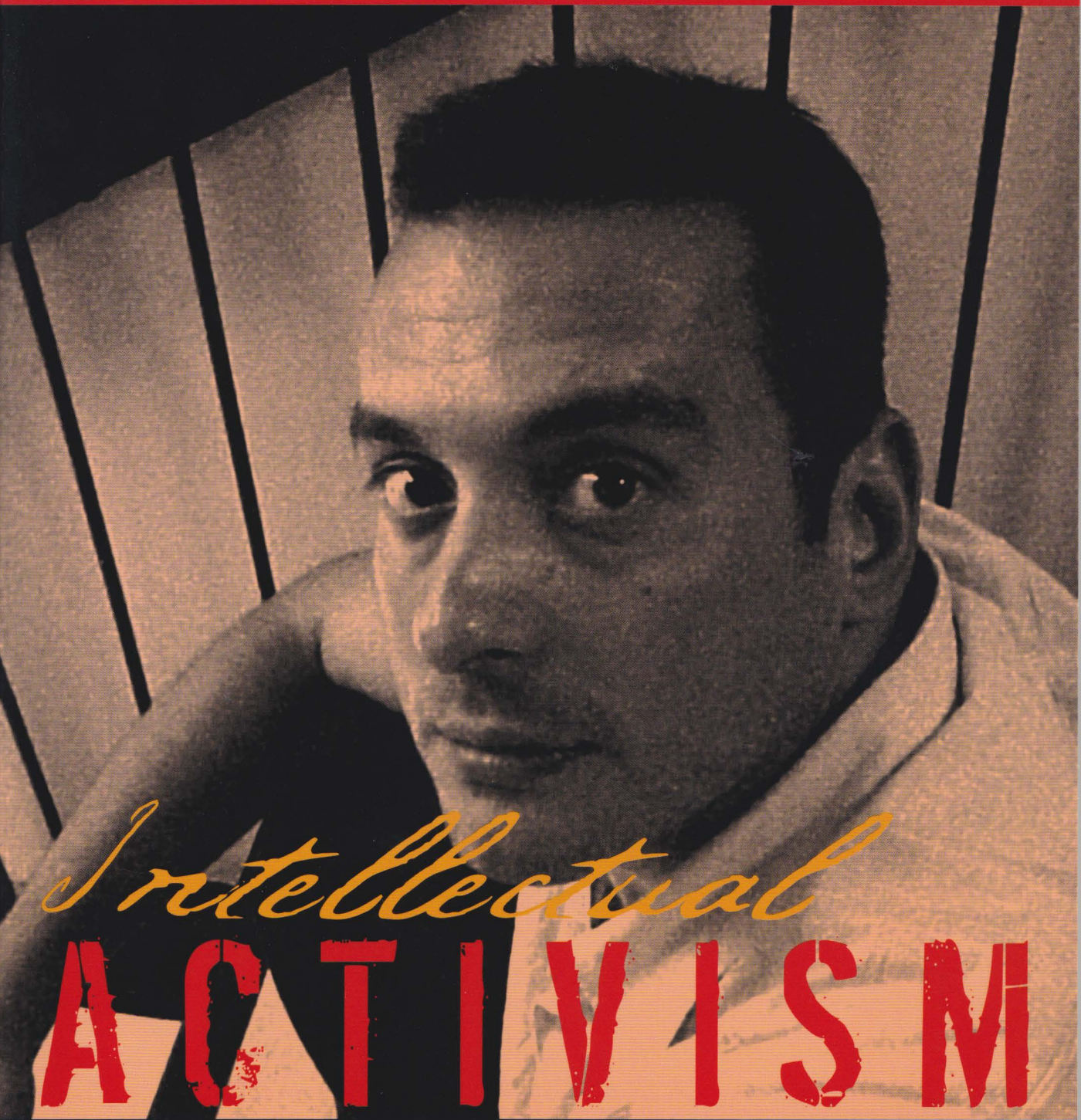


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Intellectual
ACTIVISM

FEATURING **CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS** ON POLITICS, FAITH & SEX

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INTELLECTUAL ACTIVISM

THE FIRST THING you notice is the gentle music, like a lullaby or perhaps the introduction to a Sunday afternoon arts show. Don't you just feel like stretching out and having a cup of tea? Then there are some Decent People, in Real Workplaces; bosses and workers talking casually, evenly, to each other. They look basically the same, and like lots of other people you've seen: good ordinary folk. There are some messages: short and simple, in solid white lettering on a soft orange background. The message becomes clear: these workplace changes are about fairness, making things simpler, bringing people together where they can talk as equals: restoring community, really. Like the old days. And existing ways of working and levels of pay have got the strong red stamp of a government guarantee. Yawn, stretch, feel like an early night.

Unless of course you went to primary school. In which case you've probably been watching this breathtakingly expensive government television advertising campaign for the new workplace changes and the 'Fair Pay Commission' – give me a break – with that weird feeling, somewhere between outrage and resignation, that is perhaps the defining feature of emotional life for many people in contemporary Australia. This has all been going on for so long. Both sides of parliamentary politics are in it up to their necks (as testified recently by Mark Latham and Barry Jones). A degree of resignation is probably necessary to keep one out of jail and from overdoing the Zolof. But you can't help feeling disgusted: 1. we're being screwed; and 2. we're being lied to about it.

And so you do something, if you're an activist, or you say something, if you are an intellectual with a conscience, or you do and say things, if you're energetic, and you sit back and wait for the response. You know what it will be: outrage (of the John Howard 'I've never been so affronted in all my life' variety), followed by denunciation (of the Andrew Albrechtsen/Janet Bolt defender of 'common sense' variety), if you've made a political impact or got some publicity; or silence, if you haven't.

In one sense it has never been easier to be an intel-

lectual. There is so much official bullshit around you hardly know which contradiction to point to first. 'No-one predicted a social disaster following Hurricane Katrina', says George Dubya. Right. As Peter Holding documents in this issue, practically everyone who'd ever had cause to consider the safety of New Orleans had predicted just that. Moreover, as Holding outlines, the humanitarian disaster is a direct reflection of the nature and structure of American society, a social model which our leaders are falling over themselves to introduce here. Similarly, as Heather Benbow suggests, all you have to do nowadays is wear a hijab and you automatically qualify as a dangerous subversive. According to Bronwyn Bishop, of course, people wanting to wear hijabs, because it makes them feel comfortable, are like those other people who wanted to feel comfortable; that's right, the Nazis! Contenders everywhere for the 'Facile Comparison of the Millennium' award could be seen exhaling and shaking their heads in resigned defeat.

But in another sense both genuine intellectual work and political activism have never been harder to practice. The sheer volume of corporate and government spin is daunting. The control of the mass media by the far right has never been more universal. University academics have never been under more pressure to step back from progressive politics. Right-wing think-tanks and journalists have never been so organised and active in denigrating structural analysis and progressive values. The criminalisation of dissent continues apace, with police paramilitarisation, the exponential strengthening of ASIO and other secret police agencies, and new 'anti-terror' legislation targeting 'thought-crimes', enabling 'preventative detention' and legitimating the further steady erosion of civil rights.

Here, Christos Tsiolkas talks openly with Patricia Cornelius about his struggle to bring together personal, political and aesthetic interests and desires. His new novel, *Dead Europe*, as contributors to our symposium suggest, is a profoundly innovative and revealing account of contemporary life. Radical historian Marcus Rediker discusses his attempt to fuse social justice and

intellectual concerns, with Rowan Cahill. Joy Damousi and Ken Gelder respectively survey the state of Australian labour history and cultural studies, disciplinary areas that in part grew out of activist concerns. Anthony Langlois engages with the intellectual contribution of Chandra Muzaffar, an important Malaysian Muslim thinker and campaigner. And RW Connell provides a sorely needed critical overview of the intriguing and inspiring, if sometimes frustratingly abstruse, Antonio Negri.

correspondence

ON OVERLAND 180

While reading *It's Time Again* (Circa, 2003) I received a letter from a factional hack seeking donations to a \$100,000 appeal to fund legal action over branch stacking rules in the Victorian ALP. Spitting derision, I promptly wrote a cheque to the ACTU and sent it to Greg Combet in recognition of the strategic leadership his team is showing in the fight against the Howard Government's industrial relations offensive. This, and the book, set me ruminating on the Whitlam vision, the contemporary ALP and Howard's truculent neoconservatism, which is animated by visceral instincts that are essentially premodern. Despite the mendacious sophistry, its core objectives are brutally clear. Workers must be punished for their insolent collectivism. The poor need to be disciplined for their moral turpitude and want of enterprise. Women should not have autonomous control of their bodies, and would be better off in the home. Homosexuals can be demonised for their sin of misplaced loving. It is regrettable, but acceptable in the interests of robust border protection, that asylum-seekers might drown for their refusal to join an orderly queue. The sick, whose lack of self-control probably caused their illness, should pay the full cost of their health care, just as students are the only beneficiaries of the education system and should sustain the full cost of maintaining it. The political dynamics of this are equally clear: to make people fearful and simultaneously exploit their anxieties to the greater good of their betters. In contrast to the Whitlam vision, this is all about refashioning the nation state and all its civilising potential into a consortium of coercive agencies to enforce a thuggish individualism. And where, in the face of this onslaught, does the ALP,

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with its petty squabbling, electoral prostitution and pusillanimous postmodernity, stand? Who knows? The benefit of this book, however, is to remind us that we may need to do more than revisit Whitlamite social democracy. It might be time again to rediscover a few Enlightenment metanarratives, along with the moral courage and intellectual acuity of people like Tom Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft.

PETER LOVE

ON NOAM CHOMSKY

In parading his obvious admiration for Noam Chomsky, Clinton Fernandes (*Overland* 180) unfortunately distorts and whitewashes Chomsky's role in the Faurisson affair.

Chomsky chose to intervene on behalf of Nazi apologist Robert Faurisson in two ways. Firstly, he signed a petition drawn up by prominent American Holocaust denier Mark Weber in defence of Faurisson's civil rights. This action was arguably defensible on the grounds of defending Faurisson's freedom of speech.

But then Chomsky wrote an opinion on the civil libertarian aspects of the Faurisson affair. This opinion stated that "the fact that Faurisson denied the existence of gas chambers plainly did not demonstrate that he was a Nazi or anti-Semite", and that "denial of the worst atrocities, even the Holocaust, does not in itself suffice to prove racism (or Nazism)". Chomsky concluded that Faurisson appeared to be a "relatively apolitical liberal".

Chomsky's failure to recognise the anti-Semitic implications of Holocaust denial, and his decision to provide a political character reference for a leading figure in the international neo-Nazi movement was astounding. The overall effect of his statement was to promote (however unintentionally) a reversal of the roles of Nazi persecutor and Jewish victim. The neo-Nazis and the Holocaust deniers were transformed into the persecuted victims whose rights demand protection whilst the Holocaust survivors and their supporters were depicted as the persecutors.

Whilst it would be wrong to say that Chomsky supports Holocaust denial or Holocaust deniers, there is little doubt that the nature of his intervention in the Faurisson affair granted political credibility to the purveyors of race hatred (For further details,

see my 'Noam Chomsky and the Holocaust denial controversy in Australia', *Political Expressions* 1:2, 1996, pp.111-126).

PHILIP MENDES

CLINTON FERNANDES RESPONDS:

Dr Mendes may be referring to a personal letter in about 1980, asking Chomsky whether denying the existence of gas chambers proves that a person is anti-Semitic. He responded that it does not, because one might believe six million Jews were exterminated in other ways. Furthermore, even denial of the Holocaust does not prove that a person is anti-Semitic. For instance, "if a person ignorant of modern history were told of the Holocaust and refused to believe that humans are capable of such monstrous acts, we would not conclude that he is an anti-Semite". The letter was later made public.

Chomsky notes that the US public believes Vietnamese casualties in the Vietnam War to be approximately 100,000 although the official figure is two million and the actual figure is probably four million. But this does not necessarily imply that the entire US public are anti-Vietnamese racists.

Similarly, most Westerners deny, despite massive historical and demographic evidence, the genocide of approximately ten million Native Americans in North America and approximately one hundred million in South America. They are not necessarily anti-Native American racists.

Many Australians are unaware of the extent of the death tolls of Aboriginal Australians. Racism is not the sole reason; others include ignorance, misinformation or incredulity.

Dr Mendes correctly describes Nazis as anti-Semites. By contrast, some of Chomsky's pro-Israeli detractors describe Holocaust denial and Nazism as "antique and anaemic forms of anti-Semitism". They argue that "delegitimisation of the Jewish national movement" is a "far more virulent form" of anti-Semitism, as is the "attack on talent" and the "politics of resentment" represented by the tenet "that a just society would not have individuals from any group underrepresented or overrepresented in its positions of prestige and influence" (*New Republic*, 3 October 1988, p.9).

CLINTON FERNANDES

THE HURRICANE, THE USA & US



IT WAS APRIL of 1992 when the magnitude of the sycophantic awe that Australia's corporate classes hold for the USA was brought home to me. It was during the days when the Hawke-Keating government handed out corporate welfare to business in order that it should discover 'best practice', 'continuous improvement', 'TQM' (total quality management) and the value of training and consulting with workers.

I had only been working at the Meatworkers' Union for a few weeks when I learned that Don Smallgoods would be participating in a delegation to the USA to explore best-practice issues. Don wanted the workplace union delegate to accompany their middle manager on the trip but the union delegate did not want to go unless accompanied by somebody from the union office and I was to be that designated somebody.

I'll freely admit that I was still suffering the effects of 'anti-Americanism' at the time. After all I had only been five years back from an eighteen-month stint working with unions and human rights groups in Central America. There I had witnessed firsthand the effects of Uncle Sam's support for terrorism: the Contras in Nicaragua and the state sponsored variety in El Salvador. Nasty people those CIA-organised, Ronald Reagan 'freedom fighters'.

Michael Oravic (the shop steward from Don) and I were the only union people on the tour. Michael was a great asset for the union at Don. Fluent in about seven different languages he was uniquely placed to traverse the ethnic jungle of Don's workplace. Like me he was highly sceptical about the value of this trip. He considered that there was little scope

for 'continuous improvement' among his members at Don. It was a sausage factory where workers did what they were asked and if anything stuffed up it was generally because of incompetent management. There was already a consultative committee. These were much in vogue and most of the new enterprise agreements provided for them. At Don, as elsewhere, union delegates on consultative committees would tell management about problems and how to fix them and management would listen to the complaints before mostly ignoring them. This was considered, by the employers at least, some kind of major advance on the days when they would ignore the workers without first having 'consulted' them.

From the moment we land in LA the half dozen or so middle managers (from various Australian companies) seemed to become afflicted with a kind of nervous, almost sexual, attraction to the US. They constantly marvelled at how 'big' everything was. We travelled all over the joint visiting factories in LA, Little Rock Arkansas, Wisconsin, Portland Maine and other far and away places I no longer remember. We went from the west coast to the east coast and all the way back west again. The trip took about ten days and we seemed to spend more time on planes than anything else, constantly having to put up with innuendos about how better things were here than at home and comments about what a great time would be had over the final weekend in LA when the managers had, among a variety of activities organised at company expense, arranged themselves a trip to Disneyland.

We visited a peanut butter factory in Little Rock. We were shown around the factory which was nice

and clean and then had a meeting with management and a single representative from the non-unionised consultative committee. An African American, he informed us of how harmonious things had been since the consultative committee had formed and management began to consult and had replaced supervisors with 'team leaders'. Then there was time for questions. "How much annual leave do you have here?" asked Michael, already having been briefed by me on the answer that would likely follow. "Two weeks," came the reply. "Is that all? We have four in Australia," said Michael. "What would you do if you wanted to get four weeks?" Michael asked, following our pre-planned script. A careful pause ensued. "Oh I guess we would talk to management about it." "And if they didn't agree to four weeks?" No answer. "Well I mean would you consider going on strike if they wouldn't agree?" I pressed. "Well, we don't really do that here," was the furtive, hesitant reply.

An awkward kind of silence ensued prompting the organiser of the delegation, some kind of consultant to industry, to try and fill the void. "Don't you find this just a great place to work?" he asked. The blatantly leading nature of the question seemed to make even some of the managers wince and sparked the ounce of independence that remained hidden deep within the recesses of this co-opted representative of the workers. "Well look man, it's pretty nice but hey – it is a peanut butter factory."

Throughout the trip I had been following a story in the newspapers about a black man in LA who had been filmed as he was mercilessly beaten by police. We arrived back in LA on the night of Wednesday 29 April 1992. Michael and I had changed our schedule so as to return to Australia the next day and to give a big miss to Disneyland and whatever other plans the deputy vice-captains of industry had planned. I went up to my hotel room and turned on the TV. I had not noticed anything unusual on the way in from the airport but now it was there on my screen. Parts of LA, the very city I was standing in, were ablaze, and it was international news. The Rodney King riots had commenced.

Michael and I made it back to Australia the next day. It took us three hours to get through the traffic jam to travel the relatively short distance to LA International Airport, the one where the big jet engines roar. The traffic jams meant that the managers never did make it to Disneyland. In fact I'm not sure they

ventured far out of their hotel rooms until leaving for home the following Monday.

During my visit in 1992 the minimum wage in the USA was \$4.25 an hour. It is now \$5.15 an hour. If you adjust for inflation the real value compared to the 1996 minimum of \$4.75 is now \$4.15, ten cents less than in 1992. If they weren't on social security that minimum is probably around the amount most of the people who stayed in New Orleans during the hurricane were probably earning, working in the un-unionised service sector of New Orleans' now largely de-industrialised economy. The very cheapest hotels in Baton Rouge, the nearest major town to New Orleans, are advertised at \$38 a night, about \$3 less than you would earn for a full day on the minimum wage.

The minimum wage in Australia is about double the US minimum. The Coalition plans to change the way the minimum wage is set in Australia. It is hard to believe that the reason is for any objective other than to lower it. The mantra is 'when in doubt defer to the USA'. This theme runs through so much Coalition policy. Follow them to Iraq. Lower the capital gains tax. Give income tax cuts to the rich. Oppose Kyoto. Run down or privatise public infrastructure. Give them an FTA that threatens our quarantine standards, our PBS, our cultural heritage and that provides tariff arrangements and access to government procurement markets that are heavily skewed in their favour. Agree that as it is so poorly governed there is no point increasing aid or delivering debt relief to Africa. Let's aim for their health system too and their education system. We still have some major catching up to do in these two areas, at least in relation to the southern US states. New Orleans has a 40 per cent illiteracy rate and over 50 per cent of black ninth graders will not graduate in four years. Louisiana spends on average \$4724 per child's education and ranks 48th in the country for teacher salaries.¹

On the day Hurricane Katrina hit, New Orleans' main newspaper, the *Times-Picayune*, declared about the impending disaster, "No one can say they didn't see it coming".² On 1 September, the Thursday after the hurricane hit on the Monday, President Bush stated, "I don't think anyone anticipated the breach of the levees".³

Wrong, Mr President. Three years earlier the *Times-Picayune* had spelled out almost exactly what would happen if the levees burst:

Amid this maelstrom, the estimated 200,000 or more people left behind in an evacuation will be struggling to survive. Some will be housed at the Superdome, those designated too sick or infirm to leave the city. Others will end up in last-minute emergency refuges that will offer minimal safety. But many will simply be on their own, in homes or looking for high ground. Thousands will drown while trapped in homes or cars by rising water. Others will be washed away or crushed by debris. Survivors will end up trapped on roofs, in buildings or on high ground surrounded by water, with no means of escape and little food or fresh water, perhaps for several days.⁴

In his 2001 *Scientific America* article, 'Drowning in New Orleans', Mark Fischetti had also predicted, "New Orleans is a disaster waiting to happen".⁵ Knowledge of the danger was not limited to local newspapers and scientific journals. The relevant public sector organisation also knew of the danger. In 2001 the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had designated a major hurricane hitting New Orleans as one of the three "likeliest, most catastrophic disasters facing this country".⁶

In April of 2001 President Bush's director of the Office of Management and Budget, Mitch Daniels announced the Bush administration's goal of privatising much of FEMA's work. In May 2001 Texan Joe Allbaugh who had been appointed by Bush to head FEMA, despite having no previous experience in disaster management, confirmed that FEMA would be downsized: "Many are concerned that federal disaster assistance may have evolved into . . . an oversized entitlement program," Allbaugh said. "Expectations of when the federal government should be involved and the degree of involvement may have ballooned beyond what is an appropriate level."⁷

After less than two years in the job Allbaugh left FEMA to start up a consulting firm advising companies that wished to do business in Iraq. He was replaced by his deputy, Michael Brown. Brown had been Allbaugh's roommate in college and had worked for eleven years prior to going to FEMA as the commissioner of judges and stewards for the International Arabian Horse Association. He also had no previous disaster management experience before moving to FEMA. Little wonder that soon after the hurricane hit New Orleans Emergency Op-

erations head Terry Ebbert told the press: "FEMA has been here three days, yet there is no command and control. We can send massive amounts of aid to tsunami victims, but we can't bail out New Orleans."⁸ In March 2003, FEMA had been downgraded from a cabinet level position and folded into the Department of Homeland Security. Its mission was refocused on fighting acts of terrorism.⁹

In 2004 the US Army Corps of Engineers proposed to study how New Orleans could be protected from a catastrophic hurricane, but the Bush administration ordered that the research not be undertaken¹⁰ and the Corps budget for levee construction in New Orleans was slashed.¹¹ The Corps had sought \$105 million for hurricane and flood programs in New Orleans. The White House offered about \$40 million. Congress finally approved \$42.2 million.¹² The lack of federal funding became so dire that in November 2004 Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, at the urging of Louisiana levee districts, considered suing the federal government for a larger share of the \$5 billion in royalties from offshore oil and natural gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, just so the state could pay for the work needed to repair its deteriorating coast.¹³ On 31 August 2005 FEMA's former disaster response chief Eric Tolbert was highly critical of the response to the unfolding disaster: "What you're seeing is revealing weaknesses in the state, local and federal levels. They've been weakened by diversion into terrorism." The government, Tolbert claimed, had scrimped on spending for dealing with natural disasters while shifting attention to fighting the global 'war on terrorism'.¹⁴

Budget cuts do not represent the entire explanation for the inadequate response to the disaster. The New Orleans levees might never have been breached had the Bush administration not reversed Clinton administration policies prohibiting development of coastal wetlands that once provided some natural buffer to the impact of storms.¹⁵ Yet perhaps the biggest cause of the inadequate response to Katrina was ideological. This was a free-market response to risk management based on a view that the government's role was to announce the need to evacuate and leave people to their own devices for doing so. The *Times-Picayune* stated:

Official preparations for the storm centered on an evacuation plan designed to hasten the flow of private vehicles out of the city. This system worked

well, and many more lives would have been lost without it. But as is now obvious, the plan did not take sufficient account of those who would not or could not evacuate on their own. No federal presence was evident as the storm in the Gulf gathered strength and chugged toward us . . . FEMA and other federal agencies responded quickly and effectively to past catastrophes and this one should have been no different.¹⁶

With around 500,000 people, New Orleans is not a heavily populated city. About 80 per cent of residents did leave. It was completely foreseeable that the poorest would require some assistance to meet the costs of transportation out of the city and for alternative temporary accommodation. Either the state or federal government could have provided buses for people before the hurricane hit. Even at \$2500 a pop, an exorbitant fee, it could not have cost more than about \$7.5 million to offer transport out for the 100,000 or so who stayed behind in New Orleans.

As author Michael Parenti wrote, the response to New Orleans threw up questions that the free market seemed unable to answer:

By Day Three people were dying because relief had not arrived . . . Who was in charge of the rescue operation? Why so few helicopters and just a scattering of Coast Guard rescuers? Why did it take helicopters five hours to get six people out of one hospital? When would the rescue operation gather some steam? Where were the feds? The state troopers? The National Guard? Where were the buses and trucks? The shelters and portable toilets? The medical supplies and water?¹⁷

Although describing the initial response as “unacceptable” President Bush tried to suggest that New Orleans had quickly become inaccessible. Again the *Times-Picayune* would have none of it and responded in an open letter to the President. It pointed to the city’s multiple points of entry and to the fact that over the same period when federal authorities were complaining about how impossible the city was to reach, journalists were moving in and out of it and a caravan of thirteen Wal-Mart tractor-trailers was able to bring food, water and supplies into the city.¹⁸

In Australia and the US alike, journalists that had supported Bush’s war in Iraq leapt to his defence over Katrina, oblivious to the fact that criticism of

his administration was clearly coming from sources who had not taken any particular position on the war. Perhaps they were moved to defend Bush by the spookily parallel images between the war and the hurricane: planning ignored, lack of boots on the ground, looting, loss of innocent life. Or perhaps, like the middle managers that visited the US with me in 1992, they just plain love the ol’ US of A.

Andrew Bolt referred to a “Hurricane of lies” and claimed that fault lay with “the [black] Democrat Mayor of New Orleans, former cable executive Ray Nagin, responsible for law and order in his city, and for its evacuation in a crisis”. “How much of this was truly Bush’s fault, in a federal system that limits his power to intervene?” asked Bolt rhetorically.¹⁹ He made not the slightest effort to answer his own question. Not even the Bush administration had claimed that it was hamstrung by a lack of power. And the simple fact is that FEMA is a federal agency whose job it is, or was, to respond to such disasters.

In the *Age* Tony Parkinson’s article was headed “It is Ludicrous to Blame Bush. There has been much smug finger-pointing in the hurricane’s wake.” He wrote: “Critics say the response by US authorities was slow. Scandalously slow. But compared with what? What is the performance benchmark in modern times for contending with destruction and suffering of this magnitude?”²⁰ Reasonable questions with answers that may not be palatable for “USophiles”. In mid 2004 Cuba was hit by Category 5 Hurricane Ivan. Despite seas that “surged 600 metres inland”, 1.3 million people were successfully evacuated, amphibious tanks were used to retrieve people in flooded areas, and no deaths were reported. On 8–9 July this year, unusually early in this 2005 hurricane season, Hurricane Dennis struck Cuba, causing extensive damage to many of the island’s provinces. On this occasion the Cubans say that 1.5 million were evacuated from the most dangerous areas but sixteen lives were lost. The Bush administration offered \$50,000 in aid, an “offer” Cuba promptly rejected.²¹

Both Bolt and Parkinson claimed that Bush was being blamed for causing hurricanes because he ignored the risks of global warming. It is true that environmentalist Ross Gelbspan had written an opinion piece in the *Boston Globe* saying that, like a number of other extreme weather events, Katrina’s real name was global warming.²² It is true that

Germany's environment minister, Jurgen Trittin, also sought to link Hurricane Katrina with global warming and used the opportunity to criticise the Bush administration for doing little to fight climate change and for its attitude to the Kyoto protocol.²³ But nobody made a simplistic claim that Katrina was a direct or exclusive result of Bush's environmental policies. It is true that it has not been proven that Katrina occurred or was as destructive as it was due to global warming. It is also true that proof in relation to such matters is, for the time being, impossible to attain. Surely however there are grounds for unease or suspicion as to the role of global warming. Even the US Environmental Authority has stated "warming has occurred in both the northern and southern hemispheres and over the oceans . . . Preliminary evidence suggests that, once hurricanes do form, they will be stronger if the oceans are warmer due to global warming".²⁴ It is completely untrue, as claimed by Andrew Bolt, that "records prove global warming has not made hurricanes worse".²⁵ Parkinson's equating of fundamentalist "greens" who had raised the spectre of global warming with those in the Middle East who put the hurricane down to divine punishment for Bush's Iraq policy, was in itself extremist.

While cutting budgets that might have assisted New Orleans, President Bush has delivered \$130 billion in tax cuts to the rich and according to the National Priorities Project has now spent in excess of \$192 billion on the war in Iraq.²⁶ Given the opportunity to distinguish between those who were taking food or water in order to survive and those who were looting for material gain the President exclaimed: "I think there ought to be zero tolerance of people breaking the law during an emergency such as this".²⁷ This was a far cry from the description of looting in Iraq made at the time by Donald Rumsfeld: "Freedom is untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things. They're also free to live their lives and do wonderful things. And that's what's going to happen here . . . Stuff happens".²⁸ In any event President Bush might do well to hope that the zero tolerance he would extend to looters in New Orleans is not the basis upon which his administration's response to Katrina is judged. He can certainly rely on an uncritical response from those Australians who, no matter what, seem forever determined to go all the way with the USA.

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'FALSE TOLERANCE' OR FALSE FEMINISM? HIJAB CONTROVERSIES IN AUSTRALIA AND GERMANY

IN AUGUST 2005 federal parliamentarian Bronwyn Bishop raised the spectre of Nazi Germany to support her colleague Sophie Panopoulos's call for a ban on the hijab for state schoolgirls. Bishop was given an instant hearing when she phoned in to Radio National on 28 August: "Now this morning on a debate with a Muslim lady, she said she felt free being a Muslim, and I would simply say that in Nazi Germany, Nazis felt free and comfortable. That is not the sort of definition of freedom that I want for my country."¹ Bishop's bizarre non sequitur may be of some benefit to a discussion of the issue of Islamic headscarves in schools if it directs our gaze to Germany. Not to the Nazi period, but to the controversy which has raged there since a German teacher of Afghan birth was refused employment because she wore the hijab and took her complaint against this decision to Germany's highest court.

Most people know of the French ban on conspicuous religious insignia in schools, but Germany's battle with the question of the hijab in schools has received little attention here. Yet the German experience is possibly of more relevance to the Australian context than that of France, a country which prides itself on its secular state, secured in law since 1905. In contrast, Germany and Australia share a constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, yet both states are embroiled in the funding of religious institutions. In Australia the Howard administration has overseen the massively increased funding of religious

private schools, while in Germany the state collects taxes on behalf of the Catholic and Protestant churches, requiring citizens to declare their religious affiliations to the government. Clearly Australia and Germany are not secular states of the same hue as France, making secular arguments for a hijab ban more than a little tenuous. Thus the debates in both countries have tended to frame the issue of the hijab in schools in terms of women's rights. In the process, Muslim women and girls have become identified with a monolithic Islam, which stands opposed to the values and culture of the two countries.

Panopoulos and Bishop both traded on the notion that Muslim values were a threat to women's hard-won equality when calling for a ban on schoolgirls wearing the hijab in state schools. Although the proposal received little support among politicians, a grateful print media ran with the story for weeks, particularly on the opinion pages. Many women, mostly of non-Muslim backgrounds, weighed in on the issue, drawing on feminist arguments.² It is significant that feminist debate seems to attract attention in the media only when women – and feminism itself – are criticised by other putative feminists. Thus in this case, Panopoulos and Bishop – not previously known for their feminist advocacy – presented themselves as the defenders of the gains made by the women's movement. Arguing that the hijab represented "the uncompromising retrograde curtailment of a [*sic*] women's rights", Panopoulos

declared: "As a female MP I am concerned about women's rights in this country. Women have fought too hard in this country to allow political correctness to silence any criticism of women-hating ideologies."³ Likewise, the arch conservative Bronwyn Bishop was happy to hitch her wagon to the feminist cause in her pursuit of modestly attired schoolgirls: "Now in a Muslim country, under Sharia law, there is no equality of the sexes, there is no freedom as we understand it. Women are entirely second- and third-class citizens, and in other words, there's a return to slavery, and that is not what I want to see in my country."⁴

Pamela Bone, a columnist for the *Age*, who has often written on the oppression of women in Muslim majority countries, hailed the surprising arrival of the two Liberal women on the feminist scene with some scepticism:

But here's an irony – or perhaps merely an indication of how far we've come. The fight for women's rights was driven by left-wing women and opposed by right-wing women. The women who signed the petition to deny women the vote would have belonged to the same side of politics as Bishop and Panopoulos, who are now defending women's rights. Because these days women of all political stripes take equality for granted.⁵

But can we take Bishop and Panopoulos at their word when they say it is a concern for women's rights which underlies their call for a hijab ban for state schoolgirls? How, in the absence of their feminist outrage over, for example, new punitive conditions for the single parent's pension, the absence of a federal maternity leave scheme and the rumblings in some coalition quarters over abortion, can we explain Panopoulos's and Bishop's sudden emergence as the feminist vanguard in Australia? It is surely not, as Bone suggests, that feminist values are now mainstream, but that an *apparently* feminist rhetoric is being deployed selectively and disingenuously in the service of a more conservative agenda.

Joumanah El-Matrah, of the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria, has argued that "the presence of Muslims is often treated as a threat to the freedom and equality women in Australia currently enjoy"⁶ and it is clear from Panopoulos's and Bishop's statements that the welfare of the schoolgirls they have thrust into the spotlight is not their most pressing concern. Instead, the veiled girls are deemed

to represent the possible erosion of the equality of non-Muslim Australian women, evidenced by Bishop's and Panopoulos's invocations of 'my country' and 'this country'. Muslim girls and women are thus portrayed as "a political movement or force to be contained".⁷ While Bishop and Panopoulos clearly hoped to appeal to a smug sense among Australians that Western women are fully emancipated,⁸ their apparently feminist arguments are in fact subsumed under the larger project of cultural hegemony. Panopoulos defended her call in the context of more general anxiety about the emergence of "a frightening Islamic class" in Australia.⁹ Bishop was even more forthright in her conflation of hijab-wearing schoolgirls and Islamist extremism:

At the end of the day what I was saying was not about headscarfs per se, it's about a clash of cultures where there are extremist Muslim leaders who are calling for the overthrow of the laws that indeed give me my freedom and my equality as defined by the society in which I live.¹⁰

Schoolgirls in Muslim dress are identified by Bishop and Panopoulos as the forefront of a clash of cultures. By targeting Muslim girls who dress in accordance with what they regard as the dictates of their faith,¹¹ the politicians hope to spread a broader message of intolerance of Islam. The truism that the hijab represents Muslim women's oppression is invoked to make this message palatable to a liberal constituency that might otherwise be inclined to religious tolerance. By identifying Muslim schoolgirls as the vanguard of Islamist extremism, Bishop and Panopoulos place undue symbolic weight on the choices of girls and young women of Muslim background in Australia who have to negotiate two patriarchal cultures at once. As El-Matrah has pointed out: "Australian commentary on Muslim women has targeted them, both blaming them for their disadvantage and rendering their resistance to oppression invisible".¹²

That Muslim culture and its apparent incompatibility with vaunted Australian values is the subtext of this talk of women's equality is clear in the Prime Minister's response to the calls by the two backbenchers. John Howard rejected the idea of a ban on the hijab for schoolgirls due to its 'impracticality': "I don't think it's practical to bring in such a prohibition . . . If you ban a headscarf you might, for consistency's sake, have to ban a . . . turban. It

does become rather difficult and rather impractical.”¹³ That we would self-evidently not wish to ban other items of religious dress and be consistent in the way we deal with religious attire was obvious for Howard, and reason enough to reject the idea of a hijab ban. It is for this reason that the French ban – which explicitly prohibits all conspicuous religious insignia in the name of secularism – is of less relevance to us here than the German controversy, where the debate was one arm of a broader Islamophobic project of which feminist-seeming arguments were but one aspect.

Germany is home to 3.2 million Muslims, around two million of whom are of Turkish background.¹⁴ Many came to Germany as so-called guest-workers from the 1960s to the 1980s. Despite this significant Muslim minority, Germany failed for many years to integrate and accept this population into the German body politic. Since the 1998 election of the red-green coalition of Social Democrats and Greens Germany has more openly acknowledged itself as a land of immigration and engaged in a politics of ‘integration’.¹⁵ It has been suggested that the lack of integration of foreigners in Germany for many years meant that Germany was until recently spared the numerous controversies over the hijab that raged in France from 1989 on, for Germans generally cared little what the foreign ‘guests’ in their country wore.¹⁶ This changed when an immigrant woman chose to wear her headscarf not as a cleaning lady or a factory worker, but as a representative of the state in the public service.¹⁷ Fereshta Ludin’s public affirmation of her Muslim identity was treated as a threat to German cultural cohesion. The legislative and political response to her legal campaign united disingenuous feminist arguments with the defence of Germany’s Western/Christian national identity.

In 1998 Ludin, a German citizen born in Afghanistan, achieved her primary-school teaching qualifications. She was denied registration as a teacher in the state of Baden-Württemberg,¹⁸ however, when she indicated that she would not remove her hijab in the classroom. Ludin took her complaint against Baden-Württemberg to Germany’s highest court, the Federal Constitutional Court, which decided in September 2003 that there was no legal basis upon which Baden-Württemberg could prevent Ludin from teaching. The five-to-three majority decision made no comment on the merit of a ban on teachers wearing the hijab, instead inviting Baden-Würt-

temberg to implement legislation at state level to enable such a ban. Baden-Württemberg and several other states responded by introducing laws banning teachers from wearing the hijab.¹⁹ The laws rested on the duty of neutrality which public servants in Germany must observe, yet the Baden-Württemberg law and those of Hesse, Bavaria and Saarland made *exemptions* from this principle of neutrality, explicitly allowing teachers to display an allegiance to Western and Judeo-Christian values, these being the values of the dominant culture. As Ludin herself astutely observed of the putative secularism at play here: “We are not secular. Christian values are part of the basic consensus, you can see that already in the names of the parties.”²⁰

Ludin made a final attempt to overturn the ban by challenging Baden-Württemberg’s new law in the Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig. While she did not succeed in winning the right to teach wearing her hijab, her challenge did show that the defence of Western/Christian hegemony lies at the heart of the headscarf issue in Germany. The Leipzig court held that the Baden-Württemberg ban was legal, but it ruled that all religions should be treated equally and that there ought be no exceptions for any particular forms of religiously motivated clothing. This could have consequences for two public primary schools in the state of Baden-Württemberg where nuns teach in habits, something Annette Schavan, the devoutly Catholic education minister for the Christian Democratic Union in Baden-Württemberg, defends vigorously. Since the Leipzig decision Schavan, who presided over Ludin’s exclusion from the public service and guided that state’s headscarf ban into law, has tried to define the habit as a kind of uniform in order to avoid the obvious implications of the Leipzig decision: that the state must understand the neutrality of the public service to encompass all religious insignia, not just those of minority religions.

Like Panopoulos and Bishop, Schavan interprets the hijab as a political statement about women’s oppression. But Schavan’s more urgent grievance is with a Muslim Other asserting its presence in Germany and Europe. Schavan opposes Turkey’s membership of the European Union because of its cultural difference and because she believes that Europe ought not share a border with ‘countries like’ Iran, Iraq or Syria. Schavan’s discomfort with the Muslim world on Europe’s doorstep is displaced

Panopoulos's and Bishop's comments were ready-made for the kind of divisive feminist controversy opinion-page editors love . . .

onto the teacher in her headscarf. Ludin represents the infiltration of an imagined coherent Western/Christian Europe by the Muslim Other. Ludin herself is alert to this displacement. When asked by a journalist whether she is concerned about human rights abuses in Muslim countries, Ludin replies: "But isn't this issue about Germany and a German Muslim? I am not Afghanistan, I am not Saudi-Arabia. That is being projected onto me."²¹ Similarly, conservative politicians in Australia have no complaint about the role of religion in schools per se, but are uncomfortable with the visible presence of Islam in particular. Again, the women's rights argument is used to obscure a more general distaste for Muslim culture. Like Schavan, Panopoulos rejected the suggestion of a similarity between a nun's habit and the hijab, relying on a widespread understanding that Islam amounts to the oppression of women: "None of these other articles represent the uncompromising retrograde curtailment of a women's [*sic*] rights as does the hijab."²²

Just as Panopoulos's and Bishop's comments were ready-made for the kind of divisive feminist controversy opinion-page editors love, the debate in Germany about teachers and the hijab has divided the Left, including feminists, the Social Democratic Party and the Greens. The discussion there has converged on the slogans 'forced emancipation' and 'false tolerance'. Feminists who support a ban on the hijab for teachers and other public servants have claimed that feminist or leftist opposition to a ban is a manifestation of the 'false tolerance' of postwar Germans trying to live down their country's past horrors. Critics of the German bans have labelled them attempts at the 'forced emancipation' of Muslim women. Significantly, two German politicians of Turkish background have been vocal proponents of a ban on religious clothing for public servants, and both invoke women's rights as a value which is transgressed by the presence of the hijab in the classroom.²³ The most prominent feminist proponent of hijab bans in Germany, however, is the publisher and writer Alice Schwarzer, Germany's highest-profile feminist. Like the conservatives

Panopoulos and Bishop, Schwarzer makes the hijab the symbolic heart of a clash of cultures: "Can the crusaders on the way to Islamic world domination be stopped? Can the Enlightened world yet be saved?"²⁴ And, like Bronwyn Bishop, Schwarzer has compared the rise of Islamic fundamentalism to the Nazi period.²⁵ Schwarzer's rhetoric is likely to widen the gulf between Muslim and non-Muslim feminists when, like the colonisers of old she places the hijab – "flag of the Islamic crusade"²⁶ – at the centre of her criticism of Islam.

Feminists today cannot escape the legacy of a disingenuous feminist rhetoric directed against Muslim societies which has been around since the eighteenth century, as Leila Ahmed shows in *Women and Gender in Islam*: "The peculiar practices of Islam with respect to women had always formed part of the Western narrative of the quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam".²⁷ Western concerns about the position of women in Muslim societies peaked around the late nineteenth century, at the same time that feminist ideas were gaining some prominence in Europe. At this time, feminist ideas and arguments came to be used – entirely disingenuously – against Muslim societies "in the name of colonisation":

Even as the Victorian male establishment devised theories to contest the claims of feminism and derided and rejected the ideas of feminism . . . it captured the language of feminism and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, toward Other men and the cultures of Other men.²⁸

Feminism is no less subject to this abuse today than in the nineteenth century. Feminist arguments are part of the arsenal of conservative politicians – Bishop and Panopoulos in Australia, Schavan in Germany – who identify the hijab as a symbol of Muslim difference and then deem it an act of defiance or of Muslim proselytising. The focus on the hijab makes Muslim girls and women the standard-bearers for all of Muslim culture. Ahmed describes how in colonial Egypt and Algeria the European attack on veiling as a sign of oriental backwardness served to entrench

it as a symbol of Muslim culture. Veiling and the segregation of women was affirmed by Muslims who wished to resist colonial power:

Standing in the relation of antithesis to thesis, the resistance narrative thus reversed – but thereby also accepted – the terms set in the first place by the colonisers. And therefore, ironically, it is Western discourse that in the first place determined the new meanings of the veil and gave rise to its emergence as a symbol of resistance.²⁹

Attacks on the hijab in the context of the current divisive ‘war on terror’ – easily interpreted as a latter-day colonialism – are likely therefore to enhance its importance and potency as a symbol of Islam, thus reinforcing women’s role as the visible face of Islam.

The exploitation of feminist ideas for Islamophobic ends does not mean feminists should ignore the significance of the hijab as an expression of women’s oppression. But when Western symbols of women’s inferiority go unchallenged in schools, singling out the hijab will rightly be interpreted as cultural hypocrisy. A more productive feminist discourse on the hijab sees it as but one of numerous practices in patriarchal societies of both the East and the West which regard women exclusively in sexualised terms. Schwarzer puts this point well: “Covering and uncovering are two sides of the same coin on which is written: Women are the property of men, they belong to one man (if covered) or to all men (if uncovered)”.³⁰ However, an effective feminist response to this insight is not to support a ban which addresses, to pursue Schwarzer’s metaphor, only one side of the coin.

Well-meaning liberal feminist arguments in favour of a hijab ban conspicuously neglect to criticise the ways in which *Western* dress detracts from women’s equality with men. Leslie Cannold, for example, frames the issue purely in terms of gender equality: “Because equality of people and of opportunity is a critical value that Australian schools must – and must be seen to – uphold, the wearing of the hijab in public schools must be banned”.³¹ Yet where is her call to liberate schoolgirls from the constraints of skirts and dresses which are still so often a part of school uniforms? So long as state schools can require the compulsory gendering of students by means of gender-specific uniforms, the hijab cannot reasonably be banned on grounds of gender equality. As Amal

Awad argued pithily in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “it would be a questionable kind of freedom that acknowledges a woman’s right to wear a bikini but rejects another’s right to cover up”.³² Similarly, in Germany there has been no debate about whether teachers should be banned from displaying the ethics of female inferiority by wearing high heels, an item of dress infinitely more physically harmful and constricting than a mere headscarf.

In Germany and Australia feminist arguments have been used selectively to ‘veil’ a pressing anxiety about the visible presence of Muslim women and girls in the public sphere. At best, the focus on the hijab as the epitome of Muslim oppression of women shows an inability to critically evaluate the vaunted status of women in Western societies. The apparent assumption that the hijab represents the most blatant expression of women’s inequality in Australia would not bear much scrutiny. Most disturbingly, though, the undue attention brought to bear on Muslim women and girls in ill-informed controversies over the hijab intensifies their association with a monolithic and feared Islam. El-Matrah has identified in the focus on the status of Muslim women an anxiety about the place of Muslims in Australian society: “Perhaps the concern for the oppression of Muslim women is more correctly identified as a concern about the intrusion of Muslim women into the Australian landscape”.³³ We must not allow feminism to be used as a tool for ‘othering’ Muslim girls and women in Australia. A feminism which, in these xenophobic times, constructs Muslim girls and women as the antithesis of Australian values and culture is indeed a false feminism.

1. Transcript of ‘The National Interest’, ABC Radio National, 28 August 2005. Available at <www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/natint/stories/s1447773.htm>. Bishop invoked Nazi Germany again on ‘The Religion Report’ on 31 August 2005, by which time she had sought to clarify the relevance of the example: “Now in a Muslim country, under Sharia law, there is no equality of the sexes, there is no freedom as we understand it. Women are entirely second and third class citizens, and in other words, there’s a return to slavery, and that is not what I want to see in my country. And it is time to stand up and say No. And I’d ask you this question: what was it about Germany, a country steeped in music, in art, and literature, that enabled those people to succumb to a Hitler? The answer is, that nobody stood up early and said No. And that’s why I think it’s absolutely important that people such as myself stand up and say No.” Transcript available at <www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/relrpt/stories/s1449019.htm>.
2. Opinion articles which took up the issue include: Iktimal Hage-Ali, ‘Intolerance on display in headscarf row’, *Age*, 30

- August 2005; Amal Awad, 'The type of cover-up freedom lovers need not fear', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August 2005; Pamela Bone, 'Women, the hijab and the burqa', *Age*, 1 September 2005; Andrew Bolt, 'Libs' hijab hokum', *Herald Sun*, 31 August 2005; Leslie Cannold, 'For equality, ban the hijab in public schools', *Age*, 31 August 2005; Liz Conor, 'Hijab means different things to Westerners and Muslims', *Age*, 9 September 2005.
3. 'Panopoulos stands by ban on hijab', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September 2005.
 4. 'The Religion Report', 31 August 2005.
 5. Pamela Bone, 'Women, the hijab and the burqa'.
 6. Joumanah El-Matrah, 'One man's patriarchy is another man's inconvenience', *Arena Magazine* 75, 2005, pp.8-10, 10.
 7. *ibid.*, p.10.
 8. This notion is contested by El-Matrah, who points, for example, to parliamentary representation of women in Muslim majority countries which is on a par with the female presence in many Western democracies, p.8.
 9. 'Panopoulos stands by ban on hijab', *Age*, 5 September 2005.
 10. 'The National Interest', 28 August 2005.
 11. It is not the aim of this article to contribute an interpretation of the meaning of the hijab, rather to examine the way in which the hijab has been used for various purposes in the debates in Germany and Australia. It is accepted that feminist scholars - including Muslim scholars - have contested the role of the hijab in the Muslim faith, but it is also apparent that many women regard it as an item of their faith, for example, Iktimal Hage-Ali, 'Intolerance on display in headscarf row'.
 12. El-Matrah, 'One man's patriarchy', p.8.
 13. 'PM rejects headscarf ban', *Age*, 29 August 2005.
 14. The Turkish population in Germany is relatively secular. For example only around 20 per cent regularly attend a mosque.
 15. For example, it has been made much easier for people of non-German background born and residing in Germany to gain German citizenship.
 16. Riva Kastoryano, 'Religion and Incorporation: Islam in France and Germany', *International Migration Review* 38:3, 2004, pp.1234-1255, 1241.
 17. Beverly Weber is one of few commentators to have noticed the class dimensions of the headscarf controversy in Germany, arguing that the immigrant women who wear the headscarf have had only limited visibility "predicated on their lack of agency, their cultural difference, and their oppression within that Other culture". The entrance of Muslim women into the public service is a claim for much greater visibility and agency. Beverly Weber, 'Cloth on her Head, Constitution in Hand', *German Politics and Society* 22:3, 2004, pp.33-64, 39.
 18. Baden-Württemberg, in the south-west corner of Germany, encompasses the cities of Stuttgart, Freiburg and Karlsruhe, where the Federal Constitutional Court sits. The state has a slight majority of Catholics (39 per cent) and a sizeable minority of Protestants (35 per cent) but also a relatively high population of foreigners (12 per cent). The state is governed by the Christian Democratic Union and the headscarf ban was passed into law with the support of the centre left Social Democratic Party (SPD) and liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP). The Greens voted against the ban.
 19. At time of writing these other states had passed laws banning teachers from wearing the hijab: Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hessen, Lower Saxony and Saarland.
 20. Ludin is referring here to the main conservative party, the Christian Democratic Union and the Catholic Christian Social Union. Interview with Fereshta Ludin, 'Ohne Kopftuch bin ich nackt', *taz*, 22 September 2003.
 21. *ibid.*
 22. 'Panopoulos stands by ban on hijab.'
 23. The social democrat Lale Akgün, federal parliamentarian representing the city of Cologne and a practicing Muslim, and from the Greens Özcan Mutlu, a Berlin state politician.
 24. Alice Schwarzer, 'Die falsche Toleranz', in Alice Schwarzer (ed.), *Die Gotteskrieger und die falsche Toleranz*, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Cologne, 2002, pp.9-19, p.10.
 25. *ibid.*, pp.10-11.
 26. *ibid.*, p.17.
 27. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992, p.149.
 28. *ibid.*, p.151.
 29. *ibid.*, p.164.
 30. Schwarzer, 'Die falsche Toleranz', p.16.
 31. Cannold, 'For equality, ban the hijab in public schools'.
 32. Awad, 'The type of cover-up freedom lovers need not fear'.
 33. El-Matrah, 'One man's patriarchy', p.10.

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CASUAL OBSERVATION

“I HAVE SPOKEN to some people about your work.” The Little Boss, in charge of hiring and firing at the lower levels of a large Australian media organisation, smirked. He’d asked ‘K’ to stay back when her shift ended at 9 p.m. Then he kept her waiting for half-an-hour, only to deliver bad news. “Everyone has a problem with it,” he stated. “We have to let you go.”

K was gobsmacked. She’d been working on a casual basis as a subeditor for five-and-a-half months. In two weeks, she was due to move into a permanent position. Until then, she’d had nothing but good feedback for her work. Her goal was eventually to move up to writing and reporting. “What kind of problem?”

“I can’t tell you anything more,” the Little Boss shrugged. When she pressed him, he admitted, “I’ve never seen your work.” On the other hand, he said that everyone had told him it was substandard.

“Everyone? Like who?”

He wouldn’t say. But when she named the editors she’d worked under, he confirmed several as having complained.

He informed K that she had a choice: she could either work her two remaining shifts for the week, or finish up then and there. In shock, feeling utterly humiliated, she quit on the spot.

The next few days were miserable for K. She tried to work out where she’d gone wrong, and how she could have been so deluded about her own competence. She knew she needed to look for work, but her confidence was on the floor. She went to Centrelink and registered for the dole to hold her over until she got a new job. There, she was told that because

losing this last job had been her own fault (it said on the paperwork that her performance had been unsatisfactory), they would dock \$70 a week from the fortnightly allowance of \$464.

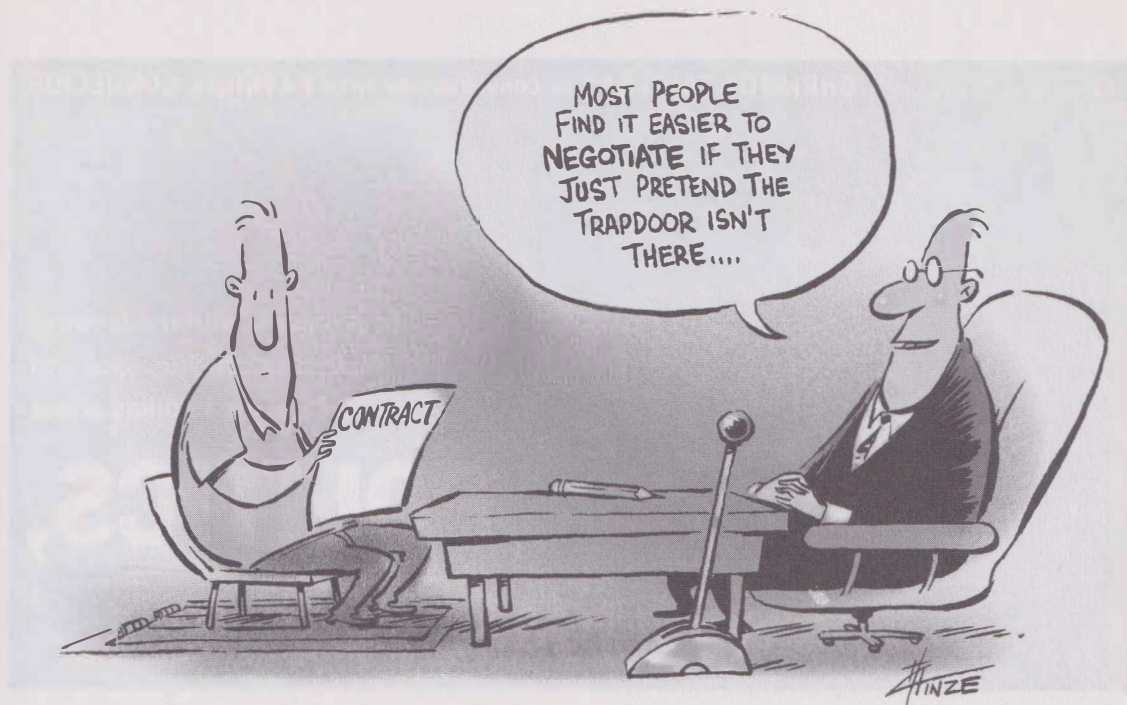
K summoned the courage to contact the people she used to work for, those who’d complimented her work to her face but apparently not behind her back. Two emailed her to say that they’d told Little Boss she was a fine worker and, in fact, superior. A third person had only taken over the section where she worked two days earlier and had never even seen her work.

A little detective work revealed that higher management (representing shareholders) wanted to cut costs. Jobs had to go. It was easiest to chop casuals, and if they’d waited two weeks, she’d have become permanent staff, with all the pesky entitlements that would entail. It turned out the company had numerous strategies for avoiding that particular disaster, including forcing casuals to take a week’s holiday or changing their job description slightly so that, technically speaking, they hadn’t been in the same job for six months, and thus had no right to a permanent position.

“Hold on,” I said to K’s friend, the woman who was telling me this story. “Can’t she take this to some tribunal, or ombudsman?”

Silly me. Casuals, even those as steadily employed as K had been, have no access to any tribunal or ombudsman or any redress at all. I thought it was just freelancers like myself who had to fly through the air without safety nets.

“What about those people who thought she was a good worker? Can’t they help?”



“Everyone’s scared for their jobs,” my friend shrugged. “There aren’t many media outlets in Australia. Even she doesn’t dare complain about it openly, as she wants to get back into that kind of work some day, in the same organisation if possible.”

Soon after she’d lost her job, another media outlet where K once worked heard she was free. They contacted her and offered her a job. So, at least she’s off the dole and back in employment.

K emailed the Little Boss to say how disappointed she was with the deception which he’d resorted to in order to fire her. He replied by email, “There is nothing else I can tell you. I wish you well.”

In July the Treasurer said he’d be open to the idea of exempting firms with over one hundred employees from unfair dismissal laws in the future. K might have kept her job then – after all, in that scenario, the Little Boss could have fired her for no good reason even *after* she’d been confirmed in a permanent position.

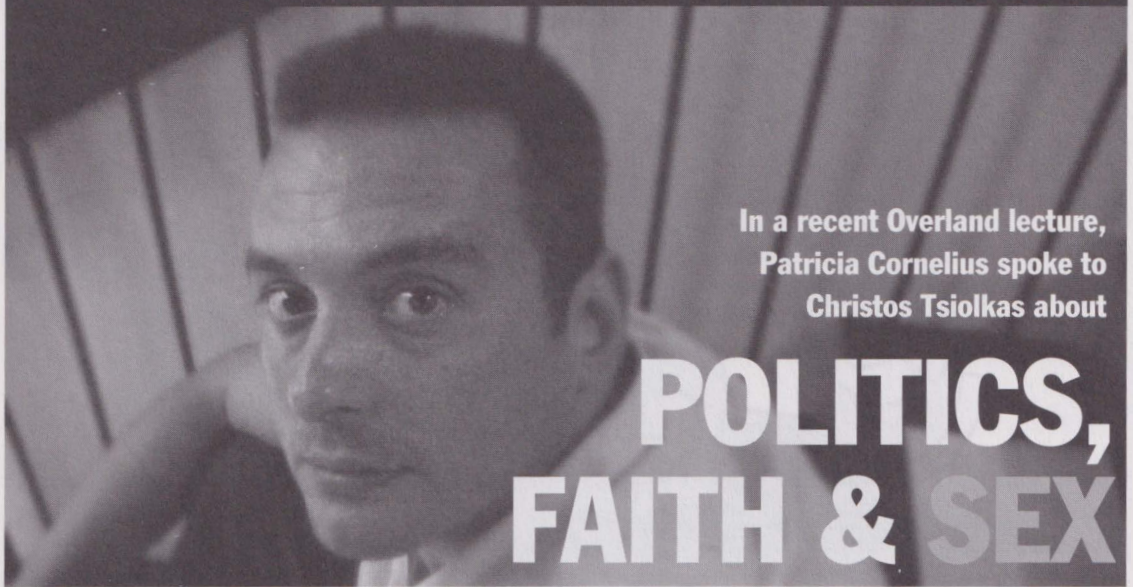
The proportion of casual workers in the workforce is growing; more than one quarter of the workforce are casuals. That’s almost two million people working without annual leave, penalty rates, sick pay, or guaranteed regular hours already. Sue Richardson, Professor of Economics at Flinders University, is just one who has warned of the disastrous effects job insecurity is already having on family life and the wellbeing of children in particular.

And yet Prime Minister John Howard has told the Sydney Institute that casual employment “reflects the contemporary needs of many employers and employees alike”. The Little Big Boss had special advice for casual workers: “To those who bemoan this trend I say this: you of all people should be interested in getting rid of bad laws that hinder the creation of permanent jobs. Either way you look at it, the cost of the existing unfair dismissal laws falls most heavily on firms and individuals who can least afford it.”

Maybe. But it doesn’t appear that the proposed IR ‘reforms’, which would give some permanent positions all the security of a casual job, would have helped K or people like her. There are other ways of adding up costs which depend on who’s footing the bill.

On the same day as my friend told me K’s story, the following letter appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Signed “Henry Partridge, Lindfield”, the letter read: “The unfair dismissal law has had a big impact on our small company. It encouraged us to work together with under-performing employees to increase their skills and production. They are now highly valuable to us and our team. Leave the present law alone. If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Linda Jaivin is a freelance writer and translator. Her new novel, *The Infernal Optimist*, will be published in May 2006 by Fourth Estate.



In a recent Overland lecture,
Patricia Cornelius spoke to
Christos Tsiolkas about

POLITICS, FAITH & SEX

Patricia: *I'm going to stick as close as possible to those three areas: politics, faith and sex. I put the sex at the end because of course if we get there too early, we'll just stay there. And the politics and the faith leap over into that area anyway.*

I think, as a playwright and a novelist, that the whole area of politics – writing political art, or work – is a really difficult one. If you've been associated as I have with the Melbourne Workers' Theatre for a long time, the name 'Melbourne Workers' Theatre' kind of condemns you to everybody's bias about politics. There is a sort of immediate presumption that it is didactic, that you're talking to the converted, that there is no other level, your agenda is a straightforward simple one; and I want to start there: do you call yourself a political writer?

Christos: I'm a political person, and I think my writing reflects my interest in politics. I think in relationship to the literary world I work in, in Australia, I am a political writer, but I think that tag is only applied to a writer who works from oppositional positions, or from the positions of the Left. I think all writing is political, because all writing deals with culture, all writing is words, so all writing has to deal with ideas, it has to deal with politics. In that sense everything that is writing is political, but I think for someone who writes from within the tradition and within a culture that is the Left, it can often be a

troublesome term precisely because of those things you were talking about. I think if you come from an oppositional politics, or from a left-wing politics, you can be labeled with the term 'political writer' in a way conservative writers don't have to think about. It's assumed that their work is not political, when I think in fact it is.

One of the things I have been fortunate in is . . . I don't think that *Loaded* would have been possible to write in the early eighties; I don't think *Dead Europe* would have been possible to write in the eighties. I'm very aware that I've come through two really important moments. One is the struggle of the Left – the feminist Left, the queer Left – which made it possible for me to work from a tradition that I could start to criticise, that I could start to rethink and that I could start writing in different ways. And then the other reality as a left writer was the collapse of communism and the historic project that was communism, which gave me an ability to start writing about contradictory politics, to write about complex and difficult politics maybe in a way that would not have been possible twenty-five years ago.

P: *When you talk I immediately think of a character named Jamie in Who's Afraid of the Working Class?. Christos and I and two other playwrights and composer Irene Vela worked on Who's Afraid of the Working Class? and a lot of the time we would bring back the*

material that we would write alone and read it to each other. There was a lot of discussion of how you talk about race, or how you talk about racism, and one of the main characters in your play is Jamie, and he's an Aboriginal man. I think the same thing applies about that play at that time, that earlier you probably wouldn't have been able to write Jamie because there was a sense that you don't talk about members of different cultures in a negative way, that you should always look for a positive perspective. Jamie is an Aboriginal man who is actually a very damaged person and not a likeable character and he's difficult to deal with. In fact, a lot of us during that process were sort of shuddering and in fear because there is a kind of audacity, I think, that you come to your work with. You're audacious in the sense that you often tread in areas that we fear to tread and of course that audacity sometimes makes us nervous. Here's a character that was difficult and who was talking about: 'What does white cunt smell of?' He asks a prostitute, and he answers for her: 'It smells of death'. Very simply, that character talks about genocide. Later we'll talk about *Dead Europe* and the sense that there's also incredible trepidation about people mentioning Jews if you're not Jewish.

C: One of the things that I think is really important for me to say about that is: none of this comes from a void and none of this comes from merely a desire to shock or to be obscene, or to be transgressive just for transgressiveness' sake: with Jamie in *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?* and not only Jamie. For those of you who don't know the play, it opens up with a monologue by a 15-year-old boy, who's a working-class boy, he's unemployed, and is sexually fantasising about Jeff Kennett (see *Overland* 153, 1998). You can laugh about it, and I consciously did it so that we would laugh when it began, but what it ends up with by the end of that monologue is that this boy is espousing fascism. What he is identifying with Jeff Kennett is that will to power; he's comparing Kennett to his father, who is a labourer, who 'means' shit, and what he wants to be is Jeff Kennett. Now, as I said none of this came from nowhere: I got invited by Patricia and Andrew [Bovell] and Irene and Melissa [Reeves] to work on a play for the tenth anniversary of the Melbourne Workers' Theatre. I was very conscious, as we all were, because we had huge discussions about it, of 'What did an audience expect from a play?' and 'How would an audience dismiss a play that was about class?' 'A play that was

about politics?' They would dismiss it by saying it's worthy, that we've heard this all before. So it seemed to me and I think it seemed for all of us, it was imperative that we would actually do something that would confront an audience like ourselves.

We know racism is a horrific thing but we could know more about the legacy of colonial history in Australia. You know I'm not an Aboriginal man and I'm not speaking as an Aboriginal man, but I know enough about racism, and something racism does is it plays with your psyche, it creates horrific images, it creates horrific desires, it creates insecurities and angers and furies that are part of the way you go forward into the world and I wanted to express that in the play. I wanted to create an Aboriginal character who was not worthy and who was not good, because I don't think politics is about only liking Aboriginal people if they're good, or Jewish people if they're good, or Greek people if they're good; I think the task is much more complex than that.

But that first night before the opening of the play we were terrified, really we were terrified because you do fear two things: 'Will people respond intelligently, to the intellect in the work?'; and 'Will an audience trust that you are doing this out of a political commitment, or if you want to call it a humanist commitment?' What we discovered in *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?* is that we could trust the audience; not that the audience didn't have questions, not that the audience didn't want to discuss it, not that the audience wasn't confused, but that's part of the response you want as a writer from your work.

P: I think too that there's that stuff about contradiction, that art is about that. Art is about not always feeling comfortable with the material. At times I think that you go into areas where for a moment you're totally unsettled with where you're going, with what it means. That stuff is often the ingredient of great art. What you often do is take us into very unpalatable areas. There is always that concern about shock. A lot of people respond to your work, but sometimes shy away because they cannot deal with some of the material. Is that something you're conscious of? You don't pull back really.

C: When you're working in this terrain, dealing with the kind of material I do, there is a pulling back. It may not be very evident to the reader. I spent seven years on *Dead Europe*. Part of that time was having to rethink places that the writing took me, and to actually take a step back and go, 'What am I doing

here?'. When you deal with something like racism you know it can invade your psyche, you start creating a character that is racist or thinking about racism all the time and suddenly you find yourself thinking as a racist, and you need to step back, to separate the story I'm telling, the characters I'm producing, to remind myself of the reason why I'm telling these stories, why I'm using these effects.

I'm unashamedly left even if some aspects of the Left may not want to claim me, and I am very aware that there is a whole history of art and writing and film making and culture that was not sanctioned by the Left. You can go back right to the beginning of the Soviet experiment where there was an amazing period of artistic experimentation over the 1920s. It started to be repressed, and artists were told this is how you were meant to produce work, this is the nature of what political work is, this is what real left politics is and what real left art is, and I've been very conscious of that history and if you like writing against that impulse in the Left.

Like everyone here, there are times when I want to go to the Multiplex and watch a Hollywood movie, but that's very rare. What I actually want from a novel I read, or a film I see, is to actually go into dark places and difficult places because that's when I feel most alive and engaged by my interaction with the work. Spiro [Economopoulos] and I decided to do a film about Pasolini and *Salò* because *Salò* is a film – no matter how difficult an experience it is to view it – that I love. That's what I want cinema to be. The artists I respect, and not in an idolising way, are people like Pasolini who took risks with their material, and took risks in their politics and with the way they created their art. I'm not putting myself in that league but that's who inspires me. I think it's important in a conservative time, and this is a very conservative time, to be reminded of the importance of that kind of artwork.

P: *Talking about Pasolini, is part of that feeling of being at odds with the Left or outside the Left, a feeling of being gay as well? Is it that there're always gay characters in your plays and in your novels and that you're talking about gay experience all the time . . . does that create a kind of barrier to the left world?*

C: From a very young age the experience of knowing that I was homosexual, which felt like an outsider position, meant that I was drawn to and attracted to a particular kind of work. Because I felt I had a

hidden existence I think I was drawn to work that was difficult and challenging, and actually spoke from an outsider position. Coupled with the fact that I was a migrants' child, and that I felt somehow dissident to this culture, I was from a really early age interested in the work of outsiders – left of field stuff – that sometimes was political and sometimes was not, but it was experimental or difficult or not of the norm if you like.

One of the difficulties of being gay at the moment is that I don't necessarily feel much affinity to a commercial gay culture, which is really prominent in a place like Australia, and in much of the West. There're parts of *Dead Europe* that kind of go really dark about what the nature of that culture is, and that's probably because I am left wing. A homosexual, in a gay culture that I see, is increasingly conservative.

P: *I want to refer to the politics from Loaded. In it Ari says:*

The Polytechnic is history. Vietnam is history. Auschwitz is history. Hippies are history. Punks are history. God is history. Hollywood is history. The Soviet Union is history. My parents are history. My friend Joe is becoming history. I will become history. This fuckin' shithole planet will become history. Take more drugs.

It's actually so refreshing. And in The Jesus Man, in the schoolroom, someone says, "Whitlam's got sacked, Whitlam's sacked". And at the same time the brother Dominic is worrying about fucking some girl, but there's sort of a lovely overt way that you place important historical moments within a context. That is quite subversive in that mostly in plays now the politics have to be camouflaged because otherwise people turn off or get irritated or furious. But you drop in all those moments really seamlessly.

But in Dead Europe the politics are really camouflaged by a tremendously huge story, that is the folkloric tale that threads its way through. Do you feel that there's a time now when you can talk more broadly or that you still have to find the camouflage, you have to find the way of talking about the politics in a way that's not so overt?

C: With *Dead Europe* I urgently wanted to talk about history and politics and this out-of-control and horrifying resurgence of the most virulent racisms and hatreds. So, because Greece is the European country I know well, know best, coming back in

I think it's one of the great human questions. What is the role of God? And just because we believe ourselves to be secular Westerners doesn't make that question any less important or any less relevant for people.

the mid nineties and thinking I wanted to – just as a person from the Balkans, coming from Greece – to understand certain deaths, that was the first thing I knew: the title and the deaths. These were the death of communism, the death of Yugoslavia – a country that had meant something to me, had meant something within my family – and the third death was that of a peasant class which is where my origins lie. (A friend emailed me this week saying you shouldn't use the word 'peasant' because in Australia it has negative connotations. When I use it I don't mean it negatively at all. He says it's a failure of our language that we don't have a positive term for peasant.) So anyway, I thought: 'I'm a writer, I want to write about these things. I want to write about these amazing vast things. And part of the reason I want to write about it is because I do come from the Left'. I feel – I don't know for those of you who are from the Left if you also feel this – a shared sense of responsibility to understand aspects of the violence done in communism's name, and also to understand the betrayal of a hope that occurred in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

All these things were in my head and I thought what I was going to do – and this is how *Dead Europe* began – [was] a non-fiction travelogue. It was going to be myself traveling through Europe, writing about Europe. Very quickly I realised that the world doesn't need another travelogue from an Australian writer: it really doesn't need 'I went to Corfu and I drank coffee'. Also I started reading history and realised there were really committed scholars and historians who could do those stories, who knew those stories, had studied those stories, who could commit themselves to those stories in a way that I couldn't as a writer of fiction.

One thing I discovered in the research however, and it came out of being interested in the Macedonian question, was a Jewish history, a Sephardic Jewish history to the Balkans that I'd never been told about. A lot of you here, this being Melbourne, would realise that in the early 1990s there was a real tension between Greeks and Macedonians about this contested territory. I didn't want to accept either

the Greek nationalist position or the Macedonian nationalist position, and so I thought I'd just start to investigate a little bit of that history. I'd been told lots of stories about the Balkans. I'd never been told this Jewish story. And then there'd been another book in my head which had been these ghost stories that my father had told me from a very young age about the demons and the vampires and the ghosts that possessed his part of Greece; and look, it's one of those moments . . . and I'm not trying to be mystical at all . . . it's one of those moments where you get this rush as a writer about what you're going to do. I can't be an historian, I don't have the discipline, I don't have the talent or the scholarship for it, but what I can do is write a book that is about ideas and about racism and about history, through this fiction. And that's really how the novel began.

P: *So your first intention was to actually write a non-fiction novel?*

C: Yep.

P: *Can you go over the three deaths again, in more detail; what Dead Europe represented: the Balkans, communism and peasantry?*

C: For me the death of communism is a straightforward historic death in the sense that it was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. What I was seeing in Europe, but not only in Europe because we all felt the consequences of this death here in Australia, we felt it with the new immigrants and refugees and people who were coming into our country, was a collapse of this system and of a politics and of a notion of progressive politics. There was the euphoria of the capitalist Right in the early 1990s, proclaiming the end of history. History didn't fucking end.

It was evident in the former Yugoslavia that history had not ended, that history was in the present, it was being lived now. I don't think we in the West really understood it until this event called September 11, 2001, when New York and Washington got attacked. That slapped us right in our faces, that

slapped us at where we consider home to be. So in that way the death of communism and the death of Yugoslavia are connected for me, they're part of the same process.

The death of the peasant class has been an ongoing death in Europe. One of the things I wanted to talk about in the book and that I hope I express is that that class was not only Christian. It was Muslim, it was Jewish, and the historical consequences of that death are still being lived through the migratory cultures we have now in this country. The simplest way to explain it is when I look at people behind the detention wire of our camps it doesn't matter that the women are wearing hijab, it doesn't matter that the men may not look exactly like my father, but I actually do see my parents and I see their peers. I don't see Muslims, I see people fleeing an economic disaster. I don't actually believe there's 'economic refugees' and 'non-economic refugees'. I think economics is part of politics and war and in that way I'm a bit of an unreconstructed lefty.

But all those things gave a fuel to the writing of *Dead Europe*, because what I saw in Europe was this underclass being formed of refugee people. And that's what I wanted to deal with in the book. Europe hasn't died. The title should not be taken in that sense literally, but Europe has changed and part of that change is how Europe is dealing with the new people coming into its borders; or as is increasingly happening, not being allowed to come within its borders.

P: *So when you talk about those deaths, you think that for us in Australia Europe has represented for such a long time some sort of Mecca for the artist community. There's some sort of sense it's all better there or the culture is far more sophisticated; the artwork is greater; everything is finer. You certainly don't take us to any finer place at all. There is a great sense of loss in the novel about what Europe doesn't represent. What do you think this says about our relationship to that place?*

C: I think what it says for Isaac the main character is that whatever politics or whatever identity he now wants to construct in this world, as an Australian, it cannot be by looking romantically to a notion of Europe, whether that notion is Britain or Greece or France or Sweden. When you go to Europe now – and I go as a second-generation Australian of Greek background, I love Greece – there's a feeling of hap-

piness to be able to have an experience of Greece, or Europe. But I'm not Greek and I can't search for a homeland in Europe anymore.

Also, as somebody from the Left I'm very acutely aware of the United States of America's position in the world, and of the politics of the USA and their role as a superpower. I think there is an anger being expressed in *Dead Europe* and it's partly my anger about the whole fucking colonial imperialist legacy of Europe, that I haven't forgotten and the characters that populate my novel haven't forgotten. I think if you come from anywhere around the Balkans you can't forget it. That comes out in the book: those guys have not died, they've not gone away.

P: *Going back to The Jesus Man, in the opening there's this fantastic moment where the family walk down to the beach and along the beach are a row of crows and they're feeding off the heart of some animal and Louie and Dominic are absolutely terrified. Immediately you set up a sense of the mythology of that family and that there is a legacy felt by that family. The incident has a huge symbolic feel to it that's followed through by what the legacy is. In *Dead Europe*, it seems like you've taken this notion of what the family inherits, the notion of some folkloric mythological burden, that is carried through Isaac's journey. In terms of faith now, how do you reconcile the loss of faith?*

C: I think that the loss of political faith permeates *Dead Europe*. This loss is there and there is a bleakness to the book that is a reflection of how impotent I feel as a political person in the world at the moment. To answer that question honestly, there is a pessimism to *Dead Europe* about 'What is an effective politics in the current world?' What is an effective politics where economic rationalism and greed seem to be empowered? That's *Dead Europe*. I think it's really important that those of us who identify as left actually begin these conversations about how we renew political faith, how we address the failures of communism, how we address the failures of the Left, but also how we address and make viable again the possibilities of the Left, the hope of the Left.

Dead Europe is also a book about religion. I had to explore the history of the Jewish people in Greece and so started exploring Judaism, which led me to the Bible, it led me to the Qur'an, it led me to an engagement again with the word of God. This is an exile position for me. It goes back to being homosexual, to being an outsider in relationship to that

I wished sometimes that I wasn't a fag and I wasn't that shy, nice Greek boy, that I was actually one of the tough wog kids who could bash you . . .

stuff. I call myself an atheist, even though I pray, but I think it's really important to understand the immense importance for so many people of the issues and the questions and experiences of religious faith. One of the things that was forgotten I think in the greed of the end of history was just how important religion is in terms of how people define themselves in the world. I think it's one of the great human questions. What is the role of God? And just because we believe ourselves to be secular Westerners doesn't make that question any less important or any less relevant for people. I know you don't like God.

P: *I can't stand it! I've a great irritation to it, I just want to wipe it all. I just feel like the dialogue's been had about it and we're at a point where we think 'there is no God'.*

C: I said that I call myself an atheist. I think I make that statement out of a political sense. That arises from the stuff you're talking, those fears and ambivalences you're expressing, but one of the questions you're asking me is about faith, and all I'm saying is, I'm saying two things, that faith and an optimism that can arise from faith, are religious questions or have in our past been expressed in religious terms, and there's something we can learn from that. I don't think you can throw all of that away. And the second thing I was saying is just because you and I may speak as atheists, doesn't mean that the notion of God or religion is unimportant for millions of people on this planet, and that experience has to be dealt with honorably, is that the word? It has to be dealt with and understood by atheists like ourselves.

P: *In the publicity for Dead Europe you said: "In terms of the broad question of religion's role in politics now, we all know that since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and since the invasion and occupation of Iraq, there can no longer be a pretense that religion no longer plays a role in politics, not only in the Islamic world but in Europe and the West itself. I think progressive people have to begin to address religion seriously. We need to educate ourselves, especially, and here I am pessimistic, as I believe all*

three of those religions ultimately want our destruction." Can you talk about that?

C: I was just thinking we may not want to talk about religion, but we may have to because people like Bronwyn Bishop and Sophie Panopoulos are. I got an email response from a journalist in Greece about *Dead Europe*, and she asked me if I thought that it was a specifically homosexual experience to be concerned about God, as a Westerner. She found with her queer colleagues, friends and family in Greece, that that notion of wanting the Church to move to an acceptance of sexuality, was really important. I replied back that the only legitimate position for being anti-gay that exists in the world now is the religious position. Biologically, socially, culturally, any opposition to homosexuality doesn't make sense. It's only in terms of a religious position that you can understand a moral condemnation of homosexuality. I'm not espousing it, I'm just trying to make sense of the question, and express some of what I was talking about in that section. *Dead Europe* is a book that argues that because of the choices my characters make about the nature of their love and the nature of their lives, they're always going to be exiled from the monotheistic God, and that's an aspect of Judaic, Islamic and Christian faith that I think is almost impossible to overcome.

P: *I don't know where to go now . . .*

C: Sex.

P: *After reading Dead Europe there is that feeling of 'What in the hell can we believe in?'. So with the fold of communism, with the mythologies, there's a sense that there's just no possibility of believing in anything hopeful and so we're grasping at power and capital. Certainly those questions of faith: 'What can we grasp hold of? What can make us decent? What can make us a community again?' are there, and 'What God is there to believe in when in fact the streets are being littered with young children who are being prostituted, and there's an industry in that?'*

I read today of some example outside of Prague, I think, where all the streets are lined up with whatever

your taste of children and that it's totally out there, as it is really everywhere. Pornography is something that feeds into your books, that you're really interested in. This is for a lot of people an area that is sort of unfathomable, and I wondered if it's about the cruelty and the exploitation and the levels of going into the darker side in some ways, while at the same time one gets off on it. That's the dilemma.

C: There's a couple of things to say about pornography. One is I've talked about how from a young age I've been attracted to certain styles of writing and certain styles of art and communication, and the pornographic imagination has been part of that. So when I'm talking about film or writing, that has been an influence in my life. What pornography lays bare for me is the contradiction of desire and sexuality and this libertarian impulse that I have in me about sex and desire, and then the cruel commerce of the marketplace.

The hardest section in *Dead Europe* is the Prague section, but the level of prostitution and pornography that is circulating in Eastern Europe at the moment is horrific, and as a man who can't help being appalled by that commerce and the exploitation but who is attracted to the imagery, I wanted to deal with it. It goes back to my being not interested in creating nice characters. I'm not interested in creating straightforward characters who are idealised. I am fascinated by those contradictions and ambiguities in our psyches because I think that is something we all have to deal with and that's the terrain I want to work in.

The other thing to say is, and I really want to stress this, I had a lot of responses before the book was published, and before *The Jesus Man* was published too and while working on *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?*, of: 'Aren't you scared of what people are going to say?' 'Aren't you scared that people are going to be angry?' 'Aren't you scared about the criticism you're going to get?' And yes, I would be lying to you to say there isn't a fear, because as a good Greek boy, I want to be liked. I want to be accepted by all of you, but I'm not scared of argument. Argument is not a fight, argument is not annihilating the other person or the other person's opinion, it's to say, 'Why did I write *Dead Europe*?' Because I think that anti-Semitism exists. I think anti-Semitism is actually on the rise and I think anti-Semitism is prevalent in European culture and it's in here. I am

anti-Semitic, in the same way that I'm racist, in my confrontation with Aboriginal people. That is something that I've had to learn to deal with and to fight and struggle against. I'm not scared about having these arguments and these conversations because I think these are real phenomena and I think the more destructive thing is to say 'I'm so scared that I don't want to talk about it'. Because in not talking about it you just let it happen.

P: *Christos was telling me a story about being at Byron Bay and somebody in the audience saying "What's a nice, nice, boy like you doing writing . . .", what did she actually call it?*

C: ". . . this dark, horrible stuff?"

P: *And we were talking, because Christos is a really nice, nice boy; well not boy, man, and our mutual friend Irene Vela talks about the kind of legacy of growing up as a migrant in Australia and of having to be liked, having to be nice, because you're not liked, and it is interesting in that they are dark worlds, dark places, you take us. I felt like it was a deeply pessimistic view of the world really and not one that you appear to express in other ways.*

C: The experiences you have as an adolescent are formative. They are. And the thing about Irene's point as a migrant child, like that dual thing of knowing that I was a fag and having to hide that from the world, and that second thing of wanting to be accepted by the Aussies and therefore to be really nice, is that I thought the aspects of myself that were Greek were disgusting. I thought I was smelly. I thought I was hairy. I thought I was ugly. I thought all those things because that's what was partly there at my time when I was growing up in the culture.

That's why I go to those dark places, because . . . I want to be careful with this . . . I'm not saying I understand what it is to be someone who is not me, but I do understand what it is to have something called racism do something to you and to the way your psychology works and to your sense of self worth. I don't think that it's an accident that the first books I really remember responding to as an adolescent were things like *Portnoy's Complaint* and *An American Dream*, that were by Jewish-American writers, who basically were second-generation immigrants' children writing their experiences in a way that no Australian writer I knew was writing of my experience.

I wished sometimes that I wasn't a fag and I wasn't that shy, nice Greek boy, that I was actually one of the tough wog kids who could bash you, seriously, that strutted, that had power or what seemed to me at that time power in the world. I realised later that that was a limited power, but I think part of the character Ari has been formed by that experience. Another book I read at the time is *What Makes Sammy Run?*, and Sid in *Dead Europe* is, in a way, I don't know what the word is, *homage* to Sammy. For those of you who haven't read it, in Budd Schulberg's book Sammy is a working-class, tough Jewish guy who's not interested in being nice. He's interested in being as ruthless and as pushy and as ugly as he can be – he doesn't care about the *goyim* and he doesn't actually care about what the nice Jews think of him. So there is a dark side to where I can go. I think Irene's spot on, I think a lot of it has to do with growing up in this culture as a migrants' child.

I think we should follow this up with questions, but before we do, are you a political writer?

P: *I think the question's so complex because it's true that no-one talks about other writers in that way at all. Of course everybody's a political writer. I think I'm forced to be.*

C: Not only with *Dead Europe* but with *Loaded* too, the toughest thing to do is to try to create the sense of, I think as all of us know, how vibrant and stimulating and exciting talking about ideas and politics can be. It can become really limp on the page. That's one of the challenges about writing politics, and you know about that challenge, because you do it too.

P: *I do know about the limpness on the page. Often while I'm writing I think 'Oh God I'm tired, I'm so fucking tired', and that's because I'm bored shitless. You know the exciting bit – the bit that will take off, but how you get to it or how you build to it to make that live is a really difficult process. That's the hard part. To be able to say all the things you might want to say is really a difficult process and you've done so wonderfully in *Dead Europe*.*

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The conversation was recorded by Hand in Hand productions and transcribed by Nicole Parisi, work placement student, Victoria University.

Patricia Cornelius, a founding member of Melbourne Workers' Theatre, is an award-winning playwright. She has written over twenty plays including *Love, Lily and May*, *Jack's Daughters*, *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?*, *Hogs Hairs and Leaches*, and *Fever*. Her first novel, *My Sister Jill*, was published by Random House in 2002.

Christos Tsiolkas is author of *Dead Europe* (Random House, 2005). His earlier novels are *The Jesus Man* (1999) and *Loaded* (1995). As a playwright he has written or co-written *Non Parlo Di Salo* (2005) and *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?* (1998).

THE SPECTRES HAUNTING DEAD EUROPE

| Christos Tsiolkas: *Dead Europe* (Random House, \$22.95)

CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS'S third novel, *Dead Europe*, is a work of stunning formal inventiveness. Two narratives, one originating in the enchanted but brutal landscape of northwestern Greece under German occupation, the other in the dislocations of immigrant experience, wind towards each other from opposite sides of the modern divide. When they meet in the ideology-ravaged badlands of Western Europe, they detonate into a confronting, contemporary horror story that explores the nature of political consciousness, desire and subjectivity in a world where communism has failed and the march of global capitalism seems unabated.

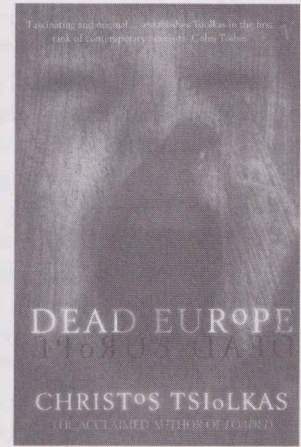
The novel is organised around a split-frame effect that moves the reader back and forth between the two dominant narrative strands. Isaac, a Greek-Australian photographer of immigrant parents, returns to Athens to attend an exhibition of his own work, conscious of the fact that his trip is also an opportunity to engage in a sexual freedom unhampered by his otherwise monogamous relationship with Colin back in Melbourne. Isaac is also carrying the anti-Semitic stories of pre-industrial Greece lodged within him like an "insidious chemical" that is capable of overwhelming the modern, more cosmopolitan socialism that he inherits from his father. At the same time Tsiolkas tells us the story of the curse, emerging out of events in a remote peasant community, that Isaac will inherit from his mother. Lucia, the "most beautiful woman in the world", stands at the centre of an archaic universe saturated with violent superstition and brutal sexuality that, refracted through the

looking-glass of contemporary experience, will fill Isaac's journey across Western Europe with a horror in which the past and the present are frighteningly superimposed upon each other.

The genre-bending movement between narrative frames indicates Tsiolkas's command of very different fictional idioms. Isaac's first-person narrative develops the corporeality and fast-paced observational prose of grunge fiction into a riveting contemporary travelogue that leaves the world of boulevards, museums and tasteful cafes, and exposes instead the reality of cities brimming with exploitable populations: Russians, Albanians, Macedonians, Africans and Arabs all morphing into a global underclass subsisting alongside a world of credit cards and designer kitsch. Against this background, Isaac's idealism looks anachronistic. "Do you know what contempt these blokes have for you, with your headstart in capitalism?" Isaac's friend Sal asks him in Prague. "Beauty and art and fucking politics. They'd sell all their fucking children for a buck. And you want to talk about fucking aesthetics and ethics." The story that develops around Lucia, by contrast, has something mythical and timeless about it. But as its pitch-black magical realism slowly assimilates historical reality – the Nazi occupation, then intimations of civil war and the winds of the 1967 coup – we get a sense of the merging of politics and myth that is so important to this book.

The fusion of these two narratives, as a cynical, drug-fucked, and increasingly predatory Isaac wanders through a Europe defined by the anarchic

. . . this nightmare is also the nightmare of the present, of dead labour and a parasitic capitalism that has created a nomadic population of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants selling themselves in the industrial zones, sweat shops and brothels of the West.



flows of global capital – people, desire, commodities – generates a sense of disintegration that is both viscerally and politically confronting. It is as if Isaac is colonised both by the curse lurking atavistically within him and by the libidinal, morally unaccountable forces driving the world of casinos, prostitution and strip-joints he moves through like a consumer hungry for more extreme experiences. The ambiguity here is contained neatly in the figure of the vampire Isaac has in effect become as the family curse runs its course. The vampire suggests a traditional, superstitious world anxious about its survival into the present, and a hedonistic, highly individualised subjectivity that has detached itself from land and people. Because of this ambiguity, the vampire can embody the horror of the past and of the present. As Isaac succumbs to his own blood lust, “the tradition of dead generations”, to paraphrase Marx, “weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living”. But this nightmare is also the nightmare of the present, of dead labour and a parasitic capitalism that has created a nomadic population of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants selling themselves in the industrial zones, sweat shops and brothels of the West.

Some of *Dead Europe*'s most intoxicating and complicated moments play out a high-speed odyssey through this world, yet in a way that cunningly implicates the reader in the moral vacuity demanded, at moments, by Isaac's viewpoint:

I will wander the streets and cross the bridges over its canals and all the while I will glory in my omnipotence . . . I will no longer be saddened by the rote masturbations of the whores parading their grotesque bodies in the clear glass windows of the brothels. I will look on at a young African woman,

her cunt shaved, cupping mammoth breasts in her hands, and it will make me laugh. She will be there for my pleasure. I will walk among schizophrenic homeless men and women and their snarls for money will appal me and I will understand the urge to wipe the wretched scum from the earth. I will enter a porn cinema and have sex with three men, a German, an Italian and a Korean: I wish to have my fill of bodies, to consume and devour.

Passages like this one foreground the relationship between global economics – the forces that can launch a woman from Africa to the brothels of Amsterdam – and the “pleasure” that circulates around the corporeality of consumption. They suggest an astute, self-reflexive approach to the issues that preoccupy the novel. The nod to Franz Fanon in the passage just quoted (“the wretched of the earth”) is typical of a book that cannot conceal its erudition, or its deep sense of political history. As we follow Isaac through contemporary Europe recast as a sort of postmodern, Baudelairian hell, we are also conscious of how our own pleasure might be implicated in the exploitative logics usually hidden under the seamless facades of capitalism, the tourist's Europe most of us still crave as an easy antidote to the banality of suburbia. When Isaac, in the grip of this delirium, declares that “there is poetry after Auschwitz . . . poetry and life and adventure and pleasure and movement”, the novel explicitly evokes the debates over the relationship between ethics, aesthetics and history that form a vital, often implicit, subtext.

The reference to Adorno (“After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric”) also gives us a context in which to read the novel's preoccupation with anti-Semitism. While this aspect of the novel has been

criticised (by Robert Manne most noticeably), it is also crucial to the way in which the novel secures a sense of temporal collision, in which the ideologies of the past seem to feed into those of the present: blood libel and blood lust collaborating in the apocalyptic sense that history might end in abjection, or in formless, universal terror.

Though this is a novel that one reads through sleeplessness with an uncomfortable sort of craving, it would be misleading to say that *Dead Europe's* political obsessions are kept at bay for the sake of disinterested story telling. The point is that they aren't. This is a political novel, yet one that is not interested in the simple polarities (self-other, immigrant-citizen, centre-margin etc.) that usually interrogate national space. Tsiolkas's world view is astute in its grasp of global pressures and dynamics. This is what, finally, makes it such an important novel. While it is still a recognisably Australian book (though it radically recasts what that might mean), it is first and foremost a novel that explores the global context of identity formation. In this sense it is also extra-territorial. It helps us glimpse the sprawling networks of exchange, violence and desire that have been moulding the modern world for at least the past two hundred years, and in doing so it gives us a sense of what the future of fiction might be.

Andrew McCann is an Australian writer currently teaching in the US and author of *Subtopia* (Vulgar Press, 2005).

ONE WAY TO highlight what makes *Dead Europe* so disturbing is to read it alongside Eva Sallis's recent novel *The Marsh Birds*. Like Tsiolkas, Sallis is a consciously political writer, and the two books share a concern about the victims of displacement and immigration. Based on a true story, *The Marsh Birds* traces the plight of Dhurgham, an Iraqi boy who flees to Australia, only to fall into a system that erases his identity, shreds his personality and ultimately destroys him. It treats its theme with subtlety – the personnel in the detention centres are not monsters, any more than Dhurgham is an angel – but its moral compass is clear. The immigration regime is inhumane; common decency demands reform.

What Tsiolkas does is quite different. *Dead Europe* renders post-communist Europe as a place where History has ended, not with the advent of Fukuyama's liberal democratic idyll, but in a welter of random violence and meaningless sex. It is a continent

where everything has a price and nothing a value, a place repeatedly identified, both figuratively and literally, as Hell. Isaac, *Dead Europe's* protagonist, journeys across a corrupt and corrupting landscape, struggling with the question of what remains after ideology dies. Eventually he concludes: "What I believe is that we will kill each other, that we will hurt each other. We will destroy our neighbours, and we will exile them. We will sell our children as whores. We will murder and rape and punish one another. [...] We will create Armageddon. In the name of God or in the name of justice or, simply, because we can. This is what I believe."

Trotsky wrote of Celine that "the very intensity of his pessimism bears with it a dose of its antidote". I don't think you can say this about *Dead Europe* (at least, not in any simple way), since it systematically and ferociously attacks not only a debased society but the liberalism that seems the only available response to its depravity. Europe, it suggests, is deeply sick, and no amount of 'why-can't-we-all-just-get-along' pieties will cure the infection in its blood.

I have some sympathy with the issues Robert Manne raised in his review in the *Monthly*. The anti-Semitism portrayed in *Dead Europe* is deeply disturbing, not simply because the novel consciously and deliberately revisits some of the most poisonous anti-Jewish slanders of the twentieth century, from peasant tales of blood libel to fantasies of Hebrew pornographers, but because it implicates the reader in these images. The main narrative, written in the first person, encourages our identification with the intelligent, pleasant and tolerant protagonist, up to and including his transformation into an anti-Semite, sociopath and vampire. The secondary narrative of peasant life begins as a folk tale and as such invites an allegorical reading – but confounds expectations by colliding violently with the central, realist narrative. The ground is further cut from underneath us by the fluidity of identities in the novel, with Jew and non-Jew constantly changing place. The book is heavily overdetermined; it's also, quite possibly, out of control, and, while racist interpretations would be misreadings, there are places where they seem plausible misreadings.

Yet it would be wrong to condemn it on those grounds. You cannot look into the abyss without the risk that the abyss might look back. The social problems facing Europe (and the world) in the aftermath of Stalinism emit only of a radical solution

The social problems facing Europe (and the world) in the aftermath of Stalinism emit only of a radical solution – and, at present, the reawakening of the most fearful demons of humanity’s past seems more likely than the reinvigoration of the Left.

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Trotsky suggested that Celine would either make his peace with darkness or perceive the dawn. The problem for radical novelists today is simply that, in this conjunction, the dawn seems a long way away. Hence *Dead Europe*’s pessimism.

Where *The Marsh Birds* makes its intervention within the framework of conventional politics, *Dead Europe* gropes for a solution beyond the options that are available. Of course, it fails. Of course, it takes us into repellent places. But the process produces one of the most challenging and significant political novels of recent times.

Jeff Sparrow is *Overland*’s reviews editor.

COLOSSAL, CORPOREAL and terrifying in its depiction of humanity, Christos Tsiolkas’s new novel, *Dead Europe*, has the effect of a Hieronymus Bosch painting. Its themes are morality and damnation, blood and bodily exploitation; even its light, if you could paint it, would have an iridescent, green medieval gloom. Tumbling over one another in poses of agony and ecstasy, exiled from paradise on earth, its characters repeat the age-old mistakes of history, perpetuating cycles of violence, racism and oppression. These are huge themes, elaborated with Tsiolkas’s distinctive forthrightness which can be confronting and even dangerous. Rather than being simply “dead disturbing”, however, as Robert Manne describes the book in his review in the *Monthly*, *Dead Europe* is expressive of a sense of disturbance, a dread that Tsiolkas detects mounting in the world along with the rise of religious and racial intolerance.

The book’s narrative follows a mid-thirties Greek Australian photographer called Isaac as he journeys across contemporary, unified Europe. In his mother’s ancestral Greek village, Isaac exposes himself to a demon that has long haunted his family, a curse unleashed by his grandparents for their murder of a young Jewish boy they were paid to protect through

the Second World War. Leaving Greece, Isaac travels across the continent, from Venice to Prague, Paris, Amsterdam, Cambridge and finally London. Haunted by this ancestral demon, Isaac becomes witness to a Europe reminiscent of Hell, its populace engrossed in an orgy of mutual exploitation. Communism is over, the East is selling out to the West, and everyone is losing or cashing in on their culture. Greeks, Czechs, Bulgarians, Albanians, Russians – all are prostituting themselves for the wealth and power offered by the European Union, for access to the global economy, for Prada and Gucci and Calvin Klein. “Yes. We wear Prada shirts now, Tommy Hilfiger jeans,” says an ex-peasant Isaac meets in Greece; in Prague, a friend wears boxer shorts with “Lenin’s profile stretched across the bumpy contours of his crotch”. All ideology is for sale, and politics has been reduced to the status of a commodity.

This Europe which Isaac experiences is dead, but only in the sense that death can be felt all around him, in the daily composition of bodies, in the palpable amassing of history. Death lingers in Isaac’s photographs, haunting them, contorting the faces of his subjects into those of spirits in pain. Pungent and grotesque, bodies and their stench are everywhere, moved about, sold, photographed, fetishised, bashed and invaded. Almost every industry in which these characters engage is in some way exploitative of flesh, not only the obvious, like pornography and prostitution, but also drug-dealing and the smuggling of people. Even in art and friendship, the boundaries between admiration and objectification are hard to maintain. “Please . . . please let this just be a photograph of friendship,” Isaac implores before taking a photograph of his mate sleeping. Later, looking at a batch of his pictures of men at work, he sees: “They are carcasses, they are meat. The warehouse is an abattoir. Those morose faces turned towards the lens are countenances pleading for a great silence: they are doomed.”

This sense of doom is powerful throughout *Dead Europe*, ominous in the blood-curdling absolutes of fundamentalist religion. Religion has claimed a

monopoly on morality and with repercussions for non-believers. Where does this leave Isaac? It's a disturbing question: he is from the secular New World and is at odds with most of their tenets because he is gay. Without faith, Isaac is locked out of paradise; without religious knowledge and erudition he is kept on the perimeters of power. When a Muslim woman in Paris asks him what he believes, Isaac says:

The question made me flounder. I had no ready answer. I had no God, nor faith in any doctrine. I was not so proud of this; I didn't believe that it indicated any intellectual authority or wisdom. If anything, it betrayed a lack of knowledge, a pampered naivete.

More than just a state of naivete, this lack of religion leaves Isaac in a state of spiritual exile, alone with his demons and nightmares, hungry for the lifeblood of others.

Later, however, Isaac suggests that if he has faith, it is in his long-term partner who is waiting for him in Australia. His belief in Colin, in this younger, less worldly society, is his one chance at holiness on earth. If Europe is the centre of the world, a place of war and torment and history that gives weight to life, Australia is a sweet hereafter – life with the guts of suffering and history punched out of it. "Australia seems a perfect place in which to finish one's life," says a woman in Prague. "I imagine it is a very quiet place, a very safe place." Ultimately, even to Isaac, it is a place to commit to simple, circumscribed love. Like Ari in Tsiolkas's first novel, *Loaded*, Isaac sees his one chance of salvation in commitment and peace with one other who, curiously, is here again a blue-eyed, blond Aussie guy.

At some moments, *Dead Europe* seems almost to be about religion's revenge upon politics, perhaps written out of Tsiolkas's own intense disappointment in politics' failure. Isaac and his sister paint a hammer and sickle in nail-polish on their Marxist father's grave, but "Like blood, it washed away in the first rain". Politics was never going to hold, it seems; was as impermanent as the blood of past generations. Hate, piety, Paradise and Hell are all part of the human condition, and none of the modern sciences has succeeded in rationalising them away. After a century of conflict over political ideology, people still kill and oppress one another. Righteousness has triumphed over conscience. Tsiolkas is by no means celebrating this; on the contrary, it is the

stuff of his nightmare. Faith not only excludes Isaac, but damns him. It is co-dependent with hatred and religion always seems to lead to violence. Even Colin, Isaac's one chance at happiness – his devotion – is marred by a tattoo of the swastika, and its ink rubs up against Isaac's own skin.

Drenched in signs and stories of religious hatred, especially those of anti-Semitism, *Dead Europe* provokes questions about Tsiolkas's own morality and intentions in writing the book. Is the book racist, as Tsiolkas himself has admitted he is, having grown up in a racist community, as both victim and agent of aggression? If it is, this is only in the sense that it takes racism on, charging into its volatile emotions in an attempt to unearth and expose them. It wields racism's cruel and ugly clichés in a determination to bring them to light, to exorcise and deprive them of their power. Unlike Tsiolkas's previous novel, *The Jesus Man*, *Dead Europe* never slips into the gratuitous but remains at a face-off with revulsion all the way. This is the writing of someone deeply troubled by racism, disturbed by his and others' desire to exercise power over other people, by the self-loathing that leads to this wish for domination and by its entrenchment in human behaviour. It's not so much that the book's Jewish characters are depicted as ghouls, but that the continuing history of persecution and racist hatred is ghoulish, and almost every one of the book's characters is in some way a participant in this.

It is difficult to determine exactly who is Jewish in the story. The layering and complicating of Jewish names and appellations leaves the reader wondering whether anybody can be singled out in this way. Jewishness is everywhere, in almost every family lineage, essentialised in local mythology and yet unable to be delineated. People who are not Jewish have Jewish names; Isaac is named after his father's friend who was known as 'the Hebrew', while his mother Reveka, named after a Jewish woman in America, bears a Christian name. In Prague, Isaac queries a woman called Maria about the fact that her name doesn't match her supposed Jewish background. "Was not Christ's mother a Jew?" she responds. Judaism is within Christianity, within America, and is crucial to the psychology of Europe. Everyone is implicated in the idea, relating to it with identification and disgust, as they relate to themselves.

The effect of this is to break up the notions of purity of race or culture upon which the logic of rac-

ism, fascism or fundamentalism relies. There never was a master race, an ideal moment to return to; therefore there's no possible fall from grace. In the same way, the book's concern about the wholesale loss of tradition in Europe is not a lament at its decay. It is concerned more with the lack of innocence than the dissolution of once-grand institutions. This is no sentimental lament about the passing of European 'civilisation'. If anything, Tsiolkas seems more disturbed by the fact that Europe has always been damaged, has always known suffering, has always persecuted its displaced and dispossessed populations. "Europe is endless Europe," Isaac's mother remarks in London. "No promise of anything else." Europe has always done itself harm and is likely to do it again.

On the same trip to England, Isaac's mother, a Greek-Australian migrant, is exchanging stories of exile with a Caribbean woman when it strikes her "that if migrants were to form a nation, they could conquer the earth". If there is any one group of people who do have a consistent identity in *Dead Europe* it is migrants. Identities such as Greek, Australian and Jewish start to split when traced back through genealogies, crossing political and religious borders in the wanderings of past generations. Through Isaac's eyes, contemporary Europe seems almost entirely populated with refugees: Albanians in Greece, Russians in London, Turks in Berlin; people from the former Soviet Union, from the former Yugoslavia, from the former colonies in Northern Africa – so many displaced from their homelands, which in many cases no longer even exist. 'Illegals', like the Jews during the Holocaust, are kept hidden from the authorities, shuttled about in limbo with the hope of safe passage to the New World. Even Australia, which in the past might have offered safe haven, now locks refugees in detention which, as Isaac is forced to explain, is "like a prison . . . No, it's like a concentration camp".

Christos Tsiolkas comes from Australia, comes from Europe, even comes from Christianity via the stories and ethics of his family, but none of these things offers sanctuary or even acceptance in his novel. This sense of dislocation and damnation is the defining horror of *Dead Europe*, apprehending a world of moral conservatism and questioning the fate of Tsiolkas and other exiles in an age of fundamentalist beliefs.

Christen Cornell is a writer based in Sydney.

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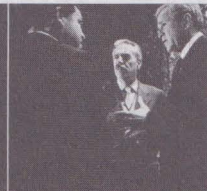
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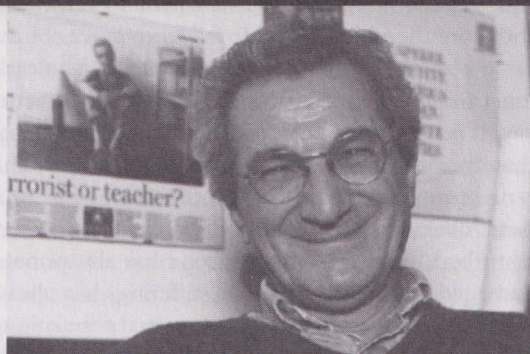


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EMPIRE, DOMINATION, AUTONOMY: ANTONIO NEGRI



ANTONIO NEGRI, philosopher, activist, and architect of class struggle, was perhaps the most brilliant theorist in the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s. He is now, on the strength of books published since he turned 60, one of the most original analysts of global power, and an intellectual force in the anti-globalisation movement.

Negri has produced work of tremendous scope. He has a truly impressive capacity for synthesis, for finding deep patterns that link disparate issues. I think he makes some false moves and leaves large gaps in his picture of the world. Yet his work throws off sparks in all directions. Negri provides us with key ideas about the modern state, about the dynamics of globalisation, about resistance, about labour and its creativity, about the method of social theory; and he gives us, almost in passing, fundamental insights into contemporary neo-liberalism.

THE PICTURE OF EMPIRE

In a long essay on materialism written in the late 1990s (Negri 2003), and in two sprawling books written with the US literary theorist Michael Hardt, *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004), Negri sets out a distinctive analysis of power and struggle in global society.¹

Negri pictures a power structure that operates on a world scale. The accumulation of power is greater than it has ever been, yet sovereignty has been dispersed. Modern capitalism has produced a strange political order, quite different from the colonialism of the nineteenth century. There are levels in this power structure, and “apexes and summits of imperial power” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 355), par-

ticularly the US state and its nuclear armaments. Yet this eminence does not give the US government the capacity to administer the world. Sovereign power is widely dispersed in network fashion. The strongest centres can, at best, conduct police operations and need help from other parts of the network.

At the same time Empire has become, in a certain sense, total. There is no ‘outside’ to the system, for instance no transcendent ethical standpoint from which its operations can be effectively criticised.

There are echoes of Foucault here, but Negri’s model is very different from one of ‘capillary’ power or postmodern fragmentation. The dispersed sovereignty of Empire is still a system of domination, specifically, capitalist domination: “In Empire capital and sovereignty tend to overlap completely” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 334). It is a system designed to maintain exploitation and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the privileged few.

Such a system has to be violent, hard-headed and ruthless. *Empire* was published before the September 11 atrocity, but the model has no difficulty accounting for the US response to the attack, and for the subsequent atrocities against Afghanistan and Iraq. *Multitude* argues that war, the extreme expression of the violence of the system, has become endemic and indeed necessary to the global order. “Military force must guarantee the conditions for the functioning of the world market” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 21, 90, 177).

Empire is a system of domination produced by rupture from earlier systems of domination. The new society is marked by hybrid forms of rule, cobbled together to deal ad hoc with urgent problems

(think private police, 'public-private partnerships', puppet governments). There is no orderliness in the global exercise of power. But there is an overall character to it:

In Empire corruption is everywhere . . . It resides in different forms in the supreme government of Empire and its vassal administrations, the most refined and the most rotten administrative police forces, the lobbies of the ruling classes, the mafias of rising social groups . . . the great financial conglomerates, and everyday economic transactions. Through corruption, imperial power extends a smoke screen across the world, and command over the multitude is exercised in this putrid cloud, in the absence of light and truth. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 389)

Empire is a new form of the state; but it is a state that has achieved an eerie autonomy from society. Negri suggests that the mediations are dying, that civil society – far from flourishing, as optimistic globalisation theorists like Beck (1999) and Giddens (2002) think – is withering away. The established institutions of modern society, such as school, family, hospital, factory, “are everywhere in crisis” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 329). In their place arises a society of control. Negri has no patience with social-democratic wailing about the decline of the state under globalisation. In his view, big government has never gone away. It has, however, changed its focus – from economic planning to social control, the mobilisation of force, ‘security’.

As a good Marxist, Negri sees an economic rationale (he never speaks of an ‘economic base’) in this political order. Empire is capitalist power being exerted over a new system of production. Adapting language from Foucault, Negri speaks of “biopolitical production”, meaning that capitalist exploitation has stretched its scope, from the simple making of commodities in the traditional factory, to the making of the whole pattern of life. “Immaterial production”, involving new forms of labour centring on the exchange of information and on human emotion, is now hegemonic. Here Negri draws on recent discussions of computerisation, the ‘information society’, the service economy and emotion work. The ‘commons’ produced by the new groups of workers are now the targets of capitalist expropriation.

Almost alone among theorists of globalisation, Negri does not see the creation of global society as a process driven from the top. Exactly the opposite.

He argues that the new forms of rule, and of global economic organisation, are *reactive*. They are the responses of capital to pressure from below. There is no other way it could be, because capital is not in itself creative.

Negri goes to some length, in his philosophical work, to emphasise the unique creativity of *labour*, “the power to create being where there is only the void” (Negri 2003: 242). In biopolitical production, this creativity can be seen across the whole terrain of human life. In earlier phases, the capitalist did hands-on organising of some of this labour (the iron master in his factory). Now, capital simply exercises control from a distance (the billionaire at Palm Beach). Capital has become wholly parasitical on the creativity of its labour force.

But the labour force – which in biopolitical production is very extensive and diverse – is not passive; rather it is a seething mass of resistance to the control that capital attempts to exert. The resistance takes a tremendous variety of forms. Negri mentions some, from workplace struggles to anticolonial wars to uncontrolled labour migration, noting both the continuity with earlier forms of working-class struggle and the emergence of new figures of resistance such as the *Zapatistas*. Empire does its best to pathologise and police them. Resistance is necessarily lived as otherness, as the *refusal* of capitalist social relations and the creation of other ways of life.

Here, Negri speaks of the “self-valorisation” involved in proletarian struggle. By this he means the creation of a life fundamentally *separate* from the set of social relations that capital attempts to impose. Negri thus argues that we are living in a society not tending to polarise (as in old Marxist models) but *already* dichotomous, in its basic processes. The global capitalist state and the capitalist corporations sit on top of a population which is always escaping their control, always creating new forms of life, and which basically does not need them.

In his recent books, Negri adopts a modified ‘postmodernity’ thesis and argues that the old class structure and the old class dynamics have gone. The dialectic has been broken. And with it, into the dustbin of history go all the strategies that ever tried to unify the proletariat around the industrial worker or the militant peasant, or under the leadership of a vanguard party.

Instead of a growing unity of the working class, Negri posits irreducible diversity. Here he is strongly

influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*: "The postmodern multitude is an ensemble of singularities" (Negri 2003: 225). Rather than seeing diversity as an obstacle to class mobilisation, Negri sees it as the very tissue of resistance, something to celebrate, a feature of democratic action in the postmodern world.

'Multitude' in Negri's usage is not a sociological term – he is not offering it as the name for a new transnational working class. 'Multitude' is a concept referring to a new *composition* of the proletariat, a new pattern of resistance to capital, a new configuration of social struggles. The crucial point about it is an absolute separation from capital:

... within the context of the sovereign organisation of globality, Empire is directly confronted by the multitude, and the multitude by Empire. In this context, all mediations tend to disintegrate. (Negri 2003: 229)

There is no vanguard group, no master strategy, and there cannot possibly be one. Rather, there is a tremendous many-sided outpouring of creativity and resistance around the world.

The resistance of the multitude is uncontrollable partly because it is shapeless – there is no world revolutionary HQ that the Bush administration can bomb – but more fundamentally because resistance is the other side of the creativity of living labour. Since capital absolutely depends on living labour, it can never get rid of the resistance, and it cannot overcome the separation. That is the contradiction in which Empire finds itself, and which will ultimately destroy it.

Within the resistance, Negri finds the outline of something that can replace Empire, indeed capitalism itself. Creative labour, especially the new patterns of biopolitical labour based on intellect and affect, construct forms of social solidarity and decision-making among the proletariat. The emerging forms of life that are the process of self-valorisation constitute commons that are inherently, directly, democratic. In the capacity of the multitude to create new democratic forms of life, Negri finds the basis of a *constituent power* that contests Empire, and is capable of taking the revolutionary leap beyond capitalism into a world of cooperative labour and universal freedom.

This will not, however, be achieved by sweetness and light. Capitalist power opposes all these

processes with violence. Therefore the movements of resistance and transformation must be prepared to use force themselves – as, indeed, many of them do. The process is a social revolution.

There are other themes in *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Time for Revolution*, and these books are peppered with entertaining and annoying excursions on a wild array of topics ranging from vampires and insect swarms to Dostoyevsky and Machiavelli. However the points just outlined are, I think, the core of Negri's theory of contemporary society and its processes of change. This is perhaps the most dynamic theory of globalisation we currently have, and the most optimistic – despite its black picture of exploitation, violence and corruption.

THE REVOLUTIONIST'S ELEMENT

I now want to consider the background of these ideas in Negri's life, and in his earlier theorising. Some of the central ideas arose in a context very different from current debates over globalisation.

Negri came of age in an Italy dominated by conservative, corrupt Christian Democrat governments that were Cold War allies of the USA and internal allies of the church, the Mafia, and big capital. The main left-wing alternative was the Communist Party (PCI) which, as part of Stalin's spheres-of-influence deal with Roosevelt, had called off the social revolution underway at the end of the war, and settled down to life as a loyal opposition. Meanwhile the Marshall Plan triggered a very rapid export-led industrialisation, mainly in the north – Italian GNP grew at more than 5 per cent per annum through the 1950s, one of the fastest growth rates in the world. Huge internal migration created new labour forces exposed for the first time to factory discipline, and began to overwhelm urban services, housing, and social welfare in cities such as Turin, Milan, Rome, and in the Veneto region. The result was growing social turbulence which erupted in mass protests through the 1960s, outside the official political system. (For an excellent history of these changes see Ginsborg 1990.)

Negri trained in philosophy and law and launched a stellar academic career, becoming a professor of law in his home town Padova in 1959. In the early 1960s he connected with other Marxist intellectuals who were looking for a radical path in politics. The most influential was Mario Tronti, whose 1966 book *Operai e capitale* (Workers and Capital)

is a foundational statement for a whole European movement to re-value working-class experience and activism. With Tronti and others, Negri edited the influential journal *Quaderni rossi* (Red Notebooks) and then *Classe operaia* (Working Class), their ideas spreading through the growing Italian New Left. Negri did hands-on organising in the new factory communities in his region, as well as developing a radical intellectual centre at the University of Padova. When the social explosions of 1968–1969 arrived, to an unusual extent the Italian student movement and workers' movement developed together (Lumley 1990).

At this time Negri became a central figure in the group *Potere operaia* (Workers' Power), which emphasised factory-based mass action for social goals. Important gains in wages and conditions for the new industrial workers were won by direct action. For the Italian New Left the factory struggle held, in symbolic terms, the central place that the antiwar struggle held in Australia and the USA, and Negri's writings embody this significance.

But the New Left could not hold together. Some thought the new militancy could transform the mass parties (Tronti, among others, joined the PCI). Others thought the movement should evolve into an insurrectionary vanguard party on a Leninist or Maoist model. *Potere operaia* split over this issue and collapsed in 1973. An autonomous women's movement arose and began its own struggles against state and church, winning a national referendum on divorce. Some left groups survived, but a widespread fragmentation occurred.

From the fragments emerged small urban guerrilla groups who regarded themselves as an armed vanguard. In the course of the 1970s they moved from defending the movement against police and neo-fascists to an aggressive campaign of violence against government officials, factory managers and prominent capitalists. The most important groups, in a shifting and turbulent context, were known as *Brigate rosse* (red brigades). Meanwhile the PCI moved the other way, invented the 'Eurocommunist' strategy and sought a deal with the Christian Democrats to gain a share of central state power. Negri subjected this "historic compromise" strategy to withering criticism in a short book *Proletari e stato* (Proletarians and the State, 1976).

Negri stuck with the model of decentralised mass action, which crystallised in the mid 1970s as the

Autonomia operaia (workers' autonomy) or *Autonomia organizzata* (organised autonomy) movement. His theoretical work now emphasised links between the factory and new social movements. Again his position was vindicated. Renewed factory activism, a youth movement, a student movement, free radio, housing occupations, the new feminism, all seemed to follow a strategy of direct action to create a liberated way of life outside mainstream institutions. In 1977 they erupted in another tremendous surge of social protest, forcible factory occupations, university occupations, battles with police, and rejection of the austerity program. Negri had his first experience of arrest and exile. In the same year his theoretical masterpiece, *La forma stato* (The State-Form), was released by the radical publisher Feltrinelli. In January 1978 Feltrinelli published Negri's most apocalyptic work, *Il dominio e il sabotaggio* (Domination and Sabotage). Both books predicted growing class antagonism and the overthrow of the system. The final chapter of *Il dominio e il sabotaggio* is titled '... and the proletarians attack heaven'.

By this time the Italian political establishment, right and left, was more than alarmed. When the red brigades, in March 1978, kidnapped and later killed the Christian Democrat leader Aldo Moro, public anger at terrorism gave the regime backing for a strategy of repression. In April 1979 the leading figures of the *Autonomia* network, and others who had been in *Potere operaia*, were arrested and gaoled. More arrests followed, continuing into 1980; the police net eventually caught about 3000 left activists. The red brigades were destroyed; but so was the core of the Italian extraparliamentary opposition. Nothing like it had been seen in western Europe since the war.

Negri was accused by the media of being "the brain behind the red brigades", an "evil teacher" corrupting youth, and was actually accused of the Moro murder as well as other crimes of violence. Such charges allowed the autonomists, as well as some real terrorists, to be imprisoned without trial for years. The officials managing the charges against Negri were, as the autonomists quickly pointed out, closely associated with the PCI. All charges of violence against Negri were eventually dropped for lack of evidence, but the prosecutors substituted charges of incitement to insurrection mainly based on his writings. I have read part of the transcript of Negri's interrogation, and it is obvious that judge

and prosecutor were on a fishing expedition. On these charges Negri was eventually convicted and sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment – but by then he wasn't there.

With masses of angry radical activists arrested, and a state bent on repression, the prisons became turbulent and dangerous places. However, in a startling turn, in 1983 Negri was nominated for parliament by the Radical Party, a small-'l' liberal group dismayed by the state's attack on civil liberties, and was elected. This got him out of prison, because Italian MPs were immune from prosecution. But when the parliament voted to strip Negri of his immunity and send him back to prison, he very reasonably feared for his life, and fled the country.

For the next fourteen years Negri lived in France. He worked as an academic in Paris, keeping a low profile politically because of his insecure residence rights as a refugee. Successive French governments, to their credit, refused to extradite him to Italy; successive Italian governments refused an amnesty. Negri became part of the Paris intellectual scene, working especially with Félix Guattari, absorbed the work of the French post-structuralists, launched a new journal, and in the early 1990s began an English-language collaboration with Michael Hardt.

In 1997, at the age of 64, Negri returned to Italy, still facing a prison sentence (though the outrageous original sentence had been sharply reduced on appeal). It seems he hoped to broker an amnesty for militants who were still in gaol, but the deal fell through. He was sent back to prison, and was still there when *Empire* was published in the USA by that well-known leftist firm, Harvard University Press, and made him world-famous.

Negri served out his term, with conventional remissions and a period of parole in Rome, being finally released in 2003. Since then he has travelled, written, and taught again in Paris. George Bernard Shaw once observed that the proper element for a revolutionist is hot water. I think Antonio Negri qualifies.

STATE POWER, THE WORKING CLASS AND SABOTAGE

Negri's intellectual work started with a commitment to Marxism, but also a re-reading of Marx. This reading rejected the mechanical sociology of 'historical materialism' (base, superstructure, modes of production, etc.), and saw Marxism as above all a theory of social struggle. By the mid 1970s Negri was forcibly

arguing that the workers' struggle itself had made some of Marx's basic concepts obsolete.

Negri's first distinctive contribution was analysis of the Keynesian state. In a brilliant essay of 1967 Negri showed how the growth of working-class power in Europe drove the development of Keynes' economic thought and even shaped the fundamental ideas of the *General Theory*. In the following years Negri traced the development of the Keynesian "planning-state" (*Stato-piano*) as a capitalist response to working-class pressure. He then, in a key text called *Crisi dello Stato-piano* (Crisis of the Planning-State, 1974a), diagnosed the disruption of the planning-state and the emergence of a "crisis-state" or "enterprise-state".

Why does the capitalist state mutate? Basically, Negri argues, because working-class struggle damages the underlying *economic* mechanisms of the capitalist system. Negri puts this in Marxist language by saying that working-class struggle destroys the "law of value" that governs exchange in the labour market, and tends to disrupt all the mechanisms of the circulation of capital. Therefore the capitalist economy cannot work as an automatic, self-regulating system. Capitalism is, in another characteristic phrase of Negri's, de-structured or de-composed by struggle.

Capital responds by an extension of state power, which through planning apparently restores market relations. That is widely recognised. Where Negri differs from conventional theories is his insistence that this solution is extremely unstable. With the law of value in tatters, there is no *rational* basis for any distribution of income that the state decrees. The exercise of state power becomes fundamentally arbitrary. In Negri's language, the planning-state increasingly becomes a system of contentless command. Its function now is essentially a police function; it loses legitimacy and lurches into crisis.

Therefore capital is forced to try another tack. The pressure can only be relieved "within a project that is qualitatively different from that of reformist planning" (Red Notes 1979: 34). This new political project involves the separation of production from circulation, the creation of a "productive subject" who does not act collectively, a new capitalist strategy for the labour market, and globalisation. Negri is, in short, analysing the strategy of neo-liberalism in response to the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state. (It is worth saying that the texts where Negri first

made this analysis were written in 1973, when the Australian Left was agog with Whitlam's victory, and "incentivation" was not yet a gleam in the young John Howard's eye.)

At the same time, capital is forced to extend the technique of factory control to the whole of society. Civil society dies, and with it all possibility of Gramscian hegemony. In a startling reversal, "to the state, accumulation; to the enterprise, legitimation, the carrying of consensus" (Negri 1977: 245). Productivity becomes the only basis of legitimacy. Meanwhile the state, as a system of contentless command, relies more and more heavily on the use of force. In enforcing capitalist command,

. . . administrative rationality does not become terror, it is terror. Remove from capitalist society its only rationality, which is grounded in the lust for exploitation: you have this baroque monster of provocation and devastation (Negri 1977: 259).

Disrupting proletarian movements, establishing total control, and enforcing the norms of business – "this is 'good government' today" (Negri 1977: 248). Negri and his colleagues may have been taken tactically unaware by the 1979 repression, but conceptually he did predict quite well what good government in the Italian style was about to do.

All these developments come about because of pressure from the working class. The *Quaderni rossi* group emphasised the generative power of the working class and developed the concept of the changing 'class composition' of the proletariat. Negri developed these ideas into a dramatic theory of class transformations. Classical socialism had been based on a working class where the central role was played by professionalised workers (we would say 'skilled trades'). During the twentieth century industry was transformed and the central place was taken by the 'mass worker' of the new industrial economy. While traditional communist and socialist parties watched uncomprehendingly, entirely new forms of revolutionary struggle emerged, centred in the factories. It was this challenge that disrupted the planning-state and forced capitalism down a new path.

The new path involved a second transformation of the working class. Through the 1970s Negri increasingly emphasised that contemporary capital depended on exploiting social production as a whole. This implied the growing economic importance of workers beyond the big factories – "the social majority of the

working class", including those involved in domestic labour and service work. Militancy and direct action were now emerging on this new terrain, and the working class was being re-composed. New demands became politically central, especially those concerned with the social wage, i.e. public spending.

This might sound like a recipe for compromise. But in Negri's eyes the re-composed working class was no less militant than the mass worker, and no more integrated into capitalism. A new theory of working-class struggle was needed. In a long essay called with marked irony 'The workers' party against work', Negri (1974b) argued that a new phase of class conflict has emerged. Where previous forms of socialism had valorised work (think trade union banners, the 'dignity of labour'), modern proletarian struggle centres on the *refusal of work* and the disruption of capitalist command (for instance in factory occupations). In later writings he added an emphasis on the direct appropriation of the products of labour (e.g. housing occupations, free public transport, production for social needs).

'Autonomy' was a word with multiple meanings at the time, but it did capture this idea of ongoing *separation* from the capitalist system. Here Negri was furthest from New-Left theorising in other countries, which at the time tended to emphasise the *integration* of the working class in advanced capitalism. (I have to declare an interest – Connell 1977, ch.10.)

Negri drew these threads together in the concept of "self-valorisation" (*autovalorizzazione*). With the disruption of the capitalist circuits that define the value of labour-power, it was open to the working class to give their own value to their own labour. They could turn their energy to the reproduction of their own lives. Negri saw this as the common theme in all the social struggles that had emerged from 1968 on. He therefore interpreted self-valorisation as implying the immediate realisation of 'communism', the new society where labour was at last free.

Here was no laborious Marxist scheme of transition between modes of production, and no role for an orthodox party. The militant working class was in effect its own party, and communism was an 'active force' here and now, not pie in a distant sky. Negri's argument immediately linked the process of self-valorisation and political organisation for revolution. Translated to the language of the US New Left, his theory said: "Do it!"

But every step of self-valorisation was at the same time a step in the de-structuring of capital. Therefore, as Negri eventually put it, every form of struggle constituted *sabotage* of the system. The stories of the capitalist class and the working class were linked, but not in a dialectic. They were linked by an irreconcilable antagonism resulting in a growing separation. Only one course for working-class militancy was now open: a leap into the future, “the proletarians attack heaven”. In a context of widening social struggle, Negri saw power shifting towards the working class, with an immediate possibility of social revolution.

As we know, it didn’t happen – the Italian movement was crushed. Negri’s writings could readily be interpreted as incitement to insurrection, because that is exactly what they were – in the context of a social revolution. They were not an incitement to terrorism.

There is no ambiguity about this point. Negri was profoundly critical of the groups who conducted the terror campaign. Negri has never been a pacifist, and in the 1970s went further than supporting self-defence – he expounded the need for armed struggle in the context of mass actions confronting a violent state and capitalist command in the enterprise. It was entirely consistent with this view to reject the strategy of terrorism, pursued by groups that were trying to substitute themselves for the working class and operate as a clandestine elite (see e.g. Negri 1974b). This was not just a tactical criticism of the red brigades. The main lines of Negri’s theorising completely contradicted their strategy. The prosecutors were not interested in such subtlety, and nailed him just the same.

LINES OF CRITIQUE

It will be clear that some of the most creative ideas in Negri’s analysis of contemporary global power come from his earlier theorising. Some of the difficulties in *Empire* and *Multitude* also have deep roots.

The first problem is Negri’s masculinism. His theorising certainly breaks with orthodox Marxism, but it never breaks from the heavy-masculine style of militancy and theory that orthodox Marxism embodied. Negri’s writing in both periods is declamatory, accusatory, and dogmatic in style.

The tough male factory worker is the implicit hero of all the ‘workers’ power’ theorising and it is not surprising in gender terms that this movement

produced violence. Similar figures of militancy, waving clenched fists, seem to stand atop all the thousand plateaus among the multitude. Negri’s 1981 monograph *The Constitution of Time*, and the joint *Labor of Dionysus*, mount bitter attacks on the idea of peace and the practice of nonviolence. These passages seem to me the most intemperate and ill-judged stuff Negri ever wrote.

Negri as a theorist pays little attention to gender, generation or sexuality. The working class and the multitude notionally include women, but not substantively, and don’t seem to include children at all. In *Crisi dello Stato-pianno* there is an amazing attack on the idea that radicals can have fun while they subvert the system! Grim struggle and hatred of the class enemy are the order of the day. In his later work there are brief acknowledgements of movements in sexual politics, especially queer demonstrations, but they figure only as examples of the diverse social struggles that destabilise Empire. Negri doesn’t begin to theorise the relationship of sexuality to power.

The masculine hardness of Negri’s stances sometimes gives his writing great rhetorical power. I am haunted by his evocation of the trajectories of capitalist power and proletarian resistance/constituent power under the shadow of nuclear catastrophe:

These two lines move on the horizon of the world as an ungraspable alterity. (Hardt and Negri 1994: 312)

But this quality also undermines his political judgements. Negri had good reason for rejecting the PCI, but when he theorised international social democracy as the agent of the terroristic strategy of the multinational corporations, he passed all limits of credibility (‘Theses on the Crisis’, in Negri 1974b). Similarly in *Empire* and *Multitude* Negri can see no virtue in working within institutions such as the United Nations. He can see little value in NGOs, which “cannot change the system that produces and reproduces poverty” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 279). The only virtue seems to be in separation and biopolitical resistance. At the least, Negri’s attitude involves a startling waste of political experience around the world.

A second deeply problematic feature of Negri’s thought is its Eurocentrism. This was perhaps understandable in the heat of industrial battles in northern Italy. In a contemporary theorist of globalisation,

this is much more worrying. Negri's intellectual sources are almost all European, and the few exceptions are North Americans.

Negri shows little familiarity with, and no curiosity about, non-Western intellectuals, concepts and debates. I haven't found a single reference to Muslim intellectual debates in *Empire* or *Multitude* – and Islam has a 150-year tradition of debate about capitalist global power! (See e.g. Vahdat 2002.) These two books make gestures towards other parts of the world, for instance citing the Zapatistas and the ANC as agents of struggle. But Negri never discusses *substantively* social structures or social struggles in the majority world. I think he simply doesn't know much about the world beyond Europe, and hasn't thought it necessary to find out.

As a result, Negri can't see anything specific in the relationship of metropole to periphery. Indeed he specifically rejects ideas that emphasise this relationship, such as underdevelopment theory, or the world-systems approach. In the typical fashion of metropolitan social theorists – left, right or centre – Negri imposes a *homogeneous* model of power on the world, insisting that Empire is much the same everywhere.

A third problem in his theorising provides a partial explanation. Negri offers a social theory without a sociology. This was already an issue in his earlier writing, which was strong on abstracted 'tendencies' but weak on descriptive detail. He didn't seem to ask *how widely* the tendencies were present, *how much* self-valorisation was happening, and what *others* social processes were also happening on the same terrain. And without hard information on these questions, Negri's belief that capitalism had entered a time of revolutionary crisis – an assumption underpinning all his work in the 1970s – remained a hopeful guess.

At least his theorising at that period *was* based on years of personal involvement in actual industrial struggles, especially in the Veneto. There is no such practical knowledge underpinning *Empire* and *Multitude*. And Negri seems to have had no interest in finding other knowledge bases – ethnographic, historical, biographical, whatever – to fill the gap.

The lack of concrete knowledge is strikingly revealed in the account of power. *Empire* presents a theory of global capitalism in crisis but never discusses actual multinational corporations, their strategies or problems. Negri discusses theories of sovereignty at great length but never analyses par-

ticular regimes. He conceptualises worldwide sovereignty but never explores who is actually deploying it, how these people coordinate economic policies and military interventions, precisely what opposition these power-holders run into, nor what conflicts of interest and differences of strategy are found among them. 'Power', in short, remains an abstract postulate not a sociological reality.

The 'multitude' is even vaguer as a social entity. After following the concept through three books, I – and, I think, any reader – would be hard put to say exactly who is part of the multitude and who is not, and just how its composition is changing and why. Negri, perhaps as a result of collaborating with a literary theorist, increasingly talks about a "figure" of resistance rather than a *group* engaged in historically located practices.

Without the sociology, the drama of self-valorisation and the principle of dynamic separation – the basic ideas carried forward from the days of *Potere operaia* and *Autonomia* that underpin the concept of the Multitude and predict the overthrow of Empire – cannot become a credible model of change in postmodernity. The theorising of 1998, like the theorising of 1978, has an apocalyptic edge, but the apocalypse isn't happening at any particular address.

WHAT NEGRI HAS GIVEN US

Though Negri's theorising does not, in my view, provide a credible picture of world capitalism or the dynamics of change, I still value his work and I think that analysts and activists can learn a lot from it.

Even his flawed account of Empire has valuable insights into globalisation. Negri emphasises that global capitalism is an unstable and dynamic improvisation, not a well-entrenched, automatically functioning system. Global capitalism is the child of crisis tendencies and it contains ongoing contradictions. Well, other people have said that. What Negri uniquely emphasises is that the global system has been improvised in response to pressure *from below*, the de-structuring pressure of the exploited, and that it continues to evolve in response to challenge and resistance from below.

Across his career Negri has given us notable insights into the modern state. Back in the 1970s, his work was streets ahead of the dreary instrumentalist-versus-structuralist debate on the capitalist state, in understanding the changing form of the state,

the twists and turns of economic strategy, and the potential for violence in advanced capitalism. His 1990s model of Empire is far too abstract, but there is something right in his argument about network power, and about the limited capacities of particular power centres, even the government of the sole superpower. The Bush administration is experiencing that truth right now.

In his earlier work Negri made an astonishing prediction of neo-liberalism, now the dominant political framework of our world. He shows its roots not in economic truth but in the failure of previous capitalist strategies. He recognises its search for totality and its capacity for violence (which we see in this country at every level from ruthless corporate management to the barbarous imprisonment of refugees). He diagnoses the purposelessness and sterility of the neo-liberal order, the fundamental arbitrariness of its techniques of rule, and the pervasive corruption that comes with it.

In his three latest books Negri gives a central place in social dynamics to *labour* – a concept that contemporary social theory and philosophy have practically forgotten. In his early work Negri gave an insightful account of labour and its social embodiment, including the changing composition of the working class; this is carried forward, with different terminology, in his recent discussions of “immaterial labour”.

Most suggestive of all, I think, is Negri’s continuing emphasis on the creativity of labour, its unique capacity to make worlds. The concept of self-valorisation ties this emphasis on creativity to a streak of eschatology in Negri’s social thought. But even without the expectation that a communist utopia may arrive next Tuesday, the idea of self-valorisation raises very interesting questions about labour processes, the limits of control in advanced capitalism, and – I have to say it – working-class autonomy.

Finally, Negri gives us one of the most striking examples in our generation of the engaged intellectual. His personal story is so extraordinary, so tied to the specifics of Italy in the 1970s, that he’s unlikely to be taken as a model. But there is something important to learn from Negri about engagement, especially from his concern to benefit from experience and develop intellectually without compromising a commitment to radical change.

There is something also to learn about energy and endurance. Under conditions of extraordinary stress Negri has produced a life-long stream of original ideas and writing. Despite appalling setbacks he has kept a deep optimism about the possibilities of social change and grassroots activism. Whether we agree with his arguments or not, we can honour someone who has never given up on the cause of human emancipation.

1. Hardt undoubtedly played a large part in producing these texts and expanding Negri’s knowledge of US politics, history, and intellectual life. Nevertheless it is clear that the basic analysis is Negri’s, so I will continue to refer to Negri as the author of the social theory in these books.

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IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

MARCUS REDIKER



MARCUS REDIKER IS an American historian, author, left-activist, and Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh. A Kentuckian by birth (b.1951), of Welsh, Scottish, Dutch, and Cherokee ancestry, Rediker grew up in Nashville and Richmond, and comes from a low-church Protestant (essentially Baptist), Southern family background of miners, tenant farmers, and factory workers. His brother is a factory shop steward, and Rediker was a factory worker for three years after dropping out of tertiary studies. Returning to study, Rediker graduated PhD (University of Pennsylvania, 1982), and has authored or co-authored four books: *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1987), *Who Built America?* (1989), volume one; *The Many-Headed Hydra* (with Peter Linebaugh, 2000); and *Villains of All Nations* (2004). He is now writing a book entitled 'The Slave Ship: A Human History', which will be completed in time for the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade. Rediker has lectured and taught extensively in the US, Europe, Japan and Australia; his work has been translated into French, German, Greek, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, and generated robust academic and public controversy and debate.

Intellectually, Rediker owes a great deal to British historians Christopher Hill and E.P. Thompson, a debt evident in his significant contribution to global labour history, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000), co-authored with Peter Linebaugh. The focus of this book is the Atlantic maritime world during the period from about 1609–1835, its social and cultural milieu, its role in the development of capitalism,

and its role as a crucible of ideas about democracy and social justice. The emphasis is on the men and women, the dispossessed and oppressed, of all races, traditionally excluded from dominant historical narratives. A rich, eloquent, literary narrative, the book details resistance to capitalism during the period on both sides of the Atlantic, trawls historical records, literature, art and theology to bring the story to light, and in the process demonstrates how the lives, ideas and social experiments of this Atlantic proletariat changed the course of human history.

Rowan: *One of the things that interests me about historians is why they write, what they think they're doing with history, and to what end. What makes researching and writing history something more than just an activity one does to fill in the time between birth and death? I've seen your historical work variously referred to as "history from below", "peoples' history", "labour history"; how do you characterise the sort of history you write, and what you are aiming to do with it?*

Marcus: Those terms emerged from various historical contexts, but they suggest a similar sensibility. 'Labour history' appeared with the worldwide labour movements of the late nineteenth century and hence signifies a moment of class power – a declaration that the history of working people is central to the development of modern society. But labour history slowly grew conservative, concentrating narrowly on the history of unions and their leaders, until the 'new labour history' exploded in the 1970s.

'Peoples' history' is a populist-democratic term used by Howard Zinn and others; it suggests an

oppositional history, a history not of kings and statesmen, generals and factory-owners, not, in the American context, of the likes of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, but rather a kind of earthy history of the working majority – those rulers’ subjects, soldiers, workers, and slaves. It entails a more inclusive approach, which is critical to any kind of radical history.

I prefer the phrase ‘history from below’, which arose in France, England, and the United States, and is sometimes called ‘history from the bottom up’. Its poetic anthem was written by Bertolt Brecht, ‘A Worker Reads History’ (1947):

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?

The books are filled with the names of kings.

Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?

‘History from below’ conveys a writer’s strong identification with peoples’ struggles, and a desire not only to chronicle, but to advance them, commit them to memory, and use them to help make a better future. The Welsh historian Gwyn Williams said we should all try to be “peoples’ remembrancers”. The idea was, if you can recapture lost struggles in ways that are meaningful to the present, you can transmute the past into the present and future. Another aspect is that the actions taken ‘from below’ affect everything that goes on in any given society. Working people therefore make history; they are ‘agents’, they practice ‘self-activity’. This is the kind of history I have always tried to do.

The history I write and teach is closely linked to what a generation learned in the late 1960s and early 1970s: the history we had been taught was full of lies. It was not only elitist, history from above, it was whitewashed, bleached-out, no colour but white, no black or brown, no red, no radicalism of any kind. It was a bland history of consensus, pretending that all Americans had always agreed on the important aspects of life; it was a fearful Cold War history that regarded conflict in American history as pathological, ‘un-American’. Then came the civil rights movement, the black power movement, the antiwar movement, and the women’s movement, among others, to demand new kinds of history. Like many others of my generation I studied history to try to answer that demand, to write history from below, to write the history of all those who had been left out of the repressive, top-down, consensus approach to history.

The hope was to increase the growing power of social movement, but by the time many of us finished our studies, the movement was in decline. Some turned away from history from below and did work that was more attuned to conservative times. But a lot of people kept on doing what we had set out to do, contributing what we could, even though what had originally inspired us was now in defeat and disarray. I wanted to answer the false history that I had been force-fed as a child, to put something more honest and humane in its place. It has been my main purpose ever since, to teach and write that kind of history.

R: *In your work generally, but specifically The Many-Headed Hydra, the book you wrote with historian Peter Linebaugh, there is obviously an intellectual debt to Christopher Hill and E.P. Thompson; indeed, Linebaugh studied under Thompson, and Hydra is dedicated to Christopher and Bridget Hill.*

M: Christopher Hill (1912–2003) and Edward Thompson (1924–1993) were, in my view, two of the greatest historians of the twentieth century. It is an honour to be able to say that they were our teachers. They chronicled class struggles in new and creative ways, and in so doing they demonstrated the power of engaged scholarship. *The Many-Headed Hydra* is in many ways an effort to expand, renew, and in a real sense to connect their work, to show that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English radicals they wrote about had a much broader and more influential Atlantic history. It is also implicitly a critique of the way in which Hill and Thompson conceived their own subjects too narrowly, within the nation-state. So yes, Hill, Thompson, and the British Marxist tradition are important.

Another major influence was a group of black Marxist writers: W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Walter Rodney. These historians had no illusions about the nation-state, because the African diaspora was from the beginning much broader. What Peter and I wanted to do in *The Many-Headed Hydra* was to bring these two traditions together – to take the depth and sophistication of British ‘history from below’ as practiced by Hill and Thompson, and put that alongside and in conversation with the more internationalist writing of Du Bois, James, and Rodney. We felt both traditions would be strengthened by the connection.

R: *Looking at your background, there is a religious dimension; you come from a low-church Protestant, essentially Baptist background, and from your CV it is apparent that you do a great deal of community work with Baptist, Unitarian, and dissenting Protestant organisations, some of them with a lineage back to the Abolitionist movement; I look at Hydra, dealing as it does with the intellectual cauldron where politics and theology, and theology and politics, mix, and I'm wondering if those Baptist traditions are still there, and do you regard yourself in some religious way?*

M: No, I am not a religious person. I am an atheist, but one who has a moral conception of the world. My life has been shaped in various ways by religion. The influence you note in *Hydra* is liberation theology, a creative body of thought and action that came out of the political struggles of the dispossessed in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. I encountered it when I got involved in solidarity work (Nicaragua, El Salvador) just as Peter (Linebaugh) and I were working on *The Many-Headed Hydra*. We then discovered that seventeenth-century radicals and contemporary liberation theologians were using the same passages of the Bible. The Book of Isaiah, for example, brims over with revolutionary meanings; the Book of Acts declares that all true Christians share everything in common. These notions have a profound genealogy illuminated by Christopher Hill in *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*. He showed that the ideas of seventeenth-century religious radicals were the forerunners of modern communism. These people wanted variously to abolish private property, wage labour, slavery, patriarchy, all forms of subjection. Hill and liberation theologians thus helped me to see peoples' history and religion in a way strikingly different from what I had experienced in the conservative Southern churches of my youth.

R: *Your website (www.marcusrediker.com) has a section titled Activism where you detail your political involvements since the anti-Vietnam War days of the 1960s, and state your belief that "the struggle for a better future must be a struggle to find new, more inclusive, more egalitarian ideas, in the past and in the present". You explain that in peoples' history or history from below, we can find inspiration and can use it to work towards a more just and humane future. You go on to say, "I have tried to combine scholarship and activism, the study of movements*

from below with the making of movements from below". This reminds me very much of the approach to scholarship and activism of the American Quaker labour activist Staughton Lynd.

M: Staughton Lynd and his equally activist wife Alice Lynd are friends of mine, we live near each other, and we have worked together on a number of causes in recent years. Staughton is one of the best examples I know of a scholar-activist. Over the years, as he has taken part in the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, the labour movement, and the prisoners' rights movement, he has written books that are both scholarly *and* popular, books that explain movements and are useful to people who work in movements. Good Quaker that he is, he 'speaks truth to power'. I think he is one of the most important radical activists and thinkers in recent American history, and I am happy to know him.

Staughton proposes that the intellectual, the writer, or the historian should accompany working people as they make their own history. There is a Spanish word for this, *acompañar*, which means to accompany or travel with someone, to be present and to offer solidarity, to be a *compañero*. I think it is a healthy antidote to the attitudes of many intellectuals, who, at bottom, really want to tell others what they should be doing. This approach requires listening to the movements of the present, trying to understand what people are saying, what kinds of demands they are making. It requires learning what people are doing on the ground as they try to organise different sorts of resistance. The movements may be small, but they are about the future. This approach creates open dialogue within the struggle. Everyone is simultaneously teacher and student. It is democratic, it is respectful, and it is creative.

R: *In recent years you have spent a great deal of time and energy campaigning against capital punishment in the US, and throughout the world. Why this focus and preoccupation?*

M: I have long believed that one of the greatest powers any ruling class has is the power to kill its own people; this is a foundation of repression. We do not grant rulers the right to kill us and we have to fight their desire to do so; if they can't kill us, then that's an important limitation on their power. It might mean that we can keep them from killing other people too. While I've been opposed to the

death penalty for a long time, my real education on the subject began in 1994, when I bumped into an activist named Jamila Levi, who was working on the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Mumia is a former member of the Black Panther Party who was sentenced to death in 1982 and has been on death row since that time.

I was living in Philadelphia on 9 December 1981, when a police officer was killed, and Mumia was blamed for it. I didn't believe at the time that he had done it. I knew him as a tough, radical journalist and radio commentator in a city governed by Frank Rizzo, the Mayor and ex-police chief, a home-grown fascist in his way, who with the Police Department had long waged war against the black neighbourhoods of Philadelphia. I knew Mumia as one of the very few people who had the courage to stand up against this violent repression, and I knew that Rizzo and the police were gunning for him. So when he was charged with murder, I immediately suspected a frame-up. But I soon left Philadelphia and lost track of the case, although I knew that he was eventually convicted and sentenced to death.

Jamila Levi challenged me to get involved in the case. I started reading the legal records, organising around and speaking about the case, and soon I began to visit Mumia on death row. It turned out that he was imprisoned at SCI-Greene super-maximum prison in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, about fifty miles south of where I live in Pittsburgh. To make a long and complicated story short, we rapidly built a powerful national and international movement, and Mumia became the world's most famous political prisoner.

Going into that prison to visit Mumia on death row shaped my work on *The Many-Headed Hydra*. Here I was writing about violence, terror, and death in the origins and rise of capitalism, and of course these are the facts of daily life on death row. Mumia is, by the way, someone who passionately loves history; my many conversations with him helped me to understand more deeply the historical documents I was studying. His experience of violence and terror – the state was, after all, trying to kill him, the movement was battling to keep him alive – helped me see how violence and terror operated in times past. My experience with him and the movement deepened and enriched my scholarship, and hopefully made it more connected to, more useful to, real struggles. I am happy to say that prisoners unknown to me write regularly to request copies of *Hydra*.

R: *The CV posted on your website details a significant output of major book reviews, chapters, academic and general articles. Four books aside, it seems to me this output is overshadowed by the conferences, panels, discussion groups you've listed, suggesting that you place emphasis on, or devote a large part of your life to, communicating face-to-face with people, and to the spoken word.*

M: Absolutely. I love the spoken word; always have. And teaching is why I got into academic work in the first place. I was working in a factory in Richmond, Virginia, got laid off, and went to night school at Virginia Commonwealth University, where I encountered an inspirational teacher named Alan Briceland. He took an interest in me, and demonstrated to me the power of committed teaching. This coincided with my reading of Christopher Hill's book *The World Turned Upside Down*.

It turned out that I liked the research and writing too, not least because they helped me to speak and teach more broadly. I have been fortunate to travel, to meet with people around the world, to see how they think about the past, about peoples' struggles, about how these relate to the present. My mother, who is no longer alive, would say that there is a bit of the itinerant Baptist minister in me. There is no small irony in this, because when I was a kid I fought fiercely to escape the church at every opportunity. I now see that it is in me still.

R: *What's it like from the inside, being an American left radical, engaging with a new Cold War, where the fear of terrorism has replaced the fear of communism?*

M: Being in the belly of the beast so to speak? It is a difficult and dangerous time. The Patriot Act portends great ugliness ahead, loss of civil liberties, more repression and violence at home and abroad. I remember Donald Rumsfeld saying, with a glint in his eye, that the new War on Terror would be a lot like the old Cold War, only it would last much longer. He was hoping for a new source of social discipline, and a blank cheque for the Right to do things they've wanted to do for a long time. It is a grim period politically, but I am an optimist at heart. I see possibilities.

Howard Zinn and Staughton Lynd also travel a lot and speak to various progressive constituencies around the US. They say that there are more people

working on left-wing causes in America now than there were at the peak of the movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. But these many people and local movements don't have a sense of being connected to each other. Concerns are fragmented: environmentalists don't work on women's rights, feminists don't work on labour questions, labour activists don't work on . . . you get the idea. So one of the great challenges for people involved in social movements is to try to come up with broad, new,

inclusive ideas, which will connect the dots and produce a new movement culture, to combine all these people and energies and maximise our power to make history and make the future.

This interview took place at the University of Wollongong, on 19 July 2005, and was facilitated by the Hegemony Research Group at the university. The audio tape of the interview was transcribed by Renee Kyle, postgraduate student, University of Wollongong.

Rowan Cahill is a labour movement historian and journalist.

The Gun-Slave Cycle

The prisoner sits
across from me
in the cramped airless cubicle
behind the plexiglass
hands gently folded
during this middle passage
between life and death
wrists ringed by steel
forged by
Smith & Wesson

It is an old story
of guns and slavery

Into the lower decks of the ships
the European merchants loaded
chests of "fine guns walnut Tree Stocks"
"trading guns"
"buccaneer guns"
muskets
blunderbusses with shot
boxes of flints
"casks of powder"
branding irons
"3 doz'n and 2 padlocks"
chains and neck-rings
manacles and leg-irons

The hardware of bondage
to bind the cargo
plantation-bound

The guns for an African king
to wage unjust wars
to produce the next shipment
in the gun-slave cycle

Like manufacturers of old
Smith & Wesson
makes the guns
the handcuffs
and the profits
on an ancient metal circuit
of violence and misery

— State Correctional Institute-Greene,
Waynesburg, Pennsylvania

MARCUS REDIKER

DIFFERENT WAR, SAME OLD BATTLE . . .

MARCUS REDIKER'S HISTORIES OF PIRATES, SLAVES & REBELS

Marcus Rediker: *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (CUP, 1987)

Marcus Rediker with Peter Linebaugh: *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Beacon Press, 2000)

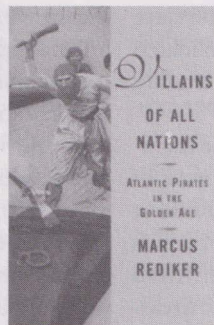
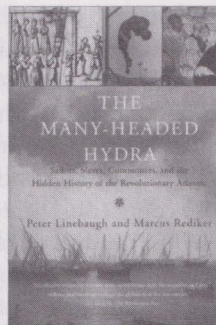
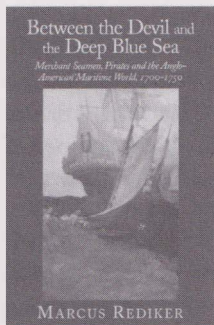
Marcus Rediker: *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Beacon Press, 2004)

IN NOVEMBER 1717, a motley crew of condemned men stood on the gallows in Boston, Massachusetts, awaiting execution. Before the public spectacle came to a grisly conclusion, noted New England cleric Cotton Mather announced that “All Nations agree to treat your Tribe, as the *Common Enemies of Mankind*, and [to] extirpate them out of the World”. Mather’s sermon was part of a lurid and violent multi-national propaganda campaign that aimed to demonise opponents of the emerging ‘Nations’ of the Atlantic world. The hangings were part of an international effort to organise and carry out a campaign of terror and extermination against these ‘common enemies’. Some of those ‘enemies’ were only recently in the employ of the nations who now condemned them – as official ‘privateers’. They were now ‘pirates’ – who stole property, resisted laws, and threatened the new social order. The rulers of the nation states had declared war upon them. Pirates, in turn, laughed in the face of death: “A merry Life and a short one,” was the common refrain, as they “wip’d their backsides” with the decrees of the Admiralty.

In *Villains of All Nations*, his latest book, Marcus Rediker vividly recounts the story of this early War on Terror, exploring the ‘Golden Age’ of Atlantic piracy between about 1716 and 1726 when perhaps

as many as four thousand pirates swarmed the seas of the mighty Atlantic. This was the age of the dreaded black flag, the Jolly Roger, and swashbuckling romanticised figures such as Welshman Black Bart Roberts and Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard. This was an era when cross-dressing women such as Mary Read and Anne Bonny fought for a ‘Life of Liberty’ alongside fellow pirates and found immortality in the novels of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, in John Gay’s sequel to the *Beggar’s Opera*, and perhaps even in Eugène Delacroix’s famous painting, *Liberté Guidant le peuple* (Liberty leading the people). This was the infamous generation of pirates that has inspired legendary tales from their day to ours; from Robert Louis Stevenson’s Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*, to Johnny Depp in *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

But if Rediker is keen to exploit our eternal fascination with this generation of pirates, his purpose is as deadly serious as the violence and the hangings that almost invariably ended the lives of so many of those involved. Indeed, Rediker, who has been an outspoken activist in the worldwide campaign to abolish the death penalty in the barbarous nations where it still exists, is passionate about recovering the daily realities of the lives of pirates, and understanding what moved them to virtually suicidal acts of crime and violence. For this is a bottom-up history of an extraordinary kind. We see here in vivid detail the terror and violence meted out by ship captains to ensure the smooth operations of commerce, including the safe transportation of enslaved Africans. We see here the deadly working conditions that sailors and seamen had to endure on merchant and naval ships, and which ultimately drove many to mutiny, or



Rediker's seemingly obvious conclusion in *Villains of All Nations* – that terror breeds counter-terror, and only leads to vicious cycles of violence – is a lesson still unlearned.

to voluntarily join attacking pirate ships. Even as he was about to be hanged, pirate William Fly sent out a warning to all ship captains that they learn from the murder of his own captain to “pay Sailors their Wages when due, and to treat them better”, announcing that “their Barbarity to them made so many turn Pyrates”. We also see in amazing detail the starkly different shipboard reality often created on board pirate vessels. We see here multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-national pirate crews constructing their own distinctive egalitarian societies, electing their officers, and dividing their plunder equitably, in the process – as Rediker concludes – challenging and subverting “prevailing conventions of race, class, gender and nationality, and posing a radical democratic challenge to the society they left behind”. Pirates most overtly and most flagrantly, however, challenged the rights of those who held mercantile property.

Such challenges, of course, could not go unanswered. And so a broad coalition of the willing began forming around 1716 – a less motley coalition of merchants and ministers, kings and governors, lawyers and judges, publicists and writers – to wage a campaign to “cleanse the seas”. Seeking to obliterate rather than understand the pirates who plagued their trade, they quickly created, through proclamations, legal briefs, petitions, pamphlets, sermons, and newspaper articles, a demonised image of the pirate that would “legitimate his annihilation”, in Rediker’s words. Indeed, only a few years after most European nations had sanctioned and commissioned privateers to do their bidding against each other in the War of Spanish Succession (which came to an end in 1713), those same nations turned their propaganda, laws and guns against some of the same men who now acted beyond the bounds of law. After offering pardons, ruling groups launched their own campaign of terror – with more vigilant naval patrolling, and

ever-greater numbers of spectacular executions.

The tragic irony, of course, was that one of the prime reasons the political-military-legal establishment wanted to obliterate piracy was to protect the slave trade from Africa to the Americas. Pirates such as Bartholomew Roberts devastated the fledgling slave trade between 1716 and 1722, ranging up and down the African coast, “sinking, burning, and destroying such Goods and Vessels as then happen’d in [their] Way,” striking a “Pannick into the Traders,” according to one naval surgeon. Pirates also led bold assaults against slave-trading fortresses on the coast. They were not as much interested in capturing slaves as in capturing the big, sturdy, seaworthy and well-armed ships that carried them, as well as the gold and silver at the castles that paid for them. Leading slave traders and slave owners struck back, petitioning the Admiralty and even the King for help. They also used political connections to get more men-of-war to the African coast to protect the slave trade against the “terror of ye Pirates”.

The War against Terror came to a frenzied climax in 1722, when the Royal Navy captured two of Black Bart Roberts’ ships on the coast of West Africa. On the gallows at Cape Coast Castle, the infamous slave-trading factory that served as a staging post for thousands of enslaved Africans about to be forcibly shipped to the Americas, fifty-two members of Roberts’ crew were hanged in front of a motley concourse of Europeans and Africans. Young and old were put to death and, according to one report, most met their fate with little fear, and no tears. To capitalise on the occasion, the authorities hanged the men under their own flag, the Jolly Roger, and turned their corpses into a “*Profitable and Serviceable Spectacle*” by distributing them up and down the African coast to broadcast the grisly message: terror would be fought with terror. After

piracy was effectively suppressed by 1726, the slave trade flourished, and England especially consolidated its position as the leading European slave-trading nation – a position it would hold until 1807.

Of course, the war on pirates was only one manifestation of a larger conflict between the forces of capitalism and the *Many-Headed Hydra*. As Rediker and Peter Linebaugh have shown in their previous work, rulers referred to the Hercules-hydra myth to describe the difficulties of imposing order on increasingly global systems of labour, from the beginning of English colonial expansion in the early seventeenth century through the metropolitan industrialisation of the early nineteenth. As merchants, manufacturers, planters and royal officials of northwestern Europe were fond of noting, the Herculean task of organising the production and transportation of bullion, furs, fish, tobacco, sugar and manufactures, was only made harder by the Hydra-like resistance of the men, women and children from Europe, Africa, and the Americas whom they put to work as “hewers of wood and drawers of water”. No sooner had one strike been put down, when another slave rebellion and mutiny began. Hercules, symbolising economic development, had to work tirelessly to put down the hydra, symbolising disorder and resistance – a powerful threat to the building of state, empire, and capitalism.

In the *Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Rediker and Linebaugh trace this story of the early origins and rise of Western capitalism, but they trace it unashamedly from the perspective of the sailors, slaves, pirates, labourers, “blackymore maides” and indentured servants who were pressed into service to construct the new Atlantic world. From this perspective, Rediker and Linebaugh discover the threads of a new Atlantic working class that developed its own agenda and countered the increasingly state sanctioned use of terror to enforce the appropriation of their lands and labour with a fusion of old and new forms of terror of their own. Thus it is that we find connections between the methods and ideology of resistance among the Levellers of the English Revolution and the oppressed and landless in far-flung Naples, Ireland, Barbados, Virginia and the Gambia River within the space of a few decades. As quickly as the Atlantic littoral was brought under the heel of merchant-capitalists, these connections grew more extensive, sophisticated, and

expansive, culminating in the sharp universalist edge of the Age of Atlantic Revolutions and the rising abolitionist movement. And, of course, it was the sailors, soldiers, and slaves who plied the Atlantic seas and who quite literally worked the engines of the developing capitalist order that helped create and nourish those connections of resistance.

As one of the leaders of a new generation of scholars interested in a more international social history and in re-invigorating a class-centred approach to the history of the early modern world, Rediker is not without critics. Indeed, though his work stands at the centre of a revival of interest in the ‘Atlantic world’, more conservative leaning scholars keen to celebrate Atlantic connections and the rise of ‘Western civilisation’ have virtually ignored Rediker and Linebaugh’s monumental challenge. Replicating the divide between ship captains and seamen, between slaves and masters, between traders and labourers, many historians of the Atlantic world today are too busy focusing on merchant communities, the creation of colonial Creole elites, and the transmission of ‘enlightened’ ideas to notice or acknowledge that their story actually mirrors the one told by Rediker and Linebaugh. When they have, they have dismissed the work as fanciful. The divide between the New Left and the New Right historians seems as wide as the contemporary political divisions that plague us. At stake is a very different version of history, a very different view of contemporary issues, and a different kind of hope for the future.

Critics complain, for example, that the connections drawn between various disaffected groups and classes are tenuous, and point to the fact that pirates preyed on ordinary people too, not just ship captains and merchants. Pirates themselves did sometimes concede that there were no clear boundaries in a war of total destruction. Shortly after the hangings in Boston, pirates who were still at sea vowed to “kill everybody they took belonging to New England”. Edward Teach, the infamous ‘Blackbeard’, and his crew burned a captured ship “because she belonged to *Boston* alleging the People of Boston had hanged some of the pirates”. But as recent events have reminded us, violence begets violence, and terror – practised by all sides – knows no bounds. Relatives of the young Brazilian man shot seven times in the head by London police at point blank range were made to swallow the lesson of “collateral damage” just as surely as were the families of Muslim victims

of the World Trade Centre and London bombings. Indeed, Rediker's seemingly obvious conclusion in *Villains of All Nations* – that terror breeds counter-terror, and only leads to vicious cycles of violence – is a lesson still unlearned. A young British teaching assistant, Mohammed Sidique Khan, has just reminded us of that fact, even as Tony Blair and John Howard continue to deny that the unlawful invasion of Iraq has been a cause for the continued escalation of violence and terror.

In a similar vein, critics also complain that Rediker and Linebaugh read too much into the motives of their subjects – that they take their subjects too seriously. Many historians have for too long been content with the nameless, faceless anonymity of the eighteenth-century crowd, or 'mob'. Rediker and Linebaugh give the mob names, faces, and voices, and try to understand their actions on their own terms. What they find when trying to understand the rationale for those actions makes us deeply uncomfortable, of course, because it forces us to acknowledge the *original* violence and terror perpetrated by those who enclosed the commons, financed slaving voyages, and gave orders to discipline sailors and suppress rebellions. It forces us, in other words, to acknowledge the depth and scale of the historic violence that gave rise to capitalism and imperialism.


Such a bloody history makes us deeply uncomfortable. And given historians' reluctance to talk about this dimension of our shared past, is it any wonder, then, that today's Western leaders remain thoroughly uninterested in acknowledging both the particular motivations of our new 'terrorists' and by extension, our own complicity in the deep and long-term historic violence that helped create these responses in the first place? As John Howard asserted at a press conference with Tony Blair on 21 July, "We lose sight of the challenge we have if we allow ourselves to see these attacks in the context of particular circumstances . . ." But as we learn more of the identities of the London bombers of 7 July 2005, we realise with horrifying clarity that the current 'war on terror' and polarisation of views has only provided yet another cause for disaffected, poverty stricken and racially abused youths to rally around.

Echoing Howard, Cotton Mather and the other royal officials, governors, attorneys, merchants, publicists, clergymen and writers who helped wage war against the pirates and 'cleansed the seas' with an

unmatched ferocious efficiency, were not particularly interested in what motivated the "Vermin", the "Sea-Monsters" the "Enemies of Mankind" that roamed the seas. The coalition of the willing were unable or unwilling to do much more than censure the captains of ships who oiled the engines of their commerce with the blood of the labour of sailors and slaves, precipitating the flight of many into refuge on board pirate ships. Only after being forced to listen to the defiant death speech of convicted pirate William Fly did Cotton Mather concede that perhaps ship captains had been complicit. He admonished the captains among the crowd that had gathered for the hanging to avoid being "too like the *Devil* in their *Barbarous Usage* of the *Men* that are under them and lay them under *Temptations* to do *Desperate Things*". He could, however, afford to be a little more magnanimous: this was 1726, and Fly was one of the last pirates hanged in a different War against Terror. At what point in this new War on Terror will *we* stop to think?

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LABOUR HISTORY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Tom O'Lincoln: *United We Stand: Class Struggle in Colonial Australia* (Red Rag, \$20)

Iain McIntyre: *Disturbing the Peace: Tales from Australia's Rebel History* (Homebrew Books, \$14)

Susan Kruss: *Calico Ceilings: Women of Eureka* (FIP, \$21.95)

Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus (eds): *Thinking Black: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League* (Aboriginal Studies Press, \$34.95)

John Edwards: *Curtin's Gift: Reinterpreting Australia's Greatest Prime Minister* (Allen & Unwin, \$35)

Frank Cain: *Jack Lang and the Great Depression* (ASP, \$34.95)

Gwenda Tavan: *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Scribe, \$32.95)

IN ANSWER TO the question 'What is labour history?', posed in 1967 in a symposium of the same name, one of the discipline's leading exponents, Eric Fry, responded with a three-fold answer. It was, he believed, "the history of a social class, particularly concerned with the structure of society and the changes in it",¹ and was controversial because it "breaks new ground".²

The publication of these books is a timely moment to reflect on Fry's characterisation of the discipline he helped to build. Much has happened, of course, to transform the very approach of labour history itself. The fiery debates about the meaning of class, the disagreements of where power lies in society and how to define it, and the disapproval of some of the new postmodern directions, have mirrored the ruptures within the historical profession at large. Labour history has been perhaps more vulnerable to changing political climates and agendas, as its very identity was formed through a particular junction of politics and vision of social change.

It is the understanding of the 'political' and the 'radical', in the context of writing history in the twenty-first century, that provides the context for this review essay.

CLASS AND LABOUR HISTORY

Even from labour history's early conception, 'class' was understood in different ways by different practitioners. Its meanings and application were the source of lively and continuous debate. All agreed that class was the defining category of labour history, of socialist politics and the motor of social and political change. This was a radical project in the Liberal supremacy of the 1950s and 1960s, and its purpose was tied explicitly to the politics of the day. It was with some matter of urgency that Robin Gollan insisted that labour history be of "immediate practical value" to the labour movement and that "past experience, of success and failures can provide guide posts for present and future actions".³ His clarion call spawned union histories, histories of the labour parties, biographies of labour and socialist agitators, and studies of the various ideological currents that shaped the philosophical and intellectual traditions of the Australian labour movement. Terry Irving, another participant at the 1967 symposium, was less convinced that labour historians had what he termed a solid grasp of class, or of class relations. "Why should the working class be separately studied?" he asked. In demanding attention to the question, Irving was foreshadowing the criticisms that would soon be hurled at the founding fathers of labour history – the Old Left – by the younger sons who rebelled against them under the banner of the New. Irving himself would take this inquiry

further. In 1980, he and R.W. Connell published *Class Structure in Australian History*, one of the few attempts to apply an explicitly class-based analysis to Australia's past. Their study attempted to bring to fruition the criticism that the New Left so abrasively made of its predecessors. Class should not be taken as given or as a structural category, Connell and Irving argued. These are "real groups of flesh-and-blood people". "To understand a class fully", they wrote, "is to be concerned with the structure of situations: their limitations, their intractability; and their potential for fundamental change . . ." ⁴ It was the wider relationships between classes that needed to be addressed. According to Stuart Macintyre, the task of any Marxist historian should be "the analysis of the full complexity of class oppression . . . it must involve a consideration of class relations". ⁵

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF LABOUR

It was within this context – the need to expand labour history to include the history of societies, and to consider the ways in which societies were interconnected – that labour history became "the social history of labour". ⁶ The project remained overtly political, and the aim was to guide social and political practice, which meant moving away from the institutional base of labour. This shift was inclusive of gender, race, and sexuality, reflecting the emergence of the new and exciting social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. The key to social history was to understand society through a whole range of forces. Social history was less directed by the revolutionary praxis, but did attempt to show the interconnectedness of class with other oppressive structures. Labour historians broadened their analysis, sought connections beyond that of class and, as Verity Burgmann observes, showed how "labour history could not only become a form of social history but could also inform other social history". ⁷

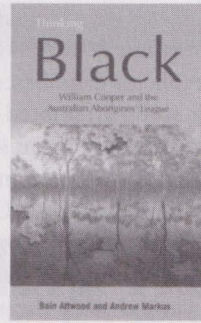
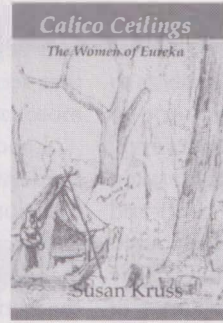
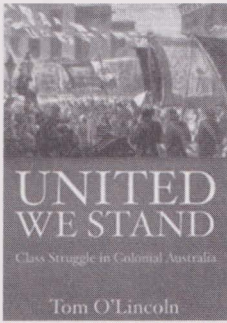
During the 1980s, it seemed possible to integrate the various webs of oppression into a coherent prospect of liberation. But this proved to be a fragile edifice. With postmodern theories, and the emergence of difference, fragmentation and multiplicity as political catchcries which displaced the coherent call of collective labour, it seemed that labour historians no longer had a monopoly on the "oppressed, exploited and under-privileged". ⁸ The groups who now claimed recognition did not always possess a class status. Their claims arose from sexuality, race

and gender. The politics of difference and recognition began to shape the writing of history in ways that seemed for the next generation of historians, more radical and more political.

Labour history was challenged next by post-modern theorists, some of whom brought into question the very usefulness of class as a category of historical analysis. Through the 1990s, class became increasingly understood through a different set of theoretical categories – language, discourse, identity and agency. Controversially, historians such as Patrick Joyce and Joan Scott attempted to integrate post-modernist theory into their labour histories. ⁹ They identified the language of class as a key way of further politicising labour history. In questioning our very understanding of class Scott and Joyce adopted an approach which antagonised historians of all political persuasions. The enterprise now became one which attempted to understand class not as given, but as "unstable, open to context and redefinition". Its very meaning was "always potentially in flux". ¹⁰ The contingency of class experience enunciated in these histories undermined understanding of class as a coherent motor of social change.

Within these new approaches and in broader terms, many labour historians no longer aimed to produce a scorecard of successes and failures of past struggles. Nor did these histories intend to instruct future behaviour. As Macintyre argues in the case of the Communist Party, communists used "the past for inspiration and instruction. Such works typically distinguish truth from error by demonstrating the perfidy of reformists and revisionists, and extolling the heroic efforts of the faithful". ¹¹ In his work, he attempted rather to "evoke the milieu of Australian communism . . . to stand outside it and grasp it as a historical phenomenon". ¹² Perhaps Macintyre's most radical departure from earlier histories of institution and instruction has been his success in humanising communism. In stressing the experience of party members and capturing their "foibles and idiosyncrasies, in order to suggest the diversity of human qualities that lay behind the hard outer shell", ¹³ Macintyre managed to encapsulate class as a personalised experience, in ways unimagined by his predecessors.

What do these books under review suggest about the current state of labour history? Class analysis is certainly central in some – but not all – of these histories. Those who adopt this framework are



embedded within the labour tradition of using the past to instruct and inform present and future struggles. What all of these histories share is the need to offer a different version of the past than that presented by the ‘victors’ of society and by conventional historians.

Tom O’Lincoln’s powerful narrative is a timely reminder of the need to revisit a class history of Australia. In doing so, he provides important new material on the history of class antagonism in Australia. Colonial Australia is the context for exploring the ways in which issues around class, gender and race were played out in various struggles such as the campaign for women’s suffrage, the formation of unionism and strike activity. The discussion of the evolution of White Australia and the role of the Labor Party in promoting and sustaining it is especially timely. O’Lincoln makes clear that the purpose of his book is to instruct and inform future political campaigns:

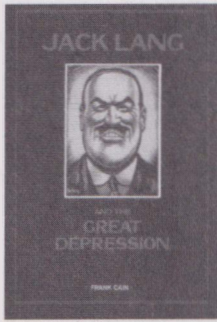
The traditions of resistance . . . remain, with lessons to guide us in today’s struggles. Yet because conventional accounts are usually written by the victors, all too often the traditions get obscured. That’s why we need to write our own history.¹⁴

Similarly, Iain McIntyre writes that his collection of radical stories is not only to “celebrate Australia’s unique rebel tradition”, but also to offer the collection as its own “struggle against forgetting”.¹⁵ It is also to “demonstrate that radical troublemaking is something that happened and is still happening right where we live”.¹⁶ There are indeed some intriguing and compelling cases which McIntyre brings to the attention of the reader. These include body snatching during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially of Indigenous relics; the strike of carnival workers in 1947; cross-dressing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as profiles of bet-

ter known activists such as the poet Lesbia Keogh, socialist R.S. Ross and communist parliamentarian, Fred Paterson.

Far less strident, but framed by a similar aim to document and retrieve unknown stories is the collection by Susan Kruss of *The Women of Eureka*. Drawing on archival material on women at Eureka, Kruss offers an engaging and fascinating collection of poems. These capture the diversity of women’s experience and their material lives. It is a moving, rich and powerful collection which gives agency and voice to a generation of forgotten women. In doing so, it also provides an alternative history to that usually written about Eureka and the goldfields.¹⁷ The collection of documents compiled by Attwood and Markus also aims to rescue a crucial historical figure from oblivion – William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines’ League. The editors provide a detailed and engaging introduction placing Cooper within the wider context of Indigenous activism during the 1920s and 1930s. It provides a rich history of resistance to Indigenous dispossession, displacement, the denial of rights and Indigenous campaigns for citizenship of their own country.¹⁸

Scholarship of a kind which is more traditionally in the labour history paradigm are biographical studies of two Labor leaders: John Curtin and Jack Lang. There is a robust tradition of biography within labour history and these fine studies are no exception. John Edwards attempts to reinterpret John Curtin by arguing that he was a gifted politician who was far more strategic and deliberate in how he came to office and what he did when he assumed the reigns of power. Edwards argues in a lively and readable book how Curtin “grasped the authority to move the country in the direction he wanted to go”.¹⁹ Frank Cain’s purpose is similar in that, through his detailed and meticulous analysis of Jack Lang’s role during the Great Depression, he aims to challenge



What all of these histories share is the need to offer a different version of the past than that presented by the ‘victors’ of society and by conventional historians.

the view of Lang as a political manipulator and offer an interpretation that is far more complex than the one historians have offered in the past.²⁰

The history of White Australia is explored by Gwenda Tavan in her compelling and significant account of the changing and shifting history of the White Australia Policy. The continuing residue of anxiety about race and immigration also reveals the ways in which popular prejudices and fears can be manipulated by governments. She too attempts to challenge received views in her discussion of how the White Australia Policy was dismantled, what this suggests about democratic processes, and how many of its values remain embedded within Australian cultural life.²¹

In a piece entitled ‘What’s left of the Left’, Eric Hobsbawm notes that single-issue movements such as the women’s movement and the environmental movement as well as campaigns against racism and homophobia “belong to what could be called the Left continuum”.²² As these works suggest, that continuum, and the various moments that appear on it, need to be perceived as a strength and not a weakness if labour history is to continue to occupy the radical and oppositional status it assumed in the latter half of the last century. They point to the importance of considering class in broader terms – not the separation of it from other forms of oppression – but rather its interconnectedness and its merging with different aspects of oppression. Furthermore, they also highlight the need for another type of interconnectedness: that of a closer dialogue between historians for an inclusion of issues of class, race, sexuality and gender in any historical analysis, whatever the subject matter. To promote this integration would broaden understandings not only of ‘labour’ in labour history, but also notions of ‘radical’ and ‘political’ in historical, contemporary and future understandings.

1. E.C. Fry, ‘Symposium: What Is Labour History?’, *Labour History* 12, May 1967, p.64.
2. *ibid.*, p.62.
3. Quoted in John Merritt, ‘Labour History’, in G. Osborne and W.F. Mandle (eds), *New History: Studying Australia Today*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, p.118.
4. R.W. Connell and T. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narrative and Argument*, Longman Chesire, Sydney, 1980, p.7.
5. Stuart Macintyre, ‘Radical History and Bourgeois Hegemony’, *Intervention* 2, 1972, p.66.
6. Verity Burgmann, ‘The Strange Death of Labour History’, in *Bede Nairn and Labour History: Labour History Essays: Volume 3*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1991, p.70.
7. *ibid.*, p.76.
8. Merritt, ‘Labour History’, p.139.
9. Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England*, CUP, New York, 1994, p.1; Joan Scott, ‘On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History’, Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p.63.
10. Scott, ‘Introduction’, *ibid.*, p.5.
11. Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia: From Origins to Illegality*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1998, p.4.
12. *ibid.*, p.8.
13. *ibid.*
14. Tom O’Lincoln, *United We Stand: Class Struggle in Colonial Australia*, Red Rag, Melbourne, 2005, p.106.
15. Iain McIntyre, *Disturbing the Peace: Tales from Australia’s Rebel History*, Homebrew Books, Melbourne, 2005, p.5.
16. *ibid.*, p.5.
17. Susan Kruss, *Calico Ceilings: The Women of Eureka, Five Islands Press, Melbourne, 2005, p.v.*
18. Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus (eds), *Thinking Black: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines’ League*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2004, pp.1–24.
19. John Edwards, *Curtin’s Gift: Reinterpreting Australia’s Greatest Prime Minister*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.11.
20. Frank Cain, *Jack Lang and the Great Depression*, ASP, Melbourne, 2005, p.viii.
21. Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2005, p.5.
22. Eric Hobsbawm, *The New Century*, Abacus, London, 2001, pp.103.

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US, THEM & EVERYBODY ELSE

THE NEW HUMANITIES IN AUSTRALIA



WHAT IS THE current identity of the humanities – or the ‘new humanities’, as it is sometimes called – in Australia? We can start by saying that it is simultaneously endangered and hyperactive: it also reflects upon the disciplines at stake more extensively and often more critically than perhaps ever before, which means it can be both confident and abject. Utterly preoccupied by its contemporary role and relevance, the humanities has long since turned away from a reified world of eternal truths and values and has tried to adapt as best as it can so that, now, it exists in a perpetual state of rearrangement. Its primary disciplines – English or Literary Studies, Philosophy and History – jostle for space these days alongside a gamut of newcomers: Cultural Studies, Cinema Studies, Multicultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Ethical Studies, Gender Studies (or Women’s Studies, in its old guise), Media Studies and, in this country, Australian Studies, among many others. In universities across Australia, there is – for example – barely an English Department still standing on its own. Most of them are now yoked to other disciplines in the humanities with whom, only a few years ago, they would have barely exchanged a word. So at Sydney University we now find English with Art History, Film and Media. Its School of ‘Philosophy and Historical Inquiry’ puts Philosophy and History alongside Gender Studies, Anthropology and ‘Peace and Conflict Studies’. At La Trobe University in Melbourne, a new School of ‘Communication, Arts and Critical Enquiry (*sic*)’ ties its old English Department to Philosophy, Media Studies, Cinema Studies and ‘Gender, Sexuality and Diversity (GSD) Studies’. (That last word, *diversity*, leaves things

nice) open.) History at La Trobe now finds itself in another School with Italian Studies and Greek. Elsewhere – at the Queensland University of Technology – the new humanities has bravely linked itself to industry. QUT’s ‘Creative Industries’ Faculty was launched in 2001 as an indication of the humanities’ future in the new millennium and it has been wonderfully productive. Even so, there have been dissenters. Not long ago a couple of its staff, from Film and Television Studies, broke ranks to express their disenchantment. “Creative industries needs a new road map”, they noted, adding perhaps a little too desperately: “there are many in the faculty . . . who are capable of plotting a path through the wilderness”.¹ The new humanities in this country has indeed been surprisingly adaptable. But it could well be forgiven for wondering where it is going and what exactly it has become: as if there is a great deal more wilderness out there than path.

QUT’s Creative Industries is fairly sure about what *it’s* become, promoting a combination of creativity and commercial enterprise as it happily stitches the ‘new humanities’ to the ‘new economy’. It was the idea of Cultural Studies academic, John Hartley, who became its first Dean. Cultural Studies as a discipline finds its own origins in the kind of critical theory produced by Adorno and Horkheimer during the 1940s, directed towards what used to be called the Culture Industries: cinema, ‘mass production’, popular music, entertainment. Since Adorno and Horkheimer only understood these things critically (in the days when critical theory meant *being* critical), their relation to Cultural Studies is thus a negative one. Cultural Studies, by contrast, is often

downright celebratory of both mass cultural production (its variety, its 'textuality') and consumer choice and 'agency'. The turn from 'Culture Industries' to 'Creative Industries' is therefore symptomatic: the word *creative* is precisely what enables Cultural Studies to reconcile itself at last to commercial interests. In Simon During's useful new introduction to Cultural Studies – one of several recent reflections on this particular discipline – the term "enterprise culture" is given special prominence early on to reflect this current affair with industry and commerce. Enterprise culture, he notes, is associated with "enterprise" and "entrepreneurialism", obviously enough.² These traits are claimed by Cultural Studies, which now casts itself as 'vocational' and about 'skills production' all in the midst of an older humanities (English, Philosophy, History) which on the whole had set itself apart from all this, content to muse instead upon higher things. On the other hand, During's book ends with the observation that with just a few exceptions Cultural Studies has barely given work itself a second thought: "labour", he suggests, "tends to disappear as an analytic category".³ We might say here that the superstructure Cultural Studies has now happily erected – bringing creativity, entrepreneurialism and commerce together – has suppressed its base: especially when we think of those other foundational texts of Cultural Studies by Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart, which precisely came out of analyses of labour and the British working classes.

'Creativity' has now become a synonym for 'ideas' and both words are equally abused these days. Every creative event now has a bottom line, as if Marx's base-and-superstructure model has in other respects returned with a vengeance. The University of Queensland Press's *The Ideas Book* is a collection of short talks delivered at a "festival of ideas" recently held in Brisbane. One of the introductions, by Dale Spender, gets straight to the point: "Not long ago, everyone was talking about the emerging notion of the 'ideas economy' . . . Since then, we've been accustomed to talking about ideas and money in the same sentence".⁴ Although I have no idea who she is talking about here, Spender – once a radical feminist – has clearly now embraced 'enterprise culture' with a breathless, evangelical zeal. The US basketball player Michael Jordan is a particular hero, his "personal economic value gained from copyrighting and merchandising" exceeding "the Kingdom of

Jordan's gross national product".⁵ By comparison, I suppose, QUT's Creative Industries looks rather more like a *cottage* industry; if only Jordan had been slamdunking for the new humanities. In the meantime, work or labour has indeed disappeared here as an analytic category since Spender now sees nothing but entertainment (the 'leisure industries') around her. So it was perhaps a little surprising to see the first talk in this collection, by Sharon Beder, a professor of science, technology and society from the University of Wollongong, actually speak out *against* work, and "the work ethic": "What this world needs", she writes, "is not more work – it needs more wisdom. To have a culture of wisdom, we need a society in which people have time to contemplate, time to think about the problems and time to talk about the solutions".⁶ This is one of those statements that brings the sciences and the older humanities together, albeit a little abjectly these days. Both are tangential to 'enterprise culture', and both are aligned to 'contemplation' rather than the sensibility so routinely linked to leisure and mass entertainment and the marketplace: distraction. English, Philosophy, History; these disciplines have each built themselves around the need to have 'time to contemplate'. Nowadays, however, as the desperate logic of 'enterprise culture' saturates every cash-strapped Australian university and the bottom line is the measure of all things (wise or otherwise), that has itself become a problem increasingly worth contemplating.

And so, alongside *The Ideas Book*, we have David Carter's anthology, *The Ideas Market*, published by another prominent sandstone university press, MUP, which has also become more market-friendly. This book is interested in the role academics from the humanities and social sciences (new and old) should play in what is loosely called the 'public sphere'. A few years ago, Graeme Turner noted that the public sphere was itself increasingly resembling a marketplace, a "thoroughly commercialised" zone where ideas and money do indeed go hand in hand.⁷ A traditional discipline like Literary Studies must therefore "find, articulate and hold its place" there; difficult to do after this discipline had spent so much time becoming 'theoretical' more or less at the expense of public sympathy and understanding.⁸ The contributors to *The Ideas Market* know this and so cultivate a kind of ambivalence towards theory: wanting on the one hand to invoke it to explain their

As far as Australian literature is concerned, a ‘creative nation’ is a subsidised nation.

predicament, but on the other hand acutely aware of the negativity it elicits from the outside world. Media Studies academic Catharine Lumby begins by noting that, on radio, she was asked to explain what postmodernism is and responded unconvincingly in front of some already-sceptical journalists. “The public sphere today”, she concludes, “is not one where traditional hierarchies of expertise and knowledge are respected”.⁹ She may mean *non-traditional* here, but the point nevertheless comes from her sense of the massive gulf these days between academics and journalists, those information workers in the thick of the public sphere for whom humanities academics in particular are often just a kind of quaint luxury. Should journalists therefore become more academic, that is, more ‘respectful’ of knowledge and expertise? Or should academics become more journalistic? The former option might be worth pursuing, but in fact Lumby favours the latter, calling for a new kind of academic who is simultaneously *less* academic: media-savvy and theory-free. “Academics are used to being approached by journalists and having their ideas translated into the language of the media,” she writes. “It’s time academics started translating their own work and learning a new mode of speech.”¹⁰

Lumby’s populism – which sees academics able to ‘perform’ in the ‘media sphere’ – provides a possible future for the new humanities which is appealing to some, a little horrifying to others. Of course, if the public sphere is pretty much everywhere, then academics are already in it along with everybody else. This is the view held by Alan McKee in his Cambridge University Press book, *The Public Sphere: An Introduction*. McKee is also a self-declared post-modernist, which means that he attends not only to those traditional spaces for public discussion like the ABC or the quality media, but also to new populist movements, popular mass media like magazines and commercial TV and radio, and even micro-media, the kind produced by marginal social groups who would otherwise remain outside the public sphere: just like academics. This is a good-natured, optimistic book which doesn’t much like the rationalist/traditional model of the public sphere bequeathed to us by Habermas, and also doesn’t care for the pessimism

of someone like Neil Postman, who thinks the public sphere is now trivialised, fragmented and dumb. Like Lumby, McKee speaks up even for tabloid media as one form of ‘engagement’ amongst many others, and just as legitimate: exactly the kind of cultural relativism that makes humanities traditionalists bristle. For McKee, it’s all about “everyone getting along: Black, white, gay, straight . . .” – just as the new humanities is supposed to get along with industry, media and the marketplace (‘ideas’ and ‘money’).¹¹ In his own contribution to *The Ideas Market*, where he thinks about the identity of the ‘public intellectual’, McKee is thus ultra-democratic. “I will not call myself an intellectual,” he writes, “but I am happy to call John Laws an intellectual: somebody who thinks in public about issues of common interest. And Stan Zemanek. And Don Burke and Pauline Hanson.”¹² Some readers might at this point think that the new humanities is a world turned upside down, rather like those old films where a prince swaps places with a pauper and vice versa. What was dumb is now smart, what was smart is now dumb: as the new humanities yearns for credibility in public life, it lends legitimacy to practically everything it comes across and so speaks to nothing much more than its own abjection (‘I will not call myself an intellectual’). We’ve moved here from critical theory to a new humanities without a single critical bone in its genial, compassionate and troubled body.

How does Literary Studies ‘hold its place’ in this brave new world? One answer comes, perhaps surprisingly, from a recent issue of *Cultural Studies Review*, Australia’s primary Cultural Studies journal; another indication of just how porous humanities disciplines have now become. Iain McCalman is what is now called the “Immediate Past President” of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and not long ago *CSR* – in an issue interestingly titled *Desecration* – published his ‘Telstra Address’ to the National Press Club on 16 June 2004, celebrating the establishment of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS). McCalman’s address is optimistically titled, ‘Making Culture Bloom’ and it turns to James Joyce, *Ulysses* and Ireland for its inspiration. For McCalman, Joyce

was a literary genius and a “cultural innovator”; no cultural relativism here. But more importantly for the new humanities, his great novel gave us Bloomsday – also 16 June – and so established a tourist industry with a significant market value. Bloomsday, McCalman says, “shows us the serendipitous way that humanistic culture can bring economic benefits to the nation, or to use the jargon of our day, how it can produce commercial spin-off”.¹³ *Ulysses* literally becomes a Creative Industry here. One can almost see the National Press Club audience nodding along in approval. Thousands of people now celebrate Bloomsday and both industry and government contribute to the event, to produce something close to a national literary culture that sees literary genius and the marketplace seamlessly folded together. As I read through McCalman’s piece, I recalled by way of dissent the Irish novelist Roddy Doyle’s much-publicised complaint a few months before Bloomsday 2004: that almost no-one actually reads *Ulysses* which was in fact first released in expensive limited editions anyway, that the Bloomsday celebrations are a shabby debasement of “the Joyce industry”, and that Joyce stands tyrannically over all things literary in Dublin as the measure of excellence in relation to which every other Irish novelist is found wanting.¹⁴ But McCalman pursues his untroubled vision of a national literary culture underpinned by investment and promising full returns, also invoking the considerable fortunes earned out of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. Of course, Tolkien’s current relationship to any sort of national literary culture is hard to determine. The recent films brought money into New Zealand of all places, but also to US and other producers and investors elsewhere, even though the novels themselves were written in Oxford.

What does it mean to put your literary faith these days in an anti-popular modernist novel and a work of fantasy, both of which are far from contemporary? It is partly to do with wanting literature to recover its fullest authority all over again; but this time, with the nation (and commerce, if you can get it) right behind it, or rather, underneath it. McCalman calls for a literature that “embodies and represents the culture of an entire nation” – something not even *Ulysses* could hope to do.¹⁵ Not even the most expansive national allegory can ever perform this holistic task. But McCalman is unmoved. He laments the fact that so much canonical Australian literature is out of print, as if industry has abandoned its liter-

ary interests as well as its commitment to the nation altogether (which may well be true). So he ends his talk by drawing attention to a new national literary project: a joint venture by the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Macquarie University and Sydney PEN to produce “a really major anthology of Australian literature”.¹⁶ This anthology, he says, is designed to “teach our kids their cultural heritage”.¹⁷ We might pause to ask: *whose* kids? *what* heritage? As I shall note later on, even the folk in Australian Studies don’t think in this way any more. But a great deal of public (not commercial) money is being invested here – the anthology has an estimated budget of \$1.5 million – and someone’s kids are surely going to learn something, somehow, in spite of the fact that the teaching of Australian Literary Studies at Australian universities nowadays is in serious decline. I looked at the Academy’s website for this anthology, which promises 1500 pages of material for release in 2008 but wisely says nothing about the contents. Outside of wondering how much this thing would cost and weigh – about the same as *Ulysses*? – I hope it turns in a profit.

As far as Australian literature is concerned, a ‘creative nation’ is a subsidised nation. The poet and academic Martin Harrison has published a small book titled, *Who Wants to Create Australia?* – the kind of question perhaps only a poet, or one of the Australian Academy of the Humanities’ anthologists, would dare to ask. The subtitle is ‘essays on poetry and ideas in contemporary Australia’. As we might naturally expect from a poet, ‘ideas’ are meant in their purer sense, remote from industry, the marketplace and money; all of which are conspicuous here by their absence. This is a book Dale Spender might therefore hardly recognise. Even so, it is a fascinating collection of essays which begins precisely at the moment at which an ideas-laden poet – Harrison – is about to participate in the public sphere, a conference at which he was scheduled to speak along with “economists, cultural theorists [and] political scientists”.¹⁸ I am sorry to say that for some reason he never makes it, which means that the first essay is given over to how a poet *might* have performed in the public sphere, but didn’t: “I wanted to talk about literature . . . Yet (I wanted to add) it was self-evident . . . The view I wanted to discuss . . . My comment, then, would obviously have been . . .”, etc. Harrison’s essay is thus reproduced here as a public event that never actually took place. I have used the

term *abjection* a couple of times already to describe the predicament of the new humanities; but we see it again in this example of a writer who conspires in his own marginality even as he turns out to be thinking of the productive role poetry can play in the context of “new media” and “new technologies”. This may well be a useful allegory for the state of Literary Studies today. Acutely aware of the marginality of the poet (which he literally plays out by remaining at home), Harrison’s book is nevertheless about the *accessibility* of poetry. Under the influence of Roland Barthes and ‘poetics’, he turns away from ‘reading’ – which is dogmatic – to ‘writing’, which is democratic since anyone can do it. That is, he advocates participation in the public sphere *in spite of himself*; marginality and accessibility turn out to be the two sides of Literary Studies’ coin.

The sort of democratic vision we see here, and which we saw above with Alan McKee’s account of the public sphere, can risk falling apart under the weight of its own compassion. Poetics, Harrison says, is “a study which explores the immersion of each individual in his or her own metaphoric construction of the world”¹⁹ – a point which is too close to solipsism for comfort, and quite different in kind to McCalman’s point that literature should “represent the culture of an entire nation”. Harrison’s idea of writing reminded me of the American novelist Jonathan Franzen’s famous essay, ‘How to Be Alone’ which – although it retains some notion of ‘American Literature’ and its traditions – believes that writing should indeed be an idiosyncratic activity, free from the tyranny of the public sphere and altogether free from the influence of industry and commercial culture, too. Like Franzen and like so many poets these days (who are closer in sensibility to Adorno than they may like to imagine), Harrison therefore despises mass entertainment, objecting to what he calls “worldspeak”, the kind of writing that could have been produced “anywhere where American TV is staple diet”.²⁰ For Harrison, this is bland and inauthentic, globalised and “clever” but derivative. By contrast, he offers the virtues of the “local experience”, the kind of thing you might find expressed in the nature poetry of Les Murray. The first essay in his collection had seen Harrison not participate in the metropolitan public sphere. The last essay leaves the earlier interest in “new media” and “new technologies” far behind as Harrison moves out of Sydney and retires, Murray-like, into the countryside, where

a poet’s yearning for commerce-free authenticity can seem at last to be realised. It would appear as if Harrison can now happily live out Sharon Beder’s call for “time to contemplate”. “Was moving away from the city”, he asks, “my own way of encouraging some such intuitive influences of time, land form and season to be at work on my sense of the world around me?” I’m tempted to say probably not, and recommend a return to the pressing realities of ordinary life as soon as possible.

Literary Studies has been a remarkably adaptable discipline over the years, but poets can still be as tied to “authenticity” (the “local experience”, Nature, art, etc.) as they ever were. Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe’s *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New World* is a collection of essays taken from a conference held at Harvard University, where there is a designated Chair in Australian Studies. *Imagining Australia* is a poet’s title, rather like Harrison’s *Who Wants to Create Australia?* The volume is divided into three sections, *Narrative* (essays on prose fiction), *Culture* (essays by Cultural Studies folk) and *Poetry* (essays on poetry, often by poets themselves). The editors tell us that these sections “are in no way discrete”,²¹ hoping to reflect the current state of interdisciplinarity in the new humanities; but in many respects they are and the section on poetry stands out in particular. Kevin Hart’s paper, subtitled ‘How To Read a Poem by Judith Wright’, gives us exactly the kind of dogmatic reading that Harrison had objected to. The poet’s reading here is supposed to be the correct one: “we” (the essay routinely invokes this plural pronoun) “must” read it in this way. But even here, the confident authority of the poet-academic is tinged with abjection, as the last sentence reveals when it wonders what might happen if people didn’t read Wright as Hart had just done, or perhaps, simply didn’t read the poem at all: “would the poem’s meaning”, Hart asks, “remain forever in the dark?”²² This is quite a different position to the work in Media Studies I’ve mentioned above, which thinks that everyone can be equally visible in the public sphere if only they could “translate” themselves in the appropriate way. But are some kinds of writing condemned to remain untranslatable? For poetry, this is a nagging problem since, as I’ve noted, poets like to invest in poetry’s accessibility to the point even of suggesting (in a way that recalls Iain McCalman’s point about *Ulysses*) that poetry perfectly reflects the nation’s

Zeitgeist. Judith Ryan's essay on Les Murray in *Imagining Australia* does just this, running the bizarre argument that the "vernacular" language of Murray's poetry absorbs and transcends all its "foreign" influences (Harrison's "worldspeak", perhaps) and in doing so becomes authentically Australian. But this kind of thing gets Literary Studies nowhere. It valorises a particular kind of writing (poetry) above all else, refusing interdisciplinarity altogether, then pitches poetry against the world only to take refuge in "local experience" – or worse, in the *nation-as-local*. "Imagining Australia" doesn't get much more narrow-minded than this.

By way of remedy, I recommend Meaghan Morris's wonderful essay 'The Man From Hong Kong in Sydney, 1975' from the *Cultural Studies* section of this book. Morris, an astonishingly versatile critic who spans much of the new humanities in her range of interests, begins with some critical remarks on the "insular imagination" in Australia:²³ the sort

. . . as the new humanities yearns for credibility in public life, it lends legitimacy to practically everything it comes across and so speaks to nothing much more than its own abjection . . .

of thing we find here amongst the poets. Her key text is precisely one of those derivative works of mass entertainment that poets disdain: a 1975 joint Hong Kong/Australian action film called *The Man from Hong Kong*, starring George Lazenby. The authentic yearnings of poetry couldn't be further away, but 'Australia', too, is much less easily able to be imagined through the clichés of the local and the vernacular. Morris herself establishes a tangential relationship to Australia, where even Sydney can "feel" different. And when Hong Kong *comes* to Sydney, those differences are substantially heightened. Rather than shun it, Morris engages with commercial cultural production, writing about how it works and what it does within what she calls "a history of transnational cultural experiment".²⁴ The task here is not to turn commerce and industry into the bottom line as we saw with Dale Spender. It is instead to treat commerce and culture dialectically and realistically, understanding at the same time that these things work on Australia not to localise it at all but to regionalise and globalise it; to fissure it rather than to render it into some sort of fanciful

whole. She asks "how Australian film history might be conceived and narrated through its real industrial and imaginative connections to people beyond our national borders";²⁵ the kind of question to which the new humanities is only just beginning to turn its attention.

Much work in the humanities is still too attached to the local as an authentic expression of "homeliness" in Australia to properly engage with transnational/industrial/cultural matters. Or perhaps it tries to mediate between the two, as Felicity Collins and Therese Davis do in their study, *Australian Cinema After Mabo*, published by Cambridge University Press. The theme they pursue in recent cinema is precisely about "being at home" in Australia during a period of "intense globalisation".²⁶ But there is much more about the former here than the latter. This is a study that draws on Postcolonial Studies – in particular, the work of Leela Gandhi, whose name is mis-spelt throughout the book. It wants to

say that recent cinema in Australia responds both empathetically and traumatically to the Mabo decision, so that the Australian landscape is now always politically rendered. But this book might also have been called 'Australian Cinema After Howard', since it takes much of what has happened in contemporary films as a reaction against a new social conservatism in this country. It is a social analysis of film, having nothing much to say about commercial and industrial imperatives and remaining, once again, pretty much within the frame of the nation. I also missed a discussion of Tracey Moffatt's challenging films: *Bedeevil*, for example. Nevertheless, the commentaries are useful, earnest and perhaps just a little dispiriting, building themselves around the themes of guilt and shame and pain and arguing that in Australia the public sphere is by no means as inclusive as some of the Media Studies people would have us believe. "The Australian character", the authors conclude, "cannot be foreign, female, queer or black".²⁷ Perhaps they're right, although it might depend on where you look for your Australian characters.

Griffith Review doesn't clarify matters, bringing

out special issues with titles like *Our Global Face* and *People Like Us*. People like who, exactly? This lively journal comes out of Griffith University in Queensland, which takes its name from Sir Samuel Griffith, once a Premier of Queensland and the first Chief Justice of Australia. A Welsh immigrant, Griffith was fascinated by Italian culture and amongst other things produced a translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. (A wit once joked that he had worked on the *Inferno* in Brisbane, the *Purgatorio* in Melbourne and the *Paradiso* in Sydney.) The *Our Global Face* issue reflects these early interests, to the point even of "Imagining an *International* Australia", to give the title to one of its essays: no insular perspectives here.²⁸ Where the "Australian character" is amongst all this is therefore a bit of a mystery, but it returns with a vengeance in the flagship essay from the *People Like Us* issue, Margaret Simons' 'Ties That Bind'.

Simons was a supporter of Mark Latham and she draws here on his distinction between cultural elites – or what Latham had called "tourists" – and the ordinary Australian folk you are supposed to come across in the outer suburbs of Australian cities, like Fountain Gate: the ones who both Latham and Simons believe properly 'belong' in Australia. In their book on Australian cinema, Collins and Davis had noted that the cultural elite/battler distinction was nurtured by Howard and his government and used as a means for political conservatives (who might be just as 'culturally elite') to then imagine themselves allied with ordinary Australians. In Simons' essay, we see a social anthropologist from the Left absorbing this propaganda and reproducing it wholesale. She thinks that cultural elites are precisely the ones who respond to globalised culture – imagining, to recall Meaghan Morris's point, connections to people beyond our borders. The battlers, on the other hand, are resolutely local and properly 'Australian'. Her metaphor for this distinction is taken out of Carlton in Melbourne where two large bookshops, Readings and Borders, face each other off on opposite sides of the street. Readings, Simons suggests, services the tastes of the cultural elites while Borders services the local battlers. It's worth noting that the best-selling novel for many months in Borders has been Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, which opens with a detailed description of the Louvre in Paris: hardly an image of local suburbia. And of course, Borders itself is part of an international bookshop chain, while Readings is a local business. But never let the facts fly

in the face of a good binary. Simons plays up the cultural divide, flattening out the cultures of the outer suburbs to the point of sheer banality. Fountain Gate is "about faith, not reason", she concludes. "It is about heart, not head."²⁹ I'm inclined to think there is more faith than reason in this essay as well. But what is fascinating here is that Simons, who herself fits the profile of a cultural elite, utterly embraces the paradigm that conservatives have supplied her with. She is upset when Fountain Gate people don't talk to her, and perhaps one can understand why they didn't. But Simons wants to 'belong', too; she wants to be just as local as everybody else, even if she knows that the local and the xenophobic often go hand in hand. She believes in the rhetoric that casts inner metropolitan people in tune with globalised culture as 'unAustralian'. So her article is a strange kind of lament for what she's now become: another abject academic expression of contemporary life, similar in kind to Alan McKee's inverted disavowal ('I will not call myself an intellectual') quoted above.

If it is 'unAustralian' and culturally elite to turn your attention beyond Australia's borders, then the new humanities may be increasingly guilty as charged. But what about Australian Studies – and Australian Literary Studies? How insular are *these* disciplines these days? Allaine Cerwonka's book, *Native to the Nation: Disciplining Landscapes and Bodies in Australia*, is published by a US university press, but its project is resolutely local. It wants to examine, anthropologically again, one's "imagined connection to place". The uniqueness of this book – some might say its sheer idiosyncrasy – is that it did its fieldwork in Melbourne at the Fitzroy Police Station and the East Melbourne Garden Club. One might wonder how typical each of these places is of the 'Australian character', and naturally enough they turn out not to have much in common with each other. Cerwonka's book does have some transnational points to make (e.g. about gardeners who deal with 'introduced species'), but her thick descriptions of the two sites lead, unfortunately, to some ordinary conclusions. The Fitzroy police officers are "deeply connected to state policy and power, for instance":³⁰ no surprises there, then.

A more intense commitment to the local is found in Christopher Lee's *City Bushman: Henry Lawson and the Australian Imagination*, published by Curtin University Press. The 'Australian imagination' is a little like the 'Australian character': easy to invoke,

but difficult to find. In fact, Lee examines Henry Lawson not so much in terms of imagination as *commemoration*, and in the process he reproduces exactly the kind of us-and-them binary we see in Margaret Simons' essay. Much like Lawson himself, Lee pitches the local against the 'metropolitan', the 'authentic' bush against the globalised commercial marketplace, the rural against a 'public culture' which is always city-biased. He turns away from the clever, sceptical, cosmopolitan values of university-educated readers to look, instead, at how rural Australia has understood and honoured Lawson's heritage. In places like Mudgee and Gulgong, well away from Sydney, Lawson is commemorated in a way that provides an "affirmation of a sense of community identity".³¹ Lawson functions in Lee's book as a kind of totem around which rural people can innocently bond together. "The local", he writes, "is never clearly and easily written-over by the homogenising desires of a public culture or a national market".³²

Interestingly, Lee's book stands utterly opposed to the directions of the new humanities as I have outlined them above. His defiant support of the 'rural community' – free from market influences, non-cosmopolitan, resolutely local – reminded me of Ferdinand Tönnies' famous distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*: community and society. The former is tied by family and kinship (Lee writes of his own intimate association with Lawson, channelled through "personal memories of family"); it is organic, authentic, local, face-to-face. The latter, for Tönnies, is increasingly dominated by the marketplace and industry, by remoteness and alienation, fractured and yet globalised. We see the legacies of this powerful binary in a range of commentaries across the humanities, new and old, these days. It is there in Martin Harrison's book, for example – he also leaves Sydney, rather as Lawson did – as well as in Margaret Simons' essay as she makes her abject journey to Fountain Gate. It underwrites the cultural elite/Australian battler binary, and so means that the latter is condemned to be spoken of only in a nostalgic, sentimental way. This is exactly what happens in Lee's study, which goes on to talk about local communities as if they have been 'dispossessed'. Once, of course, we used to talk about Indigenous people like this. The us-and-them binary once worked to distinguish non-Aboriginal from Aboriginal, which is why not so long ago it seemed important also to start talking about reconciliation. Now, it seems,

this binary distinguishes the rural settler from the urban cosmopolitan. By commemorating Lawson, Lee suggests, rural communities are thus able to "reorder and repossess *their* ground".³³ The italics here are Lee's: their ground, not yours, and certainly not Indigenous peoples'. We have seen Felicity Collins and Therese Davis talk about Australian cinema after Mabo, but in Lee's sentimental homage to rural settler communities in Australia it is as if Mabo had never happened.

Lawson is still taken as an emblem of an 'authentic' Australia, even today. But how does Australian literary studies deal with the *inauthentic*? What if Lawson wasn't really Lawson? Maggie Nolan and Carrie Dawson's special *Who's Who* issue of the journal *Australian Literary Studies* devotes itself to Australian literary hoaxes and impersonations like the notorious Ern Malley affair, another event that worked to distinguish cultural elites (those who knew about modernist poetics) from ordinary folk who were not supposed to be so easily led. A number of essays examine cases where Australian writers have impersonated marginal identities: the Italian ('Nino Culotta'), the Ukrainian-Australian ('Helen Demidenko'), the Indigenous ('B. Wongar', 'Eddie Burrup', 'Wanda Koolmatric'), and so on. For Terry Goldie, writing about Demidenko and the quasi-Aboriginal novelist Mudrooroo, these impersonations underscore the unassailable differences between Anglo-Australians and everyone else, demonstrating that the former long for the latter always to be exactly who they are: authentically ethnic or authentically Aboriginal. But this is doubtful, especially in these hybridised, diasporic times when everyone knows that ethnic and Indigenous identities are routinely hyphenated just as Anglo-Australian identities are. Where does one look for authenticity in the diaspora? As Lee's book suggests, the real yearning for authenticity today directs itself not towards ethnic or Aboriginal communities at all but to rural folk, the unhyphenated Australian 'native born'.

Multicultural Studies is caught up with exactly this problem. Sneja Gunew's *Haunted Nations* looks at 'transnational' or comparative multicultural studies and makes the point along the way that ethnic communities can have just as much investment in ethnic authenticity as anyone else – not least because their cultural producers (writers, film-makers, etc.) carry such a 'representative' burden. This is a small but ambitious book which tries to mediate between

global and local interests, perhaps pleasing no-one in the process. Gunew's discussion of Demidenko, for example, barely does justice to the complexity of positions on this particular imposture but it has some good things to say about ethnic 'impersonation' and identity 'transgression', all of which make those local yearnings for authenticity harder to justify. She has her own argument to make about abjection, too: that someone like Helen Darville who 'passes' as ethnic provides evidence of the melancholy that Anglo-Australians must experience as they "mourn" their "own suppressed 'ethnicity'".³⁴ This would be truer if there were more Helen Darvilles, and it's difficult to generalise out of one rather peculiar literary case study. Multicultural Studies relies on generalisations, however, not least because it thinks precisely in terms of 'community', much along the lines of Tonnies' early definition. It works most effectively, as Gunew understands, when it looks at situated, urgent cases such as Islamic ethnicities in, say, New York. In Australia, Ghassan Hage does this kind of thing best. But I missed this sense of urgency in Gunew's book, which generally reviews older material and remains literary in its interests, even though it has something useful to say about where a newer Multicultural Studies might go in the future.

But where can Australian Studies go in the light of all this? Does it even have a future? A recent collection of essays from the University of Queensland Press, *Thinking Australian Studies: Teaching Across Cultures*, casts the discipline as powerful in one sense and surprisingly fragile in another. There is a bit of nostalgia here for the 1980s, when the Australian Studies Association (ASA) began, when the *Windows onto Worlds* report on Australian Studies was written with ministerial support, and when what is now called the Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies was set up in London. Since then, the discipline has both fractured and declined. This is partly because of the new humanities' increasingly global interests, which make Australian Studies seem insular by comparison. For Ann Curthoys, the trend is "towards a more transnational approach",³⁵ something which you would think would undo the notion of Australian Studies pretty much altogether. Although David Carter is optimistic about the discipline's future, he nevertheless notes that "Australian Studies will always be attached to something else", like Multicultural Studies, or Postcolonial Studies, or Asian Studies.³⁶ Even so, the nation is a powerful

thing to invoke even in a globalised new humanities. Carter is probably right to say that Australian Studies is now mostly about "cultural diplomacy", a way of "telling the rest of the world something positive about Australia".³⁷

For James Walter and Susan Lever, however, a "lack of common goals" in Australian Studies means that it is "at the mercy of lobbying, caprice, and contradiction".³⁸ Other disciplines should be so lucky. But their point is an interesting one: that Australian Studies, for better or worse, is potentially close to government, to national cultural policy and to national Culture Industries such as tourism. Governments invest in a discipline which can indeed say something positive about Australia; this is precisely the vision Iain McCalman has of Australian Literary Studies. In the late 1990s Liberal minister Rod Kemp allocated significant Australian Studies funding to the Menzies Centre in London and Georgetown in Washington, proving the point even as he ignored "a decade of insistence that Asia was the main game".³⁹ Having said this, however, Walter and Lever then complain about the current "Asian obsession" in Australian cultural policy, "sending Australian writers to live in a studio in Vietnam, for example, when support to live at home might prove more productive".⁴⁰ I would ask: more productive for whom, and in what sense? Perhaps this throws up one of those 'contradictions' bedeviling Australian Studies, that it still doesn't quite know whether to stay at home or look beyond its borders. How critical of the nation can Australian Studies be? What exactly are its cultural – and commercial – values? Walter and Lever suggest that Australian Studies should retain its commitment to the Australian arts, for example, because overseas markets have a "core interest" in these things.⁴¹ Then they note, a little sourly, "yet theoretical and academic approaches to cultural studies tend to eschew as 'elite' culture the very things that offshore practitioners wish to pursue".⁴² Australian Studies may very well always be attached to something else – but not Cultural Studies, at least for these authors. The comment reminds us that the us-and-them binary works as effectively in a market-conscious new humanities as it does elsewhere. Australian Studies is a privileged discipline here but it is just as caught up in the maelstrom of self-definition – and self-preservation – as everybody else.

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CHANDRA MUZAFFAR, RELIGION & THE DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS



HAVE AUSTRALIANS become complacent about the values which stand as the backbone to our political traditions? Do we remember why we are a liberal democracy, and why being a liberal democracy is such a good manner of polis to be? There are many citizens and commentators in Australia today who share the concern that in our political treatment of many outsiders, and indeed, some of 'us' over recent years, we have lost the memory of some ideas without which our identity as a liberal democracy becomes hollow and hypocritical. Think of the plight of Indigenous Australians; our treatment of asylum seekers – even where claims to asylum might be legitimately rejected; our selfishness with regard to East Timor's oil fields and thus the fledgling nation's economic future; the manner of our involvement in Iraq; our preference for the spoils of trade over human rights concerns. And so on.

We are not, however, the only political community to behave in ways which undermine the practice of what I call a high humanism, a belief in the importance of each individual and the communities in which they live; a belief in the vital nature of human rights. In our region there are many nations which claim democracy as their form of government, which affirm the need for human rights in both domestic and international politics, and yet which also behave in ways that belie these public pronouncements.

One of the ways in which Australians may show a commitment to the high humanism of which I speak would be to join with those in other societies around us who are also striving to help their co-nationals and governments remember what it is to be human

and humane. In what follows I want to look at the work of one such commentator – Chandra Muzaffar. It would be easy, particularly in the case of this man, to write a piece which lauded his virtues and cited him as an example to follow. What I want to do instead is to highlight what may be the central difference between the way in which a devout Muslim intellectual defends a high humanism, and how I along with many of my contemporaries would. I do this not out of a bid to be antagonistic for its own sake, but because I believe – as indeed does Chandra Muzaffar – that a willingness to carry out a dialogue about our differences is a key to the preservation of our humanity.

So then, to Chandra Muzaffar. Muzaffar is a well-known figure on the scene of human rights advocacy in Southeast Asia, and globally. He has been an active participant in political debate and protest, has been jailed by his government for his preparedness to dissent, and has been a ceaseless agitator for change and reform. Chandra Muzaffar has thus taken the stand on many issues.¹ The range of issues Muzaffar engages with is very wide. On the one hand, he is very well known for his commentary on issues in Malaysian politics, and the politics of ASEAN and the region more generally – as well as for his vital concern with the structures of international affairs more generally.² On the other hand, his contributions also range over more historical and philosophical perspectives on politics, ethics and religion. I shall engage with some of the latter here.

Let me begin by citing some paragraphs from his recent book *Rights, Religion and Reform*:

Let us admit it: our vain attempt to build a glorious civilisation by ignoring, even denying, God has failed miserably. The twentieth century – the most secular century ever – has also been the most violent century in human history. As the century draws to a close, rapid globalisation is bringing to the fore some of the iniquities and injustices that divide humankind. It is only too apparent that in politics and economics, as in culture and social relations, moral considerations have little weight or values.

This is why at the end of the millennium our greatest need is to remember God. The remembrance of God is not some fanatical plea for a return to rigid religious dogma. To remember God is to uphold justice, for justice, the Qur'an tells us, was the mission of each and every prophet. To remember God is to strive for peace; it is to uphold freedom; it is to ensure the equality of all human beings. The remembrance of God is the expression of compassion in our daily lives.

To remember God, in short, is to fulfil our role as God's trustee. By fulfilling our role as God's trustee we are in fact reminding ourselves of who we are and why we are here and what lies beyond this transient life. There can be no better reminder for humankind as we enter the third millennium.³

Muzaffar is passionate about human rights, but this passion, so he argues, is grounded in a spirituality, a religious worldview, which makes sense of human rights. In Muzaffar's view, the tragedies which we name using the language of human rights stem from our failure to adequately live according to the spirituality or religious worldview which ultimately is what marks us out as humans in the first place. Muzaffar's commitment to human rights, then, is dependent upon a religious metaphysics; moreover, he argues that any such commitment to human rights ultimately requires this religious metaphysic.⁴

Muzaffar is right that a commitment to metaphysics is required for us to make sense of human rights. The simplest way of putting this is that in order to defend human rights, we need to be able to supply some answers to the following sorts of questions: Why do we have human rights at all? What is it about being a human being that gives me value? Why are my rights of equal value to those of others? And so on. These are big questions, and in societies like my own – middle-class Adelaide – the customary set of answers to these questions is so well known, and so

well integrated into society, that people often see the answers to these questions as commonplace, common sense, obvious – self-evident, even. This too was the case for those who originally formulated human rights as they have come down to us through history: the first human rights declarations speak about our rights as being self-evident truths.⁵

And like Muzaffar (and importantly for my argument here) many of these documents and the people behind them also thought of the existence of a divine and benevolent creator as a self-evident truth. This, however, is something that even in middle-class Adelaide ('the city of churches') is no longer taken for granted. But Muzaffar's arguments, the presence of God in the philosophical traditions which ground human rights, and the re-awakened awareness of the role of religion in international affairs (for good and ill) together suggest the need to keep this question before us today. Both in the West and in the South, political and intellectual leaders, and religious people of various persuasions, are claiming the authority of God for their agendas and values. Those with a commitment to human rights will want to be sure that God is in the fray for *all* humans, if indeed God is in the fray at all. In the latter case, if anything the issue becomes more pertinent.

I shall return to this question presently. But I want first to take a look at the foundations of Muzaffar's ethics. Muzaffar argues that in international affairs there must be a commitment to the transcendent, to values which go beyond human need or interest and are absolute in their nature. It is these *transcendent* values which give meaning and significance to our political values. This is why Muzaffar claims that we must remember God. The remembrance of God is to remember why and how to bring justice, peace, equality, freedom and compassion to human beings. The remembrance of God, from this view, is the foundation of ethics in human affairs.

But how do we remember God?

This immediately brings us to one of the tensions in Muzaffar's approach. His remembrance of God, or the adoption of a spiritual worldview, is avowedly and unashamedly universalist. However, any knowledge of this universal spiritual philosophy is always going to be inescapably particularist. This is clearly the case for Muzaffar, who's universalism is itself borne out of a very specific interpretation of Islam. In the quotation above, we see that the remembrance of God, for Muzaffar, is not actually

the articulation of a universal spiritual philosophy, but is a particularly expansive reading of one kind of moderate Malaysian Islam.⁶

An important part of Muzaffar's religious metaphysics, as we have seen, is that remembering God gives humanity a transcendent context. The difficulty is that any claim to transcendence is always mediated through specific humans, with all of their particularistic baggage. In Muzaffar's account, a religious philosophy must be central to our approach to politics and ethics because it is God that gives humans value, and it is through religion that we know about God. Thus religion and God are attempts to escape the nihilism that it is often thought attends an exclusively anthropocentric worldview. However, this attempt to avoid nihilism and to give humans certain meaning does not succeed. This is for the very reason that proponents of religion like Muzaffar use to support the need for transcendence: namely, that human experience is mediated via human consciousness, and thus can only be fundamentally anthropocentric.⁷ The religious say this is why we need the transcendent: because by ourselves we cannot reach beyond the limitations of the human condition. The irony is that any claim to articulate the transcendent that we need to get beyond ourselves, must always be mediated by ourselves, must come from ourselves. Claimed knowledge of the beyond is still knowledge mediated by the human. Thus, the claim to exceptional knowledge by the religious is unconvincing because the basis of that exceptional knowledge is not actually different from that of the non-religious: neither has direct or unmediated access to knowledge – of the transcendent, or of anything else.⁸

This, in turn, is where some of the political implications of Muzaffar's position start to make themselves felt. The assertion that we must have a universal religious worldview in order to ascribe meaning and value to human community obviously leaves those who find such a view difficult to comprehend out in the cold. Those who accept the critiques of traditional religious claims and authority will not in good conscience be able to accept Muzaffar's arguments. And it seems that there is very little room in his account for people who fall into this category. So we have the ironic (if common enough) situation where an attempt is made to ground the concern for human value and ethical worth, human rights and other humane political ideals, in a broader ideological system which itself

turns out to be exclusive and exclusionary – despite its claims to be universal and all-encompassing.

Again, Muzaffar argues the following:

It should be apparent from our discussion so far that the main element in our spiritual vision of the human being is the belief in God. The cures we [suggest] to the five challenges [we face] – curbing greed and acquisitiveness, limiting power, emphasising universal justice, recognising the unity of the human being and nature, and providing a sound moral basis to all economic and even non-economic activities – have, as their ultimate referral point, the concept of God.⁹

Muzaffar's claim has a certain attractive logic behind it. While being a devout Muslim himself, he argues strongly that all of the world's great religions have shared conceptions of transcendence and absolute values, and that these – among other things – point to our moral unity as a species, point to our role as God's trustee and steward. These universal and absolute values then serve as the foundation for the rights and responsibilities we acquire as human beings.¹⁰ Thus, the social issues of human existence are linked to God.

But, it is with precisely this linkage that a number of aspects of Muzaffar's account become questionable. Let's take two examples: the role of women in society, and the acceptability of homosexual practice. How exactly is it that these two social issues should be linked with God, and the alleged universal or transcendent values which the remembrance of God represents? On the first of these issues, Muzaffar speaks like a Western liberal. Gender myths (i.e. traditional patriarchal practice and ideology) must be shown to be what they are: forms of injustice. But this puts Muzaffar at odds with the vast majority of defenders of religious faith and practice, who advocate various forms of inequality between men and women (a situation which is as true in Sydney as it is in Kuala Lumpur). Whereas with the issue of women Muzaffar appears to be on the side of the liberal progressives, with the issue of homosexuality Muzaffar is a conservative. Homosexuality is only mentioned in passing in the book noted above, but it is taken to be one of the degenerate signs of our failure to embrace a universal spiritual worldview (e.g. p.190). The impression is given that a view like my own – where homosexual practice can be as legitimate an expression of 'God's love' in human

It is possible that one of the reasons why Australia finds itself somewhat confused (to put it mildly) about its moral compass in our times is because we do not talk about these things often enough, or with sufficient attention to detail and depth of engagement.

affairs as any other form of sexuality can be – would be roundly condemned.¹¹

Muzaffar is right that we need to fight for justice and that we need an appropriate metaphysics to ground our belief in the values and significances of all human beings – a metaphysics that proudly advocates the equality of all individuals and the moral unity of the human species. But I am sceptical about the value of Muzaffar’s universal spiritual philosophy as the answer to this quest.

The vision that Muzaffar articulates does not seem to take into account the intellectual environment of the modern globalised world: and yet he wants to use his universal spiritual philosophy to address this environment. The intellectual life of the modern globalised world is one in which cultural difference, identity, interpretation, contingency, historicity and pluralism are all social facts. Muzaffar’s universal spiritual philosophy seems to have the same Achilles heel of much contemporary liberal commentary: the assumption that it is somehow straightforward to identify authoritatively what the universal elements of the world’s religions are and to escape our sectarianism and put them into practice. But as the concrete issues used above show, while it may be easy to say that all religions insist on justice, or equality, as universal values, the content of these will be fraught. Is it unjust to stop gays from practicing their sexuality? Is the equality in the phrase ‘women are equal but different’ *really* about equality? Many other examples could be essayed here: capital punishment; family law; matters economic – in the case of Islam, for example, the prohibition on usury or interest; the standing of unbelievers within the political community (to which I shall return below).

The link between Muzaffar’s claim that we need a transcendent divine in order to insure our own value, and the actual practical ethics which then ensue, is subject to factors which actually quarantine our capacity for moral knowledge from any transcendent

source. The transcendent – in any strict sense – becomes a merely formal intellectual theory which forever must remain empty. Any attempt to fill it with content is always and has always been the result of human activity, human interpretation of our moral situation, human anticipation of the best way of dealing with our moral dilemmas. The Qur’an was given to the Prophet: a man; Jesus the Christ was a man; we know of God’s appearance to the Patriarch Abraham because of the stories recorded and interpreted by humans. God, as well as the remembrance of God, comes to us via ourselves: the bid for transcendence seems fundamentally and inescapably human at its core.¹² As Mahatma Gandhi said of inspired texts: “Firstly, they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly”.¹³

And this brings us to the crux of the matter: the justice which Muzaffar so passionately pursues is closer to our grasp when we recognise not the need for transcendence, but the need for a high humanism. We need to learn to trust our humanity. Recognition of and honesty about the anthropocentrism of all claims to transcendence is an important step here. And this in turn, or so I would argue, leads us to the advocacy of a liberal humanism rather than the advocacy of a necessarily religious universal spiritual philosophy.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the two is that liberalism, because of its commitment to a high humanism, *and* because of its non-partisanship at one level on the issue of religious belief, is able to provide a framework for the pursuit of justice and human rights which is not *prima-facie* exclusionary of those who in good conscience (or, for that matter, in bad), cannot accept a fundamentally religious account of what it means to be human.¹⁴

These people do *remember* God: it is after all true that much of liberalism finds its historical formation and the initial homes of its ideas in various of the religious traditions of the world. But in the modern

world, there are many for whom it is no longer possible to live *with God* in the way that our forebears may have. It is surely not acceptable then to posit as the foundation for global justice a philosophical system which these people cannot endure.¹⁵ By contrast, members of all the major faiths have made their homes in liberal societies in ways which enable them to maintain their genuine piety and to contribute to the justice of their society. In my view it is this model – even admitting its ambiguities and weaknesses – that we must pursue for international justice. It is in this fashion that we should remember God.

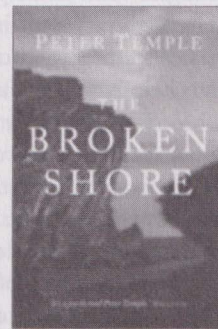
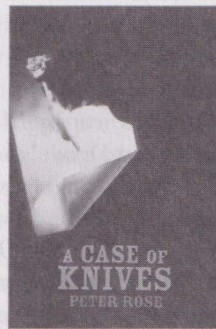
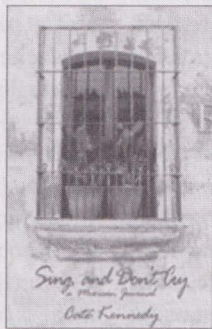
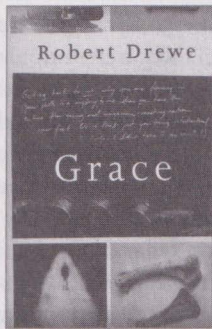
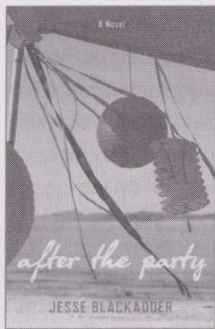
Australians are not always good at talking about the things which mean the most to them. The popular adage has it that there are three things one must not talk about at a barbecue: politics, religion and sex. All three are interrelated, and are more important to us than we often care to admit. They are also important to our neighbours in the region. Chandra Muzaffar does us the great service of talking about all three. It is possible that one of the reasons why Australia finds itself somewhat confused (to put it mildly) about its moral compass in our times is because we do not talk about these things often enough, or with sufficient attention to detail and depth of engagement. We have become complacent in our comfortable world and, because many of the benefits of globalisation have been accruing to us and making us happy, we have forgotten to think about those of our fellow humans who in one way or another suffer because of our material prosperity.¹⁶ Our economic, territorial and political choices all affect others. On my argument, our capacity to be the people of the fair go – our capacity to offer “Justice as Fairness” (in the language of the philosopher John Rawls) – to people in our own society and those abroad depends on our willingness to remember the humanity of others.¹⁷ Muzaffar and I may differ about whether this can finally be articulated in anthropocentric or transcendent terms. But Muzaffar’s provocation to think about these matters, to be willing to talk about them, is a provocation that Australians should attend to with gratitude.

1. He has also been a ceaseless organiser of the stand for others. The publication *Human Wrongs: Reflections on Western Global Dominance and its Impact on Human Rights* (JUST World Trust, Penang, 1996), an edited volume from a conference, is one such example. Muzaffar has also never eschewed engagement with those who disagree with him: a critical discussion of this publication and the

conference that gave rise to it can be found in the book referenced in note three below.

2. See the home page of the NGO he is most closely associated with: JUST World Trust, <www.just-international.org/>.
3. Chandra Muzaffar, *Rights, Religion and Reform: Enhancing Human Dignity Through Spiritual and Moral Transformation*, Routledge, London, 2002, p.357.
4. See also Michael J. Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries*, OUP, Oxford, 1998; see especially the chapter ‘Is the idea of human rights ineliminably religious?’, pp.11–41. A more recent contribution is Roger Ruston, *Human Rights and the Image of God*, SCM Press, London, 2004.
5. For an excellent piece on this see Eugene Kamenka, ‘The Anatomy of an Idea’ in Eugene Kamenka and Alice Erh-Soon Tay (eds), *Human Rights*, Edward Arnold, Port Melbourne, 1978, pp.1–12.
6. For another similar project from Malaysia, see the work of Sisters in Islam. Their website is: <www.sistersinislam.net/>; an academic treatment of their work by one of their own is Norani Othman, ‘Grounding Human Rights in Non-Western Culture: Sharia and the Citizenship Rights of Women in a Modern Islamic State’, Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell (eds), *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, CUP, Cambridge, 1999, pp.169–192.
7. See Richard Holloway, *Godless Morality: Keeping Religion Out Of Ethics*, Cannongate, Edinburgh, 1999.
8. For an interesting discussion of the transcendent among Western thinkers who are not religiously orthodox, see Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity*, SPCK, London, 1997.
9. Muzaffar, *Rights, Religion and Reform*, p.114.
10. But see my arguments in Langlois, *The Politics of Justice and Human Rights: Southeast Asia and Universalist Theory*, CUP, Cambridge, 2001 – especially chapters two and five.
11. cf. the recent report by the heads of the American and Canadian branches of the Anglican Communion on Homosexuality, titled ‘To Set Our Hope On Christ’, and written by Mark McIntosh of Loyola University, Chicago.
12. See again, Kerr, *Immortal Longings*.
13. Many thanks to Vin D’Cruz for pointing me to this reference: *Mahatma Gandhi Collected Works*, Harijan, 5 December 1936, CD version, vol.70, p.117.
14. Two recent contributions to the debate here are Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Convictions in Liberal Politics*, CUP, Cambridge, 2002; and Michael J. Perry, *Under God? Religious Faith and Liberal Democracy*, CUP, Cambridge, 2003.
15. For a pertinent discussion of an international order which is liberal but aware of the political ambiguities in arguing for liberalism, see Duncan Ivison, *Postcolonial Liberalism*, CUP, Cambridge, 2002.
16. An argument strongly put in Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002.
17. cf. Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1999.

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FURNITURE OR MUST-READS?

A QUARTERLY ACCOUNT OF RECENT FICTION

Jesse Blackadder: *After the Party* (Hardie Grant Books, \$24.95)

Robert Drewe: *Grace* (Viking, \$45)

Cate Kennedy: *Sing, and Don't Cry: a Mexican Journal* (Transit Lounge, \$29.95)

Peter Rose: *A Case of Knives* (Allen & Unwin, \$22.95)

Peter Temple: *The Broken Shore* (Text, \$29.95)

AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE has always suffered from the three Ps – poverty, philistines and praise. The first P is a direct consequence of a small market, however enthusiastically a percentage of it reads, or attends literary festivals. Writing in Australia is largely unrewarded, not helped by the second P, a direct consequence of a materialistic, sport-mad culture. Here even such a moral exemplar as the Reverend Tim Costello can cite his major school memory as the teacher who tried to instil a love of poetry in her Grade 6 class, instead of letting them go out and play sport. He never forgave her (how Christian of him!).¹

This casual philistinism, dropped without fear of censure, is regrettably very Australian. A Russian would not publicly regret the teaching of Pushkin, nor a German Goethe. Small wonder we have a GST on books (the good Reverend is not his brother's keeper, of course, but it may be surmised that they had the same teacher). Well may the poets of Australia consider the example of Adam Lindsay Gordon, who blew out his brains on Brighton beach. And

yet Gordon achieved great posthumous love from colonial Australians, who suddenly found someone articulating/validating their experience in verse. He became the first Australian in the literary canon, with various colonial expatriates organising his entry into the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey. He also, er, figured in *The Stuffed Owl* anthology.

To achieve canonicity is not to be perfect, yet defenders of Australian literature continually praise rather than damn. In part they are reacting to the previous two Ps, their cultural insecurity shown by excessive praise, praise, praise, like Molly Meldrum on uppers. Do yourself a favour, comes the command from on high, read this book! But what if I do, and I don't like it? There are various subterranean grumbles about the Ozcanon. We are not supposed/allowed to criticise Helen Garner, Tim Winton or Les Murray, just to name three examples that intelligent readers of my acquaintance read and found wanting. If we do, then Peter Craven will hit us over the knuckles with a dahlia, possibly.

Excessive praise is nearly as old as the scrutiny of the national literature itself. Consider this comment: "Page after page of laudation is given to the writings of authors who have no Australian celebrity whatever, except in the imagination of the authors . . ." Sound familiar? In fact it is over a century old, from the London *Daily News* of 1898, dismissing Turner and Sutherland's *The Development of Australia*.

lian Literature.² Increasingly in this new millennium, market forces, spin doctoring the author for public consumption, are at work. If you have done something extreme, look good, and can talk a blue streak . . . oh, I'm forgetting, if you can also write what passes for literary prose, then you can sell books. It also helps to be a celebrity.

Very occasionally a book is worthy of its overblown praise – and I cite Robert Drewe's *Shark Net*, which I reviewed in this magazine, as an example of the hype being true. Sometimes the canonmakers can get it spectacularly wrong, as with Darville/Demidenko. More often they go unchallenged. The danger exists: does a chorus of spin drown out voices more quirky and valuable, but less conventional, or easily marketable? What stuff is falling under the litcrit radar?

The other danger is the creation of a calf-bound set of what the *Imperial Review* in 1883 termed 'furniture books': "There is a class of literature known in the cabinet-making trade as Furniture Books, which no library can be without, but which nobody reads, although they are conventionally made idols of adoration".³ Any such literary furniture come to mind?

More significantly, perhaps, what Australian fiction is being read? It is possibly more useful to abandon the idea of a canon, and consider differing audiences, fandoms, or what booksellers call demographics. Do Goths read Henry Lawson? Do nice grey-haired ladies read John Birmingham? Do some people read at all? Not if they happen to be Shane Warne or Elle Macpherson, it would seem. And what a shame that people are walking around absolutely ignorant of the enormous pleasure in books. Or of the thunderclap of encountering Barbara Baynton's *Bush Studies*, for example.

Here is a sample of Australian writing, culled from an assortment that arrived in the *Overland* office, and were sent my way, with instructions for an overview. They are, respectively, *Sing, and Don't Cry: a Mexican Journal*, by Cate Kennedy, which is a memoir of life in Mexico by an Australian Volunteers Abroad survivor, also an award-winning poet and short-story writer; *A Case of Knives*, a novel satirical of the publishing and opera world, written by Peter Rose, a respected poet and memoir-writer who edits *ABR* (a really dangerous assignment, if the reviewer happens to be also a writer, as I am); *The Broken Shore*, a crime book by Peter Temple, who

walks away with a Ned Kelly award almost every time he publishes; *After the Party* by Jesse Blackadder, a first novelist of the popular ilk; and *Grace* by Robert Drewe, a writer of assured literary stature.

To sum up. Two of these books gave me headaches. Two were unputdownable, but were eventually closed with some disappointment. One nearly got entered for the Bad Sex award (and still might, if I get sufficiently grumpy). I might keep just one, but that is only because shelf space is very limited in the house.

In no particular order . . .

Peter Temple's *The Broken Shore* has been heralded as being both a great crime novel and great literature, although the two categories are not mutually exclusive. See Charlotte Jay's *Beat not the Bones*, for instance, the Edgar-winner that academics fell upon with cries of 'Oh wow! A postcolonial thriller!', or for a less heralded example, Barry Maitland's *The Marx Sisters*. Actually, I thought Temple had achieved a standard to satisfy both literary and crime fans several novels ago, but the dogs of praise seem to have been unleashed with this particular book. Those like Drusilla Modjeska, who complain that Australian fiction looks backwards and does not concern itself sufficiently with the present,⁴ should examine the local crime writing. It is resolutely contemporary, gritty, and when first-rate can be excoriating in its investigation of how much damage is caused by poverty, government ideology, or drugs. And even at its worst, crime writing entertains – it wouldn't sell if it didn't.

Temple's virtues are a crisp, effective style, and an absolutely perfect ear for dialogue. He should be earning pots of money for writing television drama. He also has a sense of landscape as character (one of the underrated strengths of Arthur Upfield, for instance). But arguably *The Broken Shore* does suffer in that its artistic impulses are pulling in slightly different directions. The plot imperatives of the crime genre are here not quite working in tandem with the form of the 'literary' narrative. US writer Joe R. Lansdale, who has a very keen understanding of trash and aesthetics, managed in *The Bottoms* to tack a conventionally unhappy 'literary' ending onto an otherwise crime-structured (justice is achieved) narrative, with award-winning results. Temple has similar aims, and his novel works the expectations of the literary and the crime narrative forms very successfully for most of its length, handling some

difficult issues, such as race, politics and police corruption. Then in the last quarter, the imperative of solving the crime, knotting up the loose ends, takes over. Suddenly two serial killers appear, and to thicken an already complex plot, paedophilia is introduced. As a result the ending of the book becomes a little too busy, in my humble opinion. Oh, all right – not so humble opinion!

And now for something not completely different, given that its narrative form also partakes of the mystery. Peter Rose was well known as a poet and publisher until he hit the literary jackpot with his memoir *Rose Boys*. *A Case of Knives* is social comedy with a satirical edge, its milieu the opera and publishing scenes. With such an approach and subject matter, author and reader should properly beware. Mixing vitriol and soda requires a certain sureness and delicacy of touch, too often lacking. And it must contain not one word in excess – otherwise the text can metamorphose into a jeroboam of syllabub, simply too much of a good thing.

That said, after approaching the book with faint groans, I was pleasantly surprised. Rose links two overachieving families, one Prime Ministerial, his cast including an interfering (castrating?) mother, and a *Death in Venice* swooner, whose disappearance powers the narrative. He also knows his subject very well. On a publisher reading a pile of manuscripts, for example: “They were all trying to write like the latest American sensation, the one who carried off the Pulitzer and the National Book Award and the Golden Globe for Overblown Prose with his sicko family saga that belaboured every nuance and metaphor for about 820 sodden pages.”

That is a comment which applies equally well to any award judge, and someone attempting a fiction overview, as here.

Jesse Blackadder’s *After the Party* comes from Hardie Grant, a small(ish) press. The reviewer feels a bit obliged to be nice to small publishers; they run at a greater financial risk, and lose more than the majors if a book fails. The reviewer also feels inclined to be nice to first authors, because they have no idea what they have gotten themselves into. In Blackadder’s case I would have definitely suggested a name change for the main character. Black Dragon, in a book by Blackadder, is simply too confusing, especially if the reviewer has an imminent deadline. The setting for this book is Byron Bay, and the PR for this book compared it to *Sea Change*, though I

don’t recollect Sigrid & Co tangling with overdoses, or gay sex.

In its comedy of manners and also plot resolutions, *After the Party* could be stabled with *A Case of Knives*. The two books would probably not be mates, given their different backgrounds: *A Case of Knives* is a racehorse from the cultural elite, and *After the Party* a shaggy pony with a dreadlocked tail and a nosebag smelling of dope. However, the treatment avoids the easy route of sending-up characters who happen to be Feng Shui consultants and trendy photographers. By the end of the novel, parents have been reconciled with children, new loves found, others lost. The result is popular, agreeable but not cosy. The book does not aim for the heights, and thus does not plummet onto its fundament either. However, it is very unlikely to be found on Andrew Bolt’s or Gerard Henderson’s bedside tables.

Neither would Cate Kennedy’s *Sing, and Don’t Cry*, for purely political reasons, given its stinging critique of fashionable economics and their human, Third World cost. This book has interest in having been both mentored and thoroughly structurally edited – as few Australian books are these days. False economics means the money goes to marketing, and the author may well have to fight to get their manuscript polished. Transit Lounge is a new press, prepared to make the time to shape the text, strengthen its narrative, something all-important when a writer expert in short forms is making the transition to a longer wordage. I reviewed the book positively for the *Age*, and during this second look noted tendencies to wander, and to be a little over wordy. Yet it was forgivable, because Kennedy is saying interesting things (not exactly common in Ozlit) in an evocative prose.

Finally, to the most experienced writer in the batch, and the most prestigious. Robert Drewe is a respected author, well known for the seriousness with which he approaches his subject, and his frequent attendance at litfests. *Grace* is a highly ambitious book, an extended muse on the matter of Australia, as approached via a variety of characters and themes. The title character is a movie reviewer afflicted by a stalker. Her father, a noted Australian palaeanthropologist, has named his daughter after a Lake Mungo-style cremation. He himself was a child migrant from Britain, whose origins were expunged by the authorities. Another significant character is an Afghan asylum seeker, escaped from detention.

All of these diverse elements, which include a swipe at tourism, both eco and Crocodile Dundee crass, are, it seems, intended to merge into a grand design of Australia, its history and settlement.

Some parts of the book are indeed a killer: the stalking is written with great acuity and suspense, not to mention a truly squirmy distaste. Yet to cut from this psychological wringer to a crocodile farm and SIEV X is a little too much variety for one narrative. Some of the subjects here could fill a book in themselves – palaeanthropology and its titanic egos, for instance. Another issue in the book, Australia and its refugees, has far too much information and nuances, also grey areas, to be relegated to a corner of a larger narrative. Reading *Grace* is a little like flicking between television channels: here a science documentary, here a crime story, here *Four Corners*, here another documentary, here a travel program, here Steve Irwin and his crocodiles. *Grace* is over four hundred pages long, but most of its themes demanded greater wordage.

So, which of these books will end up as literary furniture, which will be read? It is hard to imagine anyone reading all of them, unless they are paid (as I am). Were they combined into a whole, it would be a gigantic curate's egg. Perhaps rather than make snap judgements as to potential canonicity, the demographics should be considered. Blackadder's *After the Party* would sell well, if its subject matter

actually gets to hear about it. *The Broken Shore* will chart with crime readers. Fans of *Rose Boys* may not find *A Case of Knives*, a book not about sport, nor a famous family's tragedy, quite as much to their tastes. On the other hand it may reach out to an entirely different readership. *Grace* should sell to Drewe's established audience. *Sing, and Don't Cry*, to the publisher's and author's great pleasure, made the top ten of books sold at the Melbourne Writers Festival, among such seasoned performers as John Ralston Saul and Karen Joy Fowler. Perhaps such a placing indicated the benefits of having a Mexican band at your launch, and speaking convincingly and with great fervour. Or having a lot of friends. How it does outside the festival environment is another matter, but I wish it well, as I do all the books here. To have a book fail is a terribly sad thing.

To conclude then, with a final quotation from the Spanish writer Arturo Pérez-Reverte's *The Club Dumas*: "In literature, time is like a shipwreck in which God looks after His Own".⁵

1. 'Your Time Starts Now', *Age Good Weekend*, 4 September 2005, p.13.
2. Quoted in the *British Australasian*, 3 March 1897, p.501.
3. *Imperial Review*, October 1883, p.56.
4. 'The Present in Fiction', *Timepieces*, Picador, Sydney, 2002.
5. Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *The Club Dumas*, p.12.

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The Puppet Man of Vision and Talk

Alone in a room of spaces unknown,
a solitary figure sits in dreams of a lost way
which will talk his identity into need of another being,
as a glove puppet adorns his fragile hand,
as dimensions of illusory visions and talk erupt into his psyche,
as another time in the future is present at once,
as shadows display his hand on the white wall of redemption,
as he is lonesome with his being.

ANTHONY BUTT

NO BOXED GIFTS

"WE HAVE an invite," she said. There was a slight agitation in her voice that he had not heard for many years. It was not sufficiently marked to have made a difference, but it was there, a slight shift in tone, a small flutter, a bit of an inflection that made him look up from his desk and say, "Yes, dear." "And look," she said, "it is from Premilla, remember her?" Yes, he recalled the party in a suburban white house with vast columns and huge rooms, as if the entire house had been designed for parties. There was a huge entry from which radiated in both directions two Bollywood-inspired staircases. To the right and left were entertainment areas, interchangeable lounges, one could say, to which men and women went, parting company as they entered the foyer, moving into two different worlds, men's and women's. It was a big party, and he remembered sitting next to Premilla's husband, Ravindra, who needled him about his work. "Academics do not earn much, do they?" he had insisted. All he could say was, "It is enough for my needs, I lead a very simple life." He had coaxed further, "But surely, you must have invested in something?" Yes he had, but he remained silent. In the 1987 stock market crash he had bought Bell shares and saw their value collapse within weeks of purchasing them. Someone had said that these were great shares, the timing was right, the investment would quadruple in months and so he had withdrawn a portion of his superannuation and bought them. He had lost most of his money, but then he had never won anything; life was like that for him and

he was really thankful that at least he had tenure and provided he could teach well, there would always be enough money to keep his world intact. He had had little success, never won a lectureship anywhere else except for this one which came his way in the early seventies when it seemed no one wanted to move to Perth and the old university there was something that one never spoke about in Sydney.

"Amar, but you're not excited?" Shakuntala asked.

"Yes, dear, of course I am, if you are."

He shouldn't have said that, the unnecessary qualification, a sort of conditional utterance that he had picked up – if you are, if you think so, if that's what you think, should you wish to – he had never given much thought to these. But that evening, Kunti (for that's what he called his wife) picked on it, not harshly, but sort of wistfully, remarking that he too should be happy. For after all they had not been invited to a wedding for years, in fact for almost twelve years when that Indian engineer who had some Fiji connection (his father was a high-school teacher there many years ago) had invited them to his daughter's wedding; a formal affair it was where they'd sat at a table, sipped wine and made small talk with people they'd never met. The wedding reception complete, they never heard anything more from the engineer or from his daughter. But this time the invitation had come in a large envelope with sheets in a quire. Kunti had received it in the midday mail, looked at the unusual handwriting, in red it was, and

so rounded in form, lacking in those vertical strokes that she so admired in a good hand. "Mr A.C. and Mrs K. Prasad," it said, with the initials all rounded like d's and o's and lower case a's. She had opened it with some delight as large envelopes that signalled anything other than junk mail were so rare. Within she read "Mrs Premilla and Mr Ravindra Joshi take great pleasure in inviting Dr A. and Mrs K. Prasad to the wedding of their dearly beloved daughter Preity." And in the folds of this large invitation had been inserted two further crisp papers: "Mrs Ranjini Nath invites Mrs Shakuntala Prasad to a Sangeet at her place" and again "Mrs Dolly Ram invites Mrs Shakuntala Prasad to a Sangeet in honour of the wedding of Preity Joshi to . . ."

"Amar, what could this mean? Your name doesn't appear on the other two invites. Shall I ask Premilla?" "No," was his immediate reply. "You hardly know her, she called us once, I spoke barely a line or two to her husband and it wasn't as if you've been on the phone speaking to her. There must be a reason, perhaps it is numbers, perhaps it is only a women's thing. Whatever the reason you go to the two Sangeets." He was about to add "if you want to", but corrected himself for he had sensed her response.

Shakuntala had met Premilla some six months back in a Coles Supermarket. Premilla, fair and rounded and dressed in an Indian salwar-kameez that seemed to waft around her in bulbous circles, had noticed Kunti's Coles-Myer share card which gave her a discount on groceries purchased in Coles supermarkets. "I've got one of those too," she added and immediately plunged her chubby fingers in her large brown handbag to take it out. Just past the counter as Kunti dragged her trolley out, Premilla, who had followed her, caught up and called, "I haven't seen you before, do you come here a lot?" "No, not really," said Kunti, "but our Coles in Victoria Park didn't have some of the items I wanted and so I came to Garden City." "So you live around there, we have a house in Applecross, do drop by, and I am Premilla, what's your name?" "Shakuntala, but everyone calls me Kunti." They'd walked together towards the underground car park. Premilla noted Kunti's small red Ford Laser as she lunged her groceries into the boot of her golden

Mercedes Benz. "I'll call you one of these days," she said. "And what's your husband's name? I'll look up your phone number in the white pages, Kenwick or Cannington is the suburb you said?" "Amar Prasad, he is a university lecturer you know." Premilla didn't seem at all interested in Kunti's declaration of pride, and was by then opening the driver's door of her car. Some days later Kunti did receive the phone call from Premilla. "Kunti, guess what, we're having a party next Saturday, why don't you come along?"

So a chance meeting around a share card. Serendipity you could call it. She liked the word, it sounded so exotic, so unEnglish, she felt. Imagine someone noticing a share card and making that remark and so familiarly too. She had lost that kind of casual intimacy, and at any rate would never have started a conversation over something so private. She recalled getting into Coles-Myer shares. She had read in the papers that five hundred of these could give you a hefty 3 to 7 per cent discount on groceries and white goods purchased at any Coles-Myer shop, and this included Target from where she bought most of her white goods. On an annual purchase of say \$5000 she had calculated that the savings could be \$350 and at \$4 per share she would recoup her money within six years, and this didn't include the dividend she would be getting. She never told Amar about this, but she was so pleased with this investment of hers. Not like Amar's Bell shares, she thought. But she never said a word when he had made, on an impulse, that disastrous investment. And to use part of one's superannuation too! But she didn't think it was right to make matters worse by asking questions. What worried her a little was that he had never asked her advice. Amar had simply gone ahead and purchased ten thousand shares at \$5 apiece. Their life had become like that; they said little to one another. They communicated well enough and there was no tension, but life had become a routine as she did her work, kept the house, took money out of the bank, paid the bills, supervised workers, from plumbers to roof tilers, and cooked the meals. And there was the red Ford Laser which gave her mobility, to the supermarket, to flower shows, to sales of fine bone china, which she liked to purchase if there was something she could afford. Over the

years she had built up a small collection. She placed them in a neat row on tables, shelves, sideboards, fireplace ledge, anywhere at all. Royal Worcester, Wedgwood, Royal Doulton; she liked these names, and their distinctive patterns. The reds and whites of Worcester, the cameo designs on the Grecian blues and seaweed greens of Wedgwood, the way in which Royal Doulton china carried the flavours of tea, capturing the essence of a Nilgiri or an Assam or a Darjeeling. In the afternoons, she would sip tea in a Doulton cup in the sunroom overlooking the backyard where Amar had planted, over the years, citrus trees, a guava, a mango, even a papaya and a grapevine, the latter now a large, sprawling affair. Around the green lawn she had planted roses of every colour, black roses, white ones, and her favourite the yellow ones that exploded in sunlight.

She re-read the invitation and recalled Premilla's party six months back. She had taken out her saris, all six of them, and chosen the pink sari, with green borders all around, and with a pallu or endpiece into which had been embroidered what looked like a Buddhist stupa. She hadn't worn this sari since that wedding twelve years back. It had faded a bit, but it looked fresh enough since pink was such a neutral colour. Her body, unused to wearing saris, had responded to the folds of Western clothes; her hips and back were not large enough for the easy creation of pleats so essential for a sari. She was a slight woman, but slender and tall, her chest somewhat flat and her shoulders sloped a bit so that a sari would stay on her with great difficulty. But she had a simplicity about her and her skin was such, olive and ageless, that soft subdued colours always looked wonderful on her. In her simplicity she always exuded class, and on the rare occasions they'd been to official engagements, she had stood out, taller than most women. Parties were a thing of the past, of the early years of their marriage, and she had lost the art of small talk, which of course meant, the ability to gossip. She knew few or any secrets and Amar, forever absorbed in his books, had little to say about people. So she had arrived at Premilla's impressive Applecross mansion a little uncertain, and a little self-conscious too. How many times I've told Amar not to wear that dated tropical green coat of his and there he

was once again in that green coat and yellow shirt that reminded her of TransPerth bus drivers. There were so many women of her kind there, all dressed in saris and salwar-kameez. They made her feel like one of them and when they gossiped they simply assumed that she should also know. This was so unlike the occasional parties she had attended with Amar at his colleagues'. The men would hang around the barbecue, stubbies in hand, and the women drank red wine and looked sullen and lifeless. Once or twice she had called Amar's colleagues for a curry at home, some ten or so at a time, and except for the Greek and a few others, none had reciprocated. So she had stopped calling and the social more or less disappeared for her.

"Well, what do you say, that young son-in-law of Sheila has been eyeing his mother-in-law!" "What impertinence," someone added only to find that her remark was superseded by another's remark that one shouldn't believe everything that Karishma said, as she was so filmi and she thought that life should imitate Bollywood. Why would any husband want to call his wife Kunti? they'd said, trying to bring Kunti into their talk. Shakuntala, Dushyanta's Shakuntala, now that is a name straight out of the epics. And Kunti had giggled, in a girlish sort of a way, for she didn't know what to contribute. "You must join our kitty party or our one-dish club, perhaps even our card club, you must have so much time to spare. Look at Subhadra she manages to combine so much with her babysitting and all and see how well-off she is."

"No, thanks," she had excused herself. Then she asked, "I understand the one-dish club and your card club but I don't understand your kitty party, is that named after one of your friends?" They giggled spontaneously, not to declare their exclusiveness but indicate her innocence. "Nothing of that sort, no we don't know anyone by the name of Kitty." Warming up, but against her nature, Kunti said, "Oh, then it must be some sort of a bridge party?" "No, it is not a card game, that is separate," said Kareena, clearly the youngest in the crowd. "That's not what I meant," said Kunti, "I was thinking about the party given by the Turtons . . ." She stopped in mid sentence; no, she said to herself, what on earth are you saying, and in a crowd like this. For a moment, so Kareena de-

clared afterwards, there was a touch of sadness in how Kunti stopped herself. Maybe that's what happens to women, Indian women especially, who remove themselves from the Indian social circle. Kareena was right but her reasoning was misplaced. Kunti's mind had suddenly, dangerously in fact, taken her back to the three years she had spent reading English literature in Wellington. It was the mid sixties and she had spent her time reading voraciously. She had read everything for English I, II and III, and if her money had not run out would have even done postgraduate work. She was paying her own way after her first year; not that her parents weren't willing to support her financially but because she felt that her vacation job and the weekend work in the university library gave her enough money to keep her afloat. Her needs were few and she would rather read a book in the library than take it out or even purchase it. Once Don McKenzie, the great New Zealand textual critic, said to her in his Shakespeare tutorial after she had mispronounced 'Freud' (she had called him 'Freeud') she should catch up on the Western intellectual tradition by reading philosophy. "Idealist philosophy from Plato to Hegel, that's what you should read so that you can fully understand literature. You see," he added, "the Kiwis know it because this is part of their heritage, as an outsider you will just have to master it." She took McKenzie's words seriously and each night for an hour she would sit in the library reading philosophy. She didn't get much out of her reading but at least she could place names, and of course never mispronounced Freud again. And then there was Boyd, the red-haired student of philosophy and mathematics she had met. They had become friends and met, not at all by design, a few times each week in the cafeteria. He in his duffle coat, she in that Edinburgh Mills shawl. Over coffee they discussed philosophy. He spoke most of the time; she simply listened. They would go to university revues and now and then to the Roxy cinema. Once after a student production of *Troilus and Cressida*, Boyd had pulled her towards him and kissed her. She had bowed her head, felt embarrassed and had moved away. She wasn't pushing him away, she was just shy; she had not learnt how to articulate her feelings, although she felt warm inside her and

she was thankful. Many years later when she heard that Boyd had died, suddenly, at the age of thirty, she had cried with her two children. Amar had noticed and had asked. She said it was nothing, just one of those things that happened to women.

"No, you must live in a completely different world," said Kareena. "A kitty party is where ten or twelve women make up a group and meet at each other's home once every month. They put \$100 each in a kitty and whoever is the host for that month keeps all the money. So if you had ten people in your kitty party and if you were the host for this month, you'd get \$1000. A month later it would be Subhadra's turn and she would pocket the \$1000. It is one way of ensuring that once each year or thereabouts you have a large amount of money to spend on yourself. It works to everyone's advantage. There's one kitty party where each person puts in \$1000 and there is another, though I must say I mustn't believe everything that Sumita says, where \$10,000 is thrown in each month. Can you imagine, that sort of money, and for a kitty party?" "How extraordinary," thought Kunti. But it does make sense, sort of an advance that everyone can get and each year you buy your big item and then pay it off without interest. The women at the party gradually drifted into their smaller groups and Kunti sensed that these were possibly the smaller card, kitty or one-dish groups. It was then that Kunti began to feel left out. They gestured towards her – she thought she was sitting next to the one-dish group – but these were gestures of politeness, not of inclusiveness. And at any rate Hindi didn't come naturally to her any more for ever since her Wellington years she had begun to think in English. So she translated from English into Hindi, not an easy matter as language always implied getting the idiom right. And then, of course, the word order of English and Hindi was so different. They smiled at her formal grammar and found it reminiscent of, as they said, IndiEnglish, the new variety of Indian English made so popular by Salman Rushdie. Except for one especially nasty woman who kept saying, "In your country you have agriculture, not culture," and laughed nervously at her wit. "Yes dear," Kunti finally said, "and have you noticed how everything you do is a parody of

actual lived experience?” She hadn’t meant to sound aloof or standoffish, and certainly she didn’t mean to put her down, but the evening was getting exasperatingly long and quite simply she wasn’t used to this range and complexity of social discourses. She thought of Amar then, and wondered how he was handling himself. Sometimes, she felt, he was so defenceless, and quite incapable of fighting back. She could see him being silent for long periods. He had begun to do this quite recently although he was not naturally reticent. These were tender thoughts and they caught her unawares. Tenderness, after all, had become a rare commodity in their lives.

Amar sat with a beer in his hand. The host, Ravindra, had moved on, having failed to engage Amar. He sat alone for a long time, Ravindra’s chair remaining empty. To Amar’s left a man in a grey suit was vigorously defending the policies of the current BJP government in India. The discussion was picked up by others elsewhere in the room and for a while the lounge was a cacophony of sounds. Amar had nothing to say. He knew of the BJP and what it had done in opening India’s economy and he felt comfortable with the idea of a poet-prime minister. But beyond that it mattered little to him who ruled India or what happened there. It wasn’t that he had grown insensitive but something within him had disappeared or was in the process of disappearing. He wasn’t always like this; there was a time when he was gregarious and could make small talk with ease. There was a time when he could sense the mood of a party and single-handedly make it alive or change its direction. He used to feel comfortable with people. Now he was afraid of exposure, disliked being questioned and wished for nothing better than periods of solitude. Kunti had said it wasn’t good for him, this self-imposed isolationism. “You’re not a poet, an artist in isolation, the genius seeking expression, the lamp that projects the imagination,” Kunti had said. She had used a language that he understood for his field was in fact Romantic poetry. He had written a thesis on the poet Shelley at Sydney and on the strength of the thesis cracked a job in Perth. This wasn’t quite true as he found out afterwards: there were so few applicants and none was a Romanticist. But he was

happy to get a lectureship and he took it up with great enthusiasm. He had a knack with words and thanks to his year at the teachers’ college in Sydney, he knew how to teach. The professor at the university in Perth had emphasised the need for specialisation. “You are the Shelley man, and you should remain one all your life. You should know everything about Shelley, become a world authority.”

So he had spent the next twelve years of his life – to the mid eighties – writing a book on Shelley’s poetry. It was a solid reading of his poetry and he had done the right kinds of analyses, touched upon those moments in Shelley’s poetry where the imagination was sharp, where language was alive to experience. The readers of the two publishing houses he sent the manuscript to were qualified in their appraisal. One said he was not political enough: “There is in ‘Ozymandias’, the voice of the political revolutionary in Shelley, the reader of Godwin’s *Political Justice*.” Another said that Shelley’s wife was totally absent from the work and this was not going to go down well with the feminists. These objections he could handle. He had the notes available and if the publisher wanted a political Shelley he could give it to him. As for Mary Shelley, he felt that *Frankenstein* was worthy of a lengthy footnote and nothing more and as for Mary’s imagination he agreed with Mario Praz: she was no more than an amanuensis to the poet’s sublime imagination. But if it meant he could get his book published he was willing to add a page or two on Mary Shelley. This he could do. What he found impossible was the demand by the senior reader of one of the publishing houses who declared that Mr Amar Prasad had failed to deconstruct Shelley’s work. Amar had read Shelley critically and had indeed examined those places in the text where poetic closure was absent but he lacked the kinds of rigorous engagement with theory that the reader demanded. He wrote well and with clarity but could not transform what was essentially critical judgement into theoretical insight. Across the river from his university, a new university, the second in Perth, had revolutionised theory in Australia. Over there people lived for theory, they ate theory, as a T-shirt from that institution declared, and scholars from there were in great demand by publishing houses. Even

his professor had changed tack. "The goal posts have changed, we need to compete theoretically," he said. "And we need to be adaptable; there is no guarantee that we can live by our specialisations. We have to be malleable; even academia is life-long learning of difference." And so Amar managed to publish an essay or two in *Notes and Queries*, but nothing more. After twenty years they promoted him to Senior Lecturer and he was told very quietly that should he seek an early retirement. He could get a golden handshake. But he knew that they could never fire him as he held a tenured position. He disliked the link between productivity, mainly of a theoretical kind, and excellence. Yes he hadn't published his thesis or his book, but he knew what scholarship was, he knew how to work through primary sources and as for the books published by people who got promoted to chairs, he wasn't at all impressed. Grudgingly though his colleagues respected him. If you wanted to know facts and figures about English literary history, Amar was your first stop. If you wanted to know why clothes were hung on the Hill's hoist and not hanged, he could tell you the history of weak and strong verbs. But this knowledge did not add to a university's research quantum and so he didn't really matter. So he read and taught and retreated into lengthy silence now and then.

The empty chair next to him was filled, somewhat dramatically as, it seemed, three people went towards it simultaneously. "I'm Shiv Mann," a very pleasant voice said. "We had heard about this Indian English professor at the university but we never managed to make contact. You know how it is, our boys and girls do not do the humanities – there's no money in them. Now if you were a professor of engineering or law or medicine or dentistry or even accountancy, we would certainly have met." Amar corrected him: "I'm not a professor, but a lecturer, professors are different, and rather rare." "Doesn't matter professor sahib, it is all the same to us," he replied and then said, "Drop by at our house one of these days." "Yes, thank you," replied Amar, sensing that it was probably Indian politeness rather than an actual invitation, which in fact it was. Amar had not understood Indians, and nor was he one. He was an ethnic Indian but he didn't belong to any

continuous culture or language like real Indians did. Both he had to learn as he wasn't born into them. In his island home Indian culture was a fragmentary culture with no symbols that could link it to a direct past. As for language, his mother tongue was a Hindi demotic which really meant that for him to learn standard Hindi was no different from learning standard English. So he couldn't quite connect. This was a worry although his relationship with Kunti was somehow linked to the awkward space that he occupied as an Indian, an Indian but not quite. He met Kunti after graduating from an Australian university. He had returned to complete his bond; he hated high-school teaching and its endless hours. Kunti worked as a public servant overseeing supplies to schools and much else. Although she missed literature, administration came naturally to her and soon she became very adept at it. Her boss had remarked that with localisation underway, her future in the civil service was very bright. He had married her as a Hindu and with Hindu rites and within two years had resigned from his position to take up a university postgraduate scholarship. Kunti was not happy to leave so suddenly. She had adjusted to her new life, and enjoyed the challenges of the job; she had also begun to enjoy the social scene, the chaos of bazaars and weddings, the weekly outings to the cinema. The country was going through a transition to self-government and there was great optimism. She didn't know what she could do in Australia, and what she had read about the country did not impress her. Her heart was still in New Zealand to which she would have readily returned, but Australia looked so vast (too big she felt for so few people) and so dead. New Zealand, at least, was fertile and full.

Three years in Sydney, where he read towards his doctorate, were totally uneventful. He left for the Fisher Library each morning while Kunti stayed back in a two-bedroom flat in Balmain. She occupied herself going to libraries and museums. On the weekend Amar wrote in the mornings and then drove Kunti around Sydney in the afternoons in his yellow Volkswagen. This was their routine. Once or twice they were invited to the flats of other doctoral students where Amar felt very much at home. Kunti would sit on a sofa or a chair and look at the pat-

terns on the ornate ceiling or just glance at the street lights outside from a nearby window. By the time he had completed his doctorate Kunti was pregnant. His arrival in Perth coincided with the birth of their first child, a girl. Another, a boy, followed barely eighteen months later. Kunti's life changed into that of a mother and in the Cannington late fifties style house ("art nouveau" the estate agent had called it) they bought, she brought up the children. It was a small house, with three bedrooms and wooden floors. In summer it was very pleasant; in winter the draughts came through the floor and the lack of proper heating meant that the house was very cold. He did his usual routine, replicated his Sydney PhD habit and left for work every morning. On weekends he would read in the mornings and then take Kunti and the two children, the younger strapped in his baby car-seat, for a ride around Perth. On alternate weekends he would drive as far as Mandurah or Rockingham, sometimes north to Yanchep or east to Toodyay. Kunti and Amar said little to each other and spoke largely through their children who in turn never asked Amar too many questions. They did their homework and when the time came simply undertook degrees that were familiar to them. The boy read History, the girl English and both left to undertake postgraduate degrees in England. They never returned, although they wrote lengthy letters to Kunti about their wish to be academics and write books. Then one day they heard that their son had got married and was tutoring at a recently upgraded university in Britain. Their daughter had suspended her candidature and was living in a flat with a group of would-be writers. If Amar felt anything about these matters, he never said a word. Kunti remained silent but sad.

"Well," said Shiv Mann, "dinner is served. I hope you didn't stuff yourself on the samosas. The trick with Indian parties is that you go slow on the samosas because the dinner is always very big." He was correct. He hadn't seen so much food at a party before and people ate such huge amounts, and so late in the night too. As custom dictated, or so it seemed, men ate first, followed by women. He had noticed Kunti in her pink sari, uncertain, slightly uneasy but happy enough. Yes, he thought, how

typical of her to always eat selectively and take such small portions, one tandoori chicken, one puri, some lentils, some bhaji but not the rice. She never came for seconds which almost everyone else did. Amar ate alone, silently. He had declined a glass of red wine, and regretted doing so because drinks always made him feel that he had company. A few people made the customary remark – "I hear you are the professor of English" – but no conversation ensued. It was getting late and although moves were afoot for the next stage of the evening – the singing – he felt that perhaps Kunti needed to get away from it all. And so he waved at her across the entry on the other side and she responded. Unlike Amar, she had had a pleasant evening. On their way back home, as he struggled to get his grey Holden Camira into top gear, he felt Kunti's hand graze his. That night she curled herself into his body and slept soundly.

In the end Kunti went to the two Sangeets, one at Ranjini's and the other at Dolly's, held a week apart. She had met both at Premilla's party so she was not a complete stranger to them. Some husbands were indeed invited to the Sangeets. There was the bride-to-be Preity with Premilla proudly taking her around. Kunti thought of her own Apsara, her daughter, somewhere in Hammersmith trying to be a writer. She would have enjoyed showing off her daughter at a time like this. It didn't seem odd to Kunti that Amar had not been invited as he was not known to the hosts. By the second Sangeet, she had got to know some of the women well enough to be able to inquire about their children. About her own though she remained silent as there was nothing to say about Ajit and Apsara, and even if there was, their lives had taken a turn so different from the highly motivated and successful Indian boys and girls of the diaspora. She felt slightly embarrassed about them, but matters were never pushed and she simply enjoyed the singing and the dance. She recalled, in particular, the early film songs being sung as she had seen them in films during her years in Suva and then during the two years in Fiji she spent with Amar. They were happy years for her, and when one of the women sang a song that she knew, she hummed effortlessly, and connected with it. The song, about a girl on a

swing as the wind blew past her, made her sad. She was barely six or seven when she saw this film, about a young man who challenged the legendary Tansen to a singing contest, and it brought back to her days when life was carefree. She hadn't felt like that in a long while, and this saddened her. "You must keep in touch," said Shiv Mann's wife as she was about to leave Dolly's home. She didn't.

"Perhaps there is a bridal registry for the wedding," Kunti said to Amar a few weeks before the wedding. The thought delighted her as she knew that Myers had a bridal registry and if it was the case with Preity's wedding then there would be the usual 7 per cent discount on her Coles-Myer card. "What does the invitation card say?" She had another look at the invitation. The Sangeets on separate sheets of glossy paper had distracted her and she had paid little attention to the invitation to the wedding reception. No, there was no reference to a bridal registry and then she said, "Wait a minute, there is something here at the bottom, it says 'No Boxed Gifts,' what could it mean?" "Well you know," replied Amar, "remember at our wedding all those boxes of dinner sets we got – ten of them – from all our close friends and we didn't know what to do with them. It is a polite way of saying please do not bring these heavy, and in the end not very useful, dinner sets. It makes good sense. Remember when we wanted to give them away no-one would take them as all our young friends were trying to get rid of theirs." Amar's logic made sense, but she wasn't totally convinced. "It does sound a bit odd though, Amar," and she repeated 'No Boxed Gifts' a number of times. It didn't sound right, why would anyone want to use a clumsy phrase like that? One could have said, 'small gifts only' or nothing at all but then that was Amar's point, if you wrote nothing and you didn't make use of a bridal registry you could end up with a dozen boxes of dishwasher-proof dining sets.

"Let me ask Premilla," Kunti said. "You hardly know her, and that may look like prying. It is just not polite, and you know it will be what I said, and you wouldn't know what to reply," said Amar. Kunti was persuaded. Amar had a way of speaking, he did that rather well, make a convincing case. It came from

all those years of trying to persuade his students that Shelley was the greatest of all the Romantic poets. She liked this conversation. They hadn't spoken like this to one another for many years, and there was enthusiasm in both their voices. They were trying to resolve something together, and this was so satisfying to her. No longer in their own worlds, they too could discuss with a purpose, focus on the issues, debate and compromise. "But then," said Kunti, "what can we buy Preity which is not boxed?" Amar had been thinking about it for some weeks. He had sensed in her a growing excitement about the wedding reception since the two Sangeets. Kunti had been talking about Indian women friends, although she had seen them at best thrice. She had received one or two phone calls from them too. Nothing important, but the how are you calls had not come to her in a long while. She had also begun to look at the internet for sari shops, especially since now with the two Sangeets finished there were only three saris left in her collection that people had not seen. And these were not the best. The pink she had already worn, the purple with a scene from the epics she had worn for the first Sangeet, and the brown silk for the second. She was left with a sari the colour of magenta (or so she thought), an orange and a blue. She had dry cleaned all three and had almost settled on the magenta. But if she could purchase one via the internet or in a local shop that would be nice.

So Amar was concerned. He wanted to do his share and he was willing to sacrifice something dear to him. Some years back he had purchased, for \$200, a first edition of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, a novel about Bombay. This was a year or two before the fatwa and Rushdie's subsequent notoriety after which the early Rushdie first editions became rare. He knew that Kunti valued books and this would be such a wonderful gesture. He was sure that someone as well-to-do as Premilla would appreciate this. Money can buy anything but not class and he felt that a gift of a first edition (with just a hint of a little wear of the boards, and a trace of sunning to the spine but, except for scattered light foxing, no discolouring of the jacket, the Harper's catalogue had noted) would be so unusual. It would be good for Kunti's social life too. Kunti liked the idea but

the 'No Boxed Gifts' continued to bother her. She felt there was something else, the directive meant something else even if it hadn't been used before. Amar had promised to ask his colleagues, which he did. They all came to the same conclusion as he had. And Kunti too asked Julia who said that it probably meant something like flowers only. "You know," she said, "people who are so rich don't really need gifts, they can give their child whatever she wants." Even so Kunti remained unconvinced but she couldn't offer a viable alternative reading. And the thought of parting with their copy of *Midnight's Children* did worry her. The copy smelt of sandalwood and she was convinced that the original owner was actually from Bombay. But Amar's gesture said something about him, perhaps this was his way of making an important statement to her. He hadn't been happy; he was treated like a workhorse at the university and he felt he was not being taken seriously enough. Perhaps this was a way of establishing something that he alone had, a sensibility towards art and literature. This pleased Kunti; artistic sensibility was something she cherished.

In the end she had to settle for the magenta sari. The internet prices were exorbitant and even if she had purchased one via email there was no guarantee that it would look like the electronic image. As for Amar, he took out his graduation suit, which looked a little tight on him but he always said that as he hardly ever wore a suit purchasing a new one for a wedding was an excessive luxury. It worried Kunti though that the suit did look decidedly dated. But Amar was pleasant looking and although stooped, he had a little agility about him that made him surprisingly youthful. The reception was to be held at a winery, next to one of the tributaries of the Swan River. It was a warm late summer's evening but it had rained, quite uncharacteristically, an hour or two before and so the ground was generally wet, in places even a little soggy. Amar and Kunti didn't know what the protocol was: did 5.30 mean that you had to arrive on the half hour or half an hour before? They compromised and reached the venue some fifteen minutes before. The winery had obviously styled this part of its establishment specifically for wedding receptions. There was a slightly raised

outdoor stage for a string quartet or even a small band. Next to it was a large marquee with triangular plastic windows which could be unzipped for fresh air if need be. A large crowd had gathered by the time they arrived.

Amar and Kunti walked uneasily, Kunti with the gift and a New York Metropolitan Museum of Art card in her hand. Kunti smiled when she saw a few women she had met at the two Sangeets. Their presence made her feel a lot more comfortable. But she didn't know where to go with her gift. There was no table on which you could surreptitiously place the gift; in fact there was no-one carrying a gift at all. Perhaps Julia was correct after all; rich people simply wanted you to be there, that was gift enough. Amar agreed with her but added that there were people going towards Premilla and embracing her, one or two even held her hand, or so he thought. At any rate the Rushdie book was not so much a gift as a way of saying thank you, and she shouldn't feel uneasy about giving it to her. Looking around he felt that Premilla was the person to whom such a gift should be given.

So Kunti walked slowly, making way through slight gaps in the throng of people, perhaps even annoying one or two as her shoulder brushed some carefully coiffured heads, for she was so tall. She reached Premilla who recognised her and waved. Kunti came closer and said, "We've brought a special book for Preity, I'm sure she'd like it." Premilla froze. She thrust her hand towards Kunti, half heartedly it appeared, to snatch the book before other people saw it. In the movement and Kunti's own incomprehension of the gestures, the book fell on the ground, on the soggy patch of earth between Kunti and Premilla. The spine split and the dust jacket looked wet. Premilla quickly picked it up and thrust it in a large orange Duty Free shopping bag next to her. She didn't say another word to Kunti and turned around to receive an envelope from Subhadra.

Kunti didn't understand: the dismissive gesture, the sudden withdrawal of warmth, Indian familiarity suddenly turning into scorn or disdain, these didn't make sense. It was then that she heard a murmur which gradually became louder. She heard, "It's no boxed gifts, it means you give money." Kunti felt

so small; she had obviously misunderstood. How could she have been so stupid? She had known all along that there was something else to it. She bit her lips, and moved away, not raising her head. Amar found her and said, "Did you give it to her? Did she like it?" Kunti didn't say a word. She sniffed a little, her nostrils dilated and she took a tissue out of her handbag to wipe her upper lip.

In the marquee they sat at a table with four other couples; two, Kareena and Karishma and their husbands Kunti had seen at one of the Sangeets. The rest they had never met. Amar had not seen anyone although Kareena and Karishma's husbands were at the Applecross party six months back. Amar tried to look composed and to please Kunti made polite conversation. To no avail though as everyone looked at both Kunti and Amar in a strange sort of a way, and even Kareena and Karishma, always so bubbly, hardly said more than a word or two to Kunti. So they sat at the table, ate their three-course dinner, hardly spoke to anyone, and not even to each other. When Premilla brought Preity and her husband to the tables, she ignored Kunti totally. It was then that Kunti said, "I really must go home now." So they did.

In their grey Holden Camira she sat quietly. A few kilometres down the road, Amar heard Kunti sobbing. Soft and staccato-like at first then more like a continuous cry, the sounds came. He slowed the car down and asked, "What's the matter?"

"What's the matter, you say, Amar. Oh Amar when will you understand?" She paused to gather her thoughts. "You must always be right, it is always about yourself, your sense of a gift, your everything. When I said let me at least ask what 'No Boxed Gifts' means, all you could say, as if you always knew, was don't bother it really means nothing." She clasped her hands together, rubbing the insides. "And just when I could find some joy in life, something that would give me some happiness, a sense of belonging, you had to destroy it. See how they

looked at me accusingly, Kunti the tall, ungainly fool with that remaindered book in her hand! You should have seen the sneer on Premilla's face, you should have heard the collective grin and then that slow reverberating correction, 'It means money you stupid old hag!' Oh how humiliating." Then other matters began to well inside her. "Oh Amar, I've tried so hard, so hard to keep up the act, and you never asked of the pain, never inquired about my loneliness, you never asked, as simple as that, because you always knew, you and your Shelley. And look at our children. When they were young I said let them know Indian kids, they'll learn from them determination and the work ethic, a bit of their own language and all you could say was they'll find out when they grow up. And what happened when they grew up? A son who gets married and simply disappears, a daughter who thinks that hanging around with no-hopers in London will turn her into a Rushdie. How utterly absurd." Tears swelled in her eyes, trickled down and she had difficulty wiping her face. She grimaced and for the moment seemed to hate herself.

Amar drove slowly back to Cannington. He didn't say a word. He couldn't. He didn't know his wife's pain, her loneliness. His own life, now showing the first signs of old age, had been a failure, this much he knew. But to see Kunti, his Kunti who had never said a word, not even when he lost all that money in Bell shares, the woman he had grown to love, to understand, so dispirited, hurt him. He felt exhausted and for once his heart missed a beat. But he could not console, couldn't even say sorry because he felt so inadequate, incomplete. He had arrived where he began, from being nothing to one who was still nothing. As he opened the front door of the house he tried to touch Kunti's shoulder, but she walked quickly into the hallway. That night, in bed, she cried in hiccups, softly, and there were no young children of hers with whom she could share this cry.

THE FREEDOM DRESS

SHE CALLED IT her freedom dress. It was red linen, with flecks of black through the red. The neckline was square and flattered her collarbones. She was wearing it the day she arrived. The only other time I saw it after that it was hanging on the line, a vivid splash of colour against the wild ginger plants I've been cultivating out near the laundry. A week after she arrived we talked for a while at the washing line. I was struggling with the weekly wash, she was pegging out her few things.

"This dress . . . this my running away dress," she told me when I complimented her on it. "This my freedom dress."

One of the first things I did notice about Margarita was that she had very few clothes. I only ever saw her wearing long cotton shorts and T-shirts during the day. The few times I saw her at night she wore a plain, seersucker house coat, an oddly feminine garment for such a severe woman. She obviously had enough underwear to last the week, a change of shorts and T-shirt for every day, then the Saturday wash and the cycle would begin again. I thought the red dress must have been for special occasions, aside from running away. But then, special occasions aren't much of an issue around here.

The day I complimented her on the dress she told me she'd decided to stop using her married name. She wanted her rent receipts in her maiden name, **R**odríguez. I asked her how she spelt it and she wrote it painstakingly on a piece of paper. I asked her if Rodríguez was Spanish, or Mexican. She said she

was originally from Chile. Her accent was still very thick and I remembered reading once that retaining a strong accent was related to homesickness and a sense of not being able to settle in the new country. I asked if she was ever homesick and she said no, she had no reason to be homesick and there was no reason to go back to Chile. She'd run away from Chile over twenty years ago and she'd left her Australian husband, Mr McMurtrie, a good six months before she arrived here.

"We work at the school . . . in the desert. I'm cleaner there. People say, How you can work there? but I like this desert. One day, Father Benedict going to town. He say, you want to come Margarita? and I think, why not? I should see this town. My husband, Mr McMurtrie, he not like me to see the town. He not like me away from his sight. I am tired of this . . . control. So. I change my clothes. I put my red dress. Father give me wages. I put money in my purse. I walk out the door. When we get to town, Father leave me in the truck. He go to the bank. Something . . . how you say . . . snap? There is McCafferty bus parked there. I go to bus and I say Where you going? North, he say. I ask him How much? I have enough. I buy ticket. That's how I'm coming here. I not live with McMurtrie, so I not use that name anymore."

Days pass slowly here. The little boarding house I manage is the last of its kind in a city obsessed with development. All the old tropical houses are almost

gone. We can't afford to run air-conditioners here, which keeps the guests away in the Build Up and Wet Season, so I'm always glad to have regular tenants, although there's never that many of them. The tariff here is cheap but even backpackers won't tolerate this heat without air-conditioning. So the Dry Season's my busiest time. Apart from that, business can be very slow.

I never imagined I'd end up running a boarding house in the tropics but the manager's flat is free and there's a modest wage I can just live on. I approach the cleaning as exercise. The boarding house is on the edge of town, so I don't really need a car. I walk or catch minibuses. If I do walk anywhere I make sure it's either early or late to avoid the worst of the heat. I need to be here most of the time, so I don't go out much anyway. It's a job I can do without thinking too hard. I direct guests to their rooms and the limited attractions of the town. I change coins for the phone and call cabs to the airport and when the guests go, I wipe the rooms clean of them and wait for the next contingent. The interstate owners leave me to do things my way and in the late afternoon and evening I try to write. Nothing much comes of that, but it seems to be something I need to keep doing.

When Margarita arrived I thought she was just like any other traveller, except for this tiny bag. She kept up a ferocious itinerary of sightseeing that first week, then the week turned into two and two weeks turned into a month with her heading off every day like a real tourist. I remember wondering where can she be going? There's nothing left to see.

I was caught off guard when she said she wanted to stay on. The boarding house has its charms in a run down sort of way, but the single women's section, the cheapest section, reminds me of a 1950s boarding school. It's not somewhere I'd want to stay for very long. I worried she wouldn't tolerate sharing the kitchen and lounge and bathroom with the turnover of guests, because it soon became obvious Margarita wasn't a tolerant woman. She was often scathing about the young women travellers who came through. I think she might have been jealous of their youth. She certainly didn't like sharing her personal space with them.

It wasn't long before she found herself a cleaning job in the mornings at an office complex in town. As soon as she'd saved some money, she bought herself a bar fridge for her room and a small television and that was it. You never saw her in the lounge room. She never mixed with anyone, never rang anyone, never, as far as I can remember, received any mail.

She eventually applied for the better-paid afternoon shift. I saw even less of her. When she wasn't working, she was usually sleeping or just sitting in her room. Sometimes she'd go out and come back with a small bag of shopping. Just a few things, but hardly anything that seemed like real food. I could never work out where she ate. She rarely used the kitchen and I never did find out where she went on her days off.

I went into her room once. She'd said to me, "Please . . . don't clean my room. I clean it. You have too much to clean."

"So do you," I laughed. "I don't mind. It's part of my job."

"No. Please. Don't clean my room. I clean my own room thank you."

But I did go into her room. I'm not even sure why. I think it was this sense that she was paranoid about something and I wanted to work out what that was. The minute I went in there, I knew I shouldn't have done it. The force field of her privacy was so strong the hairs stood up on my arms. It felt like some kind of booby trap. I didn't touch a thing. I just stood there, rooted to the floor, trying to glean something from the way she'd left it, but there was nothing to tell me who she was, or what she liked, or what she might do in there except watch television. There wasn't even a television program to be seen. The bed was made with military tautness. Her terry towelling scuffs were under a chair, very faintly soiled, with just the slightest imprint of her feet. She'd bought a bedside lamp. The fan was on low, stirring the hot, damp air. I almost turned it off, but then she would've known I'd been in there. I felt she'd know I was in there anyway; she'd feel the quality of the air was different. Disturbed. Transgressed. I felt so guilty I avoided her, which wasn't hard, until she came to pay her rent. She didn't seem to be harbouring any malice, so I relaxed.

She'd been here about eight months when the cleaning company gave her an award. She brought home a framed photo of herself the company had organised as part of the award. The small gold plaque was engraved: Cleaner of the Month. She seemed so proud of it, which didn't seem like her somehow. She said she was going to put it in her room. I gave her a little lace doily. I said, "Here . . . this will look nice under it". After that she seemed to treat me a little differently, as though we'd become better friends, or were somehow closer than before.

Margarita never mentioned children. She never spoke about her family or friends and once she'd blotted out her husband's name from the guest register, she never spoke about him again either. But when my friend Estelle turned up with her three rampaging children, Margarita surprised me again. She always made such a fuss of the kids and her attention to the children made it easier for me and Estelle to talk. She was very tender with them. She'd push them on the swing in the garden for hours and of course, the kids would let her. They didn't seem to find her hard or strange or frightening. Maybe it was only me who thought that about her and now, I think that had something to do with my suspicion that some hard, crystalline thing I perceived in Margarita would be my fate too, if I wasn't careful. I don't really understand what I mean by that. It's possibly something that could exist in all of us, something obsidian and dark and impenetrable. The children, being children, found a different centre in her, but I just kept building up this picture of her that now seems hopelessly incomplete.

It took me a few days to realise she'd gone. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, except for a couple of incidents a few weeks before at the office block, that made her very angry.

A female office worker complained that a valuable pen set was missing from her desk. The afternoon it went missing, it was Margarita's shift. The woman made a fuss. The police were called in. They even came to the boarding house to check her room. I found out later this was at Margarita's insistence but it was as though their incursion into her room ruptured that private cocoon she'd spun for herself. She said she was insulted by the accusations. The

police seemed almost embarrassed by her spartan room. It revealed nothing.

After that, she spent even less time around the place. When she wasn't sleeping or at work she was out walking. I couldn't understand how she could walk so much in the incredible stifling heat that pulses off these streets.

I did notice, not long after this incident, that she'd bought a small, expensive mobile phone. I saw her once, sitting on a bench in the park across from the big supermarket in town. I was inside in the checkout queue. I watched her dialling numbers, listening, ending the calls. Never speaking. There were never any bills for the phone in the letterbox.

Then a week or so later, something else happened at the office block. There was another accusation of theft, although this time, no one came to check her room. She almost cried telling me about it. Accused! The best cleaner in the place!

When she came to pay her rent a few days later she said, "I leaving on Wednesday".

"Leaving for where? Where are you going?"

I don't know how to explain how important Margarita's difficult, impersonal presence had become to me. I think her presence meant some strange stability in this place of impermanence. With the weather so hot again and so few guests, I felt I needed someone else around. Someone familiar. Maybe part of it was a conviction I'd developed that she needed to belong somewhere and that I was part of the reason she could stay. I never considered at that stage, it might be my need to belong to someone. I can remember what she said quite clearly:

"I go to Father Benedict. He need me. No-one work for him. No-one stay out there." Her normally thick accent was even thicker now with emotion.

"If the school needs you, that's great, but . . . I'll miss you Margarita." I really meant it. Margarita looked shocked.

I stammered, "I know . . . I've never asked you this before . . . I won't mind if you say no . . . but come to dinner? Have a meal with me?"

Margarita looked at me, a distant hollow look, so hard to fathom.

"Thank you. No. I am very busy. I will pack my bag."

“Of course,” I said, “of course . . . but if you change your mind . . . any night . . . just knock.”

I didn't see her after that, except for one moment when the minibus drove past the cathedral late the following afternoon. It was almost dusk. She was wearing her red dress and the colour of the dress glowed in that afternoon light, the deep green of the palm garden beside her such a contrast. It was impossible to tell, before the bus sped on, if she was going in or out of the cathedral, or just standing outside.

It took me a while to work out the reason for the quick prickle of unease I felt. She'd told me she would finish work the following Tuesday, and this was only Thursday; she should have been at work. So why was she walking past the cathedral in her red dress?

It was Sunday before I checked her room. Her tiny suitcase lay on the bed. It held three bras, six pairs of underpants, the house coat, seven pairs of shorts and seven T-shirts. All that was missing was a set of underwear, the red dress and her slip-on sandals. The frame for her photo was packed in amongst the soft folds of her T-shirts, but the photo itself was gone. Her mobile phone lay on the bed. I checked it for recorded calls, for numbers. Nothing. I found her disposable terry towelling scuffs upended in the garbage bin like abandoned feet.

Wednesday came, the day of her planned leaving. I hadn't seen her for five days. The suitcase was still in the room. I knew I had to do something, despite her ferocious privacy.

The hospital could at least tell me she wasn't there, under either name, but the bus company wouldn't say whether she'd bought a ticket or not. For privacy reasons. The cleaning company said she'd resigned three weeks before, which I figured was just after the last accusation. The police were reluctant to start a Missing Person's file because I just didn't seem sure enough she was actually missing. It was hard to convince them someone who was leaving anyway was really missing. They said there was a lot of paperwork. I'd have to be very sure. They seemed to suggest she'd maybe just skipped out on her rent. I had to admit there was no particular reason she'd say goodbye to me. We were nothing special to each other.

Eventually I thought of my own guest register and the name of the community she'd given when she first signed in. I checked the number of the school in the directory and rang. A man with a familiar, thick accent answered.

No, Margarita wasn't back at the school, Father Benedict said. He'd had no contact with her since she ran away, although they would have taken her back, of course. She was a good worker. Her husband had long gone, at first in search of her, but as far as the Father knew, Mr McMurtrie had never found her. She'd never rung the school. The last time he'd seen her was the day he left her waiting in the truck outside the bank. I gave him my phone number, just in case she turned up. So I could send on her things.

I had to be persistent, but eventually the police decided to take me seriously. Little came of their investigations, except that Margarita had bought a bus ticket down south under her old married name. I couldn't understand why she'd do that. When it came to detail, I found I couldn't tell the police much about her. I didn't really know how old she was, I didn't know Mr McMurtrie's first name, I didn't know how much she weighed or how tall she was. The description I gave of her could have been any middle-aged woman with an accent.

Two months later, Father Benedict rang. It was late at night and there was a storm. I was reluctant to answer the phone because of the lightning but it rang so persistently I eventually picked it up.

He had no news of Margarita, as such. It was just that a strange thing had caught itself like a burr inside his memory. An article in the regional newspaper. A newspaper that was already a month old by the time it made it out to him in the community. The article was about a woman who went missing from a bus heading west towards the coast. The bus company alerted authorities at the time, but no-one had seen her since. She'd just disappeared into the night. The driver didn't have her name on the manifest. She'd bought a ticket just moments before the bus departed. The Father thought little of it.

But then he'd just received another month-old newspaper and there was another article, which was why he was ringing now. Three desert kids had found

a dress, hanging from the branch of a tree, way out in saltbush country on the way towards the coast. The children said the wind was blowing inside the dress and from a distance it looked like there was a person in it, hanging from the tree. But when they got close, there was no-one in the dress. The children took the dress down and gave it to their big sister, who eventually told the local police aide the story. It was a red linen dress with a square neckline. The linen was flecked through with black.

“Didn’t Margarita have a dress like that?” asked the Father. “I seem to remember, the day she ran away, I just can’t be sure, it was so long ago. I thought you might have seen her wearing that dress?”

I rang the police. They agreed there should be a search.

When the storm was over, I sat out in the yard and watched the lightning, the darkness cut through again and again by the forked white run-

nels from heaven down to the dark dark sea.

I thought about attachments and the twin fears that can grip us all. The fear of going. The fear of staying. Are they the same thing in the end? Is it the same impulse? Can we survive, not being attached to anyone? How often is it we’re blind to people because we’re blind to something in ourselves? How can a woman just walk off into the desert and not be found? How does something like that happen, that sort of abandonment? How does someone achieve that kind of deliberate cutting away of oneself from anyone else?

I could see Margarita’s red dress, filled with wind, billowing on the low branch of a tree and what she’d said that day about running away came back to me.

“Is easy . . . you just leave. You learn. Nothing matter. See this dress? Is special for me. This my running away dress. I always keep this dress with me. This dress . . . this my freedom dress.”

On the Airport Road

Last Tuesday, the sudden sight of swamp harriers,
vast birds with buff plumage, white rump and crying:
keeow . . . keeow. I saw them drift above shops,
hover near Notting Street. And if I expected to feel
surprise, I thought *paper*, for the harriers floated,
dipped, readjusted and resumed their floating in papery ways.
I watched them veer and tumble over airport fields,
touch wingtips in courtship, spiral and twirl. I wanted to clap,
sing, dance because *they are*, but I stopped the car to stare.

JAMES CHARLTON

supplication

Grind us with the escalator
muzak us to mayhem,
Needs and Wants NOW
cut-price in Confection
MARKED DOWN,
Mall More Mall
sweet shopping heaven,
Made Elsewhere
for the unemployed
downsized up, deskilled out,
dressed to kill,
Please give us
Today’s Look.

LOUISE MOLLOY

DROP

SUN-WASHED SKY faded. Almost white in the glare. Stubborn cars chase each other along the concrete corridor below.

The overpass meek in comparison.

Beside me, Carl is a kid with a round head and mean pockets.

His fingers are stubby; his nails dirty. But he's got strength in them.

"Come on," he says.

Takes two of us to lift the granite. It's jagged with rock sparkles that catch the light. It balances gently on the railing. Carl starts counting backwards, waiting for a red one. They score highest. I wait. When he reaches one, we let the rock go and start running. My sweaty hands, over my mouth, catch what breath I have left as we dart off the bridge. A horn blares from below and then braking, swerving.

But no crash.

Carl's legs are pumping madly in front of me and he's laughing. I'm laughing too, but shrill, my voice echoes back from the asphalt valley beneath us. I push him along when he wants to stop and look out over the road.

TRAIN

MITCH WAS FILLING IN that week; he wasn't used to the late morning shifts. Trash littered the floor of the driver car – unapologetic. The stations seemed further apart in the daytime. He squinted against the light refracting off the rails.

She first appeared like a mirage, moving in slow motion. A girl. Arms outstretched, walking along the track, the nape of her neck glinting in the sun.

He'd seen her two days before: at the station two stops back. A fake leather mini-skirt. Her thin hair pulled back in a plastic clip. The bright pink Mardi Gras beads around her neck offset by her stained lips, a few shades too dark. She'd stared at the train that morning, daring it to leave without her.

She still had a defiance to her posture as she balanced on the ties. Mitch yanked the emergency brake. Steel clashed against steel. Shrill grating echoed in his ears. He watched in horror as she turned towards him, smiling.

He shut his eyes and visualised her jumping. He imagined her standing safely beside the tracks while the train came to a belated halt beside her. But when he opened his eyes, she was still facing him. Smiling. Too close.

She threw her arms in the air, laughing, and strings of Mardi Gras beads came raining down as the train connected with her body.

REVOLUTION FAMOUS

To the five-year-old blonde child, sitting on my lap.

WHEN I FIRST came to the End of the World I asked a bartender why there was only one television station here and he replied mysteriously, “to stop revolutions”. I studied politics at the university and noticed that none of the students were interested in joining any political clubs. I read old newspapers on file at the university library and found out the reason why no-one at the End of the World had political aspirations. Thirty years ago there was not one but four revolutions occurring at the same time and each leader overtook a television station to broadcast their policies. After a couple of weeks the people became bored with television and stopped watching. After the revolutions had run their course because no-one was interested in politics, a Lord Mayor was eventually elected, but he was given no official power to run the End of the World. Unemployed volunteers formed committees to decide policies and make decisions because they lived on the streets and knew what problems concerned most people. Somehow the End of the World ran itself and the Lord Mayor’s only duty was to choose the programs on the sole television station allowed to run after the revolutions. As long as their favourite films and comedy shows were shown on the television station the people at the End of the World were happy. No-one ever tried to overthrow the Lord Mayor as he had excellent taste in programming entertainment for the people.

*From the jealous boyfriend
of the nymphomaniac
loved by a thousand men.*

To the seven foot tall blonde woman, sucking her thumb.

SOMEONE FAMOUS visited the End of the World. She sailed into the bay on a tall ship and when she set foot on the pier there was no-one waiting to greet her. There were no paparazzi or police escorts and the hotels were booked out, so at night she slept on the ship. There were no news reports of her arrival on the only television channel at the End of the World. There was no civic reception and advertising companies did not clamour asking her to endorse their product. The only ones to pay any attention to her were the stray cats and they sprayed their tails in doorways as her entourage passed by. Eventually tired of being ignored she sailed on her ship away from the End of the World. This is not a place for tourists. This is where you come to when life has dealt you a knockout blow. This is where you take time out to gather your strength so you can get up from the canvas and give life a black eye and kiss Death on the mouth.

*From the Italian migrant
with the caustic wit
and a taste for the absurd.*

ON THE TRIP

Saying it

Don't get smart.
Don't tell me.
I'll tell you.
You fucken will not.
I just fucken did.

Looking into it

Wadda you want?
Nothin.
What are you lookin at me for?
I wasn't.
You were.
I fucken was not.
Don't get smart.

Sorting it

You're a fuckwit.
Get fucked.
No, you're a fuckwit.
What are you then?
Doesn't matter.
Who says?
I do.
Who are you to say?
I'll say what I bloody want.
Will ya?
Yeah.
Goodonya then.
Yeah. Goodonme.

Check it out

What's that?
Dunno.
Better check it out.
Yeah.
You ready?
Yep.
Looks like a . . .
Does, doesn't it?
Yeah.
Give us a hand.
No worries.
Got him?
Yep.
One, two - three!
Heavy bastard.
Yeah.

Love it

Bloody beautiful day.
Ripper.
Look at that.
Speck fucken tackular.
Love it.
It's fucken great here.
Yeah.
Pass me one of them.
No worries.

Sorting it out

Sorry mate.
What for?
You know.
Oh yeah.
Sorry, alright?
Yeah.
No, I mean it.
I said it's alright.
Slong as you know.
It's alright.
Good.

Inheritors of Bob's Bristle Lures

My father spent all summer making lures for trevally and tailor. On a workbench with lead and scrap metal he shaped and sectioned deep riders and skimmers for rock and beach. He loved his close work, designing a lift and drop lure that released a smooth rehearsal of line. He could play a half-wound rod without retrieving, or when he did, he'd jerk a wild action, bucking lure with a yellowtail on the run. In his drafty shed he sensed deeper water, the pelagic thrill of marlin, easy waters of 'The Rip'.

Sinking his metal lures that pressed against a single hook, he flicked a watchful cast, an underwater flash. Mostly, he puttered the channel's five knots trolling water-line. At three a.m., he stuffed his boots with footy socks, pushing laughter from the wharf at Anderson's Shed to jig 'shrimp lures' off Daley's Point with a mate called Stewie. In the early evenings, he could not be stopped, and so kneaded strips of devon, cheese, and fish-oiled crumbs into odorous socks. Once the shallows washed a ten-pound jewie's heart. A morwong scaled his five-foot frame.

Late at night, with water travel on his mind, my father trawled the bay, lantern swinging, slipping prawns from seagrass to curl against his toes poking holes in gritty sandshoes. He would return cold and blue, divide the prawns, and give most of them away to the neighbours.

Near Hardy's Bay, he'd set the rod in sand; feed the fuel of his desire, a rock shelf to store his gear, pools to defrost the bait. Later, he'd return with butcher's paper, half-eaten potato cake, some tiddlers, and a peaceful song still humming on his mind.

In the Brisbane Water no one knew my father fashioned homemade lures, that he could cast an underwater dash, wind in the first flash of a school jewfish. No one knew his desire to be alone on a rock, in the black bay at night.

When he retired twice, first to wine, then to emphysema all his unfinished projects were put away. The rods still drenched in surf, salted in the rafters, his roll of lead sat flatbed in the vice.

Years later my mother writes, 'So many fishing rods and reels, sinkers, hooks, and Bob's bristle lures, what shall I do?' I can see him on that coast, an explosion of water dissipating like fireworks, bait box on granite, coat pocket hooked with jigs and silver spinners. Before he becomes mere ink and memory, I want to write back. 'Mum we are not blind. He is still standing on that cold body of rock. So please, give them away to the neighbours.'

HELEN HAGEMANN

2001

City Slacker

got myself tooled up on PT trips to the
CBD hopped on a goods train & it was
like the OC riding down boulevards to
my new POV some nail hits me right

on the top of my LED & I'm absolutely
disgusted by the smell of the KFC (no
complaints from country slickers i.e.
put your mouth to the bowsers) fuck

ET mowing lawns on the back of your
delta goodrem CD sprawls of country
suburbs stretching from A to B while
sewage spray haunts my dreams on

TV made me send my kid to a private
MLC then wash the SUV in my second
wife's pool she's got the freaking PMT
& a trigger finger for the friggin' GGs

several welts overnight from my STD
must have had one too many oral VBs
now everybody needs a bloody TPV
sick of bloody design students RMIT

bugger my drought mouth got the DTs
pissing water up against walls in WCs
breathing in stench james hardie RIP
& the rotten eggs thrown by the ALP

we've run out of toilet paper where's
my HWT better get myself to the GP
who needs rhyming on the truly QT
anyway now that everyone's a POET

DAVID PRATER

*We will decide
Who comes to this country –
And the circumstances
In which they come.*

How like a piece of poetry it was,
the roughening iambs,
those sharpened 'c's', like angled pikes,

the two-beat lines that got us going –
except line 3 which had its extra
fist banged on the table.

Note the subtle half-rhyme, too,
'country' matched with 'come'
and how the preposition 'in'

assumes its proper place.
Like most great poetry, of course,
it's mainly made from echoes:

the glorious Three Hundred Greeks
who held Thermopylae
and Winston Churchill roaring still

"We shall fight them on the beaches . . ."
Like all such deathless works of art
it's shivering with myth:

the golden hordes who spoiled our sleep
across two centuries,
the bard far back with lyre and smoke

declaiming his alliterations,
the ancient battles of his race
with dragons, gods and men.

No wonder, then, that those who might
have shown us something else,
defeated now by poetry,

had nowhere left to turn.

GEOFF PAGE

A Man from Burin

Darwish writes
the music of
human flesh

of course he knows
the discordant notes
produced by wounds

the silence as a
body slides away from itself
marked only by bloodshed

a body bored through
with bullets
a symphony of fissures

grief announcing itself
in the sterility of hospital corridors
a hijab, a wail
a white sheet
painted with blood
a man
who had a moustache
a family
but never a face

the music written in his flesh:
a cacophony of injustice
without an audience

JOSHUA TAAFFE

Burin: a small village near the valley of Nablus.

Darwish: Mahmoud Darwish (1942-).

You Can't See the Man in his Face

Those blue eyes aren't really eyes at all
just clay beads stitched in place
a cunning touch of humanity;
feeling applied with a paintbrush
and a drop of lacquer

better to study his mouth
the red tongue clenched just so
between his teeth, a fox
devouring itself for freedom,
his throat a bloody sanctuary

better to study his hands
carrion birds in flight, tempted
by strange currents
– they lay their eggs in the
warmest nests, but hatch only bones

better to undress his skin
scrawled with the writings
of a million fallen men;
those who have severed the weft
those who have swallowed the warp

when the cold air is drawn
back over his tongue and the frost settles,
his eyes may recover their artlessness

till then:

let the fucking masque go on.

SARAH GALE

Yarning with Clancy

I was riding the National Trail,
somewhere up Queensland way
when I met up with Drover Clancy
and we stopped to say g'day.
He said "I hear them literati,
who think they're very arty,
were badmouthing my mate, Banjo,
at some kind of literary party."

"I wasn't there," I quickly said,
"mate, remember I'm a fan.
I wouldn't say a word against
that famous bush poetic man.
My Father taught me all his poems
and that was many a year ago,
I recite them by the ream,
word perfect, go to whoa."

"These modern poets," said Clancy,
"if you can call the beggars that,
they're always bally whinging
and talking through their hat.
They sound depressed or tortured,
use fancy phrases all the time,
go on about love and torment
without a single ruddy rhyme.

Now every campfire poet knows
good rhymes are what you need
in case you get a mental block,
they'll give you the right lead
to a line that you've forgotten,
that way you can't lose face;
it's helped performers more
than once and saved 'em from disgrace.

The Banjo put in images
that us bush blokes can understand.
He knew the kind of life we lived
and the stark beauty of the land.
So tell them posers in the city
not to send us their poems to share,
for we'll use 'em to light the fire
and hang 'em at the ready – YOU KNOW WHERE!"

MURIEL COURTENAY

Imagine the Unthinkable

Imagine the unthinkable?
Don't you write another word.
The economy's unsinkable.

The beer will be undrinkable?
The possibility's absurd.
Why imagine the unthinkable?

The think-tanks too unthinkable:
give up now, follow the herd:
the economy's unsinkable.

The good ship *Beer's* unsinkable.
It sails the foam free as a bird.
Imagine the unthinkable?

The concept is undrinkable:
a drunken notion overheard,
the economy's unsinkable

my confidence unshrinkable.
The beer is good, and I have burped.
The economy's unsinkable.
Imagine the unthinkable!

TIM METCALF

The New City

There in the street is a long line.
In the street is a long line of people.
There are many people in the street, waiting.

The people in the street remain silent,
and are waiting in the street with plastic cards.
At the end of the street surrounded by barbed wire

are silver machines up on polished granite
walls, and the long line of people are waiting patiently
to place their plastic cards into the machines.

Some of the machines up on the walls
are not functioning, and many in the street
are out of work. The buildings emptied

long ago and there are men in the streets
with tear gas and guns, and they are protecting
the machines up on the polished granite walls.

The people are waiting patiently in tattered clothing
and some of them have fallen over into the gutters,
and many of those still waiting, are past caring,

and tread over those just fallen. Under a white hot
sun the people in their tattered clothing are anxious to
gain money from the machines up on the walls

at the end of the street, and the footpaths
where many stand are scattered with debris
and garbage; and their ivory black footwear

shuffles forever forward, boot by boot, shoe by shoe,
until they are at last in front of the machines, and
one by one they place plastic cards into the slots.

ROBERT DRUMMOND

bloody myths and lucky legends

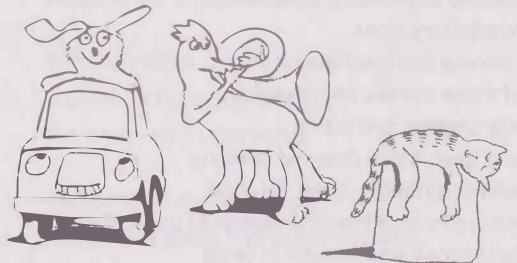
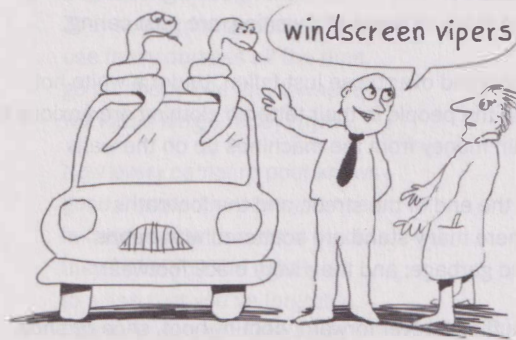
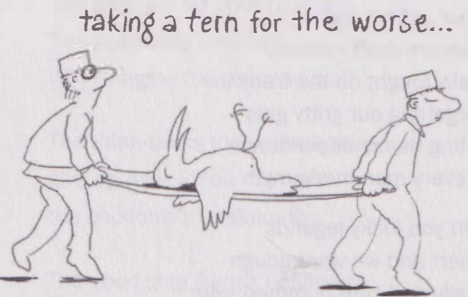
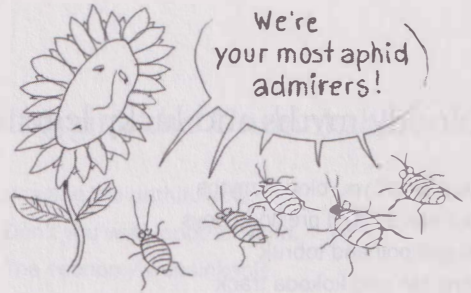
bugger off you bloody myths
our sacred and precious boys
at gallipoli and tobruk
long tan and kokoda track
were never braver or better
than our defiant lads
who fiercely draft resisted
or ferally fought on the franklin
not forgetting our gritty girls
defeating heroic dependence
upon every man made myth

piss off you lucky legends
sir robert and we want gough
ned kelly and cute bummed kylie
don bradman and stuffed phar lap
instead of parading pantheons
of arbitrary icons
i honour the inspiration
of those marias and josephs
alis sophias and trans
and even those dear old dobbins
who contribute a quiet richness
more precious than the wealth of publicity
from those who fortune in fame

GEOFF BAKER

Anomals

by Lofa



SAVING WORDS

RACHAEL WEAVER

Martin Harrison: *Who Wants to Create Australia? Essays on Poetry and Ideas on Contemporary Australia* (Halstead Press, \$29.95)

Katherine Barnes and Jan Lloyd-Jones (eds): *Words for their Own Sake: The Pursuit of Literature in an Economic Rationalist World* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, \$34.95)

In different ways, *Who Wants to Create Australia?* and *Words for their Own Sake* consider the role of literature in shaping and helping to interpret contemporary Australian culture and national identity. Both books offer complex and far-ranging discussions of literature in terms of the broader Australian cultural, historical, geographical, intellectual, artistic, emotional, technological, and political scene. Fortunately they contrive to do this with more flexibility – more *life* – than their rather dry and portentous titles imply.

Martin Harrison's book is a collection of essays predominantly concerned with poetry and place, many revised from works previously published in Australian literary journals over the past decade or so. The pieces work together impressively, cumulatively. They continuously build upon ideas around the recurring themes of country, time and history, articulation and silence, presence and absence. Deeply erudite and analytically complex, the work is also densely packed and, at times, its expression needlessly opaque. It is frustrating that a work so passionate (and convincing) in extolling the importance of poetry to understanding our emotional, spatial and intellectual relationship to national identity should limit itself to articulating this in a manner most easily accessible to poets and literary theorists. This is especially the case because, in his introduction, Harrison explicitly writes against "talk of poetry [becoming] a narrow kind of talk . . . a sense that somehow critical discussion of poetry is removed from the mainstream".



Despite the sense in which the ideas are condensed and the writing sometimes difficult, the persistent general reader will be well rewarded. Harrison's use of personal memoir and anecdote as a springboard and organising principle for wider reflections on Australian poetry is especially compelling. For instance, in the opening paragraphs of 'The Tenth Muse', memories of an elderly relative in New Zealand, a woman who had been acquainted with D.H. Lawrence, open the way for a personal and philosophical discussion of the formative influences of shared stories and histories in writing and thinking about poetry. In 'Country and How to Get There' his account of purchasing a block of land in the wilderness a few hours from Sydney segues into a larger meditation on 'country' – the book's overriding preoccupation and Harrison's term for exploring the particularity of Australian consciousness. Defined against European models of landscape to incorporate numerous overlapping meanings of possession and place/dispossession and placelessness, Harrison elaborates 'country' as a uniquely laden term, one bound up, in different ways, in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian identity, in colonial history and its inflection of contemporary experience.

The complex ways Australian poetry has enacted and expressed such ideas of place is a central concern in Harrison's analyses of the works of writers including Les Murray, Robert Gray, Jennifer Rankin, Peter Porter, Philip Hodgins and Kevin Hart. His close readings of the poetry of Gray and Hart are particular highlights. This is certainly a

book to which readers will keep returning.

In contrast to the sustained personal and intellectual intensity of Harrison's book, *Words for their Own Sake* offers an eclectic range of essays, proceeding from a symposium held at ANU in memory of the academic Axel Clark. In some ways the title premise of pitting literature against economic rationalism functions as a straw figure, one that is often cast aside in favour of more diverse engagements with literature's relationship to the broader political and cultural scene, both local and global. Ralph Elliot's essay 'Imagination Bodies Forth' takes the reader on an enjoyable crash course of poetry throughout the ages that has given "voice to the experiences, the emotions, which we all share but cannot readily shape into words". Livio Dobrez poses and explores a crisis of language in our "fictive society", a world in which the "virtual" has become indistinguishable from the "real". In 'I Will Miss You Beyond Words', Julian Lamb investigates the discursive vacuum generated by the events of September 11, arguing that in a world shocked to silence, poetry can serve a crucial ameliorative role. While it is difficult not to sympathise with this position, at moments the analysis lacks complexity in its approach to the public, political and journalistic expression that rehearses horror as the inability to speak. The statement that 'words cannot express' such emotion is not only a register of the magnitude of pain, anger and sorrow experienced, it can also be (cynically speaking)

caught up in journalistic cliché, political rhetoric, even a form of public relations management.

Scientist Roger Beckmann proposes an alliance between literature and science against their common enemy of market-driven research priorities, while Paul Eggert importantly elaborates the severity with which the study of English in Australian universities has been depleted by the necessity for marketplace competitiveness instituted by John Dawkins' education 'reforms' of the late 1980s. Without recounting the substance of each of the essays that comprise this lively collection, a notable quality is the skill with which it has been put together. Diverse topics are arranged with a logical flow that builds an interesting overview of the place of literature in public, philosophical and personal contexts. After the more conceptual orientation of the early contributions, it is with pleasure that the reader approaches the later, text-focused essays, which address works including nineteenth-century novels (George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*), the early twentieth-century poetry of Christopher Brennan, and the recent fiction of writer and political activist Arundhati Roy. Overall the book offers a sophisticated and useful framework for thinking about the importance of literature – not just for its own sake – but in terms of much wider contemporary culture and thought.

Rachael Weaver is currently a creative fellow at the State Library of Victoria.

BEWITCHING SUBURBIA

GEORGIE ARNOTT

| Tim Winton: *The Turning* (Picador, \$46)

Tim Winton once commented that he wasn't interested in making "an ornament of despair", not wanting to "moan stylishly". His new collection of short stories, *The Turning*, is more comfortable with despair and represents Winton's most stylish and exciting work: it is realism out to capture the 'everyday', an endeavour with few proponents in Australian fiction. From Patrick White to *Kath & Kim*, suburban experience (particularly women's) has been ceaselessly caricatured but rarely understood. Andrew McCann has observed that postwar Australian writing is marked by anxieties about the

'everyday', manifested in "the compulsive need to escape the banality of the suburb".

The Turning argues that pain results not from suburban life itself, but from one's resistance towards a suburban model of happiness. Indeed, conformism can be liberating. In 'Small Mercies', Don and Marjorie, whose house "smelled of meat and potatoes and the strange lemony odour of old people", insist that a recently widowed Dyson eat with them, and "though he was sober Dyson felt as safe as a man with four drinks under his belt" in the "sleepy-warm" kitchen. The domestic landscape of

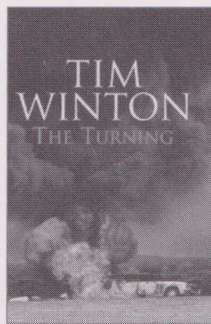
these stories (lounge rooms, cars, camping grounds) is rendered more dynamic – more ‘real’ – than simply the banal and the narcissistic.

For Winton, it is only close engagement with the everyday that allows one to float above it: a man becomes “mesmerised by the symmetry of [a] woman’s toes” as he swims laps at a public pool and a boy ritualistically enters a phone box to dial 1194 and hear “a BBC voice” announce the time, “a delicious thing”. Whereas *Cloudstreet* pushed the boundaries of ‘the real’, here familiar suburban territory is rendered strange and phantasmagoric through close examination.

Characters are damaged, emotionally and physically. A teenage Vic (who resurfaces in several stories) secretly longs for Strawberry Alison, a “shop-soiled beauty” whose face is half-covered by a crimson birthmark. ‘Damaged Goods’ is told from the perspective of Vic’s wife (who has been “told the story so many times”) and it becomes clear that Gail’s ‘damaged’ object of fascination is Vic himself. *Returning* to one’s own – and other’s – foundational moments remains a thematic link; more overt forms of interconnection are not overly self-conscious: they bestow context, a quality short stories often lack.

‘Big World’ is written in the present tense, replicating the emotional state of two friends who are “feverish with anticipation” on finishing school. After receiving their results, however, their “Saturday job at the meatworks becomes full-time” and the future seems unimaginable as the job and its associated ugliness consumes everything: “the smell isn’t good but that’s nothing compared with the feel of all those severed nostrils and lips and ears between your fingers”. It’s the ugly and messy details (both sensory and emotional) that make this book reek of ‘the real’. Dyson’s encounters with his former girlfriend, who is six months out of drugs and “blew smoke from the side of her mouth, the way she always had”, demonstrate how sex can appear as nothing more than a “small mercy”.

James Ley’s review for *ABR* bemoaned the “unreflective, monochromatic realism” of *The Turning* and – as is often touted against the genre – suggested it makes the characters appear naive. Winton is as non-judgemental of characters as seems possible but this is an emotionally mature – rather than unreflective – mode of writing. He draws out complexity and lets the audience decide. In the title story a woman endures her husband’s violence, finding solace in



Whereas *Cloudstreet* pushed the boundaries of ‘the real’, here familiar suburban territory is rendered strange and phantasmagoric through close examination.

a plastic snow-dome of Jesus. It is his physicality, rather than his spirituality, that mesmerises her: “she was seized by the look of him, his hair flying in the wind, the robe pulled back from his chest. He was all man”. Elsewhere, everyday objects such as a whisky bottle, a pair of earrings and a car wreck take on talismanic significance, becoming threatening and potent symbols. Moments of transformation – or ‘turnings’ – often revolve around such objects. A more orthodox form of transcendence also appears in ‘The Turning’, lending the depiction of domestic violence an uncomfortable ambiguity. Winton doesn’t shy away from the ordinary, unrelenting repetition of such struggles; Max and Raelene’s violent sexual encounters are punctuated with scenes of Raelene folding washing and boiling eggs.

None of this reflects the variety of *The Turning*. ‘Aquifer’ is the most consciously styled and invites (possibly too eagerly) metaphorical interpretation. The lives of an Aboriginal family, the Joneses (“who didn’t need much keeping up with”), illustrate the connection between past and present. In ‘On Her Knees’, Vic accompanies his mother on house-cleaning jobs, navigating the dynamics of class: “people . . . passed her around like a hot tip, but I resented how quickly they took her for granted”. Winton, though, takes nothing and no-one for granted. Whereas for many writers, the ‘everyday’ is either too dull or difficult to animate, Winton shows how it is actually the site of bewitching, beautiful and terrible experience.

Georgie Arnott is writing her MA on Australian poetry and teaches at Swinburne University.

FINDING THE TIME

JOHN McLAREN

| Robert Engwerda: *Backwaters* (Bystander Press, \$24.95)

Engwerda's novel shuttles back and forth between three times and three places – Northern Victoria, Melbourne, and the Western Coast. Each holds memories of trauma for its protagonist, Tom Lake-man, now a wearied teacher in the Melbourne school where one part of the action occurs.

Each of the places is fully realised. The sleepy country town where Tom grows up shows him fragments of its secrets but hides their meaning from him behind the walls of its houses, the disciplines of the schoolroom and the dust of the paddocks. In the school where he later teaches, the teachers try to respond to young minds, get on with the tedium of correction and cope with the gossip and intrigue among themselves. The beach promises holiday and recovery, but supplies the vacation politics of kids and landlords and the impasse of personal feelings grown stale.

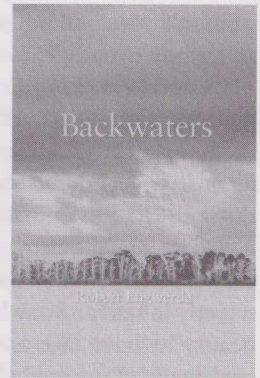
So far, so good. A competent realist novel about growing up, rites of passage, loss, the disappointments of adulthood and adultery. But Engwerda provides an extra dimension with the stories half-told, the people who intrude on the action only to disappear again into the unknown, the unfathomable. The Italian family on the outskirts, physically and socially, of the Northern Victorian town, for example. Tom makes friends with the boy, but then they are gone. In the Western Coast township the greenkeeper – another character whose story remains untold – tells him of the family that just disappeared. Tom's own father has also disappeared, and although Tom knows why, his fate remains a mystery. This dimension of mystery changes the events of the central story from mundane to existential. The choices Tom has forced upon him are not merely ways of coping with the disappointments of life, but the only fingerholds he has on the sanity that keeps him from the abyss. "They go missing easy in this country," the greenkeeper said. "At least they did then." His words refer directly to the bush, but metaphorically to Tom's life now and to his father's in the past.

He was the sum of a swirling storm of experience that had crashed on him from nowhere; his own

growing up, his family, and especially his father. Stephen. All of them were tangling him up in knots that he might not have been able to work himself free from, had the other thing not happened. Missing. They had gone missing on him, people who counted and fixed him in a time and place.

The "other thing", as becomes clear, is his betrayal of his wife and students, and its tragic result. The element of mystery in the novel keeps the reader waiting until the other elements of Tom's life have been set out to give the context in which the mystery has its meaning. The resolution of the book is not the solution to the mystery, but Tom's choice to escape from chance and make the meaning of his own life from the elements he has been given.

John McLaren is an *Overland* consulting editor.



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A GAP, ALAS, UNFILLED

MAX WATTS

Heidi Zogbaum: *Kisch in Australia – The Untold Story*
(Scribe, \$26.95)

There are, I believe, moments in history which create their own words, terms, concepts. Sometimes these persist in people's minds long after the original events have been forgotten. Ned Kelly: personal bulletproof armour. Gallipoli: a disastrous attempt to invade Turkey. Pig Iron Bob: Menzies. McCarthyism: American anti-communist hysteria. 1984: Orwell's Big-Brother-dominated future, a dictatorship where the Ministry of Truth rewrites yesterday's papers. And woe to those who remember the wrong past! In Australia, a not-fascist democracy, there is no such Ministry. But still, some of the past, once very well known, is 'gone'. Who today knows of the 'Scottish Gaelic Test'? Or Egon Erwin Kisch's landfall in Australia, his leg-breaking jump – on 13 November 1934 – from the *SS Strathaird* onto a Melbourne pier?

And yet sixty years ago the arrival, failed barring, imprisonment, deportation, stay and speeches of this Kisch, a German-writing, Jewish, Czech, communist, anti-fascist journalist, author and stirrer, made not only Kisch and his jump and his Scottish Gaelic test but also his till-then-hardly-known opponent, the new federal attorney-general Robert Menzies – household words for almost every Australian. And many, such as Wilfred Burchett, then and in the following decade, felt their own lives changed by this initially minor event. Some date the upswing of the Australian Left, particularly the then rapidly growing Communist Party, to his visit, and to the successful fight against his deportation.

Kisch had been invited as a key speaker to a November 1934 Melbourne Congress of the Movement Against War and Fascism, a then rather small, left-wing organisation supported by the Communist Party of Australia. Had the Australian government ignored his arrival, he would have spoken in Victoria to a few hundred, probably already convinced, anti-fascists. His message: 'Hitler is dangerous to us all, even you Australians', would have been ignored by most. As it was, thanks to the increasingly frantic, unsuccessful efforts of the Australian government to bar him, Kisch became famous, his words were heard by tens,



hundreds of thousands, in five states. But still, today the entire Kisch episode has disappeared into the memory trap, is no longer known.

Thus when I learned that the Melbourne writer and academic Heidi Zogbaum had written a new book, *Kisch in Australia*, I had great hopes that this would fill a woeful gap in Australian history. Reading her book I was puzzled. Not so much by her generally factual account, but by what I sensed as an undertone, a – this came to me as I re-read it – sympathetic snideness towards Kisch. Eventually I pinned this down, perhaps helped by one of her opinionated footnotes: "An earlier biography by Fritz Hoffman is useless because, working under the ideological restraints of the former East Germany, important aspects of Kisch's life, such as his connection to Willi Muenzenberg, could not be mentioned." This and some remarkable lacuna in the extensive bibliography and Marcus Patka's eighteen-page 'Afterword' (no mention of the major Kisch biography¹ published by the left-wing International Organisation of Journalists [IOJ] in still 'communist' Prague in 1985, nor of the yearly Kisch Prize awarded by the German magazine *Stern*) shows me a fundamental problem with the Zogbaum book: the author loves Kisch, but not his communism. Falsifying the second, communism, she perhaps unconsciously falsifies the first, Kisch.

And thus, unfortunately, this book does not really fill that gap in Australian history, does not explain how anti-fascism then led to the rise of the old Left, the Communist Party.

A pity. I await a further Kisch book, and/or perhaps a very overdue history of the life of Kisch's mate and communist comrade: John Fisher, 1910–1960, son of the ALP Prime Minister Andrew Fisher.

1. Tomas, Jiri & Danica Kozlova, *E.E. Kisch, Journalist and Fighter*, International Organisation of Journalists, Prague, 1985.

Max Watts is a semi-retired journalist, writer and stirrer.

THE USE AND ABUSE OF LAWSON

DAVID WOLSTENCROFT

Chris Lee: *City Bushman: Henry Lawson and the Australian Imagination* (Curtin University Press, \$29.95)

During the rise of One Nation there were calls for the forgetting of Henry Lawson and his cultural associations. Journalist Paul Kelly described Hansonism as “an echo of our Anglo-Celtic origins; the claims of the once mighty bush to define the Australian Legend; a descendant of the romanticism and racism of Henry Lawson whose hold on national identity was once so comprehensive”. Christopher Lee’s *City Bushman* challenges Kelly’s claim by arguing that cultural life in Australia has long experienced tensions between the city and the country, that Lawson’s work remains interesting and that “to overwrite our regional communities is another imperious act of dispossession”.

City Bushman is a study of the reception, exploitation and canonisation of Henry Lawson’s writing. It refuses to glorify the ‘genius’ of Lawson, or retreat problems of representation or ideology in his work. Instead it focuses on the role of institutions in creating, maintaining and aligning themselves with Lawson’s literary celebrity. The institutions studied vary dramatically in political persuasion; they were typically political parties, trade unions, cultural organisations, local arts festivals or education departments. Lee is also concerned with the way in which class-specific values affected the critical response to Lawson’s work and demonstrates that many interpretations of Lawson downplayed his politics and helped portray his writing as suitable for ‘good colonial readers’.

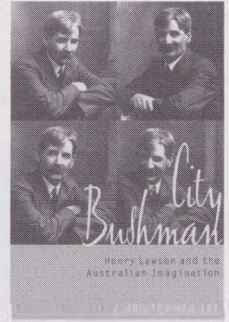
Perhaps the most famous figure to adopt Lawson for his own political ends was Prime Minister Billy Hughes, who advocated a State Funeral for Lawson. Lee rejects the claim that Lawson was awarded the funeral for his creative brilliance alone. Instead Hughes celebrated Lawson in order to highlight the similarities between the two men and to portray himself as an authentic Australian leader and friend

of the ‘bushman’. The State Funeral also enhanced Lawson’s social significance and ‘upgraded’ him from the arts pages to the mainstream news section of the newspaper. He quickly became a “remarkably useful form of authentic Australianness”. The Right acted to neutralise Lawson’s association with Hughes when conservative NSW Premier, Sir George Fuller, campaigned successfully for a memorial that would portray a respectable Lawson as ‘above’ politics.

Several decades later the Communist Party of Australia also became very interested in the representation and ‘message’ of Lawson. Although he showed little belief in revolutionary outcomes Lawson’s writing purportedly rooted the Communist Party’s ideals in an Australian tradition. Critical-realism, of which Lawson was a leading exponent, was seen as the product of a democratic, socialist, people’s movement in Australia. Furthermore his disinterest in parliamentary labour movements, and his lack of formal education or any model of ‘scientific’ socialism “ideally fitted him for the role of a people’s poet who had been desperately in need of the guidance of an informed and active communist party”.

While *City Bushman* is focused on the local sites around Lawson’s reception, in its discussion of nearly a century of literary criticism and celebrity-building it cannot but help to demonstrate the changing fortunes and cultural climate in which influential radical literary figures, such as *Bulletin* editor J.F. Archibald and *Overland* founding editor Stephen Murray-Smith, struggled to work against the mainstream. It also sheds light on the manner in which socialist literature in Australia has been variously sanitised and made ‘successful’, or patronised and rejected.

David Wolstencroft is studying history and creative writing at the University of Melbourne.



SHAPING HISTORY: AUSTRALIAN SPEECHES

DENNIS GLOVER

Rod Kemp & Marion Stanton (eds): *Speaking for Australia: Parliamentary Speeches that Shaped our Nation* (Allen & Unwin, \$35)

Sally Warhaft (ed.): *Well May We Say . . . The Speeches that made Australia* (Black Inc., \$34.95)

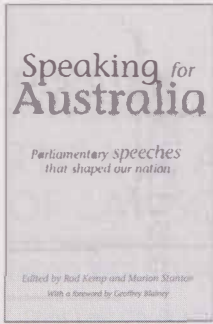
When I was appointed as speechwriter four years ago to then Labor leader Simon Crean, I had a smart idea. I'd compile a book of great Australian speeches, which I'd been collecting as inspiration and sources of quotes. It would sit nicely on speechwriters' and academics' desks, next to William Safire's *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History* and Don Watson's *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*. If I couldn't be even nearly as good as those two, I'd at least be next to them on the library shelves. So rather than sit at my desk watching Sky News to see who was stabbing my boss in the back that week, I spent the spare hours of long and soul-destroying parliamentary sittings in the parliamentary library, photocopying from Hansard, tracking down press clippings from the 1920s, and going to the documentary sources of the early years of settlement and Federation. It was going to be good. And I thought I'd add my own touch – using my acquaintance with living speechwriters and public figures to get the real story behind some of the great speeches, like who was responsible for Hawke's 'no child will live in poverty' miscalculation, and track down transcripts of long-forgotten orations, like Jim Cairns' long-lost 'we shall overcome' address to the Melbourne Moratorium March in May 1970. When I collected about three dozen speeches and wrote neat introductions to each, I prepared to write a preface on what makes them important and interesting, outlining the secret of what makes a great speech, before sending it off to a publisher, confident of a contract. It was, after all, such an obviously good and marketable idea.

Which is why it shouldn't have surprised me to find that others had got in before me.

First a librarian tipped me off that a Liberal Cabinet Minister was also compiling speeches. She couldn't tell me who. Then I heard that a friend who'd also written speeches in Paul Keating's office (not Don Watson) was publishing a book of speeches and had got a publisher's advance. He told me he'd heard that at least three others were also completing such a book. Another former speechwriter friend suggested to him a title – *Well May We Say*, a 'no-brainer' if ever there was one. In the end, both my friend and I had been beaten to the publishers, and our attempted books now stand on the shelves as dusty photocopies: no gleaming cover, no name on the spine, no royalties in the bank (although I've heard recently that this may still be coming out soon). It's a cautionary tale to anyone with a good publishing idea: get a contract *before* you do the work, and get the job done fast.

At the time of writing, at least three of these books of speeches have been published, including one by Michael Cathcart and Kate Darian-Smith in addition to the two reviewed here.

Of these two, that by Sally Warhaft (yes, with that title – *Well May We Say . . .*) is the most comprehensive. It's a well-organised and meticulously edited collection – that betrays an obvious debt to William Safire's method – and a reference that teachers, academics, political advisers and speechwriters will want next to their desks. Many of the most well-known Australian speeches are among the 125 reprinted, in edited form; from Captain Cook's orders to his men on board the *Resolution* in November 1778, to Jason McCartney's retirement announcement in June 2003. You'll find: Daniel Denihey's attack on



Many of the speeches contained neither ‘made Australia’ nor are great pieces of oratory, which makes a lie of the book’s subtitle, if not its obvious intent of including a cross-section of important and sometimes memorable speeches.

W.C. Wentworth’s proposed “Bunyip aristocracy”; all the key (but at times eye-glazing) speeches of Federation; all the declarations of war and warlike intent (Fisher’s “our last man and our last shilling”; Menzies’ “it’s my melancholy duty to inform you”; Harold Holt’s “all the way with LBJ”); the great moments (Whitlam’s “Well may we say, God Save the Queen” – yes, that phrase again); as well as the not so great (Calwell’s “two Wongs don’t make a white”).

But as the ‘speeches’ by Cook and McCartney (mentioned above) indicate, the book has a minor problem. Many of the speeches contained neither ‘made Australia’ nor are great pieces of oratory, which at odds with the book’s subtitle, though not its obvious intent of including a cross-section of important and sometimes memorable speeches. In fact many are not even speeches. Jason McCartney’s, for instance, is an excerpt from an interview that’s partly about telling us he’s going to have a few beers with the boys after the game. Significant? Made Australia? It’s at least given us a comprehensive documentary collection that tells us something about the Australian psyche.

There are many great speeches in Australian history, in fact, many more than appear in Warhaft’s book. Here are two off the top of my head: Neville Wran’s moving eulogy to Lionel Murphy in October 1986 (“No-one spoke more vigorously, so consistently, or for so long . . . against the whole apparatus by which [our] rights and freedoms are attacked . . . He was my mate.”); and Kim Beazley’s 2001 election concession speech in which he paraphrased Lincoln to appeal to the better angels of our nature. You don’t have to like the speakers to acknowledge that, rhetorically, it was stirring and moving stuff.

Which leads me to Warhaft’s claim that speech-making has been in decline, especially since Paul Keating retired. Has it ever been healthier? Just because John Howard is intentionally boring and ordinary doesn’t mean that fewer great speeches were made in the past decade than at any time in our history. Even Howard has had his moments, especially in his early wounding attacks on Keating. (“He has strutted the stage. He has behaved as though he presides like a triumphal, successful emperor over the greatest economy the world has ever seen.”) Warhaft herself includes some excellent recent speeches, including William Deane’s eulogy to the young Australians who drowned at Interlaken, and Pauline Hanson’s first parliamentary speech. The latter may have been evil, but it was perhaps the best crafted piece of pure rhetoric in modern Australian history, with all the technical touches that would have made Demosthenes or Cicero proud (such as the empathy and pathos of “I may be only ‘a fish and chip shop lady’”; or the nice contrapunt in “if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country”; or the Jeremiad-like peroration “Wake up Australia, before it’s too late”). This example perhaps alerts us too to a problem with good rhetoric: it’s not always unequivocally good for democracy. The most effective speech in modern Australian history – John Howard’s 2001 election launch tirade “we decide who comes here and the circumstances in which they come” – proves that sometimes, especially where dark passions are involved, silence is far more eloquent.

This leads me to disagree with the underlying sentiment of Warhaft’s introduction, that Austral-

ians just aren't as good at high-blown rhetoric as, say, Americans. She writes that we have a native style that objects to splendid oratory, and universities in which most undergraduates couldn't cite a single important speech, whereas their American counterparts would all know something of the Gettysburg Address. Perhaps at Harvard and NYU, but how many others could get much past "four score and seven years ago"? It may be true we have a different style, but if you take into account the fact that the US has a population twenty times as large as ours and a settlement history nearly three hundred years longer, we do very respectably. Nothing I heard in the 2004 US presidential election was noticeably more stirring or less tedious than what our own leaders were saying at the same time.

The second collection of speeches discussed here, by Liberal Cabinet Minister Rod Kemp and political adviser Marion Stanton, restricts itself only to the *parliamentary* speeches that shaped our nation. Drawn exclusively from Hansard, this is a useful textbook for those wanting to cite the reasoning behind the great pieces of legislation and the executive actions that determined the evolution of the Commonwealth: the first parliament; the establishment of the High Court; the exclusion of Aborigines from the franchise and the inclusion of women in it; the fights between free traders and fair traders; bank nationalisation; the Petrov Royal Commission; the Communist Party Dissolution Bill; the 1967 Referendum and others. There are notable omissions, like the debates on conciliation and arbitration legislation in the first decade of Federation.

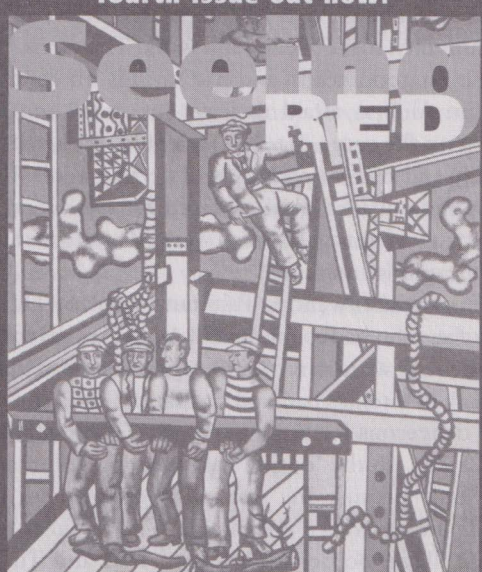
The choice of speeches included becomes more contentious when we reach more recent decades. Does anyone really want to read a stock standard Peter Costello attack on Labor over the GST? And the inclusion of a heartfelt but in no way extraordinary speech by former Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, John Herron, about the death of his Down Syndrome affected daughter, is just a little indulgent. (One of course can share the sentiment without putting it in a collection like this.)

There's an unspoken theme in these later speeches. Reading only this collection, you would get the impression that the modern Liberal Party from the 1960s on was the real champion of homosexuals, Indigenous Australians and non-discriminatory immigration; and that they alone stood up to Pauline

Hanson – although the choice of an anti-Hanson speech by Nationals Senator Bill O'Chee is surprisingly good, if unrepresentative of his party ("In hundreds of schools around this country young Australians watched the clock in fear as the minute hand clicked closer to lunchtime"). If this was a truly representative sample of important contemporary parliamentary speeches, we'd have some of John Howard's desperate efforts during the *Tampa* crisis and also the attack by his hatchet man, Senator Bill Heffernan, on Justice Michael Kirby. Perhaps unable to face down John Howard in the party room, Rod Kemp is using this book to fly the flag for that lost cause – the liberal wing of the Liberal Party. I guess one benefit of this collection is that it reminds us of what the Liberal Party once was or at least liked to think it was.

Dennis Glover is a former speechwriter to Simon Crean, Mark Latham and others. His most recent book is *Orwell's Australia: From Cold War to Culture War*, Scribe, 2003.

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ONE HAPPY ENDING

FIONA CAPP

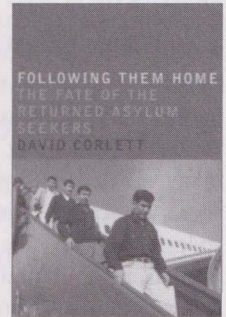
David Corlett: *Following Them Home: The Fate of the Returned Asylum Seekers* (Black Inc., \$24.95)

When I was reading David Corlett's gutsy account of the fate of returned asylum seekers, an Afghan friend of mine was waiting to hear whether his appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal had been successful. If it was unsuccessful, he had decided he would not go to the courts. He would return to Afghanistan.

As I read *Following Them Home* I was forced to confront the fact that my friend might find himself in the same position as the 'broken men' documented here. The terrible irony of this powerful and disturbing book is that the 'breaking' of these refugees began in detention camps in Australia. In a very telling moment during Corlett's time in Kabul last year, he was talking to a Hazara Afghan, Qasim Ali, who had spent two years in detention on Nauru. During the conversation, they were joined by two returnees from the UK who had not been held in detention and had been able to live in the community, make friends and work. They were, as a result, in good health and had savings. In contrast, Qasim Ali was afraid to leave his room and was often on the verge of tears. He could not locate his family and had no prospects of getting a job. If he ventured outside Kabul, he faced getting caught up in factional fighting between warlords and the threat of unexploded mines.

Corlett also went to Pakistan to talk to Hazara refugees who had spent time in Australian detention centres and who on return to Afghanistan had found that their families had fled or that the situation was too dangerous for them to remain. These refugees had taken up the 'option' of returning voluntarily, but only because the Australian government had made life on Nauru unbearable. The refugees then made illegal border crossings to Iran and Turkey where they were beaten severely and sent back to Pakistan. Corlett argues convincingly that Australian authorities must bear some responsibility for the plight of these men because they knew there was a 'reasonable likelihood' that the refugees would need to flee and would be mistreated when attempting to do so.

For Corlett, the Australian public's response to refugees has been one of mean-spirited indifference.



Along with the desperate stories of Iranian refugees rejected by Australia, Corlett profiles two families who have been shattered by the detention experience – the Afghan Bakhtiyaris and the Kadems from Iraq – and forced to return to hostile and hopeless environments. It is evident that both families were punished by the Australian authorities for speaking out and for rebelling against the humiliations of the system. Corlett never attempts to portray them as purely innocent victims but movingly captures the human complexities of their particular tragedies, exposing the terrible psychological, emotional and physical cost of an inflexible, Kafkaesque system.

For Corlett, the Australian public's response to refugees has been one of mean-spirited indifference. Australians' generosity toward the tsunami victims, he argues, only highlights the superficiality of our charity. We are happy to throw money at 'passive', 'good' victims somewhere far away, but cannot cope with the more complex moral and humanitarian demands made upon us by refugees on our soil.

While there are no happy endings for the refugees in *Following Them Home*, at least I can report one. My Afghan friend has recently learned that his appeal to the RRT has been successful. He can now dare to think about the future. He is studying at the moment and hopes to become a teacher. Our children can only benefit from the hard-earned wisdom that he will bring to the task.

Fiona Capp is a writer, tutor and reviewer. Her award-winning *That Oceanic Feeling* was published by Allen & Unwin in paperback in 2005.

SIEV X: AN AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT

MANY READERS of my book *A Certain Maritime Incident: the sinking of SIEV X* (Scribe, 2004, see review in *Overland* 177, 2004) may have wondered about what happened after the book came out.

In talks around Australia organised by my publisher and by local refugee support organisations, I found a generous welcome for the book. No author could ask for more generous or thoughtful public support for an inevitably controversial and political book. Most reviewers of the text thought well of it.¹ But there were unexpected areas of public silence about it. Professional journals of defence, police, public administration, law and politics generally ignored it. And then there were three highly-placed condemnations.

First came a hard-hitting negative review by the Anglican Bishop to the ADF, Dr Tom Frame. It appeared soon after the book's publication, in two prestigious journals: *Public Administration Today*, the journal of the Canberra branch of the Australian Institute of Public Administration; and *Defender*, the journal of the Australian Defence Association.² A second lengthy negative review, by Dr Jennifer Clarke of the Law Faculty of the Australian National University, appeared later in the online *Journal of Australian Studies Review of Books*.³ In the general press, one review in the *Canberra Times* by Professor Patrick Weller AO, Director of the Centre for Governance and Public Policy, Griffith University, would have had particular weight with government and defence professionals.⁴ Weller's review deftly combined authority with ambiguity:

So far, given the choice between the extensive sting and ensuing cover-up on the one hand, and a tragic stuff-up on the other, I tend towards Murphy in still being persuaded by the latter. [...] At times this is a hard book to read; part detailed evidence, part speculation, part condemnation. In the end the

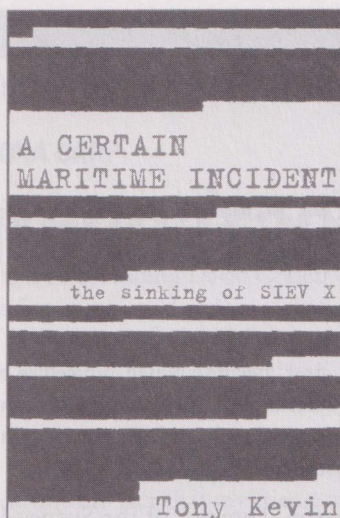
message is not clear, because Kevin himself is not clear if, and to what extent, Australia was involved. There are questions, details and suggestions. It is an unfinished prosecution case.

Gerard Henderson, Director of the Sydney Institute, reproduced Weller's review in his Sydney Institute house journal.⁵ Henderson himself did not review the book. He initially referred to it briefly in an opinion piece he wrote in the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* in early August 2004 (one week after my book came out), criticising the "Group of 43" open letter protesting at current directions in Australian foreign policy. Henderson used my membership of the signatory group (former senior Australian diplomats and military figures), as an excuse to damn the group as a whole:

Take former diplomat Tony Kevin, for example. Robert Manne's edited collection *The Howard Years* contains a chapter by Kevin in which he refers to "the unexplained sinking of the grossly overloaded SIEV X in international waters patrolled by Australia, during which 353 people drowned, and a dereliction in practice of legally binding protocols for the rescue of all persons in distress at sea". The clear implication is the Australian Defence Force was complicit in the failure to rescue men, women and children drowning at sea.⁶

Later that same day, Prime Minister Howard drew on Henderson's material in replying to an Opposition question in Parliamentary Question Time about the Group of 43 letter, saying:

The 43 people comprise a mixture of people who have over the years been, in some cases, regular critics of this government. They include one person who accused the Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Federal Police of complicity in the drowning of 353 refugees. To expect for a moment



that I am going to treat that person with the sort of reverence that is asked of me by the Leader of the Opposition – as far as I am concerned I have dealt with the merits of their arguments.⁷

The political signal Howard sent by this condemnation of me would have registered with those whose professions require them to keep abreast of the Prime Minister's views. His message to them: give any currency or credence to Tony Kevin's questions about SIEV X and I will publicly denounce you along with him.

At around this same time, the BBC World Service invited me to give a four-minute radio interview, setting out the book's main case. After a couple of days' delay, in which the BBC invited Senator Brandis to respond on behalf of the Australian government, both interviews aired on the BBCWS news and current affairs program *The World Today* on 24 August 2004. But strangely, they only ran for two early-morning broadcasts. They were removed from the program before its third daily edition, rebroadcast in Australia on ABC Radio National. It took me eight weeks of repeated requests to finally obtain from the BBC tapes of these two interviews that were never heard in Australia.⁸

Months later, after the book's initial sales impetus had passed, Henderson published in his Institute journal a lengthy argument he and I had had by emails in August–September 2004 following his misleading allegations (quoted above) about my book.⁹ He declined to debate SIEV X with me or to offer a speaking forum in the Sydney Institute. But

in finally deciding to publish our full correspondence (I had not asked him to do this), he was to his credit prepared to expose some of the public issues for his readers.

For Henderson, as for Frame and Clarke, it seemed difficult to understand the simple proposition on which my case rested: that in any decent society that places a proper value on protecting human life, there is an unarguable public-interest coronial obligation on government to explore these unexplained deaths of 353 people in Australia's Operation Relex maritime zone, at the time of an admitted Australian people-smuggling disruption program in Indonesia aimed at stopping such voyages, and an active intelligence-based maritime surveillance and interception military operation being conducted in that zone. Nor did any of these three critics mention the public history of the Senate's repeated motions between 2002–2004, demanding a judicial enquiry into SIEV X and the disruption program.

Henderson, Frame and Clarke all skilfully misrepresented my case for a judicial inquiry, as nothing more than a series of speculative allegations against the ADF and AFP. Frame argued that my sources of evidence were suspect and that other, more innocuous explanations were equally plausible, though he did not volunteer what these might be. Clarke found my book "not a great read", a book that was either excessively personal or that "plods through minutiae like a public service memorandum". Frame wrote that its speculations had cruelly distressed loyal and decent ADF professionals, many of whom were his own acquaintances. Clarke wrote that my under-researched, over-analysed attempts to explain the sinking of SIEV X could have harmed rather than helped traumatised survivors and bereaved families. She concluded: "While it appears that Kevin was justified in pursuing his concerns before the Senate inquiry, without better evidence he is not (yet) justified in turning them into a book". Frame's hostile review was likely to be read and respected by senior defence and public service professionals, given his moral authority as Anglican Bishop to the ADF. It became, in effect, the 'authorised version' of the SIEV X story.

Now, as far as Australia's national security and governance establishment is concerned, it is as if my SIEV X book does not exist. It has effectively

been escorted out of the official frame of reference, like a badly behaved guest at an official function. I believe that these negative reviews were essentially written, not with intent to join in any real debate with me on the SIEV X issue, but to lay down clear exclusion markers for senior public service and defence professionals. The merits of my argument, or even its basic facts, were really irrelevant. As Howard had effectively made clear in Parliament, for senior government servants this was a forbidden book. The reviews by Frame and Clarke had substantiated that message.

Phillip Adams gracefully discussed the book with me on ABC Radio National's flagship public issues commentary program *Late Night Live*.¹⁰ A wide range of ABC regional radio stations gave generous air-time as I travelled around the country introducing the book. But major print-media luminaries – people like Paul Kelly, Laurie Oakes, Michelle Grattan – did not refer to SIEV X, even as they continued to refer occasionally to *Tampa*, children overboard, children in immigration detention, and the Rau and Solon detention abuses.

For leading commentators, to cite the words 'SIEV X' in any political commentary – even more so, to devote any serious analysis to it – might be seen as acts of defiance of the Howard Government, that would be remembered. Most people who rely on regular working access to the apparatus of government were too prudent to indulge in unnecessary heroics in the cause of throwing more public light on what by that stage may have seemed to them a minor – albeit regrettable – historical incident. Most people who mattered played it safe: they conveniently forgot SIEV X.

The Howard Government used its agenda-setting power to sanitise Australia's border protection history in 2000–2001, to 'disremember' the disturbing history of SIEV X, and to recontextualise its own recorded border protection abuses within the convenient new reality of Islamist-jihadist terrorism. In spite of all the Senate's specific questions and motions, a soft critique of Australia's 2000–2001 border protection operations took public hold. This story admitted a few vaguely discomfiting memories of *Tampa* and children overboard, but both stories were only partially told, excluding harsh facts: e.g., as to how Australian Coastwatch deliberately ignored for twenty-four hours the *Palapa* passengers' need of rescue, and

as to how Operation Relex criminally ordered HMAS *Adelaide* to risk for twenty-two hours the lives of the *Olong* passengers. Senators Collins and Bartlett had brought such shaming facts to light in 2002, and David Marr and Marian Wilkinson had helped publicise them, but they were soon forgotten. In the same way, the facts of SIEV X that briefly surfaced in mid-2002 soon largely ceased to exist outside refugee rights circles. The Howard Government had sold to Australia at large its own sanitised reality of its war on boat people: that it had stopped the boat people coming, using legal means, and that this was a good outcome.

My questions about the sinking of SIEV X did gain stronger credibility in 2004 and 2005, as a result of a large body of survivor testimonies in a SIEV X-related criminal trial in Brisbane, in which Khaleed Daoed was sentenced to nine years in an Australian prison as a people smuggler. Daoed's defence team adopted a conservative defence strategy, trying simply (and without success) to discredit the reliability of Crown witnesses' memories. It is clear that the jury found the SIEV X survivors credible witnesses. Apart from Daoed, who had asked to testify, the defence called no witnesses. They were aware of my book from previous correspondence and a meeting, but they did not go down the riskier path of seeking to call Australian witnesses (e.g. AFP Commissioner Keely, or Kevin Enniss) who might have testified on the Australian government's people-smuggling disruption program and what contacts it might have had with Daoed's associate Abu Quassey (now serving a seven-year sentence in Egypt for accidental homicide and people smuggling in respect of SIEV X) or with those senior Indonesian police who helped him. The disruption program was never mentioned in the court. Perhaps it would not have helped Daoed if it had been; but to me, this further emphasised the wasted opportunity of the whole proceedings.

Importantly, in their separate public statements around this time, Immigration Minister Senator Vanstone and Justice Minister Senator Ellison each referred to the sinking of SIEV X as having taken place 'in international waters'. Senator Vanstone in answer to Senate question number 431, "SIEV X", by Senator Brown, recorded in Senate Hansard 14 June 2005, referred to SIEV X as "an illegal venture out of another country with the tragedy occurring in international waters". Senator Ellison stated, in his

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Media Release E070/05 of 8 June 2005, "Government welcomes SIEV X People Smuggler Conviction": "In October 2001, the vessel known as Siev-X (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel-Unknown) sank en-route to Australia from Indonesia in international waters, resulting in the death of 353 people".

This was the first time the government had accepted the truth of what Marg Hutton and I had been claiming for years. But neither Minister explained on what basis the government had changed its previous stance, that it was impossible to know where SIEV X had sunk.

Other things happened to re-ignite the SIEV X issue in 2005. Hannie Rayson's controversial play *Two Brothers*, a political thriller, aroused a storm of mainstream media criticism when it opened in Melbourne and Sydney in prestige city theatres. This was not fringe theatre that could be safely ignored: it had to be discredited.

The attack opened with two extraordinarily nasty personal diatribes against the play and its author by Andrew Bolt in the Melbourne tabloid *Herald Sun*. The hostile critics could not forgive Rayson for a key fictional plot element – that an Australian navy ship had come on the scene of the sinking but had been instructed by a government minister in Canberra to take no action to save survivors. They rebuked Rayson for slandering the ADF by not "sticking to the facts" which were, they claimed, that the Senate had fully exonerated the ADF from any role in the failure to save the lives of SIEV X passengers. Once again, mainstream media conveniently ignored the whole history of Senate demands for a judicial inquiry. They did not want readers to be reminded of how uncomfortably close to truth Rayson's play was, so they took refuge in the government's constructed 'reality' that it had been exonerated.

Few spoke up for Rayson's play. She had written on a forbidden theme and thus had to undergo exemplary societal punishment. No-one defended her play in print except Hilary McPhee and I in the *Age* letters page. I later wrote a longer review essay

for Margo Kingston's Webdiary.¹¹ The play ran long seasons to full houses in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra. It succeeded by word of mouth. But as far as mainstream media critics were concerned, it was an artistic failure. It will be interesting to see if it will be published as a play text, or if it will ever play again in Australia.

Over the past three years, I have seen two opposing trends in public response to the SIEV X issue. On the positive side, the reality of many ordinary people in Australia coming into sustained human contact with boat people (mainly Afghan and Iraqi), both those thousands out in the community on Temporary Protection or Bridging Visas, and through visiting people in detention, humanised the faces of these victims of Australian bureaucratic cruelty. Protests at the inhumane treatment of refugees swelled, especially in Liberal Party and National Party ranks.

After huge publicity regarding the Cornelia Rau and Vivian Solon detention/deportation 'bungles' (actually, sustained processes of official cruelty and cover-up involving large numbers of officials), a newly rediscovered Australian liberalism found political expression at last in the moral revolt in 2005 of seven Liberal Party backbenchers, ably led by Petro Georgiou and Judi Moylan, that finally forced John Howard to accept the need for real changes in DIMIA immigration control philosophy and practice. One embarrassing DIMIA detention or deportation scandal followed another into the public arena on an almost daily basis. It was as if a dam had broken: a whole range of pent-up horror stories came to light. The whole nasty political-bureaucratic culture of deterrent detention of boat people – aptly condemned by Julian Burnside as a disreputable doctrine of hostage-taking – now came under sustained attack.

I hoped that in the current furore of exposures of DIMIA detention and deportation abuses, some Senators might also remember DIMIA's suspect border protection record. I sent as gifts to all the members of the new 2005 Senate (to incoming and

'old' members) a copy of my book. I also lodged a submission with the newly set-up Senate Committee Inquiry into DIMIA's administration and operation of the Migration Act. In this, I asked the Committee to do three things: first, to review the activities of the Border Control and Compliance Division, with a view to preventing possible SIEV X-type tragedies in any future Australian government people-smuggling disruption operations (an activity for which DIMIA together with AFP was still by its own admission responsible). Second, I asked the Committee to reaffirm the Senate's demand that the AFP and DIMIA publicly release their lists of the SIEV X dead. Third, I asked the Committee to renew the Senate's calls in 2002–2004 for a judicial inquiry into the sinking of SIEV X and the disruption program. These seemed to me to be modest and achievable objectives. I was pleased when my submission was accepted and published by the Senate.

On the negative side, the series of terrorist attacks on Western targets that followed 11 September 2001 – the Bali, Madrid, Australian Embassy in Jakarta, and London transport bombings, and the way those events were framed in the Australian media – accentuated public fear in Australia of the Muslim religion and of Muslim people. SIEV X survivors and bereaved – mostly Muslims from Iraq – are in Australia living in this now far harsher, more suspicious public climate. It is not a climate congenial to demands for SIEV X accountability. The victims here of SIEV X will, prudently, keep their heads down as most of them have done for the past four years. No political party seriously interested in wresting power from John Howard, no Liberal alternative leader even, will touch the SIEV X issue. Certainly the Labor Party under Kim Beazley will not touch it. It is, for the major parties, irrelevant history now.

Perhaps, we may one day see a brave whistleblower begin to open up official secrets about the sinking of SIEV X. Until then, my book has laid down an historical marker. It has helped SIEV X survivors and bereaved in Australia to understand the context of what might have happened to their families. It will be a reference point for them. I am reasonably confident that the memory of SIEV X is firmly lodged in Australian public history. It may take time for academic specialists in Australian governance and defence to pick up the ball, but enough members of the public now know that something

very big and sad happened here – and that Australia has to own it. It rather reminds me of the way in which local people in the countryside know exactly where the big settler killings of Aboriginal people took place; information that doesn't always get into the officially approved histories, but that people still know. The strenuous efforts of Howard supporters to discredit and expunge from Australian memory the very name of SIEV X have, I believe, failed. When John Howard's career as Prime Minister is written about, by any Australian historians worth their salt, the sinking of SIEV X will be in the index – because it was on Howard's watch that these 353 innocent people died. John Howard has his own black armband to wear now.

1. Reviews I noted were: Antony Loewenstein, 'A Certain Maritime Incident', *Sun-Herald*, 29 August, 2004; Patrick Weller, 'An angry take on the deaths of 353 boat people', *Canberra Times Panorama*, 4 September 2004; Sarah Stephen (ed.), 'Behind the sinking of the SIEV X', *Green Left Weekly*, 15 September 2004; Louise Dodson, chief political correspondent, 'Quest to keep truth and honesty afloat', *Sydney Morning Herald Spectrum*, 11–12 September 2004; Gavin Mooney, 'A Certain Maritime Incident: the Sinking of SIEV X', *Online Opinion*, 28 September, 2004; Damien Kingsbury, 'Not a Given', *Australian Book Review*, October 2004; Chelsea Rodd, 'Review of A Certain Maritime Incident: the sinking of the SIEV X', *Journal of Australian Studies, Online Review of Books* 28, October 2004; Scott Burchill, 'Digging for the submerged truth', *Age*, Review Section, 23 October 2004; Edmund Campion, 'Books etcetera: Art by Kate Durham, and A Certain Maritime Incident', *Online Catholics – an independent E journal*, 1 December 2004; Louise Crowe, 'Disturbing Questions', *Eureka Street*, July–August 2005. An amended print version of Mooney's review later appeared in the *Journal of the Australian Centre for Maritime Studies*, Nov/Dec 2004, p.139.
2. Tom Frame, 'SIEV X and Public Ethics', *Public Administration Today*, September–November 2004, pp.87–90. A slightly longer version of the same review ran in *Defender*, Spring 2004, pp.39–41.
3. Dr Jennifer Clarke, 'Book Review: A Certain Maritime Incident', *JAS Review of Books* 30, February 2005.
4. Pat Weller, 'An angry take on the deaths of 353 boat people', *Canberra Times*, 4 September, 2004.
5. Gerard Henderson, 'Documentation 3', *Sydney Institute Quarterly*, (24:8:3&4), December 2004.
6. Gerard Henderson, 'Coalition of the Political', *Age*, 10 August 2004.
7. House of Representatives Hansard, p.32552, 10 August.
8. Interview transcripts are on my website, www.tonykevin.com: 'The need for a SIEV X judicial inquiry – a recent discussion on the BBC World Service', *The World Today*, 24 August 2004, broadcast interviews with Tony Kevin and Senator George Brandis, as transcribed from BBC tapes received by Tony Kevin by post on 11 October 2004.
9. Henderson, op.cit., endnote 5.
10. *ABC Radio National Late Night Live*, 18 August 2004: unofficial transcript on <www.tonykevin.com/PhillipAdams.html>.
11. 'Hannie Rayson's "Two Brothers" – the play, and the reviewing history', <webdiary.smh.com.au>, 27 July 2005. See also my letter in *Australian Book Review*, August 2005.

Tony Kevin is author of *A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of SIEV X* (Scribe, 2004).

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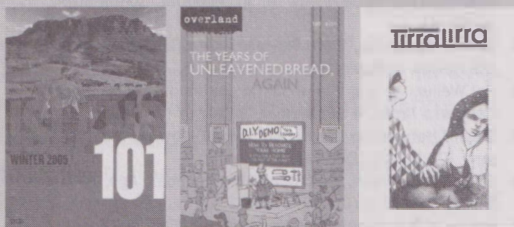
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On the day Hurricane Katrina hit, New Orleans' main newspaper, the *Times-Picayune*, declared about the impending disaster: "No one can say they didn't see it coming." On 1 September, the Thursday after the hurricane hit on the Monday, President Bush stated "I don't think anyone anticipated the breach of the levees".

Peter Holding, 'The Hurricane, the USA, & Us'

Feminist arguments are part of the arsenal of conservative politicians – Bishop and Panopoulos in Australia, Schavan in Germany – who identify the hijab as a symbol of Muslim difference and then deem it an act of defiance or of Muslim proselytising.

*Heather Merle Benbow,
"False Tolerance" or False Feminism?:
Hijab Controversies in Australia & Germany'*

I think if you come from an oppositional politics, or from a left-wing politics, you can be labelled with the term 'political writer' in a way conservative writers don't have to think about. It's assumed that their work is not political.

Christos Tsiolkas in conversation with Patricia Cornelius, 'Politics, Faith & Sex'

If you have done something extreme, look good, and can talk a blue streak . . . oh, I'm forgetting, if you can also write what passes for literary prose, then you can sell books. It also helps to be a celebrity.

*Lucy Sussex, 'Furniture or Must-reads?
A Quarterly Account of Australian Fiction'*

Hate, piety, paradise and hell are all part of the human condition, and none of the modern sciences has succeeded in rationalising them away. After a century of conflict over political ideology, people still kill and oppress one another. Righteousness has triumphed over conscience. Tsiolkas is by no means celebrating this; on the contrary, it is the stuff of his nightmare.

*Christen Cornell, 'Christos Tsiolkas'
Dead Europe: A Symposium'*

Negri provides us with key ideas about the modern state, about the dynamics of globalisation, about resistance, about labour and its creativity, about the method of social theory; and he gives us, almost in passing, fundamental insights into contemporary neo-liberalism.

RW Connell, 'Profile: Antonio Negri'

Going into that prison to visit Mumia on death row shaped my work on *The Many-Headed Hydra*. Here I was writing about violence, terror, and death in the origins and rise of capitalism, and of course these are the facts of daily life on death row.

Marcus Rediker, 'In the Belly of the Beast'

I collected about three dozen speeches and wrote neat introductions to each . . . It was, after all, such an obviously good and marketable idea. Which is why it shouldn't have surprised me to find that others had got in before me.

*Dennis Glover, 'Shaping History:
Australian Speeches'*

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