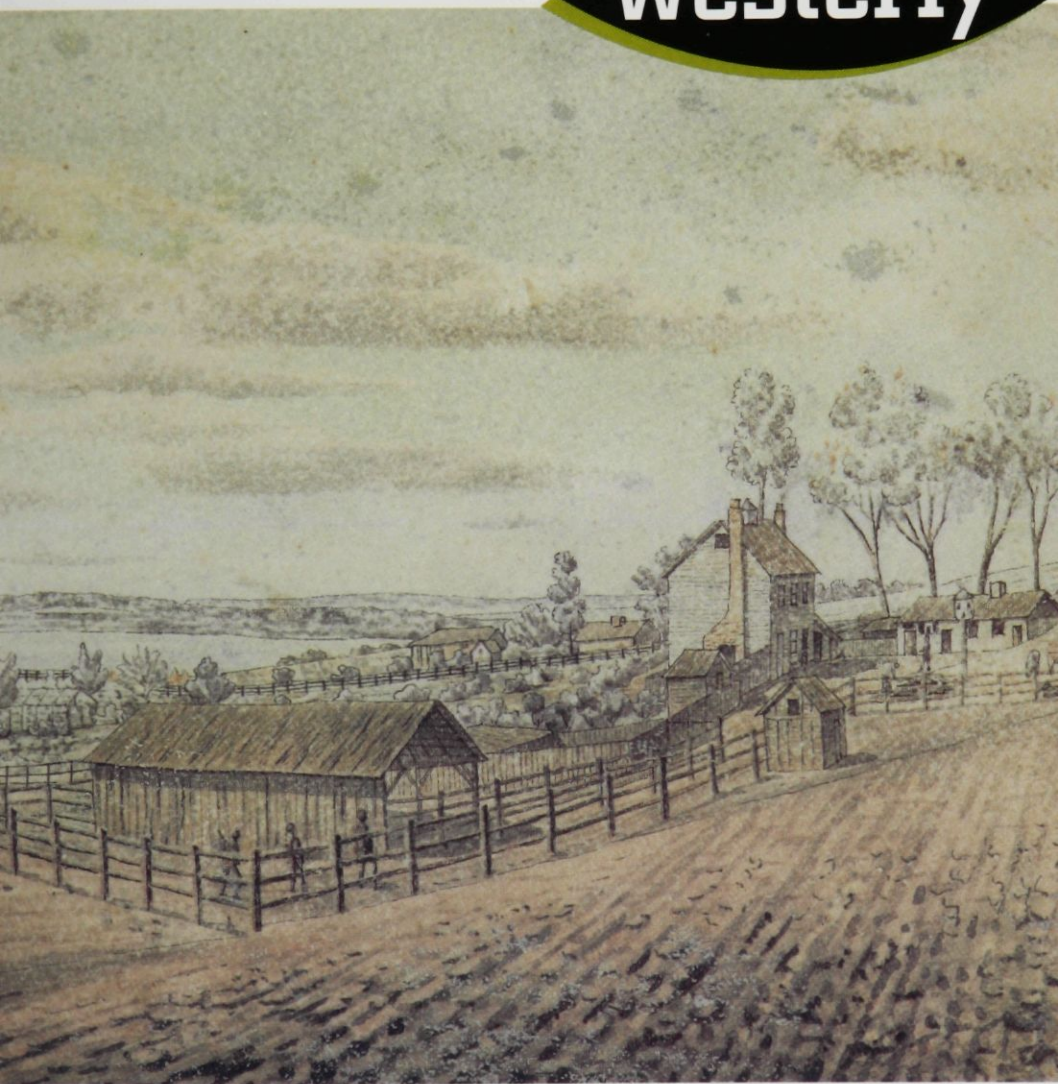


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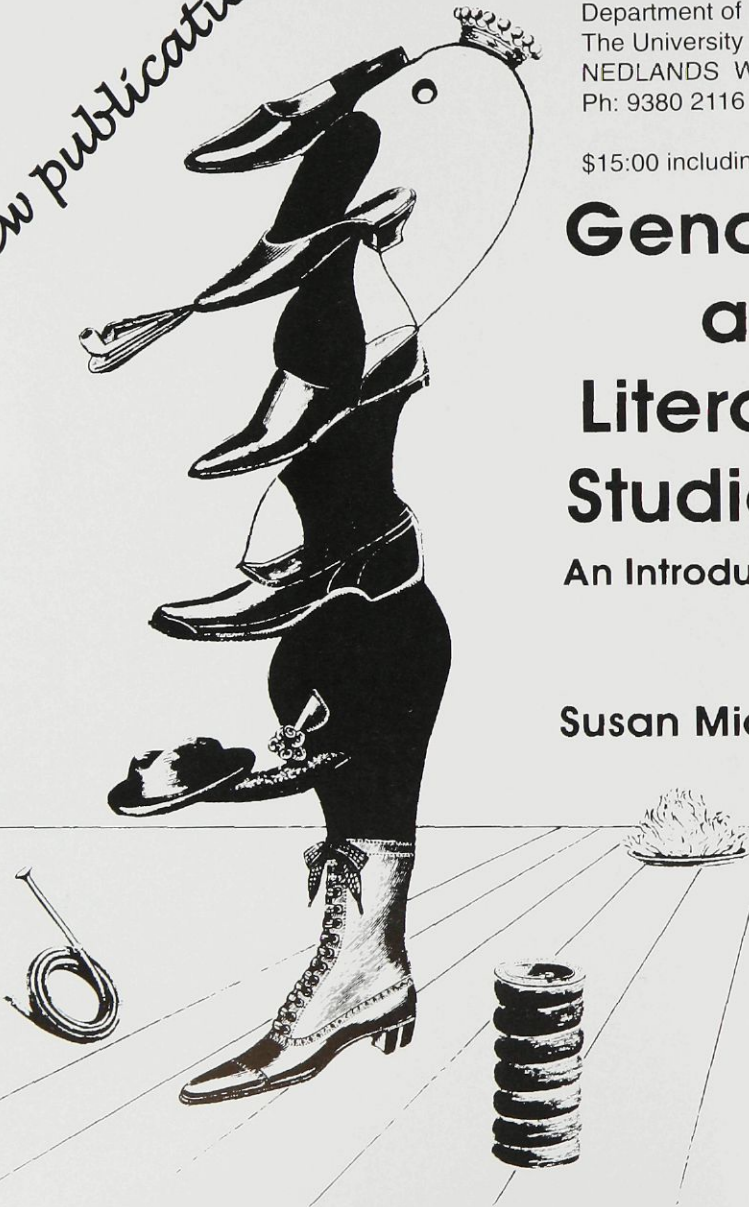
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Gender and Literary Studies: An Introduction

Susan Midalia



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Announcement

During recent years *Westerly*, like many other Australian literary magazines, has had to survive a number of financial crises. This has again been true in 1999, when government funding cutbacks to universities have resulted in the withdrawal of administrative support for the magazine. As a result, the Editors have undertaken a long investigation of all the possibilities for *Westerly's* future.

We are pleased to announce that this future will be an exciting one for *Westerly* writers and readers, as the year 2000 will mark a milestone in the magazine's history. From 2000, *Westerly* will be affiliated with John Kinsella's magazine *Salt* and Folio Press. Each magazine will be published annually, *Westerly* in November/December, in a volume of approximately 200 pages. Subscribers will be able to take either *Westerly* or *Salt*, or both. *Westerly* will continue to cover literature and culture in Australia (especially Western Australia) and the Indian Ocean region. *Salt* will continue to cover literature and culture in Australia, Europe and the USA.

This new affiliation and structure will give *Westerly* much wider distribution, and a broader and more international profile, putting it in a unique position among Australian literary magazines.

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ACLALS 2001

The 12th Triennial Conference of ACLALS will be held in Canberra, Australia, from 9th to 14th July 2001, at the Rydges Canberra Hotel (Lakeside)

THEME

Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the Commonwealth.

Opening Session on Monday 9th July 2001, will take place at the Great Hall, Parliament House.

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The Snake-Charmer

There was just the two of them on the hundred acre spread which the drought had blasted to dust. The house was nothing flash, just a big ramshackle weather-board crusted with scabs of paint; must give the old place a few coats her father was always saying. Down the back was the orchard where she sometimes went to play, mounding the crumbling earth or dragging a twig through dirt. Once there had been peach and pear and apple trees and luxuriant strands of grapes but the drought had killed them all. The only tree left was the walnut and it hunched like an old man, branches straggling greyly towards the sun. Every year its fruit dropped to the ground and rotted into small black knots. Her father had told her never to eat them. They're old and no good and might poison you.

He had a job at one of the local factories — the farm didn't bring them in enough to live on — but if he was offered night shift he turned it down. Got to stay home and look after my little girl, and then he'd go on about how you couldn't be too careful, you couldn't trust anyone these days and that there were animals everywhere. Every morning she stood on the verandah and watched his rust-streaked ute disappear in a brown cloud at the end of the track. Her mother had cleared out when she was born; it had been like this as long as she could remember. There was a framed photograph on the mantelpiece in the front room, dark eyes swimming up from sepia: "Lily" and an indecipherable year scrawled across a laughing lip-sticked mouth. She'd tried asking her father about it once but he'd just pursed his lips and turned away. You don't want to know about her, was all he said.

He arranged for correspondence lessons because he didn't like her spending time in town. Mostly she stayed in the orchard, watching the wind press down the grass like an unseen hand, or wandered through the silent rooms, rummaging in drawers which held scraps of fabric and gold threads coiled like cries. There were odd sticks of furniture, shelves stacked with dull, cracked china and once she came across an old cupboard dangling a pink shred of silk. She stood in front of it,

stroking and murmuring, then began jiggling the rusted lock. She didn't hear the ute outside or his footsteps behind her, she only felt the stinging blow to her head. It was the first time she'd seen him angry, and after that, she left the cupboard alone.

The summer she was twelve the sun burnt a white hole in the sky and lifted a blonde shimmer from the paddocks. The creek bed cracked into a thousand branching fissures and the snakes were everywhere. Bad year for snakes, people said to each other on the streets in town. They took to arming themselves with sticks and pieces of four-by-two when they went out because the snakes were seen slithering under houses and through the holes in shed floors. Out on the farm they coiled on dusty tracks made by cows as they walked in single file to nose at the brown sludge in the bottom of the troughs. She saw tails flick through grass and slide through caves of blackberry canes, dried brittle and white as bone, in the orchard. Every morning when she turned her face towards the fat yellow light streaming through the bedroom window, she saw them. She lay in the pink room patterned with blue rabbits he'd painted when she was a little girl, touching her new hair and new flesh. The sun pierced her skin, streamed through her limbs then coiled in her belly like a heavy gold weight. She closed her eyes and saw sockets of gleaming ruby and scales streaming with light. She saw the snakes twisted in a solid, roiling mass around the base of the walnut tree.

Don't go out there, her father said. He'd warned her about the snakes ever since she was a little girl. Sat her on his knee and told her how dangerous they were, how one bite could kill and that she should never trust them. The summer they crawled out of the earth he went around the house and jammed up all the holes while she set the table and put on the kettle to boil. Tea for them was never very much, just cold meat and bread and butter washed down by warm, brackish liquid. Afterwards they sat out on the verandah watching the sky stain crimson and the pale chip of moon ascend while he had a few beers and stroked the back of her neck. Getting to be a big girl now. She slid off his knee and went inside to the dishes, then lay on the bed in the narrow pink room. She saw the fence posts around the orchard lean like drunk sentinels; she saw the snakes, slicked with moonlight, gliding beneath the tree.

Night after night she lay watching the moon swell while she waited for the sound of his snores. She'd tiptoe past his door then make for the empty rooms. There weren't any mirrors in the house and she'd stand staring into the darkened glass, trying to recognise the face she saw. She saw dark eyes and pale skin; she saw the faded cotton nightdress clustered with forget-me-nots and threaded with

ribbon. She wanted to be beautiful; she wanted to wear pink silk. While the wind rattled the dead leaves in the orchard, she tugged and rattled the lock on the cupboard, willing the dry wood to splinters. Night after night she pounded the door and tore flesh from her fingers while the moon floated in its milky aureole, sheening the silk to membrane. The night it fisted into the sky as a bone-white bulge she ran to the shed where he kept the old tools, snatched up a chisel and hacked and gouged at the lock. It gave way with a shriek and a moan and out they fell. The twisted satins and stained silks and jars of perfume and paint. The beads and finery and the jumble of dresses and shoes. "Her things!" Lapis and flame red, purple and gold. She held them against her, buried her face in them, stroked velvet and sequins and lace. Right at the bottom she found the white satin sheath, twisted and stained and beautiful. *Ahhh*. She saw it reflected in the window, radiant as an angel. *Ahhh*. She slipped it on, smoothing it over breasts and hips. *Ahhh*. She was in love. She smeared her eyelids with blue and slashed her lips with scarlet and drew circles of rouge on her cheeks. She slopped her feet into high-heeled shoes and walked out into the night. Little puffs of dust rose up as she clopped along, following the moon to the orchard. It lay down a skin of blue light for her and under the tree she saw the snakes, heads rearing skyward and lidless eyes holding fractured silver. There were snakes with bellies stroked red with fire and black snakes patterned with diamonds. Snakes the colour of spring grass and snakes the colour of freshly turned earth. She stood before the harsh sibilant swaying, her limbs heavy and her blood thick as nectar. She couldn't get enough, but then they came towards her. They were all around, a sea of hissing and when she saw they meant to have her, she ran. Jagged black sounds tore from her throat and she screamed that they would kill her, kill her as she fled through the orchard, tripping over gnarled tree roots and snagging a shoe. She kicked it free and loped clumsily along, clutching the sides of her dress. She was halfway across the paddock when she felt the first coldness coil around her ankle and another slither up her calf. They were all over her as she twisted and stamped, all over her until she became a writhing column of scales. White satin shawled around her feet as she screamed and whimpered Daddy, Daddy. The sky tilted and she fell.

When she came to her father was standing over her, holding the soiled dress. There was a white line above his lip and spittle showered her when he spoke: "Do you know whose this is? This was your mother's! That whore! That cunt! This was what she wore the night of our wedding!" and then on and on, ranting, about that night — "she laughed at me! wouldn't do what I wanted!" — and how she'd packed

her bags and gone into town. Gone to the pub with the worst reputation and got work there. "A barmaid! That whore! Stayed there in one of the rooms above, while half the town came and went!" On and on about the men he'd seen her with and the graffiti on the toilet doors: "Want a root, ring Lily. Nine-Times-A-Nite-Lil-She's Allrite!". On and on about ruining his good name and all the time he was rubbing the dress against his trousers and twisting it in big knobby hands. She lay gazing up while he shouted about the pregnancy — "she walked around the town with her belly out in front! That slut! That filth! — and the tiles running red with blood. 'They found her in the bathroom with her legs apart and I picked you up and took you home! Even though I didn't know you were mine! And this is how you repay me! You whore! You slag! Like this!' Holding up the wetly stained dress and flinging it at her. "You're just like your mother! You're just like her".

She lay there, a big swollen doll with a gaudy face. When she pulled on the dress she saw splashes of blood and dark stains on her thighs. She didn't know what to do. He pushed her into the ute and they drove home across the paddocks. When she looked into his face, she didn't know what to do. She wanted to kill him and she wanted to say she was sorry. She didn't know what to do.

She stopped eating. She stopped eating and her blood dried up and every day she sat at the window watching the wind press down the grass like an unseen hand. Eat something, princess, he pleaded. Eat something, with tears in his eyes. When she first started pushing plates away he'd tried to make a joke of it, said she was making herself look like the models in the magazines. He put food on a fork and tried to baby her but she turned her face from his. The wind blew through the house and sifted loose grains of dirt from the orchard. Hunger. Hunger It ate up her flesh and burnt in her eyes like a flame. He brought special treats from town, tempted her with sticky drinks and pastries but she threw them on the floor. He'd shout at her, then beg for forgiveness and cry. Sometimes she'd watch his grovelling and tears and she'd smile. They never spoke about that night but he smashed up the cupboard and made a bonfire from it and the clothes. I reckon she put a spell on you, he said as the flames crisped velvet and silk. Red light streaked his face; red whispers filled her ears and wrapped around arms and legs withering to sticks. At night she lay on the bed in her shrinking tent of skin while strange beasts and horned dragons roared above. Her eyes filled with dark islands and her ears with the sound of flames. Armies of grasshoppers rampaged across the earth, stripping the grey paddocks bare. Hunger. Hunger. He put a new fence around the orchard but needn't have bothered; the snakes had gone. Disappeared into the cracked earth or the heat

which hung like a fiery miasma at the end of the track. Walking one morning under a bleached sky she found the fragile sheath sequinned with scales and felt its sharded heat. You're a real snake-charmer, dead set, he said, when she brought it home and laid it on the dressing table in her room. He put out his hand shyly but she turned away. She lay on the bed, folded hands white as wafers, listening to the click, click, click of the grasshoppers.

She imagined the hard shiny bodies; she imagined her own as a fragile sheath brittle as spun glass and translucent as fire. Day after day she grew lighter until her breath barely took up room in the world. *Hunger. Hunger* She closed her eyes and saw walls of flame sweeping the land. She heard the wind blow through her skin and rattle it like a husk.

Two-fella One-time Dream Machine

Mouse and Esky are sitting in the dirt behind the burnt out demountable tonight because they are trying to get out of the wind. Mouse has a Coke can hanging around his neck on the end of the string he's looped through two small holes in the tin. He's sniffing from it with his head tucked in under his T-shirt and bowed down between his skinny bare legs. The wind is strong. It makes the electricity wires moan and tosses dirt against the broken windows in handfuls.

Two dogs are fighting over a disposable nappy nearby. Mouse yells at them. He picks up a rock and throws it and hits one of the dogs — an old pitch with skinny jagged teets. It gives a yelp but keeps tearing at the nappy with the other dog. Neither one will let go so Mouse goes back to sniffing.

Esky has his nose to a can as well and he breathes the petrol in deep. The world turns upside down, then everything hard goes soft and it's like he's swimming, there's no weight to him anymore.

Esky sniffs and tells Mouse he can see the pictures.

"In my head it's me," he says. "I go flying over the top of the pack and take the mark. When I get up off the ground people are cheering. I kick the goal, Mouse, and then all them red and black flags are waving. It's the MCG, Mouse. I can see it."

Mouse laughs at this. His head pokes up out of his T-shirt and you can see him laughing big time. See his big white mouse teeth.

Sometimes Esky thinks the wind is trying to speak to him, that it's trying to say something to him but in a language he can't remember. But sometimes he'll wake in the middle of the night and, in that space between his dreams, he'll understand its whispers. He'll hear the wind say something to him like "it will rain tomorrow", and it does, or "The Bombers will win" and they don't. Once it told him: "Your mother loves you and she is thinking of you".

That morning, when the wind said that, he believed it. She was there too, his mother. He thought he felt her hands press down on his back as he lay on the mattress. It was just like what she used to do when she was there and he pretended to be asleep, and his mother knew that he was pretending. He was curled up when this happened and then, when he felt her hands, all the bad air seemed to get pushed out of him and he straightened out his legs and fell back into his dream again, which was usually about football.

But the wind tonight reminds Esky of the sea. That time on the footy trip is what it is. The bus getting in to Darwin after dark and the team going to sleep in that motel near the beach. Esky had never seen the sea before. He'd lain awake in his bunk most of the night listening to it over the others' snores. It was like it was calling him. So, without waking anyone, he'd got up and gone to it, slid open the glass door of the room, slipped outside into the night, and run barefoot across the bitumen road to stand on the cliffs and look. His eyes grew big just to take it all in. He saw the living, breathing, moving, black skin of it — the sea stretching to the big yellow moon. And there was the sound that he heard now — what the wind sounded like tonight, hurting in the wires and booming like sea on the rocks over the top of the demountable.

Mouse is talking about his parents now. Mouse doesn't get on with his parents. They're always fighting. Mouse's mother tells him he has no ears, which means he doesn't listen to her. Esky thinks this is funny because Mouse has big ears, big mouse ears that stick out. But Mouse doesn't care about his parents. He says they are always drinking, always fighting anyway with everyone, not just him. They never give him anything, he says, never even feed him. That is why he sniffs, he says, it stops him feeling hungry.

"I can do what I like anyway," Mouse says. "They don't care"

Last year some men came with Mouse's grandfather and took Mouse away, right from where he is sitting now with Esky, sniffing. The men grabbed Mouse by his ears and lifted him up and took him out bush in the back of a four-wheel-drive Toyota in the middle of the night.

Mouse tells Esky the story.

The men were angry that he was always missing school and getting into trouble. They were going to make him a man, they said. Although smaller, Mouse is older than Esky by about a year. It was his time, the men said.

When the men got to where they were going out bush they stopped the four-wheel-drive Toyota and built a big fire. They sat around the fire and began to sing

and dance and paint themselves. Mouse didn't know the songs the men sang and the men didn't give him any paint. There was no grog to drink or petrol to sniff out there. Mouse sat in the back of the four-wheel-drive Toyota and shivered because it was so cold and he didn't have anything to sniff.

Then the men came and lifted him up by the ears again and brought him to the fire and made him take off all his clothes. Mouse stood there naked in front of the painted men, shivering. His grandfather spoke to him, told him how bad he had been and then started beating him with a branch of a green witchetty bush. Then the other men joined in, each with a branch. They beat him with the branches even after he had fallen down in the dirt. It didn't hurt at first. But the men beat him until he felt it hurt, until he told them it hurt, until he knew it was bleeding on his back and he started to scream and cried for them to stop.

He had to promise his grandfather not to sniff again so they would stop beating him. He promised. The men returned to sit and sing in their circle while Mouse lay on the ground, hurting.

The next morning they took Mouse to the big hole and threw him in. The water washed off the blood and dirt but stung his cuts and he had to splash his arms and kick his legs like mad to stop from drowning before he swam back to the bank. All the time the painted men watched him.

Later, his grandfather and some of the men caught a perentie by shaking it out of a tree. They built a small fire and cooked it and gave Mouse some. Mouse ate for the first time in days. The painted men sang again then and told Mouse a story about the big hole. How it had no bottom and how, if he had told them lies about giving up petrol, he would have drowned when they threw him in and that his body would have sunk down forever into the cold water of the rock hole never to be found.

Mouse just shivered. He wanted some petrol to sniff more than ever then.

Mouse stops sniffing now. His eyes are all squinted up and he is on his feet and hopping around. He tells Esky he's bored because the TV is broken. He's angry too because the picture went when they were watching the Bombers this afternoon. The dish blew down in the wind. The Bombers were losing by three goals at the time but Mouse thinks they would have won. Mouse is only small and can't play football as well as he thinks he can —not as good as Esky anyhow, who played for the team — but he's a big Bombers fan. Mouse says they'll have to wait until someone comes from Alice Springs tomorrow to tell them the score.

Shortly before sunset Pipe and Jimmy had come in a car. Esky and Mouse heard the car before they saw it. It was like thunder in the hills at first. Then it came out

of a cloud of red dust just like it had been part of the wind and then had been broken off from it. The car was a Commodore and it was red like blood and dust and looked like something on the TV with its wide tyres and staring straight-ahead lights.

While Jimmy siphoned petrol out of the tank into Esky and Mouse's tins, Pipe popped the hood to show off the engine

"A V8," he said, and he pointed to both rows of drumming cylinders.

Pipe was tall and skinny, three or four years older than Esky and Mouse, and he leaned right over and moved something like a trigger at the very back of the engine and the red car roared. It drowned out the sound of the wind then and made its own bigger sound.

"Two-fella one-time dream machine!" Pipe said.

Mouse smiled at that. You could see his big white mouse teeth.

"Dream machine," Mouse repeated.

They'd been in Alice Springs that afternoon stealing the car, Pipe said. But they didn't know the Bombers' score.

Plastic shopping bags are blowing around everywhere now. Some are trapped up trees and are flapping like wounded birds in the cold wind. But Esky and Mouse don't feel the cold when they are sniffing.

The two dogs continue to fight with the nappy, tearing at it. Neither one will let go. Mouse picks up a rock near him, takes aim at the dogs and throws it. His throw misses and he tries again. The next shot is harder, closer, and causes both of the dogs to freeze in their fighting. They don't drop the nappy though. Mouse and Esky laugh at this and they put down their cans of petrol and get on their feet to search for bigger rocks and get a better shot. They throw about a half-dozen more times at the dogs — and Esky has good aim. He hits one dog — the one with the teets — causing it to drop its end of the nappy. The other dog runs off into the dark with the nappy as its prize. But the dog with the teets just stands there and growls. There's a strange light in its eyes.

When Esky's next throw hits the growling dog in the leg it jumps forward and comes at him with its teeth bared. The dog is crazy. Esky tries to get out of the way, but trips and falls, knocking both cans down, spilling the petrol into the red dirt. Mouse swears at this. He's really angry now. There is no more petrol. No more to sniff. He's hopping around, swearing at Esky.

There's an old star picket leaning against the side of the burnt out demountable and, before Esky can move, Mouse grabs it. The star picket is almost bigger than Mouse but he picks it up and drags it across the yard through the dirt. Mouse is

coming across the yard toward Esky and the growling dog with the bared teeth, swearing and spitting. He swings the star picket and hits the ground in front of him. But the dog rushes forward at Esky laying on the ground, teeth bared, growling, ready to kill. Esky is rolling in the dirt. The dog is on him, right on him, tearing at his hair. Esky hits out at the dog with his arms and elbows but it won't let go.

Esky hears Mouse scream then, looks up and sees his small body bracing, sees him drawing back the star picket over his shoulder. He closes his eyes when Mouse lets go. All Esky hears is a dull thud and a release of air. The star picket hits the dog, tears a hole open in the side of the dog. The tip of the star picket rips open its stomach and sticks there. The dog drops down in the dirt in a heap with the star picket sticking out as Esky crawls away _ its eyes wide and staring straight ahead, its tongue hanging out, panting its last breaths, its tail winding down like some dying machine. You can see the dog's insides. Its blood comes out now, slow and wet, mixing with the red dirt and the petrol where Mouse and Esky sat before, sniffing.

Mouse is laughing now. Laughing big time. You can see his big white mouse teeth.

"I killed it," he says, hopping around. "I killed it."

Now they have no petrol, nothing to sniff. Mouse says they should walk over to Pipe and Jimmy's, see the Commodore and get some more. But petrol costs five dollars a cup, and they don't have five dollars. Mouse says they'll ask Pipe and Jimmy if they will give them some. He says they are sure to when they tell them about the dog.

They pick up their empty cans and walk over to Pipe and Jimmy's. It's on the other side of the community where most people live.

It's a quiet night — except for the wind. Nobody is out. Just dogs and some sniffers with blankets over their heads. One looks like Esky's sister Dawn, but he can't tell for sure. It's colder now. Most everyone is inside. Dawn should be too, thinks Esky. She's only nine.

Mouse and Esky can smell the fires burning, hear country music. Esky looks up and sees the stars burning too. The moon is a big yellow football —just like in Darwin that time. Thin blue clouds pass across it quickly like lines of smoke. Esky wants to dive in and swim to it or get picked up by the wind and taken there. It's hanging there, ready to mark.

Aboriginal Police and The Colonial State

In 1825 the Victorian artist William Strutt was born in Devon, England. In 1833 his family moved to Paris where Strutt was eventually accepted into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts to be taught by Paul Delaroche and Horace Vernet. Both these artists are well known for their historical paintings, and probably helped develop Strutt's subsequent keen eye for historical documentation. Strutt left Paris in 1848 and arrived in Melbourne in 1850. His Australian paintings and sketches reveal his intense interest in documenting daily colonial life. Nineteenth century Frenchmen perceived indigenous peoples in a somewhat different manner to their British counterparts.¹ This can perhaps explain Strutt's interest in drawing and painting Aboriginal subjects during his twelve years in the colony of Victoria. Unlike many other artists in Australia at this time who saw Aboriginal peoples as alien components of flora and fauna or exotic elements in a landscape, Strutt appeared to regard them as individuals. This essay briefly explores some sketches from the series in which Strutt depicted the activities of Aboriginal police troopers.

Following his arrival in Melbourne Strutt spent some time sketching Aboriginal police both at their barracks in the Richmond Paddock, Melbourne and at the gold diggings at Ballarat. In one sketch he drew himself sitting in the Aboriginal Police quarters, a uniformed trooper standing posed in front of him while the rest of the corps went about their daily affairs. Across the bottom of the work he wrote: "Richmond Paddock Black Troopers in Quarters 1851". Pieces of equipment hang on the walls of the room, some of the police are fully uniformed while others are obviously at leisure. One is lying on a bed with an arm across his eyes as if he is exhausted. There is a sense of intimacy in the scene; three men press close to Strutt,

1. For example see: De Gérando, J.-M. *The Observations of Savage Peoples*. (Translated by Moore, F. C. T.) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969. 63 - 64.

peering over his shoulder to see what he is working on.

The atmosphere of the scene in this sketch is relaxed and intimate. As a comment on how Strutt perceived his role in colonial Victoria it is quite profound. He is interested in the men as individuals. This is to some extent revealed by his words both in his journal and notes, and in his notes on the sketches themselves. Not represented as exotic elements of the Australian landscape, these men are at leisure in their quarters. They appear to be as interested in Strutt's art work as he is in them. While he has selected highlighted features of uniform in the sketch, there is an informality about the figures that contrasts with his other sketches of police on parade. The composition of the work centres on the figure of the artist. His clothing and skin contrast with the darker figures around him, but apart from this Strutt has not given himself any more prominence than the surrounding figures. The work is as much about Strutt at work as it is about the men in their quarters at leisure. The ease with which the men occupy the space marked out by the drawing suggest they were familiar with the artist. The fact that three of them lean in close over his shoulder suggests they were all discussing the drawing and perhaps explaining elements of uniform or other details to assist Strutt in his work.

In other works in this series dated 1850, 1851 and several undated, Strutt drew Aboriginal Troopers on horseback and also sketched a couple of simple portraits. Commenting on the Aboriginal troopers' appearance at parade he writes: "they seemed to lend themselves wonderfully to military discipline, and as to their riding and capital seat, you could literally say that man and horse were one."² As Frantz Fanon notes in his text *The Wretched of the Earth*: "The settler makes history and is conscious of making it."³ Strutt's words describing the Aboriginal horsemen he observed on parade and carrying out their duties are a conscious inscribing of the colonised within the 'settler' or colonialist discourse Fanon describes in his writing, and invite a critical reading of the "man and horse as one". In his discussion of Western racism Fanon comments:

Western bourgeois racial prejudice as regards the nigger and the Arab is a racism of contempt; it is a racism which minimizes what it hates. Bourgeois ideology, however, which is the proclamation of an essential equality

2. Strutt, W. *The Australian Journal of William Strutt*. (Edited by George Mackaness) Volume 1, Review Publications, Dubbo, 1979. 32.

3. Fanon, E. *The Wretched of The Earth*. (Translated by Constance Farrington) New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963. 51.

between men, manages to appear logical in its own eyes by inviting the sub-men to become human, and to take as their prototype Western humanity as incarnated in the Western bourgeoisie.⁴

Is this what is happening in these artworks, which are among the first documentations of daily colonial routine involving the law? As illustrations of the contradictions of humanism and racism do they suggest the Aboriginal policeman, savage though he may be, is humanised and even civilised by his uniform? In his *Police of the Pastoral Frontier*, Leslie Skinner quotes Governor FitzRoy, who in 1848 comments on the establishment of the Native Police Force in the northern districts of the colony saying “[he] was ‘also sanguine in the hope that it [the Native Police Force] may prove one of the most efficient means of attempting to introduce more civilized habits among the native tribes.’”⁵ Are all colonised subjects equal citizens within a colonial empire? Or can it be argued that these artworks actually document the “violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native?”⁶

In his series of drawings and water colours from 1850 to 1862 Strutt depicts the varied activities of many members of the Victorian Police Force. One sketch, “Black Troopers escorting a prisoner from Ballarat to Melbourne 1851”, is accompanied by Strutt's notes: “A group I met on my way to the diggings.”⁷ In his journal he observes “The useful black troopers were for a time made to escort prisoners to town (as also drawn by me).”⁸ This work describes three mounted troopers with a handcuffed prisoner walking in front of them. The police are uniformed and sit proudly upright on their horses, the prisoner is dishevelled, clothes scruffy, his hands are bound, his eyes downcast and his face sullen. The troopers are Aboriginal, the prisoner white. The troopers carry weapons; a gun is clearly visible in a holster on the foremost trooper's side. As agents of imperial law the troopers are empowered to use violence to enforce that law.

Aboriginal police were not unusual in nineteenth century Australia. Formed initially in the Port Phillip district and pastoral regions of New South Wales, the Native Police Force comprised organised units of Aboriginal troopers under the

4. Fanon, 163.

5. Skinner, L. E. *Police of the Pastoral Frontier*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1975. 26.

6. Fanon. (1963) 43.

7. Strutt, W. *Victoria The Golden*. The Library Committee, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, 1980. 51.

8. Strutt. (1979) 31.

authority of white officers. The recruiting of the troopers tended to vary, but the most common method was to take recruits from distant locations. For example in Western Australia Native Troops were often recruited from prisoners sent to Perth from elsewhere to serve out a sentence. Good behaviour could see them released into the police force as trackers or native troops. The main function in Australia of these troops was the control and displacement of the local Aboriginal population. Darren Palmer notes: "The Native Police contributed to the colonisation process and to the emergence of the colonial police. They were not an insignificant part in breaking Koori resistance."⁹ In his book *The Forrest River Massacre*, Neville Green discusses the move to employ Aboriginal police in Western Australia and their role in subduing local Aboriginal communities. He writes:

In Western Australia eleven Aborigines were assigned to the police detachments at Perth, Guildford, Fremantle and Albany in 1841. These men, who were employed to assist police and capture Aboriginal fugitives, were discharged in 1845, when it was decided that Aboriginal crime had been checked. Aboriginal police assistants were reintroduced in 1864, with limited duties such as taking care of the horses and tracking. The police assistants were feared and hated by the traditional people who frequently made them the target of their spears.¹⁰

By the end of the nineteenth century the Native Troops had all been disbanded and police assumed the additional office of "protector of aborigines [sic]". Native Police had their place as an instrument of suppression of resistance to the spread of pastoral settlement and in the routine of establishing colonial authority in remote rural areas.

Strutt's sketch, "Black Troopers escorting a prisoner from Ballarat to Melbourne 1851", is remarkable in relation to this history for a number of reasons. Obviously it is of interest to the contemporary viewer that the armed Aboriginal police were escorting a white prisoner. Initially this troop were the only mounted police stationed at Ballarat and therefore performed most police duties. Robert Haldane suggests that this particular force was set up to minimise confrontations between Aboriginal peoples and European settlers and to provide back-up for existing police units.¹¹ The three policemen in Strutt's work are uniformed and dignified. They

9. Palmer, D. "The making of the Victorian colonial police: from colonisation to the new police", MA (Criminology Studies) Thesis, La Trobe University, 1990. (16 Vic No. 24, s. xii). 46.

10. Green, N. *The Forrest River Massacre*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995. 63.

carry weapons. Their uniforms are immaculate, their carriage upright and proud. The horses they ride are equally impressive. The work may be contrasted to Julius Mendes Price's later work, *The Land of Gold*, 1895, where a single file of chained Aboriginal prisoners is escorted by mounted white police officers. By the date of this work all Aboriginal mounted troops had been disbanded.

I want to go on now to discuss another of Strutt's detailed drawings of Aboriginal mounted troopers, examining it in relation to the power they represent in terms of the discourses of colonial law. Underneath this sketch Strutt writes: "Aboriginal Black Troopers Melbourne Police with English Corporal."¹² The drawing details a rank of six mounted Aboriginal troopers on parade with their corporal to the left of the drawing and in front of them. They gaze forward, the corporal is turned to gaze at the viewer and has his sword drawn so as to formally present arms, a formal gesture of respect.

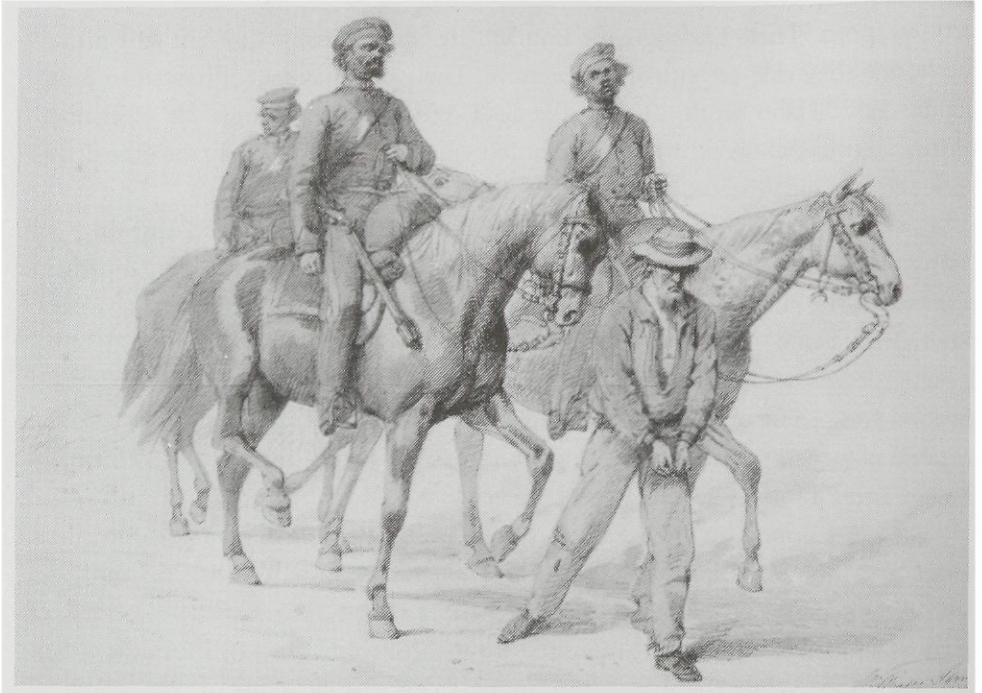
The six troopers in their rank are aligned into a formal composition, their horses, and their bodies, jackets, collars and hats recede into the work, defining and describing a perspectival space. The six figures merge into a frieze-like rank of warriors similar to the lines of mounted troops in Paolo Uccello's *The Battle of San Romano*, 1455. While the Aboriginal troopers describe elements of compositional detail in the drawing, the "English Corporal" leading them into the parade becomes individualised and commands an authoritative position. In the context of colonial Australian society of the 1850's, what rules of right does this frieze of Aboriginal police troopers represent?

The uniforms the troopers wear signify a formal embodiment of imperial power. Branded into the flesh of the trooper's horse in the foreground of this image is the royal crown, a visible marker of historical ceremony and imperial power. The organisation of the British legal system always articulates royal/imperial power.¹³ For the early colony the central role of the police as the agents at the outposts of a colonial legal system was to fix the legitimacy of this imperial power; to articulate and embody in a highly visible form the rights and powers of the absent sovereign. The police horse with its ceremonial tattoo signifies that the system of right in the colony was centred entirely on the absent imperial sovereign and a corresponding system of disciplinary mechanisms and apparatus. The tattoo refers to a sovereignty

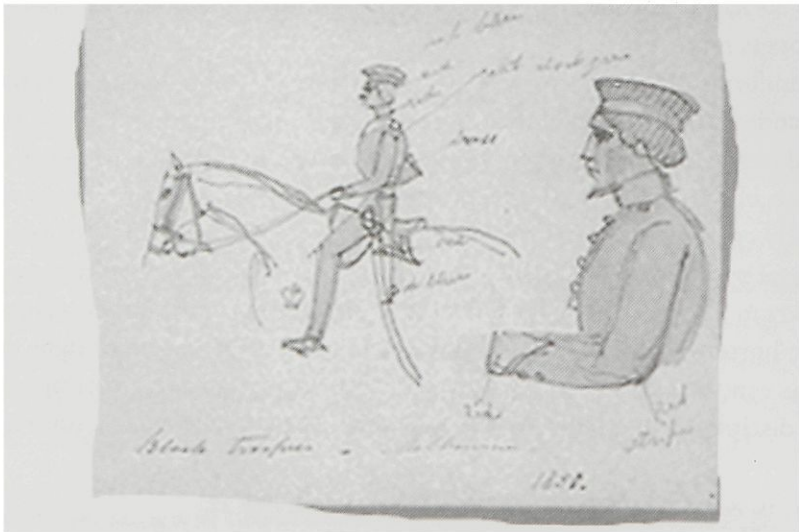
11. Haldane, R. *The People's Force*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1986. 12.

12. Strutt (1980), 55.

13. Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge*. (Edited by Gordon, C. translated by Gordon, C. Marshall, L. Mephan, J. Soper, K.) New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. 95.



William Strutt, Black Troopers escorting a prisoner from Ballarat to Melbourne, 1851.



William Strutt, detail: Black Troopers — Melbourne 1850.



William Strutt, Aboriginal Black Troopers Melbourne police with english corporal, n/d.

which is merged with legal apparatus (and thus the institution of the police), so as to appear to be part of it.

The Aboriginal trooper in the foreground of this sketch, uniformed and mounted on his horse with its emblematic tattoo, is an effect of imperial power and, at the same time, an element of its articulation and of the exercise of coercive discipline. The artwork suggests a discourse that defines a code of normalisation.¹⁴ The system of a right of sovereignty devolved into public right, and that of disciplinary mechanisms merged and embedded in the person of the Aboriginal Trooper, suggest that British colonial law invokes a universal discourse of normalisation. Thus this law ostensibly existed for black and white citizens alike in the colony.¹⁵

In an essay, "Magistrates, Police and Power in Port Phillip", Darren Palmer argues that "magistrates were the symbolic representation of 'law' and authority at the local level".¹⁶ However, if one were to attempt to study "power at its external visage, at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object", then in terms of law and authority at the local level, the police form its outer periphery, its furthest point of application.¹⁷ If the police as servants of the court are directed by magistrates, they also, ultimately, exercise that power. The uniformed and weaponed, mounted police officer represents a formal articulation of power and the right of sovereignty. He is also a subject who is responsible for enforcing the codes of law and disciplinary mechanisms that upheld colonial authority. But what of a uniformed mounted black police trooper? He too stands at the furthest point of colonial law. What does such a figure, both colonised and colonial legal authority, represent?

Prior to the establishment of colonial rule in Australia there was no uniformed, salaried and bureaucratically organised police force. Such a force emerged not simply concurrently with the establishment of colonial law and rule, but also in response to specific colonial objectives which it actively pursued. Fanon observes, "The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesman of the settler and his

14. Foucault (1980), 106

15. I qualify this remark by referring to and acknowledging Andrew Markus' extensive comments in his text *Australian Race Relations*, St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994. *passim*.

16. Palmer, D. in Philips, David & Davies, Susanne. (Editors) *A Nation of Rogues? Crime, Law and Punishment in Colonial Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994. 78.

17. Foucault (1980), 97.

rule of oppression.”¹⁸ As the authorised, public, official speech which is spoken in the name of and to everyone, colonial law can and often does appear, quite simply, as a blunt instrument of force in the hands of the dominant colonising group.¹⁹

Uniformed Aboriginal troopers were a highly visible presence in the colonial state and had an overtly political character. These police, in conjunction with the army and other coercive apparatuses were used to not only conquer Aboriginal societies but to also pacify continued indigenous resistance to the colonial rule. By the turn of the century, prior to Federation, the primary wave of conquests, land clearances and pacification was completed and a central, territorial colonial state was established throughout Australia. In the colony of Victoria the sight of Aboriginal police officers on patrol reinforced and legitimated the humanist idea of the imperialist legal system supporting the colonial state being, in fact, universal. It colluded in the violence of the colonial imperative in which the imperial value became defined as a universal and normalising truth. Such humanism may be reassuring at an aesthetic or sentimental level, but it simply functions to override or elide differences which in the case of the history nineteenth century European expansion in Australia can only be regarded as injustice.²⁰

In 1836 Lord Glenelg wrote to Lord Gipps reiterating that it must be impressed upon Australian colonists that Aboriginal peoples were in fact subjects of the Queen and not aliens. They were not however legal “citizens” of the imperial colonising state until 1967. It is the ambivalence of these works of Strutt's that undercuts the notion that they can represent some sort of absolute truth about the colonial project. These drawings of Aboriginal Troopers signal the impossibility of any absolute reading either historically or philosophically. Thus when I speak of Aboriginal police articulating and illustrating the furthest point of colonising disciplinary power, I am making an assumption that these Aboriginal police officers are identifiable as colonial subjects.²¹ In identifying them as such I believe I do them a great disservice as it is a reading that sees them as subjects trapped in the twilight of history's margins.

Palmer discusses a detachment of Native Police in 1843 whose Commandant

18. Fanon (1963), 38.

19. Bourdieu, P. "The Force of Law: Towards a Sociology of the Juridical Field" in. *The Hastings Law Journal*. Vol 38 (1987). 838

20. Barthes (1988), 101.

21. Foucault (1980), 97.

wrote a report on their conduct in the following words:

The report indicates that Dana [the Commandant] had formed what he perceived to be a disciplined Native Police Force. He achieved this by keeping daily records of their conduct, treating them with "kindness and firmness" and establishing that knowing of their birthplace, "all their old haunts, their families and connections" they were aware that they could not abscond from service as Dana would "take them again". He added that the native police should be placed under Martial Law to further civilise them.²²

Strutt's paintings refer to a colonial desire to produce the colonised as a fixed subject which may well be an "other", but is always at the same time entirely knowable and visible by and to the same. As Memmi observes, the colonised "tends rapidly toward becoming an object."²³ Strutt's paintings function as part of a normalisation process, to create a legitimate narrative in which all subjects are recognisable and "civilised". The narrative, however, is a narrative of colonial ambivalence, or a representation of a particular type of displacement. In Strutt's work we can observe not the representation of some indigenous transgression, rather the uncanny evidence of what is an often disavowed constituent of colonial life, that the Aboriginal had, and often has, no subject position within Western imperial discourse.

By 1900 all Aboriginal police troops in Australia had been disbanded. Mark Finnane acknowledges the peculiar and contradictory nature of the policing function of Aboriginal police when he notes enigmatically in relation to the colony of New South Wales:

The government of New South Wales had felt it necessary to endorse the continuance of the native police on the grounds that the process of settlement at the colony's extremes still required something other than a regular police force. The implication, scarcely disguised in this and other official mandates for the work of the native police, was that its duties were somewhat outside the bounds of legally accountable policing.²⁴

The anomaly in these paintings and drawings of Strutt's is that while the

22. Palmer (1990), 49.

23. Memmi (1990), 152.

24. Finnane (1994), 20.

Aboriginal police trooper from Ballarat in 1850 may not have a subject position within colonial discourse, he does exist as evidence of crime both within and outside that colonial social order. He acts as a sort of schizophrenic subject/non-subject signalling the manifest impossibility of the imperial project for the extraction of absolute surplus value from its colonial states. It is not simply the case that the colonial state did not have the same rationally integrated power base as advanced capitalist states and was therefore unable to discipline in the same manner.²⁵ The individual subject within this form of capitalist discourse still exists as an integral part of a productive economy.

The difficulty in trying to subsume existing Aboriginal culture into the legal perimeters of an invasive British colonial economy is clearly demonstrated by Strutt in his journal where he observes with no irony, that

The useful black troopers were for a time to escort prisoners to town (as also drawn by me) these fine fellows were at first the only mounted police and indeed performed all the police duty at the Ballarat Diggings. It was an absurd mistake, however, employing them to collect or examine the diggers' licences. Of course their ignorance was then taken advantage of, as might have been anticipated. How could men unable to read, discriminate between one piece of printed paper and another? And so the men were disbanded, and eventually murdered by their fellow blacks.²⁶

In the "Manual of Police Regulations For The Guidance of The Constabulary of Victoria", dated 22 April 1856, (some four years after the Native Troopers at Richmond Paddock and Ballarat were disbanded), the conditions under which candidates could be admitted to the police force state, for example,

3. They [the police] must be able to read and write well.

4. They must produce satisfactory testimonials of character, either from those under whom they have served at home or from parties of respectability in the colony. On the applicants being sworn in, these documents will be stamped with the words "Victorian Police, sworn in", and the date, and retained at the depôt until the party leaves the force, when they will be delivered up to him, stamped with the words "Victorian Police, discharged", or "dismissed", as the case may be, and the date.²⁷

25. Ahire, P. T. *Imperial Policing*. Open University Press, Buckingham, 1991. 26.

26. Strutt. (1979) 31 - 32.

27. Ferres, J. *Manual of Police Regulations*. Government Printer, Melbourne, 1856. 10.

The sentiments and duties formalised in this manual would have been equally relevant at the beginning of the decade in which they were written even before the Royal Commission into policing. There was obviously some expectation that police have a standard of literacy in order to perform their duties as the “spokesmen of the colonisers”. Strutt makes it clear that the illiterate Native Police in the goldfields could not carry out their duties properly. Under such circumstances, what was the nature of the relationship of the individual Aboriginal police trooper to the colonial political and legal order?

The colony existed for economic reasons.²⁸ The police force as an institution was expected to underwrite the economic welfare of the colonial state. For example, in the “Introduction to the Police Regulations of 1856” it states:

In the performance of their duty as peace officers, they are distinctly to understand that their efforts should be principally directed to the **prevention** of crime. The security of person and property, the preservation of public tranquillity, and all the other objects of a police establishment, will thus be better effected than by the detection and punishment of offenders after they have succeeded in committing the crime.²⁹[My emphasis]

Aboriginal police troopers were based at the Ballarat Diggings to maintain the order necessary for the extraction of gold which was vital to the colonial economy. Again Strutt comments on the importance of the law in this process:

The commissioner's tent was a very important place where the diggers obtained their licences, deposited their gold, which was here weighed before its dispatch to the Melbourne Treasury, and also the headquarters of the Police, the fine and interesting corps of aboriginal [sic] Black Troopers did their share of duty here before they were most unwisely disbanded.³⁰

The Aboriginal police were a highly visible part of the state mechanisms regulating the extraction of profit from the colony. Their inability to function as anything more than token legal ciphers or imperial markers was a direct result of the colonisers' failure to recognise or respect their subject positions as 'other', a total disregard and lack of respect for an(other's) subject position. This Aboriginal subject

28. See discussion in, for example, Markus. (1994) 20.

29. Ferres (1856), 4.

30. Strutt (1979), 27.

had no desire to conform to the regulations of the Western coloniser. The normalisation processes that issued from the modernising and urbanised nineteenth century European state to discipline the poor and destitute or working class do not translate to nineteenth century colonised Australia. During the invasion that initiated the colonisation of Australia, Aboriginal subjects showed no inclination to participate in a Western colonising economy.³¹ As Markus points out, eventually the predominant view of Aborigines was as a “people totally destitute of the common attributes of humanity.”³² The fundamental administrative instruments of normalisation and disciplinary strategies such as licensing commissioners, schools, saving banks, social housing, hospitals, set up to regulate families, control the extraction of profits, contain marginalised poor Western populations, and absolutely necessary for a healthy capitalist society, were entirely irrelevant in relation to the colonised Aboriginal societies.

Memmi describes the process whereby the colonised becomes inhuman so that: “all the qualities which make a man of the colonised crumble away.”³³ The Western colonial system, based on economics, tries to arrange everything to serve its power and profit. Colonised Aboriginal peoples do not serve that system willingly. “Finally”, as Memmi notes: “the colonizer denies the colonized the most precious right granted to most men: liberty.” He asks:

What is left of the colonized at the end of this stubborn effort to dehumanize him? He is surely no longer the alter ego of the colonizer. He is hardly a human being. As an end, in the colonizer's supreme ambition, he should exist only as a function of the needs of the colonizer, ie., be transformed into a pure colonized.³⁴

In Strutt's art works featuring the activities of Aboriginal Police Troopers he does not draw or paint historical reality but arguably explores the profound unreal reality of the colonising experience for these Aboriginal peoples. His works from 1850 to 1862 reveal the imposition of the same on the other, of the coloniser on the colonised, and in them we can identify a myth; the discourse of the illusion that imperial law can function as the absolute centre of the colonial enterprise.

31. See, for example, Markus (1994), 18 - 54.

32. Markus, 50.

33. Memmi (1990), 151 - 152.

34. Memmi, 152.

An Interview with Barry Lopez

On the back of his latest book, *About This Life*, subtitled *Journeys on the Threshold of Memory* (Vintage Press), the author Barry Lopez looks straight out at you with all the glint of a hawk in search of prey. It's a stare that betrays the precision, the sharp eyed native detail, which marks all his prose.

Born in Port Chester, New York in 1945, he was raised in southern California around fruit orchards, beaches and the Mojave Desert, before being brought back to life in Manhattan as a teenager after his mother remarried.

At college he began a course in aeronautical engineering (part of a lifetime fascination for flight that still colors his writing today with a peculiar sense of uplift), switching to an English major before taking up a career as a professional photographer. Lopez was already writing as well, but a crisis of conscience, related to a feeling of observing the world rather than participating in it, led him to slowly abandon photography and commit himself to literature.

He married his wife Sandra in 1967, a year after his college graduation. Since 1968 they have lived in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon, where he has written by longhand, then typewriter, in the same room for some 30 years now, largely about his worldwide travails in the natural world.

Lopez is a regular contributor to *Harper's*, *The Paris Review*, *American Short Fiction* and *Story* and has built a powerful reputation as an essayist, author and short story writer fascinated by landscape. He is widely regarded as the America's foremost "poet-naturalist", a man able to turn his hand to lupine habits and habitats in *Of Wolves And Men* (1978), or the cold and glorious north in what many still regard as his masterpiece, *Arctic Dreams* (for which he won the National Book Award in 1986).

Along with the poetic aspect of his work, Lopez brings an acute sense of obligation to detail and integrity with his every observance, and something that can

only be described as a spiritually driven, almost Zen-like regard for non-fiction.

His latest book, *About This Life*, is a collection of essays with an unusual degree of personal reflection for a writer so studiously focussed on the outside physical world.

It includes some phenomenal set-pieces like a history of his own hands as he gazes upon them in "A Passage of Hands"; the mystically fractured obligations of a long-distance driver trying to deal with roadkill in "Apologia"; and the strangely hypnotic drunkenness of worldwide materialism in "Flight", his study of international airfreighters and their cargo.

In person, Lopez is a generous conversationalist, thoughtful and serene, much as his writing voice would suggest. He also enjoys unique connections with Australia, whether he is speaking about friendships with anthropologists and linguists in Alice Springs or his admiration for books like Luke Davies' *Candy*. A storyteller with a vocational commitment to awakening our appreciation of nature and landscape, he is writing at the peak of his powers today.

§§§

Mark Mordue - I was interested in this whole issue of "voice" which I mentioned to you the other day. In your introduction to About This Life and in past essays like the piece you wrote for the Australian literary quarterly HEAT, number 2, you've talked about an American writing tradition which you've described as "nature writing" or "landscape writing" and "a literature of place". I'm wanting you to discuss this tradition with me. What you mean by it?

Barry Lopez - Well the problem with this kind of an idea is that the definitions - and to a certain extent, the *discussion* of the definition of the genre — is really on the minds of critics more than it is on the minds of writers. What I was trying to get at in that piece in *HEAT* is that the incorporation of landscape — and by that I would mean not just line and color and contour and texture, but weather and the movement of landscape through time, in other words the flow of rivers and all that kind of material, everything occurring in the so-called non-human world — is not incidental to literature. It's integral. We have fallen into the trap of believing that to incorporate this material and let it reverberate metaphorically is... is unsophisticated I guess. In fact the history of literature, written and oral among the various human traditions, is that such material is always included — in part because it is so metaphorically rich.

It's not instructive in the sense that a field guide is instructive. I mean the material is not in a story so that someone can learn the difference between one or another wallaby, for example. The effect of that material is to cause the illusions and the historical references to reverberate more completely. So in the United States, if you incorporate a particular landscape in a short story, it has historical reverberation if it's, say, in the American West. That's a crude example.

I believe something happened in the European imagination during what you might call "the Age of Reconnaissance", when Europeans became aware of landscapes utterly different from their own. At the first level they tried to turn everything into another version of Europe. For example, a lot of early immigrants tried to turn Australia into England by tearing down the indigenous vegetation, peoples, etcetera, and reconstituting it as some sort of inferior, but fateful image of the home country. That has gone on in lots of places. You can track the same kinds of trees planted in colonial capitals all over the globe in an effort to turn those places into something like the European home.

The resistance to that in all colonial literatures I'm at least aware of in English, is the insistence that the local place has an enormous effect on local behavior. And so it's only when you start to incorporate the place that you develop something distinct in a country's literature.

[This is] what happened with Melville and *Moby Dick* — obviously the Pacific Ocean is not the United States — but Melville was using landscape to reinforce the moral drama that could have been there in another way in Paris or London. But instead of going to a city like that and casting his novel in those urban terms, he chose this huge canvas of the Pacific Ocean. That tradition in the United States continues all the way through the 19th and twentieth centuries and some of the names now are quite obvious, like Thoreau and Steinbeck, down to the present. Probably the American writer who most embodies that tradition of fidelity to place, and incorporation of place in fiction where it is integral — and not incidental — is Peter Matthiessen.

What I'm trying to get at is, what distinguishes literatures at the close of the twentieth century? Probably the thing all English speaking literatures are after, one way or another, is a definition of community — and an elucidation of what has happened to community in the wake of colonialism, and, in contemporary terms, under the forcing pressure of capitalism.

So a very disparate group of writers [are dealing with this] — let's say a

handful of Australian, a handful of Indian, a handful of South African, Canadian, U.S.... And no matter what their educational background, or their chosen metaphor might be, most of us are concerned about the fate of community. It might be of the fate of that essential dyad which is the man and the woman who form a family. It could be a concern over family and the disintegration of family — a lot of America literature is about that now. And at a larger level it could be about issues between the human community and the state, or the human community and the industrial world.

I think nature comes into it because of the commodification of landscape — the level, the degree to which landscape has been commodified, turned into a scenery or one or another sort of thing that is bargained around or traded in or bought and sold. To my ear people who treat landscape like that are using the language and have the attitudes of 19th century slavers. It's that the land must do something and if it doesn't it's punished. It must produce and it must work in the fields and it must show up, in another way of thinking, like some sort of tart. As scenery on the arm of the aging plutocrat.

So what I'm trying to get at all the time is the impulse to examine the big questions — which are, what is the relationship of the individual to the state, what is the relationship of the individual to society, what is the relationship of human culture to place? All of those questions now, at least in the United States, are being most rigorously addressed in this genre called “nature writing”.

Mark Mordue - *When you talk about this Post-Colonial literature, an obvious aspect – whether you are speaking about Salman Rushdie or the “magical realism” of South American writers and figures like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the sheer poetic beauty in someone like Michael Ondaatje or an Australian writer like Tim Winton, and obviously within your own writing — always there is a sense of not just the elemental and the natural, but also of magic and transcendence within landscapes, within story, within language itself. And that dream-life in words, which these writers are stimulating, is, I think, very, very interesting today.*

Barry Lopez - You know I see reverberations of this quite a bit in David Malouf. In *Imaginary Life* and in *Remembering Babylon*. Malouf is an urbane individual and he's perfectly at home in Sydney or Italy or London, wherever he happens to be. But I think he really gets what the connection is

between culture and place. He's able to see that there's something daft about wearing a tweed coat to dinner when he's growing up in Brisbane on a summer day when it's a sub-tropical city, it's not London. And all of the business of trying to import a kind of clothing and behaviour to Brisbane that's inappropriate to the climate — that registers in his mind and he sees the imposition of culture on a place and that it's inappropriate. At the same time I think he is able to see some of the true integration of indigenous people and place which comes through in some of his thinking in *Remembering Babylon*.

Here's another turn on this — I don't know if it's interesting to you or not — there's a kind of... I guess there's a way of talking about Thoreau that isolates him within the confines of that book *Walden*. When I think back on my reading of Thoreau, the piece that stuck with me wasn't *Walden*, but his essay *On Civil Disobedience*. And I have recently reflected that, at least in the United States, the most forceful arguments against government and industry, which were raised by people like Rachel Carson, are carried largely by this group of people who are called "nature writers". So if there is going to be a voice flying in the face of business and government in the States, this is where it is going to come from.

I think Thoreau saw the end of American civilisation. I think he intuited with the rise of capitalism in England in the 1830s and the development of the Industrial Revolution and the way it carried over in to the United States, that there was something essentially dysfunctional about the situation of a society in a place — in other words, the culture was poorly situated in the place.

Emerson said once about Thoreau, "Oh he just wants to live among us as an Indian" — and I think what Emerson meant was that that Thoreau understood that the relationship between indigenous people in North America and place had been so well worked out that those societies had been stable for hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of years. Of course those societies faced the same problems as we do with corruption or infidelity or prevarication, whatever it is, all the human ills. But they'd *stabilized*. What Thoreau saw was that without another kind of mythology American civilisation was going to collapse. And the mythology that he was trying to work out was a different kind of moral relationship between place and culture.

I don't know colonial literature as well as perhaps I should — but I think that men and women writing in countries that have a colonial sense of identity — and America, though it pretends that it doesn't, to some extent

does – I mean there was a great American Revolution two hundred years ago, but America still looks over its shoulder at England and asks, almost as if England were the parent, “Are we doing everything all right?....”

Mark Mordue - Yes, well Australia obviously suffers from this as well.

Barry Lopez - Oh yeah, of course. Well I'm just saying that people don't think America suffers from it and we do. And I think what some of us are trying to say in our literatures is we have noticed that one of the ways we are failing is we haven't mounted a civilization that's congruent with the place. We've brought a civilization and in certain quarters, certain ways, it's not working well at all. And I'm one of those people who believes that whatever revitalization is going to come in Western civilization, its going to come from the periphery.

Mark Mordue - *Well because I've been doing so much travelling in the past year I've been considering the development of my own voice. And being an Australian, I think a little unconsciously I presumed an affinity with an English voice. And then when I went to London I found it alienating and unfriendly environment. I realized there that we as Australians were considered in a colonial context — and that crude image was updated right through to the popularity of Australian soapies there and the kind of stereotypes they reproduced. So I was a bit shocked by feeling that my voice itself was somehow unwelcome in that environment.*

But then when I went to New York I was very lucky, I had a very good time, I enjoyed it — there was a robustness there that I really liked. So after reading your book this whole question of voice from American and British influences kept resonating with me. Of course they've both been influential in the Australian consciousness. But I started to realize that my voice and many Australian writers' voices are closer to an American tradition because we've had that encounter with — or alienation from — a sense of wilderness, a sense of frontier, a sense of space. And at the same time we are living in a physical context where an indigenous people and how we respond to them is really going to determine our future. All that made it dawn on me that American and Australian voices have more affinities than I had thought.

Barry Lopez - I think that's very true. I know one of the reasons I feel comfortable in Australia is that I feel I am talking with men and women who have some of the same questions in the back of their mind that I do. And they

don't have to do with the rank ordering of a group of people as literary greats or not-so-greats or whatever the list is going to be.

I would say to people here in the States it's a pity that you don't read more Australian writers. Because so much of what seems to be going on in the literature or even more popular books like Tim Flannery's books... Flannery is trying to address questions that are very important. If American people knew there were people like Flannery writing in Australia they would think, oh great, we have some kind of a colleague or somebody fighting the same fight that we're fighting. Or when American writers go to England and feel marginalised in London, they would know Australians feel the same way. They are made to feel that they'll never have a command of English or the imagination to really measure up to English novelists. Which is just rubbish.

Mark Mordue - *I couldn't help but notice the most savage reviews you received were British reviews. It made me wonder whether if the British notion of what constitutes sentimentality — and what they would call a voice that is sentimental - has something to do with the large absence of a physical landscape in the British environment. A landscape for them to get a sense of awe or worship in terms of nature. An urban process that hardens the voice may also harden the mentality and make it difficult for them to respond to something that is more open or metaphysical. These are only generalisations of course...*

Barry Lopez - Oh I know, but I think you are on the right track. I think another difficulty there is that what they see as or call sentimentality is actually the presence of a spiritual component in the literature, which is part and parcel of all human literatures. But it is diminished to the point of being invisible in English literature. It's a completely despiritualised place. That's what's more striking to me than anything. A godawful earthbound loneliness. It's like a solipsistic universe – there's no reference outside to something greater than the local imagination. I think for example that magical realism is something that flies directly in the face of English sentiment. It would never be an English kind of literature.

But that doesn't mean there aren't English writers who have that sensibility. Look at somebody like John Berger, even though he lives in France. Or John Fowles' work. Or a novelist like Jim Crace – do you know his work. He's really something. The first novel of his that I became aware of is *The Gift of Stone*. His latest novel is called *Quarantine*. It's about the forty days that Christ spent in the desert. It's brilliantly done. And the land-

scape is an essential part of the drama that he sets out and he makes Christ a relatively minor figure. He wrote another novel called *Continent*, which is an imaginative book about a continent that was recently discovered. So it's not that those things don't occur in England - and in my correspondence with people in England. I sense that there's a bunch of us in English speaking countries all over the world who are working hard to articulate something that is a literature which flies in the face of the destruction of community. And we're all looking at a common enemy and that's large scale, mostly American-run capitalism."

Mark Mordue - *At the same time this is where I find myself in conflict - because there are writers who represent an extreme urban perspective, a very dark and violent perspective, and a very nihilistic perspective. And yet they offer a kind of shock which throws a mirror up to people and gives them pause to stop — it can be quite disturbing and maybe it's gratuitous, and destructive too. But I really do wonder what people like Irvine Welsh or Bret Easton Ellis, or a Bukowski even... how these people strip away hypocrisy and throw consumerism back in the face of people and horrify them and disturb them perhaps because they are horrified and disturbed in some way themselves...*

Barry Lopez - Yes, yes. Well you know Cormac McCarthy does that if you are in the States. But those wouldn't be writers I would ever dismiss. The essence of all art I think is to resist — and in many ways writers working on different sides of the issue, really what they are trying to do in your terms is strip away the mask and make apparent what is really going on...

So the responsibility of the artists is to resist - and to undermine complacency. And there are many ways to do that. What I don't like is the intimation that if you choose metaphors like natural history or anthropology that somehow you are not addressing modern problems or that you are being sentimental, when that's not the case at all. With a writer like Peter Matthieson or I would hope myself in certain things I am writing, the issue is social justice — or something allied to justice. I think a great impulse in so-called "nature writing" is an impulse towards justice. And just relationships.

The United States has a history of having to be explicit, finally, in legal terms, about all of its prejudices. And so you evolve a series of laws which make it explicit that women and blacks, for example, must be fairly treated — that it can't be just a country that works well for white men. And we're now at that stage where there is some restitution, some recog-

niton, of the rights of indigenous people. The next step after that is, “If you don’t have a moral relationship with the place that you live in, you’re a barbarian. We’re in the middle of a kind of second barbarism now. The first barbarism was Mongol invasions and the Vandals and the Huns overrunning Europe. The second barbarism is the invasion of world culture by American pop culture, which is all about reducing people to consumers — its diametrically opposed to the virtues of sharing, for example. And it is a kind of barbarism, because at the same time it promises infinite freedom — we will give you the kind of clothes you want, the toys you want and the look you want, etcetera, etcetera — it tangles you deeper and deeper and deeper in a system of purchase and debt. So you don’t achieve freedom through all these purchases, you’re enslaved.”

Mark Mordue - *In one of your essays you talk about indigenous people and the way they recognise “the immanence of the divine in both man and nature” that really struck me about that point was when you talked about it as “a remedy for loneliness.”*

Barry Lopez - So many indigenous people, when you have a coffee or a beer or something like that and you’re just talking as friends and you ask, “What is it about us, what do you see when you look at us?”, the answer often has something to do with what a hallmark of our culture loneliness is. I remember a guy said to me in an Arctic village one time, “You know, whenever you come, you come alone. You bring no family, you don’t have any children.” We are profoundly lonely people with extraordinary skill to create a material culture, a kind of dazzling group, but very lonely.

Mark Mordue - *Obviously an aspect to that need for connection is the whole matter of storytelling. You place a lot of emphasis on storytelling... Have you found that when you’ve had dealings with indigenous people — that there has been this sort of giving of the story to you? It’s almost as if they know you can carry the story on.*

Barry Lopez - Yes. I think one of the most touching aspects of twentieth century and now almost twenty first century culture, is the willingness with which indigenous people will give away what little they have with the thought that it will be preserved. Or that they want it preserved. Time and again, white friends of mine will say - people I trust who’ve some kind of long term thoughtful relationship where they’ve gone through the romantic

business of wanting to be, say, Pitjantjatjara — they realize that they'll never be that (laughs), they realize that they're going to be white and they've made their peace with it. And then stayed with it. Kept up their friendships. And then things are passed along and you feel a common bond with people quite different from yourself. And the bond has to do with keeping the stories alive because of the way stories take care of people. I don't want to put too fine a point on this, but I think it's good in a culture like ours, where there's a commercial dimension to the work you do as a writer, to remind yourself that your real responsibility is to the reader. And that the idea is that your work will help.

When you come upon a book and you realise that it's really all about the writer, you know things are less than good — what you want is a book in which the writer feels like someone who knows you are there. I sometimes think of this as the difference between the writer as an authority and the writer as a companion. And what I would put the emphasis on is the responsibility of the writer to be the reader's companion, not the authority. People who read your work are imaginative, that's a human trait, and it's absurd to think that you're there to instruct the reader. The reader is going to bring his or her imagination to the material you present, and your obligation is to construct something, the story, in which a number of disparate imaginations can range freely and widely and productively.

Mark Mordue - *You've referred to geography as an alternative to Freud and psychoanalyses. I know you've also referred to coming from what used to be called "a broken home". I couldn't help but wonder, because there is obviously a healing desire in your literature and the way you talk about your writing, whether that childhood background, that family background, has nonetheless stimulated this healing desire.*

Barry Lopez - You know, that's usually not the kind of question I entertain. But I would respectfully answer you yes, and that I've often wondered whether it isn't our individual exposure to pain that makes us compassionate about the pain that others have suffered. I had a certain amount of difficulty in my own early life with my situation at home, and since then travelling around the world I've seen godawful things — incredible poverty and broken down lives and people succumbing to disease and the ravages of inner city life in the United States or anywhere else.

And what I think has grown in me is a deeper and deeper sense of compas-

sion for what human beings are going through. I think in the United States of one thing: the ravages of alcohol. I don't know what its like for you in Australia and for your friends, but in this culture I would say I don't have a single friend or acquaintance whose family has not been touched, often violently, by alcohol or drug abuse. This is incredible. And we're mired in this to such an extent no one is saying "How could such a high percentage of American families be so dysfunctional?"

Mark Mordue - *It makes me think about how when you are a child you glory, quite unconsciously, in your imagination. But you also as a kind of protective sphere, find you can retreat into it. I think part of the process of becoming a writer involves bringing that imagination out into the light. At the same time a writer's dilemma is that there is always an essential element of the solitary. I think this can separate you from those people who are closest to you. Do you find this as a writer? That this is a dilemma?*

Barry Lopez - I don't know...

Mark Mordue - *Because your voice is very serene, but your voice is also very solitary. And there's a love of the solitary in the landscapes you enjoy — obviously in something like Arctic Dreams, or your attraction to the [Australian] Tanami desert. Personally I have a real love of desert landscapes — and I often wonder about that love of the solitary in me and how it relates to my voice as a writer.*

Barry Lopez - Well an analogous thing to me would be this — and that is, people say to me "How can you write as often as you do about community and yet be a person who is traveling all the time?" And I think about all the traveling that I did for that piece about air freighters ["Flight", in *About This Life*], scattering myself all over the world.

But the example for me here in my home in Oregon is how the house sits on a big river in the mountains. There's salmon in that river, and they spawn on these gravel bars in front of the house. And when the salmon hatch in February they go off down this river and then another river and finally the Columbia and into the Pacific and then they're gone for three or four or five years, and when they come back they're huge fish. I don't know, because the mathematics of it is always a trick, but you are talking about a fish that is two inches long when it leaves and forty inches long when it comes back. And they spawn here and they die.

It took me forever to make the connection. I was always after myself, 'Well

how can I be writing about community and place when I am always going away.' But the salmon are born here and they come here again to spawn and then they die. And it's very like that for me as a writer. I go off to Antarctica or Australia or some place and try to sojourn intelligently and then return home and write a piece about it. And then I go out again. I'm not a recluse. Or a person who doesn't enjoy human company. I'm not a gregarious person either, I don't think — I just prefer a few companions in a place like the desert rather than a hundred people in the city. It's just my *metier* — it's just a place where I feel comfortable. But I have these questions about society in my mind all the time.

I don't want to make too much of this, but I think traditionally — at least among native peoples — the ones who end up being the storytellers... part of what they do is stay in touch with a world that is... (sighs) I don't know... difficult to stay in touch with, I guess. I don't know what I'm trying to say here. There's an enormous energy loose in the world and it passes through all of us. And some people who end up being writers or photographers or painters try to shape that energy through the techniques they have mastered or apprenticed themselves to. And make out of that energy a story. And so they stay attuned in their lives to that movement of energy through them. And for most artists that attunement requires some degree of solitariness — either in the reception or the creation...

My Father's Eyes

A webbing belt and polished brass contain the stomach
of his sergeant's uniform. Above a clipped moustache
his eyes present themselves uncertainly for inspection.

He smiles across the haberdashery counter uncarding lace,
counting buttons, wrapping fifteen-denier stockings in brown paper,
takes two and sixpence and wishes another customer good-day.

On stage as president of the amateur swimming club
he stands erect, eyes fixed on the wall behind our heads,
and sings God Save The Queen loudly and off key.

Steam rises from the thermos in his hands as he watches our mother
plant flowers round the fountain the P and C has built
at our primary school. We cut our names in wet cement.

He looks into the Box Brownie to take a picture in our backyard.
His wife sits on a tartan rug watching us roll around. Her mother,
in an oyster satin frock and elastic hose, keeps her eye on him.

Years since my mother's death he sits at the kitchen table
after the late news, dealing hands of patience into midnight,
eyes down on the cards that keep falling from his hands.

In his Reuben F Scarf suit he's folded down into the space
of the mini-minor, packed in with pamphlets and collection boxes;
my father's eyes enclosed in the oblong of the rear view mirror.

Cumbersome with a borrowed video camera that didn't work,
he steps from the plane in Grafton for my wedding squinting in the heat
and aviation fuel. When we drive away next day his eyes are red.

In his new house he drinks a glass of sherry after work
and blinks against the cigarettes he's just begun to smoke again.
On the mantelpiece above his head a nautilus and line of smaller shells.

When I was twenty-four I said, "See you later,"
as though I was going down the street not overseas.
I looked down and didn't hold Dad's eyes, I didn't say good-bye.

The Quarry

The three of them came out of the restaurant and stepped into the night. Martin looked up at the sky as they walked. It was dark, brooding, the muted half-moon throwing a nebulous light, the stars hidden by clouds which didn't move and just encapsulated all the hot sticky air. He stopped momentarily to light a cigarette, sucking it deep into his lungs; the near unbreathable air pressed down upon him.

It was a short walk to the bar. Martin was eager to begin drinking and stood impatiently in line to get in. Stationary, he could feel rivulets of sweat running down his back. Just ahead a muscular young man was checking ID's. He sat chomping gum and bobbing his head out of beat to the jukebox playing loudly behind him.

His eyes widened as Cathy started to walk past, asking her, "Can I see some ID please?"

She turned to look at him, incredulous. "Are you serious?"

"You betcha."

She set her bag on the table and began rummaging through it. His eyes flickered down over her body.

"Hey guys," she turned to Martin and Moose. "Can you believe it? I'm being asked for ID." She turned back to the bouncer. "We all graduated ten years ago. I'm thrilled to be carded."

"Naw! No way did you graduate ten years ago." He took a break from his gum chomping to lean forward and take her driver's license. "You look younger than half the girls in here." He raised her ID to the faint light, scrunching his face up to read it as if it were written in Chinese characters. His eyes flicked back and forth from Cathy to her ID and then widened with sudden recognition at the hulking 6'7" frame of her husband.

"Hey!" he exclaimed. "You're Moose O'Sullivan!"

"Yeah," smiled Moose. "I guess I am."

"Oh wow, I can't begin to tell you what a thrill this is," he said, vehemently shaking Moose's hand. "I saw every one of your games as a kid."

"Nice to meet ya," said Moose. "And you are?"

"Harold," he answered, short of breath. "Harold Brodsky."

"Well Harold, this is my wife Cathy and my best friend Martin Shay. We just stopped by to check out the old stomping grounds. Catch ya later."

"*What a big shot,*" thought Martin as the three of them pushed past and found a table. "*What a pillar of society just because ten years ago he could put a little ball through a goddamn hoop.*" He immediately called a waitress over and ordered a pitcher of beer.

"Goddamn Marty, we sure did down a few here," said Moose with an air of accomplishment.

"Yeah," sighed Martin, gazing around the room. "We sure did." The bar stood suspended in time; same decor of rough hewn wood, same songs on the Jukebox, same smells of beer and youth and hormones cutting across the thick haze of heat.

The waitress arrived with the pitcher and poured out three glasses. "It's a wonder you two lived through college, let alone graduated," chided Cathy. "Were either of you ever sober outside of basketball season?"

"Speaking of which." Moose arched his body up and to the side as he dug with some difficulty into his pocket and procured a handful of change. "How about a little game of quarters?" The coins looked like little tiny buttons as he sorted them in his palm.

"Do we have to play drinking games every time we come to Bloomington?"

"C'mon Cath," said Martin. "It's a rite of passage. What would a trip to Bloomington be like without a game of quarters?"

"It'd be like going to Paris and not visiting the Eiffel tower," said Moose.

"Like going to Las Vegas and not gambling."

"Like going to Bangkok and not..."

"Moose! Christ, I don't know which one of you is worse!"

Martin was eager to play, to get drunk as quickly as possible and purge the unease beginning to flow between his gut and head. He downed the rest of his beer, filled the glass back up, and placed it in the middle of the table.

"I'll go first," he offered. He positioned the glass an arm's length away and placed the quarter between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, lining it up with the rim of the glass. He aimed the flat edge of the coin down towards the table's

surface, eyeing the glass as if it were a rattlesnake to be stared down from striking. Closing one eye, he widened the other, brought his arm up to a 90-degree angle to the table, and froze.

He knew it would go in as soon as he released it. His arm came down like a taut roped suddenly severed, and he released the coin a split second before his hand hit the table. It resonated loudly against the thick wood, bouncing at a perfect angle up into the air, over the rim of the glass, and “kerplunk” into the beer.

Moose grinned and shook his head. “Mighty fine, Marty, mighty fine.”

“For you, buddy.” Martin pushed the glass over to him. Moose began to quickly chug down the contents. His sleeves were rolled up, his shirt half undone, and his clean cut hair moved methodically up and down his scalp as he drank. A bright purple vein on the left side of his neck throbbed in rhythm to the assault.

Martin scrutinised the face again, as he had so many times over the years, and could find nothing attractive about it. Moose had a classic flat kitchen cutting board of a forehead dropping like a precipice to the sunken orbs of his eyes, with a thick bridge of fleshy cartilage between them. “*He does have delicate eyelashes,*” granted ted Martin. “*The only delicate thing about him.*” His eyes were so sunken in they dramatised the length of those lashes; they were like little roots reaching up to the sun.

Moose tipped the glass back until he’d downed it all and the quarter’d slid into his mouth. He set the glass down, spat the quarter into a napkin, wiped it, and smirked.

“*Maybe that’s what she finds so attractive,*” pondered Martin while refilling the glass. “*Muscles, fame, and those eyelashes.*” He mildly rebuked himself as Moose picked up the coin. “*So what if she’s with him for fame and muscles. She seems happy. He’s your best friend. Leave it alone.*”

“My turn.” Without hesitation and seemingly without aim Moose smacked the quarter down and in a moment’s blink it splashed into the beer, so abrupt that the sharp slap of silver on wood made Martin flinch.

“*Goddamn it!*” raged Martin as Moose handed him the beer. “*Just like everything else he does, he didn’t even have to try.*”

It was then Cath’s turn. She picked up the quarter as if it were a delicate object, as if in the handling she could somehow damage it. “*Her hands are even the same,*” observed with longing, focusing on her long lightly tanned fingers. The gold band of her wedding ring competed with the silver alacrity of the quarter for the light.

Martin followed her arm up to where it disappeared into the soft cotton of her

blouse. The material hung at an oblique angle, revealing the curve of the underside of her bicep, leading to that hollow place where the shoulder joins; a river of white skin stretched below the demarcation line of her bra.

He closed his eyes for a moment, just tight enough to make him aware of the tactile presence of his face. He thought of her shoulders, not as an aspect of arousal but of reminiscence; the feel of her hand in his when they were both nineteen. It was summer; that early evening cool when the sun is dissipating and the air is clean and fresh. She was wearing a sundress, her hair falling down. Martin knew of no more beautiful sight than the sweep of her bare shoulders curving into her neck.

Cathy took one practice try and bounced the quarter off the table, prompting a snigger from her husband.

"You guys used to get me so drunk playing this!" She said, shaking her head while keeping her focus on the glass. "I must be a real glutton for punishment."

"Aw, honey," said Moose. "You're not a glutton for punishment. You're just an alcoholic."

She gave her husband a dismissive look and slammed the quarter down, spinning it up and into the glass.

"Drink, you big bastard," she demanded with glee, handing the glass back to Moose. He picked it up and chugged the contents in three great heaving gulps, the huge knob of his Adam's apple rising up and down like a mad elevator out of control. He set the glass back down, wiped his mouth, and grinned.

"Hey Marty," he began. "Remember one of the first times we ever came here? Jesus did we get ripped. That was the night you and me and Bags and everybody went out to Lake Monroe and went skinny dipping. And I smacked my nuts so hard going off that rope swing it just about knocked me out."

Moose began to laugh so hard he was nearly crying, his eyes closed and mouth wide open, his laugh a high pitched gasping for breath.

"Then you and Bags tried to haul me out," he continued, barely able to speak, "and we kept slipping in the mud and falling back into the water."

He was laughing so hard now people from surrounding tables turned around to look. Cathy was laughing as well, more at Moose's near incapacity than the actual story.

"God, look at him," thought Martin, himself in the last throes of giggles. "*He's embarrassing her.*"

"Bags sure was funny that night, wasn't he Marty," Moose said, his hysteria subsiding. "He could always make you laugh."

"Yeah. He sure could."

"*Bastard. Why does he always have to mention Bags?*" Martin could feel Moose leer down upon him. He refused to look up and felt his ears turn crimson with the acceleration of his thoughts.

He knew that leer only too well. When Moose played basketball he was famous for it, the mouth pointing down at the ends, his eyes bulging deep in their sockets, a mask of near sneering contempt. The result was always a hint that he was laughing at you and not with you.

Martin had to check himself again. "Jesus," he sighed, exhaling a long plume of smoke, "stop poisoning it all."

"*If only I could breathe.*" He took a deep breath but with it came more thoughts and images. "Moose is a genetic freak. He's never had to earn anything, to work hard. All those hours, all those goddamn hours I spent in the weight room, only to be dropped midway through my second season. Moose had been there too but he never had to work hard, never had to... to... strain."

And he, not Martin, had Cathy.

"*What a wonderful world,*" thought Martin. "What a fair and just world. A few more genes in the genetic sweepstakes and I'd be sitting there with the perfect life and Cathy'd be my wife and he'd be sitting here with the dead end jobs, the debts, the busted relationships."

The game had long finished, having only lasted a few rounds, all that was needed as a testament to old times.

"Damn," said Moose, gazing wistfully across the room at the students streaming in, "It's times like these I really miss Bags. How about you, Marty? You ever think about him much?"

"No, not often. I've tried to forget, I guess."

"Hell, I wish I could. He got up from the table. "Maybe some more beer will help," and he went off to the bar.

"I guess it must be hard for you." Cathy began carefully. "I mean, to talk about Bags."

"Yeah," mumbled Martin, inhaling on his cigarette and in almost the same motion washing the smoke down with a big gulp of beer.

Cathy leaned forward against the table on her elbows as she started to speak again. "It's great how you and Moose have stayed friends. So many people just don't make the effort."

"Yeah. I guess it's all about effort."

"I wish I still had friends from college I was close to. I mean, apart from you." She smiled as she looked up at him. "Hey, she said, sitting back and looking at his emaciated frame, "are you eating well? You look so thin."

"I'm fine," he answered. He lit another cigarette, gulped the rest of his beer and ran a hand through his unkempt brown hair, spilling a bit of ash as he did so.

"Moose would never say this to you because he's afraid you might resent him for it. But he's really pulling for you, Marty, you know that. He really is."

They were both silent for a moment, taking sips from their beers.

"Do you remember this song, Cath?" Martin asked, turning his ear towards the jukebox.

"What is it? I can't quite hear it."

"It was playing that night — remember? Freshman year, when we came here with Moose and a bunch of other guys, and they left after a while and then it was just you and me? We were sitting right over there," he said, pointing to a table near the corner.

"I remember. That was the first time we were together, wasn't it. Our first night. You were so sweet, so gentle. We were really crazy about each other for a while, weren't we."

"Yeah. Those were happy times, really happy times."

Martin sat leaning against the table on his elbows, his fingers mindlessly caressing the rim of his glass, warmth flooding over him.

"What happened to us, Cath?"

"You changed, Marty. You changed so much."

Neither of them spoke. Martin instinctively looked up to see where Moose was; he was just turning from the bar with their beer.

He came over and set the pitcher down on the table.

Martin straightened in his chair. "Let me give you some money for the beer." "Don't worry about it. Christ, I haven't seen brewskies this cheap since the last time we were here. I'll let you buy next time you're in Chicago and they're pricey as hell."

Martin ground his teeth. "*He knows I'm hard up for cash and then goes and flaunts it in front of me. He's just trying to embarrass me in front of Cathy.*" His hands squeezed out sweat as he scrunched them into ever tighter fists.

"This is my last beer since I'm driving," said Moose while filling everyone's glass. "You two will have to finish it off."

"Fine by me," muttered Martin as he chugged most of his glass and instantly refilled it.

"I wouldn't mind getting out of here," continued Moose. "I was thinking we could go for a little drive, like old times."

"Let's go to the quarry!" exclaimed Cathy. "It'd be perfect on a night like this!" Martin sobered immediately with the suggestion. "Aw, not the quarry. It's too far."

"Oh, c'mon Martin. You used to love the quarry. We used to go swimming there nearly every day. When's the last time you were out there?"

"It's been a while."

Moose decisively grabbed his glass, drowned the rest of his beer and stood up. "Let's go."

Cathy got up with him, leaning over to take Martin's hand. "C'mon Martin. You're coming and that's all there is to it."

"No, you two go. I don't want to. I'll catch up with you before you leave tomorrow."

But Cathy had already pulled him up by the arm and was gently tugging him along, oblivious to his protest. Martin reluctantly followed her through the smoke filled bar and out the front door.

"It was a night just like this," he thought, stepping outside and looking at the sky. The heat had not dissipated. Everything moved slower due to its opposition.

"Fresh air," exclaimed Cathy as they started down the street. "I just couldn't breathe in that place."

"Yeah, fresh air," mumbled Martin as he paused to light another cigarette. "You're a regular health nut," remarked Moose, walking alongside him. Cathy then came up between them, linking her arms to theirs.

"Christ Moose, when did you get this?" asked Martin as they came to the car.

"Didn't I tell you? We got it a couple of months ago. We were lucky. We got a good deal through Cathy's old man."

Martin squeezed into the back seat. "Mind if I smoke?"

"Do you have to?" Cathy turned to face him.

"Just roll down the window and make sure the smoke goes out," offered Moose.

"Thanks, buddy."

He thought he would choke on the smell of the interior. He had never smelt anything so overwhelmingly new, and the contrast was nauseating. As Moose pulled away Martin took a long drag on his cigarette and held it deep in his lungs. He rolled down the window and exhaled, blowing the smoke out and away from himself and the car.

He sat back into the seat, just staring at the buildings whizzing by as they

headed down College Avenue and out of town. Martin knew Cathy had been looking at him for a long time before he acknowledged her presence.

"Is it that business with Simon?" she asked when he'd turned slightly from the window.

"Bags," corrected Moose. "His name was Bags. He hated his real name. No one ever called him Simon."

"I stand corrected. Bags, then."

"Yeah, sure, I think about it sometimes," answered Martin. He continued to stare blankly out the window, not wanting to talk. "It's a pretty hard thing to put out of your mind."

"It was a night just like this one, wasn't it Marty," began Moose. "So goddamn hot. I don't think there's ever been a hotter one. You just couldn't breathe, like all the oxygen had been sucked out of the air. So hot you couldn't think straight. That's what the papers said — remember? They said people do all kinds of things they ordinarily wouldn't do, in the heat. Like it was some kind of excuse for what happened."

For a moment none of them spoke and there was only the soft rolling of the tires. Cathy turned her face from where she'd been focused on her husband and turned again to the back seat. "What did happen that night, Martin? Moose has told me the basics but I'd like to hear it from you."

"Oh? And what exactly did he tell you?"

"Not much. Nothing much that I didn't already know, that wasn't in the papers. I know you guys were really close to him. To Bags, I mean."

Martin didn't respond. "Yes. *It's so very much like that night,*" he thought. "*If I close my eyes it could be then.*" He felt he could transport himself back on the tapers of the heat, to that vehicle which thirteen years ago had taken him out to the quarry on this same road. "*The same, the same, all the same. I didn't want to come out here then and I sure as hell don't want to be here now. Fucking Moose. It was his idea, and whatever Moose wants, Moose gets.*"

He shut his eyes tightly and desperately wished he was a thousand miles away. That he was anywhere but in the back seat of Moose's car headed out to the quarry on this ominous night with its hidden stars and the heat so thick it was like the car was plowing through it, the moon throwing that muted half light which touched everything with an unreal light of distortion.

"Bags was in a bad way, wasn't he Martin. Really screwed up," Moose said, glancing in the rear view mirror.

“Yeah. He was pretty messed up.”

Martin answered not so much for conversation but to hopefully satisfy them both and end the discussion.

“It was hell night, right?” asked Cathy, still turned to the back seat. “Initiation night to be accepted into the fraternity house?”

“Yeah,” agreed Martin, looking out the window and exhaling. “Hell night.”

“I just can’t understand why you guys wanted to be part of an organisation of such assholes!”

“Hell, we were just kids, Cath,” Moose protested. “We didn’t know any better. At the time we thought it was the greatest thing going. We were thrilled when we got accepted into the house, weren’t we Marty. Everybody wanted to be in a fraternity and the “Tri Dicks” were considered the coolest. We had no idea the shit that went on.”

The road twisted through the rolling hills of southern Indiana. Martin’s gut was aching, the combination of beer, anxiety and heat. He tried to stretch out in the back seat but couldn’t stretch enough to give his gut any respite. He was adhered to the vinyl. Sweat trickled down the back of his knee, where it congregated like storm water in a stagnant puddle.

“*No air, Jesus, there’s no goddamn air.*” The air conditioning wasn’t reaching the backseat; there was some sort of slipstream which evaded him. He closed his eyes and exhaled a long stream of smoke. It defied the open crack of the window and hovered thickly in front of his face.

“Martin?” Cathy asked quietly from the front seat. “Martin, tell me what happened.”

“*I think it was even hotter that night,*” he thought to himself, not answering her. “*No, not hotter, it just seemed hotter, because we weren’t able to use our hands.*”

As they neared the turnoff spot Cathy brightened, trying to change the mood. Moose turned off the main road and parked. The quarry lay a half mile down a dirt and cinder lane, blocked off to traffic. Martin hesitated as Moose and Cathy got out; Cathy reached in to the back seat and took his hand. “C’mon Martin. Think of all the good times we’ve had here.” As he climbed out of the car she slipped her arm into his, all aglow with the alcohol and the tension she mistook for excitement.

Martin had to push through the air just to move. He’d look at the sky one moment and the star his eye fixed upon would evanesce; a sky of heat and oppression and ominous portent. What little light the moon threw off came down all contorted, like an opaque veil had been pulled over it.

Cathy continued to talk amiably but there was a tension building as the gravel and cinders crunched under their feet and the light revealed the foliage not in shades of green but in the night's context of grey.

"It really could be then," he thought, feeling it more acutely with Cathy's arm in his, the same as when another arm had led him along this road. That same giving up of resistance to something separate from himself, without understanding or discernment. Thirteen years ago Martin had felt he was a stranger incapable of interceding, as if seated in the audience for his life's final and irrevocable Act.

Now he observed himself again, this time being led by Moose, watched Cathy's arm in his pulling him along, leading him gently to another fate. Every one of his senses was acutely aware, heightened.

"Remember how we always used to come out here?" Cathy asked. "Gee, those were such good times." Her enthusiasm stood in contrast to the still night. "I just love it out here. But it sure is spooky at night, don't you think?"

She grabbed Martin in the ribs, squealing, "don't you think so, Martin?"

Martin jumped and Cathy convulsed with laughter, little chortles piercing above the boisterous guffaws of Moose.

"What's the matter, Martin, getting a little spooked?" asked Cathy, giggling and holding onto his arm for support.

Moose then turned off the main lane onto a smaller dirt path. "Do you remember this, Marty? This is the way they took you and me and Bags."

Martin remembered. It was all coming back to him with a disturbing and unwelcome clarity.

There was little light but Moose walked boldly in front, striding with a slow and easy confidence.

"Why did you call him Bags?" asked Cathy, carefully picking her way along the path.

"He was always wearing these pants that were two sizes too big, real baggy ones," began her husband. "Plus he had a sort of dark complexion and never got enough sleep, so we called him Bags. Just like everybody called me Moose, it just stuck. We used to call Martin Teflon 'cause we could never come up with anything that would stick."

They then came to the open precipice of the quarry's high wall. The three of them stood looking far down at the water, all lost for a moment in their own thoughts. "Jesus. They must have taken a hell of a lot of limestone out of here to make this," said Moose. Martin gazed across the rectangular quarry to the opposite sheer

wall. To the right the wall was broken up into blocks of cut stone, the access route to go swimming.

"Whoah," yelled Cathy down to the water. "It's a long way."

"Yes, agreed Martin, almost in a whisper. "It's a long way down." He tried to look down but spun violently, almost losing his balance.

Past and present fused. He could see Cathy and knew she existed in the present, but he could also see Moose in that same spot as before, only he wasn't standing then; they were holding him down. It took almost all of them to do it. Martin remembered clearly the thick vein on Moose's neck. It was bright purple and bulging like a snake after digesting too big a meal. He could also see Moose now, standing; the same vein was beginning to throb, just a little.

It was all the same — same molecules of hot lifeless air pushing in on him, pushing until his lungs felt like they would burst. He took long drawn out puffs on his cigarette, one right after another, drawing the smoke deep into his lungs; it seemed the only way he could breathe.

"What really happened, Martin?" Cathy asked softly, silently brushing a strand of hair back away from her face.

Martin wasn't listening. He heard the words but didn't let them in. They hovered around his head, floating on the haze. He took a step back from the enchantment of the vertigo. Something beyond fear had come over him, beyond apprehension; a frozen sea ready to be cracked with an axe of anticipation.

"I'll tell you," Martin wanted to say but no words came out.

"Go on, Marty. Tell her," said Moose. Tell her about that night. Tell her about Bags."

Silence.

"All right. Will you tell me Moose?"

"It was hell night," he began in an unsure voice. "We had to pass a series of initiations to be accepted into the fraternity. They locked the three of us in a room of the frat house with a bunch of upper classmen. We had to drink a couple of bottles of vodka between us, that was the first test. Bags was really fucked up by the time we finished. They were all laughing; a big joke. Then they blindfolded us and tied our hands behind our backs. I figured they were going to make us run naked around campus, something stupid like that."

The quarry walls were etched in blue and green, the moonlight playing off the sheer face of stone. Moose's voice echoed sharply off the rock.

"Then they shoved us into the back seat of somebody's car. By then Bags was in

really bad shape, his head just lolling around on his neck and he was starting to get sick all over himself. Martin and I kept telling them to pull over, to take him back, but they just laughed. Said he was in good shape compared to most freshmen on hell night.”

Martin remembered Bags that night, walking a few steps, stumbling. He was trying to stand but couldn't really, and he kept saying. “Let me go, let me go.” his head going from side to side and he'd sort of open his eyes and slur his words and his head would snap down, chin into his chest.

“They brought us out here,” continued Moose. “To this spot. Then they took off our blind folds, and said to be in the house we had to jump. The whole time I was thinking they weren't really going to do it, that they were just trying to scare us.”

His voice was edged and hard, tinged. The vein on his neck was translucent in the moonlight.

“There were a couple of guys each holding onto Bags and Martin, and about three with me. They untied Bags' hands. They were going to make him go first, and almost simultaneously they undid Martin's, thinking they'd make the two of them jump in quick succession. That way there'd be more of them to handle me.”

“They were about to throw him in. There's no way Bags could've swum in his condition,” he went on, the big vein on his neck beginning to throb more and more. “My hands were still tied but I headbutted one of them and kicked another before they managed to knock me to my knees and hold me there. My wrists were bleeding from trying to break the ropes. They were all laughing, the bastards. And Martin just stood there. Just stood there and let them do it.”

Cathy swayed in a pale sliver of moonlight. The light cast her in a setting too beautiful for the sudden and awful reality.

“Is that true, Martin?”

He stood fixed, rooted, no discernment evident, the “yes” formed on his lips reverberating only in his troubled mind.

“And then,” Moose's voice cracked. “And then they did it. I'll never get his screams out of my head when they threw him in. We heard his body hit the water, and then it was real quiet; we couldn't hear him splashing or anything. It was obvious he was knocked out. I screamed at Martin, “He's drowning, Marty! Jump! He's drowning!”

“I remember Bags' voice,” thought Martin, “as I counted out the seconds: ‘one- one thousand, two- one thousand, three- one thousand, four- and then the smack of his body hitting the water.’”

"They realised something was wrong," continued Moose, "and undid my hands. I jumped right away. But I couldn't find him. I kept diving down, but I couldn't find him. By then some of the others had come around the other side and swum over to help. His body was submerged; we got him over to the shallow side and dragged him up onto a rock."

"I could just make out his body as they were bringing him out," remembered Martin. "All I could hear was Moose shouting, and the thrashing."

"We tried everything," continued Moose. "I felt so awful, so enraged. I remember looking back up here and I could see Martin. Just staring down at the water, his eyes fixed on that spot where we'd just hauled Bags' body out. Like he hadn't moved an inch, like he'd been standing there his whole goddamn life."

"You don't know how many times I've played that night back in my head. I just felt so powerless. Maybe it was the heat. Maybe they were just bastards, hell, I don't know how to rationalise it. I go over and over it in my head, trying to figure out if I just would've done something different, then Bags would be here now."

"You can't blame yourself," said Cathy softly. "It wasn't your fault."

"Do you do that, Martin?" he asked, ignoring his wife. "Play it back in your mind, trying to figure out what went wrong, what you could've done different?"

"I..." but the words wouldn't come, just as they wouldn't come on that night either. "I had vertigo so bad I couldn't do anything," he wanted to plead. The heat pressed down on his skull, obscuring his vision and pushing on top of his head and up from his jaw, rendering his mouth and speech mute. A wall had erected itself between his mind and his emotions, between his heart and his speech.

Time was not measured in minutes, but perception; it was eons before anyone spoke again.

"It's okay," said Cathy, reaching across and pressing Martin's arm. "It must have been awful."

"My hands were tied," Martin said weakly, as if asking for something he did not deserve.

"No, Martin," said Moose. "They cut your rope just as they grabbed Bags. I remember distinctly your arms were at your sides. Your hands weren't tied, Martin."

"No, they were... were... tied." Martin swallowed hard, desperately trying to clear a channel in his throat to breathe more clearly and facilitate speech. But still no words came, and the distortion of reality he witnessed with his eyes was matched only by a searing in his brain. He tried not to look down but was compelled to do so, wanted so badly to drown out the splashing and delirious shouting.

“What difference does it make whether his hands were tied or not?” protested Cathy. “It’s over now.”

“It’s over, yes, that’s right,” he thought to himself. He took a slight, almost imperceptible step backwards, just enough to shift the balance of his weight ever so slightly and to alleviate the vertigo. He tried to take a deep breath but it seemed the harder he inhaled the less air came in, like taking a deep breath of smoke while in the midst of a fire. The filter tasted of sweat as he lit another cigarette, drawing the sweet deliverance of the nicotine deep into his lungs; the tobacco provided some small measure of respite where the night air had failed.

He could just make out Cathy’s silhouette. Moose stood on the opposite side of her, furthest away from Martin. Martin had to blink hard to see him, had to squint his eyes to cut through the darkness. But all he could see was an outline, a vague semblance to which he had to ascribe details.

But now no details of resentment rose up, the years of harbouring hatred in Moose’s presence now suddenly gone. Something beyond ill intent seized hold of Martin, and that was fear. Fear of the unknown is great, but fear of the known — that awful gnashing of reality — is far, far, greater. For thirteen years Martin had suppressed and denied, had breathed it in until the denial had become his reality.

But truth exists; denial is merely a precursor of fate, and fate was hunting Martin down through that leer of Moose O’Sullivan. That leer cut across the heat, the years — a hot searing which cut ever more severely into Martin’s gut; a sheer outline of Fate with only white teeth and white eyes visible.

“It’s not over, Martin,” continued Moose. “You just can’t pretend it never happened. For all these years it’s tormented me. I’ve never had any peace. I’ve tried to forget about it but I just can’t get it out of my head.”

Martin had always associated this precipice overlooking the quarry with the sea. He yearned to hear the roar of the ocean, the crashing of waves; it somehow seemed appropriate. But the night was a vacuum into which no outside sound intruded. No roar of the sea; not even the gentle lapping of water against the limestone walls.

“Your hands were free.” The edge was full in Moose’s voice. His frame tightened in the darkness; the vein on his neck throbbed full and ugly.

“No, I...” Martin started to protest but there was no protest in his voice, only swirling confusion. “*It wasn’t my fault.*”

“I was screaming, “Help him, Marty! Don’t let them throw him in!” And you just kept saying, ‘No, no, please no’. And you just stood there, as if you were looking at something else than what was happening. Just stood there and let them do it. Like

you couldn't move."

"I couldn't," Martin whispered. "I just couldn't."

"Why not?" Moose turned more directly to him. "How could you just stand there and let it happen?"

"I tried but..."

"But what? You've got to face it Martin. It's like you became a ghost of who you were. Life goes on. Don't you want your life to go on?"

"Yes," he said, taking a deep breath. "I do. I really do." He took a half step forward to the precipice edge and swayed in the heat. He looked down but couldn't quite make out the water. Martin closed his eyes, concentrating on his footing; and then opened them again to fight off the vertigo. A trickle of sweat ran down the tunnel of his right ear; it felt cool.

He steadied himself on the narrow lip of rock and peered over the edge. "*Dear lord, it's a long way down.*" His mind spun. A surge of nausea flooded up to his brain, and he had to concentrate hard to right himself. He forced himself to look down; the opposite wall of rock gleamed in the light.

"*Why didn't I jump that night?*" asked himself softly, all the while so aware of Cathy's eyes upon him. How many times had he wished for her eyes to be on him! How many times had he wanted to seize her and scream into her face, "Look at me! Pay attention to me!" He felt her eyes melt into him, meeting the vertigo and mixing it into something approximating courage.

With nicotine-stained fingers clasped in prayer he closed his eyes and implored to god. But when he opened his eyes it was still there — that gaping chasm which had haunted his dreams and defined his life. If he had only jumped that night a different, better person could have emerged, with Cathy Hearn as his wife and a new goddamn car and a paid up mortgage and a job, a job, a goddamn job which didn't rip at your brain every goddamn day.

"Martin..."

"*Jesus, it's so hot.*" He was suspended on the night; it was not so much the distance to the water as the velocity separating it from the little lip of land. "*It would be easy on a night like this. The air would just hold you up and you could almost float down, like using a parachute.*"

"C'mon Martin." Her voice was anxious. "Let's go back to the car."

He could feel both of them looking at him, piercing.

That all too familiar surge of indignation and humiliation — the dead end Jobs, the failed relationships, the car repossessions, the girlfriend repossessions — the

breakdown of his physical and emotional worlds rose up within him. For over thirteen years he had suppressed it deep in his ever deteriorating life; now could come deliverance.

“Martin don’t.”

With one eye he looked at Cathy and with the other he observed himself as he planted his feet more firmly on the lip edge.

“Martin!”

The rock gave way as he jumped, throwing him off balance. Part of him stayed up on the ledge, observing as his body descended. It met his physical self as he hit hard against the water, the side of his face impacting first. Deeper and deeper he plummeted. It was cool, and mesmerising; the water was black, black and pierced with moonlight.

Running Bear

Jemma says she doesn't like watering plants anymore because she worries that she hasn't given each plant enough, or that she hasn't given to them all equally.

And lately she has been finding insects flailing in the water every time she has a shower; daddy long-legs, beetles and crickets, clambering out of the plug hole as the water floods down, scrambling up the sides. She has started checking before she turns on the taps, scooping them up in a cup and tipping them out in a flower bed.

She used to love to paint sea creatures: octopus, crabs, jelly-fish in yellow and green and blue, capering in the wild red ocean of her imagination. In the last few months all her paintings have been self-portraits, in which she is a little girl in a striped dress with the triangular body of childhood drawings. Sometimes she is in a desert with a snarling crocodile, but usually she is alone. In all of these portraits she is in her favourite wig, the long, dark one with the thick fringe, and the feathers she always wears: one short for the here and now, the other one long, for eternity.

In the last picture she painted she holds a set of wings on the end of a string like a kite. They float above her, broad and curving, painted blue with silver stars; tethered to her but not yet a part of her.

She has painted angels before: their starry bodies soared across the envelopes of the letters she sent me in England. Great, fat envelopes stuffed with sheets of her excited abbreviations and made-up words, sloping down the pages, tipping off the lines. And there were letters she painted in primary colours on butcher paper which I had to spread out on the floor to read, giant script stretching my name and address across a whole envelope, stamps stuck haphazardly and a golden letter on shiny wrapping paper which arrived without a stamp.

I remember too, the months when no letters came, when she was too sick to

hold a pen, or too angry to write the truth. I didn't know that then. I was fooled by the photos she had sent in which she was without a wig, with millimetres of her own hair and her eyes as big and bright as a nocturnal animal. So I was unprepared for her last letter and the shock of her hard words. "I'm fucking scared of dying," she wrote in smaller, neater writing than I'd seen before. She signed the letter "Running Bear."

Jemma is in the room with the yellow door. Her heart is beating over one hundred and forty times a minute to keep up with the machine that pushes air in a tube through her nose and throat into her lungs.

She can't rest between breaths the way I can. Her air sacs can't hold the oxygen long enough for it to make its way through her body in her blood. She must gasp and gasp even as they tell her she will die today.

The sight of her heaving shoulders and her small, bald head locks my tongue. Even though I know I will never have the chance again, I cannot speak to her. I can only stroke her flopping hand, watch her clutch at her mask and have it pulled off just long enough for her to gasp for a drink to soothe her dry, sore throat. That place from which song and laughter came, has become just a passageway for air and water.

The next night and the night after that I dream I am back there sitting on that high bed beside her pale, dead legs. Her chest and shoulders are straining to haul air in and out. In the dream they take off her mask just as they did when I was really there, but this time she speaks to me, a stream of words in her chirruping voice. When I wake I cannot remember what she said and I cry to think I will never hear that voice again and because I am afraid already that I will forget how it sounded.

Jemma is behind a small, white cloud: the only cloud in the sky on this hot blue day. I imagine her hovering above us as we gather on the grass: her family, her friends. We are clutching balloons, dressed to please her in turquoise, yellow, orange, green and pink. In my sweating hand I hold the ribbon of a red balloon. It bobs above me as I take my turn to stand in front of that still crowd and struggle to capture in words how Jemma moved me in her bright, twisting way. I open my hand, let go of my ribbon. I send my balloon over to that cloud where she is hiding; a little packet of air to fill up her lungs. The others begin to let go too, all the balloons are floating over to her. But we are too late. She can't breathe that air now. I want to run after my balloon, catch the ribbon, hold on a little longer. But it's high above

me already, climbing with the other balloons out of our sight. And when the little cloud drifts away we are left standing, empty-handed beneath a blank sky.

In the hall at Jemma's house I pass a photo of her with her brother and sister and their dad in a stripey jumper. Jemma is tiny, maybe two years old, curly-haired and beaming in a red, quilted jacket: the youngest, the smallest, she should have been the last to die.

I lie in the spare room remembering the last time I slept here. Jemma was on the other side of the wall and I lay and listened to her coughing. Now there is only her bag hanging on the back of the door, the patchwork bag I made for her nineteenth birthday with a shiny square of satin from a ball dress, beige corduroy from worn-out pants; pieces of my life sewn together for her. There is still a knot in the strap where she made it just the right length. She will never use it now, never fill it with her thick, squeaky texts, her sketchbooks of squiggly notes and pictures, those cough lollies that she took everywhere.

I look for her sometimes in the low clouds, remembering when she dressed up as the sky, her bright face the sun. She was wrapped in blue, her dress painted with long clouds, her blonde hair rays of light. Holding hands we danced round and round on the patio. We spun beneath the sparklers we had suspended there and lit all at once. We were spiralling in a shower of sparks, Jemma turning like a summer tornado. Dizzy, we tripped and broke a flowerpot, lay laughing on the ground.

I look for her in the long grass beside the river at Toodyay where we liked to sit, but she has slipped downstream, under the bridge, beyond me.

I am always looking, always thinking she is there behind the cloud, in the grass, under the tree. But when I roll the stone away the cave is empty. For she is Running Bear with a long feather in her dark hair and blue starry wings. She is Running Bear and I cannot catch her.

Ladies and Grocers' Wives: The crisis of middle-class female subjectivity in 1890s Australian Women's fictions

In Mrs. Henry Jones' 1878 autobiographical fiction, *Broad Outlines of Long Years in Australia* a male visitor, reclined at his ease on the heroine's verandah, recounts what is ostensibly a witty tale of colonial difference:

An amusing thing happened to a friend of mine - a very ladylike woman," said Mr. Lawrence. "She was going to England overland, and telling of her life in the Bush, how she weighed out rations to the men etc., [and] they actually took her for a grocer's wife!(149).¹

Colonial Australian novels do the work of producing subjects in class and space. Australian domestic fiction is, like its English counterparts, engaged in displaying and producing female class and behaviours, but the local domestic to which it refers is a very different one, and therefore the management of that domestic must vary from the models it might be presumed to draw from. I want to argue that nineteenth-century Australian fiction was integral to the invention of a middle-class woman for local conditions, a woman whose labour in formerly taboo areas was invoked exactly to stress her appropriately ladylike lack of labour in the production of ideology and class relations. However the "new" category of Australian lady brought into question the very naturalised categories of class and femininity on which rested the system being appealed to. Inevitably then, this particular discursive construct was doomed — fractured both from the inside and from the outside. It was threatened internally because it brought its own foundations into radical doubt, so that the fixed category of "lady" thus defined was always at risk of exposing its own construction. It was threatened externally because when it did

1. Mrs. Henry Jones [of Binnum Binnum] *Broad Outlines of Long Years in Australia*. London: S. Tinsley, 1878.

function as a stable category the ultimately conservative and domestic figuration of the middle-class female subject plotted the lady only in terms of the domestic in an environment where, increasingly, other possibilities beckoned.

Elizabeth Langland has recently argued, in relation to nineteenth-century England, that “domestic” fiction played an important role in the production (and exposure) of contemporary ideology and the regulation of class management.² Langland sees the seemingly leisured middle-class female working full-time at the exacting task of producing, maintaining and differentiating class positions and “ensuring middle-class hegemony”. For Langland the domestic is the scene where class and social status are displayed, and the middle-class wife is central to these processes, through her pivotal role in the complexities of household management and therefore the management and positioning of “lower class” servants, and the lower class objects of her middle-class philanthropy. Like Nancy Armstrong and Mary Poovey, she argues such regulations is conducted discursively, through the management of elaborate systems of signs.³

Armstrong, in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, argues that the evolving eighteenth and early nineteenth-century female conduct book begins to produce middle-class ideology and identity before the existence of a middle class, *per se*, is registered elsewhere.⁴ What gets produced, Armstrong suggests, is a domestic ideal — both a household and a type of female to put in it. She sees the notion of the domestic thus produced working to undo country-city divides and attack aristocratic interests, by representing a common “discrete and frugal household with a woman educated in the practices of inconspicuous consumption” (111).

Langland argues that while Armstrong sees the production of a domestic and private economy apart from a masculine public as a reinterpretation of a political struggle as private, she (Langland) sees the domestic discursive practices as intrinsic in “political agendas [such] as class management.” Langland, then, sees domestic fiction as partially concealing the extent to which middle-class female power and work maintain the public sphere, because the fiction naturalises that work, making it appear as part of women’s nature, concealing the skill and labour involved. Thus

2. Elizabeth Langland, ‘Domestic Ideology in the Victorian Novel’ PMLA (March 1992), 291-303 & *Nobody’s Angels: Middle Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.

3. Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

4. Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. Oxford: CUP, 1987.

according to both arguments the domestic woman does a phenomenal amount of ideological and physical labour, but is depicted as, in Armstrong's words, "apparently having nothing to do" (118).⁵ Anne McClintock has built on this work to further demonstrate that the discourses of race and sexuality as well as class and gender are intertwined in this capitalist Imperial process.⁶

Middle-class women in Australian Domestic Fiction

If this is true of English domestic fiction, then how is it possible for a lady in Australian fiction to be taken for a grocer's wife? Because her labour is of a visible, manual, unconcealed variety, though she also participates in the "invisible" ideological and class-producing functions described by Armstrong, Langland and McClintock. Where nineteenth-century British novels mostly sustain the concealment or mystification of middle-class women's work in the home throughout the century, their Australian counterparts, particularly the fiction by women, do not — or not in the same way. Instead they work to destabilise the class categories of the centre of empire to configure a quite different model of genteel female subjectivity.

In most of the Australian novels household labour is a breeze for a real lady (so that rather than domestic management being mystified or concealed as work, real household work is depicted and then dismissed as effortless). This manoeuvre is never entirely convincing — inevitably the Australian novels expose more of the hard work of performing class. I am rather tenuously extending Judith Butler's argument for the performativity of gendered subjectivity to classed and gendered subjectivity here: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its result".⁷

Thus the Australian novels denaturalise a fundamental social category, and — incidentally — unsettle other social categories at the same time. In Rosa Praed's

5. In both, therefore, the domestic and class virtues must be located in the personal qualities or mental features (Armstrong 119) of the domestic woman, rather than in physical display or material evidence of the labour undertaken. Self-regulation and household vigilance, for Armstrong, represent the work of the domestic woman, and her character and self become intrinsically connected to the aesthetic objects of the household.

6. Anne McClintock. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*. London: Routledge, 1995.

7. Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. NY: Routledge, 1990: 25. In Butler it must be stressed that the performativity discussed is not somehow 'optional'. While I am considering performance primarily in Butler's sense, there are also occasions in my discussion in which the distinction between this and the more conventional usage of performance are aligned.

Outlaw and Lawmaker (1893), "No one but ma and Elsie knew how the girls used to toil in the morning to get their house work done to have the afternoons free for their visitors and for their flirtations, and how late they would sit up at night to make the... dresses which Elsie and ma wore at the balls and garden parties..." (121). When heroines are shown to perform leisure to the extent that Elsie and Ina Valliant do here, the text which is reifying their class position as natural and privileged is at risk of instead revealing it as product of, rather than preexistent to, these actions.⁸

The Grocer's Wife and the Colonial Lady

The heroine of *Broad Outlines* laughs at Mr. Wallace's "grocer's wife" story and comments "a well-bred woman can generally hold her own anywhere..." (149). Nevertheless the story is marked by discomfort. The amusement value of the incident is doubly stressed — Mr. Lawrence opens with an assertion that it is a humorous story he is about to relate, and Mrs. Williams laughs heartily upon its not strikingly humorous completion. The story, in fact, has to be a joke, because if the "very ladylike" friend can be taken for a grocer's wife, then so can all middle-class Anglo-Australian women, whether physically involved in distributing rations or not. What is under negotiation here is no joke — middle-class women's class status and power, within "colonial" and English-defined society.

Recent Australian discussions of Australian gender and subjectivity, such as those by Delys Bird and Fiona Giles, have argued for the difficulty and fragility, as well as the possibilities, of constructing a subjectivity gendered female in a masculinist colonial environment, and each has argued for the importance of textual production in the production and negotiation of subjectivities.⁹ Jenna Mead has warned against the fallacy of searching for "the" female colonial subject, using the example of early novelist, Caroline Leakey and the possible narrative constructions of her subjectivity.¹⁰ I do not see a specific subjectivity being constructed by nineteenth-century Australian women's writing. Nor, I would suggest, do Bird and

8. I am working from Langland's argument that the domestic novel reflects and exposes prevailing ideology, with Armstrong's suggestion that the novel refers in shorthand to behaviours and ideals which have become "common-sense".

9. Delys Bird "The Self and the Magic Lantern: Gender and Subjectivity in Australian Colonial Women's Writing", *ALS*, 3 (May 1992), 123-130. and Fiona Giles "Finding a Shifingness: situating the Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Australian Female Subject", *New Literatures Review* 18 (1989), 10-19 & *Too Far Everywhere: The Romantic Heroine in Nineteenth-Century Australia*. Melbourne: OUP, 1998.

10. Jenna Mead. "Biodiscourse: Oline Keese and Caroline Leakey." *Australian Feminist Studies* 20 (Summer 1994), 53-76.

Giles. Arguably the white female subject's entry to Australia, while profoundly displacing and fraught with the implications of colonial subjectivity as Bird points out, was not a loss of or release from the ideology, the social and political structures and cultural paradigms and understandings from which she came. Giles' concentration on the Romantic heroine as national subject in *Too Far Everywhere* is useful in dispelling the dismissal of Romantic-realist fiction as irrelevant to the national narrative, but might also be seen as buying into the masculinist nationalist discourse it ostensibly resists, in the extent that it tries to fit the romantic heroine to explicit concerns with "emerging masculine Australian culture" (14). In addition, despite her rightful stress on the unfixed and ambivalent nature of the romantic heroine's subjectivity in her introduction, Giles does not sufficiently trace the diachronic moves across the broad period she covers.

The Incredible Middle-class Working Woman

Jones's concern with the possible misinterpretation of the Australian Lady's status recurs in her novel when she gives a careful outline of the characteristics of the young Australian Lady.¹¹ This is the "fantasy" which appears repeatedly in Australian women's fiction for the rest of the century:

The girls of the colonies can be charming in the drawing-room, full of sparkling conversation, for they have read much, are musical, and perhaps artists; when you see them rivalling their English sisters in grace and beauty, and often, very often, surpassing them in mind, you would scarcely credit that those nice girls can bake and churn, wash and iron, attend to the dairy, milk a cow perhaps, (never were there sweeter milk-maids), and have probably made the dress in which you think they look so irresistible. (164)

Lines such as "you would scarcely credit..." appear in many of these texts. It is necessary to this figuration that the viewer will be scarcely able to believe, and yet will believe that "those nice girls can bake and churn" — that this subject be literally incredible. The type of work that Ladies in nineteenth-century Australian women's fiction were doing was not usually extremely heavy physical labour. Even in *Pains and Penalties* (1887), in which the bigamous husband is deliberately subjecting his wife to all possible indignities, she has a maid of all work to deal with the heavier

11. I have capitalised "Lady" here to distinguish it as a specific subjective formation.

physical tasks.¹² In Praed's *Outlaw and Lawmaker* Elsie and her mother, though they sweep and dust, and even clean their own boots, employ a "Kanakan boy" to scrub the cooking pots. While it is frequently mentioned that Australian Ladies have half the number of servants that the English do, a real Lady usually has at least one.¹³ The presence of working-class women and the racially othered is one way of differentiating and fixing the lady's identity. There are of course exceptions and variations — Maggie in "How a Woman Kept her Promise" (1860s) is an extreme and maidless example:

I have seen her on horseback tailing cattle day after day for weeks together. I have seen her shepherding in all weathers; helping to draft and brand; harnessing up the horse and fetching a load of wood, or dragging timber for the fences, or busy amongst her household duties; but she never lost caste by it; she was always in everything — by action, manner, speech — a lady. (77/33).¹⁴

The most notable exception is Catherine Helen Spence's *Clara Morison* — which largely disrupts the fantasy of the middle-class woman's effortless access to working-class women's skills in the interests of asserting a utopian alternate realism of its own and producing a related but alternative subject position.¹⁵

In the novels taken as a whole there are gradations in the type of labour undertaken by middle-class women, but even more in the extent of the description of that labour. Most frequently the Lady is said to do rather than described doing. In *Kirkham's Find* (1897/1988) Nancy, one of the grown daughters in a large family) discusses with her sister one of their duties in the household: "...There's nothing unladylike in getting the children's tea, so long as you don't tell anyone you do it. It's the telling as does it" (97/103).¹⁶

This comment from a novel at the end of the century accurately describes the ambivalent way in which middle-class women's household work is represented in the novels. A Lady remains a Lady, even if she gets the children's tea, or makes her

12. Mrs. T. Kirkham. 'Kyra Keith' *Pains and Penalties*. Melbourne: George Robertson, 1899.

13. Rosa Praed. *Outlaw and Lawmaker*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1893. The shortage of servants is a topic in many novels.

14. Ellen Liston "How a Woman Kept Her Promise" in *Pioneers* (Comp E.A. Harwood Adelaide: Hassell, 1936; republished in Connie Burns & Marygai McNamara. eds. *Eclipsed: Two Centuries of Australian Women's Fiction*. Sydney: Imprint/Collins, 1988.

15. Catherine Helen Spence. *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever*. London: Parker, 1854.

16. Mary Gaunt. *Kirkham's Find*. London: Methuen Colonial Library, 1897; Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1988.

own dresses, or blacks her own boots, as long as she does not appear to have done so. However while the neighbours in *Kirkham's Find* and *Outlaw and Lawmaker* may not know of the women's activities the fictions themselves expose the secret labour in the home — and thus expose in narrative that the public leisure successfully displayed is a clever performance or enactment of class. Although middle-class identification is increasingly located not in activities but in less fixed and less definable notions of appearance and atmosphere, it is around this paradoxical schism between appearance and reality, set up to stabilise middle-class female subjectivity, that the subject position most often threatens to disintegrate.

The Rise and Fall of the Lady Ideal

Earlier Australian women's fiction can be seen as defining and consolidating an Australian ideal of Ladyhood as something innate, and attached to the individual woman, freed from the more rigid classification of a Lady in British fiction according to marriage, birth and wealth. The earlier novels are concerned with the exploration, manipulation and experimentation with the freedoms and limitations of this ideal.

As well as progressively revealing its own internal stresses, this prevailing model of the genteel female subject becomes the focus of critical attention in later women's fiction when the status of the middle-class "Lady" threatens to become a category which legitimates restrictions on women's behaviour and can be used to enforce these limitations, even in the face of new opportunities for women, paralleled by and portrayed in new plot and generic possibilities in the fiction. The status produced for the Lady in the earlier novels allowed the useful invention of a female subject whose social status was so self-evident that she could push the boundaries of acceptable behaviour without danger of losing it. However this ceased to be a boon when the Lady ideal was interpreted to refer only to the domestic sphere, and to guarantee status only in that limited area, so that it could in fact be effectively used to keep women there. Likewise the sexual dimension of the ideal — the "passionless" Lady — became the target of some later novels, which expose the way illusory freedoms were produced through a denial of female sexuality.

The Limits of Ladyhood

By the 1890s many fictions show unease with the middle-class ideology encoded in the ideal of the Lady. Not surprisingly, however, most of them were so embedded in the ideology that they could not easily configure alternative subjects, or even produce a sustained critique. Some novels just tried to produce new versions of

performing ladies. In *An Australian Millionaire* (1893) and Cambridge's *Materfamilias* (1898), for example, despite some anxiety, the Lady's status is not imperilled by attendance at University.¹⁷

Nancy Lloyd Tayler's *By Still Harder Fate* (1898), on the other hand, appears at first to be a more sustained critique, attempting to expose the impossibility of actually performing the "defining" features of this mystical Lady — the miraculous cleanliness, the passionlessness, poise, and instant ability to perform onerous tasks.¹⁸ It deliberately exposes the bodiless and mystical aspects of the Lady ideal. Lloyd Tayler's use of first person narrative, rare in nineteenth-century Australian women's novels, is indicative of the nature of her approach and symptomatic of the stylistic shifts taking place by the turn of the century. Dolly, the protagonist, neither enjoys nor excels at those things which supposedly come naturally to a Lady, such as sewing, spotlessness, and graceful bearing. Like Phoebe and Nancy in Mary Gaunt's *Kirkham's Find* (1897), Dolly and her sisters are defined as middle-class marriage prospects, and manipulated as such by their father.

However, the restrictions the women experience are approached with a different perspective to that of *Kirkham's Find*. The invisible performance of Ladyhood is more overtly questioned in *By Still Harder Fate* the idea that a woman above the lower classes is naturally neat, clean, inclined to dressmaking and possessed of phenomenal cooking skills. Lloyd Tayler's heroine is deliberately situated in a community of like-minded women, and the ironic, familiar tone of the often present-tense narrative produces the (female) reader as another among a presumed majority of women who deviate from this fictional product — the Lady. Dolly and her sister Gip are introduced as they sit sewing, "working at cotton gowns on a spring afternoon, sorely beset by darts to the fore and harassed by gussets in the rear" (11). Comparative poverty did not worry them, Dolly says:

until we were of an age to make our own dresses, and every woman's heart will be with me when I mention that this point afforded us our first comprehensive view of the desirability of riches. (10)

In this way Dolly is set up not as an individual who fails to perform ideal middle-class subjectivity, but ostensibly as a representative of all women made

17. Mrs. A. Blitz. *An Australian Millionaire*. London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1893; Ada Cambridge. *Materfamilias*. London: Ward, Lock, 1898.

18. Nancy Lloyd-Tayler. *By Still Harder Fate*. Melbourne: George Robertson, 1898.

miserable by the unattainability of that subject position, yet faced with its circulation. She is ugly, awkward and clumsy. She is very thin when it is fashionable to be "prettily plump", frequently rather grubby when a Lady is innately clean, and she is reluctant to marry. But to the extent that the romantic heroine and the Lady ideal have become identical, this level of critique and this type of satire can only produce narrative collapse. Only a Lady can be a heroine, and if Dolly is the heroine she must be a lady — so that a general ideological critique of the fantasy middle-class female subject falls back onto the individual.

The heroine of Ada Cambridge's "A Sweet Day" passes easily from bee-culture to "worthier objects for the exercise of her splendid abilities... With great households to administer and young dukes to rear — not to speak of a thousand matters of more public moment."¹⁹

When Dolly marries an English peer she comments,

life is rendered temporarily hideous to me by a housekeeper, a head-gardener, and a lady's maid... [and] the difficulty of learning to treat my appalling number of servants with the distant indifference that is attendant upon the attitude of my proud position, but which no Australian domestic would tolerate for half-an-hour. (85-6)

Dolly's failure to adequately perform the role leaves what remains fundamentally a romance plot with nowhere to go, and no alternate subject position for middle-class girls. The concealed ideological management of middle-class women is thoroughly unveiled in this novel but rather than the narrative undermining the ideal of the Lady, the Lady ideal undermines the novel — unable to fully occupy a position exposed anyway as performance the only writable future for Dolly is no future.

In the absence of the performed autonomy of the Lady subject Dolly finds herself at the mercy of male objectification of her when she is separated from her defining network of sisters. Her marriage is a homosocial transaction between patriarchs — her ogreish father, earlier, and interestingly likened to an "eastern potentate with a submissive harem at his command"⁽⁹⁾ and the forty-year-old paternalistic Sir Everard Ward.²⁰ His name is ironic, for Dolly becomes his ward as

19. Ada Cambridge, "A Sweet Day" (1897) reprinted in Fiona Giles (ed.), *From the Verandah*, 1987, p. 104.

20. "Homosocial" is here used in the sense established by Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men*

much as his wife upon their marriage; a powerless child charge, as much as a spouse.

The reason this imbalance emerges so clearly in this novel, while it has remained concealed in so many others, lies in the assertion of the spurious nature of the innate superiority of the Lady. Dolly is shown to be a dolly — the marionette for an artificial performance — but if she cannot perform that, she cannot perform anything, and a subjectivity which is more embodied — which might be seen as the goal here, is in fact portrayed alternately in terms of disembodiment or unbearable embodiment.

On her European tour Dolly encounters a man with a chained marmot, and her anguish over its plight suggests she sees it as symbolic of lively women like herself and their situation in marriage. The animal is described as,

a miserable marmot on a chain that has galled its neck and worn the hair away. The creature never learns to sit still and make its life into passive endurance, but ever, in a despairing effort to escape, runs a few steps and is hauled back again.

The chain is held by a blind man who refuses to sell Dolly the marmot which, he says — “...is my living... and to what purpose should I sell, save in order to buy a new animal, and they give one much trouble.” Dolly bribes him to let her hold the animal, but “The marmot wants freedom, not caresses” and tears her dress. She is forced to conclude “I can do nothing for it...” (197-9).

In this novel Lloyd Tayler’s heavy-handed symbolism implies that, denuded of the fantasy of Ladyhood, the middle-class woman is without status — galled, chained and restless under the complete dominion of a blind and merciless patriarchy which lives off its displayed captive.

Dolly’s reaction to the scene, and her own inability to relieve the creature’s suffering, is to attempt suicide, first by drowning, and then, more obliquely, by starvation. The end of *Still Harder Fate* resembles *An Australian Girl* in its solution and relative abruptness.²¹ Dolly’s “vague visions of flannel petticoats and soup kitchens” (207) are so brief as to be ludicrous. Her behaviour in the face of her situation is an ironic comment on the idea of feeding the poor; she is “skeletal”, presumably anorexic, and certain that she will not live long.²² It is possible to argue that Dolly has to fade away because there is not yet a narratable future for a middle-

21. [Catherine Martin]. *An Australian Girl* London: Bentley, 1890.

class female subject not identified as a lady (or a fallen woman).

A great number of novels critique the network of society which surrounds the lady. These would seem to be an attack on the middle-class ideology which produces her, and which her performance sustains. A number of 1890s urban novels, for instance, critically examine formal observances such as the morning calls.²³ Ultimately however these are hardly radical assaults on the performance of gentility. In criticising the observances they mostly work toward the affirmation of a genteel identity which is no longer reliant on such forms. Elizabeth Gaskell's 1853 novel *Cranford* makes fun of formal calls in England with limited effect, though it similarly works to subtly reconfigure middle-class female subjectivity.²⁴

Ada Cambridge plays with the boundaries and possibilities of this subject position increasingly in the 1880s and 90s, particularly in terms of the extent to which the lady can be freed from traditional signifiers of her status. A notable example is *A Humble Enterprise* (1896) in which the heroine, Jenny, performs gentility while operating a tea room.²⁵ Ostensibly it doesn't matter what she does for a living because, "[n]obody but a lady could move and turn as she does", and she has the "fine bright hair" and "delicate skin" of a Lady (78). All this is set off by the Ladylike frailty that ensures that though she has the energy to open and run a tea room with her mother and disabled sister, she collapses from overwork, and thus redeems herself from any vulgar suggestion of boisterous good health. Gentility is thus written back onto the body which affirms a class position entirely independent of activity or surroundings.

Jenny has no wealth as a guarantee of position, and though her father is repeatedly identified as an "Eton boy", he was also a lowly clerk who managed to get himself run over by a train in a rather ungentle fashion. Every ladylike attribute which establishes Jenny's status is linked to her as an individual, not to her

22. Gip, however, is also in exile from her native land, in India. It is difficult not to see some inference in the depiction of the naive young Dolly's marriage to the preoccupied older English peer, who first courts her and then ignores her, and becomes immersed in his studies. As well as the influence of George Eliot, there seems to be some political comment on young Australia, and how much it can really gain from an association with British culture, which offers much in the way of education and experience, but proves destructive when too close a connection is attempted.

23. For instance the heated discussion of Blue Stockings during an afternoon call in *An Australian Millionaire* (Blitz, 1893, p.248), or of women's work during another call in *A Knight of the White Feather* (1892, pp. 111-112). This culminates in descriptions of the sort of reluctant "paying of" of calls, which occurs in Joyce Martindale (1893).

24. Elizabeth Gaskell. *Cranford*. [1853] *Cranford & Cousin Phyllis* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983.

25. Ada Cambridge. *A Humble Enterprise*. London: Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1896.

surroundings, and the aura invested in such attributes as her “deer-like head” (112) and “fine hair” (78) operates only as a guarantee of status: “If they remembered the tea-room, they remembered also the father who had been an Eton boy; but soon they forgot all about her antecedents and belongings, and esteemed her wholly on her own merits” (172). Where class status is linked entirely to the individual, dependent only on her person, or performance, it is possible to open tea rooms, or raise bees and tin honey, or take up public speaking without any threat to class power and position.

In both Lloyd-Taylor's *By Still Harder Fate* and Cambridge's *A Humble Enterprise* the romance plot turns on the twist that the woman who appears not to be a lady is a lady — Dolly performs gentility despite herself, and Jenny's involvement in filthy commerce is cunningly portrayed as a demonstration of private class virtues. When the hero falls in love with Jenny, it is for qualities the reverse of what one might expect — not her business acumen, but her prospective domesticity, which will provide him with a comfortable home, and her small stature, with which he seems almost perversely obsessed,

‘little bit of a hand!’ he said to himself... as if it had been a baby's. ‘Little mite of a creature! I could crush her between my finger and thumb — and she's got the pluck of a whole army of men like me... Little wisp of a thing!’
(91)

Domesticity is here read onto the otherwise potentially threatening independent, anti-domestic body, and the traditional alignment of helplessness with women of the middling and upper classes symbolically located in the small appendages of an otherwise perfectly capable body.

Aspects of the body are metonymically read as representative of the body — fetishised so that the lack (of appropriately classed behaviour) is obscured by the plenitude of other unmistakable features. You might say, in fact, that Jenny is not performing middle-classness but rather is so indelibly inscribed with her class that any performance can only reiterate that immutable bodily fact. However in order for the hero to rescue her from class peril, the heroine must be in danger of losing caste, and so the indelibility of that caste — its inscription as nature and not just performance — is again brought into question.

The ideology of the novel requires that her class subjectivity be fixed and recognisable at all times; the romance plot of the novel requires that she be a

sufficiently shifting subject for mistaken identity and class panic to circulate around her. This fiction, like many others, can only reinforce her status by undermining it, and even by rendering the heroine uncanny to herself: "Jenny would not have known herself had she seen how she was painted in the fancies of his dreaming brain" (189-90). As in a number of Cambridge's stories, such as "A Sweet Day", the best preparation for the sequestered domestic and unworldly sphere of marriage is shown to be a good grounding in commercial transaction and commodity culture — the bee-keeping of "A Sweet Day", or the shop-keeping of *A Humble Enterprise* — so that contiguous with the heroine's safe removal from the world of work to the world of leisure is the exposure of the fact that the world of leisure is the world of work.

Clearly the ideology of the middle-class female subject is difficult to fully disrupt or completely stabilise, partly of course because the performance of class is no more a matter of subjective choice than the performance of gender, partly because colonial female subjectivity is even more vexed and contradictory than its English counterpart. It may also be that some version of this subjectivity has become almost inextricable from the plot of the Australian romance genre, so that the genre itself, however flexible in other ways, endlessly reproduces it.

on things not being where I want them to be

after my sister leaves I find
the salt and a potato on top of the fridge,
and coffee mugs ranged along the shelf with
the antique tea-cups, great danes that have decided
to live among the poodles; I've left on the shopping notepad
the scores from our 500 game; she's left
her moisturiser on the handbasin in the bathroom;
also, nestled snug and dark along the 1930s white glass tile,
one long straight hair, which I remove
with forefinger and thumb
and tuck away like a charm; I can believe that
while I have it she is safe, two thousand miles away

proof

I think, therefore I am,
said Descartes, but

while he thrice denied
the body, his neurones

pulsed with electric
solutions, his blood

pumped iron and the
bellows of his chest

dragged from
the protesting air

molecules to feed
his ravening lungs.

On his slow days
(when perhaps he found

the proof of his existence
less convincing)

I imagine him
looking for reassurance

to his face in the glass
oblivious to

the fingerprints
and mist of breath

that proved him
as surely as his reflection

or what his mind
made of it.

Whiteness Under Arms: Rolf Boldrewood and Rosa Praed's Outlaw Narratives

Averting Attention

One of the consequences of the imaginative opposition in early Australian literature between Australia and Britain was to split whiteness into different positions on this continuum, so that focus was able to be averted from the more basic difference upon which the nation was being constructed — that between the original inhabitants and the invader-settlers. Susan Sheridan summarises the situation when she says: "Looking back to the noisy decades at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, the crucial formative period of modern Australian cultural nationalism, one is struck by the silence of and about Aboriginal people."¹ Nonetheless, despite this cultural displacement of the anxieties of difference, nineteenth-century novels in general, which is to say in Australia almost entirely novels from the second half of the century, were not completely silent about the country's original inhabitants, and there are several studies dealing with this.² Given the importance of the rural environment in the construction of the imagined community of white Australians, it is not surprising that many novels did represent Aborigines, albeit usually as types of background, but occasionally with real attempts to represent their position as culturally problematical, even if always under white control and generally as a counter to reference white superiority. Moreover, these references were generally strictly secondary to the central narratives within the books in which they might be found, although I shall be arguing that the position of Warrigal in Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* is less straightforward than it might seem on the surface. Nonetheless, one searches high and low in Australian nineteenth

1. Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing 1880-1939s*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1995, 121.
2. See J.J. Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia 1770-1975*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978; Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989.

century writing for any comparable imaginative centrality for Indigenous people or interactions with them such as one finds, for instance, in the works of James Fenimore Cooper.

Instead, what can be found are vignettes such as that in Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl* (1890), for example, very near the beginning when the book is establishing Stella's worthiness for the reader's sympathy and attention, where we see that one of her characteristics, in pretender Ted's rough words, is to be "always interested about the niggers."³ As Ted is being positioned as something of a country clod, albeit with good intentions, his use of language has been used to mark him off as intellectually unsuitable for Stella, so that this sort of insensitivity frames Ted negatively. Stella's interest in Aboriginal culture, in turn, becomes something that indicates her sensitivity and intelligence. Nonetheless, their dialogue about the "Kooditcha shoe"⁴ Ted had brought for Stella's perusal places Aboriginal peoples as ethnographic curiosities, people whose artifacts, customs and rituals should be paid as much attention as possible precisely because they belong to cultures that will soon disappear, in which case it will have to be well-meaning white people who become the guarantors of whatever survival Aboriginal cultures will possess. Moreover, the banter between the two of them about the power of the shoe is clearly slighting of whatever significance such an object might have in the life of its original owners.

Within an accelerated period, then, lasting less than one century from the first white settlements in 1788, no amount of this type of problematic sympathy can disguise the fact that Aboriginal peoples had passed from at least some form of reference with respect to the stealing of their land, to existing as exotic others, anthropological curiosities in their own countries. Best-selling and prolific turn-of-the-century novelist Rosa Praed gives us a good example of this even as she attempts to ironise it in *Outlaw and Lawmaker* (1893), on the occasion of a corroboree. Despite the intent to show up a certain kind of visitor to Australia's interest in Aborigines as a type of conspicuous consumption of the exotic for the purpose of later display back in England, Praed's chapter on the corroboree places the occasion's events as clearly subsidiary to the development of the relationship between the principal female and male protagonists. While the English Lady Waveryng is consuming the event to raise her social cache at home, Elsie and Blake

3. Catherine Martin, *An Australian Girl*. London: Pandora, 1988 (1890), 17.

4. Martin, 18.

consume it to raise the stakes in their developing passion, the Aboriginal dancing functioning as a pre-Lawrentian spur to the revelation of their mutual attraction.

The encounter with Aboriginal peoples takes place in Praed's novel in an environment where everything the Aborigines possess and are, from their land to their very persons, so clearly under the control of the white invaders, that there is no felt necessity of the anxiety of competition or comparison on the part of the white characters, with the exception, at times, of Elsie. Lady Waverlyng even says at one point: "I never saw such droll creatures. I'd like to take Pompo back with me. Will you let me have him, Mr Trant?"⁵ However, the encounter between peoples did not always take place on such unequal terms, even though it is now known that there has been a sort of unacknowledged conspiracy throughout much Australian history to present the Aborigines as having fallen back without resistance before the irresistible advance of white settlement. In his excellent *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, gender and nation in Anglo-Australian popular fiction, 1875-1914*, Robert Dixon summarises representative examples of adventure novels in which white men travel into the wilderness and assert their fitness to rule the land, although not without all sorts of extraordinary destabilising of their certainties before they finally win through. Interestingly, however, and symptomatic of the unconscious strategies white writers could adopt to write out the Aboriginal presence, the peoples the adventurers encountered were often not Aboriginal but lost races. This can be read as an attempt to deal with the problems thrown up by what was perceived as "racial" difference without confronting the messiness of references to the actual original inhabitants of the land. When the anxieties of identity became really acute then, novelists would go to extraordinary lengths to avoid referencing the country's originary ethnic difference. In one novel Dixon writes of, the adventurers even run across a secret, fully-functioning Japanese town planted in the unguarded north.⁶

In the two adventure novels I am specifically concerned with here, Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms*⁷ and Rosa Praed's *Outlaw and Lawmaker*,

5. Rosa Praed, *Outlaw and Lawmaker*. London: Pandora, 1988 (1893), 221-22. Further references to this novel will be cited in the text.

6. Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, Gender and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction*. Melbourne: CUP, 1995.

7. *Robbery Under Arms* was first published in serial form in 1882-83, slightly trimmed in book form in 1888, and in even more reduced form in 1889. The latter edition is the one that has been reprinted ever since, although the forthcoming Australian Academy of the Humanities edition will restore the original text. The edition I use, further references to which will be cited in the text, is Rolf Boldrewood, *Robbery Under Arms, essays and short stories*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979.

whiteness is largely absent as an overt reference and the principal terms of hierarchic or cultural positioning become those of class. In part, this conforms to colonial necessity, that of imagining the (white) society being constructed, and as such warrants no further comment, but in part it also serves to deflect the terms of ethnic assertion away from those on which the nation is based: the attempted erasure of the Aboriginal difference. This has, of course, been commented on at length in contemporary Australian cultural history, by Susan Sheridan, for example, who argues: "White Australians' exclusion of Aboriginals has been, I would argue, crucial to our self-construction as 'Australian.'"⁸ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra in *Dark Side of the Dream* (1991), sum up the situation as "total suppression: suppression of the existence of Aborigines from major domains of discourse, and elimination of Aborigines as acceptable speakers on any topic."⁹ What is needed now is more close and prolonged examination of particular texts, such as Sheridan and others undertake, and the ways in which they carry out this exclusion, one that is perhaps not so broad as, and rigorously excluding as such comments might lead us to expect.

Whiteness Under Arms

Robbery Under Arms has remained one of the most reprinted and enduring of Australian nineteenth century novels, as well as being a great international success in its own day. It is perceived as a tale of masculine adventure, highly conflicted in the tension between the surface approval of conventional values and the narrative's concentration on the pleasures of social transgression in the form of bushranging, cattle rustling, gold-mining and related activities by such men who evade the need to settle down. In this, it participates in the well-known construction of the "Australian" ethos being based in masculine restlessness in a rural setting. In my reading, however, this novel has survived on account of its being much more than a tale of male derring-do. I would like to turn my attention to the ways in which the narrative of occupation and enjoyment of the landscape deals with the dispossession of Aboriginal people.

In the first paragraph of *Robbery Under Arms*, Dick Marston claims a string of masculine accomplishments, all of which involve outdoor activity and which include the ability to "track like a Myall blackfellow" (1). A Myall blackfellow is a

8. Sheridan, 121.

9. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991, 26.

less controlled and less corrupted Aboriginal, but also a wilder and more threatening one in nineteenth century terms. On the one hand a positive assessment of Aboriginal abilities, this comment on Dick's capacities also asserts that in the one sphere where Aborigines might be considered supreme, and moreover a sphere which relates to their belonging to the land, white Australians are capable of being just as proficient. It thus establishes imaginative and practical control over what might otherwise exist as unknown and threatening, and serves as a synecdoche of what the whole novel will articulate. For what we see is the occupation and use of the landscape by white people, reaching out even to the secret corners of the landscape to declare that it is theirs, a landscape in which they are able to feel as much at home as "a Myall blackfellow." Again, of Dick's father's ability to read the landscape, "people said that he was as good as a blackfellow, but I never saw one that was as good as he was, all round" (6).¹⁰ And as Dick warns his father when he first takes them to the hidden valley called the Hollow, "'there's chaps in the police getting now, natives [that is, white Australians born in the country] or all the same, as can ride and track every bit as well as the half-caste you're talking about'" (36). This declaration of ownership of the land is, however, implicit, for there are no Aborigines in the landscape to have to claim it from in explicit terms. The Terrible Hollow is only known to "four living men" (35) besides the Marston brothers, because "the tribe of blacks that inhabited the district" (38) are now irrelevant. Even though it was a relative of Warrigal, the one notable Aboriginal character in the novel, who showed the Hollow to the first white men to have seen it (44), his people have disappeared so completely they exist only as historical footnotes, references which, when they occur, only go to show how irremediably extinct are the events or conditions to which they refer, and certainly how extinct is any claim they might have to the land.

One way in which land claims are dealt with in Boldrewood's work is through the theme of gold mining. In both *Robbery Under Arms* and his novel focusing specifically upon minefields, *The Miner's Right* (1890), Boldrewood expatiates fulsomely upon the harmoniousness enjoyed on the multinational goldfields, excited by the kaleidoscopic spectacle of people from all over the globe. This league of nations is occasionally used to provide dramatic effects, and in *The Miner's Right* at one point there is a fierce dispute over the possession of a claim, no less than 162

10. Much later in the novel, however, when the urgency of these assertions at the outset of the narrative has tailed off, we read of "the Braidwood black tracker--the best hand at that work in the three colonies, if you could keep him sober" (386).

different pegs having been placed by the clamouring miners. These competing claims are portrayed by comments made by 8 of them, and it is interesting to see the ethnic constitution of this representative list: the first two are unmarked, but the third is “a civilised aboriginal[sic],” the fourth a North American, the fifth a Maori, the sixth a Frenchman, the seventh a German and of the eighth “it is unnecessary to specify the nationality.”¹¹ Presumably the first two and the last are white Australians or British-Australians, the Frenchman and the German do duty as Europeans, being the two Continental nationalities that have bulked imaginatively largest in British culture, the man from Virginia indicates the links between North American goldrushes and Australian ones (but also marks a Southerner, that is, one associated with the slave-owning states), but the presence of the Aborigine and the Maori are curious. That the Aborigine should be the first to assert a claim after the white Australians might suggest that this constitutes a recognition of the former’s significance in Australian life, but it might also be read in a less charitable light: it reduces Aboriginal land claims to merely the turbulent equality of a goldrush, in which astuteness, quickness off the mark, aggression and just plain luck decide possession rights. The Aboriginal relation to the land becomes in this way trivialized and subject to white law and white arbitration. To include the Maori only reinforces this, diminishing the Aborigine to just one among competing claimants in a competition in which an indigenous inhabitant of another country, with a quite different culture, might have just as much of a claim as the local Indigene.

In *Robbery Under Arms* the ethnic pot pourri on the goldfields is frequently held up as a colourful example of harmony and good sense, somewhat contrary to received ideas about British chauvinism throughout Australian history. Although Boldrewood was certainly not immune to English triumphalism, as witness the appallingly clichéd *A Sydney-Side Saxon* (1891 in book form), this fascination with the mixture on the goldfields to some extent contradicts the accepted picture of Boldrewood as irremediably stuffy and imperialistic. Nonetheless, it can also be seen, in terms of my theme, as positing the land as up for grabs, especially and as long as the mixture of nationalities operates under the overarching control of the British-Australian judiciary.

When Rosa Praed’s narrator in *Outlaw and Lawmaker* refers to “the oldest resident of the Luya” (96) she is referring to the white residents, even though Praed has an Aboriginal people settled and everpresent in the book’s location. This

11. “Rolf Boldrewood”, *The Miner’s Right: A Tale of the Australian Goldfields*. London: Macmillan, 1890, 33.

positioning of Aboriginal peoples as referencing only the past was, of course, standard at this time, as Russell McGregor outlines in *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*.¹² One way of achieving this, used throughout *Robbery Under Arms* (as I have outlined) is to ensure that whenever Aborigines are ascribed any proficiency, even quite trivial ones, such proficiencies are immediately reclaimed by white characters. To take one further example, when Dick is climbing out of prison, he thinks the climbing “was almost black-fellows’ work” but quickly recalls that he and his brother “had often practised this sort of climbing when we were boys, and were both pretty good at it” (140). In Hodge and Mishra’s terms, Aborigines have been consistently suppressed throughout Australian literary history, and we can see here one of the ways in which this was achieved; rather than being totally suppressed Aboriginality is instead referenced in order to be replaced.¹³

In this landscape then more than one group is battling for supremacy, but they are not the two broad ethnic groups of Europeans and Aborigines, but the categories of the law-abiding and the outlaws, or the refined and the humble, the two pairs not congruent. There is no question of survival or struggle in terms of the opposition of European and Aboriginal, and the questions of identity the novel overtly deals with concern levels of class and individual subjectivities, rather than those of ethnic positioning. For example, when respected friend and neighbour George Storefield and outlaw Dick Marston discuss land ownership, there is not the slightest reference to the land’s original owners, even though we already know that Aboriginal people inhabited the area in the living past. This theme, repeatedly returned to, of property, equality and right to the land, is entered into entirely unselfconsciously without any reference to any other opposition other than that of class or wealth. When Dick says, “God Almighty, I suppose, made the land and the people too, one to live on the other. Why should we pay for what is our own?” (49), there is not even the shadow of a reference to those people whom readers nowadays would immediately associate with the sentiments. In *Outlaw and Lawmaker* the same theme arises, and sure enough the dichotomy of the oppressed and landless versus the privileged and powerful bears no trace whatsoever of ethnic opposition but only

12. Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997.

13. Warrigal does have one skill, at which he is superlative, that of breaking in horses (180), but this is not a traditional Aboriginal skill and something he has needed contact with white society to be able to develop. It does, however, participate in the generalised positioning of Indigenous peoples as aligned with the natural, a positive reference in many novels, including this one, although also a limiting one.

of classes within settling society, albeit with elements of a familiar Irish-English conflict. When the gentleman/outlaw Blake/Moonlight talks of “the principle of the oppressed” (50) we know the Aborigines fall quite outside his terms of reference. At one point in *Robbery Under Arms*, the English gentleman leader of the bushranging gang, Starlight, talks of the things he has seen in other parts of the Empire, and although he uses his memories as conversational spectacle, there is implicit criticism of what is done to indigenous and subject peoples in those other places when he talks of “fifty men killed before breakfast, and in cold blood, too, chopped up alive, or next thing to it; and a drove of slaves—men, woman, and children—as big nearly as our mob, handed over to a slave-dealer, and driven off in chains just as you’d start a lot of station cattle” (75). Events that happen in other countries can not only be talked about, they can occasion (admittedly mild) indignation, but no reference is made to relate such events to the country and the society around Starlight. The lives of settler-invader colonists are not to be referenced by their relation to Aboriginal nations. Instead of constructing the European as an ethnicity, then, or a cultural position, or even ethnicities, with all that implies of a dynamic and constantly reinterrogated multiplicity of positions, the book elides dealing with European identity in such terms. Instead it asserts individual or class subject positions, so that the struggle for social primacy becomes that between different European visions of the relation of the individual to society, circulated in Boldrewood’s well-known, ambiguously contending, visions of free outlaws and socially-ordered civility. Yet while Aboriginal peoples are apparently erased from the equations of power through their absence with respect to anything significant in the novel, it is interesting that bushrangers themselves can only be referenced so positively, according to Hodge and Mishra, precisely “because the community believed that the problem [of bushranging] was now resolved” (134). If this is so, then perhaps the absence of the Aborigines marks the fact that the “problem” was not completely resolved, at least psychically or morally, even if it was on the level of effective political and economic power. And the repressed, as we know, has a habit of returning in some guise or another.

Outlaw Narratives

Yet outlaw narratives have their own ways of unsettling these questions or of inscribing them in less obvious ways. In defying authority, the outlaws might be said to be contesting to some extent the values on which colonial society was founded, and the element of attention to the sources and ownership of whatever

they steal situates the gangs in both novels athwart the simple ethic of exploitation and accumulation upon which they suggest important elements of colonial society were based. That is, both gangs articulate sentiments identifying colonial development with inequality and the need for things to be distributed more fairly (that is, among whites). After all, Dick Marston identifies the principal reason behind the surprising amount of harmony on the goldfields as the fact that they "had got into a world where everybody had everything they wanted, or else had the money to pay for it" (204). At the heart of this dealing with questions of wealth and possessions is the crucial division in terms of property and land, a division that enacts once more an exclusionary manoeuvre by setting up terms whose opposition completes each other and requires no outside reference for their dialectic. The haves and the have-nots are both groups of white invaders and their conflict is centrally with each other. In this way it becomes not so much a contesting of colonial power as an implicit elimination of any other destabilizing claims to participation in the issues of property and ownership. The land's original inhabitants become simply onlookers of an antagonism that doesn't even take them into account.

Here we arrive at something else that is central to outlaw narratives to some degree or another, which is that they institute violence as a function of the operation of the colonial economy, not only the violence of the outlaws, who are mostly rendered sympathetically in these novels, but that of the whole society. This is a society where violence perhaps references whiteness indirectly inasmuch as the colonial enterprise is accepted as "violent in its essence", in Terry Goldie's words,¹⁴ an acceptance that he regards as necessary to the correct perception of the nature of white society. However, once again in these novels it is a realization which is displaced onto intra-ethnic violence rather than overt violence against Aborigines. Only the disruption provided by Warrigal unsettles this division of the violence into that between different sectors of white society. Terry Goldie continues: "almost never, however, is white violence against the indigene perceived as sacrifice [...] It is always massacre, usually reflecting a certain aspect of white society which has broken the coherence which the text still reveres."¹⁵ This is, however, to perceive the violence as being always between groups, when in terms of the narratives of particular novels this is often transmuted into the relations between individuals.

14. Goldie, 100.

15. As above.

Thus it is, for example, that in *Robbery Under Arms* what we witness is not massacre, although it may certainly be implicitly understood as a pre-condition for intra-European conflict over land, but the more common and deep-seated daily violence of mastery and hierarchy to which Warrigal is subject.

For nineteenth-century novels such as *Robbery Under Arms* and *Outlaw and Lawmaker* it seems clear that the reasons whiteness was not an issue relates to their assumption that any need for contrast or ethnic opposition was not an issue either. For Elsie, in *Outlaw and Lawmaker*, generally a book which deals knowingly with the conventions of romantic adventure, the Aborigines are scarcely even picturesque. Australia is dull because “We haven’t much that is picturesque in the bush” (26), and the exploits of an outlaw such as Moonlight, oozing European and aristocratic *savoir faire*, as does Starlight, serve to remedy that lack. Aborigines operate in the book as backdrop, much more present than in Boldrewood’s tale, but backdrop all the same, features of life of less note or interest to Elsie than the landscape. Even when the book’s protagonists attend an Aboriginal corroboree, it is merely extended backdrop and described with pejorative adjectives such as “barbaric...grotesque, uncouth shapes...jabbering...savage...monstrous idol...demoniac” (221-23). While the scene also serves to set off the sort of excited, enigmatic behaviour by which Moonlight’s positive difference from dull normality is established, it further serves for Praed to reprove slyly Lady Waveryng’s instrumentalization of Australia as colour for a book she is planning to publish back in England. It only wavers in its consideration of the Aborigines as people who could be considered in like terms when Elsie thinks of “the circle of gins, women like herself — torn perhaps by love and longing, as she was torn now” (223). While this at least personalizes the Aboriginal women and aligns them with Elsie’s concerns, it also elides their status as a nation for which there may be other anxieties than those of the romantic and personal ones Elsie is focused on.

Warrigal and the Site of Violence

In *Robbery Under Arms* the only differentiated Aboriginal character is Warrigal. There are however certain inconsistencies in the narrative as far as Warrigal is concerned. When he first appears he is the Marstons’ father’s helper. He has no people and is simply an appendage of the elder Marston, needing not even an explanation. The father “had picked [Warrigal] up somewhere” (24). Straight society has no contact with Aboriginality, only the outlaw has this contact, which he controls, perhaps even at the implicit but unspoken service of conventional

society. Moreover, Warrigal is called a “half-caste” in such contemptuously dismissive tones that questions of his origin or people are rendered irrelevant for the novel’s other protagonists. However, the night after looking after the mob of stolen cattle that is the boys’ introduction to their father’s cattle duffing activities, Warrigal disappears from the narrative with no explanation and next turns up helping the injured Starlight down to the Hollow. Now he has become Starlight’s faithful companion, as he will remain for the rest of the book, referred to by Ben Marston as “your property” (150), and is described again by Dick as if he had never been seen before.¹⁶ Here he is a “slight, active-looking chap” (40), while before he had been “a half-caste brat” (25), although Starlight straight away calls him a “devil’s limb” and “that yellow whelp” (41). Interestingly, the newspaper article that reports Warrigal’s death at the end of the novel refers to him as “a man of swarthy complexion” (402), as though only in death can Warrigal be accorded some limited version of equality. Moreover, he is also erratically referenced on the level of his language. At times he speaks in the somewhat infantilizing dialect also present in *Outlaw and Lawmaker*. For example, reporting Ben Marston’s fever to Starlight after Ben’s having been shot, he says, “Captain say big one sleep. Him give him medicine like; then wake up and go on likit that. I believe him bad along a cobra” (293). However, when he swears to take revenge on Dick for giving him a beating (for mistreating a horse), he speaks standard English: “Never mind, Dick Marston [...] I owe it you and Jim, one apiece [...] You mind your work and I’ll mind mine. This is the worst day’s work you’ve done this year, and so I tell you” (373).

In general, Warrigal appears to reference Boldrewood’s classificatory anxieties, albeit in somewhat muted form, given that the alternative of direct and sustained ethnic contrast was not available to Boldrewood as it had been to his important mentor, Fenimore Cooper. It was not available because it had been written out of Australian history as a necessity or even a possibility, including within Cooper’s model of the sentimentalised historical novel set in the past; neither were Aborigines available to Boldrewood within the circulation of ideas of the Noble Savage which animated Cooper’s work. At least, we might say, Boldrewood has a significant role for an Aboriginal character, even if he is only able to imagine him as a degraded half-caste, and in this Boldrewood evinced a simplistic version of Cooper’s anxieties

16. Another of these inconsistencies occurs when Starlight, disguised as Lascelles, dances with Maddie in Turon, and then the next day at Bella’s wedding offers to escort Maddie up the aisle, whereupon “the girl didn’t know him a bit in the world, and stared at him like a perfect stranger” (327), having to be introduced to him all over again.

about racial mixing. It was a commonplace in the nineteenth century (and for some time after) to say of mixed-race person, as is said of Warrigal, that, "except in hunting, fishing, and riding, he'd picked up the wrong end of the habits of both sides" (171). In addition, the worst of the gang's associates, Moran, who becomes a reference point for a depraved, selfishly acquisitive and murderous approach to their outlaw activities, is said to be "a half-bred gipsy" (270), thus supposedly explaining his nasty and violent temperament. Even for the romanticized and sympathetically-rendered hero Blake/Moonlight, when it comes to planning his future, it seems "as for the half-castes, they don't count" (285).

In *Outlaw and Lawmaker*, Aborigines are much more a part of the fabric of the life of the narrative. However, they are also totally subservient in a way Warrigal isn't. As with a number of other tensions in *Robbery Under Arms*, Warrigal's truculence and perceived untrustworthiness represents him as contesting the power of the invaders, attaching himself to them for his own purposes but retaining his own priorities. In Praed's novel Aborigines tend to be local colour, and either comic or disagreeable or both, so that although we might say she has incorporated them much more fully into the fabric of Australian life than has Boldrewood, she has also written them into highly conventional roles which present no discomfort for the invader-settlers in the way that Warrigal does. Warrigal's surly, inscrutable imperatives could perhaps be seen as an unexamined recognition of Aboriginal contesting of invader culture in a way that Praed's obedient background Aborigines are not. They are allowed a touch of comical directness, merely a sign of their naively uncivilized status, rather than Warrigal's more troubling cryptic presence. And Blake's mixed-race henchmen, such as Pompo, although present at a good deal of the narrative's action, are mere shadows and plot devices compared to Warrigal.

Like much in *Robbery Under Arms* Warrigal's role is both interestingly evasive and resonant with semiotic excess. Not only might he function as a sign of Aboriginal resistance but this might be the reason why he is a constant site of violence in the novel, not as its perpetrator but as its victim. For the most part this exists on the level of discourse; that is, whenever Dick Marston or any of the other major characters thinks of or sees Warrigal they are troubled by him, as can be seen by the words used to refer to him cited above. They think he needs a beating, or they threaten him with one or they recall that the threat of beatings is what is needed to keep him in line. And as Dick says, "we couldn't say what grounds we had for hating the sight of Warrigal" (67). Ben Marston, to take another example, talks of spending time with Warrigal, "that's like a bear with a sore head half his time. I'd a mind to

roll into him once or twice” (177), to which Starlight replies, “I’ll knock his head off myself as soon as we get settled a bit. Warrigal’s not a bad boy, but [...] he’s no good unless he’s knocked down about once a month or so” (150). This relation to Warrigal becomes crucial in the novel’s development, for it is in response to Dick’s administering a beating one day that he lets the police know about Dick’s whereabouts toward the end of the novel. As a result both Jim and Starlight are killed in a shootout with the police, and later Warrigal and Ben Marston kill each other as well. Although we might posit this as implicitly suggesting that the relation of violence the whites have with Warrigal has backfired, and operates as a critique of this relation, it is also true that Dick, who administers Warrigal’s beating, is the one who survives and is the book’s hero, while Jim, consistently portrayed as more morally responsible than Dick, gets killed. The complexities of this relationship are further suggested at the only point in the narrative when a Koori person is seen to interact with Warrigal — he bumps into a woman outside the prison and “an angry scowl passed over her face, so savage and bitter that I felt quite astonished” (134). This is never explained, and also seems to exist in the series of references to Warrigal as the occasion of hostility and antagonism, with the suggestion that as a person of mixed race he is hated by both sides of his ethnic inheritance for he is a permanent invocation of the Other.

In discussing whiteness, one discusses that which is not white, which appears inevitable. Given that, as semiotics has taught us, we establish meaning only in terms of comparison with linked terms. And this gives rise to great discomfort when we read nineteenth century Australian novels as they fissiparously divide whiteness into categories which can then complement each other. Thus they attempt never to have to face up to any of the ethnic moral and social issues of the day outside of the framework of these would-be complementary oppositions. This is why, despite the greater knowingness and sympathetic positions of Praed’s novel, Boldrewood’s is more interesting, for he hasn’t been able to completely establish the complementarities in almost any of the areas which are significant to the narrative’s diegesis. In this case, the interesting figure of Warrigal exists as the sign of the repressed or displaced ethnic difference that the novel attempts to erase. In his provocation of the discourse of violence he is resonant with that central fact of the white presence in colonial Australian history: that it is, in fact, whiteness under arms.

One Light, Many Lamps

Caught short by nightfall in a forest;
chancing upon fungi, luminescent.
Peaks of bluish-white intensity
(shards of metal about to melt)
would in the morning be as cold as crockery.

Strata of fungi,
suspended like cave-homes in Cappadocia,
where in a spirit of silence
a countenance was seen and known.
and known to be seeing back.

Just so, the wilderness
sees those who see it
on a late summer night with stars,
a night for mystery to be brought to sense
by sight of the earthly.

Is fungi a hardening of light
which peers outside itself
with unabstracted sight? — Beyond its bluish
glow, tiny beings call their complement.
Each of them, a lamp;
each lamp the embodiment of one light.

The Key to Everything

Kate didn't get to tell me about Sean in the way she'd planned. She said she didn't want me to find out like I did, but she had no choice. It was forced upon her. Sean's ex, Rose, found Kate and Sean together. Rose let herself into Sean's flat with her old key to pick up some stuff and there they were. It was eight o'clock in the morning. I imagine Kate wrapped in Sean's dressing gown, her cleavage gaping, and Sean in a pair of tartan boxers leaning on the kitchen bench, a cup of coffee in his hand. I imagine a gaze between them broken by the noise of a key in the door and then, them looking shocked as Rose let herself in. Rose told Kate she couldn't believe her eyes. She rang her later that morning, angry and screaming, and told her that if she didn't tell me by midday then she would do it herself, and it wouldn't be pretty. She'd come to my office, interrupt whatever meeting I was in, and tell me my wife was having it off with her ex. She told Kate I had a right to know.

At eleven o'clock my secretary buzzes me and says my wife's on line one. She *needs* to speak to me. I think one of the children must be sick. She never rings me at work. Not even to ask me to swing by the shops and pick something up on the way home. Her voice is shaky. I'm sure now that the kids have been runover. She says *I have something to tell you* and then pauses. My head is bursting with *What?* Then she says it, like it means nothing to her, or anybody, least of all me. *I slept with Sean last night. It just happened. I'm sorry to tell you this way but his ex-girlfriend knows and she's threatened to tell you herself. I wanted to tell you. I was going to tell you.* She says this like somehow she is an angel for telling me, rather than letting Rose blurt it out. But it doesn't seem to matter much how I am told, since later I won't be able to recall this conversation. Her exact words will be lost. I will block them out in some stupid attempt to fool myself that none of this is happening.

Her words are replaced with pictures. I can hear her speaking, her voice a thin

sour ache in my ear, but my mind is busy viewing images of her and Sean. She lies back in his bath, her thighs rising out of soft bubbles, her feet on the edge of his lime green tub. He sits on the rim with a white towel around his waist. He takes her foot in his hands and places it on his lap; slowly he caresses it. He places cotton wool between each toe and paints her nails.

I realise she is still on the phone and she is telling me how it happened. I am not listening. I tell Kate *I am coming home to sort this out* as if she's having trouble with a tradesman and needs me to quickly fix it and then be off again.

But in the car I find myself crying. Tears, like those belonging to my five-year-old, are wet and hot on my face. It's a strange sensation. One I haven't felt since the birth of my first child. I remember holding him and crying into his pink body. I am crying so much I can barely see the road and I need to stop. I rest my head on the steering wheel and my whole body shakes. I remember Kate phoning me last night to say she needed to stay with her sister Suzie and talk things through. She said Suzie was having a difficult time in her marriage to an overworked doctor, who never came home and left her alone with the children. Kate thought she'd stay the night; keep her company. I had said *yes, do that for her, poor thing*.

Now I wonder if everything she's ever said to me has been a lie.

There are things I want to ask her about him. When did she first realise she was attracted to him? Was it a year ago when I first introduced him as an old buddy from school? When I ran into him in the street and suggested he come home to meet my wife and children did I know I was inviting him home to fuck my wife?

Kate liked him right from the start. He had split up from Rose, the mother of his child, and didn't get to see his kid much. We both felt sad for him and I felt strangely better and luckier than he was for the first time in my life. I remember being jealous of him at school. Of his tan and surfing abilities. Of his way with the girls and his sexual conquests. I lay in bed with Kate, one night after a dinner with Sean and a girlfriend of Kate's (an attempt by her to match make), and said how good it was to have caught up with him. I told her how envious I'd been of him as a teenager and how now I felt sorry for the guy. I said he still hadn't grown up. Maybe we could help him, I told her. She'd said he was perfect the way he was. She said he had a youthful innocence about him. I felt a pang then. I remember wishing I hadn't criticised him in front of Kate. How doing so had made me look small.

Kate's attempts at match making Sean never succeeded. A couple of dates came out of them but nothing substantial. He used to ring her to talk about them. She called it a post-mortem. I would hear her giggling, sometimes for twenty minutes,

taking the phone onto the back verandah and having a cigarette while she spoke into the receiver. I would half listen from the kitchen, while stacking the dish-washer, and presume it must be one of her sisters. Then when she'd come back inside and I'd ask her who it was, she'd say *it was Sean telling me about his latest date. What a scream.*

Now of course all these things seem significant. Now that I am sitting here in the emergency-stopping lane and people are slowing down, staring to see if I am okay, slumped over the steering wheel, shaking uncontrollably, it seems obvious. With my eyes closed I see flashes; one-second edits starring Sean and Kate like I am watching the bloopers from a bad soap. His tan mocks me. His teeth mock me. I feel this awful querying about the size of his penis. Even his old car seems a better choice than my Honda. I think about the words she said on the telephone only minutes before. Did she say slept with or had sex with? Maybe it was *almost* sex but not quite? Does it matter if his dick penetrated her or not? The question is why. Why him suddenly and not me?

I can't begin to imagine what I will say to her first. A part of me wants to walk in slamming doors, throwing plates and say *well now you've done it*. I imagine her falling to her knees and clinging to my trousers as I pack my things into a bag. But it's just a fantasy. More likely I will walk in and she'll be at the table. Maybe she'll be smoking in the house, just to say she doesn't care about my rules anymore. Maybe I'll say something like *Do you love him?* And she'll say *I want a divorce*. And that'll be the end of it. A partnership of ten years obliterated by a night of passion. She'll say I drove her to it. She'll say she's sick of asking me for emotion and getting nothing back. She'll say she's sick of my weakness. I know these things because this is what we always argue about. About me not seeming to be present. About me being locked away somewhere else, inaccessible to her. Like I make her feel like she doesn't exist.

I am frightened of walking in and finding out these things. Of walking into my own house, the house we painted together and arranged the pictures on the walls together and where she gave birth to our two sons; and find her gone. Gone not only in the physical sense, but gone from me, to a place I can't go. Maybe she's in love with Sean like we were once in love. Maybe she laughs with him, and talks about herself, like she once did with me.

I pull back into the traffic and drive slowly the rest of the way home. I stay in the left lane, using my indicators to signal turns and do all the things I usually forget about. I switch off the car phone. I drive courteously, like somehow this might make

a difference to the way things will turn out when I get home. I let in other cars instead of pretending not to see them. I wish Kate could see me and the way I am driving.

I think about going past the primary school and picking up Jake and Calvin and driving off with them. Some sort of sweet revenge. I could take them to the country. I could show them what it feels like to drive over gravel and watch the red dirt fly out behind the car. I imagine her waiting at the gate for them, like she has told me she does, and then the minutes going by when they don't turn the corner and march up the street with the other kids. She'd know right away that it was me who had them. She'd weep and blame herself for her stupidity. But then would she think it was me who was vindictive? That I behaved badly when things came to a head? That I had no self control?

When I get home the kids are already there. They are playing in the front on the smooth green verge with make believe swords made from the branches of an umbrella tree. Jake has one hand on his hip and the branch makes a swishing noise as it slices the air. He says *on guard* and pokes the stick into Calvin's tummy. Normally I would park the car and go up to them. Maybe say something about how we don't like them to play aggressive-type games, but this time I hope they won't look up and see the car pull into the driveway. I hope they don't notice that I am never home this early.

Kate looks like she's been crying. Her eyes and nose are red. She has no shoes on, as if she's just got out of bed or the bath. I notice the colour on her toenails; a gold metallic nail polish like a teenager might wear. I am looking at her feet when she says *Aren't you going to say something? Aren't you going to show some emotion?* I want to tell her I've been crying on the way home. I want to ask her where she got the nail polish. Instead I say *I never want you to see him again.* She says *you can't tell me what to do anymore. I want my own life.*

The conversation turns into a battle so I don't even know what's being said. She cries in bursts and I even try to hug her, but she pulls away. I feel like it is all over even though I have just found out it has been going wrong for so long. She tells me she has felt unloved and I wonder where it is my love has been going. Where does it go, if it has not found her? Has it left me and got lost in a void? Seeped out of me and mingled into the carpet, into nothingness? It hasn't found its target. Have the kids felt this way too? When I go into their room at night and kiss them on the hairline, smell the sweet soap on their skin, do they not feel my love for them? She starts yelling that nobody in this house feels anything from me. I feel weak inside. I

sit there, mute, while she yells and I let her punch me in the arm.

My mind keeps going back to what seems like a pivotal question; was his love making better than mine? I don't want to ask, not really, I just want to have the information. I want to know. She is looking at my blank face and it is as if my question is scrolling out in large letters across my forehead like subtitles to a foreign film. She says *it wasn't the sex, you know*. She says *why do men always think it's the sex that's important?* Maybe it is because we haven't had sex for so long, that I think her decision to have it with someone else is relevant. She says *it is something else*. But she can't tell me what. I want to shake it out of her.

Then I see Jake and Calvin standing in the hallway watching us. Their faces are stony and cold; their mouths turned down and their eyes worried. She sees them and rushes to them. She kneels in front and throws her arms around them. She is saying *it's okay, mummy and daddy are just having a grown-up time. Now you boys run off and play at Suzie's and I'll come and get you soon*. They say *we want Daddy to take us* and I feel relieved. Like they've taken my side in all of this. Maybe they know Kate's betrayed me with my old friend.

I say *I'll take them*, pleased to get away from her and all her accusations. All her sudden ravings. Like she's gone mad in a day.

I take each little boy by the hand. I am tall against their smallness, yet I do not feel strong or protective like I think a parent should be. I feel clumsy like I might trip down the front verandah steps. They are leading me, helping me.

I walk the kids to Suzie's, and wonder if she knows what's been going on. Does she know she was an alibi for last night? Does she know that I thought it was her marriage that was in trouble? Does she know that as I sipped on a glass of port and thought her a poor sod, my wife was fucking another man?

Friends will ask me if I knew what was happening. Hadn't I guessed? Didn't I know her not wanting to sleep with me meant she was having an affair? I will try to recall conversations we had over breakfast. When did she stop pouring my orange juice and bringing it to me in the bathroom? Were there things I should have picked up? Things in the tone of her voice. Did she walk differently? Did losing weight till the size of her hips shrank two dress sizes mean she'd found someone else? Were these all clues I had missed?

I see Jake and Calvin running ahead, trying to jump over a pathetically small puddle and landing smack in the middle of it. Dirty water splashes their clean after-school clothes that I know Kate would have ironed and laid out on their beds, ready for them to change into. I say *Mummy'll be upset if you get those lovely clothes covered*

in mud, but I don't care about the clothes. Suddenly I'm overcome by wanting to splash in the puddle myself. To get down in it and roll like a dog trying to scratch its back. I want to go running back to Kate dripping wet, my suit covered in dirt, mud in my hair, and say *see look how foolish I can be*.

But I don't know what she wants of me anymore.

At Suzie's the kids run off to find their cousins. She looks at me like she's heard I've got cancer; like my life's a tragedy. She lays a hand on my shoulder and says she's sorry. She says she didn't realise Kate and I had grown so far apart. She asks the questions everyone will ask. *But you do still love one another*, she says, like it is the key to everything.

burbs

I
pink and greys hoon around bitumen hill shopping centre
their turf circles a flooded drain
they tap their beaks on the ground, strut and bow
folding leafy headdresses

a rhode island red examines each glint
in the bitumen, yellow eyes tilt for angle
he's the height of a spaniel
a perfect "u" balances between his comb and
fountaining tail feathers
he polices in careful steps
chocolate, auburn and midnight green
snake through him
he spends forty minutes inspecting
a mini with the wheels off
and a phone number in the window

for weeks we imitate the circular dance
of the little chestnut boobook that whistles
from the karri at night

her perfectly round head and shoulders
bob and swing as she signals

we mimic her cry, try for the plaintive suggestion
of her solitary whistle

the heads of our sunflowers hang by their skin
port lincoln parrots graze the black centres
with the intimacy of insects

black, green and yellow plumage on tall stems
backdoor hinge sends them flapping
they cry uh oh, uh oh, uh oh

II
afloat on the first breeze
of a white-hot day
the open hand wings
easy rhythm
legs trailing thin as wire
an egret balances the merge
of lavender and tangerine

pelican squats huge as a human
neck and pterodactyl head pose swan-like
on the overhanging freeway light
takes in the breeze off the purple river
and the parade of locked in traffic

tender quiver of under-bill conceals
digestion of a silvery planet under a hinged smile

from the feathered boat of her body
up there in the warm exhaust
would she consider turning the sword
of her beak, vuln her breast, drop red
diamonds over the windscreens

or does her fishing eye look
into the chrome and coloured metal bonnets
for the movement inside?

III
words pour down onto him from open mouths
a rescue, drama of stopped traffic
the fireman's balancing hand is forced off the
scorching asphalt repeatedly
population escalates as kids on their way home
are attracted to the fuss

tiny fuzzy shadow zigzags under the truck
runs through the corridor between dual wheels
children squat on the kerb where the man on his belly
lifts ducklings out of the grate

those of us stuck in heating cars
make plans to offer the event as solace
to angry children waiting to be collected from school
who now, in their distress, pack tight fantasies of a cool house
and the treasures of a deep fridge

Presence and absence in the Western Australian landscape.

The 1992 Mabo decision highlighted in the public arena the legal principle of *Terra nullius* that the British government invoked when deciding to establish a colony in Australia in the late eighteenth century. At the core of *Terra nullius* was a Eurocentric concept of culture and civilisation. For people to have sovereign rights over territory, it was necessary for them to demonstrate that they had developed a complex society based primarily on agriculture, and governed by religion, commerce, legal structures and government. If a group did not have these attributes, and most importantly, had not in any way cultivated the earth, they were deemed to be living in a “state of nature”. Whilst British authorities could argue that the Australian landmass was not being utilised, the very term *Terra nullius* also symbolically denied the existence of Indigenous people in Australia. The British based their possession of Australia in 1788 on the premise of first discovery, occupation and *Terra nullius*.¹

It is interesting to look at some of the early visual records of Western Australia to assess if the principles of *Terra nullius* and artistic representation converges in them. A pattern emerged, particularly in the work of British artists in Western Australia from 1800 to about 1840, of depicting Indigenous people as passive and nomadic travellers wandering through the landscape. Aboriginal people are consistently illustrated as “living in a state of nature” neither tilling the soil nor exhibiting any outward signs of culture and civilisation that would be recognisable to the nineteenth century European viewer. They are shown as cultureless appendages to the landscape and ultimately reduced to the status of another

1. Discussions of *Terra nullius* and British government policy towards Aborigines can be found in A. Frost, “New South Wales as *Terra nullius*”, *Historical Studies*, vol. 1, 1981; J. King, “*Terra Australis: Terra nullius* aut *Terra Aboriginum*?” *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 72, 1987; A. G. L. Shaw, “British policy towards the Australian Aborigines, 1830-1850”, *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 99, October, 1992.

picturesque element on the periphery of the scene.² Indigenous people are represented as disinterested and impotent observers of the British taking control of their land. Consequently the principles of *Terra nullius* are subtly reinforced. This article traces how some of these undercurrents may be evident in the work of artists active in Western Australia both before and after a British colony was established.

The history of European visual depictions of the land and people of Western Australia goes back at least to the late seventeenth century with the earliest known visual records being made by Dutch artists.³ The voyage of the British adventurer, William Dampier in 1699 to the North West coast produced several carefully observed images of plants and animals, but it was to be almost a century before a substantial body of work was produced by French and British artists who accompanied voyages of discovery to the west coast of Australia.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, expeditions were dispatched from Europe to investigate new lands and peoples. Sponsored by Governments as well as scientific organisations, science was a crucial aim of these projects. Empirical observation could lead to a competitive edge in new opportunities for trade and resources to supply a growing middle class market at home, as well as the prestigious respect gained for a nation from pure scientific endeavors. Strategic military and economic objectives were important too, as European powers sought refueling bases for an increasing naval presence in the region.

In post-revolutionary France there was a growing concern that scientific endeavor was slipping behind that of Britain.⁴ Captain James Cook's massive collection of specimens and documents was still being carefully worked through in Britain, while France had suffered a decade or more of instability and even some destruction of scientific collections. Between 1801 and 1803 a major expedition commanded by Nicolas Baudin spent several months surveying the Western Australia coast looking for safe anchorages and making accurate recordings of the

2. A notable exception to this view of Aboriginal people as "cultureless" is that found in the work of the amateur artist Richard Atherton Ffarington. Ffarington's folio depicts Aborigines of the south west of Western Australia 1843-47 and includes a scene of a corroboree, a burial and daily routines such as hunting and fishing. It is likely that Ffarington's ethnographic interest was based on establishing a compendium of "Field sports" similar to those about Aborigines on the east coast made by JH. Clark and others and also found within Indian literature.

3. Watercolour and ink coastal profiles of Western Australia by Victor Victorszoon who accompanied the Willem de Vlamingh expedition of 1696-7 are held by the Maritiem Museum Prins Hendrik, Rotterdam.

4. For a discussion of the French interest in Australia see Leslie Marchant's *France Australe*, Artlook Books, Perth, 1982 and Susan Hunt and Paul Carter's *Terre Napoléon: Australia through French Eyes 1800 - 1804*, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney, 1999.

landscape and people they encountered. The expedition included astronomers, geographers, zoologists, botanists and scientific draftsmen to record collected specimens.

For scientists, at the start of the nineteenth century, the Australian landmass was a blank page awaiting inscription. And for artists, there were possibilities of producing exotic and dramatic pictures for a European audience. One of the artists accompanying the Baudin expedition was Charles-Alexandre Lesueur who was fascinated by the strange and exotic animal life of Australia. His exquisite natural history drawings of birds, animals and fish recall the excitement of discovery. Amongst Lesueur's sketches are some of the dwellings of Indigenous people found along the south coast of Western Australia. In these he carefully illustrates the construction details as well as information about daily life including fish traps and stone circles. Despite his attention to detail in all other aspects, Indigenous people are shown in a schematic way. It is probable that his observations of the life and customs of the people they met were influenced by the expedition zoologist François Péron who had immense interest in the new field of scientific anthropology.

In 1801 the British Government, with substantial support from Sir Joseph Banks, commissioned Matthew Flinders to circumnavigate Australia. The principal objective was to survey the coast, mark tides, rivers, topographic features, the manners and customs of inhabitants and note anything of commercial or strategic value to Britain. Although a colony had been established on the east coast in 1788, the west still remained largely unexplored territory. A sense of urgency was supplied by the knowledge that France was showing interest in setting up a base in the region and that the Baudin expedition had already departed from Le Havre.

Flinders' party included an astronomer, a naturalist, and scientific artists. In contrast to the Baudin expedition, a landscape painter, William Westall, also accompanied Flinders. This was an important opportunity for Westall to establish a reputation as a professional painter and he was keen to gain material that would enable him to submit to the Royal Academy. William Hodges' earlier and spectacular scenes of the Pacific and India undoubtedly inspired him. Westall was however bitterly disappointed when he learned he would be wintering in Sydney, not the South Seas.⁵

The group departed from Britain and after a brief stop at the Cape of Good Hope sighted the Australian landmass on 6 December 1801 at Cape Leeuwin on the south coast. Two days later they anchored at King George Sound, their base for the

next few weeks. Westall went on several of the excursions inland and recorded his impressions of the landscape in detailed pencil and wash drawings. In "Part of King George III Sound on the South Coast of New Holland, December 1801" Westall has tried to emulate Hodges' very successful Pacific scenes. Contrasted against a luminous sky and the curving arm of the bay, is a dark foreground composed of unfamiliar plants — a zamia palm, a striking grass tree and a stunted eucalypt. In the centre of the group, an Aboriginal man kindles a fire looked on by a companion.⁶

But Westall's original vision of the scene was an uninhabited one. Preliminary sketches for the painting contain no human presence although the expedition made contact with Indigenous people of the King George Sound area and Westall had numerous opportunities to sketch the local inhabitants. On closer examination, it is clear that Westall's painting is a composite of various elements taken from different locations around Australia. The eucalypt in the centre right is based on a sketch done at Spencer's Gulf, and the grass tree hails from Port Jackson although it is also endemic to the Albany region.⁷ The Aboriginal figure group does not relate to any known sketch. It is most likely that the sketches for these figures were made later during the voyage and subsequently pasted into the foreground of the painting for picturesque effect.⁸ The topography of the landscape remains reasonably accurate, but through Westall's practice of "cut and paste", the representation of Aboriginal people cannot be seen as an accurate record of encounter.

At almost the same time as Flinders was making his way around the coastline, another French expedition led by Dumont D'urville was visiting the King George Sound area on a scientific reconnaissance. The interest in scientific anthropology propounded by post revolutionary scientists like Péron was evident in the work of artist Louis Auguste de Sainson who accompanied the Dumont D'Durville

5. Westall expressed his disappointment to Sir Joseph Banks in a letter dated 31 January 1804, "I was not aware the voyage was confined to New Holland only had I known this I most certainly would not have engaged in a hazardous voyage where I could have little opportunity of employing my pencil with any advantage to myself or my employers." W.Westall to Sir Joseph Banks, Banks' Papers, IV, f.149, Mitchell Library Sydney.

6. "Part of King George III Sound on the South Coast of New Holland, December 1801" was one of a series of oils commissioned by the Admiralty to illustrate Flinder's voyage. The paintings are currently on long term loan from the Ministry of Defence to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. It is illustrated in colour in Barbara Chapman, *The colonial eye: a topographical and artistic record of the life and landscape of Western Australia 1798-1914*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1979, frontispiece.

7. These drawings are now in the National Library of Australia collection. "Spencer's Gulf, eucalyptus", pencil 21 x 17.8 cm and "Port Jackson: Grass trees", pencil 26.4 x 17.9cm.

8. In the companion painting "Bay on the south coast of New Holland, January 1802" (Ministry of Defence on loan to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich) Westall included similar botanical detail but in this case, a striped serpent based on a sketch done at Thistle Island provided the exotic element in the foreground.

expedition of 1826 – 1829. De Sainson was an accomplished artist as evidenced by his landscapes of the area and his careful representation of the French pursuing their scientific activities. However his illustrations of Indigenous people are in stark contrast. The published image “Port du Roi Georges” 1833 clearly contrasts the French men in their elaborate uniforms against the almost caricatured group of Indigenous inhabitants, scantily clad, huddled together and expressing a mixture of fear and amazement at the trinkets being offered them. Clearly the intention of De Sainson’s image was to represent the perceived advantages of European and French civilisation over the Indigenous culture they encountered.

When the Swan River area around Perth in Western Australia was being explored in 1827 by James Stirling, the artist assigned to the expedition, Frederick Garling, showed the land as basically uninhabited and benign. The goal of the government financed expedition was to assess the feasibility of establishing a trading and military outpost at the Swan River. Stirling argued that the area was strategically positioned to capitalise on trade within the Indian Ocean region and was a strong base from which to protect the rest of the colony.

Frederick Garling made at least ten watercolours of Western Australian scenes.⁹ They reinforce Stirling’s recommendation that the fertile soil, mild climate and safe anchorage would enable a colony to be successfully established.¹⁰ Stirling also noted that the Aboriginal inhabitants might be employed to help set up the colony but were “capricious and revengeful and always ready to resort to offensive measures.” Only two of Garling’s watercolours show any Aboriginal presence, the rest record the progress of the exploring party as it made its way up the Swan River and eastwards towards the Darling Ranges.

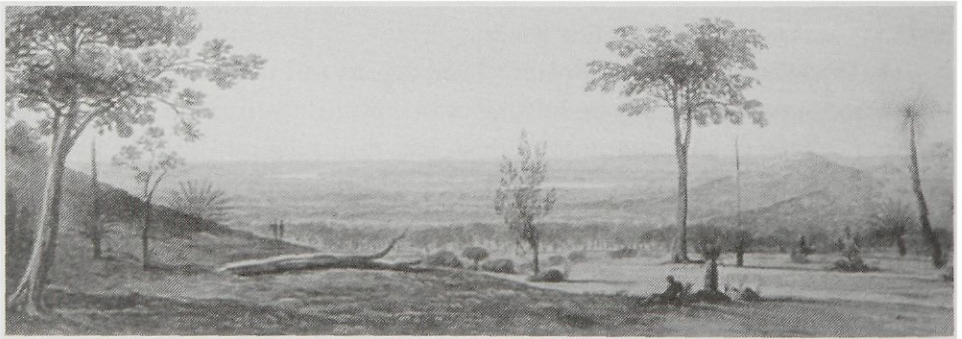
His “View across the coastal plain” 1827 depicts an extensive landscape with open woodlands and a gently undulating coastal plain. Distant Aboriginal figures present no threat or impediment to a British gaze that is directed over the plain. In this and the companion piece, “View from Mount Eliza”, small groups of Aboriginal figures are placed in counterpoint to the expansive landscape. Their inclusion reflects ideals of the picturesque approach to landscape then currently in fashion. Whilst artists in Britain may have followed the current aesthetic theories of Uvedale Price’s to include gypsies and beggars as “picturesque objects” and as a way of

9. Eight of these are in the Art Gallery of Western Australia collection, one attributed work is in the Rex Nan Kivell Collection at the National Library of Australia and one watercolour in the Holmes à Court Collection, Perth.

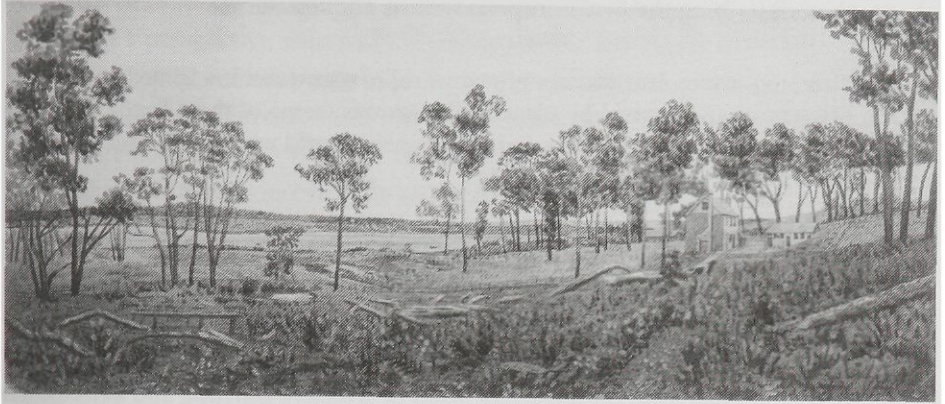
10. A small military outpost had been set up at Albany, King George Sound in 1826. The Swan River Colony, later known as Perth, was established 1829.



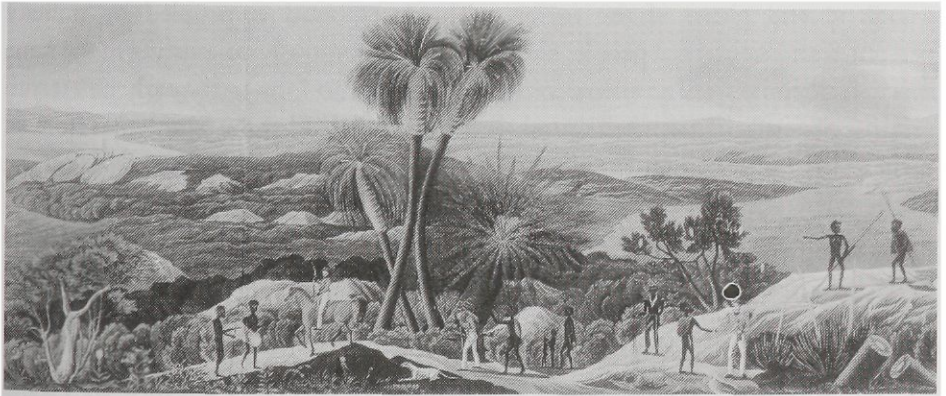
After Louis Auguste de Sainson 'Port du Roi Georges' 1833, hand coloured lithograph, Collection of Art Gallery of Western Australia.



Frederick Garling 'View across the coastal plain' 1827, watercolour, Collection of Art Gallery of Western Australia.



Thomas Turner 'Albion House, Augusta' 1836, pen and ink and watercolour, Collection of Art Gallery of Western Australia.



After Robert Dale detail of 'Panoramic view of King George's Sound, part of the colony of Swan River' published 1834, hand coloured engraving and aquatint, Collection of Art Gallery of Western Australia.

nostalgically noting the changes in the rural landscape, Australian-based artists trained in the picturesque transferred this function to Aboriginal groupings.¹¹

Garling's pictures of the Swan River area, like so many of the time, imply that the land has no prior history, it is the "blank page" scenario Mary Louise Pratt writes about when describing the first European writers about America:

They, too, wrote America as a primal world of nature, an unclaimed and timeless space occupied by plants and creatures (some of them human), but not organized by societies and economies; a world whose only history was the one about to begin.¹²

It is now acknowledged however, that Indigenous people in Australia did have complex systems of land management, cultivated certain crops, and engaged in environmental control through regulated burning. The open bush expanses so apparent in the work of artists like Garling, were in fact carefully manipulated environments created from thousands of years of selective burning and agricultural practices.¹³

In Robert Dale's "Panorama of King George Sound" published in London in 1834, the artist takes a naturally elevated position to survey the landscape. His gaze extends over and beyond the small British settlement of Albany, across the woodland and plains of the region. The foreground is peopled by military personnel and Aboriginal people, all shown as harmoniously co-existing in the same space. Panoramas were an entertaining and lucrative art form in the early nineteenth century. Specially constructed round viewing halls would show panoramas from all parts of the Empire to an audience eager for information about the colonies. The Albany view is typical of the kind of panoramas intended to provide a wealth of detail for prospective settlers and investors as well as those that may have had family or friends starting a new life in Australian colonies. It provides accurately recorded topographical information, (Dale was a surveyor) as well as indicators of human relationships.

But it presents a scene where any barriers to European advance are clearly

11. See Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and ideology: the English rustic tradition, 1740-1860*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, p.69 for a discussion of Uvedale Price's theories in this context.

12. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p.126

13. Of particular interest is Sylvia Hallam, *Fire and hearth; a study of Aboriginal usage and European usurpation in south-western Australia*, Canberra; Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1979; and Neville Green, *Broken spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia*, Perth, Focus Education Services, 1984.

removed. His is an exotic Eden where “none of the obstacles to occidental progress appear in the landscape”.¹⁴ His gaze describes the land as awaiting the embrace of European progress. The foreground detail subtly contrasts the Aboriginal people perceived to be in a “state of nature” against progress and order in the form of mounted military officers and rigidly uniformed soldiers. It is clear from Dale’s perspective who will ultimately control the landscape.

Other early colonial artworks depict an Aboriginal presence only through absence. Thomas Turner was a self taught artist who emigrated from Britain with his family to Augusta, Western Australia, some 200 kilometres away from the colonial seat of power in Perth. In 1834, after continual tension between Aboriginal groups and white settlers, military authorities and settlers attacked a group of Aboriginal people in the south west. The incident became known as the Pinjarra massacre. Turner’s view of his home “Albion House, Augusta” 1836 depicts it as a fortification against physical threat — threat emanating both from the environment and a strong Aboriginal presence in the area. The two-storied house and its outbuildings are symbolic of material achievement and an attempt to locate oneself in the environment. But the Turner house is surrounded by a strong perimeter fence delineating the interior and controlled space from the exterior. As Paul Carter has said:

The act of settling was not a matter of marking out pre-existing boundaries, but one of establishing symbolic enclosures. It depended on establishing a point of view with a back and front, a place with a human symmetry, a human focus of interest. Boundaries were the means of expressing this ambition, of articulating presence.¹⁵

Bearing in mind the local circumstances, the scene might also be interpreted as a statement of the tension that existed in the area until the perceived Aboriginal threat was eliminated. In “Albion House, Augusta, after clearing of land”, painted in the 1840s, Turner expresses a sense of pride as settlers in Western Australia like his family began accumulating possessions and capital. The house now projects well above an extensive area of cleared and tilled land with the focus on individual and collective achievement.

Aboriginal presence (or absence) in Western Australian colonial art remains as

14. Mary Louise Pratt, p.127.

15. Paul Carter, *The road to Botany Bay: an essay in spatial history*, London, Faber and Faber, 1987, p.168.

an indicator of black — white relationships. The work of early French recorders is primarily based in scientific observation but is still laden with Eurocentric ideas of race and culture. The work of British trained artists takes on a particularly potent role as the colony was established with dominant British political and aesthetic models. Whether British trained artists during the early colonial period may have been either consciously or inadvertently imaging an understanding of *Terra nullius* is an intriguing question. However, Westall's romantic visions of another Eden and the topographical and picturesque landscapes of Frederick Garling and Robert Dale include Aboriginal people as exotic detail, divorced from their culture and silently observing their dispossession. Thomas Turner's implied sense of danger may hint at another dimension, to the psychological climate of a settler society. The works of these artists depict a cohesive and constant view of unimpeded European progress through the landscape. What is missing from the visual record is any expression of contested territory and conflicting visions.

The Meeting

“Jesus died for somebody’s sins but not mine...”

Patti Smith

The girl stands in front of the mirror, tugging down the thin jumper. It's brown with white stripes and she knows it's no good. She has big saggy tits which drag the stripes down and make them pucker and curve. She stands there, makes a face in the mirror then goes into the kitchen where her father sits with the paper in front of the unlit wood stove. So what's it gunna be like, this meeting? I don't know, just a meeting. There gunna to be people there jumpin up and down, shoutin *praise de lawd*? I don't know, says the girl. Don't know, don't know, what do ya know? Not a lot says the girl, and she walks down the front path, past rows of beans and cabbages neat as braided hair. While she waits she thinks about the half-dark hall, all the singing and crying and calling out to Jesus. (*Jesus ain't no lover for a woman.*) The caterwauling and bawling and upturned faces. Eva Pearson rolling on the floor with her dress pulled up under the pastor's moon-faced gaze. The girl tugs down her jumper and listens for the car. The boy's late but she knows he'll turn up; they've had this arranged for a week. There's a sound like distant thunder and when the old puke-green Ford with the foxtail hanging from its antenna comes round the corner she grips the top of the gate so tightly flakes of rust come away in her hands. He's got a half-bottle of Jim Beam and when she hands it back the neck's ringed with brown smudges and sweat. She's seen him driving down the main street on Friday night, one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the can between his legs. She doesn't know why he comes to the meetings, she only knows that when they saw Eva Pearson on the floor their eyes met and he smirked. After the meeting they sat out in the car while people called out cheerfully, you behave yourselves now,

before going back to conversations about the Holy Spirit and the price of fencing wire. He kept looking at his hands and shifting around in his seat while she asked him about the footy team and how many wins they'd had. Not many, they were playing shit house, and then he apologised for using language. He had a sweet face and smelt of Brut 33 and yes, she thought, he'll do.

At home, she brought up his family's name, just casually, and her father put down his paper and stared. You going round with those tall Irish boys? You better watch yourself, girl. The girl watched herself: she watched herself in the mirror and in the meetings and afterwards in the car. She sat on the hard wooden seats in the hall watching people open their mouths and utter dark streams of words which rose up to Jesus and wondered what it was like.

When he stops the car in the clearing he hands her the bottle again but she shakes her head. She doesn't want to be like the girls she reads about in *Truth*: "He drugged me, then took advantage..." or "Girl, sixteen, sold into degradation". He leans towards her and she cups the hot mystery of his breath in her mouth, tastes liquor and smells cheap aftershave. When he tips back the seat she knows he's done this before and she's glad. Their voices rise grappling and calling, past the dark trees while she straddles him awkwardly and he fumbles with his zipper and swears. She expects pain but there isn't any and as she rides him her power rises like sap. Wild hallelujahs burst from her throat while he puts his hands on those heavy tits and moans as though he's receiving a sacrament or a blow. He's saying words she can't hear, begging slow down, slow down but he doesn't know she's got a dervish inside. Scarlet arpeggios leap from her and she opens to him like a flower, like a Venus flytrap while he howls in adoration below. She milks him and drinks him, tasting his sweet blood while his eyes roll back in his head and he clamours to be saved. He's moaning, he's begging, there's a sea of fire around them and when he cries ohchristgodjesus she blesses him and they glide, clear-eyed and sanctified, through to the other side.

On the way back she tries to talk but he won't look at her, he only grunts and drops her at the corner instead of driving right up to the gate. The girl feels a flash of contempt but it passes and when she gets out she thanks him and gently closes the door. Branded, she thinks, watching the red gimlet eyes recede. The devil's spawn. The empty bottle hits the road and explodes into fragments of light. She starts walking.

When she reaches the house she creeps in so she doesn't wake the others. The sky's clear and night light burnishes the old wood and worn lino. The girl takes

down the big white enamel bowl with the dark blue rim, fills it from the kitchen tap and gets a thin, rough towel from the cupboard in the hallway. She stands over the bowl and she laves herself, ladling cool water between her thighs while she watches the tendrils of blood curl in the bowl and disappear. After she washes away the blood and stink she dries herself with the towel, rubs herself so hard the skin mottles and streaks. She picks up the heavy bowl, carries it carefully to the yard and tips red-tinged water onto the plants. Then she goes inside and rinses and dries the bowl. Still holding the towel she moves quietly down the hall, and stands outside her brothers' room. Now you be a mother to them, her mother had whispered in the hospital but the girl didn't need to be told. She tiptoes in and strokes the hair of the littlest. They remind her of something she's seen in the window of the second hand shop in town, the row of rotund wooden dolls with painted cheeks, which fit snugly, one inside the other.

When she reaches her room she turns down the blankets and crawls under. Faint blue bruises bloom across her breasts; she feels a familiar soreness and knows that soon she will bleed. No drama, she thinks. In the morning she'll be up with the sun to get the boys off to school and will watch the bus raise plumes of dust as it ambles along the road. Her father will come into the kitchen wanting bacon and eggs and start yakking about the meeting. Who fell over, go on, you tell me. Did that silly old bugger Jackie Merton fall over? The girl sighs but then the lines on her face ease: no use wishing for something you don't have. Through the uncurtained window she sees stars and the dense familiar outline of trees. She falls asleep beneath the dark mantle of sky.

Toenail Painting Lesson

I wonder how a teacher can be so beautiful. With her plaid mini skirt and platform shoes the boys die for her, hang out of their desks so they can smell her walk past, drop biros so they can look up her skirt.

She has dark hair and leaves it all flowing down over her shoulders and sometimes it goes back in a pony tail just like a groomed showhorse, shiny black almost wet to look at with all the green she wears making her like a queen. Black and green and like a queen. Like Cleopatra, black and green and bathing in asse's milk. Where does she get the asses?

"From the back row," my friend Muriel giggles.

We sit in the front because I want to see the teacher's skirt ride on the bottom of her bottom as she reaches up to write on the board, her stockings the same colour as the chalk, sort of white but not, stucco. Her legs go all the way to China and back and after class she carries her notes against her breasts as she slinks like a cat down the corridor and her subjects fall to their knees, plunge asps into their chests, dig holes to bury their heads so they don't have to gaze on her beauty. And she doesn't seem to notice any of it, she's so nice.

"We could be like her if we dyed our hair," says Muriel and I point out that we'd have to grow another six feet and bleach our skin. Muriel is never discouraged, she dyes her hair anyway, and it looks like she's had a date with Elvis, sort of bluey black but it doesn't take right and there are faded ends where Muriel's hair, like steel wool, is splitting and splaying at the edges.

"What have you done to yourself," the teacher says to Muriel, and Muriel just smiles, all sheepish, because even saying that the teacher sounds like she's giving Muriel a gold star and Muriel makes me take a photo so she can remember how it was to look like her for a day. It isn't a day, though, it's supposed to be, it's called a rinse, but these things never do as they're told, and she's fading down to grey black

and a horrible mud colour for ages, weeks, until her mother takes her to the hairdresser and tells them to fix it. She comes back blonde, she's very happy about that, for a week or two, until the roots start to show, and the rest goes yellow, and the frayed ends really start to sizzle. Poor Muriel, she was never meant to be a beauty queen.

But you've got to give her 100% for trying!

She has a flat nose, like her nostrils didn't inflate in time before god handed out the cement for the moulds, and you don't have to be very inspired to see she resembles a cow. Which makes it doubly bad that I can't help calling her Moo. But she takes it well. Like I said, she's a good friend.

I like to go to her house at lunchtime, Moo's I mean, because she lives just up the road, so it's handy and if we can get over the fence without getting spotted that's what we do.

You're only supposed to do it with a note, like a permanent pass, but we don't have notes because Moo's Mum works, because her Dad isn't around, so the house is empty.

It's funny going home for lunch to an empty house. Like someone should turn the heater on or the radio or something, it should have noise and air moving around. But it doesn't and we raid her biscuit tin and eat strange concoctions of tuna and small hairy fish and sardines and whatever she can find in the cupboard.

I never seem to have any lunch of my own. I'm sure I see it sitting on the oven when I leave in the morning, it's in a brown paper bag and it has my name written on it but the G is all wonky like a Y. That's the way Mum writes because she was brought up in the country and they don't teach you much there she says. So now I'm Yabby instead. What happens after I pick up the brown paper bag off the oven? Why don't I have any lunch by the time I get to Moo's? I haven't eaten it, that much is for sure. Maybe I don't have any in the first place and the oven is from a million years ago, from when Mum used to be there to make sandwiches.

Now I see her as I come into school. She's just leaving and she's been here since dark, mopping and sweeping those same corridors that the teacher, the queen, strides along, getting them ready, polishing them so the teacher can see her face in them. Like the duco on her yellow Datsun 260Z.

Mum kisses me on the top of the head and carries her bucket up the hill through the car park with all the teachers cars. She looks grey against that yellow. Like Mother Theresa on the telly.

I try to imagine my teacher as a saint, with her hair wrapped close to her scalp,

pinned and covered with a tea-towel and her body in a long shapeless robe that covers her knees, her ankles, all her stucco stockings, and her feet just in sandals. Then I see her toenails painted red, and the image pops away and she is lying on the beach with her triangle bikini on and the sun is baking her a perfect shade of biscuit and it glints off her shoulders where she has put the baby oil and even the sea stops rolling in to watch her.

Could I be a lesbian?

Moo says lesbianism is a disease, she's heard her Dad swearing about it, he says that's her mother's problem, that she should see a doctor. That was right before she threw him out, he didn't want to go, Moo says, reckoned it was just a phase, this disease, and that she'd grow out of it. But her Auntie Liza is still living in the guest bedroom, although mostly she sleeps in Moo's Mum's room, so I guess her Mum's still sick.

"Do you think you can catch it," I asked Moo, but Moo was sure you couldn't. "Otherwise my Dad would have it, and what about me brother," and I had to admit her brother hates girls so maybe it isn't contagious at all.

That's why it comes as a surprise when Moo's rubbing my back, like we sometimes do to each other, when we're home for lunch watching Mike Walsh on the twelve o'clock show and she puts her hands under my jumper and says she can get a better shot at scratching bare skin.

She has great nails, Moo. Like I said she's not convinced she's ugly. They're like half moons and perfect soft edges, not ragged like mine, and she's getting a good scratching thing happening while I sit between her legs on the stool. She unhooks my bra so she can get a better go, and I'm listening to Geoff Harvey playing *Raindrops are Falling on My Head* and Johnny Farnham is singing and the audience of grannies is going wild.

Such a nice face, he has, and hair like gold.

Makes me goey inside and I'm thinking about him and Moo's scratching and then all of a sudden like a mouse popping out of a hole she sort of scoots her hands around to the sides and tickles my breasts and I almost shoot through the roof the electricity is so strong, and then she goes back to back scratching, except tickling more now, and then I don't jump when she's shooting her hands round the sides, and then the tickling is on my front and Johnny Farnham is singing and somehow I feel like I'm stuck to the stool and I don't want Moo to stop but I do because it should be Johnny Farnham not Moo and I'm confused and then the phone rings and Moo has to go answer it.

I'm all organised and eating a tuna sandwich by the time she's off the phone and everything's hooked back up and straightened away, and now Mike Walsh is interviewing some snake handler so the threat of loving Johnny Farnham has passed and I think we're both relieved. But maybe she's caught it, whatever it is, and I wonder whether I've caught it too, and I study my face in the mirror that night to see if I've changed, but I seem the same, maybe spottier, but the same.

My dreams are different though. Now I'm the queen strolling down the polished corridors and my legs have grown so long I can barely see my red painted toenails.

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Marion Campbell, *Prowler*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1999, \$19.95, 392 pp.

It is fourteen years since Fremantle Arts Centre Press published *Lines of Flight*, a first novel by Western Australian writer Marion Campbell. In doing so, it took a considerable commercial risk; Campbell was an unknown writer, and this "difficult" and aesthetically unconventional novel was hardly destined to be a bestseller. But for this reviewer at least, *Lines of Flight* — formally audacious, linguistically inventive, intellectually and politically challenging — remains one of the most important works of experimental fiction to have appeared in Australia. Now as then, Fremantle Arts Centre Press is to be commended for its willingness to take a punt on risky writing.

Campbell's third and long-awaited novel, *Prowler* is also a risky text. It makes demands on the reader. While it is certainly less theoretically complex, linguistically dense and extravagantly performative than *Lines of Flight* — more "accessible", if you will — it is both formally challenging and stylistically engaging. It has a discernible story-line about growing up and the search for identity, while disrupting chronology through the

use of dream and memory sequences to enact the workings of obsession and desire. It uses as narrator the academic Lou Barb, who tells her story of sexual confusion, familial tensions and professional disillusionment, and who functions as the archivist and anguished interpreter of a series of notebooks left by her dead childhood friend, the dancer and painter Tom-Tom O'Shea. These notebooks are Tom-Tom's stories — of her search for meaningful vocation abroad in bohemian Marseille; of a failed cross-cultural marriage; of her life-long friendship with an Aboriginal family which ends in a fatal act of solidarity. Lou Barb's narration and Tom-Tom's notebooks are interwoven and counterpointed to tell the moving story of a friendship between the two women — a friendship which, precariously and preciously, survives difference and disapproval.

The riskiness of *Prowler* is also evident in its mix of modes and styles. It ranges through lyricism, polemics, satire, poetry, and more conventional description and dialogue which renders the mucky complications and misunderstandings of everyday life. Like *Lines of Flight*, it is tonally various: it is both serious (without being sententious) and at times very funny. Campbell has a flair for visual comedy, a good ear for accents, and an acerbic

line in satiric demolition. The wedding scene in which the Anglo-Saxon heroine Tom-Tom, accompanied by her Aboriginal friends, is married by an Ocker celebrant to her North African lover Asif, is a wonderfully clever comic piece on cultural difference, combining slapstick, verbal wit and a keen sense of the absurdity of social rituals. Such formal innovation, then, as with Campbell's earlier fiction, requires us to be active co-creators rather than merely passive consumers of the text.

There is riskiness as well in the fact that *Prowler* revisits many of the issues, characters and locales of *Lines of Flight*, leaving itself open to the charge that it is simply re-working old material. Certainly there are conspicuous similarities between the two novels, both of which are narratives of the innocent Aussie 'broad' abroad — stories of the artist/heroine who goes to Marseille in search of authenticating knowledge and an enabling sense of vocation. Both focus on the heroine's attempts to negotiate the emotional and ethical entanglements of friendships and sexual relationships — including a liaison with a foreigner which produces a child — and her confrontation with colonial and class politics. Both are centrally concerned

with issues of representation, self-consciously exploring painting, dance and writing as aesthetic and ideological forms.

But if there are similar preoccupations and story-lines, there are also important thematic and political differences between the two novels. Indeed, *Prowler* might be read as a bold attempt to confront some of the evasions and elisions of *Lines of Flight*. One important difference is the treatment of female sexuality. *Prowler*, particularly in the Marseille section, "fleshes out" the muted homoeroticism of Campbell's first novel: it openly celebrates lesbian desire. Its representation of lesbian sexuality, as fantasy and actual encounter, is both erotically charged and ethically astute, acknowledging as it does the legitimate claims of relationship.

Prowler is also tougher on its artist/heroine: the suggestively named Tom-Tom — seductively feline, sexually ambivalent, politically threatening — is perhaps more an emotional victimiser than a victim. Creative and unconventional, she is also manipulative — "practised (in) intimacies", as Lou Barb pointedly has it — and often careless with the affections of others. As such, she is a more disturbing version of Rita Finnerty, the heroine of *Lines of Flight*.

While *Prowler* sustains sympathy for Tom-Tom, it offers a far less benign portrait of the artist as egotist and exhibitionist.

Prowler also gives more attention to issues of masculinity. While the gender politics of *Lines of Flight*, and indeed of Campbell's second novel *Not Being Miriam* (1988), focus on the victimisation and oppression of women, the feminism of *Prowler* shows how men, too, can suffer under patriarchy. Through the character of As if, Tom-Tom's husband, it explores the self-destructive consequences of "machismo" and the difficulties of fathering in ethically circumspect, culturally specific and often very moving terms. Its representation of masculine violence not only registers its horror but also tries to locate its social sources.

These differences show Campbell's willingness to scrutinise her earlier ideological and political assumptions. In a number of ways, then, *Prowler* is a more tough-minded and emotionally courageous novel than its predecessor.

However, perhaps the most important difference between the two novels — the treatment of Aboriginal issues — is also the most problematic. While *Lines of Flight* merely hints at the racism of white Australia, *Prowler* brings the issue unmistakably home;

the thematic, structural and political prominence it gives to white Australian racism is a significant departure in Campbell's fiction. Drawing on a number of recent "incidents" in Perth, including deaths in custody and media harassment of Aboriginal families, the novel refuses its white readers the self-interested comfort of historical amnesia. But while this kind of political commitment is surely welcome in these Hansonite times, it doesn't always make for the best writing. At times the critique of racism is heavy-handed, tending to assertion rather than imaginative realisation. With the exception of the matriarch Maeve, who is given a convincing voice and presence, the Nyoongar characters are rather too nakedly expedient, "wheeled in" at opportune moments to denounce racism. This is not to criticise the novel for its failure to create realistic characters — *Prowler* is after all a non-realist text, and such a criticism is simply beside the point. But if the novel's critique of racism is to be politically persuasive, its representation of racial issues needs to be more aesthetically compelling.

Campbell is at her best when the critique is earned — when it emerges from concrete evocation, from writing which is imagistically arresting and rhythmically assured. This kind of

writing occurs more often in the Marseille than in the Australian sections of the novel. As just one example, here is Tom-Tom's description of the slum area of St Charles — its high proportion of North African immigrants implicitly attesting to the destructive legacy of French colonialism:

Here the rain camouflages nothing: squalor is fixed under its veneer. No lyricism can reclaim this. This is the triumphant banality of misery. Between the two high-rises there is a relatively bright ochre-rendered building.... In the square, covered with patchy bitumen, rubbish floats in puddles. The buildings themselves are what we used to call taupe, torp, we'd say, back in Perth, torp. Mole-coloured. But it's the death of all senses, not just sight. It hesitates between grey absence and contaminated earth except where the soot has made blackheads of the stucco bubbles. There are cyclones fences topped with barbed wire, backed by a crumbling limestone wall, grey-rendered with glass embedded at the top. Even as a prison it's

dysfunctional. The buildings were once, I guess, called brute functionalism. (203)

This is poised and authoritative political writing. The critique emerges with apparent artlessness from the concrete details. The blighted nature of the lives of the inhabitants is implied through the visual and aural imagery, rather than stated. Tonally, too, the description makes its political point: the cynical offhandedness of the concluding sentence compounds the sense of powerlessness of both the slum inhabitants and the observer.

This kind of writing — knowing, evocative, engaged — is to be found throughout the novel, and is certainly not confined to matters political. Some of the best sections deal with intense, often painful, personal experiences; Campbell writes with great affective power about loss and longing, and she is particularly good on the subject of death. Let me conclude with a passage which highlights her preparedness to take risks. It describes one of Lou Barb's visits to the hospital in which her friend Tom-Tom lies dying, and has all the ingredients for a tear-jerker — the life-long friendship between two women, the innocent child (Tom-Tom's daughter) who is poignantly ignorant of her mother's imminent death, adult helplessness in the face of

the inevitable — the potential for cliché and sentimentality is obvious. Campbell not only avoids these dangers but offers us the pleasures and consolations of language used artfully and intelligently:

Isidore is in the grubby lemon and lime fairy costume she refuses to give up to the wash. The leotard is bobbed, the netted tutu gashed, the star of the wand whirling dangerously close to the tubes and the monitor knobs. If only her magic could work. Her little hand, calloused from days on the monkey bars, grips mine like life itself and down we go, day after day, to the lift, stopping at the drink machine for her to laugh as the Fanta can clunks into the serving window. Now in her mother's dying time, we retreat into the fairy's balancing act, all along the limestone walls outside the ugly brick hospital. I think each time: if Isidore gets through that shrub without losing her foothold on the wall, Tom-Tom will live. Our concentration is fierce and wonderful and each time I have to take hold of myself to go back to level 5, where there's all that grim concentration and waiting,

waiting, for the unbearable to happen or to retreat. I just want this suspension, to be weaving with the dark-eyed fairy through the shadows and light, with her wand waving, wanting, wanting, more and more of this. (12)

The power of this writing lies in its capacity to evoke both the magic and the fragility of the moment. The childhood world of sensorial and emotional immediacy — of "life itself" — is here threatened by the pain of adult knowledge, registered in that deftly placed reference to "her mother's dying time". The hypnotic rhythms enact the adult's desire to arrest time, to remain suspended in that realm where, magically, death has no place. And it is cleverly understated: child-like phrases like "if only" and "I just want" subtly suggest the adult's awareness that such desire is mere wish-fulfilment.

For such stylistic authority alone *Prowler* is highly recommended reading. This, and its formal inventiveness, political commitment and ethical poise, confirm Campbell's standing as one of our important novelists.

Susan Midalia

Frances de Groen's *Xavier Herbert: A Biography*, University of Queensland Press, 1998, \$39.95.

On the back cover of Frances de Groen's biography of Xavier Herbert is a photograph of the white-haired Herbert on a morning jog. It is a telling picture, incorporating many of the contradictory facets of the author's personality. The background is blurred, as are his origins; additionally, its shadowy nature in contrast to the clear forward thrusting chest and muscular shoulder reflects the difficulty he has in reconciling the "feminine" nature of writing and his obsession with masculinity — being seen as a "real" man. That he is alone is significant too: one after another he alienated almost all his friends and colleagues.

The evidence points to "Inky" Stevensen as the editor of *Capricornia*, something that Herbert publicly refuted. Once good friends, they had a bitter falling out; Beatrice Davis his beloved patroness, editor and some time lover suffered a humiliating snub when Herbert failed to send an invitation to the launch of *Poor Fellow my Country*. Intensely self obsessed he took offence at real or imagined slights. Manipulative and with absolutely no sense of loyalty, he once expressed the fear that he would be

remembered as a monster. But unlike Patrick White ["... the Monster of All Time. But I am a monster"] who acknowledged the possibility, Herbert sought to justify his actions and shift the blame. He was also an incorrigible liar according to de Groen, and she produces evidence to prove it, quoting and paraphrasing copiously from his autobiography, testing self-referential statements against known facts of his life from which they differ. Hyperbole, exaggeration, self-aggrandisement — he presented the persona he wanted to be, rather than the person that he was. At the same time he never lacked for patrons, even if they had to be coerced. And in spite of his misogyny he attracted women and never seemed short of temporary lovers. Almost inevitably he terminated relationships with rancour but strangely, in time he was forgiven. de Groen chooses a psychological bias to her text, and quite early in the book discusses personality disorders concluding that Herbert may have suffered from narcissistic personality disorder which manifested itself in gross self doubt which he compensated for by bluster and boast. Some of his grosser misdemeanours suggest his problem might have been more serious. There are hints of paranoia in his delusions of grandeur and feelings of victimisation, and it could be argued

that his confusing the real events of his life with their fictional counterparts to the extent that he actually believed he was living the fiction verges on the schizoid. But then autobiography can become the ultimate fiction.

All that aside, for me, he emerges from these pages as a tragic figure. Someone who might have been acclaimed a genius if he had been less erratic and irrational. He had a formidable intelligence but it was completely undisciplined and quite anarchic. His epic vision encompassed humanitarian concerns, philosophical principles and political arguments yet was flawed by ratbag ideas riddled with prejudices and inconsistencies, including racist elements (while espousing a fairer deal for Aborigines, he could refer to them as boongs and black bastards) sexist opinions (his patriarchal diatribes stressed the absolute necessity for woman's subservience to man in an ideal society) and homophobia (at the same time his closest and often patently sensual friendships were with men). His flaws were legion and they are recounted with verve but his strengths are not treated with quite so much vigour.

The overall picture remains confused and contradictory. The problem is, De Groen is also identifying the man with the personae

he created and even if this only confirms what he himself believed, it makes it difficult to view his work in an unbiased way. This, I feel, does the writer and his work a disservice.

Between *Capricornia* and *Poor Fellow My Country*, the two novels on which his reputation finally rests, he wrote *Soldier's Women* and a fictionalised autobiography, *Disturbing Element*, and several shorter works including *Who Killed my Sadie* and *Me And my Shadow*, both unpublished and libellous. Curiously he saw his wife Sadie as his "shadow", walking in his footsteps, protecting him, promoting him. He expected this as his right but did not show the same kind of loyalty and support towards her. It might be interesting to speculate on the role he sought for that other shadow, his grotesque doppelganger. Was it a mask to hide his feelings of inadequacy or an outlet for his not inconsiderable histrionic flair?

However much one might abhor many of his personal characteristics Xavier Herbert's contribution to Australian letters is a major one and for all his inconsistencies he was arguably the first to write with some insight into Aboriginal culture and with a genuine attempt to understand the problems that have to be faced. This biography presents a

controversial but diligently researched account of a writer in terms of his work (or visa versa) and like the man himself is full of surprises.

Julie Lewis

Jennifer Sabbioni, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, eds., *Indigenous Australian Voices: A Reader*, Rutgers University Press, 1998, \$22.00 (U.S), lviii + 311 pp.

Peter Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, \$24.95, xviii + 211 pp.

Let no one say the past is dead.
The past is all about us and
within.

For some reason, I find these famous words by Oodgeroo amongst the most haunting in our literature. In saying "our literature" I hope I am speaking in the spirit of challenging inclusiveness that the 'us' in this poem evokes. It is without doubt a troubled 'us', but retaining common ground is at the heart of reconciliation. In her preface to this important anthology, Nyungar researcher Jennifer Sabbioni cites approvingly the words of Marcia Langton, who argues that Aboriginality emerges through "dialogic exchange" between

Aborigines and non-Aborigines. *Indigenous Australian Voices* is an important contribution to this dialogue.

The book follows in the tradition of a work like *Paperbark* (UQP, 1990), and the pioneering anthology work of Kevin Gilbert. Like any anthology, however, *Indigenous Australian Voices* has its parameters. There is certainly a focus on poetry and various forms of memory writing, to the exclusion of historical or overtly political treatises. This might simply reflect the fact that these more personalised genres have been central to the emergence of Aboriginal writing in the past three decades, and particularly so in the most recent decade. A more significant complaint is that there seems to be a concentration on certain key writers — Oodgeroo, Kevin Gilbert, Jack Davis, Sally Morgan, Lionel Forgarty — whose work is already quite accessible. There would appear to be space within the three hundred pages of this book to include a greater number of voices. I was also surprised to find no material from writers of the calibre and importance of Mudrooroo, Jimmy Chi or Sam Watson.

Criticising what is included (and what is not) is of course *de rigueur* in reviews of anthologies. Far more important, are the strengths of this collection. The words convey a

richness and diversity of contemporary Aboriginal experience and bring to life a community that is diverse, politically engaged, and articulate. The differing experiences that the *Reader* collects are nevertheless united by the condition of Aboriginality, and in many ways constitute a record of that ongoing dialogue discerned by Langton.

The writings are also united by the past, in the complex and insistent manner that Oodgeroo evokes. Nowhere does this connectedness to the past emerge more painfully, than in the writings about the stolen generation. In his meditative poem, "Please mista do'n take me chilen, please mista do'n", Errol West writes that "The devastation visited on the Aborigine is the holocaust of/ the explosion of the nuclear family — in our people, the/ family goes on and on — it is as endless as we are." The term "stolen generation" has already been absorbed into the emotionally frictionless language of the mass media. It takes writing like West's, or indeed art like that in the recent "Generations" exhibition at the University of Western Australia's Lawrence Wilson Gallery, to recharge the significance of our past. The victims of the policy of forced separation have found an aggregated and politically powerful identity

under the banner of the stolen generation, yet in some ways these are issues that only come into focus at the personal level.

There appears to me to be a sympathy for the stolen generation issue in Australia that goes well beyond that extended to other injustices that indigenous Australia has suffered since European colonisation. Perhaps it is because we are all children, or have been. This makes children universally susceptible to empathy. It has also made childhood the site of wide-scale emotional projection. We search for the seeds of where "it all went wrong". I never quite understood the myth of childhood innocence. Memories from my own childhood are enough to warn me that children, like adults, are as capable of cruelty as they are of kindness. But children must bear the burden of a lost innocence that goes well beyond them. This is the theme that lies beneath Peter Pierce's intriguing new study, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety*.

The book has two quite distinct parts so I will deal with them separately. Part I, "Discovering the Lost Child", concerns the second half of the nineteenth century, and the recurring *topos* of the lost child in stories, plays, paintings and the popular press. Readers may be familiar

with many of these stories but the success of this aspect of the book is the way in which Pierce blends the interpretive discussion with the broader cultural history of colonial Australia. At the centre is the issue of land. In these stories, the children are not lost at sea (like Holt), or in the city (like Oliver), or in a dream (like Alice), they are lost in the 'bush'. One might be dismissive of the instinct to psychologise social narratives, but there is something almost pathological about the Australian obsession with this story. Indeed, Carmel Bird calls it "Lost Child Disease". It is a telling irony that this story is the exact obverse of that told again and again in *Indigenous Australian Voices*, where the child is taken from the land. In the stories that pepper Part I of *Lost Children*, the child is taken by the land.

For me the most intriguing cases touched on in Part I were McCubbin's 1886 painting *Lost* (he did others) and Lawson's desolate story, rather wryly named, "The Babies in the Bush". McCubbin's painting is significant because, in contrast to much genre painting at the time, it makes its point at the level of form. The saplings that obscure the child speak to me of a deeper obscurity. European Australians literally cannot see the country they live in. Lawson's story is important because it relocates a

projection on to the land to its rightful place — within the psyche. Indeed, the mother and father of these lost children are called — in true, dark, Lawsonian fashion — the Heads.

Part II, "The Child Abandoned", concerns the second half of the twentieth century and sits in a kind of dialogue with the earlier part. Here Pierce broadens his analysis to consider a range of stories that concern children who are not so much lost as, in various ways, violated. It is, of course, harder to be distanced about the present. Where the nineteenth-century obsession with 'lost' children leaps conveniently out as a neurosis springing from the trauma of colonial ambivalence, the equally obsessive late twentieth-century narratives of violated children are not so readily reducible. To his credit, Pierce does not try to reduce these stories. Of the Jaidyn Leskie case which is discussed in a final, powerful, chapter called "True Stories", Pierce writes that the "lost and murdered Jaidyn was the child of parents who were themselves lost."

Late twentieth-century Australia has largely given up trying to project the lost child into the landscape. Perhaps there is a competing reassertion of innocence in the landscape itself that works now to prevent it from being stained in this

fashion. Even landscape-charged events like the Azaria Chamberlain disappearance find narrative solutions by pointing toward the demons of social disorder or individual perversity. Like Part I, the strength of Part II is in the deft and wide-ranging blend of Pierce's cultural analysis. In what might so easily have turned into a recitation, Pierce has given us an incisive and disconcerting account of a rupture in the cultural imagination of this country.

Tony Hughes-d'Aeth

The Oxford Literary History of Australia. Edited by Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss. Oxford University Press. \$49.95, vii & 488 pp.

Bennett, Strauss, and their associate editor Chris Wallace-Crabbe are a formidable team. And each has contributed an important essay to the book: Strauss on "Literary Culture 1914-1939: Battlers All"; Bennett on "Literary Culture since Vietnam: A New Dynamic"; and Wallace-Crabbe on "Poetry and Modernism".

When Geoffrey Dutton edited *The Literature of Australia* for Penguin Books in 1964, "in a cheap and compact form", he prefaced the book thus: "The primary purpose of *The Literature of Australia* is to fill a gap".

Since then the gap has widened sufficiently, despite more recent attempts to fill it by such academic luminaries as Dame Leonie Kramer and Laurie Hergenhan, for this latest effort to be warmly welcomed. It will probably be the last twentieth-century literary history of Australia.

The book is neatly circular by beginning and (almost) ending with essays on Aboriginal writing by Adam Shoemaker, who is careful to define Black Australian writing as widely as possible to include, among others, song lyrics, transcribed oral narratives, even carvings and rock art, as well as that "crucial text" *The Flinders Island Chronicle* of 1836-37. Continuing his theme of recurrence and presence in Australian indigenous writing in his second essay, Shoemaker notices the sea-change from an exploration of the "fringe" to a consideration of centrality, and that "indigenous writing is overflowing in the late 1990s; in particular, in works conceived by Black Australian women".

The book concludes with Graeme Turner's topical discussion of literature today competing "for the Nation" with film and television. He concludes on a positive note, reassured by "the capacity of Australian writing to survive and prosper" — against all the odds so far

encountered. Perhaps it is as well that there is no editorial Postscript on what looms in the IT century ahead.

The division of Australia's literary history into several more or less distinctive periods is by now well established: Part I: To 1850; Part II: 1851-1914; Part III: 1914-1939; Part IV: 1940-1965; Part V: Since 1965. At the back are 35 pages of notes and a valuable Guide to Reference Material. This is followed by an excellent Chronology of "events that formed the context of Australian literary history", beginning with Quiros in 1605 and ending with the waterfront dispute in 1998. Is the inclusion of the first public clock installed by Governor Hunter in 1798 a reminder that editors and contributors need to watch their deadlines? Notes on the sixteen contributors and a very full Index complete the volume.

Among the opening chapters, which cover largely familiar historical ground, there are some memorable moments, like Delys Bird's claim "that the rhetoric of exploration is characteristically sexualised"; and the perhaps unexpected notion in Robert Dixon's enlightening study of "Literature and Melodrama in the period to 1914", that "the decline of moral certainty is reflected, *inter alia*, in Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding*".

Richard Nile's essay "Literary Democracy and the Politics of Reputation" offers an interesting survey of "commercial" versus "serious" writers and the world of publishing in the period 1914-1939. There were best-sellers like Ion Idriess who maintained that literature was a saleable commodity, and whose thirteen books between 1927 and 1939 amounted to almost half a million copies. Only Ferguson Hume's Melbourne-based *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* appears to have outsold every other book.

The connection between the Australian "bush myth" and the "Anzac legend" is explored by Adrian Caesar in "National Myths of Manhood: Anzacs and Others". This is another fine essay and its conclusion seems indisputable that the writers he discusses who attempt to define "Australia" and "Australianness" (the subtext of the whole volume), including the Jindyworobaks, "all travel away from urban, suburban, and even rural domestic life where the majority of Australians live and work to locate an essence elsewhere in the geography of the imagination".

Patrick Buckridge discusses Australian literature "as an institution" in the period from the Second World War to 1965 when Australia became involved in the Vietnam War. Several

writers' organizations were founded, the law took a closer look at obscenity after the prosecution of *Angry Penguins*, in 1944, and the Ern Malley hoax, with all its political and legal overtones, also highlighted the perennial debate between the classical ideals of form and clarity and what Buckridge calls "the looser expressivism of the modern movement". It was in the universities that "Aust.Lit." became firmly institutionalized, even if there were some academics who doubted whether there was such a thing. Professor J.I.M. Stewart (alias detective writer Michael Innes) of Adelaide decided to devote a publicly funded Australian Literature lecture to D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* because he could not find any Australian literature worthy of the name. As it happened, the Adelaide University English department, with writer and critic Brian Elliott in the forefront, pioneered the university study of Australian literature in this country.

The significance of the two world wars for Australian literary culture is rightly stressed by editor Bruce Bennett who explores the "new dynamic" of that other war of Vietnam. He recognises the broadening of literary criteria with his acceptance of a writer like Morris West being widely accepted as an

author of importance. Perhaps he could have mentioned popular works like Bryce Courtenay's *The Potato Factory* (Susan Lever does briefly mention him later in the book), or even Sara Henderson's *Bullo* sagas, which with their idiosyncratic characters and commercial successes are unmistakably part of what Bennett calls "the general shake-up of Australian cultural values and attitudes", the lessening distinction between "high" and "low" culture since 1965 to which Dennis Haskell also draws attention in his illuminating article on contemporary Australian poetry.

The essays are for the most part happily free of contemporary critical jargon, although Susan Lever tends to overuse words like "postmodernism" without heeding the warning of such as Mautner's recent *Dictionary of Philosophy* that the word can mean many different things and ought to be properly defined. I was also puzzled by a comment like novelist David Ireland's "trespass on feminist territory". A case for prosecution?

While less "canonical" genres like science fiction and crime or mystery stories are accepted into the "Literary History of Australia", there is no discussion of writing for younger readers. Bruce Bennett devotes a single paragraph to it despite its prominence

and importance in Australian literature and despite the undisputed excellence of its major authors. There is of course *The Oxford Companion to Australian Children's Literature* of 1993, but it serves a different function, as does the more recent edition of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* which manages to include some writers for younger readers. But here we are talking about literary history.

The gap which Geoffrey Dutton filled thirty five years ago has now been filled for the last time this century by the new *Oxford Literary History of Australia* with authority and distinction. Its wide range, its placing side by side canonical writers of the stature of Patrick White, Christina Stead, A.D.Hope and Judith Wright with others barely remembered, represents a welcome broadening of the literary horizon.

Ralph Elliott

Soundings: Poetry and Poetics: The Proceedings of the Third Biennial National Conference on Poetry. Eds. Lyn Jacobs and Jeri Kioll, Wakefield Press, 1999, 146 pp.

language — heard, written, spoken — especially the language of poetry, remains a powerful cultural force. (Jacobs

& Kroll, x)

The *Soundings '97 Third Biennial Conference on Poetry* invited poets, academics and readers to focus on the term *Soundings* as a way of exploring relationships between poetic practice, criticism, reading, writing and performance. Participants explored diverse possibilities, including: sounding lyrical aggressive, hip; sounding memory or history; sounding personal or political; sounding out; cross-cultural exchange; sounding authentic: who owns poetry; sounding off; protest poetry and sounding poetry on the net.

The keynote speakers were Philip Salom and π.o., who surveyed critical, historical and personal receptions of poetry. As practising poets, they engaged with performance as the dynamic medium of their craft so that the benefits of aural and oral dimensions of poetry were not just theorised but illustrated.

Philip Salom has a substantial body of published works, some six collections of poetry, and is a two-time winner of the Commonwealth Poetiyy Prize. His work in recent years also reflects his interest in new media and installation work and he has developed computer interactive

poems with artist Meredith Kidby. Some of these pieces toured West Australian regional arts centres last year in an interactive group exhibition entitled "Techne", an Art on the Move project.

Salom's paper, "Pinning Tails on Uncertainty", presents "some ideas and questions about uncertainty itself as a fundamental in poetry." (1) For this poet, poetry is "rarely a language of certainties; quite the reverse. Its suggestion and signifying power are more about the texture of experience, and its insights... are quite as much about the momentary." (1) Composing a poem, says Salom of the possibilities that come to mind, is "A bit like living in an ever present extended family. Possibly a madhouse." (2) We are accustomed as readers in an academic context to the idea that each reading of a text, each interpretation, constructs a new reading of the text. Add collaborative and interactive mixed-media techniques to the already dense realm of the madhouse/poem and the possible readings multiply infinitely. The potential of new media — which is truly exciting but more than a little ideologically terrifying in the ways it unlocks the doors of the asylum and shakes up the notions of a poem ever achieving the status of *finished work* — is that it offers more than a rereading in those safe, familiar terms.

It will be the poem itself that is remade every time it is read. How's that for uncertainty?

$\pi.o.$ is well-known on the Australian poetry scene for his work in performance poetry. He has published poetry magazines and the definitive performance poetry anthology, *Off the Record* (Penguin, 1985), as well as books of his own work. In his keynote address, $\pi.o.$, performance poetry, particularly "Dialect Poetry in Australia", considering Australian society where monolingualism, xenophobia and fear of difference — especially when manifested as a use of other than standard English — has prevailed." (VII) he analyses and contrasts the poetry of C.J. Dennis, Odgeroo Noonuccal and Robbie Burns with theories of right and proper Australian language as articulated by poets/critics such as Roland Robinson, Brian Elliot, Kenneth Slessor and Mudrooroo. O.'s paper is acidic in tone (excuse the pun), informative, entertaining, and exposes a few patronising practices of some schools of criticism.

Like the thylacine, the cringe factor is occasionally sighted — seemingly alive and well — in the hallowed halls of Australian literature. However and fortunately for poets, the academy and its critics — so is the kind of cross-pollinating criticism that

enables all the interests groups/ individuals to have their say; "Poetry as a dynamic process," state Jacobs and Kroll "flourishes on contested ground."(x) Diversity and dialogue are healthy. It is in the theorising of one's practice that one creates firm foundations which can withstand being "sounded" out. After all, the academy is often where reflection occurs, and creation too.

The keynote speakers were supported by an impressive team: Lee Cataldi and Fred Jensen on video poetry "Sign, Moving Image, Sense", John Mateer on voice in "Aspects of Lev Vygotsky's *Theory of Language...*"; Ann Vickery on cultural identity and the poetry of Anna Wickham; Max Richards on new Zealand poet/historian Allen Curnow; Brian Dibble traced the history and cultural politics of anthem creation in Australia; Glen Phillips explored new Australian pastoral poetry, particularly the work of John Kinsella; Andrew Taylor focused on the tensions between what may be said and the inexpressible. Lyn Jacobs examined the ways in which cross-cultural experience transformed ideas about language and poetry, while Adam Aitken presented a comparison of the work of Aboriginal writer, Lionel Fogarty, with the writing of an Hawaiian of part-Asian descent, Lois-Ann Yamanaka.

Tom Shapcott revealed the intricacies, pleasures and pitfalls of translating the work of the Macedonian poet Katica Kulavkova. Lyn McCredden addressed the age-old conflict between the "real poets and academic poets," an issue that also emerged in other papers delivered at this conference.

I found much of interest in Ruth Strakes' presentation, "Droning Bards, Passionate Declaimers and Modest Whisperers: Poets at Adelaide Writers' Week." It is an engaging historical narrative, the Festival serving as a microcosm for the history of the Australian poetry scene overall since 1960. Reading this, and several other of the conference papers, particularly the keynote addresses, I found myself hoping for a prescription for a cure for the current malaise affecting poetry in Australia.

Things are crook in Australian poetry. It seems that never before have so many Australians written and studied it, and yet so few publishers published it. Is this because no-one is *reading* it?

Major publishing houses have slashed their poetry lists and, on the smaller publication front many literary magazines — like *Westerly* — are ricocheting from one funding crisis to another, always teetering on the brink of extinction. There is no doubt, audiences are shrinking. Australian

poetry is sorely in need of a new direction to grasp the public imagination and, therefore, the publishers' interest, something like Phillip Salom's "poetries", perhaps? Or Pl.. "rock paintings"? I long for the excitement of something; someone with the crowd pulling powers of a Yevtushenko (the passionate Russian star of the 1966 Adelaide Writers' Festival who attracted huge crowds to his readings). Yet, I confess, I am also frequently nostalgic for the resonances of poetic traditions. It should be possible to have both, and — as *Soundings '97* illustrates — we (= us + them) don't always have to agree with each other.

Barbara Brandt

Brad Miller and McKenzie Wark.
Planet of Noise. CD-ROM/Macintosh format. 1997.

The concept behind *Planet of Noise* is a good one: a CD-ROM where text, music, art, and video come together to create a multi-dimensional, interactive reading experience.

Here's how *Planet of Noise* works: you start with a title screen. A rotating ball hovers before you. Once you click on it, you have a choice of ten "zones," with intriguing titles like "The military entertainment-complex" or "Sea of lost

moments."

The zones contain screen after screen of "aphorisms": brief observations, clever yet jaded. Sometimes the text is spoken by a female voice. The accompanying music is reminiscent of Severed Heads and O Yuki Conjugate, with a dash of Single Gun Theory (if that helps). Strange hummings and throbbings drum in the background, along with occasional radio broadcasts from the beyond. The background art, one of the best parts of the CD, features changing marbled patterns and strange alien terraforms. Some screens provide movies of rotating shapes for that extra effect.

A rolling ball, like the one in the title screen, is your navigation device. Clicking on the ball takes you to the next screen, though at times, in a spirit of perversity, the ball skitters away from your mouse. Readers who prefer books to computer screens might find this device frustrating, particularly as the navigation ball likes to position itself in the centre of the text with each new screen.

Some people dislike electronic texts because they lack the tangibility of a book. *Planet of Noise* turns this quality into a plus—there's nothing to hold on to except the mouse, and this contributes to the sense of lostness suggested by the moody music and

dark atmosphere.

The weak link here is the text. The sometimes witty, sometimes wise aphorisms reminded me of the kind of comments uni students write in the margins of their A4 notebook during lectures. Frequent references to insomnia are another clue as to how these jottings originated. Kudos to McKenzie Wark for doing something with the marginal epiphanies most of us file away into obscurity.

In terms of content, the language of literary theory ("simulacra," "sign," "modernity,") meets popular culture ("Frequent Flyer," Elvis, "Dying white male") to position this text as self-consciously post-modern. Perhaps this explains why aphorisms scathing of scholarship appear alongside aphorisms which have scholarship (or at least theoretical terminology) as their basis. Comments such as "Scholastics: knowledge cut into meat. Aphorisms: The meat cutting back into knowledge." rest uneasily amidst oblique or direct references to Derrida, Sartre, Umberto Eco, Nietzsche, Marx. Is *Planet of Noise* an attempt to create a text which dismantles itself with its own tools?

Some of the better aphorisms contain the personal "I" of the aphorist/writer: "Thief reader: Someone stole a copy of my book from the bookstore. How I would embrace

that reader!"; "Review: At least he did me the honour of taking the trouble to misunderstand me." "Use value" is not writerly, but maintains the charm of the specific: "As much as I'd like a drop-dead sports car, it seems wrong to buy one. They must be either stolen, or accepted as a gift for sexual favours."

Other aphorisms take the form of wry definitions: "Alarm clock—the police of sleep"; "Mates: ... the mutual honouring of failure."

Rhetorical questions are also effective when the follow-up is tongue-in-cheek: "Why is god so much more reliable an inspiration for aphorisms than sex? But then nothing compares to sex as a source of one liners!"

On the down side, while you might be tempted to quote one of the aphorisms as the signature line on your e-mail, these musings are too flimsy to carry the conceptual weight of the project. The tone of the aphorisms is occasionally poetic but often eye-rollingly pompous ("Aphorists think wrongly about many things—but always for themselves"). There are too many references to boredom (five), and too many uses of the f-word (six). By the time I reached the third aphorism-as-word-reversal ('That which is impossible is real, that which is real is impossible'), I was

ready to invoke both of the above.

Perhaps the vehicle of “aphorisms” is the problem; one can swallow only so much self-styled truth in a single sitting. Having the text take varying forms (poetry, prose fiction, quotes from other sources) might have helped. As it stands, while the text elicited from me a few half smiles and nods of recognition, I was left with the uncomfortable impression that this was cynicism masquerading as cultural critique.

For some people, *Planet of Noise* is one answer to the question, “What can you do with an Arts degree?” For others, it’s an entertaining half-hour’s clickery.

Any PowerMac (or even high-end 68040 Mac) with a CD-ROM will work for the disc. Make sure you have an extra 8 MB of RAM to work with, and install QuickTime if it isn’t already on your Mac (available free from www.apple.com/quicktime).

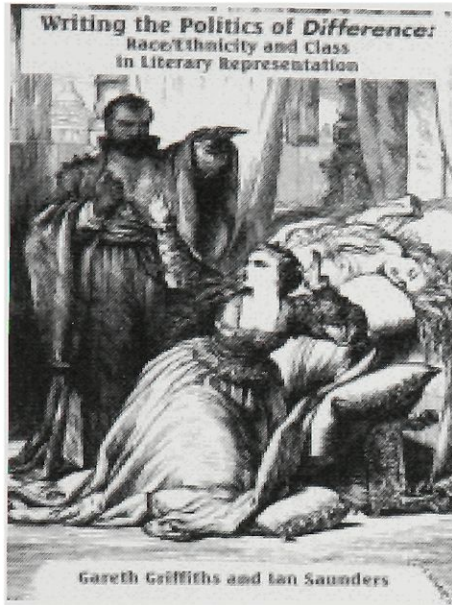
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Race / ethnicity' and 'class' are central in the representation of cultural and social identity. Gareth Griffiths and Ian Saunders examine the history, development and critical implications of these terms, offering helpful definitions and distinctions of their meanings.

The informed discussion is illustrated with many practical examples drawn from a wide range of of texts, including popular film (*The Lion King*, *Forrest Gump*, *Clueless*) as well as literature (*Othello*, *Emma*, *Heart of Darkness*, *A Fringe of Leaves*, T. S. Eliot).

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