cool towards Frank. It made him sigh to think he had worked so hard to get her out here, promised her so much if she went fishing with him, cajoled and badgered her. Yet she seemed uneasy.

“Great day for a dun hatch, hey, Rhub?” he asked rhetorically to enthuse the other two.

Rhub shrugged a maybe. Shared a look with Julie. Some guide, thought Frank. At four hundred dollars a day for the two of them, Frank considered a little enthusiasm should be gratis. Rhub lit a cigar-

ette, indicating he would take a while to enjoy his smoke and settle his mood after the angst on the walk in. Frank could not wait.

He turned his back on the other two, began wading the shallows and yelled over his shoulder, "Rhub will show you what to do, honey."

With his polarised fishing glasses cutting down the shimmer off the water, he could see a few scuds pulsing away from his wading boots and he knew their presence indicated the possibility of exciting nymph fishing. But fishing wet is what desperates do when there is no action on dry fly and he was sure the highland duns would soon start popping to the surface, bringing up the predatory trout with them. No sooner had he tied on a parachute dun and ginked it with floatant oil than he spotted a line of duns like tiny boats drifting with a zephyr on the meniscus. One by one, they began to disappear in slurping ringlets as the trout rose to them with the calculating brutality of a wolf pack of submarines homing in on vulnerable merchant ships. The swooping swallows could have been attacking aircraft. Only nature's wars seem so peaceful, even irresistible. He false cast several times to stiffen the hackles with the drying oil and then set the fly down on the nearest rise. A few tense seconds went by before his dun too went under with a swoosh. Frank struck, his line tightened, rod buckled and adrenalin coursed his veins. The trout took off in an accelerating run before leaping in a head-thrashing somersault, its spotted flanks glowing like white gold as the reel whirred, and Frank so excited he could have burst. Yet he just controlled his emotions and played the trout deftly to the net. A sharp whack with his brass priest and the trout hung heavy and safe in his hessian fish bag.

He clipped off the fly and stuck it in the band of his broad-brimmed hat as a memento. As he tied on another fly he could see the rise was quickening with thousands of duns riding those moments of fatal risk as they dried their wings before taking to the air to mate. The lake was pockmarked with hundreds of circles of wavelets where the trout came up to feed with gusto. For a glorious hour, perhaps longer, Frank lost himself in hooking, playing and bagging

more trout than he had ever caught in a session in his life. And mostly bigger, too. This is it, he thought. The angler's dreaming is here. It's Nameless!

He reached his bag limit and felt elated. He pondered if he should go on.

"If that guide wasn't here," he heard himself say, "I could just keep going until I had more trout than I could carry."

But the guide was here. Where? he thought. He had not seen Rhub, or Julie for that matter, for some time. Expecting to find them, he rotated on the spot. He peered to each horizon, but only the sparse wilderness glared back under the ozone-thin atmosphere. Wading to shore, he scanned from horizon to horizon as he tried to locate their silhouettes in the shimmer.

He came ashore and walked towards an ironstone hut. He looked in, yet could not see into the shadows with his glasses. He took off his glasses and hat, wiped his forehead, put down his rod and bag of fish and strode inside. He almost stepped on them. On the stone floor, made comfortable only by their shucked neoprenes, lay Julie and Rhub in all their lusting glory. Frank hesitated, shocked, inadvertently giving Rhub enough time to begin pulling his neoprenes back up to his knees.

"You son of a bitch," spluttered Frank.

Frank wanted to smash them, wanted to smash something, anything. He grabbed Rhub's top-of-the-range rod, leaning against an inside wall, and defiantly snapped it into small lengths over his knee. Rhub jumped up to stop Frank, only to trip face-down in his neoprenes, his arse showing layers of sweaty dust. Julie hurriedly dressed. Frank found the rod he had given her, bought her as a present especially for this trip, and crushed it beneath his boots. One thousand dollars worth of carbon graphite splintered into shards. Like his heart, he felt. He spun around to face Julie.

"I hope you got your four hundred bucks worth. Better a whore than a widow, hey?"

"Don't be rank, Frank," Julie tried to scold, but her face showed she knew her plea was hollow. "I kept telling you, I'm not into fishing."

She looked down, sobbing.

“What about you, hot dick?” he demanded, glaring at Rhub. “What are you into? Cos it sure as hell ain’t fishin’.”

Rhub searched Julie’s eyes. Frank swung a boot as Rhub’s gaze shifted, only to glance the felt sole off a hard shoulder. Rhub leapt to his full height and then leant towards Frank, menacingly.

Frank was suffocating. He stormed outside to find breath, wondering at their cruelty, profaning the sacred ritual of a fisher catching trout on fly in this pristine wilderness. Now everything seemed despoiled, in the gutter with the filthy cynicism of those who don’t, won’t, refuse to find empathy for the primal yearning to hunt with refined elegance; this juncture where a man finds the natural origins of his being.

“Fuck them,” he cried, too angry to stop himself from smashing his fly rod too because it was the only thing left in this rocky terrain he could break. Except the necks of Julie and Rhub. And he so wanted to break their necks.

“Don’t do anything foolish,” ordered Rhub from the hut.

Arrogant prick! reckoned Frank. He was going to punch Rhub, but he knew the lanky bastard, fit from months of walking and camping in the bush, would beat him to a pulp.

He grabbed his bag of trout and took them to the lake’s edge to clean. He scaled their dappled hides methodically with the serrated edge of his knife and slowly laid their skins bare, like smoothing off soap suds while shaving, as his instinct rose to plots of revenge. He slit the trout open with the sharpened side of the long slender blade to reveal their fat flesh, eating some of the precious roe like orange caviar, popping each egg between his front teeth so its sweet saltiness burst onto his tongue and ran down his throat with the cold, slimy blood. He knew the other two had no food.

Frank sat outside the hut in full view of Julie and Rhub, eating his trout sashimi style in thin slices cured with pinot noir from his flask. He watched their faces twist with hunger in the glow of the fire they had lit in the hut’s burner from wood placed there for emergencies by Parks & Wildlife. The sun was going now and an aurora began to curtain in reflection across the lake where all surface activity had subsided. Too late to walk back until tomorrow. Frank took another slice of the trout and, chewing with purpose, pondered the impulse purling through the troughs of his mind. He realised he was the only one there with a knife.

1. Greg French, ‘Nameless, Lake’ (sic), *Tasmanian Trout Waters*, Australian Fishing Network, Croydon South, Victoria, 2002, p.254.



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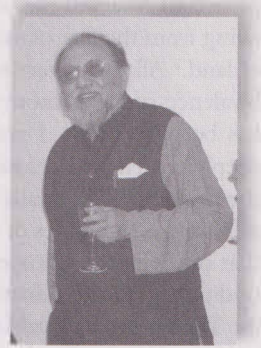
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# THE ALTERNATIVE HORIZONS OF ASHIS NANDY



YOU MIGHT WELL ASK who is Ashis Nandy? And why should his thinking matter to Australians? What relevance has this Indian pundit to our concerns? For those not familiar with the man or his work, he is an original and vigorously independent thinker, with a taste for the unorthodox. He is best known for his writing on colonialism but in recent years he has come to be acknowledged as one of the founding figures of postcolonial studies. He is also India's foremost public intellectual. He is greatly respected across the subcontinent, tagged as a romantic by some, occasionally savagely dismissed. A Bengali Christian, Nandy grew up in Calcutta and the culture and the past of that city were the most formative influences upon him. For many years he has lived in Delhi, based at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. His formal training was in psychology, which continues to deeply mark his thinking. But his work and lively interests have taken him into so many diverse knowledge fields that it is impossible to pigeon-hole him. In his wistful manner, he recently observed to me "I am whatever people think I am".

Leaving aside the politics of cricket, Australia hardly features in Nandy's writing.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless his work speaks to many of the issues that face us. And it does so in a very productive way, by challenging received understandings of ourselves and our orientations to the outside world. First, however, some remarks about Australia's approach to India, and to Asia generally, that will help set the context for our discussion.

Of late, India has been making headlines in the press. Not in the news sections, but in the business

pages and educational supplements.<sup>2</sup> It is a sign of the times that interest is decidedly instrumental. The dramatic increase in the Indian middle classes (what counts here is their spending power), plus the favourable long-term growth prospects of the Indian economy have belatedly caught the attention of Australian investors and policy-makers. So also universities have become eager participants in the competition for fee-paying Indian students. It is a sad reflection on our society that the politics that now appear to matter are about economic deregulation, taxation 'reform' and restrictive labour laws.

There was a time when Australia's concern with India was not so narrowly directed—at least within universities and in more progressive sections of government and the community. For perhaps two decades after India's independence the sub-continent was taken seriously. Jawaharlal Nehru commanded respect. The Indian model of political and economic change was held up as an alternative to that of China. The Colombo Plan was seen as a significant initiative. No doubt Australia's concern with India owed much to the imperial legacy as well as to the insecurities of the Cold War era. Still India registered on Australia's global map and Indian studies held a respectable place in universities. The best undergraduate course I took at Melbourne University was a year-long subject on Indian politics and culture, taught brilliantly if in a rather absolutist fashion by Hugo Wolfson. But then with the Vietnam War, the rise of the south-east Asian 'tigers' and the allure of the China market, Australia's centre of gravity shifted eastward.

In the larger scale of things, the ebb and flow of Australia's concern with India is of less consequence

than the underlying nature of Australia's engagement with Asia. Vin D'Cruz and William Steele have taken ambivalence as being at the heart of Australia's approach to Asia and they bring out the insecurity deriving from the fear of invasion and the original theft of land.<sup>3</sup> All this is very much to the point, but ambivalence suggests more openness and fluidity than has been apparent. I prefer to think in terms of a deeply entrenched colonial mindset. A large part of the problem of Australia's relationship with Asia resides in the categories of thought and the way of life that privilege the European experience, the Western tradition and Euro-American approaches to modernity. Thus it is that local knowledge, often embedded in the culture rather than in texts, is played down, that the analysis of Asia's 'problems' and what is to be done about them is generated from the outside, and that cultural difference, if it is acknowledged at all, mostly works to enhance Western ways of proceeding. Universities, canons and scholarly conventions have much to answer for in this regard.

We are now becoming aware of the partiality of the story that has been told about political and economic change in Asia, not only in Australia, but in most of the developed world. It is not by accident that Asia has been rendered up in terms that accord with Western models and, very often, Western interests as well. The difficulty of doing otherwise is surely underlined by the early work of that remarkable and much loved Indonesianist, the late Herb Feith, who, despite his egalitarianism and commitment to change, favoured the Westernised, secular, rational elite in the building of a modern Indonesia. In the words of a recent critic, "Feith's work reveals his preference for good government over 'politics' and for the 'administrators' as the practitioners of good government".<sup>4</sup>

Much remains to be done in the way of exposing how approaches to Asia are skewed to privilege Western categories: how politics is so constituted as to exclude subordinate people, the frequency with which approaches to ethnic and communal violence in non-European societies are tied to backwardness, the way in which understandings of the role and nature of the state proceed on the basis of Euro-American norms. By challenging such thinking, scholarly analyses can contribute to the processes of change in Asia and help ordinary people escape from being pawns in power politics or forced to live according to other people's designs. At the same time, such work will reflect back

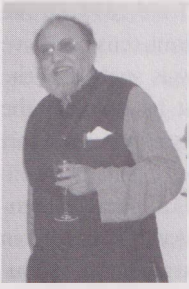
on our understanding of our own society. By looking elsewhere, at what is happening in other societies, we may get new insights into politics at home.

No-one could give better leads in these matters than Ashis Nandy. His work provides a critique of colonial categories in the boldest of terms and across many different registers. He takes as his basic reference point the fluidity of pre-modern south Asian traditions and the damage that has been done by the insertion of a secular, violent modernity. His sense of loss leads him to identify with the defeated, to find in their suffering pointers to the possibility of more humane futures. Nandy has therefore refused to be confined within the academy. He has made a point of connecting with broader constituencies through newspaper articles and radio interviews, developing close relations with activists and being involved with centres of alternative thinking and research, not only in India, but in neighbouring countries as well. He has never shown the slightest interest in professional prizes in Europe or North America and he is firm that in the first instance his books be published in India.

Yet Nandy has not cut himself off from the West. He is well versed in Western theory and history and, like his mentor Gandhi, he draws from the Western traditions what he needs to develop an alternative politics. Despite his deep attachment to south Asia and his sense of affinity with formerly colonised peoples in other parts of the world, he is attentive to the possibilities of creative change within dominant collectivities.

In what is probably his most influential work, *The Intimate Enemy*, Nandy develops the theme that the experience of colonisation damaged the coloniser even more than the colonised. Modern oppression, he declares, is not an encounter between the self and the enemy: it is a battle between the de-humanised self and the objectified enemy.<sup>5</sup> Directing his attention to gender and sexuality (at a time when neither was the subject of much academic enquiry), Nandy drives home his argument by reference to the lives of individuals whom he presents as emblematic of their societies. The colonising experience elevated hyper-masculine values and downgraded those aspects of British political culture that were tender, humane and associated with the feminine. This was the tragedy of Rudyard Kipling. He lived and died fighting his Indian self — "a softer, more creative and happier self".<sup>6</sup> Gandhi, on the other hand,





*One by one, the societies that seemingly have done well with development have grown more authoritarian, and ethnic and religious tensions have intensified.*

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searched for the other culture of the metropole that might provide self-fulfilment for Britain and salvation for India. Borrowing his non-violence, not from the sacred texts of India, but from the Sermon on the Mount, he wanted to liberate the British as much as he wanted to liberate Indians.<sup>7</sup>

As Nandy tells it, then, the white sahib turns out to be not a conspiratorial dedicated oppressor but a self-destructive co-victim, caught in the hinges of history.<sup>8</sup> It is much the same with his latter-day successors. One must therefore think in broader terms than simply attempting to raise an ex-colonial collectivity. Nandy is concerned to build on the civilisational perspectives of the defeated.<sup>9</sup> It is his view that man-made suffering “has given the Third World both its name and its uniqueness”.<sup>10</sup> But in endeavouring to give voice to the Third World, Nandy insists that one cannot stop there. The Third World must become, he argues, a collective representation of victims everywhere.<sup>11</sup> The experience of co-suffering has the potential to bring the major civilisations of the world closer together, but in a way quite different from the ‘one world’ concept promoted in the nineteenth century and underlying so much Western thinking today.

From time to time, Nandy has presented his work as explorations in the politics of awareness. His concern has been to find in everyday life and in ordinariness sources and clues to human potentialities. He is fond of quoting a friend who told him that Bangalore’s auto-rickshaw drivers are probably more cosmopolitan than the well-educated middle-class residents of that city.<sup>12</sup> It was his friend’s view that as we become more educated we learn to handle diversity better, but actually in our day-to-day life our capacity to converse with other cultures and people diminishes. That is to say, we lose our access to the multiple worlds in which people all around us live.

I think it can be said that unlike many contemporary scholars, Nandy is less interested in theorising the everyday than in using it; drawing from it a sense of hope about pluralism, diverse loyalties and an acceptance of difference that doesn’t preclude affinities and familiarities. For him, how people live is the stuff of politics. It needs to be reckoned as knowledge, a category that cannot be restricted to what is set out in print and has gone through a process of supposed validation. As Nandy sees it, established knowledge systems serve to underwrite the power of the West and work against alternative ways of thinking and experimentation. This goes hand in hand with his rejection of disciplinary boundaries and his rather cavalier approach to many scholarly conventions. It is not uncommon for Nandy to develop his argument by observing “I seem to remember so and so saying”, meaning that if they didn’t, someone should have.<sup>13</sup>

Fundamental to Nandy’s concern with the politics of awareness is an engagement with the past. In his understanding, the past is a resource for rethinking the present and imagining alternative futures. People have very different ways of arriving at their past and history is only one of them. (At the risk of overstating Nandy’s position, history, for non-European peoples, becomes a way of remembering a Western past.) The dominance of the historical mode is coterminous with the advent of the nation-state, the elevation of the secular and the scientific, and the commitment to the idea of progress. Hence, history becomes a tool of the powerful and memories that cannot be historicised are discarded or marginalised. In Nandy’s view, postcolonial critics have made a start in addressing the problem but they have fallen short. What is needed are alternatives to history, not alternative histories. In the interests of diversity, Nandy privileges myths over history and insists that

at times “it is important *not* to remember the past, objectively, clearly, or in its entirety”.<sup>14</sup>

Nandy’s critique of history stands as a contribution to the debates about the historical imagination and the politics of historicism. It might be said, of course, that the situation in Australia is different from the context in which Nandy writes: our problem is how much is forgotten or repressed about the dispossession of and violence against Indigenous people. But the nub of Nandy’s argument is that it is the privileging of history and the reliance on certain kinds of sources that is responsible for what is told and what is not told. It is instructive here to contrast Keith Windschuttle’s approach with that of a senior Australian judge who told me recently of how moved he had been by an elderly Aboriginal woman speaking of an experience she had suffered, in the very place in the outback where the event had occurred. The judge added that if urban Australians could hear the woman telling her story, they could never think as they do. It is also worth noting that Nandy’s approach shares some ground with that of Paul Carter in his remarkable volume *The Road to Botany Bay*.<sup>15</sup>

Interlocking with Nandy’s claim that history exhausts the idea of the past is his rejection of developmentalism because it forecloses on the future. Visions of the future have become the monopoly of the powerful and non-European peoples must now submit to the design of others. Their own experience and cultures are pushed aside; social engineering increasingly takes the place of critical thinking. In its broad outline, the story is a familiar one but it is told from a different standpoint. Not Daniel Bell’s “end of ideology” or Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history”, but a reconceptualisation of the political that constricts human choices. Nandy takes us back to imperialism and argues that its most enduring legacy is developmentalism, which has established itself as one of the few universals of our time. He shows how the idea of progress expressed itself in Anglicisation, Westernisation and reform movements of various kinds, before being recast as modernisation and most recently globalisation.

At the centre of it all has been the faith in development, powerfully supported by the belief in modern science and technology. In a rich mosaic of work, Nandy tells of how such thinking has insinuated itself into organised politics. The scientific study of poverty has come to be more important than poverty itself.<sup>16</sup> One by one, the societies that seemingly

have done well with development have grown more authoritarian, and ethnic and religious tensions have intensified.<sup>17</sup> The allure of the city is such that the imagination of the village has lost its hold on the Indian self.<sup>18</sup> In such ways, terrorism becomes part of the everyday culture of politics.

One does not need to accept all of Nandy’s arguments to see their importance to critical debate in Australia. Development, I would argue, plays a crucial part in underwriting Australia’s approach to Asia. It is, however, seldom presented or seen in such terms, which helps to explain why there is so little bite in public discussion. In large measure, development has been evacuated of its political content. Instrumental rationality has come to be substituted in its stead. More and more, aid agencies have been neutered by their dependence on government contracts and grants. The recent attacks by the Institute of Public Affairs against the political activism of non-governmental organisations may work to make matters worse. The university scene is not much better. Casting around for money spinners because of government cutbacks, the temptation is to teach what the market requires, which is applied not critical knowledge. Reflecting on some of the postgraduate courses targeting the NGO sector, the risk is that students will be well schooled in project management but much less equipped to ask searching questions about development itself.

Yet development is too important a subject to be shielded from public scrutiny by a sense of self-satisfaction and the appeal of bipartisanship. It was through the prospect of whole societies being remade that the figure of the West resplendent was fashioned. For a decade and a half, development has served as a conduit for the promotion (or imposition) of democratisation, civil society and the idea of social capital—all of which are more problematic than is customarily thought. Deprived of the ideology of development, I would assert, contemporary neo-liberalism could never have become a global phenomenon.

This leads us to consider Nandy’s approach to dissent, which knots together so much of his writing. The dedication in *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias* encapsulates where he stands: “For those who dare to defy the given models of defiance”. As Nandy presents it, institutionalised oppression is a process intent on destroying the basis of all dissenting visions of a more just world.<sup>19</sup> Running through his writing

is the idea that dominance is secured through ever more sophisticated means of acculturation. These produce not merely the models of conformity but also the models of dissent. Thus the sting is drawn from dissent. It is co-opted, domesticated, more readily controlled.<sup>20</sup> Nandy reflects on the way such processes work within Western societies—and he confesses his earlier disappointments—but it is their externalisation to non-European societies that is his main concern. The colonial archive provides him with rich material to flesh out his arguments. He shows how the turn to violence and the emphasis on masculine values on the part of subject peoples fell within the terms of engagement laid down by the dominant, whereas non-violence represented a challenge to the imperial self and thereby to the structure of imperial power. It was the same with respect to the politics of nationalism, secularism and state formation. The role of the intellectual, according to Nandy, is to work against the grain and thus to challenge the conventional wisdom.

Readers of *Overland* will need little prompting to appreciate the significance of Nandy's arguments to the corralled nature of political dissent in Australia. Few will question that party politics have been increasingly characterised by closure. While the political leadership has been censured on the ethics of some of the key issues of Australia's external involvement, it is notable that public intellectuals seldom venture into the waters of deep dissent. Even in the matter of asylum seekers and would-be refugees, the argument has mostly been about giving a more caring face to existing approaches rather than questioning the territorial basis of the present world order. Our imaginings appear to be cramped by the complacency of the culture and the liberal tradition. In the arena of Indigenous rights and responsibilities, Noel Pearson has been sharply critical of what he calls the "progressivist" positions of left-leaning, liberally minded people. My friend, Marcia Langton, has recently asserted that we are living in a "culture that has no comprehension of otherness beyond the romantic".<sup>21</sup> In her experience, it's simply not possible to speak to white liberals about the everyday issues of decolonisation or even postcolonialism. "There is an epistemological and an ontological gap between the academy and the actual lives of Indigenous people."<sup>22</sup> This is precisely Nandy's point made in an Australian context. Drawing on different source material Langton and Nandy make common cause

in challenging the knowledge industry, the cultural consensus and the in-house nature of much contemporary dissent.

1. His major work here is *The Tao of Cricket: On Games of Destiny and the Destiny of Games*, Viking and Penguin, New Delhi, 1989.
2. See for instance 'The Swami Army', *Age*, 11 October 2004; and 'Passage to India', *Age*, 29 January 2005.
3. J.V. D'Cruz and William Steele, *Australia's Ambivalence Towards Asia*, Monash Asia Institute, Clayton, 2003.
4. Simon Philpott, *Rethinking Indonesia: Postcolonial Theory, Authoritarianism and Identity*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 2000, p.68. Philpott is referring to Feith's seminal text *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, London, 1962.
5. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, OUP, Delhi, 1983, p.xvi.
6. *Ibid.*, pp.69–70.
7. *Ibid.*, p.31.
8. *Ibid.*, p.xv.
9. Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness*, OUP, Delhi, 1987, p.xvi.
10. *Ibid.*, p.21.
11. *Ibid.*
12. 'The Darker Side of Modernity', Ashis Nandy in discussion with Phillip Darby, chapter 5 in Phillip Darby, ed., *Postcolonising the International: Working to Change the Way We Are*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, forthcoming. The friend is U.R. Ananthi Murthy, the prominent Kannada novelist and scholar, who was at one time Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University in Kottayam, Kerala.
13. In this respect, I am reminded of my late colleague, A.F. (Foo) Davies, who once complained about his treatment at the hands of an editor of Cambridge University Press who was concerned about inaccuracies in his quotations. Indignantly, Foo declared, "But my versions were much better than the originals".
14. Ashis Nandy, 'History's Forgotten Doubles', *History and Theory* 34, 1995, pp.44–66 at p.47.
15. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Faber and Faber, London, 1987. In this work Carter is concerned with the haze of first contact: the haze that preceded the clear outlines provided by historians who Carter so effectively censures. For an incisive overview of the critical response to Carter's volume see George Seddon, *Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape*, CUP, Cambridge, 1997, ch.4.
16. Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, p.107.
17. Ashis Nandy, *The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*, OUP, Delhi, 2003, p.177.
18. Ashis Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey to the City: The Village and Other Odd Ruins of the Self in the Indian Imagination*, OUP, Delhi, 2001, especially ch.1.
19. Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, p.xv.
20. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p.xii.
21. 'The Changing Complexions of Race', Marcia Langton in conversation with Phillip Darby, chapter 11 in Phillip Darby, ed., *Postcolonising the International*.
22. *Ibid.*

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## DIALOGUES ACROSS CULTURES

'DIALOGUES ACROSS CULTURES' was an ambitious conference, convened by Monash University's Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies and held in Melbourne (11–14 November 2004), that sought to address pressing challenges in studies of identity and difference. Speakers included Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Sneja Gunew and the program traversed a range of fields, including politics, education, history, literature and the visual arts. Our contemplation of questions raised by papers and sessions is indebted to conference chairs Lynnette Russell and Stephen Pritchard, who created an important, challenging and stimulating event.

Speakers from New Zealand, Guam, India, Malaysia and Austria provided comparative elements for the conference themes. The ways in which presentations negotiated indigenous and other non-white identities and cultures was instructive. Many of the papers at the conference engaged in larger debates about identity, globalisation and the politics of representation that have become central to contemporary cultural studies. That said, and barring some keynote sessions, levels of critical interaction with papers seemed to be relatively low.

This is perhaps not surprising, given the fraught nature of cultural 'authorisation' and community politics in the fields of both indigenous and multicultural studies. This is an issue that deserves careful enunciation and we cannot, in the limited space of this review, do it justice. Suffice to say that one of the hoariest chestnuts within studies of racialised cultures and politics remains the question of a person's speaking position and authority (particularly assumed community authority). This was a thread that ran through the conference, from specific presentations to the ambience of groups during question times. The process of shifting from posing questions to suggesting possible solutions or alternative frameworks often seemed stalled.

There was the usual dismissal of the term 'postcolonial' (i.e. how can we talk about *post*-colo-

onialism while the processes and consequences of colonialism linger?) that, in the face of much rousing theoretical work at the conference, seemed too easy. There's no denying that it is a problematic term, similar to 'multiculturalism', but when used with reference to its considerable body of critical work, its ability to focus particular types of critique is still valuable. Rey Chow, a critic whose recent work was quoted by both Gunew and Spivak during the conference, points to liberal politics and the "well-intentioned disaffiliations from overt racist practices . . . that often end up reconstituting and reinvesting racism in a different guise".<sup>1</sup> It is in this climate of alleged equality for all, and the promotion of multicultural (multiracial?) societies as a 'natural' good, that the boundaries of 'nation', already ill-fitting, become ever more stretched and split. The sweep of neoconservative politics prominent in governing Australia these past few terms, a brand of politics that encourages jingoism, badly needs foiling.

The broad scope of the conference occasionally led to sessions lacking a tight focus, though this is a criticism that could be levelled at any number of contemporary conferences, where finances necessitate broadly targeted 'calls for papers'. The conference theme often manifested in papers based on traditional models of black/white, coloniser/colonised, oppositional modes of speaking. How do we negotiate our differences across often complex and multifocal relationships of power? How can we move beyond simple binary modes of speaking about difference, and speaking to each other? Where is this dialogue across cultures located? In her address, Spivak defined dialogue as a juggling of positions, a constantly shifting rather than a stable and fixed process. Spivak argues that dialogue demands that we not only engage critically with the Other but reconsider our own positioning. In relation to this key issue, Ghassan Hage discussed the unacknowledged "labour of intercultural relations". Without this element of self-reflexiveness, there is no genuine dia-

logue, only a soliloquy that can frustrate both speaker and listener with its limited effect.

Ann Curthoys has conceptualised the relationship between Aboriginal and migrant communities in Australia as an “uneasy conversation”.<sup>2</sup> Curthoys’s notion was an apt description of some of the disputed terrain that this conference sought to examine. Perhaps it is the sameness *and* difference of indigenous and migrant experiences that makes conversation and dialogue across these cultural divides both difficult and contested. There was often a clear divide between indigenous and multicultural issues, and this separation negated the possibilities for fruitful and challenging conversations. For groups that experience high levels of misrepresentation and abuse, and who are often still trying to find effective ways of intervening in the public sphere, it is understandable but unfortunate that the struggle sometimes remains thought of as a competition for space and voice. The connections between indigenous cultural identity and cultural diversity in Australia continue to be highly charged political and critical issues.

‘Dialogues Across Cultures’ demonstrated and challenged some of the difficulties inherent in cross-cultural conversations, emphasising both their complexity and necessity. When there is still so much to recover, document, explicate and recognise, it can be hard for individuals and communities to keep larger cultural frames in reference and to give due respect and consideration to other marginalised groups and their concerns. It is in the mutual acknowledgement of our own and one another’s agendas, perhaps, that a more honest and constructive basis for cultural conversations within and between our communities are to be had.

1. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Columbia University Press, New York, p.17.
2. ‘An Uneasy Conversation: The Multicultural and the Indigenous’, in *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, John Docker and Gerhard Fisher (eds), UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000, p.9.

Dr Tseen Khoo, author of *Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literatures* (McGill-Queens and Hong Kong University Press), is a Research Fellow based in the National Centre for Australian Studies. She is convening a ‘Locating Asian-Australian Cultures’ symposium on 28 June 2005.

Som Sengmany is completing an MA thesis on the work of Chinese diasporic artists in Australia, in the School of Literary, Visual and Performance Studies at Monash University.

## from *Australiana*

V.

*i.m. Dorothy Hewett*

I asked you where we’re bound across  
the clear expanse of grass,

I asked you of the home we saw  
out across the plain?

what field of yellow lies  
grows tough & wide

now poetry seems to fail us,  
its lies no longer big enough?

You said *the Official Language*  
is spritely as an adder in the breeze,

*blasphemous tongues*  
*saccharine in formaldehyde.*

We know the politicians & the preachers  
feel afraid

but can’t find our ways to tell them,  
imagination wary

in air made thin as constant desolation dries it up.  
Outside the bedroom window

suburbs stir & spread, the city  
stacked in sheets of smoking glass,

millions penned in  
above the burning plain.

The animals have up & left  
a bleak and hungry circus

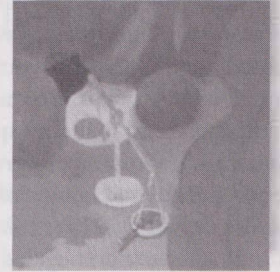
for an end to days, dark salt seeps  
beneath the feet of capital men.

Where are your lips’ formidable accounts,  
who’s going to say

*things are getting dangerous again?*

PETER MINTER

# UNREQUITED JUSTICE



UNREQUITED JUSTICE,<sup>1</sup> a one-day colloquium I attended at Macquarie University, was organised in a way where members of different racialised communities and community activists, members of human rights organisations, academics, filmmakers, parents, young people from both university and high school backgrounds (a few of them who came as refugees and were interned at detention camps) were able to come together, hold discussions, hear and learn from each other. The colloquium was energising, as the speakers presented papers on medical, legal, migration and media discourses and systems of racialised criminalisation. As many of those who attended the colloquium were from the very communities which were facing the effects of racialised criminalisation, apart from community workers and young people, the debates and discussions were meaningful as well as useful for both the speakers and the audience.

Racial profiling and criminalisation has a long history in Australia. Within the context of the White Australia Policy, Indigenous peoples, for instance, have faced incarceration and legislation on the basis of race. Contemporary racial profiling by the media and the legal system emerges from this history as it operates on the basis of otherising, homogenising and criminalising non-white groups. In this sense, non-white peoples (often men) are equated with criminality. Many of the speakers presented analyses of the current targeting of Indigenous and Arab Australians, who appear to bear the brunt of racial criminalisation by the media as well as the legal system.

Keynote speaker Ray Jackson, President of the Indigenous Social Justice Association,<sup>2</sup> powerfully outlined the systemic violence of racialised effects of

overpolicing in Redfern, and the recent effects of this policing system in the tragic death of teenager Thomas Hickey. Placing this death within the larger history of the Aboriginal community at Redfern as well as a history of Aboriginal deaths in custody, Ray Jackson traced the ways in which Indigenous families face a continual system of unrequited justice, especially at the hands of the justice system. This system places the blame on the teenager's mother, rather than on the police who chased her son, instead of challenging the ways in which police surveillance at Redfern targets Aboriginal youth; not those who control the drug trade and are attempting to destroy Redfern's Indigenous community. Or as Ray Jackson put it, "four hundred families since 1980 know how it is to be blamed" for the deaths of members of their own family. In a larger sense, this racialised violence is systemic as there is disproportionate representation of Indigenous peoples in white legal and prison institutions. Many of these people become deaths-in-custody statistics, and often there is no action taken against the police.

Paula Abood outlined the manner in which young men and women from a range of Arab-Australian ethnicities face daily police harassment. The films *Trouble Comes To Me* and *Of Middle Eastern Appearance*, directed by Paula Abood in collaboration with community organisations, illustrated the level at which media discourses homogenise communities and saturate Australian publics in racialised ways of thinking about crime. Such a saturation is visible, for instance, in a 2002 opinion poll cited by Abood, which states that 52.8 per cent of Australians would be concerned if a close relative married a Muslim.

In a theatrical format, Dr Katherine Biber, from Macquarie University, illustrated the justice system's reliance on surveillance cameras and the often speculative and discursive ways in which this medium is read, resulting in unjust arrests of people "of Aboriginal appearance". For instance, Dr Biber cited a court transcript where a suspect's identity was verified through a camera shot of a hooded man. The verification was based on speculations as well as witness and police impressions of what an Aboriginal person must look like. Since the photograph showed someone who could have been "coffee-coloured" or "South-American" or "Aboriginal", the suspect was deemed to be Aboriginal.

Abood and Biber's analyses of surveillance technologies and racialised criminalisation generated a heated discussion as to what technologies may or may not be used. Some audience members raised questions about what technologies could be appropriate if ethnic descriptors and photographic representations depend on racialised ways of thinking and seeing. Others agreed with the speakers, calling for more awareness of issues of racial profiling as practiced by the media as well as the legal system.

On a slightly different, but related issue of racialised detention, Dr Sev Ozdowski, Federal Human Rights Commissioner, stated that children, mainly Afghani and Iraqi, traumatised by experiences in detention, should not be separated from their parents. Ozdowski was critical of the whole brutal system of detention, especially in the light of evidence that 98 per cent of children are deemed to be genuine refugees. The very system of detention of refugees is, of course, based on the criminalisation of refugees who are suspected of illegal migration and identities.

The detention and criminalisation of those who struggle with mental illness was highlighted by Louise Shara. Shara, who has struggled with a history of schizophrenia is now a community advocate for those who live with mental illness. She also outlined its links to the prison system: 50 per cent of women and 30 per cent of men in the NSW correctional system have been admitted for mental disorders. Judging from the questions from the audience about the prison system and mental illness, it seems that many found

Shara's account informative, educational as well as moving. But Shara also highlighted the fact that given the reduction of funding for psychiatric institutions, many of those living with mental illness are simply being criminalised. They are, in fact, moving from psychiatric institutions to prisons.

The colloquium ended with a powerful and moving address by Demetra Tsakos, migrant mother and social activist, who embodies unrequited justice. Her son, Angelo Tsakos was shot by police on 11 November 1985. Despite a long battle with the police and the legal system, Demetra Tsakos was not able to achieve legal justice for her son. Yet she spoke inspiringly of continuing the ongoing struggle to achieve social and legal change in the face of unrequited justice. In the case of Angelo Tsakos, this ongoing struggle has resulted in the writing of a book and the making of two films. These struggles ensure that unrequited justice does not end in silence, but as Tsakos herself suggests, "keep(ing) alive in public memory, the history of a killing".

In the spirit of "sharing the sorry business of our mobs", as Ray Jackson described it, the conference ended with the lighting of candles for all those whose bodies yearn for unrequited justice. Musicians Kostas Polydoropoulos and Karlos Gourdalís appropriately performed Rembetika or Greek urban blues music which deals with the life of marginalised groups. Hearing the beautiful and healing melodies performed by Polydoropoulos and Gourdalís, I thought more colloquiums need to be organised in this spirit—the spirit of shared knowledge and an inspiration for continual action against social injustice.

1. Conference Report on Unrequited Justice (One-Day Colloquium), 30 November 2004, organised by Dr Joseph Pugliese and Shae Bacales, Department of Critical and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University. More information is available about the speakers and papers from this colloquium at <[www.ccs.mq.edu.au/justice/index.html](http://www.ccs.mq.edu.au/justice/index.html)>.
2. The Indigenous Social Justice Association of which Ray Jackson is president proclaimed 14 February 2005 a day of National Action to appeal to have the NSW government reopen the Hickey Inquest.

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# AMBIVALENT OR DIVIDED?

J.V. D'Cruz & William Steele: *Australia's Ambivalence Towards Asia* (Monash Asia Institute, rev. edn, \$49.95)

*Australia's Ambivalence Towards Asia* provides a benchmark for tracking how far Australia has regressed—and perhaps progressed—in its relations with Asia since the Hawke and Keating eras. Discussion of Australia's engagement with Asia in the 1980s and early 1990s focused on the country's imminent rendezvous with an imagined future somewhere *out there* among the economies, cultures and societies of Asia. The degree to which Asia was enmeshed within Australia held little place on the Labor agenda.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after taking office, John Howard repudiated the Keating paradigm of engagement with the states and societies of Asia, arguably setting back progress on that front by a decade. At the same time, however, discussion of the place of Asian communities and cultures in Australian public life picked up apace. This passionately and at times intemperately argued book chronicles the twists and turns of Australian commentary on relations with the states of Asia over the past two decades while making room for Asian-Australian participation in the engagement and making space for Asian diasporic voices in the analysis.

The book is largely grounded in the field of cross-cultural communications. Every kind of communicated gesture provides material for the book: novels, films, television programs, radio broadcasts, classroom practices, newspaper articles and op eds, and the public pronouncements of ministers and their civil servants. The first half of the book provides a theoretical and historical setting for the problems at hand. The second provides a forensic analysis of the film version of Blanche D'Alpuget's novel, *Turtle Beach*, which the authors take to be symptomatic of a distinctive but popular Australian mindset with re-

gard to Asia—or more specifically towards Malaysia—that needs to be exposed for critical appraisal. The two halves might well have been published as separate books. Their joint publication offers good value for the academic market but is probably too unwieldy for the bestseller list.

*Australia's Ambivalence Towards Asia* is a work that straddles the fields of Asian and Australian studies. Looking back, those who struggled over the Hawke-Keating period for the promotion of Asian languages and studies in Australian education could be said to have embraced the Keating paradigm rather too uncritically. “Asian Studies, despite undergoing significant disciplinary growth during the 1980s, focused almost exclusively on modes of Asian impact or influence in Australia,” proclaim the editors of a recent collection of essays on Asian diasporas in Australia. The national Asian studies enterprise “was cast in terms of specific regional studies and almost always excluded examination of the cultural practices and/or socio-political concerns of Australians of Asian descent”.<sup>2</sup> Australia, by this account, was encouraged to engage closely with Asia in the Keating era but not to bother looking too closely at itself.

This argument may be a little off target in so far as it fails to distinguish between the structural division of labour separating Asian and Australian Studies in schools and universities. As arguments go, however, the case for granting greater recognition to the place of Asia within Australia, past and present, can hardly be faulted. Australian Studies and Asian Studies need to engage with one another no less than Australia and Asia in the post-Keating era.

The incentive to converge Asian and Australian studies has never been greater than in John Howard's

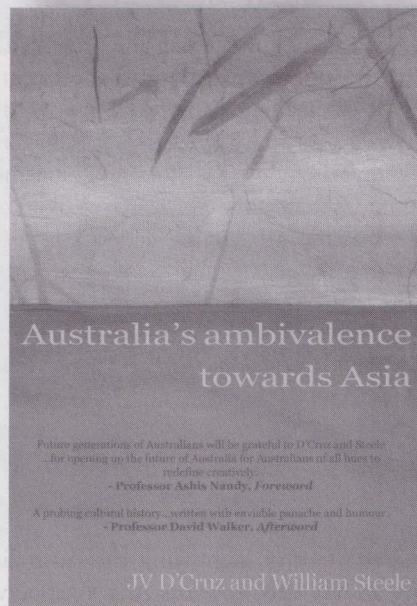


Australia. To be sure, Howard is no fan of Asian immigration and can hardly be counted an ally of those who would encourage Australians to learn more about Asian languages, cultures and societies. More broadly, his rise to power signalled an abrupt departure from the rhetoric of Asian engagement in Australian public life to one favouring sympathetic ties with traditional allies such as Britain and the USA. Howard's calculated hesitancy on Asian immigration and his perfected indifference toward Asian cultures and societies has prompted comment here and abroad that the 'real' Australia has resurfaced once again in an old and familiar form as a complacent, mediocre, and basically racist nation of yobbos inclined to convert their own self-doubt into contempt for their Asian neighbours and for other Australians of colour. Asian and Australian studies both have something to say about this.

The book sets out to remedy a long-standing omission that would leave Asian Australians out of the debate about Australia's engagement with Asia. But the greater part of the work is devoted to the book's central problematic—on what ethical and historical foundations does Australia imagine that it can tell countries in the region how they should behave? Much of the book's four hundred pages is devoted to highlighting the hypocrisy of an Australia that would profess universal principles abroad which are not at all consistent with its historical conduct at home and in the region.

Another important theme running through the book is regional status competition. Australia is imagined as vying with the countries of Asia not for wealth or power—the old trophies of empire—but for supremacy in the regional status hierarchy. In this status competition, the superior agent is the one which best affects *indifference* to the opinions of others. The book is as much about indifference as ambivalence. The Foreword by Ashis Nandy, for example, sets out to demolish the frail foundations of Australian self-esteem by showing that no-one outside Australia actually cares what Australians think one way or the other.

Sifting with malicious agility through the metaphors of schoolboy cricket annuals, Nandy describes Australia as an English Second Eleven that has never quite caught on to the true spirit of the game. While Australians are easily persuaded of the merits of cricket (perhaps too easily), they have never grasped the class ideals proper to the sport and so fail to



sense how deeply they are despised by the Upper Form boys. Unable to make the grade—and unable to fathom why—Australians have learned instead “to despise the browns and the yellows of Asia and Australia because it itself was despised and the contempt had been internalised”. Back in the Clubhouse, other national teams remain indifferent to Australia and its fate. Indians, Nandy assures us, cannot help but smile at the seriousness with which the Australians take the game and the part they play in it. Australian ambivalence towards countries in the region is matched at every point by Asian countries' indifference to Australia.

The book draws out these arguments in a variety of ways, often with unanticipated effects. One effect is to confound the orthodox battle lines of the ongoing Australian culture wars. The authors interrogate policy speeches of John Howard and his ministers and they highlight the banal prejudices of capital-city shock jocks to expose the complacency, colonial presumption, and implicit racism that often underlies their everyday commentaries. At the same time, however, D'Cruz and Steele show little sympathy for critics of the Howard agenda who still cling to the 'Asian engagement' paradigm of the Keating era.

Alison Broinowski comes in for particular criticism. Her book *About Face* (2003) is singled out for failing to acknowledge the significance of Asian-Australian voices in contemporary public life, and

is likened to “*Turtle Beach* reborn in non-fictional form”, for sustaining neo-colonial representations of Australian relations with Asia into the twenty-first century. In challenging Broinowski’s work the authors share the company of Melbourne’s notoriously abusive right-wing journalist Andrew Bolt. Much the same could be said of the voices which D’Cruz and Steele summon in defence of their arguments. They assemble an inter-denominational choir of conservative, liberal, and Marxist voices that would not normally be heard performing in the same chapel—Phillip Adams alongside Greg Melleuish, Humphrey McQueen with Owen Harries, John Docker with Bob Santamaria—on this occasion singing in harmony about Australia’s troubled relations with Asia and with its own past.

Given this eclectic selection of voices, the reader may find the task of identifying the Australia that harbours ambivalence towards Asia a slippery one. Many of the book’s most elaborate critiques of Australian attitudes toward race, nation, and indigenous and Asian relations draw heavily on the work of prominent Australian public intellectuals. Page after page, the case for the prosecution is mounted as strongly by the fifty or so leading scholars and commentators whose works are consulted for the project as it is by the authors themselves. Virtually all of the evidence tendered about the Stolen Generation, refugee policies, Australian forward military postures, surviving colonial attitudes, and so on, come from published Australian studies. I am reminded of the response of an American colleague some years ago to tirades from the Australian Left against US policy in Central America: “Would we know any of this but for American Public Radio?”

Presumably the collage of Australian views marshalled in support of the authors’ case do not qualify for inclusion in the Australia that is ambivalent about Asia. These commentators are on the whole hostile to the Howard vision of a complacent Australia that befriends only the great and powerful, and they are largely sympathetic to the authors’ vision of a country more inclusive of its own citizens and less exclusive in dealing with its neighbours. The Australia that is ambivalent about Asia would then seem to be the Australia of John Howard and his supporters. But this assumption is equally problematic given the hostility shown by Hanson and the shock jocks on is-

suues of race and indigenous affairs. They show few signs of indecision either.

In fact there is very little evidence of ambivalence towards Asia among the Australian sources cited on either side of the great debate. To one side the authors amass a substantial body of Australian public commentary that is consistent with their vision of where Australia has come from and where it ought to be heading. On the other they list a score of enemies of a more tolerant Australia—from Pauline Hanson to Stan Zemanak—whose public utterances leave little doubt about where their sympathies lie. Rather than an ambivalent Australia we are introduced to an unambiguously divided one. The only note of ambivalence that I could detect lay in the authors’ own views of the likelihood that Australia can or will rise to the challenges that they identify. The jury is still out.

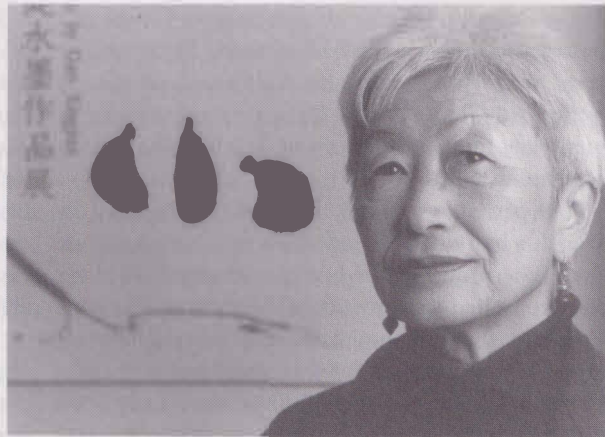
The concluding chapters restate Nandy’s opening gestures, without the cricket metaphors, to observe that the election and re-election of the Howard Government compels Asian societies not already acquainted with Australian popular attitudes towards Asia to reduce their expectations of the Australian people lest they be consistently disappointed by the country’s conduct in the region. To their credit, D’Cruz and Steele are not content to reduce their expectations of Australia. The anger that runs through the book—an anger that often erodes the finer points of their arguments—is shared by many Australians who feel disappointed by the conduct of their government and their compatriots. Few readers of this landmark book are likely to feel ambivalent about the choices that now confront them as Australians.

1. See Jan Jindy Pettman, ‘AFeminist Perspective on “Australia in Asia”’ in John Docker and Gerhard Fischer, eds, *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, UNSW Press, Kensington, 2000. A similar point has been made elsewhere by Ian Eng, Jacqueline Lo, Tseen Khoo, Nick Night, Helen Gilbert and others.
2. Jacqueline Lo, Tseen Khoo and Helen Gilbert, ‘NewFormations in AsianAustralian Cultural Politics’ in Jacqueline Lo, Tseen Khoo and Helen Gilbert, eds, *Diaspora: Negotiating Asian-Australia*, Special joint issue of *Journal of Australian Studies* (JAS 65) and *Australian Cultural History*, UQP, St Lucia, 2000, pp.1–12.

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## MABEL LEE

Mabel Lee is a third-generation Australian of Chinese heritage. She served on the academic staff at the University of Sydney for thirty-four years, and her translation of Gao Xingjian's novel *Soul Mountain* played a significant role in the author winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000.



### ON BEING BORN A CHINESE IN AUSTRALIA

It was the Depression. My father left the Parramatta greengrocer's shop in which he had a share. Profits had dwindled and he had nothing to send his wife and three young children in China. Deciding to try to make some money in the country town of Warialda in northern New South Wales, he rented a corner store. Meanwhile, my mother who had received neither letters nor money from my father heard a rumour that he had gone bankrupt. It was time for her to take action and, together with my three older siblings Stan, Desmond and Judy, she resolutely boarded a ship bound for Australia. They arrived in Warialda in April 1939 and I was born on Christmas Eve that year. My three younger siblings, George, Hazel and Harry were also born in Warialda.

My birth coincided with an upturn in business, and my father thought of me as 'lucky'. The dole cheques arrived for Christmas and customers came to settle their accounts. I have indeed been lucky: doors to wonderful opportunities have continually opened for me, and I have simply walked through them. I have also for a long time been aware of a protective energy that surrounds me.

While each of my older siblings had been conceived in China, my father had returned to work in Sydney before they were born. I was the first of my father's children he had seen as a baby. He and I developed a very strong bond based on mutual love and respect, and also on a shared interest in discuss-

ing what it was to be human. I used to be playful and cheeky as a child. At the age of 11, I took my father by surprise when I grabbed him from behind and lifted him a couple of inches off the floor to show how strong I was. My mother scolded me for being disrespectful, but she could not help chuckling. As a university student I sometimes went at night with friends to drink coffee at King's Cross. My father disapproved, saying that if one goes into muddy water one becomes muddied. My response startled, but pleased him. I said that the lotus grows in muddy water yet remains upright and pure. Such was the nature of our discussions, and we continued these until his death in 1990.

My mother was born in the town of Shiqi, in Zhongshan County, Guangdong Province, China. She believed in Buddhist karma and believed that her accumulated good karma would protect those she loved. When my mother died suddenly in 1976 my father was bereft. My siblings and I took good care of him, and on their days off work employees would regularly take my father on outings. From my mother we all inherited a generosity of spirit to help those in need, depending on our earnings. Each of us has always supported charitable causes. There is a strand in traditional Chinese thinking that strongly promotes the support of charities to help those less fortunate. The rationale was that regardless of one's social status or wealth, one requires only so much space to lie in a coffin.

My paternal grandparents were also from Shiqi. They arrived in Sydney during the 1890s. My grandfather had an import/export business, and my father was born in the People's Palace in Pitt Street. My grandmother took him as a baby to China, and he returned at the age of 17 to work. Every two or three years after earning his sea passage, he would 'return' to China. Finally, he had enough money to marry my mother to whom he had been betrothed as a young boy.

My parents were very happy to be reunited in Warialda but were worried about feeding a family of five. When my mother became pregnant with me they consulted the town doctor about an abortion. Poor language communication resulted in my mother taking Epsom Salts. It failed to abort me, and I was born. My three younger siblings were each born eighteen months apart, so within five years there was a family of nine to feed. However, my mother was exceptional as a household manager and wasted nothing. She made all our clothes and ensured that there was nutritious food on the table.

My eldest brother Stan, who was a young teenager, helped with the household chores as well as doing deliveries on his bicycle. He would do the laundry for the whole family. He also looked after his younger siblings. Not knowing any lullabies he would instead sing 'hillbilly songs' which he had heard on the radio: "I found my thrill/ On Blueberry Hill . . ."

## LIVING IN AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY AND SUBURBAN COMMUNITIES

My parents were keenly aware of being poor but they worked hard and were not ashamed of being poor. The Chinese in the town despised us for our poverty, but the Warialda community was kind and friendly.

My father's name was Harry Hin Hunt, and all of his children have the surname Hunt. In Cantonese my father's name is Chan Hun, 'Chan' being the surname. The immigration officer said that 'Hun' should be the surname because it came last. Moreover, he added, it sounded like 'Hunt', so that was how it should be spelt. In the 1910s and 1920s this practice of naming Chinese immigrants was common, but only in Australia and New Zealand. My mother did not adopt an English name. She was Leung Wun Gin, 'Leung' being the surname. The local community addressed her as Mrs Hunt.

My parents had no formal schooling in China but could read and write Chinese. My father acquired

some English by attending a protestant Sunday School when he returned to Sydney as a teenager, and through talking with customers in the green-grocer's shop in Parramatta where he worked. The women at the Sunday School liked my father. One of them remarked, "Harry, your collar is always clean, unlike those of other Chinese men." My father, who had been clean and immaculate in his appearance from childhood, felt it was important to debunk the stereotype of the 'dirty Chinaman'. Meticulous attention to one's physical appearance and one's surroundings became an aesthetic for all of us. Justice and fair play were also instilled in us from childhood.

My family left Warialda and came to Sydney in 1945. My father first rented a market garden in Wetherill Park where he became obsessed with growing the perfect cauliflower. My mother was quick to realise that the family would soon starve to death. She threatened to return to China and leave my father to fend for all the children on his own. She had come from a bustling town in China and hated the isolation of the place and living without electricity. Prodded into action, my father opened a fruit shop in Merrylands.

My older siblings terminated their schooling to assume roles of responsibility in the family business. As a team they ran a fruit shop with a reputation for being exceptionally clean and well managed. Customers were attracted to the shop from miles away. There was another reason for the popularity of the Hunt family fruit shop. In times of potato shortages that sent the price soaring my father insisted on keeping the price low because this was a staple food for Westerners. This did not go unnoticed in the community. As pre-school youngsters I and my younger siblings would do light chores like removing the paper wrapping from apples, then as we grew up we would bag and weigh potatoes after school until there was enough for the next day. I got into the habit of reviewing while working what I had learned during the day at school.

At first my family did not engage socially with the local community. The shop was open six days, and Sundays were reserved for household chores and occasionally a family outing. We did not engage socially with the Chinese community either, and anyway people did not like us because we were poor. However, my father was dismissive of such slights. As a family we adopted his fearless attitude. I grew

up thinking I was as good as anyone, and I have never stopped believing this.

### AWARENESS OF BEING CHINESE

My father believed that our cultural identity as Chinese should be maintained, and insisted that we spoke Chinese at home. When the Pacific War ended and the Japanese troops withdrew from China, he seriously considered relocating the family to China. A brief visit there during the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists made him decide to make Australia home.

My family began to mix socially with the local community in the 1950s when my brother Stan joined Apex, Rotary, Lions, and the Masonic Lodge. Later, my youngest brother Harry also became deeply involved in Rotary and other community activities. Stan and Harry are both outgoing personalities and enjoy community work and the social aspects of such activities.

I became aware that I was Chinese and different from the time I started infants school at the age of 5. Some of the children called me 'Ching Chong Chinaman' in a decidedly unfriendly way, but I had no qualms about hitting them. My Chinese identity did not ever worry me. My younger brother George and I were once waiting for the school bus to take us home from Parramatta West Primary School when a group of older boys started pelting us with stones. We retaliated in kind but were outnumbered. Luckily the bus arrived. When two Greek sisters at the school were taunted with nasty jibes about their eating garlic and smelling like it, I immediately went to their defence. They were recent arrivals, and I comforted them and befriended them. My abhorrence for any sort of bullying was already well established, and I was aware of not being afraid of anyone. At Parramatta High School, the only co-ed high school at the time, I was treated like everyone else. My being Chinese did not create any borders for me, but my being short did. It meant that I would always come last in the cross-country races.

### UNIVERSITY LIFE AND CAREER

I went on to study at the University of Sydney in 1957 with the help of a Commonwealth Scholarship. My parents were delighted. None of our acquaintances had completed high school. In those times there were few Chinese in Australian universities, and certainly very few Australian-born Chinese.

Chinese students at the University of Sydney were either Colombo Plan students or the offspring of wealthy families. The women from the latter group wore designer clothes and shoes as well as diamond-studded jewellery, while I made my own clothes. I joined with a group of Chinese whose socio-economic backgrounds were not too different from my own. They were mostly men and we liked talking about the political situation in China. Later, I was elected the first president of the Chinese Students' Society at the University of Sydney, but did not join other clubs or societies because I worked most evenings in the restaurant my father had by then acquired. Rather than wait on tables I chose to wash up because it was mindless and allowed me to revise the day's lectures in my mind.

I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with First Class Honours in Chinese in 1962. A Cambridge scholar, Professor A.R. Davis, had been appointed to the Chair of Oriental Studies, and I was amongst the second intake of students in Chinese Studies. I went on to study Chinese political and economic thought from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century for my PhD degree. I wanted to find out why China had failed to effectively deal with the Western powers and Japan in this period. It had become clear to me that Chinese history was important to me because it was an integral part of my own history. I joined the Chinese Studies academic staff at the University in the year I graduated as a PhD, in 1966.

During her thirtyfour years as an academic at the University of Sydney, Mabel Lee supervised to successful completion ten PhD theses, a number of MA theses, and about forty BA honours theses. She taught Chinese language, and early twentieth-century Chinese literature and history at all levels. She was elected founding president of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia in 1989.

I was committed to teaching creatively and effectively. I thoroughly enjoyed all the courses I taught. However, while I enjoyed teaching Chinese literature, nothing I read inspired me until I read a book of prose poems called *Wild Grass* by Lu Xun (1881–1936). These poems spoke to me and my research began to focus on this powerful intellectual and writer. Two research papers that I published in 1982 mark my entry to literature: 'Suicide of the Creative Self: the Case of Lu Xun' and 'Sol-

ace for the Corpse with Its Heart Gouged Out: the Classical Poetry of Lu Xun’.

### ON BECOMING A TRANSLATOR, AND TRANSLATING GAO XINGJIAN’S SOUL MOUNTAIN

From the mid 1980s Chinese writers began to visit Sydney. I would always be contacted and would arrange for them to speak in the University Staff Club. With my extensive network of past and present students I could call on a few and they would inform others, so audiences always numbered eighty to a hundred people. One such writer was the poet Yang Lian who I first met at the home of Lyn and John Tranter in late 1988. When he asked if I would translate two cycles of poems he had written in Australia, I told him I was not a translator. He looked forlorn. I knew he desperately needed translations for his poetry readings and as I liked his poetry I agreed to help him. I eventually translated and published three books of Yang Lian’s poetry: in 1990 *Masks and Crocodile* and *The Dead in Exile* and in 2002 *Yi*, a book of sixty-four long poems based on the ancient shamanistic text *Yijing* (Book of Changes). My academic training had equipped me for translation, and I believed I was playing an important role in making contemporary Chinese writings accessible to English readers. I have never received royalties for my translations of Yang Lian’s poetry, nor did I expect any. Yang Lian himself has received very little in royalties for those three books, but they have enabled him to win substantial international poetry prizes.

Yang Lian relocated to London, and when I travelled to Europe in 1991 we arranged to meet in Paris. It was through him that I met Gao Xingjian. Gao talked about his novel *Soul Mountain* that had recently been published in Taipei. As I scanned the copy of the novel he had given me, I found myself drawn to the beauty of the language: it read like poetry. I surprised myself by suddenly saying to Gao, “Do you have a translator? Do you want me?” It was as if some mystical force had pushed me to ask this of him, and, taken aback for a minute or two, he agreed. Translating *Soul Mountain* then became a mission; I could sense that it was a very important work. However, until my appointment as Head of the School of Asian Studies ended in 1993 it was impossible to devote time to the translation. I was also mindful that translation counted for nothing in my academic career.

When I completed the translation at the beginning of 1999 I sought out Lyn Tranter who was a literary agent. I wanted the manuscript to go to a commercial publisher to ensure that Gao would receive adequate royalties to support him in his future literary endeavours. We had not at any stage discussed royalties, and it had never crossed my mind that I would be receiving a share. Lyn Tranter insisted that we clarify the matter of royalties, and Gao and I agreed upon a 60:40 split.

I terminated my contract with the University of Sydney in January 2000, and I have since translated Gao’s novel *One Man’s Bible* (2002) and a collection of his short stories called *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather* (2004). Gao’s winning the Nobel Prize meant that I had been sprinkled in gold dust. This gold dust has increased my support for the disadvantaged. It has also subsidised my various projects aimed at promoting a better understanding of Asian cultures in the English-speaking world. Wild Peony publishing company, which I own with Dr A.D. Stefanowska, allows me to do precisely this. In recent years we have published four volumes by Australian poets with Asian backgrounds.

### ON BEING ‘A SYDNEY PERSON’

I like to think of myself as a Sydney person, because in Australia I see no need to assert my Australian identity. After Gao Xingjian won the Nobel Prize, reports in the Australian media only once referred to me, his translator, as “Chinese Australian”. I was generally described as “a Sydney woman” or “a Sydney University academic”. These descriptions meant that I was acknowledged as Australian, and I like this.

Since 2000, Mabel Lee has been awarded the following honours: NSW Premier’s Prize for Translation and the PEN Medallion, Life Member of PEN International (Sydney Centre), Centenary of Federation Medal “for service to Australian Society and literature”, University of Sydney Alumni Award “for her commitment to the promotion of Asian scholarship and creativity in Australia” and Honorary Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

*This interview was conducted at the University of Sydney Library on 19 February 2005 and transcribed from audio tape by Rita Camilleri, Hon. Research Fellow, Monash Asia Institute, Monash University.*

*J.V. D’Cruz is Adjunct Professor in Australia-Asia Relations, Monash Asia Institute, Monash University.*

## TASTY LIFE

Subhash Jaireth: *Yashodhara—Six Seasons Without You*  
(Wild Peony, \$15)

‘Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree’, the centrepiece of Judith Beveridge’s *Wolf Notes* (reviewed *Overland* 178), presents Siddharta Gautama (a.k.a. The Buddha) in itinerant mode, wandering the roads and jungles of ancient India on his spiritual search. Subhash Jaireth’s verse-novel, *Yashodhara*, presents Siddharta Gautama in terms of what the (future) Buddha took himself away from. It’s interested in the consequences of Gautama’s withdrawal from the life he’d become used to—especially in its effects on his wife Yashodhara and their young son Rahul. Subhash Jaireth has arranged the story as a series of lyrics—formal quatrains spoken by Yashodhara—interspersed with commentary by the implied poet, who is also the reader’s contemporary. The quatrain poems, based on medieval and older Indian verse forms, are marvels of rhythmic phrasing and evocative sensuous imagery. They’re vocally intimate, yet have a pleasing and convincing archaism. They bring home to the reader Yashodhara’s initial grief and longing, her bewilderment as the mother of a newly fatherless son, and the longer term of her mourning, as time planes down its sensual edge. The commentaries are astringent. The implied poet is self-accusing, self-interrogating. He’s beguiled by the story he tells, yet also distrusts it. While no sides are overtly taken, the poetry shapes itself around questions. What happens to a family—a community—when one of its members chooses to live out a religious search that is (was) already mythic? What happens when the uncertainties and paths-not-taken of a lived life, are reworked over time into stories and invested with the authority of myth? As icon, The Buddha is said to ‘speak to’ and also to ‘express’ the human condi-

tion. *Yashodhara* locates a segment of ‘the human condition’ in the relationships between its small cast of characters, in their propensity to tell stories about what happened, and then to tell stories about the stories. Subhash Jaireth’s *Yashodhara* does this with subtlety and precision, in poetry that refreshes the senses, makes feelings poignant, and entices thought.

| John Tranter: *Studio Moon* (Salt, \$22.95)

Tranter’s beat is the city, less a nameable hot spot than ‘the city’ of 1950s American film noir—a mythic space, seemingly stable (baddies vs. goodies), yet also destabilising (affect knows no boundaries). Tranter’s poetry renders the mix in perfectly timed, epigrammatic phrasing. Tranter’s long involvement with the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud—rebel, criminal, voluntary poetic mute—now seems displaced onto cinema. It may be going too far to say that the image of the nineteenth-century French peasant boy-genius haunts Tranter’s poetry. But the movie form, which engineers build-ups and climaxes on a deeper scaffold of perpetual audience anticipation, now seems a metonym, in *Studio Moon*, for the unresolved contradictions represented by Rimbaud: volubility and self-imposed silence; thuggishness and tenderness; homoerotic s-&-m and spiritual intensity; scatology and austerity. How many Rimbauts are there? The picture won’t settle; the moral tale has no pay-off (Rimbaud simply exited, stage right). Tranter’s response—which I read in *Studio Moon*’s many suggestions that feelings-are-movies-are-poems—has a contemporary acuteness that goes beyond irony or satire. *Studio Moon* could excite a reader with its suggestion that, in the well-heeled end of the contem-

porary West, ‘experience’ is mediated as if it were cinema-to-be, and that perhaps we suffer the most when we come to feel we’ve botched the movie. Inevitably the question will arise: ah, but *whose* movie? *Whose story?* The poet’s language creates tensions between multiple mediated experiences and the always-potentially-unmediated space of feeling. More stories are begun and then truncated, than are told. Tranter’s affinities with Frank O’Hara ought to be obvious, but *Studio Moon* goes beyond O’Hara’s gadfly charm, as it goes beyond Rimbaud’s boyish exultation and exhortations, into political engagement. The long poem ‘Opus Dei’ is a stunning, deeply thoughtful portrait of a person who could be considered a type, almost a representative of the Christian Right. American or Australian? Where are the boundaries? The implied poet refrains from spelling things out. Suggestion is all. Not everything in *Studio Moon* rises to the heights of ‘Opus Dei’ but the obsessive evocations of Rimbaudian late-, post- and anti-romanticism, through cafes, bookshops, parties, poems and poets, and through a virtual pickling-vat of alcohol, are bloody fascinating. (See also Michael Brennan, ‘Last words: Tranter & Rimbaud’s silence’, *Jacket* 27, April 2005; <jacketmagazine.com/>).

| Leith Morton: *At the Hotel Zudabello* (Island Press, \$22.95)

Leith Morton’s playful, imagistic poems, which open the collection, are at times so abstract that the effort can feel considerable, just to discern even the *abstract* ground on which they play. However, Leith Morton is also a great translator of poetry from Japanese to English, as his *Garland Anthology of Contemporary Japanese Poetry* (1993) amply demonstrated. *At the Hotel Zudabello* rewards its readers with a selection of translations—from Shikibu Izumi (tenth century) through Yosano Akiko (twentieth century) and others; plus haiku from Basho, Buson, Issa, Shiki (already a span of two centuries) and several twentieth-century exponents. These translations have the added boon of Romaji text (i.e. Japanese in English script) printed right next to the English, so the sound of the Japanese can be heard and the mood, imagery, feelings put into English can be explored, seen, felt. All this is a gift to any reader who likes Japanese poetry, and especially to haiku aficionados. It’s a vital clarification—here are the words-made-flesh, giving off their own heat-and-cold, the tonal echoes of their original music.

| D.J. Huppatz: *Book of Poem!* (Textbase, unpriced)

“Please insert this book of poem in your mind. It has the functions of getting rid of cold wind, sharpening eyes . . . It can . . . reduce fat, cure hypertension, promote sex action, augment immunity from disease and prevent losing memory of the old ages.” Got the drift? Rock to the word-music of global Creole, via poems distilled from (it feels like) long, deep but not at all ponderous meditation on language, commerce, pleasure and where we all be headed (yep, that’s a pun). Maybe notice how useful an instrument is this happy non-McLanguage, as a poker-of-holes in the increasingly dull fabric of what-passes-for-seriousness in these Howard days (see: ‘Golf Wear’). “21<sup>st</sup> century poetry is trendy feeling:/ where is author? where is reader?/ everybody knows them/ but nobody knows them.” Go, D.J. Huppatz! Not only it make happy, but could make think. “There is very embarrassing/ to be smart, being fresh is everything.” Oops. “Why don’t we put our faith in this series of words?” Exactly. “Every day it bring/ fresh wind.” Yes.

| Carolyn Gerrish: *Dark Laughter* (Island, \$22.95)

The muse here wears a ‘consumer society’ handstamp yet also insinuates that life has become more complex than the old jibe—‘consume, be silent, die’—once implied. Focusing on the processes entailed by consuming—whether food or clothes or advertising or ‘identity’—the best of these new Gerrish poems have a sneaky delicate humour. Whether under suspicion in an art gallery, or watching a landscape ‘disrobe’, or compiling a low-key but eccentric domestic bestiary, the implied poet keeps the whole thing in constant movement. It’s on the go—rueful, at times klutzy, operating a subversive wit.

| Barry Scott: *Love & Wigs: Poems of Bangkok, Bollywood & Beyond* (Transit Lounge, \$19.95)

Handsomely produced, this is a collection of poems—set in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand—from a new press specialising in Asian–Australian writings and graphics. The poetry moves swiftly beyond the fuss-and-fevers, the agitated surfaces of travelogue. It evokes a spiritual searcher’s floating world, yet is open to where its poems are setting their feet, very interested—and engaging to a reader. Heat, rain, flowers, flesh; the illicit and the innocent; an incessant seeking after something elusive—each poem is



a tantalising dream in which events occur and faces pass by, intent on their own errands, yet etched on the page in words that can invoke as well as depict. And the voyager has a muse. Barry Scott has read and re-read the poetry and prose of Vicki Viidikas, who loved India, and travelled and wrote there many times between 1973 and her death, aged 50, in 1998. Scott's poem 'Writer & reader' is a discerning tribute. He's caught something of Vicki's style, her gift for the falling cadence. And he's steered clear of her weaknesses—the declaiming, the insistence. It's a tribute from one restless, searching artist to another, yet points to a problem commonly human and genuinely spiritual, with flair—with some fine, assured art.

| James Quinton: *Festoon* (email: jbubby@operamail.com)

"No more waiting in this novella!" In this small but rangy first collection of poems, the vocal is, consistently, a young man's—by turns sardonic, jejune, hypersensitive, crude, yet always engaged with the making of the poem and its matter. The writing is committed, without trumpeting about it, and rather naked, without making a drama of that. Thoughtful, abstractly tangled at moments, but the world it creates feels lived-in, alive.

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet.

## floating fund

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Totalling \$1032.

## Beaching

A deserted beach,  
boundary to a tranquil sea.

The silence resonates  
to the rhythm  
of the gentle lapping of the water.

The encroaching dusk,  
a foreboding of the unwelcome.

A whale explodes from the water  
and with mindless determination  
invades the alien sand,  
driven perhaps by:

sounds from another ocean,  
a magnetic fixation,  
a sonar inadequacy  
distorting or destroying communications.

The pack blindly follows  
its fixated leader.

The gathering crowd  
can do little to alleviate the disaster.

Humans have little understanding  
of beachings.

Even after the last election,  
when the  
eagerly indebted  
beached as the  
easily silenced,

we have little understanding  
of self destruction.

BARNEY EGAN

## 1939 Summer's End

The house brimming  
with sun and laughter  
the company of old friends  
sharing food and talk  
that drifts into evening

Our son turns on the wireless  
to catch the nightly bulletin  
It sputters out news of the war—  
death is a sudden contagion  
the day's ease an illusion

One more time he asks his father  
to sign his papers, let him go to sea  
Over and over his asking, again and again  
refusal from one who knows the road he trod  
will serve his son no better

About the table faces flicker disbelief anger dread

My world slips

His father paces the garden, wet face glistening

## At Sea 1940–45

His letters are spare  
these long years  
lived through  
we scan daily papers  
keep an ear to the wireless  
for a word

at night I dream jetsam bodies  
look for his fresh young face  
wake in wild water

drowning

he told me once  
the torpedo room was a sealed area  
bristling with lights, dials, switches

thick with sweat and fear  
man-needing-man  
as they fire their missiles

my son dealing destruction

## In Action July 1945

This time Balikpapan  
The hillside's in flames  
black heat and the stink of burning oil  
you're flooded with sweat shells slip from wet hands

and your fear strides the deck

We make covering fire for our blokes  
in landing barges as they head into battle  
through tight smoke and smouldering water

from one hell to another

Over time I've learnt one thing and it's this—  
if your number comes up it's up.

Dead soldiers float by

When those Kamikazes come at you  
every bone in your body turns to mash

## Home-Coming 1945

"You're skinnier than ever, kid!" old Tom says,  
His braying laugh breaks to a harsh, phlegmy cough  
He was a stretcher-bearer in the last one.

I'm no kid anymore. But he knows that.

Same old scene. My old man in his cane chair, smoking a cigar.  
arguing politics with Tom . . . Webster's Dictionary to hand  
on the table—I see it's got a new binding at last—and the sturdy  
old Breville wireless where we listened to the news.

I've gone past all this.

No-one mentions the war.

Neighbours drop in to welcome me back.

No-one mentions my stutter.

My mother watches with that look in her eyes  
plies me with food and egg-flips  
'to build you up' she smiles.

Not even she can do that.

My head's awash.  
At night waves thunder.  
Guns or is it men? howling.  
My mad wet dream.

The old man doesn't drink anymore.  
Funny that. Only it was never a laughing matter.  
Funny though. Because now I can understand why he did.

## Return

Our son has come home  
cast taut like tripwire  
He looks out at us from his mask  
What is it he sees?  
Never still.  
He paces the house, the garden  
lights one cigarette from another.  
So bare his sleep  
that last evening when I slipped  
quiet past his room  
he started from his bed  
fumbling into his clothes  
shuddering bleak-faced.  
I talked to him soothing  
as I did when he was a small boy  
until he fell back into his body,  
his breath easing as his eyes returned.  
I told him he was home, he was safe.

Today he says nothing.  
Did I dream his nightmare?

The past the present  
blunted jagged  
These pieces will never seam.

## Fluidity

I poured an infinite river into the cup of my hand,  
its sweet waters mingled, and slid over smooth stones,  
slipped through my hand's creases, then under my skin,  
it curved through my body and turned flesh to sand.  
It washed clean through my heart and emptied my bones:  
For a few years I held my river, and it ran within.

But even now, when I know it is safe and within,  
I am warned by the ticking of an unseen clock hand,  
which is cold and is reaching and is sharp as old bones  
and is turning my tears into blue little stones,  
which fall from my eyes into hourglass sand:  
I fear that the river will wear a split in my skin.

Too late now, for the water is as familiar as skin,  
and by now my blood had turned to water within.  
But time threatens to bleed me out onto the sand,  
so I grasp at the current with a powerless hand.  
I reach for blue-water, but grab only slime-stones  
and a new razor fear stabs its way through my bones:

—that, when the hand strikes, bones shall separate from bones  
until all that's left holding me will be my simple skin,  
I'll crouch to the ground and search through drying stones,  
but I still will have lost my sweet river from within;  
because I couldn't hold water in my heart or my hand,  
my hands will fall empty; my heart will collapse into sand—

Until then, if it happens, I'll ignore the hourglass sand,  
even as it trickles and spreads through my bones.  
Like people, a river won't be contained by a hand,  
even if it is as familiar to me as my own skin:  
Even ice melts and pours out from within,  
and will splash away lost, and fall under the stones.

I'll make myself hard, and fill my belly with stones,  
I'll ignore tears for now, and fill my eyes with sand.  
It is because I ache so much to keep him within,  
to have him to fill the spaces between my bones—  
For now, I'll calm, and love him, and I'll fingerprint his skin  
and stop trying to catch currents with only my hand.

For though stones are solid, and unmoving as bones,  
though a hand can't contain the quick hourglass sand,  
and rivers can wash over skin—I can't know what's within.

KATIE KIMBERLEY

## The Eyes of a Dragon

The novelist tries again to imagine the scene.  
She wants to evoke the heat, the drought,  
the sudden panic. Breathe life into the blank page.  
She wishes her writing would come more easily,  
but it never does. Time to gee herself up,  
close her eyes and begin. 1928. The soak  
near Coniston Station. There'd be an old man,  
she thinks, sitting by the charred fireplace.  
Bearded dragon, he'd love to catch a dragon  
and roast it slowly, eat it with nardoo damper  
and pigweed. The others are talking about the trouble  
with Marungali. Going over it all again.  
That white bloke, Brooks, the one who hunts dingoes,  
took Marungali for wife without permission or gifts.  
So Bullfrog speared him. Of course. It was  
just like Bullfrog. Bullfrog and Paddirka.  
Now the two of them are hiding in the hills,  
where they'll be safe. Something moves.  
Is that my lizard over there? The old man  
gets up and walks noiselessly into the mulga.  
The others ignore him. Crouching behind  
the dragon, he raises his nulla-nulla.  
But he is too late. The novelist stops writing;  
she shifts in her chair. She hears children playing,  
an engine turning over, birds chattering, the sounds  
of a suburban afternoon. She wants the old man to live.  
She pleads with Constable William Murray, asking him  
politely to lower his Martini-Henry Mark Two rifle,  
asking him to remember that the Warlpiri don't speak  
English and won't have a clue what he means  
when he yells, "Surrender in the name of the King!"  
But she cannot rewrite history, nor does she want to.  
Murray grips the reins of his sorrel mare  
with his left hand and shoots with his right.  
The bare backs of fleeing women, gunsmoke  
floating across his face. She cannot save the old man.  
She squints into the sun with the eyes of a dragon.  
Over there, sprawled on the red dirt, she watches  
the dust settle on an old man's bleeding lips.

ANDY KISSANE

# Prophecy

For two years you have been imprisoned  
in E Block on a hill surrounded by walls

of unbreakable glass. You arrived on a south Auckland beach  
were met by a fur-seal resembling Kahlil Gibran

trapped in a trance and writing prophetic  
statements in the sand about people

populating the earth for the express purpose of  
beating seals into furs to be sold to the

wearers of coats and hats and other soft things  
to keep out cold winter nights.

You arrived at 2pm on a day when trees  
were red with flowers and the moon

matched the sun for size and the sea was woven  
flat as a mat and other seals were starting to

congregate and squabble for top locations.  
The walk inland was revelatory. Each

step featured a new horizon  
brought new sights—a house

of corrugated iron a rusty car in weeds a  
street without people a huge sky

which covered a city. Men  
with black suns for glasses

took one look at your clothes your skin your webbed  
barefeet and chucked you into a prison for being different.

For two years you have walked the same yard in circles  
worn a track through grass and bitumen

travelled anticlockwise—always meeting yourself. For  
two years you have tried to write a letter to

the Prime Minister about who you are your family your  
neighbours about apartheid and injustice your love for

etymology your hatred for confined spaces. Each night you  
hear seals shuffling on beaches in the silence of giving

you see the big watery eyes of the prophet  
looking at you reminding you of the killing

sands of the seals the seasonal plunder that is to  
come the reward that is not everlasting the day

that is suddenly skinned of its fur. You live in solitary  
where everything outside is visible

but can't be touched everything's possible  
to the senses but seemingly impossible. One day

according to the man with the key  
you'll walk out into the brightness of a morning to

watch the last of the fur-seals finally  
plunging back into the sea and you will be

tempted to go but that's not why  
you came here at all why you arrived

to be something else somebody different  
something illusory.

IAIN BRITTON

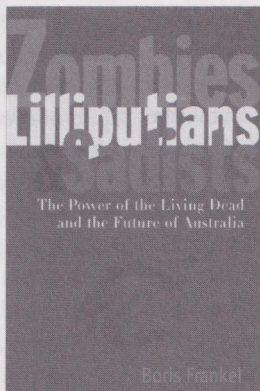
## TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Boris Frankel: *Zombies, Lilliputians and Sadists: The Power of the Living Dead and the Future of Australia* (FACP, \$29.95).

The peculiar fact that a fourth-term Coalition government presides in Canberra yet Labor rules throughout the States is frequently remarked upon but seldom explained. Perhaps the simplest reasoning is the truest: the electorate prefers the ALP to run its schools and hospitals but, as John Howard surely guessed, is less distrustful of the Liberals when faced with the Twin Panics (terrorism and interest rates). This makes Australians seem rather canny in the nuanced way they tend to their imagined interests. On the other hand it exposes a profound conservatism in relation to matters of security, both physical and economic. The sources of this conservatism include a century or so of insularity and anxiety, and the over-inflated housing bubble, but also global processes that run deep. Fully conscious of the immense challenge lying before him, Boris Frankel faces this relentlessly creeping tide, dives in, and starts freestyling.

His worthy aim is to supersede the obsolete tools usually deployed to survey the Australian political terrain. In place of the infinitely differentiable spectrum of Left and Right, Frankel describes the three fundamental mindsets among participants in Australian policy debate, differentiated according to quasi-psychological rather than directly political criteria. He thus builds a topology based on Australian policy character types. Within each category a range of political perspectives is possible. Rather than merely providing another portrait of the various 'sides', this enables Frankel to discern clues about the psychosocial (dys-)functioning of political and policy debate in Australia.

First up walk the 'zombies', frozen in a mummified embrace of ideas and understandings from a dead past. Zombies include right-wing nationalists (One Nation types), the remnants of the revolutionary Left, and, generally, the religious, both funda-



mentalists and those concerned to build a more 'progressive' and 'relevant' church. What unites this disparate collection is not any common understanding but the tenacious way they cling to their outmoded dreams in spite of anything they encounter in the dark heart of the present. Hence both their impotence and their charm.

Next are the Lilliputians, short of sight and small of mind. 'Reformers' and bureaucrats, they are moles who industriously burrow their way through, never seeing past their noses, never certain where they are burrowing *to*. Sub-types include progressives and liberals dedicated to waging their own micro-skirmishes against neo-liberalism, and idolatrous worshippers at the altar of the 'knowledge economy'. What brings them together is their inability to see that they are in fact the shepherds of the neo-liberal wolf.

Finally come the sadists. These are less differentiated, because they share something more substantial: a love of control, power, and destruction. Sadists really run the show—they are the true driving force behind Australian politics and economics—but are secretly necrophiliacs. They are the vampiric employers, managers, and legislators who take joyless pleasure in sucking the life out of the body politic, its institutions, and democracy.

There is a remarkable narrative arc to this book. It is achieved not through any plot development but rather its evolving style. Frankel is frustrated by the refusal of the zombies to awake from their slumber, but his overall tone is almost affectionate. Whatever their failings, at least the zombies do not serve the current agenda. At least they are committed to something, however fanciful or absurd.

The Lilliputians are more of an annoyance, because compared with zombie blindness their myopia is more dangerous. They have overseen, for instance, the incremental decay of the education system. Some imagine themselves fighting a rearguard action against the wreckers, while others are the vanguard of a

PowerPoint-led education 'revolution', but all are incapable of reflecting on the purpose of education as such. Or, again, triumphantly identifying themselves as citizens of the future, it never occurs to Lilliputians that support for reconciliation, republicanism, refugees and Kyoto are all perfectly compatible with naked neo-liberalism.

When he turns to the dehumanising sadists, however, Frankel's prose expresses not only annoyance but bitter fury. He realises that, Lubitsch aside, it's not easy to satirise Nazis. Frankel's rage forces the reader to a confrontation. To my ears he increasingly sounds like an outraged Left zombie, but with the unusual distinction of years spent earnestly studying 'reports' and devising imaginative 'solutions'. Picture the despair of someone whose ideas *are* alive, yet who feels just as ignored as the most dogmatic International Socialist.

As the stakes are hammered into each of these living-dead monsters, one perceives that at journey's end lie conclusions about 'what is to be done'. Apprehension about this inevitable climax slowly builds.

I won't spoil the denouement, but will say that all his proposals, however thoughtful, also rely upon the possibility that 'the unimaginable could happen'. The line between Frankel and any generic utopian zombie starts to seem razor thin. This concluding element of optimism runs counter to what precedes it, and shows the internal struggle required to hold two utterly opposed notions simultaneously. Anti-sadist rather than anti-capitalist, he nevertheless exposes his own unavoidable and necessary masochism. In spite of everything, he too clings to an almost tangible vision of paradise. The trouble is the sadists and their Lilliputian henchmen can't be repressed, and the dream keeps dissolving into nightmarish reality. Despite this melancholic aspect, the virtue of this volume lies in the unforgiving light it shines into the uncanny, shadowy, and possibly bottomless cavern of Australia's politically stunted and deformed. To all the zombies, Lilliputians, and sadists, however, heed this warning: Frankel rankles.

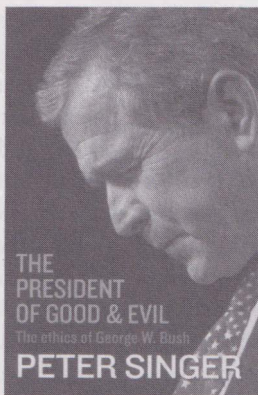
Dan Ross is co-director of the recent film, *The Ister*, and author of *Violent Democracy*, published by CUP in 2004.

## A Fruitless Search for Ethics

### GEOFF BOUCHER

Peter Singer: *The President of Good and Evil* (Text Publishing, \$30)

In *The President of Good and Evil*, internationally renowned philosopher Peter Singer subjects the doctrines of George W. Bush to searching ethical scrutiny. Despite manifest intellectual limitations, Bush presents himself as a person of moral substance whose presidency is characterised by the rhetoric of conflict between good and evil. Professing to "take George W. Bush seriously", Singer demolishes the arguments used by the President for his domestic and foreign policies. Singer systematically contrasts Bush's declarations of principle with the political reality of his programs, and demonstrates that Bush not only uses moral rhetoric as a screen for political manoeuvres, but also cannot maintain a coherent ethical position across his many contradictory principles. "In the president of the most powerful nation on earth," Singer warns, "self-righteousness and hypocrisy are dangerous



vices." Singer presents his arguments in accessible language and documents his case scrupulously. Not surprisingly, his conclusion is that Bush's views "lack any clear and consistent philosophical underpinning".

The result is like watching a chess master take on a rank amateur—and unfortunately, it is also about as edifying. Quite simply, the book misses its mark. Despite announcing that Bush "represents a distinctively American moral outlook" which "tens of millions of Americans" accept, Singer never comes to grips with this belief structure. He seems unversed in the historical literature on American conservatism and the religious Right, and unaware of the existence of a tradition of left-wing ideology critique that might have rescued his book from political naivety. Instead, he analyses Bush's policy statements as if they were instances of formal moral reasoning, only to discover at the end of the book that, in the crucial case of the Iraq war, Bush's personal convictions were completely irrelevant.





On the one hand, Singer discovers that Bush relies on instinctive moral reactions that are combined ad hoc with a mixture of contradictory religious and political discourses. On the other hand, this confused screen of justifications and personal intuitions cannot explain the clear and coherent imperial agenda driving the war on Iraq, making it probable that Bush “really was someone’s puppet”. In other words, Bush’s political rhetoric is just that: a screen masking an anonymous economic and political structure, from which clear (but non-moral) interests can be straightforwardly derived. Faced with the collapse of his governing assumption—that moral argument can assign individual responsibility to political actors—Singer retreats in the direction of conspiracy theories. This salvages the assumption that politics can be explained in terms of a unified and conscious intentionality, at the cost of absurdity.

Consequently, the book abounds in lost opportunities. Although Singer mentions the neo-conservative philosophers behind the ideologues advising the President, such as Leo Strauss and Leon Kass, and the theologians of the Christian Right, such as Jean Bethke Elshtain, he does not appear interested in an extended critique of their ethical positions. More importantly, despite mentioning the centrality of Bush’s moral intuitions several times, Singer lacks the conceptual apparatus to analyse how these link ethical

reasoning and political calculation. If we understand ideology to be a ‘whole structure of feeling’ based in ‘lived experience’, a contradictory medley of gut reactions and discursive fragments, which seems coherent because it is taken for granted, and appears rational because it guides the established routines of everyday life, then Bush’s speeches are not about moral philosophy at all. They are examples of ideological persuasion, efforts to justify political calculations in quasi-ethical terms by relating these terms to the moral intuitions and ‘common sense’ assumptions of American culture.

It is the absence of the category of ideology that explains Singer’s failure in *The President of Good and Evil*. As a work of moral philosophy, despite mentioning qualified opponents, it refuses sustained philosophical debate. As an intervention in the current ideological climate, it comprehensively misunderstands its discursive context, pitching its arguments at a completely incorrect level of abstraction. Singer plays the late modern John Stuart Mill, confronting imperialism with the evidence of its immorality. This might impress his undergraduates, but it is unlikely to make any political difference.

Geoff Boucher lecturers in literature and works as a research fellow for the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at Deakin University.

## A Green Future

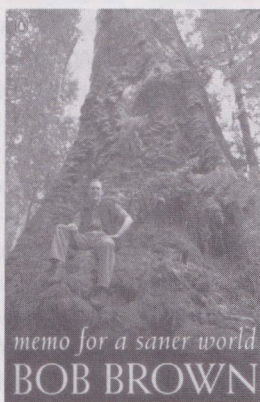
### SHANE HOPKINSON

Bob Brown: *Memo for a Saner World* (Penguin, \$24.95)

James Norman: *Bob Brown: Gentle Revolutionary* (Allen & Unwin, \$29.95)

The Greens emerged from the recent elections as the only principled winners, doubling their Senate places with more than 900,000 votes. Prior to this, two books emerged which shed light on the mixture of ethics and politics that characterises the Australian Greens and their leader Dr Bob Brown. Both books are very good—especially for those new to Green politics.

Bob Brown’s autobiographical *Memo for a Saner World* is a manifesto on a range of global Green issues (the global Greens charter is included as an



appendix). The book traces the Green movement through Brown’s eyes, beginning with the Franklin Blockade in the early 1980s, which is seen by many as the birthplace of the movement. Brown makes clear the extent to which the Party grew, step by step, out of the series of mass actions that would eventually save the Franklin. It goes on to detail the Green’s electoral experiences in Tasmania, through to the recent parliamentary confrontation with US President George Bush. It shows how the

Greens represent an ethical political alternative which would have been even more successful in the recent elections had the ALP acted according to principle and preferred the Greens ahead of Family First.

The second book is a readable and accessible bi-

ography of Brown. One gets the sense of a man carried forward by his convictions, somewhat reluctantly, into politics. It traces his life from his early years in Oberon in Central Western NSW, as the son of a policeman, through his troubled years growing up gay in the fifties and sixties. It explores his initial, conservative political leanings, his radicalisation by the Vietnam War, through to his first anti-nuclear actions and involvement in Gay Rights campaigns—again culminating in the confrontation with Bush. The book leaves no doubt that Bob Brown is a man of physical courage as well as sensitivity, and that both traits have been central to his role in forging an alternative to the neo-liberal consensus.

Brown is supportive of direct action and public protest politics, especially against logging companies, who he sees as profiteering from ‘god-given’ natural resources which should be freely accessible. In this context he explores the issue of violence—noting that despite the Greens being painted as feral extremists, most often it is they who are the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence—mainly at the hands of loggers, with the at least implicit support of the local constabulary and the media, if not the whole political system. Yet, Brown still relies on Green parliamentarians being able to pass laws to stop both violence and logging; and to force markets to “do what they should do”. Given that such laws already exist, and given acknowledgement that those with vested interests in exploiting the forests are willing to act both unethically and often illegally, this looks a bit thin. The recent multi-million-dollar damages actions issued against him and other environmentalists by Tasmanian timber giant Gunns, reinforces this point.

In both books it is clear that for Brown nature is a spiritual force from which he draws inspiration. He contrasts this earth spirit with a lifestyle based on materialism and money. In relation to issues like global warming, Brown sees the rich nations as over-consuming resources. He frames this as a *moral* challenge, where the damage that has been done has been based on “greed and studied ignorance”. He suggests that in some respects the battle with market fundamentalists is a simple one of “green vs greed”.

In Norman’s book I hoped to learn more about Brown’s ideas about how to fundamentally change an unsustainable system whilst also seeking to work within the rules of that system. Again the narrative relies on an idea that the primordial bond to nature

will allow people to develop a radical vision of a democratic, people-centred and sustainable society. I find it dubious that a supposedly unconscious, inherent connection to nature can be used to ground a ‘green’ politics. Likewise the idea of ‘greed’ implies something of a conscious intent to consume more than one’s fair share. Maybe this applies to some sections of the community but while people do consume in unsustainable ways, such a lifestyle under capitalism is a ‘normal’, commonsense way to live. There isn’t the clear or even partly formed intention to act destructively that the notion of ‘greed’ implies.

Alternative politics has to develop in the struggle between ideas and with the growing success of the Greens it is important to be well armed as the Party mobilises to enact its principles without compromising the central vision of a sustainable society based on radical democracy. Two things threaten in the intervening period—one is a mainstreaming of the Greens—a search for respectability that compromises that vision. The other is that with the conservatives controlling the Senate, parliament will be a limited vehicle for social change. It is important that the Party learns to mobilise people in the streets against Howard’s agenda—and the recent Gunn writs are clearly pre-emptive actions on those planning such a course of action.

In this respect, missing from both these accounts is the other point of origin of the Green movement: the BLF and the the early 1970s Green bans. While this occurred when Brown was in London, it has been referred to by him and others as the source of the term ‘Green’, so its omission from both books is quite disappointing, especially after the debacle of Tasmanian forestry workers seeming to rally to Howard in the federal election. This other root of the Green movement may prove important in the years ahead: it shows the potential power of the Greens if they can forge links with the labour movement and broaden their appeal to working-class people.

For Brown it is clear that within his calls for sustainability over capitalism and compassion over profit there resides the implicit vision of a very different world. However I think we need more than a statement of values and there is not enough vision or direction. There needs to be more fire and a little less spirit.

*Shane Hopkinson is a sociology lecturer at Central Queensland University and convenor of Mackay Greens.*

# A Genuine Love Story

JENNIFER STRAUSS

Patricia Clarke & Meredith McKinney (eds): *The Equal Heart and Mind: Letters between Judith Wright and Jack McKinney* (UQP, \$24.95)

It will probably be Judith Wright's name that draws readers to this collection of letters exchanged between her and Jack McKinney during two periods of separation within a relationship central to their lives from their first meeting in Brisbane in 1944 until McKinney's death in 1966. This would not necessarily please her. Perhaps she knew, by the end of a long and distinguished life, that few people would agree with her assertion that "when my modest name goes down in posterity it will be because I had the honour of typing the first copies [of a series of articles McKinney was writing in 1946]". Nonetheless, she never abandoned her conviction that McKinney's philosophy mattered and that the world was the poorer for wilfully ignoring it. She accepted with manifest ardour the idea that, as poet and philosopher, they shared "the job" of making the world listen to what it needed to hear if it was to be cured of a despairing sense of meaninglessness and isolation by grasping the proper relationship between world and word, concept and experience. The letters do not, of course, spell out the bases of McKinney's philosophy in any systematic way, since they begin with the two correspondents already fully engaged in a discussion, the premises of which are mostly taken for granted. The introductory Memoir from their only child, Meredith McKinney, provides a helpful summary of the essentials of his position and wise readers will resist any temptation to skip it and plunge straight into the letters.

The largest section of these covers the two years of a secret love affair between an emerging poet and the much older man who had earlier left his marriage and set out to revolutionise philosophical thought. The phrase 'living in sin' is nowadays jocular: Wright, however, was not joking when she wrote to McKinney that from the perspective of her upper-class rural background "you and I are queer and sinful fish". Not until 1946 did she manage to tell her father about their relationship, reporting that he broke down and

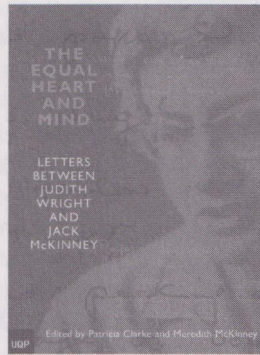
cried at the news. He appears nonetheless to have developed a friendly relationship with McKinney and to have supported the couple when their daughter was born, an 'illegitimate' child, in 1950. McKinney's Catholic wife, who could not countenance divorce, is not mentioned in these letters, but they record friendly contact with his children.

It may be that the passion of Wright's early conviction of the importance of 'the job' became overlaid by later passionate hopes for the environment and for justice to the Indigenous people of a "much-loved land". These are visible here only in the brief Epilogue where she speaks sadly of being distracted by her work for the Wilderness Society from attending fully to McKinney's failing health. In reading letters, where the past is unmediated by later knowledge, it is the reader who is allowed an ironic perspective. Retrospect lends a particular poignancy to the moment when Wright, invited to

join the Queensland Authors' and Artists' Association, protests that she has "no sense of public service whatever".

I think that she would have seen later engagements with public service as a continuum of, not a diversion from, the intense intellectual and emotional experience she shared with McKinney. And it was a shared experience. As the title takes pains to establish, Wright, despite occasional flourishes like the one quoted, was no mere handmaiden, but an active collaborator whose quite healthy ego about her poetic worth produces some distinctly uncharitable remarks about editors like Clem Christesen or the poet described as a "long drink of arsenic and water". Nor, on the other hand, was McKinney a mere eccentric, parasitic on the vitality of a youthful lover.

Nonetheless equality of heart and mind does not always mean unanimity, and the exchange revealing the tension caused by Wright's desire to have a child is a moving and rare moment of pain in the relationship. We don't find out how this knot was untangled, since it happens in the sanctuary of their life together at Tamborine Mountain. The smaller, more domesticated, set of letters exchanged during Wright's months in hospital thanks to a difficult pregnancy and recuperation from a caesarian delivery, certainly don't show McKinney as a reluctant father. His rather touching response to Wright's message



that she is “suspected of possible twins” is to vary his concluding message from “Love to both” to “love to you *all*”.

These letters indeed constitute a love story. If it has extraordinary dimensions, it is also rich in intimate ordinary details: darned socks and the need for nightdresses jostle with Susan Stebbing and Heidegger. The intermitted poems may speak with

a richer, more artful rhetoric, but their effect is not to diminish the letters but to validate the depth of a relationship that is not only recorded but also to some extent shaped by them, especially in the early years of intermittent separation.

*Jennifer Strauss is a poet, editor and critic and her monograph Judith Wright was published by OUP.*

## Death, Description, Dislike

### RICHARD KING

Bruce Dawe: *The Headlong Traffic* (Pearson Education Australia, \$24.95)

Kieran Carroll: *The Night I Saw Terry Alderman Dancing to Nick Cave at Chasers* (Ginninderra Press, \$15)

Paul Mitchell: *Minorphysics* (Interactive Press, \$22)

Ouyang Yu: *New and Selected Poems* (Salt Publishing, \$22.95)

As the title of Bruce Dawe’s new collection, *The Headlong Traffic*, appears to imply, there is something Canute-like about the poet’s attempt to arrest in words the particular moment. Poems are stays against eternity, but in the end they cannot stop “the headlong traffic of history”, of age and the only end of age. “It is the drift, the steady drift that wins” runs the tender refrain in Dawe’s ‘Drift’, a near-villanelle and as such wholly suited to the anguished resignation it singingly describes. The poem is a stay against eternity, but the headlong traffic continues apace.

The subjects of age, of death and of grief have a central place in *The Headlong Traffic*. ‘An Easter Saturday Evening Dream’ describes a sort of surreal resurrection (“your face / was a hollow oval only”) and in ‘Evergreen’ Dawe talks of “the guilt of forgetting, the one grave / on which the grass is evergreen”. These personal poems are much more successful than Dawe’s more explicitly religious offerings, which tend to come across as rather didactic. Poetry which has a palpable design on us is, as Keats saw, rarely successful.

One way to arrest the particular moment is to encapsulate it in a striking image, and in this respect Dawe is occasionally brilliant. In ‘The Cyclists Club’, the handlebars of a racing bike are described as “drooping like Zapata moustaches”, and in ‘Australian Ruins’ some iron sheds are “stained with the spreading sunset of rust”. When, however, the poet

describes a windmill as “creaking quixotically” he is merely being frivolous: phonetically imitative of the thing it describes, the adjective is nevertheless just a joke, a knowing wink to the cultured reader. There are also too many puns for my liking. “So *that* is what is meant by *the Thai’s that bind!*?” says Dawe of a dodgy Malaysian meal (the poem is entitled ‘Malais-ia’). Fortunately, there are enough fine things in the book to compensate for these occasional comic outbursts.

Kieran Carroll is funnier than Dawe, but he doesn’t have Dawe’s gravitas. Indeed, there is a singular lack of gravitas in *The Night I Saw Terry Alderman Dancing to Nick Cave at Chasers*, as that title suggests. It is, as Carroll says at one point, “as if a guy called ‘FRIVOLOUS’ / walked in on / a guy called ‘CEREBRAL’”. When the high style is employed it is done so comically, in order to provide an amusing contrast with the invariably trivial subject matter. Hence ‘Lament for the Chicken Twistie’ or ‘Summer Ode to the Sporting 70s’:

*Bring back the moustache!*

*Boony retires, the essential trademark dies.*

*Forget all those inner-city café latte goatees.*

*There was a unity in that piece of hair.*

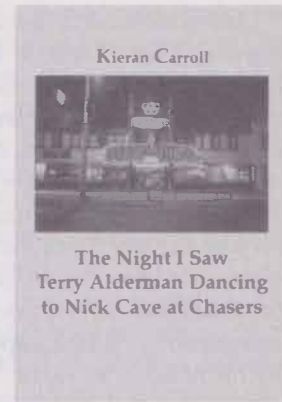
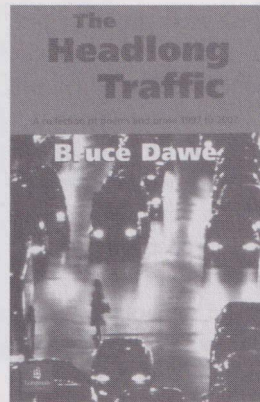
“Am I really up hours earlier than the rest of my generation?” Carroll asks, in ‘New Year’s Morning’, and this is indeed how he comes across: as more alive than anyone else to a particular period of popular culture. Carroll’s generation is my generation (‘Generation Spandau Ballet’), and it is the case that to be in one’s 30s is often to feel between two worlds. But Carroll appears to feel this acutely. For all its references to popular culture, this is a book about getting old.

The sense of being out of place is figured by the armpit-igniting spectacle of Terry Alderman strutting his stuff, surrounded by “gangs of diminutive goths” (“their eyeliner thicker than shoelaces”). And as that image suggests, this book is fun. Fun but not that nourishing—a bit like eating Chicken Twisties.

*Minorphysics*, by Paul Mitchell, has something of Carroll’s wackiness. 747s jog the block; cars get caught in Buddhist gridlock; water bottles plucked from fridges meditate on the arbitrary nature of existence. Occasionally, when strangeness is allied to description, Mitchell reveals a Martian gift that announces him as a devotee of Murray: “the road to home / is lined by wheelie bins in military green. / Lids open, saluting us”. In ‘Leaving Glenthompson’ the poet shows that description is indeed where his talents lie:

*Next-door the RSL club’s laughing,  
multi-coloured windows wink and blink  
and flick out the occasional cackling digger  
two hours late for dinner*

The problem for me with *Minorphysics* is that Mitchell’s occasional flashes of brilliance do not in the end amount to anything other than solidly localised incidents. A case in point is ‘Kevin Robert Mitchell’, a poem about the poet’s father, whose signature is described—quite vividly, I think—as “a spinning mini Ferris wheel / on the trail of a centipede”. But despite this nugget of fine description, the poem itself is a complete non-event, an essentially idle meditation on the signature’s ostensible dearth of letters. “[S]omebody stole my father’s name / left him with a wobbly line”—the final line



is displayed on its own, as if it is saying something important. But what it is saying is entirely obscure.

It becomes apparent, reading Ouyang Yu, that not many people return his calls. It also becomes apparent why: he doesn’t appear to like his friends. “i’d be so angry”, he says at one point, “i’d just dial a familiar number / and hiss into the phone / wordlessly”. And that’s not all. Ouyang Yu hopes that, one day, “a wireless telephone gun” will be invented, so he can not only hiss, but shoot at you, too.

Ouyang Yu’s contempt for humanity (especially Australian humanity) is, in the end, his own affair, and as long as he doesn’t make good on the threat that the tone of his poems implicitly makes, I don’t suppose anyone really cares. As for the *quality* of Ouyang Yu’s poems: suffice it to say, I disliked this book (*New and Selected Poems*) as much as I felt it disliked me.

*Richard King is a reviewer currently living in the UK.*

## A Tale of Dislocation

**RACHEL SLATER**

| Shirley Hazzard: *The Great Fire* (Virago, \$28)

Shirley Hazzard won the 2003 National Book Award for fiction in the US, was short-listed for the Orange Prize and long-listed for the Man Booker Prize in the UK, and with *The Great Fire* last year won Australia’s Miles Franklin Award. Set predominantly in the immediate post Second World War Japan and Hong Kong, with brief detours to Britain and New Zealand, this long awaited novel

(twenty years in the writing) addresses the complex themes of war, survival and recovery.

Accompanied by a cover reproduction of Turner’s *Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, the title suggests parallels between the Second World War and the 1666 ‘great fire’ of London. That fire caused death and destruction but also ended a rampant plague, and like London then, the world of this novel seems fragile but ripe for renewal. Permeating the novel is beautifully conveyed nostalgia for a time when the world seemed on the brink of major ideological and social change.

At this moment in history we meet the main protagonist, Aldred Leith. At 32 he does “not consider himself young”, having sustained both physical and emotional scars in becoming a decorated British war hero. Despite his bravery, he remains in the shadow of his eminent father, a man who writes famously about love while being unable to demonstrate it to his wife and son. Leith’s arrival in postwar Japan, to observe and describe the impact of battle and defeat on an ancient culture, marks the start of Hazzard’s examination of British imperialism. Leith is repulsed by his position as victor, the obvious devastation emphasising the Pyrrhic nature of this victory. The only real lesson to be gained is that the consequences do not stop when the fighting does.

During his exploration of a shattered nation Leith meets two teenagers, Ben and Helen Driscoll, themselves damaged and distant. In the consciousness of these two dislocated people, literature plays a pivotal role; we are shown reading as an experience capable of changing lives. Leith is captivated by the siblings’ beauty and intelligence and soon falls in love with the 17-year-old Helen. He seeks to ‘rescue’ her from her boorish and ruthlessly ambitious parents and her nullifying life of exile in New Zealand. Hazzard depicts this country as a land with an “antipodean touch of desolation”. The inhabitants are “longing for their home”.

Looking back to her youth in the 1940s, this may indeed have been Hazzard’s perception of Australia. She has had to defend this position in interviews, claiming: “I’m just depicting what I grew up with . . . I was born into the British Empire. In those days, there was only one way out for a bookish girl with aspirations, and that was a one-way ticket to Europe.” Yet Hazzard is writing almost sixty years after the events and could have been expected to turn a more ironic gaze upon the relationship of the Antipodes with Britain and the rest of the world.

A more sympathetically portrayed Australian can be found in the character of Peter Exley, Leith’s long-time friend and fellow veteran, who interrogates suspected war criminals in Hong Kong. Exley’s story runs both parallel to and through Leith’s own and is similarly a tale of disenchantment with war and yearning for love. While Exley’s story substantiates Leith’s own, it becomes at times a diversion to the main event, disrupting the narrative flow.

There are other moments of disjuncture in the novel, such as the overly literary conversations between characters. All of the characters in this story are dislocated however, which perhaps explains their mannered interaction. Every line of dialogue is accompanied by at least a line of what is not said, an explication of the story that lies behind the words. And Hazzard writes without melodrama or hyperbole.

The story ends with a mercy dash to New Zealand and Leith’s hope of ‘saving’ Helen from life in the colonies and returning her ‘home’ to Britain as his wife. Hazzard does not problematise this resolution. In fact the reader is encouraged throughout the novel to hope for this very outcome. However this retreat into Britain as mother country and into marriage and family seems a very individualistic approach to the universal trauma and misery of war. The story ends with a decidedly old-fashioned possibility of happiness. In the realisation of the love between Leith and Helen, Hazzard uncovers the capacity of love to restore a person, or at least to heal old wounds and enable a new beginning.

Thankfully the narrowly nationalistic impulse that ruled works by Frank Moorhouse, Christina Stead and others insufficiently ‘Australian’ to be eligible for the Miles Franklin, has been reconsidered. *The Great Fire* is a worthy winner.

*Rachel Slater is a researcher in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History, University of Queensland.*

## Genre-bending in Elsinore

**MERRILL FINDLAY**

| Merle Thornton: *After Moonlight* (Interactive Press, \$25)

Somewhere in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*’s archives there’s a black-and-white photograph taken in March 1965 of two stylish young women quietly enjoying a

beer in a public bar. One is wearing a white tailored knee-length suit, the other a timeless light-coloured short-sleeved frock. By today’s standards they look as though they’re going to a garden party, but if you let your eyes slide down their clear nylons towards

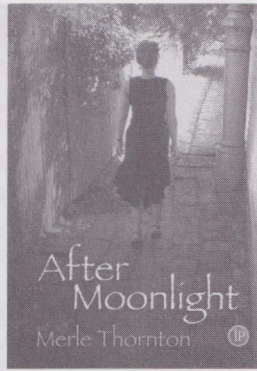
their white stiletto heels and high wedges you'll notice a dog chain and padlock securing them by the ankles to the bar's foot rail.

The pub is Brisbane's up-market Regatta Hotel; the women are Merle Thornton and Ro Bognor, and the chain and padlock signify their refusal to be 'disappeared' into the 'Ladies Lounge' while their spouses and colleagues network, close deals and socialise in the public bar. "It is not just the right to drink in bars we are seeking," Thornton said at the time. "We are after equal educational opportunities for women, equal job opportunities and equal treatment in every direction."

Forty years on, and after a long career as an academic, scriptwriter and playwright, Thornton has published her first novel. Given her background you'd expect her to offer readers a good strong thought-provoking brew rather than a fizzy commercial genre-fiction cocktail, and she does. She also transgresses established genre boundaries as if they were 1960s drinking laws.

*After Moonlight* opens in a Carlton bookshop within walking distance of a certain sandstone university. The 37-year-old narrator, Claire Meredith, a part-time university teacher and documentary filmmaker, is thumbing through *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (the entries for Free will and Determinism) while she tries not to think about her ex, a Foucault-fixated lecturer and "pathological tail-chaser" called Roger Wilkinson, with whom she desperately wanted a child. After surviving seven years of Roger's Foucault-speak Claire is reduced to defining herself as "Foucault flotsam", a mere "vehicle for the discourse of domesticity", but she remains obsessed with this man. She stalks him, harasses him with phone calls, and gatecrashes his new lover's thirtieth birthday party in the house she once shared with him. She gets very drunk at the party, behaves outrageously and is 'rescued' by Jim, the university's Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who gives her a lift and a grope in his "midnight blue Porsche".

This brief synopsis of the first few chapters might suggest that *After Moonlight* is a satirical Campus Novel in the tradition of *Lucky Jim* (Kingsley Amis), *Groves of Academe* (Mary McCarthy), *The History Man* (Malcolm Bradbury), or more recently *Human Stain* (Philip Roth) and *I am Charlotte Simmons*



(Tom Wolfe). Roger's appallingly bad behaviour with his female students; the DVC's grope and ongoing affair with the novel's protagonist, the aridity of his marriage, his disenchantment with the institution he describes as "an advanced kindly", and his uncritical embrace of the university's new "entrepreneurial spirit" are classic Campus Novel themes. The painfully ironic eulogy to "disinterested inquiry" from a "distinguished classicist and defender

of the humanities" at the launch of Claire's corporate video, and her students' inability to peer below the surface of *Hamlet* in her English Literature classes also fit the Campus genre. Academics will either grin or grimace as they recognise the institutional pathologies Thornton's female narrator both observes and participates in.

But there are also elements of Tragedy in *After Moonlight*. Claire is haunted by the ghosts of her dead parents; she experiences periods of madness; she has a psychotic sibling; her sandstone 'kindy' is as malevolent as Shakespeare's Elsinore; and she and the people she lives with are all escapees from families that are as dysfunctional as the Prince of Denmark's. So is Thornton rewriting *Hamlet* from the point of view of Ophelia? Well—no. By the end of 'Act III' Claire and her friends are all poised to live happily ever after, as though they're in a Chick-Lit Romance, or even a classic Quest, a mythic journey of self-discovery.

In a Quest reading Claire becomes a very fallible female hero who climbs a high mountain (Hong Kong's Mount Victoria on a naughty long weekend) to confront her demons and slay the evil 'power-knowledges' that have entrapped her. She is then able to leap into another genre to construct a new identity for herself, a new story in which she is victor rather than victim.

So next time you visit your local, please raise your glass to Merle Thornton, not only for her decades of feminist activism, but also for the genre-bending threads she has "plaited and spliced and plied" together into this, her 'true fiction' about the internal contradictions so many of us white middle-class women still struggle to resolve in the 'real world'.

Merrill Findlay is the author of *Republic of Women* (UQP, 1999) and founding editor of the e-journal *Redreaming the plains*, [www.redreaming.info](http://www.redreaming.info).

## AN UNEQUAL TREATY

The Canadians don't know what they've signed. In twenty years, they will be sucked into the US economy.

—Clayton Yeutter, US Trade Representative,  
3 October 1987, the day after the first  
Canadian FTA with the US was signed

As Canadians are well aware, when you negotiate a bilateral deal with the US you better have something to put on the table—such as Brazil with its huge market—or else you will probably become chopped liver.

—*Calgary Herald*, 21 November 2003  
commenting on the negotiations on the  
Free Trade Area of the Americas in Miami

The US–Australia free trade agreement is a disaster for Australia's economy, culture and society . . . It was clear from the beginning of the negotiations that, despite government claims, any agreement reached on the trade agreement would benefit US corporations at the expense of Australian industry, workers and consumers. The final deal was a dud for Australian agriculture and manufacturing industry and traded away important regulation of access to cheap medicines and intellectual property.

—Kerry Nettle, Senate Hansard,  
7 December 2004

. . . a passionate attachment of one nation for another produces a variety of evils. Sympathy for the favourite nation, facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no common interest exists, and infusing into one the enmities of the other, betrays the former into the participation of and wars of the latter without adequate inducement or justification . . . it gives to ambitious, corrupted, or deluded citizens (who devote themselves to the favoured na-

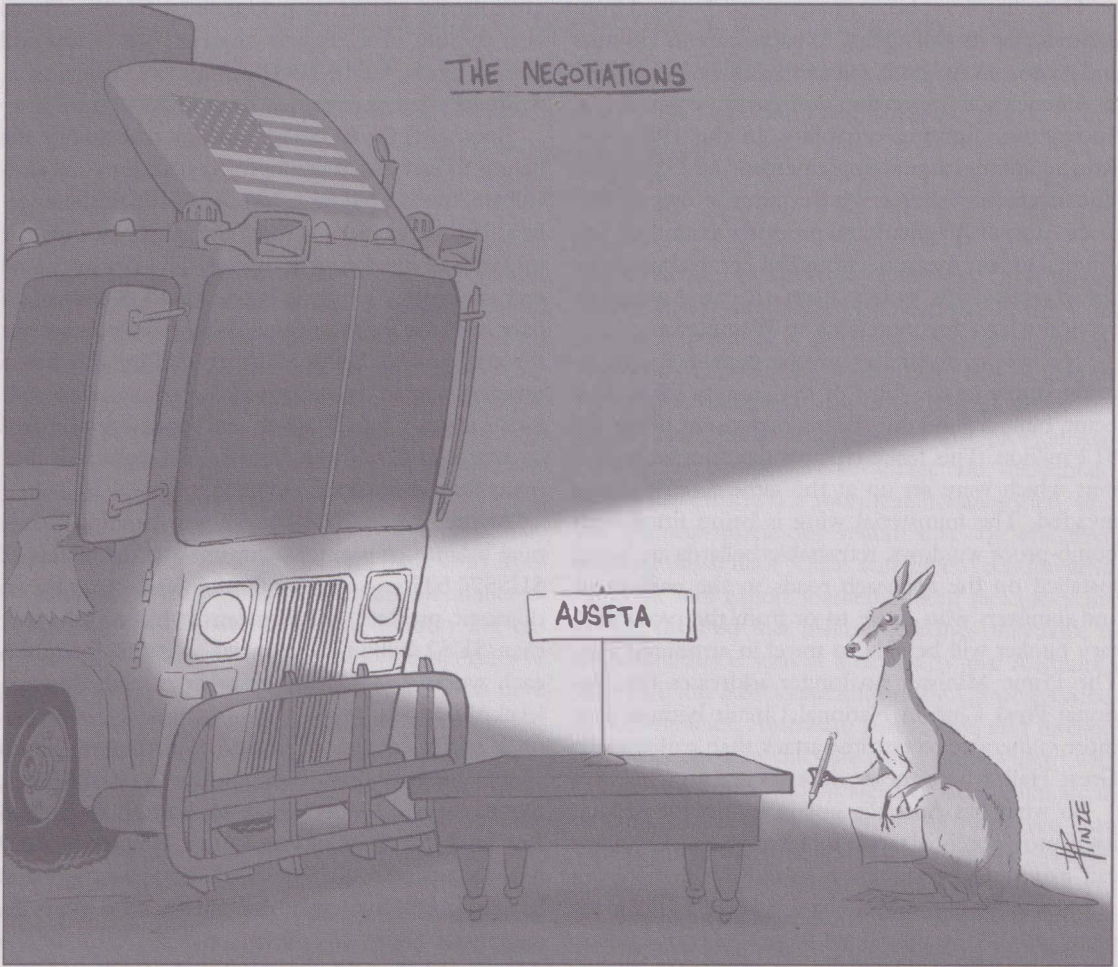
tion) facility to betray or sacrifice the interests of their own country without odium, sometimes even with popularity, gilding with the appearances of a virtuous sense of obligation, a commendable deference for public opinion, or a laudable zeal for the common good the base or foolish compliances of ambition, corruption, or infatuation . . .

—George Washington, Farewell Address,  
17 September 1796

AUSTRALIA IS certainly chopped liver. There was no way we would get a better deal than Canada. Australia entered the negotiations with the simple-minded belief that Australia's 'special relationship' with the US would result in the US opening its markets to Australian agriculture, even though the bilateral agreement (unlike an agreement to open agricultural markets through the multilateral WTO) would not place any constraints on the ability of the US to continue and extend production subsidies (which were increased by a further \$40 billion by the Bush administration).

Howard's belief in the special relationship was based on what we are told is his close personal relationship with George Bush, built on Howard's decision to invoke the defunct ANZUS security treaty as the basis for Australia's commitment of support for the US in the aftermath of September 11. Howard's decision to commit troops to the illegal invasion of Iraq was made as soon as he became aware in 2002 that Bush would use the terrorist attack on the twin towers and the Pentagon as a pretext for the invasion in 2003—even though the public wasn't informed until the eve of the invasion. In order to serve the 'special relationship', the prime strategic task of the Australian defence forces has been transformed from the defence of Australia to an expeditionary





force of 'white Ghurkhas' whose prime function now is to act in concert with the US in rooting out terrorism around the world.

It is worth recalling that ANZUS was the reluctant US pay-off for Australian and New Zealand acceptance in 1951 of the generous peace treaty with Japan, which was designed to make Japan a bulwark against communism in the Pacific. It only commits the parties to 'consult' in the case of military threats and in the case of armed attack to 'meet common danger in accord with constitutional processes'. The treaty was made redundant by President Nixon's 'Guam Doctrine', enunciated in 1969 as part of the US withdrawal from Vietnam. It said in effect the US would only defend countries in the region if they were directly threatened by the USSR.

The history of the US-Australian strategic relationship since Pearl Harbor is that the US will only

defend Australia against America's enemies rather than Australia's enemies. The US is no different to any other sovereign state, apart from Australia, in that it works on the basis that nations have interests, not friends.

Australia has a 'special relationship' with the US when Australia is useful in providing a veneer of respectability to American wars in places like Vietnam or Iraq. History shows the 'special relationship' cuts little ice when Australia's interests are in conflict with US interests. For example, where Australian interests have been in conflict with Indonesia's (Indonesia's takeover of West New Guinea and East Timor) the US put its relationship with Indonesia first because, apart from Indonesia's size and potential to destabilise the region, it sits astride the Lombok and Sunda Straits which are vital to the movement of US naval forces between the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

There has never been an economic dividend from Australia for its willingness to participate in US wars and to host in Australia military bases which are vital to America's 'full spectrum dominance' of space and nuclear war fighting capability. In the 1980s the Reagan administration implemented the US Export Enhancement Scheme whose purpose was to displace Australian agricultural products from their traditional export markets. Australian complaints about the damage this policy does to the Australian economy have had no effect on Washington.

The cost of Australia's involvement in Iraq is already visible in the form of the security fence now being built around our federal parliament house for \$12 million. This fence replaces the temporary barriers which were set up at the same time Iraq was invaded. The ministerial wing is being fitted with bomb-proof windows, retractable bollards are being installed on the approach roads to the parliament and ministers who move to or from the parliamentary bunker will be able to travel in armoured cars. The Prime Minister no longer addresses the National Press Club in National Circuit because it is more vulnerable to terrorist attack than parliament's Great Hall, where these addresses are now held.

So what has Australia got in return for making itself into a potential target for terrorist attack? American export and production subsidies weren't even on the agenda in the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement talks. Australia hoped to get increased access for sugar, dairy and beef exports to the US. Before the negotiations Australia said it would walk away from signing an agreement if the US refused to make meaningful concessions on these commodities. Australia got nothing on sugar and promises that 'price safeguards' on beef, dairy, horticulture and cotton would be removed in eighteen years' time. A personal appeal by Howard to Bush to give Australia increased quotas for sugar and dairy products was refused.

To rub salt into the wounds, shortly after Howard's appeal to Bush failed, the US trade negotiator Robert Zoellick announced new annual sugar quotas totalling some 900,000 tonnes. This included 153,000 tonnes for Brazil (one of the instigators of the developing countries' walkout at the WTO talks at Cancun in 2003, caused by the US, EEC and Japan refusal to include meaningful negotiations on First World agriculture protectionism in the multilateral negotiations). The Philippines was 'marshmallow', according to Alexander Downer, because the

government pulled its troops out of Iraq early to save the life of a Filipino hostage, but it was still given a quota of 142,000 tonnes. By comparison, Australia's quota remained fixed at 85,000 tonnes.

Apologists for AUSFTA now say that despite the failure to get any meaningful concessions on agriculture, this is a piddling cost compared to the once-in-a-lifetime chance to integrate Australia into the mighty and dynamic US market. This doesn't stand serious scrutiny either. It is true that US consumers have been the locomotive of global economic growth throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. But this is unsustainable in the future unless trade surplus countries such as China, Taiwan and Japan are prepared to accept IOUs in the form of US dollars in payment for their exports indefinitely.

At the end of 2004 the US was running an annual balance of payments current account deficit of \$US572 billion—equal to about 5.5 per cent of gross domestic product, which means it has to sell more than \$US2 billion of financial assets to foreigners each working day in order to finance the current level of imports.

A study by the respected Washington-based Center for Economic Policy Research (CEPR), in a report entitled 'Fools' Gold: projections of the US Import Market', said that annual US imports will have to decline by \$US90–375 billion in today's dollars from current levels, depending on various assumptions about US exports and the value of the American dollar, if it is to stabilise the level of foreign debt (which is presently 27 per cent of GDP) at 50 per cent by 2013, "an unprecedented level of foreign debt for a developed country". (Actually this is not true as Australia reached this dubious milestone at the end of 2004).

The CEPR report argues that "it is not possible to construct a plausible scenario in which the US can even sustain its current level of imports. Measured in real terms, the extraordinary growth in US exports over the past twelve years clearly will not be repeated".

In other words, if Australia is to expand its exports of goods and services to the US it will have to be at the expense of other exporters to the US, such as Canada, Japan, Taiwan and China. Commenting on countries which have signed up to FTAs with the US, involving concessions which will heavily favour the US (especially in areas such as intellectual property rights, rules governing investment and govern-

*The AUSFTA reflects and reinforces the new US economy, which increasingly makes profits from exploiting intellectual property and the global operations of its financial intermediaries, rather than production and trade.*

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ment procurement) the CEPR report states: “the cost of such concessions can be expected to exceed any gains they might anticipate from increasing access to a shrinking US market for their exports”.

The implications are that, even with a continuation of the managed and orderly devaluation of the US dollar against the Australian dollar, the bilateral trade deficit of \$US12 billion in favour of the US is likely to grow even wider in the future. The main impact of AUSFTA will be to divert trade away from the rapidly growing markets in Asia. The ability of Australian manufacturers to exploit the duty-free entry into the US market will be inhibited by ‘rules of origin’ which will penalise manufacturers who have sensibly improved their competitiveness by sourcing components from the lowest-cost producers in Asia.

The Bush administration is running a budget deficit equal to \$550 billion a year or 4.4 per cent of GDP (which would be equal to a budget deficit of \$35 billion in Australia) with promises, but no plans, to reduce it. The war in Iraq is costing \$150 billion a year, with no exit strategy in sight. There is a mulish determination to avoid increased taxes, despite the fact that the promise to privatise age pensions will involve massive borrowings to finance the transition to full privatisation. OPEC countries, as well as Russia, will present a major threat to US hegemony if they begin to insist on payment for oil in Euros rather than greenbacks. This would mean the US would have to finance oil imports by exporting like every other country instead of printing more greenbacks as is the case now.

The global reaction of financial markets to these developments may lead to a more disorderly decline in the US dollar, involving a sharp rise in US interest rates and world recession, which could see the US transformed from superpower to dinosaur. Now is the wrong time for Australia to be hitching its fortunes to the US economy.

The loss of sovereignty involved in this deal is well explained in *How to Kill a Country: Australia's Devastating Trade Deal with the United States* by Syd-

ney academics Linda Weiss, Elizabeth Thurbon and John Mathews, published by Allen & Unwin. What the book describes is the antithesis of an agreement based on the principles of free trade. It is an unequal treaty which quite blatantly aims to break down Australian institutional arrangements that provide Australia with a competitive advantage and, incidentally, help make Australia a more egalitarian society than the US: the quarantine system that cost-effectively protects Australia's ‘clean and green’ advantage in domestic and export markets is seen as a protective device; the PBS that makes medicines affordable to all Australians is seen as a device to give Australia a ‘free ride’ on R&D expenditure by US pharmaceutical companies; Australian patent laws and intellectual property right rules are to be ‘harmonised’ with US laws and rules and breaches of these rules are to be criminalised to the detriment of Australian consumers and innovators; and, the \$40 billion taxpayer-funded government procurement system which can be used to foster local industry is no longer allowed.

The AUSFTA reflects and reinforces the new US economy, which increasingly makes profits from exploiting intellectual property and the global operations of its financial intermediaries, rather than production and trade. According to Weiss et al. the long-term US “goal is to turn these intellectual property rights from what have traditionally been monopoly rights for limited duration, strictly to encourage innovation in the arts and sciences, into (perpetual) ‘natural rights’ associated with trade and investment”.

A parliamentary research paper (No. 14 2003–04) pointed out that because Australian imports with some form of intellectual property right (IPR) are five times the level of Australian exports with IPR content, agreement to the IPR chapter of the agreement—which in practical terms means Australia is required to substitute US law for Australian law—will worsen the bilateral trade balance between the two countries. The paper also pointed out that as well as adding a burden to consumers, the accept-

ance of US IPRs “can also be used to restrict exports from Australia to other countries, thereby defeating any industry development ambitions that Australia might have”.

The agreement is little short of a mercantilist arrangement which opens up the Australian economy to US commercial interests on terms and conditions which historically were associated with colonial powers and their subordinate colonies operated by Britain in India and the Dutch in Indonesia from the late eighteenth century to the 1950s.

The major difference is that the colonial relationship was imposed by military force. The enforcement mechanism in the AUSFTA is equally one-sided. Breaches allow the injured party to impose penalty duties on imports from the party in breach of the AUSFTA. But this is also one-sided in favour of the US in practical terms. Such duties imposed on the US by Australia would be no more than a pinprick on the US economy and could be harmful to the Australian economy, whereas penalty duties imposed by the US on Australian exports in retaliation for an Australian violation of AUSFTA could have serious consequences for the Australian economy.

The Canadian experience with respect to softwood exports is instructive. According to the *Economist* (18 September 2004), in 2002 the US imposed 27 per cent anti-dumping duties on Canadian imports on the grounds that Canadian exports are subsidised because of the different system of managing forests in the two countries. Loggers of Canada’s government-owned forests are subject to royalties that are lower than the stumpage rates (cutting fees) set by market forces in privately-owned US forests. The additional duties resulted in the closure of fifty mills and the lay-off of thousands of workers. In a series of rulings over the past two years in both WTO and North America FTA (NAFTA) tribunals the Canadians successfully appealed against the US action. The NAFTA tribunal (with three American and two Canadian members) made a final, unanimous, ruling which rejected the claim that Canada’s allegedly subsidised exports posed a “threat of material injury” to the American industry, which required the US to revoke the duties and refund the \$US2.4 billion paid by the Canadian exporters.

According to the *Economist* report, the US International Trade Commission lambasted the tribunal for “overstepping its authority . . . and committing

legal error” and the Commerce Department continues to collect the duties. The *Economist* commented that “Canadians are left to wonder whether their neighbours’ rhetoric about free trade and the rule of law is just that”. It is clear that the dispute will only be settled in Canada’s favour if the consumer lobby proves to have more political clout than the US timber industry.

The Canadian rationale for signing NAFTA was, according to a report by the Hemispheric Social Alliance (Lessons from NAFTA: The High cost of ‘Free’ Trade [www.asc-has.org](http://www.asc-has.org)) was “the belief that the cold shower of increased competition would force Canadian firms to adapt to new technology quickly or fail”. In fact, according to the report, Canadian manufacturing productivity was 83 per cent of the US level before CUSFTA was signed in 1987 and by 2000 it had fallen to 65 per cent. The reason? According to the report, the opening up of Canadian financial markets has led to the wholesale acquisition of Canadian companies (overwhelmingly financed by Canadian savings) by US multinationals which typically spend only a fraction of what domestic Canadian firms do on industrial R&D.

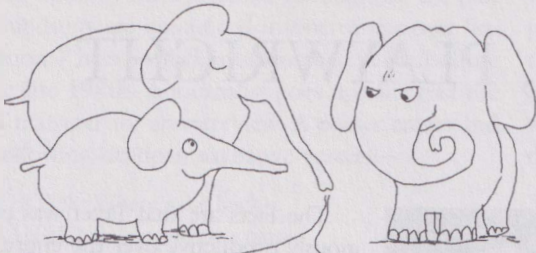
The decision by the Howard Government, supported by the Labor Opposition, to sign up for AUSFTA, has unnecessarily sold out a huge chunk of Australia’s sovereignty and the interests of Australian farmers (which in this case just happen to coincide with the national interest) and provided the US with a lever to get around the rules of the WTO by pressuring other countries to sign up to the AUSFTA template. The foundation of the WTO and its predecessor the GATT is the most-favoured-nation principle, which means that trade concessions offered to one country must be offered to all WTO members.

These WTO principles offer the only real long-term protection for small countries like Australia against the US, the EEC, Japan and in the future China, which with progressive weakening of the WTO will be able to use its economic and strategic power to enforce unequal treaties with weaker countries. These other small countries would not be so stupid as the Australian Government (and Labor Opposition) which has shown itself eager to enter into an unequal treaty with its ‘great and powerful friend’.

*Kenneth Davidson is a columnist for the Melbourne Age and co-editor of Dissent magazine.*

# Bon Moths

by Lofu



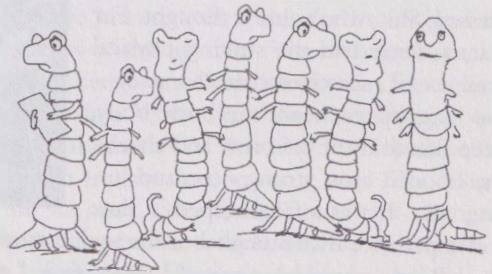
He's ten. Next year he'll be elevant.



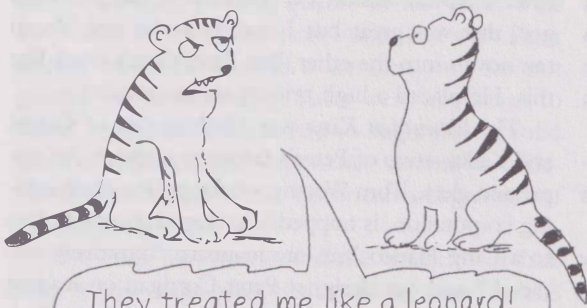
A bad hare day



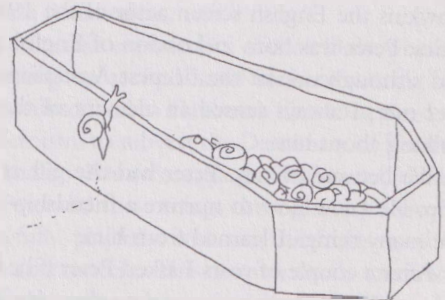
No need to go to monotremes!



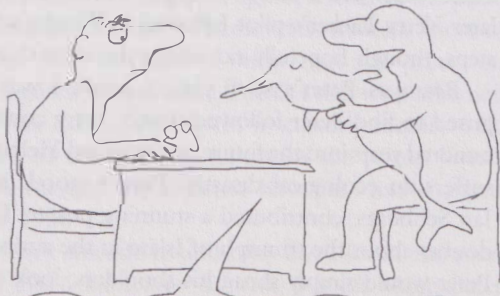
The seven caterpillars of wisdom



They treated me like a leopard!



The last snail in the coffin



This is the purpose of my visit.



A dugong

## PETER MATHERS, PLAYWRIGHT

I FIRST MET Peter Mathers at Stewart's Hotel in 1981, a year after I had left Adelaide to join the Pram Factory as an actor and director. I was immediately impressed. Shit, who's this? I thought. For a start, Peter had the striking physical presence of a seasoned character actor—the magnificent head, the burly body, deep skin folds of the brow and cheeks, the hooded eyes, strong nose and jutting chin. It was a face steeped in time and experience that Brueghel or the sculptors of ancient Rome would have enjoyed. It reminded me a little of Churchill—although Peter would be aghast to be mentioned in the same breath—and Jack Hawkins the English screen actor of the 1940s and fifties. Peter was born in London of English parents and although one of the deepest Australians I have ever met, I always sensed an element of the British bulldog about him.

We became friends. Peter had the gift of friendship. He knew how to nurture a friendship—one of the many things I learned from him.

After a couple of years I asked Peter if he had any plays, as I was keen to return to directing after an intense acting period. "I'll have a look," came the cryptic reply. Peter came back to me with *The Mountain King* which we produced at La Mama in 1985. The next eight years were an enormously creative time for Peter in the theatre. I directed a further seven of his plays and I know of at least two produced by others. There would have been few playwrights in Melbourne as prolific over this period. I feel that this is an important point to make as there are some who have overlooked Peter's creative output following *The Wort Papers* and perhaps the publication of his short-story collection in 1984. This of course is exacerbated by the nature of playwriting, which tends to be a fly-by-night activity and rarely leads to publication.



The facts are that Peter was prodigiously productive over the entire time I knew him. His prose writing never stopped (although neither did his mistrust of publishers and editors diminish), his theatre writing flourished over eight years, and in the last decade of his life he made the amazing transition from visual arts aficionado to practitioner. If I may put it this way: Peter suffered creativity as one may suffer a chronic health condition. It regularly overflowed from his work into his conversation. One could begin talking with him on the most mundane matter and after an hour or so end up in the nether regions of Pluto. After a typical session I'd often come out thinking, gee, that was great but I suspect we've just blown ten novels into the ether. But Peter didn't think like this. He placed a high priority on conviviality.

*The Mountain King* was Mathers out of Gogol and Kafka—two of Peter's favourite authors. An oppressed clerk, Tom Worthy, working for a giant mining corporation, is trapped into donating vital organs to a Lang Hancockian ore magnate. "Positively medieval," said our designer Peter Corrigan on reading the text. We consequently staged it as a sinister, albeit secular, mystery play, using mask and stylised movement. Peter and I shared a laugh when several years later Kerry Packer's pilot followed in Worthy's footsteps, though hopefully not under the same duress.

*Bats* was Peter's sci-fi play, a genre I was surprised to find Peter followed closely. Set a couple of hundred years into the future, an Islamised Melbourne suffers an ecological disaster. Peter's good friend, Jan Senbergs, contributed a stunning poster. To my doubts about the triumph of Islam in the antipodes, Peter would simply shrug his shoulders, look at me quizzically and say "Why not?". Peter had a mind large enough to entertain any possibility—the limits being only those of a tethered imagination.

*Grigori 3* was a satire on the cultural cringe and the cult of the overseas celebrity. A supposed nephew of Rasputin poses as a psychic to the stars and is fawned upon by local journo. Throughout the play the fraudsters are ensconced in one of the new 'international' hotels which mushroomed in Melbourne in the late 1980s. A journalist goes upstairs past the hotel manager for an interview. A porter enters and the following deadpan exchange ensues—

PORTER: Where's the hack?

MANAGER: Up with the fame.

—several volumes of celebrity journalism summed up in seven words.

In 1988 Peter was appointed playwright-in-residence at La Mama and came up with *Travelling*, a play set not in the bi- but the sesqui-centenary following the adventures of a group of travelling workmen during the Depression. If Peter's work inhabited the unique territory between social and magical realism, *Travelling* generally occupied the former. When working on this play I realised that Peter had not only absorbed the work of the European fabulists but was also an inheritor of the Australian realist tradition of Lawson and Furphy and owed them the picaresque, yarning quality in his work. This accounted for a conversation I once had with Peter during which he berated a certain writer for not getting his facts straight. Facts were important to Peter. Imaginative flights had to begin from a solid basis of research and experience as well as a detailed knowledge of the historical background of the subject matter.

*Travelling* also introduced the character of Jack Trap to the stage after his extensive career in the novel of the same name. The character of Trap is one of Peter's greatest inventions. On stage he became a kind of Harlequin figure, a joker in the pack, a sometime servant of humourless masters, most of whom were prepared to throw him into prison on the slightest provocation. The fact that we performed the play during the deaths-in-custody inquiry only added to the gripping nature of the prison scenes and reminded the audience how little had changed since 1938.

Trap's attitude to authority has a lot in common with *The Good Soldier Schweik*, a book which Peter revered as he did a great deal of Czech literature. The shade of Swift also presides over *Travelling*, when Trap recites a version of 'A Modest Proposal'

as a way of suggesting methods to alleviate hunger while 'on the wallaby'. This reminds us that the use of a withering black irony was a major weapon in Peter's writing arsenal, often aimed at perceived injustice towards the poor and the powerless, those on the fringes of the capitalist world. Peter was far from a po-faced, didactic social realist, but you always knew where his bread was buttered, leavened as it was with the spirit of Tristram Shandy and Flann O'Brien.

Formally Peter's plays were always an enormous challenge to actors, directors and designers. Whenever Peter would say "I've got another one" you felt excited but also daunted as you realised that this would not be another pedestrian piece of 'slice of life' theatre but something designed to extend the boundaries of the medium. The actors always rose to the challenge and Peter loved them for it. Even in his last days his conversation was peppered with inquiries about this or that actor and speculations as to what he/she may be doing now. The designers for the plays, Greg Carroll and Peter Corrigan, created some brilliant work, but my one regret is that I never asked Peter to design himself. He always had terrific ideas, which I used to pass on, so I was very happy when in his last years Peter showed us his fine visual talent.

Did Mathers ever write a cliché? Only when he was sending up second-hand ideas or writing. He certainly subscribed to Flaubert's dictum at the dawn of Modernism: to subvert the Dictionary of Received Ideas, and to Pound's urgings to always "Make it new". Peter did these things throughout his creative life—joyfully, playfully, with wit and humour—both in form and content. This country needs more writers with this approach, particularly at the time when it seems to be entering another of its Menzian zombie periods, lulled to sleep with the clichés of John Howard and Bryce Courtenay. I would urge readers to seek out Peter's works, especially *Trap* and *The Wort Papers*. They can still be found in second-hand bookshops and *Trap* is available online at the University of Sydney Press. We thespians might even get our act together and revive some of the plays in the near future. Peter may be gone but his works can live on in the minds and hearts of readers and in the laughter of audiences.

*Denis Moore is an actor and director working in Melbourne.*



## PETER MATHERS 1931–2004

PETER MATHERS was born in London when his migrant English parents were there on a visit. He came to Australia as a baby and his boyhood was in Rose Bay, where he had a state school education. His early reading was in popular science and mechanics, and the books of W.E. Johns and R.M. Ballantyne. After his intermediate certificate at Randwick Intermediate High School he spent a year at Sydney Boys High School. He remembered an English teacher there who wrote and published short stories, a man of the Henry Lawson school.

Later he worked by day as a laboratory assistant for Drug Houses of Australia and attended an agriculture course in Ultimo in the evenings and on weekends. The course took him out to the bush. It was then he started serious reading, devouring paperbacks of all sorts. After finishing the course he worked a variety of jobs throughout his twenties—for James Hardie at Asbestos House, shearing, a stint at share farming on the north coast of New South Wales; he was also a qualified wool-classer.

He started writing short stories. From the beginning he set rigorous standards, discarding all but two or three, that were first published in *Overland*. But within him a greater gestation was under way. Peter spent a long time thinking about his novel *Trap*. The work had several false starts from the very early 1960s.

In 1963 a chance meeting with Muriel Button in a bank led to marriage. Later that year he had a draft of *Trap* written when they sailed for England via Suez on the *Roma*. He spent time on board correcting the manuscript. In London he worked at odd jobs. He was delighted at getting a ticket giving access to the British Library. Eventually news came by telegram when *Trap* was published in Australia in 1966. It was awarded the Miles Franklin prize for 1967, acknowledged as one of the greatest Australian comic novels.

Much of the literary talk that year, particularly in Australia where it had been banned, was about J.P. Donleavy's *The Gingerman*, a novelistic account of wild living in Dublin. I had just arrived in London and like many Australians was reading it there. Peter was regarded as a bit of a gingerman himself at the time, when I met him in Hampstead; a bit wild, but he was never a binger. In those days Samuel Beckett was still alive and a presence in literary circles, Brendan Behan had died quite recently, and Dylan Thomas was still remembered around the pubs in London. For me Peter embodied a direct contact with that world, an uncompromising literary life set firmly in a culture that owed nothing to television, or to almost anything American, mass-produced, plastic or commercial, but in-



stead was committed to language, humanity, and a life free to create. It is a world hard to find these days. In Melbourne it takes an event like Peter's wake to bring it together for a few hours.

Peter's daughters Sarah and Zoe were born in London during these years. The success of *Trap* took him to the United States on a writer's residency at the University of Pittsburgh. He would take up a number of residencies over the years in a variety of Australian organisations. He returned to Australia in 1969, rejoining his family in Melbourne, a city he liked. He published his other great comic novel *The Wort Papers* in 1972.

Peter Mathers also embodied the Australian literary tradition of Lawson. He travelled the outback and knew the country and wrote stories about it. He knew emphatically the days of a small farmer, the deadend tiredness and poverty it could bring. No doubt the young writer growing in him was protecting himself when he got out of that life. He continued to visit favourite bush and coastal locations until his final days. But he was never a bushy. The inner city, the streets and trams, the pubs and the alleys behind theatres were his natural haunts.

By the 1980s Peter was living alone in Richmond, in a little maisonette crammed with books, by a certain old shirt factory. This became the fabled Pelaco Hill, a node in the fabric of Melbourne for a whole community in the arts, a site for all the gossip. Here Peter gardened as naturally as he talked and walked. His tiny plot produced vegies, herbs and flowers, all given out freely. It was always a great pleasure and indeed a little adventure to go for a visit and see what was happening, and talk about the affairs of the day. I traded home brews for jars of this and that with him for years. Above all there was compost. He readily showed one his wads of composting copies of *The Wort Papers*. He befriended my wife Hui and to this day we have flowers in the garden from his cuttings, and the masses of compost worms in our bins all derive from a big lump of seething muck passed one day from Peter's hand.

In the eighties he published a volume of short stories, *A Change for the Better*. By this time he was building a whole new career as a playwright, often collaborating with Denis Moore and Greg Carroll, but many others too. He wrote more than a dozen plays and eight of these were produced at La Mama

and The Courthouse theatres, drawing critical success and sometimes good audiences. In the nineties, as the plays continued to come forth, he diversified into visual art, thoroughly enjoying himself as he sent out hand-crafted satirical postcards to his friends, and started playing with sculpture, notably his angels. The angels were done as a joke but reflect his lifelong interests. Their names started with Al, Fe, Zn and other elements from the periodic table. At first they were made of bread and bits of stick gathered in his garden or off trees in the street. When weevils got into the bread he used plaster. In 2001 an exhibition at Bridget McDonnell's gallery featuring his angels came with his last book—*Angels*—a story handsomely illustrated with photos of the angels.

There remains the enigma as to why he stopped writing novels with *The Wort Papers*. The novels in fact never stopped. Perhaps they were not published for the same reason most of those early stories were discarded. He would not let them go unless he was convinced they worked properly. Peter, because of that tradition he embodied, cared nothing for fame and glory, let alone commercial success. As he would say, he did not 'submit' work to publishers. He did not live in the hope he would be published and get his name in the paper. He 'offered' a work when he was good and ready, and destroyed anything that he regarded as unsatisfactory.

He retained a fascination since his youth with the chemical industry and its viler products, and its place in war machines. He would ring me at my desk where I worked and ask me to check the library for some obscure paper about the doings of I.G. Farben. I would relish a chat about life in a modern, innovative, education-services enhanced, client-focused service delivery unit (once known as a university campus); he was a tonic, a touchstone of sanity, of keeping a sense of humour.

He continued, with humour, working on his sculpture, stories, plays, a novella, until his death from cancer.

*Craig Robertson's books include Buckley's Hope (Scribe, 1980), Song of Gondwana (Penguin, 1989) and The Expedition, a novel set in the Kimberley (self-published in CD-ROM).*

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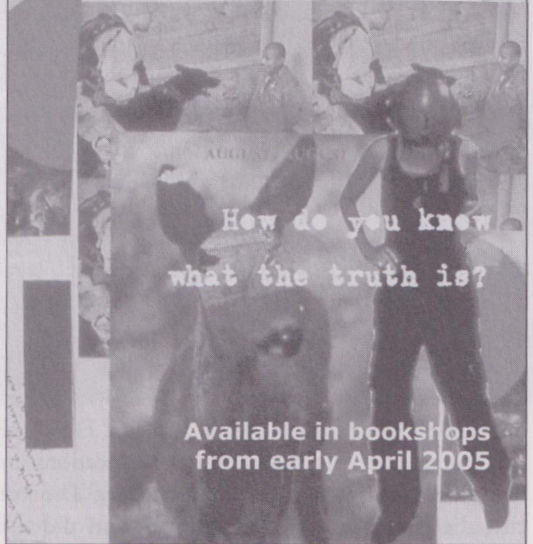
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Seven or eight years ago a flurry of publications addressing the rise of Hansonism helped us grasp what she represented and what we could do about it. Today the issue is Howard's relentless advance. And what an extraordinary story this has been.

*Graham Willett, 'Us and Them'*

With control of the Senate now in Coalition hands, the apogee of the New Right campaign may well be nigh. Behind the rhetoric of 'choice' and 'values' lies an apology for privilege and prejudice.

*Damien Cahill, 'The Right Values in Education'*

Almost all of the people interrogated under the anti-terrorist legislation have been Muslim. Frighteningly, this is something that the general public have no right to know, and very little likelihood of actually finding out. Indeed the fact that people have been interrogated is only publicly known because Attorney-General Philip Ruddock happened to mention it as an aside on the ABC's 7:30 Report.

*Stan Winford, 'Activism and the Law'*

D'Cruz and Steele are not content to reduce their expectations of Australia. The anger that runs through the book is shared by many Australians who feel disappointed by the conduct of their government and their compatriots.

*John Fitzgerald, 'Ambivalent or Divided?'*

The US is no different to any other sovereign state, apart from Australia, in that it works on the basis that nations have interests, not friends. Australia has a 'special relationship' with the US when Australia is useful in providing a veneer of respectability to American wars in places like Vietnam or Iraq.

*Kenneth Davidson, 'An Unequal Treaty'*

The novels here are more inward-looking, more introspective, and more claustrophobic than Australian fiction has ever been.

*Ken Gelder, 'The Despondent Worlds of Contemporary Australian Fiction'*

The award-winning *Shantaram* and *Vernon God Little* might actually be products of the same energy which gave rise to the authors' criminality, rather than mere compensations for it.

*Brigid Magner, 'Bad Boys Made Good: The Literary Redemption of Gregory David Roberts and D.B.C. Pierre'*

According to George W. Bush, the "great divide in our time" is "not between religions or cultures, but between civilisation and barbarism". Defenders of 'civilisation' within the 'culture wars' see their role in similar terms, as a recommencement of the moral crusade of civilisation against barbarism.

*Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Neilson, 'Academia Inc. and the (Culture) War'*

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